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WHAT MONEY CAN'T DO.

、 VOL. III.

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WHAT MONEY CAN'T DO.

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A Novel.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"ALTOGETHER WRONG," "THE WORLD'S FURNITURE,"

ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.

1866.

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250. h. 223.

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JOHN CHILDS AND SON, PRINTERS.

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WHAT MONEY CAN'T DO.

CHAPTER I.

AN UNEXPECTED VISIT.

THERE was to be a great gathering at the Old Manor House on the night of Charlotte Blake's wedding. What the entertainment was to be no one seemed well to know, but all within driving distance were to be present. It was an intensely cold night—just the night of all others for a dance, for it seemed as if no amount of exercise would cause too great a degree of heat.

It was nine o'clock, and Isabella sat in the hall at Lee Ashton, as near to the great roaring wood fire as safety admitted of. She was getting impatient; they were to have left for the Manor half an hour ago; she was ready to

the moment, and not only ready, but in a great hurry to be off.

Parties, no matter what shape they take, when they do not occur nightly, when months elapse between them, form events in the life of a young girl. They give rise to so much conversation beforehand, so many discussions on the dress that is to be worn, so many conjectures as to who will be there, such wild anticipations of pleasure, sometimes in extreme youth thoroughly realized, that to a London-bred young lady would appear almost inconceivable, and Isabella's impatience at having to wait a few minutes childish and silly beyond measure.

She looked very pretty as she sat there, with her little foot tapping the floor with vexation. She was dressed partially in her bridesmaid's attire, a pure white tulle, trimmed with holly, and a wreath of holly round her head, the bright red berries taking off from the heaviness of the otherwise dullish green. She was listening attentively to every sound; and had it not been so cold, she would no doubt have been flying up and down the stairs, with

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endeavours to create a little haste ; but it required a degree of resolute courage Isabella did not possess to leave that warm spot, and wander from room to room along dreary passages, which even in summer-time felt chilly. Besides, she could not even now make up her mind to walk after dark from her mother's room to her sister's and her own part of the house, which were separated by a long passage, without her heart beating, and her legs feeling frightened, and refusing to grant her their necessary support, as she always maintained they did whenever she approached the haunted regions. So no wonder she remained where she was, but groaning in spirit, as she pictured to herself the charades that perhaps were being acted, or the *tableaux vivans* that were being got up, or the merry waltz she might be enjoying, if they were not so frightfully long dressing. But it was not dressing that detained them so long ; if Isabella could have known what was keeping them she probably would have braved ghosts, goblins, and cold, and gone up-stairs.

Presently, however, Mrs Crawford appeared.

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She looked very brilliant, very young, and still handsome enough for any one to have seen what she must have been twenty years ago. The harrowing scenes she had recently gone through, though in day-light had left traces on her visible enough, were hardly to be observed at night, and still less so when under the influence of dress.

“ Oh, mamma, what a time you have been ! I am sure I wonder papa did not send the carriage back to the stables instead of keeping the horses standing all this time, in such a bitter night ; I suppose he would had he been ready himself. Is he coming, and isn't Maud ready yet ? ”

“ Maud is not feeling well, Isabella, and does not intend going,” replied her mother.

“ Not going ! Maud not going to-night ! Oh, mamma, what is that for ? ” exclaimed Isabella, starting up.

“ I tell you, dear, she is not well.”

“ Oh, that's all rubbish ; I can't believe it. What will Archie say ? I must go up, perhaps I can persuade her to go ; ” and, before

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her mother could remonstrate, the girl had flown off to her sister's room.

“This is very unaccountable in Maud, my dear,” said the General, coming into the hall, looking, like his wife, younger and better than in the broad glare of day, so much so, that one could not but think, notwithstanding the disparity in their age, that they were well matched. He was a handsome old man, and having a slight figure, in that dimly-lighted hall it would not have been easy to say what his age was. “This morning she was not ready, was too late for the ceremony, and then returned home before any one else, because she was so fatigued ; and now she is not well, and cannot go at all. Agnes, I think there must be some other cause for her refusing ; it is not her health detaining her. Do you think Archie has to do with it ? You remember that affair long ago, which till now I have never thought of since ; but I fancy that must have something to do with it. Perhaps she regrets what took place then, and dislikes meeting him now she thinks and feels differently ; or can she—”

“Very probable, I think,” said his wife, not

letting him continue his second supposition, and looking down whilst she spoke at her bracelets, and turning them round so as to place them in their right position ; “ and therefore it will be wiser to let her have her own way.”

“ It does not seem a question of that, my dear, for she has it if staying at home is her desire. However, I am sorry, for I think the Blakes may feel hurt, and I don't think either it is kind to Archie. He behaved so very well all through, that I am quite sure he would not force his attentions on her if she in any way showed she did not like it.”

“ No, I am sure he would not. But, no doubt there is an awkward feeling in meeting a man one has ceased to care for, after having professed to love him.”

“ But the awkwardness, if there was any, must have been got over this morning. On the other hand, if she still cares for him, as I can't help thinking is the case, would it not be better, my dear Agnes, to consent to their union ? There is really nothing now so very much against it, and—”

“ My dear General, before you were to

touch on that point, it would be safer to be sure Archie has the same wishes he had when he proposed for Maud. I am more inclined to think something has reached her, perhaps, of an intended marriage on his part; and if so, you would give Maud terrible pain—for her pride would be so hurt, were you to broach the subject as in connection with herself, or indeed at all.”

Mrs Crawford, like all women, had more tact and skill when suddenly and unexpectedly driven into a corner, for evading a difficulty, than any man would have; they require time for thought. Thought ruins women; they go all wrong the moment they begin to think. If you want their opinion on any matter, ask it and take it then and there, and the chances are it will be as correct and worth having as that of the clearest-headed and most deep-thinking man; but give them time for reflection, and the probability is, nothing will be more shallow and empty.

The General was silent; this was so different a phase of the subject, one he had never dreamt of. Presently he said,

“There is no use in our delaying any longer, we are late enough. Where are Isabella and Percy ?”

“Isabella went up to her sister, Percy has been sitting in the carriage this last half hour,” replied Mrs Crawford, thankful in the belief she had silenced her husband entirely on the dreaded subject of Maud and Archie.

“And gone to sleep, I suppose; it is almost a pity he is going. Come, Bella, make haste,” said her father, as she appeared, looking demure and gloomy.

At last they were off. Soon afterwards Mrs Mackenzie and Maud came down and passed through the hall on their way to the school-room.

“They will have a cold drive,” said Mrs Mackenzie, when they were seated in the warm room, and she felt an extra shiver come over her from the change of the cold passages to the well-heated apartment. “I think one invariably feels colder on first approaching a fire than one does when quite away from it.”

She made the room look as cheerful as lights and a bright blazing fire could do.

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Maud sat in a low chair with her head resting back and her eyes closed, and never spoke. Presently tea was brought in; they looked very cosy and comfortable, and yet what sorrow and anguish was busy at work with one at least; and the other's heart was sore enough, from sympathy and the inability to help or abate the misery she saw was being so silently endured. Mrs Mackenzie made a rush at the subject she knew filled Maud's mind, to the exclusion of every earthly thing beside.

“Maud, I regret now sanctioning that interview you had this morning; instead of doing good it has done harm. I also am quite aware I was very wrong in doing so, the world—did it hear of it—would exclaim against my ill-judged folly and imprudence.” Still Maud did not speak, and Mrs Mackenzie's object was to make her do so; she had merely moved toward the table, and was playing with the cup of tea that stood before her. “I think, too, you have broken faith with Mr Blake, and he hardly deserved that at your hands.”

“He as little deserves it, as I do such an accusation!”

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She was roused now. She could not let such a charge as that pass unheeded.

“But did you not promise him to go to-night?” Mrs Mackenzie was glad at getting her to speak on the subject at all, that she did not mind her having been made angry.

“I did say yes, when he pressed me, but I could not; I knew at the time I could not. Oh, Mac, do you not know he—Mr Kennedy is to be there to-night? How could I meet him, and Archie present; and perhaps he might have—have chosen to-night to make me promise to—to marry him. Oh no, I could not have run that risk, for had I, and he had proposed, I should have refused him.—Do not look at me so, dear Mac, I know I am bound by my own oath to become his wife, but—I am not bound to put myself in such a position as to render it impossible for me to fulfil it. Listen for a moment; if I had gone, I could not have resisted the temptation of being with Archie as much as would have been possible. Was I not right to stay at home?”

“Yes, dear, yes, you were. But, Maud, why did you not tell your mother this, when she asked you so beseechingly to go?”

“You know, Mac, that I told you long since, my mother and I must never come on the subject. I have consented to do what she desires, to save—to spare my father sorrow. My mother must remain satisfied with that.”

Mrs Mackenzie now knew, what she foresaw would be, that this sad business had estranged the mother and child. It could not be otherwise. Maud knew she was to be sacrificed for her mother, and she had agreed to it. But it had dried up many of the springs that hitherto had flowed fresh, pure, and confiding from her heart.

“I am afraid Isabella will, in her impetuous way, say something to your father that may complicate matters; for she was very vexed at your not going, and told me she was sure it was not your own wish to stay away, and that your not being well was all trash.”

“I do not fear her saying anything. I

made her promise she would not ; and I am sure dear good papa suspects nothing in any way. Where there are no suspicions there are no doubts.”

They talked on a little longer, and then Mrs Mackenzie had the tea-things removed, and ordered the bed-room candles to be brought. Maud was standing against the mantle-piece leaning her head on her hand, her hair was pushed back from her forehead ; there was a dejected, despairing look in her attitude that made Mrs Mackenzie say some soothing words, but they jarred upon her, they brought no comfort with them.

“ I hope there is a good fire in your room,” said Mrs Mackenzie, as they each, candle in hand, were walking down the passage that led into the hall. Maud was first, and just as she was going to push the red baize door that closed it off, and that in cold weather was always kept shut, it opened as of itself from the opposite side. Maud drew back alarmed. She need not have been, for the servants were of course up, and therefore there was nothing extraordinary in seeing one of them now before

her, but she had heard no previous sound, and the agitation she had gone through had helped to make her nervous.

But beyond the servant she saw a figure that caused her to start and utter a cry between surprise and fear, for Archie Blake stood there. Mrs Mackenzie gathered her scattered senses together in a moment, for she recollected the presence of the footman.

“Dear me, Mr Blake, you are not a moment too soon. Maud and I were just going off to bed ; however, I suppose we had better take you back to the school-room which we have this minute left, and where there is a fire that will put a little warmth into you, for you look frozen.”

For a moment both Archie and Maud thought Mrs Mackenzie dazed ; for she received him as if she expected him. Archie, however, soon came to a reasonable conclusion about it ; not so Maud, she retraced her steps with them, but she did so hardly knowing what she was about. But when once they were in the school-room, and the door closed and the servant gone, Mrs Mackenzie fairly

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gave way to her feelings of annoyance and vexation.

“ Mr Blake, this is most imprudent, most ill-judged ! Every feeling of right within you should have pointed out how very wrongly you are acting ; for I cannot believe anything has brought you here, beyond your disappointment at not seeing Maud this evening. Consideration for her alone should have prevented your coming at this hour and with every member of the family but herself at your own father's house.”

“ Mrs Mackenzie, stop a moment. Believe me, rather than risk one breath being raised against Maud, I would sooner suffer the misery of losing her altogether. But surely you view this visit in a wrong light—and pray, pray do not let us lose time in vain and useless accusations when every moment is of importance. You see I *am* here, so any harm that will ensue cannot now be averted, but I am convinced none will, or, on my honour, I would not have come.”

“ What, in the name of heaven, brought you ?”

“What I have heard to-night. Maud,” and now he turned towards her, and took her passive hand in his, “is it true that—that you are going to marry that rich but vulgar neighbour of yours? Is it true that after all you said to me this morning you are false and faithless, that you are going to sell yourself to this man for his gold and fine houses? Is it—”

“Stop, Archie!” exclaimed Maud, her eyes flashing with unsuppressed anger and resentment, and drawing her hand, almost snatching it, away. “If you came here to insult me, then leave me now, for you have done so enough! Mrs Mackenzie, I will go to my own room, and if Mr Blake has anything more to say perhaps you will be good enough to listen to it, and be kind enough not to repeat it again to me.”

She was just opening the door, when Archie started up, and removing her from it somewhat abruptly, closed it and turned the key. He was very pale, terribly pale, and his lips white and tightly compressed together. Mrs Mackenzie sat spell-bound, she had not

been prepared for this, and was utterly at a loss what to do. It was just as well she held her tongue, for her words would have been no more heeded than the whistling of the bleak cold wind through the leafless branches of the trees in the Wilderness.

“Maud!” he spoke in a tone which, if merely listened to, sounded calm enough, but to see his face it told a very different tale, “I came here to-night full of the earnest, deep love that my heart overflows with for you. I came to ask you if what you said to me this morning were true,—that you would cheerfully share my comparative poverty with me,—would you become my wife at once? I came prepared to prove to you how your love had influenced my past, and to promise that it should continue to influence my future. Now, tell me, Maud, that the horrid tale I heard to-night is false; tell me, if you have ceased to love me, oh tell me that *this* is not true. That you are still the trusting, truthful, ingenuous girl I left you! For God’s sake speak, Maud, or I feel as if I should lose my senses.”

He still stood by the door, as if fearing she

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would again try to escape ; but she had not thought of it after the first angry impulse had passed off.

“What have you heard ?” she asked presently, in a voice little above a whisper, and without raising her eyes. To look at her as she stood there, one would have judged her guilty of all he had implored her to deny. She seemed, even to him, to have suddenly grown into a woman that the world had contaminated, ready for the sake of its god to set aside all the heart's best feelings, and cast his honest, true love from her.

“I heard, or rather over-heard, what—what I have just told you.”

“And who—who said it ?”

“A man who seemed well versed in all your family affairs, and Mr Kennedy's as well—Mr Hammond.” There was almost a sneer in his tone as he spoke.

“Mrs Mackenzie !” cried Maud, unable any longer to bear the agony of mind she was enduring, “tell him the truth, oh spare me reproaches from him. I cannot bear it—I cannot answer for myself ! How dare that

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man couple my name with his master's?" she added suddenly and angrily.

"To whom did he say it?" asked Mrs Mackenzie.

"A person I know very well, named Lowe, a solicitor that gives me briefs very often. More than a year ago this same man told me it was the talk of the neighbourhood, but Owen assured me it was false. But that is not the point. Tell me it is false, Maud, tell me you are not going to—marry this man, and I will take care to silence one and all."

But Maud's head sank low on her breast. She could not look him in the face as she had done that morning when she was assuring him of her love. She could not deny the fact, for she knew Archie would silence them in one respect, but God alone knew what he might not call forth in another.

"You do not answer me, Maud. What am I to believe?"

To let him think ill of her was too bitter a trial to suffer. It was perfect torture to her, and he seemed so cold, so hard, she felt almost

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afraid to speak ; but she made an effort to clear herself, at all events, in his opinion, let happen what might. She went a few steps towards him, and laid her hand gently on his arm, and slowly raised her large beautiful eyes to his.

“ Archie,” she said, “ I told you this morning I was doomed to a terrible fate, you now know what it is. I told you also how dear, how fearfully dear—you are to me. Archie, it is true if this man asks me again to become his wife, I am bound to do so ; but believe me, oh believe me, his hated wealth has nothing to do with it. It is not money that could ever cause me to sacrifice an hour’s pleasure, much less a long life’s happiness. But I am compelled by circumstances, circumstances I myself am ignorant of, to take this fatal step. I can only pray to God, as I do morning, noon, and night, that He will yet save me from such an existence as mine must be if that marriage takes place.”

She had spoken softly and gently, and when alluding to her affection for himself, in a

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loving tone. Now she paused, but did not move.

“If this is so, Maud, if it is true that this marriage is hateful to you, and repulsive to every feeling in your nature, then come with me now—to-night—this moment, and to-morrow morning you shall be safe, and beyond the reach or power of others. Mrs Mackenzie will come with you, and we can now even catch the mail train to London. I know a house where you can have rooms for the night, and to-morrow, the first thing, we can be married, and then your fears, and I pray your troubles too, may all be at an end. Come, Maud, give me the right to protect you, give me the power to tell that man you are *my* wife, and to me he is accountable for his dastardly words, the recollection of which makes every drop of blood in me tingle with fury. Speak, Maud, speak to me, darling!” and he drew her unresistingly towards him.

“Oh yes, Archie, take me, take me, save me from this terrible future.”

Mrs Mackenzie started up, she now

thoroughly realized the danger they were all in. She approached them, and laid her hand gently on Maud, as if to draw her away. But she did not heed her, she felt safe where she was, she cared not who attempted to separate them now—they could not take her from him, he would not let them. She was in a blissful dream, she was to be Archie's wife on the morrow.

“Maud,” said Mrs Mackenzie, “Maud, have you forgotten your mother? Have you forgotten your vow to save her and your father? Child, you are beside yourself! Rouse up, Maud, do you hear me?”

“Yes,” she replied, dreamingly, her head resting on Archie's shoulder, and passing one hand through his thick black hair; “yes, I hear you, but I shall be his wife to-morrow—his wife—and then you know nothing can hurt me, no sorrow come near me. Is it not so, Archie? You will keep them all away from me till they have forgotten it? You will never leave me; dearest, will you? or they might take me from you.”

“No, my darling, no one shall ever take

you from me," said Archie, stroking her hair fondly, and pressing his lips on her pure white forehead.

"Mr Blake! This must cease—you must leave us, Maud is not aware of what she is saying."

"No, no, do not leave me," said Maud—"do not leave me!" and she clung almost convulsively to him.

"Maud, Maud! Is your father's shame and disgrace nothing to you? Will you see that good old man, who so dotes on you, broken-hearted? You, who are the brightest of his home flowers, the joy and pride of his life, will you bring down such bitter woe and dishonour on his head that he will never dare raise it again; that he will sink into his grave crushed, and overwhelmed by the intensity of his misery? Maud! do you hear me? Oh, Mr Blake, have pity on us—spare us the fearful calamity which must follow if you persuade her to go away with you—you must not marry her! Are you listening to what I am saying? You must not!"

Maud now raised her head and looked wildly

at her governess, and then at her lover. Archie seemed equally bewildered. He knew not what to think. All seemed darker and blacker than even when he imagined she was willingly giving herself to this hateful man for his wealth. But he had no time for reflection, Maud started suddenly from him. She was roused at last ; she saw now what fearful results were to be dreaded if she committed any rash act. And yet it was such a temptation ; she loved him so dearly ; she had so often pictured her life as bound up with his—and now it was within her grasp—she might now clasp that happy future and make it hers. But at the same moment her father's face rose up before her, so full of woe and misery, that she hesitated no longer.

“ Archie, leave me whilst I have the courage to tell you to go ! Leave me, Archie, my own beloved Archie ! But before going, tell me you believe all I have said, and that you never, never will listen to such horrible accusations as were made against me, by that infamous man.”

But Archie gazed at her without replying.

He was very pale, and a fearful expression of misery on his face.

“Oh, Archie, if you look at me in that way, you will break my heart! You will do worse, you will again shake my resolve to save all belonging to me from this impending sorrow!”

“Is my sorrow nothing to you, Maud?”

“God knows, Archie, it is the bitterest drop in the cup that I have to drink. But, Archie, dear, there is no disgrace mingled with it.”

“Disgrace—disgrace! What is this disgrace?” he asked in a loud, almost passionate tone of voice.

“Hush, hush, no one must hear that word, and you do not know but that at this moment some one may be listening—”

Before Maud could say more, he turned round to open the door to see if what she said was possible, knowing as he did that, excepting the servants, every one was at his father's house. But he had locked the door in his anger when Maud was about to leave the room, so it refused to open, he turned the handle and pulled,

but in vain, till he recollected what he had done, and instantly turned the key. When the door was open, he looked out; but all was dark. He listened, for he imagined he heard a retreating footstep; but the sound, if it existed anywhere but in his excited brain, was no longer to be heard. He turned to Maud, and said,

“There is no one in the house that could be listening, is there?”

“No, impossible,” said Mrs Mackenzie, “there are but the servants, and they would never dream of such a thing. Maud spoke, I fancy, more from the feeling that the word grated on her ears and was painful to listen to. But, Mr Blake, do go, let me implore of you not to stay any longer.”

“How can I go and leave matters in this state? How can I go without knowing whether I am ever to see her again? Maud, what is to be done?”

“Nothing, Archie, nothing.” There was hopelessness in the tone as well as the words. “You must go, dearest, indeed you must, and—”

“Well, Maud?”

“Oh, it is so hard to say that we must part—and part for ever! Yet it must be so;—but there is a hope, Archie,” she said, quickly, “a faint shadow of a hope, then let us live on that, slight as it is.”

“What is it? God knows, hope of any kind would be some sort of comfort.”

“It is that Mr Kennedy may never renew his offer for me to become his wife.”

“That is the second time, Maud, that you have spoken as if Mr Kennedy had proposed before.”

“He did, last summer, and I rejected him in such a manner that I cannot, when I think calmly over it, imagine his ever coming forward again.”

“Maud, I cannot let you buoy yourself and Mr Blake up with any idea so chimerical, so delusive, as that Mr Kennedy will not seek to make you his wife. Both of you be firm and strong, and face the sorrow that is before you; do not try to smother it with flimsy draperies that are hardly thick enough even to hide it. Your only hope is in Providence; fate may yet work out your destiny differently

to what at this moment it seems certain to be ; but you have no other—none.”

Mrs Mackenzie spoke calmly and firmly, and she did wisely. Again she urged Archie Blake to leave them, and he again reiterated his question as to what circumstances could exist that could warrant Maud being so fearfully sacrificed. But it was useless, Maud implored him not to press the question, for she herself, she said, was not only ignorant of it, but desired to remain so. She was satisfied her father had no hand in it, and that she was doing it to save that father from sorrow.

“And you tell me to go—you, too, say we must part?”

“It must be, Archie, oh, this is very hard, God help me! But love me still, dear, dear Archie, love me still, and I will be true and faithful to you!”

“I will, Maud! And I will try and put trust in that Providence Mrs Mackenzie says alone can help us. God bless you, my own, my beautiful one! God bless you, my darling! And if ever a brother's aid is wanted,

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you know where to look for it, till the time comes when, as your husband, you will not require to look beyond for succour or help ; and the time will come, Maud, I know it will, you will yet be mine, my own, my very own, and, in the mean time, I will work hard, and gain laurels, that when you are my wife you shall have cause to be proud of me ! ”

Their lips were closed together in one long, long embrace, and so they parted.

CHAPTER II.

MAUD CANVASSES.

IN the spring of 1843 the Conservative member for Ashfield died. He was not a young man, and a severe cold caught during the winter, which he had been unable to shake off, at last proved fatal. Mr Longwood was much liked and much regretted, but, as far as the neighbourhood of Ashfield was concerned, his loss was not greatly felt ; for he only came down at stated periods to address his constituents, and see that his supporters were remaining true and staunch to him, so that, in case of a dissolution, he would have no cause to fear a defeat. Unlike most Conservatives, he thought it worth his while to take that trouble, and not leave all till the moment for action came.

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In the House, however, it was another affair, his death caused a severe blow. He was a hard-working member, always at his place, and always doing his utmost to steady his tottering party. His speeches were pithy, clever, clear, and to the point. He always obtained the ear of the House; not like the Liberal member for N——, who when he rises, so do his *confrères*, and slip out by twos and threes, and those few who remain begin chatting to each other on any subject but the one under debate, till the honourable member might, but for the honour of the thing, and seeing his name in the *Times* the next morning—himself slip out or sit down, for no one would have lost anything by it.

And now Mr Longwood's place had to be filled, and candidates were started and then withdrawn, and then fresh ones succeeded them, till at last they dwindled down to four that were mentioned as pretty certain as having two amongst them sure to contest the borough,—two Conservatives and two Liberals. A Radical showed his nose, and had his name pasted all over the town, but the

nose was only seen for four-and-twenty hours, and the bills as many minutes, for they were torn down, by the indignant inhabitants of Ashfield, as fast as they were pasted up ; so Mr Wilkins vanished off the political stage of Ashfield in a very undignified manner. Ashfield was a thoroughly Conservative borough, or had been up to this period, and a Liberal was not received with any demonstrations of welcome ; but a Radical ! his appearance at all was an insult they felt it hard to overcome.

Sir Philip Langley and General Crawford were mentioned as the two Conservative candidates, and Mr Myvors and our friend Joseph Kennedy as the two Liberals. Ashfield returned two members to Parliament, and the sitting member, Lord Charles Round, being a Conservative, the Liberal party thought it would do no harm if they tried, now a vacancy had occurred, to put in one of their own men, and Mr Myvors was just the man for them ; money enough to pay his own expenses, and not the smallest compunction what he swore to, provided he could get M.P. attached to his name.

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In 1843 the Liberals were very nearly as persevering and persisting as they are now, hence their success. The Conservatives are so apathetic, so lukewarm, and have been so for so many years, that their then power has dwindled down to a mere recollection of what it was.

But as only one out of the four candidates could be elected, and as the four must be cut down to two before the canvassing began, one on each side, there was no use in Mr Myvors' building his hopes too high, especially as Ashfield was not inclined to his way of thinking, or rather to his assumed politics, for, at heart, he cared for nothing but the honour of the thing. However, he was obliged to defer his own private wishes to the opinions of the party whose support had been promised him. For when the Liberals heard that Joseph Kennedy, Esquire, of Harpton Banks, was standing on the same interest, and that he was a large landed proprietor, with a neat ten thousand a year, a messenger from London was instantly despatched to Mr Myvors, requesting him to withdraw from the contest and leave the field

clear for Mr Kennedy, that they would only mar their own interests by putting him forward; in short, they had only done so thinking there was no one else. So Mr Myvors had to give up his hopes, and awake from his dreams, and, with much disgust, he ordered his bill at the Swan Inn, and left by the earliest train he could, fearing to see fresh bills stuck up over his own, urging the electors to 'plump for Kennedy,' and 'success would be certain;' he knew well enough that was what would be, and he did not care to see it.

As, of course, General Crawford and Sir Philip Langley could not contest the borough either, as they would not, had they had no personal feeling, have split the Conservative interest, it remained for one to withdraw, and that General Crawford did. He insisted on doing so, and said he was an old fool ever to have allowed his name to be put forward. What had he to do with Parliament at his time of life? So he set actively to work to push on Sir Philip's interests, but in this he was pulled up very sharply by his wife.

"My dear General, you must not canvass

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for Sir Philip when Mr Kennedy is going to oppose him."

"But, Agnes, I do not approve of Mr Kennedy's politics, and he hasn't a chance, he hasn't a leg to stand on. The man can have no more brains than a duck to have come forward. No Liberal will be returned by Ashfield, depend upon it."

"But you don't intend to vote against him?"

"Most assuredly I do. Why, do you think I am likely to forsake my opinions? Besides, Langley naturally looks to me for all the support I can give him; not that he will require it, I fancy, for I should not wonder if he had every vote that is polled."

"Dear General," said his wife in a coaxing tone, "of course I do not want to sway you in your opinions, but will you promise me, however much you may try to further Sir Philip's success, you will not vote for him? Will you promise me this?"

"My dear Agnes, what can be your reason for this extraordinary request? I assure you, it will be utterly impossible to grant it, and I

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cannot bear to refuse you anything; but if Kennedy were my own son and chose to entertain the political views he does, I would oppose him. The idea of our having a Liberal member is to me most abhorrent."

And so for the moment the subject was dropped, but only for the time being. A few days after, Maud sought her father in the library.—By the way, I wish there was some other name for that most comfortable of all comfortable rooms, no matter in what house, town or country. A library is so suggestive of a shop; one has coupled with the word visions of note paper and envelopes and other necessaries of a writing-table, together with books lent out to read at three-pence per volume, and no end of useless knick-knacks laid out tastefully on the glass-case that contains prayer-books and church-services of all dimensions and prices, and that invariably occupies the chief portion of the counter. I would have an especial name for a home library—some name denoting what it really is, a room for information and amusement, and private business, and the place of all others in a house

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appointed for family squabbles and amiable discussions, down to the giving of orders to the housekeeper, butler, coachman, or groom. However, library we must call it, till some clever or fashionable—and it matters not which, for if the latter they will be thought the former—person, gives it a more appropriate appellation.

In the library, therefore, it was where Maud found her father sitting before a large table, supplied with every article it was possible to require for writing, and all in such happy confusion and disorder that it showed the General was really busy. For I defy any one veritably engaged, to have all before them in what is called apple-pie order. The pen-tray was full of unwiped pens—bad ones, of course, that scratched or spluttered or made big blots—opened letters strewed about in all directions, envelopes with directions commenced on them, a wax taper that he heedlessly had left burning—Webster's Royal Red Book in his hand, and the peerage lying open at his side.

“Papa, are you too busy to speak to me for a few minutes?”

“I am very busy, my dear, but I can always spare time for you.”

“Perhaps I can help you, papa, at what you are doing, and then I can talk to you.”

“No, dear, you can't help me. It is this election I am busy about.”

“And, papa, it is about the election I came to speak to you.”

“You, Maud! Why, what interest do you take in it? I thought politics and girls were as opposite and opposed to each other as Whigs are to Tories.”

“I don't know, papa, about that. I don't think I do care much about politics; but I have come to ask you a favour, papa; it is that you will not vote against Mr Kennedy.”

Maud managed to get behind her father as she spoke, and she rested her hand on his shoulder—almost heavily it seemed to him. He turned his head round, however, and looked at her. She seemed to him to be very agitated.

“This is an extraordinary request, Maud, and coupled with your mother having made the same a few days since, I think there must

be some reason for it, that I am ignorant of. What is it?"

"There is, papa. I—I am engaged to be married to Mr Kennedy, and—so you see it is not surprising that—I wish him to succeed."

Poor Maud! She got the words out without breaking down, she even tried to smile—but she could not—it was a fearful failure; in its place an expression passed over her face that was dreadful to see. General Crawford dropped the pen that he held in his hand, and pushing his chair back from the table got up hastily.

"Maud, how is it, I never was told of this till now? Why has it been kept from me? When did Kennedy propose to you—and—and, in God's name what did you accept him for? You cannot love such a man as that! A beautiful girl—I can't stop now to think whether I am apparently paying compliments to my own child or not—I want merely to point out the truth to you—a beautiful girl like you, with every accomplishment it is possible to possess, highly educated, nurtured

in refinement and elegance—to throw yourself away on a man that has only within a year or two been in a position to sit down with a gentleman. A man whose tastes can ill accord with yours ; whose habits must be as foreign to all you have ever been accustomed to as a private soldier's is to his commanding officer's. Explain to me, Maud, if you can, how such a state of things is possible to exist."

For a minute or two she did not reply ; she required time to steady her voice before trusting herself to speak. How the poor girl longed to throw herself in her father's arms, and unburden herself of the terrible weight of sorrow she was shackled with, none but God in heaven knew. But she thought of the threatened disgrace, and as she gazed on his handsome honest face, his hair so white that it was like the driven snow, and thought of seeing that head bowed in sorrow and shame, she gained the self-command she wanted.

"All you say is true, dear papa, but I wish you would not ask my motives for the step I have taken. I am doing all for the best—at least, I pray God it may prove so ; but say no more

about it just now. It was only yesterday—it was settled, and I should have told you at once, but I had no opportunity. This is the first I have had ; and so you will promise me, dear papa, not to vote against him. I don't ask you to vote for him, only not against him."

"No, child, no, I will not. Maud, I am old now, and not so capable, perhaps, of judging of a young girl's heart and feelings as I might be were I forty years younger ; but yet I do not think you look as you ought to look, or feel as you ought to feel, after a betrothal of a few hours. Still you are free to act as your heart dictates ; you are doing this of your own accord ; it is all so new to me that, had I desired to influence you, I have not had the opportunity. It has taken me by surprise, for I thought—I fancied, even as lately as last Christmas, that you had remained true to your first—"

"Oh, father, stop ! I cannot bear this—spare me, father, spare me !"

Maud clasped her head between her hands, and in her agony murmured a prayer to God

to give her strength to go through with her fearful task.

“My child, my darling Maud! do not think I am reproaching you for changing; we none of us have control over the heart's feelings—well, there, there—hush—I will say no more.”

It was time he stopped, she could not have borne it much longer. She was resting her head against the back of her father's chair, clasped still between her two hands, and sobbing violently; his hand was laid on her glossy black hair, and he did his best to soothe and quiet her, as a mother would a restless sick child. She was calmer in a few minutes, and then she prepared to leave the room. It had been a trying scene to the old General as well as herself, and he did not attempt to say more or to detain her, but he bent her head down towards him, and imprinted a kiss on her brow, and, with a faltering voice, he said,

“God in heaven bless you, my beloved daughter.”

As Maud was passing from the library to her mother's room she paused a moment—she

paused to offer up a prayer of thanksgiving that she had not betrayed herself—she had been terribly on the verge of doing so. She opened the door of her mother's room, and said, in a haughty, proud tone of voice,

“Mamma, you may inform Mr Kennedy that my father will not vote against him,” and she instantly left, closing the door after her.

Mr Hammond was with Mrs Crawford. Mr Hammond had been the cause of Maud's petition to her father; Mr Hammond had made Joseph Kennedy write to her the previous day, renewing his offer; Mr Hammond brought the letter and bore back the reply; but Mr Hammond had not crushed Maud's pride yet, and she on the present occasion chose to ignore his presence. It chafed him somewhat, but he thought some day he might have his revenge, some day he might retaliate, and bring down that haughty beauty to very nearly the same level he had brought her mother. We shall see.

Maud went up-stairs. Isabella heard her passing by, and called out to her from her own room, Would she take a walk? It was so fine,

and the day looked so tempting, that Maud consented. Anything was better than being alone and thinking in the terrible state her mind was in, and though she would not have sought her sister, or any other human being, she unconsciously was relieved at being sought.

“Whither away, my bairns?” asked Mrs Mackenzie, as she met them going out, herself that moment coming in.

“For a walk, Mac, come too,” said Isabella.

“I couldn't, my dear; I have not a leg I care to call my own, they ache so. I have been trudging all over Ashfield and round about it; I have made love to two butchers, three linen-drapers, one grocer, five bakers, and seven—seven, my dears, farmers! Now, don't you think I have a right to be tired, and at the same time entitled to a presentation of plate from Sir Philip?”

“That depends, Mac, if your love-making has been successful,” said Isabella.

“Well, I have the promise of eleven out of the eighteen votes; I think that is pretty well, don't you, Maud?”

“Yes,” replied Maud, but she was not listening to them. She cared nothing about the election, it was nothing to her.

Mrs Mackenzie heard the listless tone she spoke in, and saw the troubled expression on her beautiful and usually calm face, and an idea of the truth flashed across her, for she had not heard it yet. Maud had not told her the dreaded blow had fallen at last and well-nigh crushed her. Mrs Crawford had not had the courage to tell her, but she fancied she read the truth in poor Maud's face, and she hastened in-doors to find Mrs Crawford, and hear how at last it had come about. Maud had not been able to command her sorrow-stricken expression so immediately after the interview with her father, and it told the tale in spite of herself.

“Maud, dear, you are not happy, I *know* you are not, so you need not try to persuade me you are. What is it, darling sister?” They were crossing the long meadow that skirted one side of the Wilderness as Isabella spoke.

“Bella, we have never had a thought, hardly, from each other, till lately—and perhaps it

would be better that I should withhold from you even now my sorrow. I often think we live to repent of words spoken, but rarely have we to regret having kept silence."

"Maud, if you don't tell me everything now, this moment, I won't believe you love me one bit. I am not a child now, Maud; I am old enough to enter into all your troubles, whatever source they may arise from; and perhaps, dear, when we talk them over they won't appear so terrible."

Then Maud told her sister she was to marry Mr Kennedy; and then she poured out the whole misery of her heart, her blighted hopes, her blasted future. Isabella never interrupted her, she let her go on and on, till she knew everything—everything that Maud could tell her—her deep, wild love for Archie—her dreams of happiness as his wife—her fearful wakening after that interview with her mother—her dread that every moment would bring the hated man with his hated offers again before her—her hope reviving as time passed on and nothing happened—her interview and parting with Archie that cold winter's night

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after Charlotte Blake's wedding, in the school-room ; and, lastly, Kennedy's letter of the previous day, and her reply containing the pledge to become his !

And Isabella listened with every nerve and fibre in her heart beating with pain and anguish for her sister, her idolized sister. What could she say ? There was no hope to hold out to her—there was no comfort to offer her.

“ Oh, that the beast had taken a fancy to me instead of you, Maud ! I should not have cared. I would have married him, and driven him wild afterwards, till his prayer day and night would have been to be free of me. But you, you, oh, Maud ! You are so good, so right thinking, so right acting, that instead of making him hate you as I should do, he will love you all the more.”

The tears trickled down the fair, loving face of Isabella as she spoke. Maud did not reply ; she did not speak for a long time ; they walked on and on in silence, but she felt better able to bear her burthen, now that she had freely opened every thought and feeling of her heart to her sister.

“Maud, is it this terrible business that has made papa look so anxious of late?”

“No, Bella, he never even dreamt of it till this morning. But has he being looking anxious? I have been so selfishly occupied with my own sorrows, that I have not noticed it.”

“Oh, yes, once or twice I have felt inclined to ask what it was, and then I thought I had better not, for you know he never tells me anything. It is only to you he ever talks about business.”

“Perhaps this election has harassed him a little.”

“Ah! I daresay it has, no doubt that is it,” said Isabella. And so the matter dropped.

General Crawford was harassed; but it was neither his daughter's affairs nor the coming election.

CHAPTER III.

THE ELECTION.

ASHFIELD was in a ferment, in a state of such tumultuous excitement, that the oldest inhabitant could not remember anything to equal it; but then the oldest inhabitant had never known a Liberal attempt to stand for the borough; the extent that they had ever gone to was just as far as Mr Myvors, but never a step beyond; and the corporation of the town and all the county people were in a high state of wrath about it. But, whatever they thought and felt on the subject, it was very clear that there were others who dared to differ with these powerful forces, and paraded their obnoxious opinions in a loud unseemly manner, under their very eyes.

“The Swan” was decorated with orange

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flags, and orange drapery hung over the balcony of the large front room, used as Joseph Kennedy's committee room. "The Swan" stood in a street leading out of the market-place, where the nomination had taken place the day before, and the show of hands being in favour of Sir Philip Langley, a poll was demanded for Joseph Kennedy; and the election was to take place on this day, the 8th of April. Sir Philip Langley's committee sat at the "White Horse" in the market-place, there blue was holding sway, even to the dress of the buxom wife of the inn-keeper, but then blue was a more suitable colour to deck her comely person with than the hostess of "The Swan" found orange to be.

Every shop in the town was shut; not only because there was not much chance of business, but hot work was expected. Ashfield did not intend tamely to let a Liberal represent them, and yet it was being whispered pretty loudly that Mr Kennedy's chance was not a bad one. A little before ten o'clock the Harpton Banks carriage came driving in with four horses, each with a huge orange bow at the

side of their heads. The servants were similarly decorated. Joseph Kennedy was looking a little uncomfortable, he had heard vague rumours about rotten eggs and decayed apples, and other equally objectionable articles being hurled at the unfortunate would-be members' heads.

As his carriage approached the hustings a tremendous shout was given by some twenty or thirty rough-looking fellows awaiting his arrival. "Kennedy for ever! Vote for Kennedy! He's your man. His pockets are well lined; that's what we want, money,—hang principles!"

"Yes, hang radical principles, and radical candidates! Bonnet him, boys! Here, give us a fist full!"

This was addressed to a man holding a bag in his hand, and who complied instantly with the request. A fist full was taken of the contents, which was flour, nothing worse than clean fresh flour, and in a moment Joe Kennedy received it in his face. It did not hurt him, but it considerably diminished his dignity, which he had been trying very hard

to keep up. Hammond was sitting beside him, and Hammond, like all bullying men, was a coward, and when he saw how things were likely to turn out, he proposed to turn back.

Joe Kennedy turned his befloured face to him and asked him what he came for if he was going back ?

“ But you can't unless you walk, the carriage—”

A huge stone was thrown from the crowd, from what direction it was impossible to find out ; fortunately it fell harmlessly at the bottom of the carriage, but it stopped Joe short in what he was saying,—besides that, it was the signal for a row. To look down upon the crowd, it seemed as if every one was intent on breaking every one's head that came within reach, irrespective of party ; and where the colours were not visible it was so . Fortunately the cry of “ Here's the right man ! Vote for Langley ! He's a gentleman ! ” stopped the fighting for the time being ; and the blues rushed off to support their own man.

In the mean while, Joe Kennedy and Hammond—for he found out that to go back

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through the mob that had now assembled would be worse than staying—managed to get into “The Swan,” where Mr Truman the chemist and Mr Lillywhite the wine-merchant, Kennedy’s proposer and seconder, were waiting to receive him, and proceed with him to the hustings.

“Is General Crawford coming to vote for you, sir?” asked Truman.

“No, not for me, but he has promised not to vote against me.”

“Ah, it’s a great pity he does not support you. The General is greatly respected in Ashfield; it would have been worth twenty votes from the opposite party to you if he had shown. However, I think we are safe.”

“They are calling for you to show yourself, sir,” said Mr Lillywhite.

“Just give them a bow from the balcony. Allow me, sir, first,” and the wine-merchant took an orange-silk handkerchief out of his hat and began to flap off some of the flour from Kennedy’s clothes.

“Thank you, thank you,” said Joe, almost preferring the flour to the flapping, and walk-

ing towards the balcony, where he had no sooner shown himself than he was received with shouts and groans, applause and hissing, and then one of the dreaded eggs were thrown at him. It tried his temper somewhat, and a muttered "Damn them" brought Mr Truman near enough to be heard by him without being seen by the crowd.

"Take it good-temperedly, sir, for heaven's sake, take it good-temperedly; joke about it; say something about an egg *soufflet*; you know it *was* one, sir."

But Joe could not joke; and, moreover, he did not understand what the chemist meant. To him a spade was a spade, and a rotten egg a rotten egg, nothing more and nothing less.

"If you'd have left the flour where we put it, you might have had a cheap pudding," called out some one.

"And if folks say true, it's not long that you've known what it is to have a pudding. Where did your money come from?"

"Where it came from, will not interest you, but I can tell you where it will go to—it will go towards improving this town in various

ways, and to building cottages for the poor round my estate, that will enable them to live in a more comfortable and proper state than they do now."

"That's right, sir—capital!" said Lilly-white, wine-merchant.

But Joe could not go on, for he had nothing more to say, and the power of invention was not strong in him; besides, the awful yells and hooting, mixed with shouts of applause, were perfectly deafening, and so he retreated. He had to undergo another cleansing process; this time it was a more elaborate business, for the egg was a very bad one and proportionately nasty.

They now proceeded to the hustings; there was a very little distance to go, but it was terrible work getting there. Hammond was bonneted almost as soon as he got out, and then when, by dint of great exertions, his hat was got off, the shouts and jokes that greeted the appearance of his wild-looking head were too much even for his friends to hear unmoved; they joined in the laughter, which simple fact did Joe Kennedy's cause great good. Many

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votes, more a great deal than the canvassers have any idea of, are given at the moment to the candidate who either in person or manner happens to please. What do half the constituents care whether a Tory or Whig represents them? They, many of them, don't understand the distinction—except by colour; but they do understand a man having a jolly face, and a joke always ready, and they can appreciate the one who is not too proud to drink a glass with them; he comes down to their level, which is what they like. They don't care for the aristocrat, whose bearing towards them is arrogant and haughty; his principles may be anything, provided his pride is not visible.

Sir Philip Langley, the head of one of the oldest Kentish families, thought, as all the county did, that he was certain of success, and no doubt, had he stood for the county, he would have had hardly a hundred votes polled against him, but the borough was another affair altogether.

Owen Blake was conspicuous amongst Langley's supporters, he was going about with his pleasant, genial smile, and a good word for

every one; nothing came amiss to him, though he was terribly buffeted about, but he walked through the friendly crowd or the infuriated mob with equal good temper. He was resolved from private reasons—for as far as his politics went, they were not very straight-laced—to do his best to push in the Conservative member. He was walking in front of the polling booth, arm-in-arm with young Ingram, son of one of the county members, who lived some twenty miles from Ashfield, but he came with his father to lend a helping hand if wanted, which however they did not any of them seem to think likely—and there lies the principal cause of the defeat of the Conservatives in general, they are so confident, so pleased with themselves, that they are under the delusion every one else is the same, so self-satisfied that they will not exert themselves, and so they have nearly been extinguished.

Kennedy's party had, from the moment it was thought of his standing, commenced canvassing on all sides, even where they knew no hope existed, still not a chance was let slip of getting in the wedge. Kennedy unfortunately

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had no wife or sister that was available to help on his cause with soft words and gentle looks ; poor Miss Kennedy would not have obtained one vote for him had she worked from Monday morning till Saturday night, and the wife—was not a wife yet—besides, had she been I much doubt Maud Crawford trying to talk over the fat coarse farmers or the greasy butchers. She might have gone, and by her proud haughty manner taken them by storm, and obtained their votes before they knew what they were saying, but that is the only way Miss Crawford would have canvassed, and as a rule that sort of thing does not do.

“ Will Killick vote for us, do you think ? ” said Owen Blake to his companion.

“ When my father spoke to him, he said he must consider, that he thought Kennedy was likely to do more good in the place than Langley would. You see that fellow coming down among them with such a fortune has done a deal of mischief, and people are not content to put it at what General Crawford says it really is, about ten thousand a year, but they treble it ; I have heard over and over again he has

thirty. www.libtool.com.cn What possessed him to buy Harpton Banks ? ”

“To be near a good old county family that knows who he is, I suppose. The Crawfords knew his brother very—take care, Ingram ! ”

But “taking care ” was of no avail, for Ingram’s hat was sent flying before he knew it stood in any danger of such an aërial journey.

“ Now, my good fellows, what’s the use of leaving me without a hat ! Who will get it for me ? ”

Half a dozen rushed off to try and find it ; half a dozen more came jostling up, and evidently intended mischief.

“ Let us quietly get out of this,” said Owen Blake, “ we are surrounded by these orange fellows, and they clearly want a fight. It’s twenty to two, Ingram ; we had better try and be peaceful.”

Part of what Owen said was overheard, the rest was imagined, considerably embellished.

“ Holloa, Jim ! They want to escape us— but that won’t do, we are not going to let you off so easy, Master Ingram.”

“ Why, what’s your grievance, what have

I done?" asked Fred Ingram, beginning to be a little ruffled, as he fancied it was a pre-meditated attack, and not one half joke, half earnest, as most electioneering rows are, at all events at their commencement.

"Why did you take the cricket ground from us?" said the man addressed as Jim, a great, heavy, brutal-looking blacksmith.

"I took no cricket ground from you. My father did, because you disgraced the place with your drunken riots."

Simultaneously as the words came out, a blow was hurled at young Ingram, it came from behind and struck him on the head; though the pain for the moment nearly blinded him, he turned sharply round, but could not discover from whom it came. At the same moment Owen was bonneted, so for the time being *hors de combat*.

"You are a set of d—d cowards!" called out Ingram, in a loud distinct voice. "Now, I will tell you what I will do, I will fight you all round, but one at a time; let there be fair play. Here, you blues, come over here and see that these rascals don't cheat."

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Owen was liberated from his hat now, and said, "I'll settle off a few of you, but, remember, one at a time!"

Both the young men began to prepare for action. The mob cleared a space, that the fight might be fair : there was the same honour amongst them as is usually awarded to thieves ; they meant to fight one at a time, but they thought that Jim the blacksmith, who was to have the first go at young Squire Ingram, would soon settle him. A man named Hughes claimed his right to take young Squire Blake in hand.

Within a very few minutes Jim was disposed of. Fred Ingram had, with his light active frame, but powerful arms, been too much for the great heavy blacksmith ; he had received rather sharp punishment, so much so, that when the young man stood still with his arms folded ready to keep his promise with number two, he found no one forthcoming, they seemed contented to leave him the victor. But poor Owen was not so fortunate, he got terribly knocked about ; and Ingram, seeing how matters were likely to go, separated them.

"Now, Blake, you get out of this, it's my

quarrel, and I have nothing to do, let me settle this fellow."

But Hughes, seeing how Jim had come off, declined, and sneaked away, saying he thought master Blake's bones as it was would ache for a day to come.

The two young men were in a wretched-looking plight.

"Are you hurt, Blake?"

"Not much, I fancy," he laughingly replied, "but I daresay, as the brute said, my bones will ache for a day to come."

"I'm sorry you had anything to do with it. I didn't recognize the men that were in the crowd. I don't fancy they are from this neighbourhood, their accent was rather cockneyfied."

"I daresay Kennedy had them down from London for the occasion."

"Good heavens, what has happened to you both?" exclaimed General Crawford, who was standing at the entrance of a gushop, but almost invisible, for other people stood before him.

"Oh, are you here, General?" said Fred

Ingram, "I am so glad to see you. We've had a little row, that's all: can we pass in, Hanway? If you will let us through to your back room for a minute or two, we may make ourselves more presentable."

"Pray do, gentlemen," replied the gun-maker.

"What's the state of the poll?" asked Owen of General Crawford, who was following them.

"Oh, I am afraid Langley will lose," he said. "Kennedy at the last return just now was twenty-three a-head, and they can't have many more votes to poll. Why, what wrecks you look! And you look ill, Owen; what's the matter, lad?"

"I feel a little sick—it will go off directly. That fellow gave me a devil of a blow in the stomach."

"You stay here, Owen, with me, you are not strong enough to risk being knocked about by those roughs."

"What, are you not coming to hear the result, General, on the field of battle itself?" asked young Ingram.

"I can't show, Ingram. They made me promise not to vote against Kennedy, though I would not vote for him. You know he is to be my son-in-law, so I suppose it would not have been quite the thing to have gone against him, though I would hear of his defeat with the utmost delight."

"That report then is true, Sir, about Miss Crawford and Kennedy," said Ingram.

The old General nodded his head. Somehow he felt a little ashamed of it—it did look so like accepting the man for his money only—what else could it be?

"Well, then, Blake, I shall take your hat, and I will see how matters are going."

Fred Ingram could not congratulate General Crawford. The idea of a girl like Maud Crawford marrying such a man as Kennedy was abhorrent to him, and he thought how different she really was to what he had imagined—but women will do anything for money, was his final reflection.

"Don't say you've seen me, Ingram."

"All right, sir."

As General Crawford said, Joseph Kennedy was getting the best of it, and there was no doubt he would be the chosen candidate. By three o'clock the last return was made, and Joseph Kennedy stood 55 votes a-head of Sir Philip Langley; the returning officer, Mr Bradley, then announced, amidst shouts, hisses, and hurrahs, that the Liberal candidate was duly elected.

Then Joseph Kennedy stood up and endeavoured to return thanks for the honour just conferred upon him; but it was impossible for him to get a hearing, the tumult was tremendous; his lips were seen to move, he was repeating almost verbatim his address over again, but it might have been the ten commandments he was giving out, not a syllable could be understood. So he resigned himself, perhaps not unwillingly, to necessity, and finished off with bows right and left, and then disappeared.

When Sir Philip Langley came forward merely to thank those electors who had stood staunch and firm to their Tory principles, and to say that as they had not all remained

united and not thought fit to return a Conservative in the room of their late and deeply regretted member, he trusted when next an election took place they would have discovered their mistake, and return to their old way of thinking. He was about to say something more, when he was stopped by a couple of eggs, both sent from the same direction. One broke over old little Blake, the other Sir Philip received, and a stream of the yolk ran down his shoulder and on to the side of his coat.

“I see, gentlemen, you desire to make yellows of us,” he said good-humouredly, and wiping away the mess as well as he could.

This created a turn in his favour, that is, it spared him any more personal attacks, and with a cheer from all for the defeated candidate, he was permitted to return to Endlemere without further annoyance.

Joseph Kennedy never before felt what it was to be the centre of attraction, he tasted the charms now for the first time—and for the last. Hands in hundreds were thrust

forward for him to take, as he got into his carriage. The mob cheered him as if he had been some sprig of royalty that had come amongst them. Yellow rosettes were seen on every one, where they had all come from seemed an enigma,—evidently they desired to curry favour with their new member. Those who had voted against him, as well as those who had been for him, they were all ready now to bow the knee to the rising sun. Hammond, who was again sitting beside him, felt much more at his ease, and though he had not been desirous of sharing the rough part of the business, he liked the triumphal portion well enough. And so they drove back in glory to Harpton Banks.

When the tumult had somewhat subsided, General Crawford emerged from the gunsmith's shop with Owen Blake.

“Will you believe it, sir,” said Hanway, “that Morris sold this morning a hundred blue and orange rosettes to fifty people; they all bought one of each colour, so as to stick on whichever was the winning colour. Law, sir, they don't care who's in, provided they

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get money enough to satisfy them. Sir Philip Langley didn't open his purse-strings wide enough, I expect."

"I don't know," replied the General, "but I am very much annoyed at his losing. Will you come home with me, Owen?"

"I am not fit, sir; no hat, and my coat nearly torn off my back."

"Is your trap here?"

"No, Fred Ingram called for me as he passed the Manor, and I drove in with him; but my father must be somewhere; he had the carriage, so I can go home with him."

"Squire Blake went off ten minutes ago, sir," said Hanway.

"Then you had better come with me, and I will send you back in the dog-cart after dinner," said the General.

Mrs Crawford had passed the day in some anxiety. In her heart she would have preferred Sir Philip Langley to be returned, but she feared if Kennedy lost the seat, Hammond would make use of his ill-luck against her; and accuse her of having worked underhandedly for the baronet. However, poor

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woman, she was saved all fear on that score. It was nearly five o'clock when Isabella rushed into her room.

“Mamma, that horrid man is elected! I am so sorry for Sir Philip!”

“It will be a great disappointment to him, I am afraid,” replied Mrs Crawford, fearing to say she too was sorry.

Maud met her father in the hall; not on purpose, but she happened to be passing as he and Owen Blake came in.

“Maud, Mr Kennedy is elected; he has to thank you for it, for had I used my influence, Langley would have come in without the shadow of a doubt.”

“Not me, papa! He has nothing to thank me for, I—” Maud stopped; she was going to say she merely acted according to her mother's wishes. What did she care whether he was in Parliament or out of Parliament? And for Owen to hear that she had exerted her influence over her father to prevent his voting it was very hard, very, very hard, but what could she do?

“Mac, dear Mac! Would that God saw

fit to take me from this world of sorrow. My life is such a burthen to me now!" Maud covered her face with her hands as she spoke. "Oh, if I could but shut out thought!"

"My poor Maud, I cannot comfort you. I know not what to say; except, child, that you are doing right, and such doing in time brings its own reward."

"Ah, Mac, but time is so long, and so dreary. And then I don't want to cease loving him! It is such happiness to love him, and to feel that I am loved in return."

"But, Maud, you must crush those feelings, they will become sinful if indulged in when you are another man's wife."

"It can't be sinful to love. If so, God forgive me, for I must love him on—on till the end; with my life only will it cease, and not even then, it will live with my spirit through eternity."

"Poor Maud, my poor child! God help you!"

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE WEDDING DAY.

How often we talk on a subject in a jesting tone, that did we actually face it, and see it in the light of a probable possibility, we should only touch on it with fear and dread—perhaps not at all. We speak of death—to those we love best, of their own death and to themselves—in a light strain, as if it were the most diverting mythical subject in the world, yet knowing it full well to be one that must come to pass, and that when it did, it would tear our heart-strings asunder with a fearful wrench, but we don't think of it in that light when we joke about it, we merely talk of it, for the sake of talking. It is the same with other

subjects, sickness, accidents, no matter what, when they are or seem to be in the far distance we jest over them.

Some such reflections as these passed through Mrs Mackenzie's mind, when she was sitting thinking over Maud Crawford's sad fate. She remembered her joking the girl about Mr Kennedy's offering to make her the mistress of Harpton Banks and his town house in York Place; and she thought could she have foreseen the future, she would have cut her tongue out sooner than have jested on it.

I am not going to inflict on you a description of Maud's wedding; it is sufficient to know that it took place, that everything was on a scale of great magnificence; no expenditure was spared in any way; and that to an outsider it appeared very brilliant and as joyous as many another wedding where no alloy mingled with the seeming happiness. No one knew, but the very few closely connected with her, and not all of them, of the unutterable anguish that was rending the heart of the chief actor in that gay scene.

She was the envied of three-fourths of the girls in the county.

Do people ever stop to consider when they are wishing other people's lot their own that they must take the good and the evil alike; or do they merely give expression to such desires simply because they know it is impossible ever to come at them? No one, it is certain, could have envied Maud with any sincerity, if they knew the bitterness that was gnawing at her heart.

Wealth may have great attractions to many, but wealth cannot purchase happiness, it cannot purchase love, though it may and does very often the profession of it. But without love or happiness, what is life worth? There are, no doubt, some few people so constituted that the sole affection their hearts are capable of containing, is the love of self,—then to those, wealth can purchase happiness in so far as it will procure their every inward and outward comfort. But it may always be remarked in such cases, contentment is wanting and health is uncertain. The body suffers if the heart is callous. In short, all suf-

for one way or another in this world ; we have suffered ; we do suffer, and we shall suffer, and we were born, it appears, expressly for that purpose, and even money cannot alter it.

The wedding was over, and Mr and Mrs Kennedy started in a carriage, drawn by four prancing greys, for the Ashfield station, where a demonstration was got up for their new member and his beautiful bride. The engine was decked with flags, and went puffing and blowing from one rail on to another till it was righted, with these gay appendages flying about, like some crazy being escaped from Bedlam. And so they went off on their way to Malvern, where they were to remain a short time, and then return to London for Mr Kennedy to attend to his Parliamentary duties.

The festivities were kept up at Lee Ashton with great spirit the remainder of the day, and a dance in the evening was to bring the whole to a conclusion. Those who came from any distance had brought their change of dress with them ; those who were within a reasonable drive returned home and came back again.

It was between six and seven o'clock. The lawn in front of the old house looked very gay and bright, for there were between twenty and thirty people assembled on it, in wedding costumes, looking as fresh as they invariably do, for people somehow or another seem to think it quite necessary to purchase everything new that has to be worn at the celebration of a marriage. The company was divided into groups of twos and threes, and amongst the latter were James Cooper Hammond, Miss Kennedy, and Stephen Lowe.

“So you think of establishing yourself in a house of your own in London, Miss Kennedy, now that there is another lady to head your brother's house?” said James Hammond, whose unruffled contented face showed how satisfied he felt at the events of the day. He had been paid his bet that morning.

“Yes, of course I must. Miss Crawford always treated me as something between a housekeeper and a poor relation whenever she came to the house, so as to living with her, it would be impossible, and I told Joe so. I can't think what possessed him to marry such

a woman, and I am sure she hates him."

"So am I, Miss Kennedy," said Stephen Lowe.

"Well, if Kennedy is satisfied with his bargain, we need have nothing to say on the matter. How will Miss Marion approve of leaving Harpton Banks?" asked Hammond.

"Indeed, I don't know, and don't care. The child is beyond my management; I must try and get another governess for her. She knows she is to have Harpton Banks at her uncle's death, and she is very fond of the place, and perhaps won't like leaving it, but it will be much better for her. She was getting more wild and unruly than ever. The Crawfords have quite ruined her; telling her all sorts of stuff about her fortune, and what she can do with it, and all that sort of thing, which I am sure is very bad for any one."

"I think General Crawford the only one of the whole family that is blessed with a grain of common sense," said Hammond.

"I am sure you and Mrs Crawford seem very thick together, any way," said Miss Kennedy.

Hammond laughed,—one of those sort of laughs that when people have asserted anything, as Miss Kennedy had just done, leave them under the conviction that they are perfectly right, but that it would not do to admit it.

“I think that old Crawford's common sense, if he really has any, must have been wool-gathering, when he bought all those Ashfield and Parkhurst railway shares,” said Lowe.

“Why?” asked Hammond suddenly.

“Because I don't believe they were worth the paper they were printed on ; and now I fancy he will find it out, if he has not done so already.”

“God bless me, you don't mean that ! When did you hear anything about it ?” said Hammond.

“Why, my good friend, all London is talking about it. It's the greatest failure that ever was. They have not had one halfpenny to carry it on with for weeks ; every shilling they had is gone, irretrievably, I believe. If he gets clear of it by only losing what he paid

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for his shares, he will be lucky, but I fear he will not come off so easily. I fancy he will find himself liable like the other tangible men."

"Miss Isabella—Miss Crawford that is now—is looking very pretty, is she not, Mr Hammond?" said Miss Kennedy, who hated business talk of every description, and had not therefore listened to their conversation from the moment she heard railway shares mentioned. And she was now watching the differently dressed people before her.

Isabella was walking with and talking to Sir Philip Langley. Isabella was confiding all her sister's sorrows to Sir Philip; he had been aware of some part from the very commencement, so Isabella felt as if she should comfort herself by telling him all he did not know—and she succeeded, for Sir Philip proved an attentive listener, and every word he uttered soothed her; and she felt happier than she had done since the day Maud first poured her sorrows forth into her sister's ear. Archie Blake was not forgotten; he was pitied and felt for with earnest, deep sympathy, but

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he weighed light in the scale compared with Maud, but this was natural enough. Isabella talked on, till at last she said, as the thought struck her,

“I can't think what has possessed me to talk to you about all this—I have no business to have done so, but you won't speak of it again to any one, will you? Because I should hate my sister to be pitied by these people.”

An expression bordering on scorn crossed Sir Philip's face, not at the speaker, but at her doubts.

“You do not know me yet, Miss Crawford, or you would hardly have thought it necessary to have made me such a request.”

“Oh, I have not offended you, Sir Philip, have I?” and Isabella looked up with her pretty blue eyes, generally so merry and laughing, but now with an expression of wonderment, and a slight, but very slight, tinge of regret.

“No, I do not think *you* could ever offend me,” he replied, gazing down at his still child-like looking companion. The idea seemed to strike him, for he said, “When do you mean

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to call yourself grown up, and a young lady that is supposed to be out?"

"Why, I consider myself that now," said Isabella, a flush of indignation rising to her cheeks. If she had a weak point it was the fear of being still thought a child.

"Do you? Then I suppose you will soon be thinking of—of following your sister's example and leaving us. What shall we all do when you are gone too? Why, the county will become the dreary, heavy place it was before your father returned from India."

"Oh no, if you mean marrying! I am not likely to do that. I never mean to marry. I intend living at Lee Ashton all my life, and keep house for Percy when papa and mamma are too old to have anything to do with it."

"So that is your resolve, is it? Well, I hope you will keep it—for my sake. You hardly know, how should you? the brightness you have shed over my solitary bachelor life."

It was well Lady Langley did not hear him.

"Oh, have I? I am so glad! I will come

and shed as much as you like, whenever you choose to ask us," she replied, laughing.

"Isabella—" his tone was deep and low, and she noticed with undefined nervousness the change from the gay strain he had spoken in before—"I have been mad—fool enough to let take root in my heart a love—for one that I know can never return it. I have had the madness to tend and nurture this love till it is so strong within me, I cannot crush it—and yet it is a hopeless love."

There was a moment's pause; the first thought that came thumping through Isabella's brain was, that every one seemed inoculated with the same terrible malady—love; and then another idea took possession of her, till she thought she must be as idiotic as he described himself to be.

"Why hopeless, Sir Philip?" she said at last, fancying she had misunderstood the purport of his words.

"Because my love is not returned—and never can be! I have known that all along."

"Then when she told you she could not

love you, I think you were very foolish indeed not to try and get over it.”

“But she never told me. I never asked her.”

“Then how do you know so positively?” Isabella looked at him inquiringly with her open ingenuous face.

“Would you advise me to ask her? Think for a moment before you answer.”

“I need not think—of course you should. You know she can but say she does not care for you, and then you will not be a bit worse off than you are now. And if it turns out so, you must try and forget her, that’s all, and try also and think she is not worth having, which I don’t believe she would be.”

Isabella’s preaching had a wondrous charm for Sir Philip—a double charm—for it brought to his heart what water does to a drooping flower.

“You are a strange girl, Isabella—unlike any I have ever met before.”

I wonder if it struck Isabella that Sir Philip was addressing her by her Christian name, a liberty he had never been guilty of

before. Perhaps she was too excited with the events of the day to notice it.

“ Who is it ? ”

“ Who is what ? ”

“ Why, the young lady you are so desperate about, to be sure. Who else should it be ? ”

“ Well, I will tell you to-night perhaps. She will be here, and I will point her out to you. Will you dance the first dance with me ? ”

“ Yes. But, on second thoughts, I don't think I care to know who she is ; I think I would rather not, for I am sure I should not like her, and then I should be rude to her. Mrs Mackenzie says I am always rude to any one I don't like ; and it would be worse to be so in my own house to a guest, than if it were anywhere else.”

Sir Philip listened to her silently. His quiet, calm face was lighted up with a smile—he had a very sweet smile—and he was about to say something ; when at that moment a man came in at the gate—it was open on this occasion, so he had no cause to summon the

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lodge-keeper—he looked somewhat scared and astonished at the gay multitude assembled, but still he walked on straight up to the house; and there, though the hall-door was wide open, he rang the bell. The servants were in the hall busy clearing away the *débris* of flowers, ribbons, paper, and all sorts of odds and ends that were littered about, so that one of them instantly appeared.

“I want to see General Crawford,” said the man.

“What’s your business? For if it ain’t very particular you’d best leave it till to-morrow.”

The servant spoke familiarly though civilly, for he saw the stranger was not a gentleman, but still somewhat above his own class.

“But my business is particular, and very particular, and I must see General Crawford immediately.”

There was no use in offering any further remonstrance, so the footman went off in search of his master. In the mean while Isabella, who had watched this, to her, extraordinary arrival—for in the country unexpected arrivals are

www.libtool.com.cn always extraordinary—said to Sir Philip that she would go and see what the man wanted ; and having heard a part of what he had said to the servant, she, with a vague idea that his business was unpleasant, and wishing to spare her father trouble or annoyance on such a day, went up to him and said,

“ Cannot you tell me what it is you want instead of disturbing my father ? Is it bad news ? ”

A smile crossed the man's sober-looking countenance, at the thought of that young bright creature offering herself in her father's place as the receiver of the news of which he was the bearer : but then, when he remembered what that news was, and the probable results it would bring to that joyous household—it had struck him as a very joyous household—the smile passed away and left his face even graver and more staid than usual. He replied,

“ No, young lady, I doubt if my telling you would avail much ; better not—better not ! The news is not interesting at all,” he added in a more careless tone, “ and is con-

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nected with business, and young ladies are not generally fond of business."

The servant returned, and desired the stranger to follow him. He showed him into the library, where in a very few minutes the General joined him.

When Isabella turned round after watching this mysterious visitor disappear, she found Sir Philip standing by her side.

"Did you hear what he said?" she asked.

"Yes." Sir Philip spoke in his usual cold, indifferent manner again; but that was as habitual to him as being merry and happy was to his companion. "I suppose it concerns your father's affairs in some way." Sir Philip did not like any women, young or old, mixing themselves up with any matters connected with business.

Isabella thought nothing of the change in his manner, she was accustomed to this one—not so to the other; so on the whole, he seemed more natural when he was haughty and distant.

"You don't think it can be anything about Maud?"

He now saw that Isabella was looking pale and agitated, and he hastened to relieve her anxiety.

“My dear child, what can there be about your sister to tell, that that man could possibly know? Besides, common sense must make you see that there can be nothing. She left you not three hours ago—why, I should never have thought you would have given way to such idle fancies.”

Isabella was reassured, but she was not altogether pleased at the style Sir Philip had addressed her in. She did not at all approve of being called a child; she certainly was too old for the term to be applied in its literal sense; but she was young enough to dislike it, and did not consider it, as in after life she learnt to do, as a figure of speech, and more-over one of endearment.

When she was the mother of a son as old as she then was herself, she liked nothing better than for his father to call her his ‘dear child.’

“Isabella, Isabella,” cried little Marion, bounding up to her, “Mrs Crawford wants

you, there's no end of misfortunes! There won't be a bit of ice to be had to-night, for some one has put the ice pails in a corner of the kitchen, and of course the corner near the fire. No one can find who did it—of course he's not going to tell of himself, and old King says whoever did it must have thought they were empty. But you know they couldn't do that; could they? Because—”

“Where is mamma, Marion?”

“In the back yard, outside the house-keeper's room. She stood outside, she said it was so hot in; and so it is, for they've got roaring fires almost everywhere. I don't believe the ice would have kept in any part of the house, even if they hadn't put it just where it must have got melted.”

Isabella went off to her mother, not that she saw any good she could do, but she went all the same; and Marion joined Sir Philip Langley.

“Come here, you little butterfly, and tell me if you are very pleased at having a new aunt?”

“Well, she's better than the old one, isn't

she?" **www** Marion looked up with such a merry, cunning look, that Sir Philip's gravity gave way, and he could not help joining in the child's fun.

"You disrespectful little rebel!"

"Do you admire aunt Elizabeth, Sir Philip? If so, why don't you marry her as uncle Joseph did Maud? because, you know, he admired her."

"When you are older, Marion, you will learn that people are not always so fortunate as your uncle. They do not always find it so easy to marry those they admire."

"Ah, but it wasn't so easy. You know uncle Joseph and Mr Hammond used to quarrel terribly about it, and then there was something about money; if uncle Joseph did not pay money to Mr Hammond then he wasn't to marry Maud; or else it was that Maud wanted to marry Mr Hammond, and uncle Joseph paid him not to."

Had it not been a serious matter, and that he knew the right story, Sir Philip Langley would have been much amused at what in the present day would have been called

Marion's Dundreary method of explaining matters.

"And how did you hear all this nonsense?" he asked.

"It's not nonsense! That's just what Mrs Mackenzie said a long long time ago, when I told her I knew Maud would marry my uncle, but you see I was right, she has married him, and I know I'm right about the money."

Sir Philip thought this a dangerous little lady, and that it might be difficult to prevent her talking of the matter in the same off-hand way to any one as she had to him; and with his views it appeared to him advisable that the less there was said touching Maud's marriage, if the money transactions the child talked about had any foundation, the better. But he was misjudging Marion, for the instant he said it would not be kind in her to tell any one else what she had told him, she never breathed a word of it to a soul.

"Would it do Maud any harm, would it make her unhappy?"

"Yes, it would, very unhappy."

"Oh, then I won't. I will never, never

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speak of it again, and mind you don't tell any one either. You know I am going to live with my aunt in another house. Won't it be horrid? And I am to have a new governess, and a music-master, and I don't know what all beside. Won't it be a bore? I wish aunt Elizabeth would marry; because, you see, if she married I should go to school; and I've lots of money; and I heard Mr Hammond say, when people had lots of money they could do anything they liked, and everybody did what they chose; and that's very nice, you know, isn't it? I like doing as I please, and I like to make everybody do the same; don't you?"

"I suppose it is pleasant," said Sir Philip, amused, in spite of himself. "But many things that are pleasant are not good for us; and I am afraid it would not be good for us always to have our own way. But, Marion, I hope you do not care much about money; it's not worth caring about. When you are older and able to understand these things you will find how useless it is in making you happy."

"No, I shan't. I understand it all well enough, and I know it is a great thing to be

rich. I shall be able to buy anything I like, and I shall have ices every day of my life. I do like ices, don't you? I am so sorry they have gone and melted them all. Percy and I had ice five times at the breakfast, and we meant to have had it five times more to-night, and now we shan't have any."

"No, that's very sad! But I am not sure but what it is a special piece of good fortune instead of the reverse, for I expect had you got through five more ices to-night, you would have been very ill to-morrow, and then I think you would have begun to see that money could not save you from having a sick headache."

"Oh, yes, it could; it could buy a doctor to cure it. It could do that, couldn't it?"

"What is Marion chattering about?" said Isabella, who now joined them.

"About ices and their consequences," said Sir Philip.

"Well, there will be no consequences from them to-night," said Isabella, laughing, "for they are all in a liquid state. You never saw such confusion as the melting of these ices has

caused. I consoled mamma by telling her they would do to drink, but King, who feels as if his whole reputation depended on the supper and refreshments being perfect, is beside himself; and, before any one could stop him, took one pail full and poured it out in the yard. It was just in front of the dog-kennel, and as it happened to be strawberry cream the dogs approved of it; and they began to lap it up with the greatest appreciation, upon which King swore at the dogs and called them uneducated fools! I laughed till I was tired, and then came away. Tea is ready in the long tent, will you come and have some before dressing?"

Sir Philip was willing to do anything Isabella suggested, so they all went towards the tent, placed on the other side of the house. As they were crossing the gravel walk leading down to it Isabella saw the stranger who had called to see her father, leave the house and go away.

CHAPTER V.

MEETING BY MOONLIGHT.

THE evening, like the ices, proved a decided failure. Every one was tired, and those whose first youth had vanished, slipped off, leaving their sons and their daughters, if they had them,—the former to take care of themselves, the latter to some matron's, who was too watchful to leave her child under any other eye than her own. The dresses were a mixture between gay morning attire and a hastily got-up evening dress,—something like the supper, what was left untouched from the breakfast, with a few fresh additions. Only the young seemed to enjoy themselves. Young people are not weary soon of amusement.

But there was one exception, Sir Philip Langley. He had felt strangely happy since

his walk with Isabella before she was summoned to hear the ice disaster ; and he was as impatient for the dancing to commence as the youngest man in the room, leaving alone Percy, who still thought dancing a great humbug. And when the squeaking, grinding noise all violins are made to produce before their after musical sounds are brought forth, and the cornet-à-piston sent forth a few soft notes, that sounded, however, frightfully discordant on account of the aforesaid violins, and a double bass that was growling in the most unpleasant manner ; when this diversified discord reached Sir Philip's ears, he instantly went in search of his promised partner. He found her talking to her father, away in a far-off corner. Sir Philip was struck by a marvellous change he perceived in the old General's face, it looked so hard and yet so haggard. His eyes, usually so bright, were dim and heavy ; but beyond some ordinary remark to him, Sir Philip made no comment on his appearance to the old man. Then he claimed Isabella for the first dance.

To Isabella the dance was just like any

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other, not so to Sir Philip : he apparently had never gone through a quadrille before, that is, if one was to judge by the very absurd and awkward mistakes he was incessantly making. And then, when they had nothing to do, instead of talking to Isabella as common civility demanded of him, he found it impossible to get a word out. Isabella was piqued, she thought he must be dreadfully bored with her, or he never could have been so stupid. And so the dance came to an end. As Sir Philip felt her arm rest on his, and they walked down the room, his heart beat like a frightened girl's ; yet he was just going to speak, when she interrupted him by saying,

“ Now, Sir Philip, you are released, you have done the civil by asking me to dance, pray don't vex yourself by considering it necessary to ask me again. Go and seek your obdurate lady love, only mind and talk to her, or else she will not believe you care for her.”

And Isabella slipped away in a moment. There stood Sir Philip feeling very like a fool. For a minute he fancied she had guessed the truth, and that what she said was to let him

know it; but on second thoughts, he knew enough of her to feel certain she had spoken under a slight irritation at imagining he really had asked her to dance for mere civility' sake, and had been bored accordingly. She was too ingenuous, too young and too natural, ever to have made such a speech, had she really known what the state of the case was.

He wandered away from the ball-room and passed a small group of men who were in the hall and talking earnestly, and in an undertone. They called out to him and he joined them.

“Have you heard the news, Langley?” asked one of the oldest of the Kentish squires, who had represented the county for thirty years, but who had long since given up politics and made way for younger men and fresher brains.

“No,” replied Sir Philip, in a careless tone, and not caring a straw what news it might be. The Emperor of all the Russians, or the Pope of Rome, might have arrived at Endlermere to claim his hospitality, and he might be about to be informed of the fact, and

had he, he would only have desired whoever brought the intelligence to go back and say he was engaged, but he hoped they would take some refreshment. What he was about to hear was likely to interest him more than the advent of either of those two important personages.

“Why, they say the principal clerk or manager of the Parkhurst and Ashfield Railway Company has bolted, taking every rap he could touch; he knew the whole thing must go smash, and so he has taken care of number one, and is off.”

Sir Philip was nearly stunned. In a moment it flashed across him how fearfully the blow would fall on the one whose hospitality they were at that moment enjoying.

“It seems he has never yet paid a half-penny to a single share-holder since the railway first began to work, he has been gathering what little came in for his own benefit, and when he saw no more was likely to come to hand he shot off with what he had.” This was said by Mr Ingram, who had dabbled in the matter a little himself; but he was only a loser of a

few hundreds, having sold his shares for a quarter of what he paid for them, some time ago, when he fancied things did not look flourishing.

“ I hope, Langley, you have no great interest in the matter,” said another of the group, seeing how silent and terribly calm he appeared. There is something in such stern calmness very dreadful to witness.

“ No,” he replied in a hollow tone of voice, “ I have not a single share, but I fear General Crawford will be a terrible sufferer.” And then he remembered that strange man’s visit, and the haggard look on the General’s face not half an hour ago. He felt it was all true, and he moved away, for he could not bear to hear more, he had heard enough ; but before going he said,

“ I would not speak of this here to-night.”

“ What a cold, unsociable fellow Langley is,” said Mr Ingram.

“ Ah, but he’s not cold if you require a service of him, and he’s not unsociable if he is with those who require cheering and comforting,” said the old squire, and the old

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squire was right. Sir Philip was, as most men of his temperament are, rapid in coming to any decision, and firm in carrying it out. He did not take five minutes to resolve that he would at once propose to Isabella Crawford. He felt to delay till the morrow would be to delay it altogether. He must ask her to become his wife whilst her father was still the well-off owner of Lee Ashton, not a ruined man. She must not fancy pity prompted him in coming forward, and there must be no feeling of gratitude on her side. They must that night be pledged to each other, or they must follow each their paths in life separate and apart.

So then he looked for her in every place where he thought it likely he should meet her ; in every room that he dared to penetrate he did, but still she was not to be found. He asked both Mrs Crawford and Mrs Mackenzie if they had seen her, but no one seemed to know anything about her. Then some dreary feelings took possession of him, and he wandered out unconsciously on the lawn in front of the house, where he and Isabella had had such a happy walk that afternoon.

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It was a lovely night, the sky looking almost black from the brilliancy of the stars, and the great moon, that was shedding a light so bright that everything within sight stood out in the supernatural manner, casting their dark, big shadows behind them, that by moonlight all objects seem to do.

There were three yew-trees at Lee Ashton that were the admiration of every one, and people flocked on Sundays from Ashfield to have a look at these wondrously beautiful old trees. Towards these Sir Philip bent his steps—they stood together—and under the centre one, round its knotted bark, was a seat. A feeling very near akin to fear took possession of him, so near that he would not afterwards have cared to own it, as he saw something all white moving slowly up and down just beyond this tree, not within the reflection of the moon's light, but walking over the ground shadowed over by the trees. He stood still. His footsteps over the soft turf had been noiseless, so that his presence was unperceived by Isabella, for it was her light figure had struck him for a moment with alarm, which,

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the instant he stood still, he recognized. He waited a moment, hoping she might see him, but she continued her walk, quietly unconscious of his proximity.

Sad thoughts filled his mind as he stood there watching her. Thoughts of what sorrow a few hours would bring on her and all dear to her. How he cursed speculations of all kinds ! It was something to him so foreign to common sense having anything to do with them, that he could not understand any one with reasoning powers having the folly to risk even a shilling. Then his ideas ran riot for a few minutes, wandering off from the railway schemes to his brother-in-law, who had, before he married, nearly ruined himself through another species of gambling, that is, buying foreign stock at a very low figure, and waiting till it rose either to par or at a premium. How often it dwindled down to nothing, Lord Stoneham best knew ; but the result was that for many years Stoneham Castle was shut up, and his Lordship living in an *entresol* in Paris till his affairs became tolerably straight again ; for he happened to

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be an honest man, and determined, that as he could not think of marrying till his property was all clear, there was no use in remaining in England, and mixing in society where by some ill luck he might happen to fall in love.

Sir Philip was aroused from his meditations, which had so little to do with what really most occupied his heart, by the rustling of Isabella's dress seemingly nearing him. Then, as he resolved to speak to her then and there on the subject that had for long months been his constant thought, came such a shower of doubts, that had it not been for the terrible tidings he had just learnt, he would have returned back to the house, leaving her in ignorance of even having seen her.

Would she accept him? That was the point. She, so young, so joyous, so attractive, so pretty! Goodness knows what other charming qualities he would not have added to the list, but he saw at that moment she was moving out from the shade, probably intending to go in.

“Isabella!”

It was very thoughtless of Sir Philip to

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speaking in so lachrymose a tone at such a time and in such a place, to say nothing of his having hitherto been invisible. The poor girl gave a smothered scream ; for she recollected at the same instant that all the guests that then thronged the house might hear her, which was certainly not her desire ; she did not care to be found wandering about in that crazy manner all by herself. But she was horribly frightened ; too frightened to run, and she stood still, hearing her own heart beat.

“ I hope I have not alarmed you,” said Sir Philip.

Of course he had ; and he ought to have known he would.

“ Who is it ? ” asked Isabella, somewhat reassured.

“ Me !—Philip Langley ! ”

“ Oh, how could you frighten me so ? ” said Isabella, feeling now exceedingly cross.

“ I am very sorry I frightened you. I did not think about it. I was so anxious to speak to you. I have been looking for you everywhere, though I did not come out here to seek you ; but not finding you, I wandered out

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without thinking, and then I saw you, and could not resist waiting to speak to you.”

Isabella was silent. A woman's instinct told her what Sir Philip sought her for, and that very feeling urged her to escape if she could.

“I am so cold,” she said, “I must get back into the house and warm myself.” And she shivered as she spoke.

“No wonder you are cold! You 'have no shawl on, and nothing over your arms. Why, your hand is like ice,” he said, taking hold of it. “Let me go and fetch you a cloak, for I wish to say a few words to you, and it is impossible to do so as well in the house, with so many people around us.”

“You want to make up for your silence when you danced with me, I suppose.”

Sir Philip smiled, a sad smile, and Isabella saw it as she looked up in his face. She was not either in the humour for joking, so she said no more. He went off for the cloak, and when he was far enough to be out of hearing if she followed him, she also moved towards the house, thinking to get in whilst he was searching for a cloak, and so escape him. She

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would have done so had she been a little quicker in her movements, but he did not stay to choose a wrap for her, but laid hold of the first he saw amongst the heterogeneous mass lying on one side of the hall on a long oak table. They met at the hall door, both starting back, for both were hurried.

“This is not kind, Isabella! Come, let me put this round you, and I will not keep you five minutes. You surely can spare me that, it is not so very much to ask for.”

So she went, and they, for a few minutes, walked up and down on the velvety grass, so smooth and soft that no carpet could compare with it. The five minutes he had petitioned for were close on elapsing before he began to speak. He felt a slight contempt for himself that he should give way to this nervousness, at the mere thought of asking this young girl to become his wife. But then it was a plunge he was going to take, a blindfolded plunge; he did not know whether he might not strike against a rock that would sorely bruise him, or find a soft bed of flowers to rest on. The consequences might blast his whole future, or

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it might brighten every moment of life he had before him. At last he took courage and spoke out.

“Isabella,” he stopped a moment, but then went firmly on, determined at once to know the worst. “This morning you recommended me to ask her I told you I loved, whether she returned that feeling. I am going to follow your advice. Do you love me, Isabella, sufficiently to become my wife? If you do, tell me so at once—or, if you do not, then tell me still more quickly, and let me go away, and never see you again.”

Isabella, something like Maud, was devoid of romance, inasmuch as they were both too natural, too genuine, too truthful to be romantic. Isabella waited a moment, and then said, more as if speaking her thoughts aloud than answering Sir Philip,

“Then it was me you meant, when you spoke to-day? I thought so once or twice, but then I thought you, who are so staid and grave, could never like such a wild thing as they all say I am; and then you called me a child. Now, how can you call me a child in

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the afternoon, and ask me to marry you in the evening? ”

This certainly was not the sort of answer Sir Philip expected to receive ; still it was not a refusal, far away from that. He felt that could his mother have overheard what had passed, she would exclaim, “ Oh, Philip, if you take that untamed girl to your heart, it will be closing it up to all peace for the future.” But he knew to the contrary, he knew his whole soul was wrapped up in that bright, sunny child. He would tame her fast enough—once feel secure of her—if necessary, but was not her very wildness to him a loving quality? He had not answered her question, he had been thinking all this instead.

“ Well, if you have nothing more to say, I suppose I may go in,” said Isabella, a little piqued by his silence.

“ You have not answered me, Isabella ; you have not told me if you love me. *Can* you love so staid and grave a man as I am ? ”

“ I don't know if I *love* you, but I like you very, very much, and I—don't think I should be happy if you were to marry any one else.”

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“Then, Isabella, will you promise to marry me yourself? You could not condemn me to continue my old bachelor life, and you perhaps go off and marry the first handsome young fellow you meet.”

“Sir Philip, I know I am a thoughtless, careless, wild girl, but I can't joke on this subject. Perhaps my sister's marriage to-day has put more serious thoughts into my head for the moment.”

“Dearest Bella, you do not think I am joking! Could you see the steady, deep, earnest love my heart is overflowing with, you would not think me joking. From the day I saw you at the Old Manor, when you and your sister went there to tell the Blakes of your intended ball, the first you ever had here, I felt as if I could never love any one unless yourself, and yet then you were little more than a child. But, Isabella, if you have the vaguest thought that there is any one you have ever seen to whom you could give a stronger love than you can give to me, I will accept no pledge from you, you shall not bind yourself to me; I should never know another peaceful moment were you to do so.”

“There is no one I like better than yourself—none so well. I was always inclined to like you, perhaps because we are so opposite in character.”

This amount of admitted liking would have sounded a very doubtful sort of foundation to most men for building a whole life's happiness on ; but not so to Sir Philip Langley, he was satisfied, for he knew that every word she uttered was the truth.

“Then, Isabella, you promise to be mine—my own little wife !”

The “yes” was spoken but in a whisper ; it reached Langley's ear, however, and for one moment he put his arms round her and gave her one gentle, tender kiss.

His love was quiet, like himself, but, like himself, it was stedfast and true. Isabella felt very, very happy, but there was none of that violent impetuosity of feeling that all who knew her would have imagined she would have felt. His quiet, calm nature seemed to have hushed and stilled her usual excitability.

“Now the five minutes you so begrudged me are past, I suppose I must release you,”

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Sir Philip said, jestingly, "and it is as well, for I am sure you must still be cold." And he thought it necessary to take possession of the little hand that was now resting on his arm to feel whether his surmise was not true.

But Isabella would now have willingly lingered on, in that quiet calm moonlight; a peaceful night it was, and the last she passed for many a long day. The recollection of that walk always called forth happy, cheering thoughts, which bore her up through the anguish that even at that time had fallen on her home. But it was no presentiment of coming sorrow made her desire to stay a little longer; it was from the simple and natural reason of wishing to avoid a few minutes more the noise and bustle within. She wanted to think a little, to be able to dwell undisturbedly on her new position, which was so strange and unexpected she could not realize it.

They found the long drawing-room comparatively empty when they went in, and the dancing for the moment had ceased.

"They are in the dining-room, I suppose, at supper," she said.

“Will you go there, or would you rather stay here?” asked Sir Philip.

“I think we may as well go there, for I am rather hungry. I consider that I have had no dinner to-day.”

Decidedly Isabella was not romantic.

Just as she was seated and preparing to do justice to some chicken Sir Philip had procured for her, her mother, who was at the other side of the table, said to her,—

“Have you seen your papa, Bella?”

“No, mamma, I have not seen him, oh, for hours I should think.”

“I wish you would go and see where he is, dear.”

“Let me go,” said Sir Philip to Isabella.

He fancied he knew why the old man had absented himself. It would have been beyond human endurance to have quietly witnessed the gay scene before him, with the dreadful truth which was staring him in the face. Sir Philip would also have spared Isabella, if he could, a knowledge of the terrible blow that had fallen on them all, till it was absolutely impossible to conceal it from her.

“No, no,” she said, “I would so much rather go myself, because,” and then she whispered as he stooped down to listen to her, “I can then tell him about you. I may perhaps then be able to believe it, for now it all seems like a dream and not a reality.” And she rose to go, leaving her supper untouched.

“Let me go with you at all events, and, if need be, plead my cause.”

Though, in his heart, Sir Philip Langley doubted that being necessary, there could be no possible reason, had all been with them as it had been a few hours back—before the terrible catastrophe that was to be the cause of working such hideous results was known—why General Crawford should not joyfully accept the honourable, upright baronet as his son-in-law.

“I shan’t be able to say anything with you there,” said Isabella; “however, come with me.”

So they both went together.

To the last day of his life Sir Philip Langley never ceased being thankful that he did not allow Isabella to go alone.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HOUSE OF MOURNING.

SIR PHILIP and Isabella lingered a little on their way through the various rooms, more than was really necessary, for a glance round each sufficed to show that General Crawford was in none of those open to the guests.

“Perhaps he’s in the library,” said Isabella; “if he is not there, he must have slipped off to bed, in which case I shall tell him his behaviour is very mean.”

“He is not in a mood perhaps for gaiety,” said Sir Philip.

“I think Maud’s marriage was anything but a cause of pleasure to him, though he did not know the worst of it. He looked very worn and sorrowful this evening, I thought.”

They had now reached the library. Isabella opened the door.

“He is here,” said Isabella. “Oh, papa, we have been—” She turned round to her companion and said, “He is asleep, isn't it a pity to wake him? we can go back and tell mamma.” She spoke all this in a whisper.

For a minute Sir Philip Langley stood and gazed at the old man's calm, peaceful face: and then a thought struck him, and a look of terror and consternation crossed his countenance. Isabella, who was watching him, as if waiting to know what to do, saw it, and putting her hand on his arm, and without moving her eyes off his, said,

“What is it?”

She too felt alarm, but she knew not what of; she merely caught it from her companion.

“Don't move, Isabella; stop where you are.” He spoke so authoritatively that she never dreamt of doing otherwise than as he bade her.

It appeared to her as if some danger menaced her, which he was protecting her from. Her eyes followed his movements. She saw

him go towards her father and take his hand, which he let fall again instantly, and then he put his own in between the waistcoat and shirt, and placed it against the apparently sleeping man's heart. A minute he left it there, and then slowly removed it. Now he turned towards the young girl, who stood like one turned to stone; without being able thoroughly to grasp it yet, she suspected the truth—her father was dead!

“Isabella!” Sir Philip was by her side once more, and placing his hand on her fair wavy hair, and drawing her towards him, he said in a gentle soothing tone, “You know the truth! you must be brave, my child, under this awful affliction. You must bear up; you will have to support your poor mother under this heavy blow. God help her,” he added to himself, “if my suspicions are correct it will indeed be a weighty sorrow.”

“Papa, papa,” wailed out poor Isabella as she went up towards her father, and gazed on his calm, peaceful countenance. It was a terrible shock to the poor child; she kneeled down and put her hand on his, but started

back as if an electric shock had passed through her. It was the contact with death—an awful, fearful sensation.

“He is not dead, Sir Philip, he cannot be, look at him!”

Sir Philip shook his head. It was hard to realize it. He looked as if in a quiet sleep, but it was that sleep from which there is no waking. Isabella had never looked on death before, and to her it was fraught with more terrors than it would have been to a less sensitive, less imaginative nature.

“My sister, my darling sister! Oh, this will be a heart-breaking sorrow for her,” exclaimed Isabella, as the thought of Maud’s love for her father came across her, and she has sacrificed herself in vain! “Oh what misery, what misery for us all!”

“It was to be, my Isabella,” said Sir Philip, “or it would not have been permitted. We must hope, must pray, it is all for her good.”

But just now Isabella could see nothing that could turn to good. She forgot the good that had befallen herself; she did not think of

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her own happiness, she was so completely bowed down with the shock of her father's death, and, as she believed, the unavailing sacrifice her sister had made.

There was now a bustle in the passage, and the rustling of ladies' dresses, and merry laughing voices were heard approaching. Sir Philip, with his natural forethought, rushed to the door to prevent any one coming in; he feared Mrs Crawford coming, perhaps in search of them. But it was not her; it was Mrs Mackenzie, followed by a group of girls in eager haste, with Marion at the tail of them.

"Oh let me in, pray, Sir Philip," she said, seeing him holding the door as if to close it on her, "let me escape these tormentors, they are insisting on my joining in Sir Roger de—— good God, Sir Philip, what has happened?"

Her suddenly stopping, and then her trembling inquiry, were occasioned by nothing more than Sir Philip Langley's awe-stricken countenance.

"Something very terrible," he replied. "Will you come in here? But first send back all those with you." Sir Philip was glad to

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get hold of her, it was necessary to have some one; and he was fearfully anxious that nothing should reach Mrs Crawford's ears in a sudden or abrupt manner.

“Oh, Mac, papa, papa!” cried Isabella, as her governess returned, and went and stood beside the poor girl and gazed at the dead man's placid face. She saw in a moment that it was not sleep, no fainting fit, but death,—death, however, in its least appalling shape. He was sitting in his arm-chair, one arm hanging over the side of it, the other, in some manner, bent under his head, for his body had fallen down that way, but merely fallen as a sleeping man's might have done.

To Mrs Mackenzie it came instantaneously, as it had almost to Isabella, that Maud's whole future had been blasted in vain, and with ten times greater force, for she knew the whole truth.

The next moment, however, she thought of the poor woman, who was now amidst a brilliant gay company, unconscious of the terrific blow about to fall on her, and which would be more crushing, more ruthless, than

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had her child's happiness not been blighted to save her honour. It fell to Mrs Mackenzie to break the sorrowful news to her. She had loved the old man, and her grief was sharp and bitter.

A medical man was sent for instantly, but he declared life to have been extinct for upwards of an hour. He was aware, it seems, that General Crawford had disease of the heart, he had known it ever since he first attended him on his return from India, and he had cautioned him against excitement or any great exertion. To his daughter's marriage was at that moment attributed the cause of his death, the excitement had been too much for him. And so at the inquest, which was obliged to be held, they returned a verdict accordingly.

And now the house of joy was turned into a house of bitter mourning. Mrs Crawford felt her husband's death deeply; but when the state of his affairs was learnt, she had to feel it in another manner, for she was left not only alone, but penniless, comparatively speaking. He was utterly ruined. Lee Ashton was mortgaged to the fullest extent, also his hard

won money, money gained truly by the sweat of his brow, his Indian savings were gone, all gone.

It was this knowledge so suddenly thrust upon him that killed the old man. It was this that wrenched the life from his body. Perhaps it is well that he died through God's will, for none can say what such anguish as the news brought to him had produced, might have led him to do.

The confusion that ensued for an hour or two after it became known what had happened cannot be imagined. Every one seemed more personally concerned than the other in the matter. Had the poor General been the father of all present, there could not have been a greater display of regret and sorrow.

It seems to be thought necessary by some people on such occasions to pretend to feel so very much more than it is humanly possible to do, where the one taken so suddenly from the midst is not either very near or very dear. At last, through the quiet exertions of Sir Philip Langley, and the more active though less persuasive endeavours of the servants, the house

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was cleared of all the guests but those from Harpton Banks. Hammond lingered behind to learn all he could; Lowe stayed because Hammond did, and poor Miss Kennedy had some vague notion she might be of use. Marion had crept in behind Mrs Mackenzie unseen, when Sir Philip had called her into the library to tell her what had happened. Where the child was now, no one knew, she had been entirely forgotten, and so not inquired for. She was sobbing her little heart out in Bradley's arms. The General's death was a sorrow to her, but it had awakened to life the one great grief of her babyhood—her father's death.

The question was, the moment the funeral was over, what was to be done? There was nothing left for Mrs Crawford but her jointure of three hundred a year, and that was safe, so she had that, but nothing more to depend on.

"Thank God you have that," said Mrs Mackenzie.

"But it's sheer starvation," said Mrs Crawford, in a complaining tone.

They were sitting in the boudoir, no

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longer pretty, for all the little knick-knacks were packed up or removed. All she could take from Lee Ashton Mrs Crawford resolved she would. Her sorrow for the time being had rendered her selfish, and not easily pleased with anything that was suggested. Sir Philip Langley had the greatest influence over her, she would listen to him, but she was snappish to every one else.

“It is very little, my dear friend, after what you have been accustomed to,” replied Mrs Mackenzie, humouring her. “But I have a plan to suggest, if you will allow me :—It is to let me live with you, and join in your house-keeping; you know, through your great liberality to me all these years, I have saved enough to keep me in comfort,”—poor Mrs Mackenzie, she wanted to make the best and the most of her little store of savings,—“and if I can be with you, I can attend to all household matters for you, and so spare you that trouble; and I think I could manage more economically than you could.”

“No doubt. But you think me extravagant, too; every one thinks me extravagant;

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and yet I am sure I am not so much so as others. Oh, I wish I were away from here now ; as I must leave, the sooner I am gone the better. Why has the taking a house and arranging everything been left to Mr Hammond ? ”

“ He offered his services, and you know there was no one else,” replied Mrs Mackenzie.

“ There was Philip Langley.”

“ You want him more here ; you could not do without him.”

“ Mamma,” said Isabella, coming in, looking very pale in her deep black dress, and weary as well, “ will you take a little jelly ? you took no breakfast this morning, and I am sure it will do you good to take something before luncheon.”

“ I don't want anything, Isabella, take it away.” Isabella was going, giving only a sorrowful look in reply, when her mother called out, “ Come here, Bella ; come here, child.” Isabella went up to her, and Mrs Crawford threw her arms round her and burst into tears. “ You are very good, very patient with me, my child ! God will reward you ; you will

www.libtool.com.cn Forgive me, Bella, if I am cross, but my troubles are hard to bear."

"Dear, dear mamma, if I can only be a comfort to you in some shape or way I do not mind anything you say to me. Indeed, your sorrow must be great, and hard to bear. I know how hard it is for me to bear, and to you, how much worse!"

"Yes, dear, for yours will pass away; mine, never."

The wheels of a carriage were heard driving up over the gravelly road.

"It's the Endlemere carriage," said Mrs Mackenzie, who had moved to the window when the mother and child were speaking. A slight blush mounted to Bella's pale face.

"Philip said he would be here this morning, mamma; will you see him?"

"Yes, dear; go to him, and tell him to come up."

"Mrs Crawford, how you must thank God for having given that dear child such a future. Sir Philip Langley is, if ever a man was, the soul of honour and truth, and a man any woman might love, and all respect."

“Yes, he is; and I am very thankful Bella seems so fond of him, though I never should have thought, with her wild, merry ways, she would have chosen one so much older than herself, and so stern and serious.”

“I don't suppose she has found him very stern,” said Mrs Mackenzie, making a sorry attempt at a smile.

Isabella did not require a second bidding to join Sir Philip. She met one of the servants—a woman, all the men except two that remained in the stables were already dismissed—coming up to tell her.

“I have been so wishing for you,” was Isabella's welcome greeting to him. “A letter has come from Maud, but I have not told mamma yet, for I waited for you to decide whether she is to have it or not. Then there is another from Mr Hammond; here they are both.”

Sir Philip took the letters, and detained the hand that gave them.

“You are not looking well, my Bella, my own heart's treasure! You look so pale and—so sad. Is anything vexing you? Are you.

unhappy from any cause I am ignorant of? If so, you must tell it me. You know," he added in a serious but gentle tone, "we are never to have one secret thought from the other."

Isabella's lips quivered and her eyes filled with tears, but she conquered them ; they did not fall.

"But for the one sorrow common to us all, I have none," she replied, nestling up to him, as if by the closer she was to him the further troubles were removed ; and so she ever found it to be. "Perhaps I let mamma's position harass me, and I don't think I am as patient with her as I ought to be. But sorrow, beyond what you know, I have none."

"When once you are mine, Bella, my very own, I can then make your mother's position as comfortable as you could desire ; but till then I dare not offer to do so. You must see, dearest, that I could not ; it would, I am sure, both offend and hurt her. But when she becomes my mother, as well as yours, we can, you can, do for her whatever your heart dic-

tates. So you must not let that thought cause you another moment's uneasiness."

"How good you are, Philip! and how thoughtful! I don't think I am half worthy of you; you ought to marry a sober, steady, parish-working woman; one that could carry out all your generous good wishes, for you have no others." Isabella spoke more like herself than she had done for days. "I am sure you only live to benefit other people. I expect you will repent of your bargain some of these days, and wish you had never met Isabella Crawford in your path in life."

"No, Bella, I can never wish that, however long I may live, or however much you may torment me. The happiness I have enjoyed since the moment you promised to be mine, has been of itself enough to prevent my ever regretting the step I have taken, selfish as it must seem to you for me to speak of happiness with the dark cloud that is just now overshadowing us all. Is Percy in?"

"Oh yes, he is sure to be in, probably in his own room. Do you want him?"

"Yes, I want to speak to him; will you

send him to me, and then I will read these letters and join you in your mother's room."

Percy Crawford was a fine, manly boy, now between ten and eleven years of age. He was tall and slight, and very like Isabella, quite enough so to make Sir Philip Langley take more interest in him than he might otherwise have done. His father's death had fallen with a double blow on him, as indeed it had done to all,—the loss to him of a father, and the loss of a fortune. Even at his age it was a terrible hardship to learn the bitter lesson scanty means teaches. Lee Ashton he knew was his, but it was worth less than nothing at present. It must be let, and the rents would have to go to the creditors. The boy, young as he was, hated the idea of any one else living in his home; the thought of a stranger being master there was galling in the extreme.

The last fortnight had greatly altered Percy. From a bright mischievous boy, he became moody and silent, always alone, and oftener doing nothing than employing himself. Isabella found him in the school-room, he was gazing out of the window, his two elbows on

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the window-sill, and his fair curly head resting on his hands. She went softly and caressingly up to him, and told him Sir Philip desired to speak to him.

“What’s he want?”

“I don’t know, dear; but go at once, for he is waiting to see you before he sees mamma.” So Percy went down.

“Percy, my boy,” said Sir Philip, kindly, “you know one of these days, and not very far off I hope, I am to be your brother. You see I might be your father as far as age goes,” he added, smiling, “but as I am only to be a brother, I want you to look on me in that light at once, and not wait to do so till your sister is my wife.”

Percy looked up inquiringly; he did not quite see what good it would do him, but he liked Philip Langley, as every one did who knew him well, so he was quite willing to oblige him, and look on him in any light he chose.

“Very well,” said Percy, “of course I will if you like.”

“You have had a terrible sorrow fall on you,

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Percy, and you have borne it, as far as I have seen, better than many boys would have done, for young as you are, you are old enough to understand the extent of the change in your position. But by great care and good management, I have no doubt by the time you are a man, things will begin to straighten."

"Well, you see, Sir Philip, it's very horrid for a fellow to feel that strangers are going to turn him out of his own home. But it isn't me so much, it's much nastier for poor mamma; I can't bear to think of it, and you see she cries so about it, and it makes me a deal more miserable than I should be if I only suffered; because you know it doesn't matter for a boy to rough it. I should not so much care either if I was old enough to do something and help her—if my education were finished—I'm so horribly sorry I didn't work more last half!"

Philip Langley laid his hand on the boy's shoulder, when he replied, "You are a brave-hearted boy, Percy, and as long as I live you shall never want for education or anything else I can give you. It is just on that point I wanted to speak to you; for that reason I told

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you you must look on me as a brother now. You must go back to Eton, Percy — and at once, my boy. Your holidays are over, and your great object must be to work on steadily, and gain all the knowledge you can, so as to fit you for any profession you may a few years hence desire to enter.”

“ But I can't go back, Sir Philip ! Mamma told me she couldn't afford to send me to any school at all.”

“ Yes, she can. She has, since telling you that, made such arrangements as will enable her to send you.”

“ I don't believe you ! It's *you* who are doing it—now isn't it, Sir Philip ? ”

Langley smiled ; he could not tell a falsehood even for a good cause, or to hide his own generosity.

“ You need ask no questions, Percy ; and all I am going to ask you is, to write to me for all you want, all you wish ; and to remember it is not to Sir Philip Langley you are writing, but plainly and simply your brother Philip.”

“ What a jolly good fellow you are ! ” burst forth from Percy before he hardly knew what

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he was saying ; “ and what a lucky girl Bella is to get you. I pitied her at first, because I thought you were so old, and a great deal too serious, but I don't now ! ”

Perhaps this was not quite pleasant for Sir Philip to hear, but it did not distress him long, and he made no reply.

And so it was that Percy Crawford continued at Eton.

CHAPTER VII.

A MORNING CALL.

LORD and Lady Stoneham lived in Grosvenor Place, the park end, and in one of the larger houses. It was late autumn, the trees were leafless, and the air damp and misty. Lady Stoneham and her mother were in the drawing-room, and sitting near a blazing fire.

“It is hardly a fit day for you to go out; had I not better go alone, and say you will call another day?”

“No, my dear, as I promised Philip, I must go; he would never believe the weather kept me at home. I wish it were over.”

Nothing more was said; Lady Langley went on with a blue silk purse she was netting, and Lady Stoneham with her drawing, till

something stopped at the door, and a double knock followed.

“That is Philip, I suppose,” said Lady Stoneham, “and yet it does not sound like his brougham.”

But it was not Sir Philip. A minute after Lady Grant was announced. Greetings ensued that would have led an ignorant person to imagine great cordiality existed amongst the three ladies; though I am inclined to think the only feeling there really was, was envy on the one side and something approaching to dislike on the other.

“You have been quite a stranger, Lady Grant; where have you been all the summer, and since it left us?” asked Lady Stoneham.

“We went to Buxton till August, and then my husband insisted on going north for some grouse shooting. It was very dull there, I will never go again, and I told him so; however, I managed to make him so uncomfortable,” continued Lady Grant, laughing, “that he was very glad to come away. Then we went home, and stayed at the Old Manor till

last week. I am quite glad to be in London again, it's the only place fit to live in."

"For those who care for nothing beyond gaiety and follies," remarked, somewhat unjustly, Lady Langley.

Lady Grant did not hear what the old lady said, or if she did she ignored doing so.

"And now tell me all you have done," said Lady Grant.

"We have been very steady, sober people," replied Lady Stoneham. "My husband and I went to Scarborough, and then we went to Suffolk for a month's shooting."

"I have persuaded my father and mother to come and live in London," said Lady Grant. "They have taken a house in Gloucester Place, the other side of the park. I have just been there to see that everything is going on properly."

"Then, Lady Grant, you have done a very unwise thing. You should never transplant old trees, they never thrive," said Lady Langley.

"Well, you see, Lady Langley, they did not seem to be going on well at home, in fact,

they never have since Archie left. Mamma is wrapt up in him, and the pleasure of having him once more near her will be very great."

"Oh, will your brother live with them?" asked Lady Stoneham.

"I hope so. William is to remain at the Manor, and to take the entire management of the estate. Owen goes back to India in January. Poor Owen! I am so sorry for him, he hates India, and it does not agree with him. However, it is better for him perhaps to be out of the way of temptation."

Both ladies looked up at Lady Grant; she smiled, and said, "You don't know the romance of Owen's life; it's not very long, if it's very sad. Owen fell in love with a young lady, an orphan, who had gone out to India to her uncle and aunt, for the purpose, I suppose, of getting a husband. She was very pretty, and encouraged Owen, and they thought him a very good *partie*, being in the Civil Service. Owen proposed, and was accepted; the day was fixed, he had taken a house, went in debt to furnish it, made her some handsome presents, and all that sort of thing; when

three days before the wedding was to take place, Miss Merton writes him a letter and tells him she likes Mr Somebody else better, and that by the time he receives her letter she will be Mr Somebody else's wife! Now, poor Owen was infatuated with the horrid girl, and nearly broke his heart, and became so ill that he was sent home on sick leave. Well, this nice couple, it seems, have come home also, and Owen met the husband the other day at his agent's; and it has so upset him, he has hardly been himself since."

"I don't think a girl who could act so heartlessly is worth the love your brother feels," said Lady Stoneham.

"Mr Owen Blake is a very charming young man, but he must be very weak," said Lady Langley. "However, really, love does make such fools of men," she added in a vexed tone.

"I think India must be a horrid place," said Lady Grant.

"Every one seems to do wrong there, especially ladies. Did you ever hear people say that Mrs Crawford—"

“Sir Philip Langley, my lady,” said a servant, opening the door.

Sir Philip walked in, dressed still in mourning out of respect to the memory of General Crawford. He greeted his mother and sister warmly ; Lady Grant, with a good deal of formality and *hauteur*. He never particularly liked her, but now that he had seen more of her, he neither liked nor approved of her. He did not care that Lady Grant should be an intimate friend of his future wife's, and he somewhat feared it would be a difficult matter to close his doors entirely against one that had been her friend from childhood, and whose father was the dearest friend Isabella's father had ever possessed. He resolved, however, to throw as much cold water on the acquaintance as he could, without actually saying or doing anything offensive. He knew Isabella did not like her, but he knew her ladyship well enough to feel sure she would not let the *entrée* of a pleasant house slip through her fingers, by any omission of her own.

“I have never seen you to congratulate you, Sir Philip, on your engagement to my

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dear little friend, Isabella Crawford. I always suspected the fair little thing had made an impression upon your heart," said Lady Grant, with a laugh very much resembling her mother's, "for I remember how you used to look cross whenever mamma spoke of her giddiness and childishness. And the time—do you remember it, Sir Philip?—when she accused her of being too fond of Archie."

Both Lady Stoneham and old Lady Langley looked up, pained and annoyed.

"Perfectly, Lady Grant. Your mother, like many other parents, was too apt to judge other people's daughters by her own. It was no doubt natural, but she often made mistakes in consequence."

"Ah, you've not forgiven her yet, I see," replied Lady Grant, with another laugh, a laugh that told of vexation; no doubt Langley's speech bordered on the rude, still he did not regret it. "I have paid you quite a visitation, Lady Stoneham," she continued; "but the truth is, I have not now fulfilled my mission; which was to beg of you to aid and abet me in getting up some theatricals. I have had great

trouble in getting Sir Martin to give in about it, but he has at last, and I have set my heart on having them on the last night of the year. What do you say to it ?”

“ My dear Adelaide,” said her mother, “ I do trust you will not have anything to do with such things. I highly disapprove of private theatricals, or public ones either, for the matter of that, and I am sure Stoneham would not like it.”

It was a most unusual occurrence for Lady Langley to attempt to offer advice to her daughter, or in any way interfere with her actions ; but she could not keep silence in this instance, she had a peculiar distaste to all connected with acting, and thought it wrong in principle. Lady Stoneham looked up, astonished, and had it not been that she had the very reverse notions to her mother's on the subject—owing, possibly, to never being allowed, before her marriage, to enter a theatre—she would, in all probability, instantly have given in to her wishes. But as it was, she said,

“ I will mention it to Lord Stoneham, and let you know to-morrow what he says.”

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Lady Grant, after a few more casual words being spoken, took leave. As she parted with Lady Stoneham she said, "Till tomorrow."

Lady Stoneham replied, almost in a whisper, "I shall enjoy it above all things; you may be sure of my help."

"Adelaide," said her brother, when their guest was gone, "pray do not have anything to do with these Grants. If you accede to her request it must lead to an intimacy which I am sure would not be desirable for you, or for any other woman. Lady Grant is not spoken of as I should like to hear my sister's friend spoken of."

"Philip, you always take strange ideas into your head. I don't know what people say of Lady Grant, but I know that the world always manages to find something ill-natured to say of a young and handsome woman. You used not to think of her as you appear to do now."

Lady Stoneham was vexed at any opposition being offered to the plan of her joining in the proposed theatricals, otherwise I am afraid she would not have troubled herself to have

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offered the slightest excuse for the world's opinion of Lady Grant.

“Perhaps not, Adelaide; but I did not know her character and disposition as I do now.”

Langley said no more; he was, or I should say had been, passionately fond of his sister, for now his love seemed all *centered* in one object; still Adelaide Stoneham was very dear to him, and his pride in her was as great as ever. He could not bear that her name should be coupled with Lady Grant's, whom people called very “fast,” and spoke slightly of accordingly. He trusted that Lord Stoneham would see it in the same light he did, and so put an end to it. And he was very sure his mother would use her best endeavours.

“Are you coming to Victoria Place, mother? It is nearly three, and the days are not very long now. Will you get ready, Adelaide?”

“It is such a wretched day, Philip, I thought mamma had better not venture out; what do you think?”

Philip looked annoyed; his mother saw it,

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and instantly said, "I intend going, my dear. Let my things be brought down-stairs to me, I need not go up."

"I do not think the weather is bad enough to hurt you, mother," said her son; "but if you think so, then put off going till to-morrow."

"No, no, Philip, better get it over at once."

This did not sound agreeable in Philip's ears. He had had no easy task to reconcile his mother to his marriage with his child-like Isabella. Lady Langley only remembered her fit for "short frocks and skipping-ropes," as she told him long long ago, when she feared a trap was being set to catch him. She could not bear the thought of her son, of whom she was so proud, taking a wife that would be little better than a plaything for him, and totally unfit to do the honours of his house. She had done her best to induce him to believe that he was going to make a fool of himself, and that he would wreck his peace and happiness by taking such a step; but all in vain. He persisted in considering himself the most fortunate man on the face of God's earth, and that he would be blessed with such a wife that no

man that had ever been born heir to the baronetcy of Langley had had the equal of. So the old lady gave up arguing, but not regretting.

She had not yet seen her future daughter-in-law, that is, not since she stood in that light to her. Till a few days ago neither had been in town at the same period ; but now that both were settled for the winter, Sir Philip lost no time in fixing a day for his mother and sister to pay their first visit to Mrs and Miss Crawford.

“ If it had only been the other, that beautiful, queenly Maud ! ” thought the old lady as she stepped into her daughter’s carriage, “ I should go with warmer feelings to welcome her to my heart, than I can that fair-haired child, that is no more fit to become the wife of a Langley than a goose is to sit on the wool-sack.”

Lady Langley had no dislike to the connection ; the terribly altered position the Crawfords were now in had not made the slightest difference to the old lady,—she was too generous-minded for that. She said truly when she

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said had it been Maud she would have rejoiced at her son's choice.

It was not a pleasant drive they had, and, unfortunately, it was rather long. They were silent for some time, each busy with their own thoughts. Lady Stoneham was picturing herself as Desdemona or Juliet, or some other prominent personage in the forthcoming theatricals, which she inwardly resolved no one should stop her in joining; her husband she did not fear, he rarely forbade her doing anything she specially desired. Lady Langley was bemoaning her son's blind infatuation, and her son was revelling in the thoughts that very very soon, now, Isabella would become his own.

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS KENNEDY'S HOME-LIFE.

AT Number 4, Ivy Cottages, sitting in the front parlour, which no longer was in the confusion that it used to be some year or two ago, was seated Mr James Cooper Hammond. He was as shaggily dressed as usual, his clothes hanging about him in the old way, and his hair in wild disorder. He held a note in his hand, one he had just received, and, to judge from his countenance, produced a mixed feeling of pleasure and surprise. He read it again, and then put it by.

“Three o'clock, she says ; I may as well get ready at once. By Jove! what a narrow thing it was! Had the old General died a day sooner, ay, twelve hours sooner, it would have been no go. Nothing would have per-

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sueded the mother then to allow the marriage to take place, and the girl herself would have turned restive. It was nothing but the woman's fear of her husband and the girl's love for her father brought it about as it was. But she ought to be devilish glad she married so well. By George, I think she owes me a great deal for the trouble I took in the matter. But I'd just as soon not have anything to do with her. I can't quite make out what she wants me for. She is deuced sharp, and once or twice I fancied she mistrusted me; but never mind, I have her well in hand. I have not forgotten the trump card I hold,—that visit of Mr Archibald Blake's at twelve o'clock at night at Lee Ashton, the day of Miss Blake's wedding; and if I keep my eyes open I dare say I may pick up another, and another, and then, damn me! if I don't play them if she drives me to it."

At the time the Langleys were calling on Mrs Crawford, Hammond knocked at the Kennedy's door in York Place.

"Mr Kennedy's out, sir!" said the servant, who, knowing all Hammond's business

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was with his master, thought he might save him the trouble of going in.

“ Perhaps so ; but Mrs Kennedy is in.”

It was with an undefined exulting feeling that Hammond said this, and then he walked up-stairs without waiting to be announced. The man stared, and no wonder. What could Mr Hammond want with his mistress, or his mistress with Mr Hammond ? for if ever two people hated one another, it was these two ; and the fact was no secret amongst the servants, by whom Mrs Kennedy was very much loved, and, consequently, her antipathies were shared by them, and Hammond detested accordingly.

Maud was sitting in a low easy-chair, with a book in her hand, but not reading. She was dressed in a handsome black silk dress, perfectly plain, and sitting close to her fine figure. She looked very beautiful, but a shade paler than she used to be ; and there was a settled look of scorn in her great brown eyes, that was rarely seen in days gone by, and then only when her temper was roused. Her white hand with its taper fingers was playing nervously with the cover of the book,

and every now and then she compared her own watch with the ormolu clock that stood on the velvet-covered mantel-piece.

When Hammond entered she rose slowly, and gently inclining her head with a haughty gesture, she begged him to take a seat.

“Law! surely she’s grown!” thought Hammond as he sat down, feeling somewhat uncomfortable before that proud beauty. “She never looked so tall as that before.”

He did not speak; she spoke first.

“Mr Hammond, I have troubled you to call, that I might speak to you on a matter of business,—business concerning my mother. You have seen fit to take the liberty of discussing her affairs with Mr Kennedy, and of telling him a falsehood concerning me in connection with her. I do not know how you manage Mr Kennedy’s money matters, nor do I ask to know, but I insist that you do not say I draw money for the purpose of helping my mother. You know best what has become of the money that to him you have accounted for in that manner; but I tell you what I this morning told Mr Kennedy, that my mother

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would starve sooner than touch a sixpence of his money.”

Hammond's sensations varied during the delivery of this speech. He certainly quaked a little when Maud hinted that he could himself account for the money said to have been disposed of by her, but a second's time reassured him. He, after all, had only Kennedy to contend with, not his wife. All he had to do was to avoid making use of her name again. It was clear Kennedy had broken faith with him, for he had given a solemn promise not to mention the subject to his wife, and this was how he had fulfilled it. He would, however, easily settle the matter this time; and the reason he paused before replying was, to consider whether it would be a wise move to give her a hint that *she* was in his power. But he came to the conclusion it would be better not, it would be the very way to prevent his gaining any fresh weapons to use against her, so he said, with the utmost coolness,

“There is some error in the matter, Mrs Kennedy. Your husband has totally misunderstood me. I know nothing about your

arrangements with your mother. I did suggest that he should help her, and I mentioned £500 a year as being a fit sum for him to allow. And I did say that it would be a much more proper way of disposing of that amount than the way many five hundreds were spent, but I never dreamt of you in the matter. I trust no ill-feeling has arisen between you and Mr Kennedy in consequence. I should be painfully grieved were I to think through any mistake of mine I had occasioned words between two people so—”

“Mr Hammond, I never allow any one to interfere between me and Mr Kennedy, nor do I permit remarks to be made to me on his or my conduct. I will not detain you any longer.” And Maud rose, rang the bell, and with another slow inclination of the head, dismissed James Hammond.

“Poor mamma!” exclaimed Maud, when she was alone. “I thank God that I can say with truth you will not, and never have taken a sixpence from him—that you are not indebted to him for one penny. But I must try and manage some way for you to have com-

forts, that I know you are without—but you shall never know it is through me they come. I must get some one I can trust to help me.”

Hammond waited to see Kennedy before he returned to Ivy Cottages. For that purpose he went into the room behind the dining-room, where Kennedy sat half the night, smoking, and drinking brandy-and-water.

“This reminds me a little of ‘The Elms,’” thought Hammond, as he sat down in a large leather arm-chair. “I knew the fellow would never turn out a gentleman, do what one would; to say nothing of his strange persistency in what I call his poverty tastes; why, he even now prefers the coarse hot brown English brandy to the pale Cognac. I wonder how those two get on when they are alone! It must be as good as a play to see that haughty beauty fire off her scornful looks at him. I daresay he leads a precious life of it, and wishes himself back at ‘The Elms,’ with the Hardys as his best friends, and Miss Kennedy to bully at as much as he likes. Poor Joe! I should be sorry for him, if the business did not pay so well.”

With these reflections he leant back in the chair, his long legs stretched out, and his boat-like shoes resting on a fender that was so rusty, it looked as if a pail of water had been upset over it. The truth was, Kennedy would keep a kettle there constantly on the boil, that he might have some hot comfort in the shape of brandy-and-water whenever he felt inclined—which was not seldom.

Marriage had not worked the improvement in Joseph Kennedy that it does in some men. Instead of being more particular in his dress he was less so, and he now always had a slouchy, untidy appearance, that rendered his plain face plainer-looking still. He was horribly afraid of Maud, yet ridiculously proud and very fond of her. If she proposed driving with him or walking with him anywhere, he was elated to the seventh heaven, and longed to tell every one he met, that the beautiful woman by his side was his wife; but these occurrences were so rare, that it was not often he indulged in the feeling that she was his wife.

Maud never varied in her behaviour to him

from the first moment she became his wife, or during the whole time she was such. Before visitors, or if the servants were in the room, she talked on ordinary subjects, but otherwise, beyond a cold, distant, good morning and good night, she never opened her lips. She was proud, haughty, and reserved; to the world she was his wife—but to himself, she was as far beyond his reach as the bough richly laden with delicious fruit was to Tantalus.

But one point there was to which he could not reconcile himself, even to her indulging in; and that was the large sums of money that were spent, and that to him seemed not only unnecessary, but extravagant beyond measure. So he fell foul of Hammond in consequence. He was responsible for the money, to him was intrusted the whole management of it, and to him he looked to explain how it was there had been such an excess.

Hammond, having desired to enter a little speculation on his own behalf, took £500 to do it with; it failed, and the money was lost; so he put it down to Mrs Kennedy's account, and when he was asked by Kennedy what she

could have required such a sum of money for, all at once, he replied that he thought it had gone to Mrs Crawford. Kennedy looked through his accounts tolerably closely. Hammond knew this, and was cautious accordingly. He dinned into him the necessity of not alluding to the matter to Mrs Kennedy, which doubtless he would have attended to, if he had not that morning sent to ask her if she had three pounds she could lend him to pay a bill; the man was waiting for the money, and he could not find his keys to get at his cheque book. She sent back word she only had a few shillings. This roused Joseph Kennedy's indignation, and when he had found his keys and paid his bill, he went straightway to the drawing-room, and whilst the pluck was in him, blurted out about the £500, and told her he would not keep her mother.

I suppose he would have given his little finger five minutes afterwards to have held his tongue, for Maud, calm and haughty as usual, yet stung him to the quick with her bitter, cutting replies. He wished any one in his shoes but himself at the moment. There he

stood listening to her, telling him his contemptible meanness and miserly ways were beneath her notice, that she never had noticed them, yet he should not imagine her mother or any one bearing the name of Crawford would touch so much as a farthing of his money! He slunk back to his own room determined to make Hammond pay for what he had undergone. But Hammond knew whom he had to deal with, and when Kennedy came in and giving something like a start on seeing him in his room, but merely saying,

“ I wanted to see you, Hammond, about that money. Now, why the devil did you tell me my wife—” he was particularly fond of calling Maud his “ wife,”—“ had given her mother the five hundred ! ” he replied,

“ Because she did. And you have been a cursed fool to let her know you found it out ! ”

“ But I tell you she didn't, for she told me she didn't, and—”

“ Well, I tell you she did. She sent for me to come here ; she wrote me a note, she was in such a devil of a way ; she thought she

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had got into a mess, and wanted me to help her out."

"I don't believe you, Hammond. My wife would never send for you,—why, she hates the very sight of you."

"Perhaps she does ; so she may you, for all I know ; one never expects gratitude in this world, but she sent for me all the same. You can ask herself, if you don't believe me. Hang it all ! I don't do your work to be insulted. I'll wash my hands of the whole concern. You may find some one else to manage your affairs."

Hammond thereupon rose, and took up his hat, as if he were there and then about to bring the whole business to a conclusion, by simply walking off.

"Don't be so hasty, Hammond. You know I didn't mean to insult you ; why, what did I say that could offend you ?"

"You doubted my word !"

"Well, I was confused between the two statements, that's all, and spoke hastily ; but no doubt you are right and I am wrong. Now, sit down again like a good fellow, and

talk rationally. www.libtool.com.cn Can't you stay to dinner?"

"No, thank you, not to-day," replied Hammond, who thought it best to seem pacified; but he declined the invitation from a sudden vision presenting itself to his mind's eye of the scornful lady who had just now dismissed him—he didn't care to meet her again so soon.

Kennedy could not afford to quarrel with Hammond; at the same time, he had not the least doubt but that Maud had told him the truth, and that Hammond had done precisely the reverse. To couple a falsehood with Maud's name was impossible. On many occasions her husband had found her much more truthful than agreeable. He never for a moment doubted her word.

Mr Kennedy took occasion that day at dinner—whilst the servants were still in the room—to say, that he wished much his old friends, the Hardys, should be asked to dinner.

Maud looked up with an air of languid surprise, but made no comment. Her husband went a step farther, and asked what day it would suit her to invite them.

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“Choose your own day,” she replied, “and if you let me know, I will make arrangements accordingly.”

“Supposing we say next Wednesday, will that do?”

“Perfectly.”

“And who will you ask to meet them?”

Kennedy was quite delighted, he had expected opposition in the matter. Maud had hitherto refused to visit them, and all he had been able to do to pacify his old friends, to whom he clung now more than he had done before his marriage, was to make his sister leave one of his wife's cards on them.

“You can ask any one you like,” she replied, pouring some water into a tumbler. The servants had left the room now, and Kennedy no longer felt so brave; when alone with her, his courage never came, unless anger brought a false kind to him.

“I should like to ask the Grants to come, and your mother and sister; and then I could ask the Framptons, you know he's the new member for Willsborough.”

“The Grants would not meet such people.

I would not let my mother and sister meet people I myself decline to sit down with, and, in any case, my mother would not come. As to asking the Framptons at all, you know best about them, they are friends of yours, not mine, and, as they are tradespeople, I have no doubt will accept your invitation."

"What do you mean, Mrs Kennedy? Do you mean you refuse to sit at my table and entertain my friends when I invite them?"

"Certainly. When you ask people of that description you must entertain them yourself and alone. I have never been accustomed to mix with that class." And Maud rose and swept out of the room.

"We shall see this time who has the best of it," said Joe, who was brave the moment the door closed on his proud, unapproachable wife. "I will have my way this time, at all events; or if I don't—but I will, I am determined I will! She shan't always walk over me in that style."

Kennedy, after drinking a couple of glasses of port wine, rang the bell, and desired the servant to fetch him a dozen printed invitation

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cards for dinner. They were the usual kind, "Mr and Mrs Kennedy request the honour," &c., &c. Five of them Kennedy filled up, one for the Hardys, one for the Grants, another for the Crawfords, one for the Framp-tons, and one for Lord and Lady Hallerton. The Hallertons were poor Joe's greatest cards, he knew them independently of his wife, through his parliamentary business; he and Lord Hallerton had sat on a committee together; then they frequently came home together from the House, the Hallertons having a house in Portman Square. Lady Hallerton had taken a great fancy to Maud, so that a tolerable intimacy existed between them.

When these invitations were written out, he despatched them at once, whilst the pluck was in him. The following day Maud, to her surprise, received replies, and all acceptances. It was not a time of year for refusals, if people were in town. Towards luncheon time Isabella, with Mrs Mackenzie, made her appearance, Isabella looking like herself once more. She was very, very happy, and her

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happiness beamed out brightly from her laughing blue eyes. It was the greatest pleasure Maud had in life, to see her sister.

“Dearest Maud, what in the world could possess Mr Kennedy to send us a printed invitation to dinner! Just as if, if you wanted us, you were not sure we should come.”

“Indeed, Bella, I did not even know he had sent you one, or to any one else either, but for some acceptances I received just now. But I do not want you to come, dear; had I, I should not have asked you in that way.”

Maud then repeated what had passed between her and Mr Kennedy the night before.

“What shall you do then?” asked Isabella.

“On Wednesday morning I shall write to Lady Grant and Lady Hallerton, and tell them it is a gentlemen’s party, and that I hope their husbands will come, but not themselves.”

“My dear Maud, think well before you do that,” said peace-making Mrs Mackenzie. “It will be a terrible insult to these Framp-ton. Had you not better consent to the

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party and take your proper place at your own table? I think you would act more wisely if you did."

"Mac," said Maud, looking at her with a sorrowful expression in her great eyes, "I have grown very obstinate; don't try to change my determination. I will not receive these people as my guests. It will be no affront to the Framptons, for of the two I think the Hardys are somewhat the best. Mr Hardy is an attorney, though a very low one; Mr Frampton is a shopkeeper, and having M.P. attached to his name will not make him anything else. It would be an insult to the Hallertons and Grants were they permitted to meet them."

There was no use in arguing with any one who spoke in the quiet, firm tone Maud had. She knew she might as well attempt to melt ice in winter under the influence of a hard frost as change Maud's resolve.

"What will you do, then?" asked Isabella.

"Come and dine with you, dear, and—enjoy myself!"

CHAPTER IX.

MET ONCE MORE.

THE Grants' house was one well calculated for theatricals. It was one of the large corner houses in Portland Place, on the west side. The drawing-room was a large wide room, and long enough to afford a sufficient space being taken off to form the stage, yet leaving ample room for as large an audience as Lady Grant could desire.

On the Wednesday that Mr Kennedy had fixed for his dinner party, Lady Grant and Lady Stoneham were very busy talking over some of the necessary arrangements for the forthcoming entertainment. Lord Stoneham had told his wife she might do as she liked, provided she promised not to ask him to have

anything to do with the affair. She agreed to the conditions, and entered into the matter with Lady Grant with all possible zest.

Private theatricals were then uncommon, and the moment it got wind that Lady Grant was getting some up, and that Lady Stoneham would be one of the performers, with half-a-dozen other attractive names, all the London world that knew they should receive invitations, resolved, if they were away, to make a point of going up to London on purpose.

Lady Grant could not have started anything that was likely to make her more popular, or could she have done anything that was so likely to silence the ill-natured remarks that were afloat concerning her—not because it rendered her one bit more quiet or steady, but simply because people wished to be invited, and so it would not do to abuse her; at all events, not till her entertainment was over.

“I wish my brother would make haste and come,” said Lady Grant, “he promised to be here before four, and it has now struck.”

“Perhaps he cannot find the plays he wants,” said Lady Stoneham.

“Oh, he has them ; and has acted in them over and over again.”

“Does he act well ?”

“I don't know. I suppose he does, or he would not have acted so often. I have never seen him—it was in India.”

“There he is, I suppose,” said Lady Stoneham.

There was a loud double knock at the door, more a footman's than a gentleman's—so it proved. Mrs Kennedy was announced.

“Why, Maud, I should never have expected you at this hour.”

“I am on my way to my mother's,” she replied, shaking hands with both ladies, “and I called, in passing, just to say I hope your husband will not fail Mr Kennedy to-night.”

“Oh no, Martin is sure to go. Look here, Maud ; don't you think gas footlights would be much better than oil ?”

“Better, yes ; but won't it oblige you to have the boards taken up in order to lay the gas pipes down ?”

“No, why should it? It's not as if they would be seen; the pipes might lay outside, and the carpet would hide them. The stage will be raised a foot and a half; do you think that enough?”

Maud smiled. “Yes, I should say so; but I know very little about such matters.”

“I wish you would take a part—do, Maud!—you'd make a famous tragedy Queen. Wouldn't she, Lady Stoneham?”

“But,” said Lady Stoneham, laughing, “if you are thinking of tragedy, I am sure I don't know where we shall find the ‘company’ capable of acting.”

“Well, if you only think of getting up a tragedy in order to induce me to act, I am sure it will end in your playing nothing but farces. Lady Grant knows I would not act, Lady Stoneham; she only said it in joke.”

“No, indeed, Maud, I wish you would, even in a farce, though there's not much farcical in you now.”

“I must say good-bye,” said Maud, “I promised to be at my mother's by five.”

“Then you have plenty of time, so wait a few minutes, for I am expecting Owen, and he will be so vexed if he finds you have been here and he missed you.”

“Is Owen in town?” asked Maud, with great interest.

“Yes, he came yesterday. He is staying with Archie. He won't go away again till he leaves for India. My father and mother will be up in a few weeks in time to see him off; their house will be ready soon, I hope.”

Maud could not resist the temptation of waiting to see Owen. She had not met him or any of the Blakes since her marriage, except Charlotte. And though she was never partial to Lady Grant, still she could not withstand seeing her now as much as possible; for she was *his* sister, and the only remaining link between them. Occasionally Charlotte said something about her brother; that he was working hard; or that he was on circuit; or that he had some great brief given him. Maud listened, but never asked a question, never made a remark. Once or twice she had just escaped meeting him; but she always paid

her visits at an hour she fancied he ought to be—if he was not—busy in his chambers.

Owen Blake soon came in. He greeted Maud warmly and affectionately, and a glad smile lit up her beautiful face, the first heartfelt smile that had crossed it since she became Maud Kennedy.

“I am so very, very glad to see you,” he said, pressing her hand.

“I did not know you were in town, or even expected,” she replied. “Charlotte only this minute told me. And so you are going back to India?”

“Next month. There is nothing else for me to do. I would almost prefer sitting all day long at a desk if I could stay in England, but even that employment no one will give me—so I must go. But never mind talking about me, tell me about yourself.”

“Indeed, Owen, if you are both going to sit and talk over auld lang syne, you may defer it till to-morrow, when Maud, I dare say, will be happy to see you at her own house. But you are here now on my business, and so you must attend to it. Lady Stoneham and I

have been waiting as patiently as any two women could."

"And I really must go," pleaded Maud. "Come and see me to-morrow, Owen; come at twelve o'clock."

And hurriedly taking leave, she went without allowing Owen to accompany her to the door. Just as she reached the first landing she saw some one coming up, two steps at a time—it was almost dark on the stairs, though the lamp was burning brightly in the hall. She moved on one side to allow the person to pass her; as she was wondering who it could be going up in that familiar way unannounced, Archie Blake stood before her.

A sharp stifled cry burst from her lips; till he heard that, he did not recognize her, she was standing back in the shade; all the light that came up the stairs was shining on Archie's handsome face.

"Maud!—Mrs Kennedy—I did not expect to see you here."

There was a pause. He went up to her; he took her hand—his own shook terribly—still she did not speak.

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“You were going out—may I see you to your carriage?” His voice was low but steady, he had recovered himself now.

“Thank you. I am going to see my mother.”

She could hardly get the words out. Why she volunteered this piece of information it is difficult to say, unless she thought he would rather think of her as going to her mother's than going back to her husband's house.

He placed her hand within his arm, and led her down-stairs.

“Maud, it is hard to meet thus!” He could not resist saying this to her. They were alone in the large hall. “It nearly broke my heart, Maud; God knows how I endured it! You little know what I have suffered—what I still suffer.”

“Hush, Archie! You must bear—as I have borne—you must try and help me to bear on, and not make my burthen too heavy for me to endure. It has been a terrible fate for”—us, she was about to say, but she said —“me. We each have our duties to per-

form; you have done yours, would that I had done mine!"

"And have you not? Has not duty made you what you are? Was it not duty tore you from me, when all your love was given to me? It was mine, Maud, was it not? It *is* mine still—tell me so; tell me, darling, that you still love me—none other but me—and it will give me courage to go on; or else, Maud, I don't know what will become of me! I have the ring still—see, here it is! Am I to return it?"

It was not generous of Archie Blake to take advantage of poor Maud at such a moment—he knew it; but he felt no regret at having spoken so—he would not recall a word if he could. All pride, all scorn, had left Maud's face. Had her husband seen her at that moment, with a world of love beaming out of her soft brown eyes, he would not have recognized his haughty, cold wife. She gazed up at Archie, and putting her other hand on his arm, her fingers clinging round it, she said, "Archie, I am as true to you as when we last parted. No, keep the ring."

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It was enough. His heart bounded with a sudden joy that had been foreign to it for many a long day. He wondered how he ever could have doubted that Maud Crawford would be otherwise than true. True in thought, word, and deed.

“My darling! my own one!” His head was bent down towards hers; another moment, and their lips must have met. But she drew back with a quick, sudden start.

“No, Archie, to be really true, one must be true to all. You must never have cause to cease to believe in me.”

Archie was silent. He felt the force of what she said, but he thought she might show her love for him, and yet be true. He thought it then—during the excitement of the moment—but not later, when he reflected over their meeting; only he felt he loved her ten times more than he had ever done before.

“God bless you, Maud! You shall never have cause to regret your love.” He had opened the door himself, and then placed her in her carriage. Her servant stood beside it, she gave him the direction where to drive to,

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and then with a bow to Archie—to a passer-by, it was a cold, distant bow—they parted.

Instead of going into his sister's house again, he closed the door and walked slowly away. He could not bear to see other faces and listen to ordinary conversation immediately after the interview he had just had. It was strange he should meet her so, for he knew Maud was not fond of Lady Grant, and that beyond formal visiting very little intimacy had existed between them, at least so Charlotte had led him to suppose; and he himself had, in consequence, ceased to be a constant visitor in Portland Place.

He had no great admiration for his brother-in-law, and his sister's disposition was totally opposite to his own; but he had gone, gone incessantly, with the hope that he might see Maud: his heart yearned to look on her again, if only for once; but she was never there; she declined all invitations to the house. She was afraid of seeing Archie; she required a longer time to elapse before she could gather courage to meet him in the spirit she knew she ought; and so she tried to avoid him, till

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she felt she had subdued her great love, and brought it into subjection. She must meet him with a sister's feelings only, and she hoped and prayed time would bring her that comfort. Yet whilst she fancied she was gradually weaning her heart from him, she gloried in the fact that she was faithful and true to him ; thus unconsciously fostering and nurturing her boundless love. Yet his suffering could not equal hers ; he, at all events, was free, whilst she was fettered ! and that thought brought tormenting trouble with it— for might he not seek elsewhere for the love that she now no longer dared give him ? Would he—could he remain true to her memory only ? No ; and thus she feared to meet him—she would not seek temptation, she would avoid it till she had sufficient strength to meet it safely. So whilst he was endeavouring to see her, she was trying to escape an interview.

The fact of finding he never was at his sister's had latterly given her more courage in going there, and since the Grants' return to town she went much more frequently ;

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whilst he, from the same cause, had ceased that continual dropping in. His brother Owen was his attraction there this afternoon. Next to Maud he loved Owen best in the world; and they were so soon to be parted that he would not give up an hour of his company that it was in his power to enjoy. He had gone there merely to fetch him away. Now, he resolved on sending him a note, saying he was prevented coming, and naming some place for them to meet.

Owen was victimized that night, as he had often been before. Archie could think of nothing else and talk of nothing else but Maud; and at twelve o'clock, when Owen suggested they might as well 'turn in,' Archie was more inclined to talk than ever; he was not weary of his subject.

When Maud drove off, she leaned back in the carriage and closed her eyes. She wanted to shut out everything but the recollection of Archie; she could not bear that the brightly-lighted shops, the busy crowd, the masses of carriages she was threading through, should shadow across the memory of the last few

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minutes. She knew it was nothing more now than a memory, it had been too fleeting, too unexpected to bear much reality about it; but she enjoyed the reflection it had cast over her, whilst its brightness remained,—the brightness occasioned by the assurance that his love was still hers! As she drove up to her mother's cottage, her brief happiness was dimming, a cloud was coming over it, gathered by the reflection that one like Archie would not long be let—if he himself would—remain unbound by ties that would utterly sever her from him, even in thought. She forgot at that moment her desire, her daily prayer, to think of him with a sister's love only.

In one of the largest of the small houses that form Victoria Place, Kensington, Mrs Crawford had been living since her severance from Lee Ashton. After the first few weeks, and when she was able to face her position and realize the terrible calamity that had befallen her, she became once more the kind and gentle woman it was her nature to be. That the blow had fallen heavily on her, it only needed to look at her as she now was,

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and recollect her as she was a twelvemonth ago, to see how fearfully it had told. Her widow's cap may have added to it, but she certainly looked a worn, middle-aged woman. Few things ever called up a smile to her pale, wan face; few things appeared even to interest her. She courted no one's society; she fancied all her visitors came to witness her downfall. She did not believe in the existence of real sympathy in the outer world; she knew her own little world was true and sincere, but she trusted nothing beyond it.

Perhaps she was right; at all events, she was on the safe side, and spared herself disappointment. Suspicion is a noxious weed of rapid growth, and it quickly chokes up that tiny, delicate plant, trust. Mrs Crawford, because she had met that one dastard in her life's path, thought all were equally bad with him; that all were anxious to do as he had tried to do—had done,—crush her. Because one knew her secret, she thought every one must know it, and so she felt enmity to every one in consequence. We do dislike people who know any evil of us, try to hide it as we may, and

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as we invariably do—through fear—for it does not do to let such persons know we despise them ; they might turn round and betray us, and probably would. Hence it was that Mrs Crawford was forced to keep up a semblance of friendship with James Hammond. If he called she did not dare deny herself. She was afraid of him. He still had much in his power—how he had gained it, she never learnt. Bradley was innocent, that she long since ascertained—he might yet tell her children, what, thank God, her husband had never learnt.

But this constant fear was undermining her health ; the incessant dread she lived under, the everlasting, ever-present terror, that Hammond could, if he were so minded, destroy every peaceful moment of her own, and all dear to her, was draining her life-blood drop by drop from her. Another sore grief to her, was her eldest child's fate—sold to save her name ! She never saw Maud without a wrenching, agonizing pain at her heart, almost unendurable. Had she been differently constituted to what her mother knew her to

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be, she might have been somewhat reconciled by her having ample wealth secured to her ; but she knew that to Maud all the thousands at her command were not more valued than the stones that lay at her feet. To her, herself, it would have gone a great way, for she believed in the efficacy of money ; she believed in it now more than ever ; she thought, had she an unbounded command over it, she might have succeeded in getting Hammond out of the country ; that she could have rid herself of the terrible apprehension she endured, if he were too far away to care aught about her or hers.

She did not argue with herself on the matter, that could she have done so, it would have been like giving a thirsty man a pleasant drink, he would return for more, as soon as the quenchings had ceased, and come again and again, until he had drained the source that supplied him. She had not yet learnt that there are villains in the world, that any amount of money is insufficient to buy up their villany ; they always have a fresh supply at hand to replace their stock when it is sold

out. It seems as inexhaustible as the contents of a clever conjuror's hat.

The inside of the house was pretty. The drawing-room, with its cheerful blazing fire, looked to poor Maud, as she went in, more comfortable, more like home, than her own house. Love reigned in the one, where only loathing held sway in the other.

"You are late, my child," said her mother.

Maud blushed up to the roots of her hair, yet she had hardly any cause. Her mother did not notice it, and there was no one else present; besides, there was only the uncertain light of the fire to see by. Mrs Crawford always avoided meeting her daughter's eye, if she could help it.

"I called in at the Grants on my way, mamma, to see that there was no mistake about Sir Martin going to York Place to dinner."

Mrs Crawford would, under any other circumstances, have remonstrated with Maud on what she had done, but she felt as if she had no right to offer advice or censure on any one of her actions.

“Owen came in,” continued Maud, as her mother did not speak, “and that delayed me a little. They are very full of their private theatricals; Charlotte can speak of nothing else, and, I believe, thinks of nothing else.”

Isabella came in now, and, soon after, Mrs Mackenzie,—Mrs Mackenzie, who had been such an unspeakable support and stay all through to poor Mrs Crawford. She felt more at her ease when they were all together; when alone with Maud, she always feared something being said that would call up painful recollections that might be converted into words. She was right in thinking them best unspoken, but she did Maud a great injustice in fancying for one moment she would ever touch on that past that was wrapt up in folds of such bitter anguish, that she shrank from touching it as she would shrink from touching a still open wound.

Maud had a keen sense of duty, and she felt that a child's duty to its mother was one of the most sacred that man or woman is called on to fulfil in life. So far from having

a thought of upbraiding her mother, she only pondered what she could best do to lighten that mother's sorrow, which she saw was deep and heavy. Maud's great filial love had been, no doubt, for her father; but the love she knew her father had borne for her mother, and his sudden and terrible death, increased her own for her. She felt, in a measure, as if it were her duty to take care of and protect her till Percy was old enough to do so. And so it was, that no sooner had she returned to London after her marriage—which she did almost immediately, in consequence of the calamity that fell on all of them in the General's death—than she begged her mother to be with her till a home could be settled for her, and entreated of her to determine after Isabella's marriage to live with her entirely. That Mrs Crawford would not listen to either proposition was not surprising; she felt that to partake of anything procured through Joseph Kennedy's money would almost stifle her. How, then, could she live under his roof even for four and twenty hours? Maud at first was pained at the constant refusals she met with

to all her kindly intentioned offers, but she afterwards felt glad she could truthfully maintain her mother owed nothing to her husband. It was not, at any rate, for her own individual benefit she had urged her child's marriage with him—so the world said. They spared her the accusation that she had done it for her own aggrandizement.

“Mamma, you are not looking well; do you think this air agrees with you?” asked Maud, looking anxiously at her mother. “It is a very debilitating air, I know, and I think you require a bracing climate.”

“Oh yes, dear, it agrees with me well enough,” replied Mrs Crawford.

“I don't believe it does, or, at all events, something does not,” said Isabella; “for mamma eats nothing, drinks nothing, and I don't believe sleeps half the night.”

“Nonsense, Bella, how do you know what I do?”

“Because I watch you. Mamma, do accept Philip's proposal, and go to Endlemere for a month. He says, Maud, that we shall have it all to ourselves, he won't even come

himself—only once a week just to see that we are safe and well. Now, would it not be nice, and it would do the mother all the good in the world.”

“Do, mamma,” urged Maud; “why do you refuse?”

“I do not like the trouble, dear. The very thought seems to tire me beforehand.” She did look weary.

“But it will be no trouble, dear Mrs Crawford; you shall not, or rather you need not, have a thought concerning it. I will undertake everything,” said good Mrs Mackenzie.

Mrs Crawford smiled. “You are all very good to me.” Then her lips quivered, and her eyes filled with tears.

“Mother, dearest mother!” said Maud, going up to her, and kneeling down beside her, she put one arm caressingly round her—“go to please me—you do not often grant my requests, grant this one!”

“If you really wish it, my child.”

“I do, I do! I am sure it will do you so much good. I cannot bear to see you like

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this; it is like looking at a flower fading for want of proper care."

"Oh, my Maud, the flower is faded! But I will go, child."

"Oh, I am so glad," exclaimed Isabella, springing up with childlike glee, and pressing her warm cherry lips to her mother's pale face, "so glad. I shall listen for Philip's step, and I will open the door before he can knock, that I may be the first to tell him. He will be so pleased!"

"Isabella, I thought since Lady Langley's visit you had grown more sedate, toned down your wild ways a little, but I see she only brushed off the froth for the moment, you go on effervescing just the same. When will you grow sober and steady?"

"Like my respectable sister?—never!—Let me alone, Mac, I am so happy, I can't help showing it." Her merry laughing eyes fell at that moment on her mother and sister, and her heart smote her. How could *she* be so happy, when there was so much sorrow there? "Dear mamma, I am very selfish! But I wish you and Maud were happy too,

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I don't care to be happy alone ; it's only just at moments, it makes me like this. You will be happier, mother dear, when you are once more in a large house, with carriages and horses and servants at command."

"I will try to be cheerful for your sake, Bella—happy, I never can be—but the nearest approach to it is seeing you so, my child."

After dinner Sir Philip Langley came in. Isabella had watched for him, as she threatened to do, and told him how Maud had succeeded in persuading their mother to accept his invitation.

"Then you will go down and learn to be accustomed to your new home," said Sir Philip. "I think it very unselfish of me to have made such a proposition."

"Why, Philip, you do not seem half pleased. I thought you would have been delighted.—Has anything changed you? would you rather we did not go?"

"My own darling! No; what could change me in the matter? But whilst you are here I see you daily, and when you are there it will only be once a week."

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“But you can come oftener if you like, dear Philip,” said Isabella, leaning her head against him—“it’s your own house.”

“The very reason, my child, why I cannot. Your mother could not tell me not to come to my own house, and yet she might not like it—and then it would cease to be doing the kindness I wish. I want her to feel she is at home and her own mistress.”

“You dear, good Philip!” That was generally the extent of Isabella’s vocabulary of affection. But it satisfied Sir Philip. He knew he possessed all her fresh young love, and she—was his idol.

“Bella, had this great happiness—you look as if you wondered what happiness—your love, you foolish child—come to me when I was a younger man I should have trembled for fear of aught taking it from me—but I think now I may bask credulously in its sunshine, its halo will continue to encompass me—at least I shall live on, nothing doubting.”

“If you mean by all that, Philip,” said plain-spoken Isabella, “that I shall always continue to love you, I suppose you are

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right, but I should have loved you just as well if you had been younger.”

A shade passed over his countenance as he said, “Would you have loved me more, Bella?”

“No, you dear stupid thing! I don't think I could—not a bit more, only just as much.”

He bent down and kissed the small mouth and smoothed the fair hair that was resting against his arm, and they went in together to the drawing-room.

The more the three that were sitting there saw Isabella and Philip Langley together, and the more they thought of their different characters and disparity of age, the more astonished were they at the sincere and deep love that Isabella very evidently felt for him. She not only loved him, but respected and looked up to him. She thought it would be as impossible for Philip to err as for a rushing torrent to turn its course and leap upwards. This being the groundwork of her affection, it was likely to prove strong, and not to be lightly shaken. Still, it no less surprised

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those who knew her best. But there is no more possibility in accounting for the strange flights of woman's fancy than there is for the way the wind blows; it springs from causes equally incomprehensible.

"You saw my sister to-day," said Sir Philip, addressing Maud.

"Yes; how did you hear that? Have you seen her since?"

"No, not her, but Owen Blake."

Maud coloured up again as Owen's name recalled the recollection of her meeting with Archie. Sir Philip noticed it, but attributed it only to her hearing the name of Blake.

"He is going to take part in these absurd plays Lady Grant is pestering people about."

"Not a very active one, I think," said Maud. "He is to be stage-manager and prompter, and, in short, he is to be the useful man."

"Oh, I beg your pardon, he is to be another man as well, for he told me that he has undertaken the part of Mr Quicksilver in the 'Idle Man.'"

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“That must have been arranged after I left.”

“Possibly. I know that my sister is to be Lady Sylvia Limpid, and I think Stoneham must be out of his senses for allowing her to have anything to do with the matter beyond being a spectator, which would be quite sufficient.”

“Why, Philip, do you dislike private theatricals?”

“Yes, Bella; I think they are a great mistake. They lead to all sorts of folly, and very often mischief; besides bringing about intimacies of so familiar a kind that they frequently end in quarrels. I should not like to see my wife having anything to do with them, and it pains me very much to think that my sister has.”

“And supposing I asked you to let me act, Philip?” said Isabella, looking up in a provoking manner.

“You would hardly do so after what I have said, Bella; but if you did, I could but repeat it, and then leave it to your good sense and kind heart not to give me unnecessary

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pain; as I should in anything that I disappointed of."

"No, Philip, I hope I never shall; I never will willingly," replied Isabella, seriously.

Philip Langley little knew at that moment how much hung on his reply. Had he not worded it as he did, had he not touched the chord of affection, had he in the least way let her think he would coerce her, she would have rebelled, as she had already commenced doing in spirit when he had said what he did about his brother-in-law and his sister. But he had secured Isabella's future submission to his wishes more firmly than he dreamt of. In that respect, hers was a difficult character to deal with. Warm-hearted and impetuous, almost to a fault, she was equally ready to give in, no matter how much against her own wishes, if gentleness and affection were the weapons used to induce her; as she was to be obstinate and determined with anything of compulsion or restraint.

How much depends on the form of words used, and the tone they are spoken in—often, very often, a whole life's happiness.

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It was past eleven, Maud's carriage had long been waiting, but she lingered on, dreading to go home. She expected her husband to upbraid her for her treachery concerning the dinner, and she hated the thought of a scene.

But at last she went.

CHAPTER X.

WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN.

REALLY the York Place house was not to be despised, though it did not look like the house of a man of large fortune, but when well lighted up, and great big blazing fires in both drawing-rooms, shedding a glow of comfort on the stiff and heavy furniture, it was not so bad. The heavy crimson damask silk curtains were falling in rich folds against the white and gold paper, a sight not often seen in Joseph Kennedy's house, as, except on festive occasions, they were allowed to remain in the original position the upholsterer had placed them in. Maud troubled herself very little about curtains, or any other household matter; they might be hanging down or hanging up, and she would be as unconscious as in-

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different to it. This evening, however, Kennedy had himself looked after the—not the curtains, but the—butler, and consequently the butler bestirred himself and looked after the housemaid, and so like the nursery tale of the old woman and the pig which got over the stile at last, so did the York Place house look in proper company trim, and every man and woman did their duty.

Giving the devil his due—which, as a rule, is admitted on all sides to be a necessary act of justice to be done—I must say that Maud, before she took herself off in the unseemly manner she did, saw that all, as far as she was concerned, was duly attended to. She read through the *ménu* and approved of its items. She was asked if ice was to be provided, and she replied in the affirmative; she, moreover, desired fresh flowers should be put in the flower-baskets that stood between each window. Perhaps it was from this inward conviction—that she had done all she could be called upon to do, except according her presence—that she had permitted herself the enjoyment of a peaceful evening, undisturbed

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till the very last moment, by one passing thought of the utter dismay her non-appearance, and that of the two principal lady-guests, must have created.

A few minutes before the appointed hour for his company to assemble, Joseph Kennedy, in blissful ignorance of what was before him, entered the drawing-room ; first with a somewhat timorous gaze, thinking his queen-like wife might have been dressed and already sitting there ; and then with more confidence when he saw the room was empty. He always felt an uncomfortable sensation on appearing before her when she was in full evening dress and himself also. His feeling generally was, that by a slight stretch of the imagination one might fancy a cock-sparrow's would be that was doomed to live in the presence of a peacock, with the task before him of endeavouring to persuade every flying creature of his acquaintance that he and the peacock were birds of a feather. Seeing, however, that no one was there, his self-possession returned, and he felt very elated at the prospect of his party.

It was something to show people like the Hardys what he had become—what a change money had wrought in him and his position. Then again the Framptons; he was an M.P., it is true, but then, as his wife had justly remarked, he was one of those M.P.s that it seems necessary there should be a sprinkling of in the House, representatives of the trade of England, and therefore, though he might have eaten off plate, and been waited on by half-a-dozen flunkies in silk stockings and plush breeches, still his wife and daughter had probably never done anything more grand than assist at a Lord Mayor's feast. It was very pleasant for a man in Joseph Kennedy's position to feel all this, to feel that he could show these people what the right thing was; and that he could show them also, that now he could entertain noblemen and their wives. He remembered the time—it was not so long since that his memory was likely to fail him on the point—when he would have run the length of a long street to have caught sight of a lord, and now he thought no more of them than ducks do of geese. But beyond all this

that he felt his heart beating proudly at ; beyond all the gold and silver that would deck his table ; beyond all the big-wigs that he could get to sit and eat off his well-covered board ; there was one possession he was prouder of, one possession he boasted of having beyond all beside—his beautiful wife ! She would grace his table as naught else could—yes, he longed for the Hardys and Framptons to see her—to see what money had been able to do for him in that respect. It was but a poor boast, still without money the world, as well as himself, was aware that his path could never have crossed hers.

Mr and Mrs and Miss Hardy were announced as the clock struck seven. Old Hardy would be punctual ; he did not understand what people meant by asking you for seven if they did not want you till half-past. It was in vain for Jemima to tell him it was the fashion ; he merely in reply expressed himself in somewhat strong terms against fashion, and told the maid-servant to go off for a cab. Mrs Hardy informed him she had ordered a fly. Jemima for once was thankful to her mother

—the idea of having to drive from Brompton to York Place in a hackney-cab with her new silk dress on, was sadly ruffling to her temper ; moreover, she could not endure the thoughts of those tall footmen seeing them arrive in such a manner.

“Such nonsense,” exclaimed Mr Hardy. “Just as if they did not know we do not keep a carriage ; and a hired carriage is a hired carriage, whether it is a cab or a fly ; and to go and pay seven and sixpence for such stuff is beyond my comprehension. However, Mrs Hardy, you may pay the difference yourself, I certainly shall not.”

Mrs Hardy was standing before the looking-glass arranging her eye-brows ; that is, putting the few hairs that grew there, together ; she chalked them to make them look better, but somehow or other the line did not seem to her liking, and she discovered it was the eyebrow that nature had provided her with that was rebelling ; the one supplied by art was right enough,—so Mrs Hardy made no reply—she did not care whether she paid it or not. Thus they arrived in York

Place decently, as Miss Jemima termed it.

"Tell Mrs Kennedy," said Joe to the butler, after he had announced the Hardys.

The butler bowed in reply. He thought he had heard John say when he came back with the carriage, that Mrs Kennedy had ordered him to fetch her at half-past ten, and that the man grumbled in consequence, for he said it would be all he could do to get away in time. However, the lady's-maid's bell was rang, and on Dobson's appearance the message was delivered.

Dobson was a pretty young woman, with curling hair, which she looped up in regular corkscrews. She availed herself of some of Mrs Hardy's methods for improving her looks. Dobson was specially got up this evening, for she knew her mistress would not want her, so she was going out, and there was an extra coating of red, and the white powder had been used very freely.

"My lady is not going to honour your party this evening, Mr Gilbert, she's hanged helsewhere." Dobson never left an *h* out wherever she could put it in ; right or wrong,

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if she could but find room for it, it was sure to be there.

“ You’ve been helping yourself from her dressing-table in consequence,” replied Gilbert. “ Law, what a fright you do make of yourself, with all that there white stuff on you ; why, you look ready for basting ! ”

“ What do you mean, Mr Gilbert, by such himpudence ? I’ve got no white stuff, and I haven’t touched hanything belonging to my mistress.”

“ Then you’ve been stealing out of the dredger ; so you’d better not show them cheeks of yours in the kitchen, or Mrs Watson will be after impounding you for theft.”

“ You’re a hignorant man, and I shan’t condescend to hanswer hanyone so much beneath me.” And Dobson prepared to swing herself off.

“ So Mrs Kennedy isn’t at home, eh ? ”

“ I gave you my hanswer before.”

A loud knock, followed by a tremendous pull at the bell, caused Mr Gilbert to allow Dobson to depart in peace. He had done what he had been desired to do, and there was

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an end of it. Having, however, ascertained that Mrs Kennedy really did not dine at home, he lost all care about the success of the dinner. *She* knew what was right, but as to Mr Kennedy, a good butler was lost on him—and Gilbert knew he could be a good butler if he chose. When the company had assembled, it dawned upon his mind why Mrs Kennedy had absented herself. “Such a lot!” as he, in confidence, afterwards remarked to Mrs Watson, in the housekeeper’s room—“only two gentlemen, and no ladies amongst the whole of them.”

Presently, when the Framptons arrived, Joseph Kennedy asked Gilbert if he had sent up to tell Mrs Kennedy. Gilbert walked up to his master, and whispered something in his ear. He was too well-bred a servant to risk speaking what he had to say out loud, for he knew very well there must be something considerably amiss in the matter. Kennedy turned pale. He excused himself to his guests for a moment, and went out of the room.

“What do you say, Gilbert? Mrs Kennedy is out?”

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"Yes, sir."

"Where is she—do you know? but of course you don't. I am very uneasy, Gilbert! Do you think anything has happened?"

"No, sir, I don't think there's any cause for you to be uneasy: Mrs Kennedy went to Kensington, and has desired John to go with the carriage to fetch her at half-past ten."

At first Kennedy felt relieved—she was safe, at all events; but the next moment he saw the whole affair in its true light, and he became angry and furious beyond bounds. She, then, after all, had gained the day! And what a position to have placed him in. The worst of the matter was, he could not help himself. He wished then he even had his hard, thin sister to head his table; but she was never asked to dinner now, when company was expected.

Gilbert suggested Mr Kennedy should excuse her presence to his guests by saying she had been taken suddenly ill; nothing serious, only it would prevent her being able to come down-stairs.

Kennedy grasped the suggestion eagerly.

“ Yes, Gilbert, it's the very best thing I can say—”

Another knock, and Gilbert disappeared down-stairs to be at his post, or had he remained another minute, his master, in his gratitude, would have thanked him for his help.

Whilst Joe was expressing his regrets and excuses for the misfortune of Mrs Kennedy's non-appearance, Lord Hallerton arrived.

“ Where is her ladyship ? ” asked Joe, in a tremor.

Lord Hallerton thought some mistake had occurred. His wife told him she had received a note from Mrs Kennedy, saying it was to be a gentlemen's party only, owing to a change of circumstances ; but seeing four ladies present, he did not like to say so ; and he was hammering at his stock of civil speeches to get one out that would do, and he began stammering and muttering something about a mistake and a letter, when Sir Martin Grant came in and—alone.

“ Why, how is this ? ” began the thick-

headed baronet. "My wife would not come because she said it was a man's party, and I see three—four, by Jove, four of the fairer sex! I say, Kennedy, is this a—"

"Stop, Grant!" Kennedy was in an awful fright at what the stupid fool, as he inwardly thought him, might say next. "There's some mistake occurred; I am sure I cannot think how, but the worst part of it is my being deprived of the pleasure of seeing Lady Hallerton and Lady Grant to-night. I am sorry to tell you my wife is very unwell, and not able to dine with us; but—"

Here Joe was interrupted by a loud laugh, which came from Sir Martin Grant.

"Why, my good fellow, your wife is at Kensington; at least, she left my house to go there; she may, though, have only said so, and—"

Lord Hallerton put his hand on Grant's arm, and said:

"You are quite wrong, Grant. Mrs Kennedy is not well, you did not hear that, I think; she may of course have gone to Kensington in the afternoon. What a stupid

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fellow you are, Grant," continued Lord Hallerton in an under-tone, as Kennedy moved away from them—"don't you see something has gone wrong, and you are making it worse! Poor Kennedy does not know whether he is on his head or his heels; do hold your tongue the whole evening about the matter, or else you are sure to blunder out something that had best be let alone."

Dinner was announced, and they went down; each feeling that something had happened which gave an uncomfortable shade over all; but after a little it wore off, and the dinner passed most satisfactorily. Lord Hallerton, a good-natured, kind-hearted man, exerted himself to make every one pleased with themselves and each other, beginning with his host, who had never ceased wishing Hammond was within reach to tell him what he ought to do. He could not pour forth his grievances to any one else, but he sadly wanted to unlade himself of the burthen he was bearing. It was well for him and for all that Hammond happened not to be there, or the chances are he would have produced such discord on the al-



ready badly strung wires, that they never would have been brought even into moderate harmony again.

The Hardys, notwithstanding the absence of their hostess, enjoyed themselves immensely. Perhaps once or twice it occurred to Joe Kennedy that it was as well his aristocratic wife was not present. He saw, he felt he had made a false move in inviting such people, still he could not get over the feeling that he had been made look small, and his resentment was not one whit abated when Maud returned home. She was going straight up to her own rooms when her husband met her outside the drawing-room door, and begged her to speak to him a few minutes.

Maud prepared for battle. She felt very angry at his interrupting her on her way upstairs; she would rather not have come to an explanation; besides, something kept whispering in her ear that she had done wrong. She gathered her lace shawl around her, for it had partially slipped off, and resting one arm on the mantel-piece, and one foot on the fender, she stood silent, waiting to hear what her hus-

band had to say; though no one would have thought she was waiting for any one or anything; she had much more the appearance of keeping others waiting, whilst she warmed herself.

Joseph Kennedy was annoyed that he could not find words to say what he felt. How could he scold that grand, haughty-looking creature, for not behaving as a dutiful wife ought to behave? Had she not always treated him as the very scum of the earth? And was he much better? he asked himself, as he gazed at her with strange infatuation. She so gloriously beautiful, so tall, so commanding, at least to him, and he—?

Well, the deductions he drew from the comparison made him exclaim, before he was himself aware the words were uttered:

“ We are strangely ill matched ! ”

Maud turned suddenly round. There was nothing deriding, nothing provoking in the expression of her husband's face. She thought perhaps he had spoken tauntingly; but she could no longer think that when she saw him looking at her almost sorrowfully, and yet with

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deep admiration. Maud's pride now came to her help; it was her pride softened her; it was her pride forbid her claim to be right when she was wrong; it was her pride made her look her husband full in the face with her honest eyes, and say:

"I regret, more than you can, allowing myself to do what I did this evening. I trust that you did not miss me as I hoped you would; and, if I can in any way make amends for it, I will."

"Oh, never mind," exclaimed poor Kennedy, amazed and astonished beyond the power of expression. "It was wrong to ask people you did not like, and I had no business to do it. They are vulgar people, and not fit for you to associate with. I think, perhaps, if you had asked me not to invite them, I should not; but you see you took it all so high and mighty, it put me out. Will you always, another time, tell me, gently and kindly, what you wish? I so want to—make you happy!"

Kennedy was standing beside her. He would have given much to have come to a

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better understanding with his proud wife ; he thought perhaps he might if he only knew how to manage her ; but that was exactly what he failed in. With all her haughty bearing, with all her scornful looks, he loved her, loved her with all the intensity his nature was capable of ; and there lay the chief cause of his inability to manage her, for coupled with that, he was afraid of her.

“ You said just now we were strangely ill matched. We are so. You have only found it out since I became your wife, I knew it beforehand.” She was speaking in a softened, saddened tone, one very foreign to Kennedy’s ears.

“ Did you not like me then ? Did you not care for me at all ? Why did you marry me ? You refused me the first time, why did you not refuse me the second, if you meant to —act towards me as you do ? ”

Ah, why did she not ! But she could not tell this man why she did not. Yet, a feeling of pity for him was kindled within her. Was not his life far from being a happy one ? Had she not made his home devoid of every-

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thing that constitutes happiness? Had she done her duty by him, as she had sworn to do? That, at all events, lay still in her power—she could do that mechanically, and she resolved that moment that, with the help of God, she would. She had injured him enough by becoming his wife, and yet being no more to him than the marble statue that adorned the end of the room; she had been less to him; for that was always in its place, whereas she, as on that evening, had often been absent. Maud was far too proud ever to do actually wrong—wrong as regarded in the light society views it in; but she had erred in other ways, and she knew it.

“It will be better for us not to go back to the past,” replied Maud, still speaking in a gentle tone, “it will not help to make the future better, which shall be my endeavour to do.”

She held out her hand; he seized it with the impetuosity of a young lover, whose mistress after withholding her love for a long time, at last surrenders it. Maud gently withdrew it and left the room; crushing out

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every wild hope that had for an instant sprang to life. He watched her till the door was closed, and then, leaning over the fire with his head resting on the mantel-piece, he cursed the hour in which he first saw Maud Crawford.

To have gained her love—ay, even her endurance—he would have returned again to the Joe Kennedy of a few years back—poor, but contented. What was fortune or position to him with her as his wife; and with the knowledge that she could not disguise her feelings of repugnance towards him? The prize he had so coveted was won, yet it proved worse than valueless. Then he remembered what she had said that morning to him about Hammond deceiving him. What did she mean by it? Was that fellow false? If she said so he was certain she was right.

Perhaps if Maud had known the extent of her influence over her husband, she would have made better use of it; but she did not and never attempted to find out, or did she care to do so. When Joseph Kennedy went to bed that night it was with a heavy heart, —heavier than he had ever in his recollection

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known it to be. Maud had let him see what might have been his fate had she loved him ; it was worse a thousand times over than before, when he believed it was not in her nature to be anything but hard and unbending.

When we have the bitter misfortune to love those that cannot return it, it is far better to think ill rather than well of them. It has the effect, at any rate, of keeping the affection a little under subjection, instead of increasing and nurturing it, which if there are virtues to add to the already-gilded idol, must inevitably be the result. We have but to feel pride in the one our heart's love is given to, for us to find that it daily grows and strengthens. Maud Kennedy had shown to her husband that she had not only had a sense of duty, in the general acceptation of the word, but that she felt it was due to him ; and though duty is a nasty word, a nasty thing, when it is the only prompting the heart has, still it is better than nothing. It will lead to small deeds of kindness, gentle words, thoughtful acts, that go very far to lead any one, blinded themselves by love, to imagine that duty is not the sole

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moving-spring, that affection must lay somewhere near, even if there be but a thin coating of it.

So as time went on Joe Kennedy thought that she might, after all, learn to love him. Poor Joe! He little knew the hard struggles, the inward battling that were incessantly going on, that she might force herself to give him the scanty amount of gentleness of manner she accorded him. How she had to fight against her loathing dislike to him, and how she prayed that she might do right. None ever knew what she went through, and it was better it should be so.

Owen Blake came the next day. He expected to have found Maud in a state of distracted sorrow and of wild grief. He could not fancy anything else should be the result of her again meeting Archie; knowing as he did, that their love for each other was strong, aye, perhaps even stronger than ever. But she greeted him with a quiet smile and a warm grasp of the hand. She looked calm, if not happy; there was none of the restless, passionate temper he expected to see, for he knew her dis-

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position, he knew how she must chafe against her destiny, and he expected to see it all. But a change had come over Maud since the previous night; that very interview with Archie had been the main cause of it. Her firm resolve to do right, to think even right, had brought its own reward.

Perhaps if we erring mortals knew one-half the solace and balm that a determined will to tread the narrow path of truth and right will always bring, we should more readily and more frequently test its virtue.

But I do not think all are alike responsible for the faults they commit. Some err from ignorance, some from example, many others from an unseen incomprehensible influence against which they are powerless. Though they may, not only have a firm conviction that the act they are about to commit will lead to sorrow, but that in the very nature of things it actually must do so, yet they will go on and on with their eyes wide open, till they fall head foremost into the future of trouble and misery they seem to have actually courted.

“I am very sorry, Owen, you are going

back to India; surely if your father were to exert himself amongst all his friends he might manage to get at some one powerful enough to give you an appointment at home."

"My father, you know, Maud, rarely exerts himself for any one, least of all would he do so for me. Besides, I am too old now to take many appointments that I might otherwise get. No, I must go back; I do not like the thoughts of it, I own, but there is nothing else to be done. But don't talk of me, Maud, I want to learn all I can about yourself."

"Have you heard nothing of me, Owen?"

"Well, yes, perhaps I have," he replied, with a pleasant, frank smile; "I was with Archie all last night."

For a moment Maud's pale face flushed, but it passed away as rapidly as the rosy tint from the setting sun on the snowy mountain-peaks, leaving them purer and whiter looking from the contrast.

"I met him yesterday for the first time since my marriage," she said in a firm, steady voice.

"He thought you looking ill and—and not happy."



“And yet one can hardly judge of looks by the light we saw each other in. He is getting on well, is he not ?”

“Wonderfully so. He will get his silk gown soon. I shall never be surprised to hear he is chosen as one of the Crown officers as time goes on. He is young now, but I believe if the Solicitor-Generalship became vacant, Lord Grayson would obtain the office for him.”

“I always thought he would succeed,” replied Maud, her eyes brightening with interest in spite of herself, “if he would but persevere, and I knew he would do that, for he told me he should.”

“Yes, but then he had an object in view ; now he has none, and I always fear his becoming reckless. Maud, you must keep him up to the mark when I am gone ; you can do so, none else can.”

“I will do what I can, Owen, as much as if he were my own brother. He must not flag in his endeavours, but work on, till he reaches the top of the tree.”

“Maud, you talk so calmly about him, so differently to what I expected, that I hope,

I trust you are happier in your marriage than I thought you were."

Owen Blake spoke hesitatingly ; he knew with one of Maud's temper he was on dangerous ground, but Archie had given him a commission, a very hard one to perform, and he scarcely knew which way to set about it—he was to ascertain if Maud and her husband were happy together.

Archie, the strongest of the two, or ought to have been, could not resist the temptation of venturing on dangerous ground. What would it benefit him to know of Maud's misery ? Besides, did he not know it already ? had not his own heart, even his common sense, told him it must be great ? Then why try to make her own it—but for his own selfish gratification ? Owen had sorely tried her during his visit, but she bore up bravely almost to the end.

"Owen, you must ask me no questions touching myself and my husband as in connection with each other. It is a subject I would not discuss or enter on, with any human being breathing." And she never had, not even with

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Mrs Mackenzie, to whom, up to a certain point, she confided all and everything.

Poor Owen thought he had made a horrible mess of it,—had asked the question in some blundering manner, and blamed himself proportionately. They talked now on every subject but what they were most interested in. Archie's name was not mentioned again till Owen was leaving, and then Maud gathered courage to say, what for some time she had longed to do respecting her mother. And having seen Archie yesterday, it occurred to her during the night, he would be the best person for helping her to carry out her object.

“I want you to ask your brother, Owen, whether he, or rather whether I, can manage to secure to my mother a certain sum annually without her knowing it comes from me, or that I have anything to do with it.”

“Have you got the money at command?”

“So far, that I draw, monthly, a certain amount from Drummond's, and out of that I want to make over ten pounds a month to my mother.”

“I will explain it to Archie, and let you

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know. I daresay he will be able to manage something which will enable you to do it, though it strikes me you can't secure it to your mother, because it isn't secured to yourself, is it ?”

“I think not. I don't think there's any settlement, but I'm sure I don't know. You will come again soon, Owen ?”

“Yes,—and I may tell—I may say you are happy ?” Owen looked as anxious as if his own happiness depended on her reply.

“If it will comfort him to tell him so, do ; but do I look happy, Owen ? God help me ! It's a happiness that makes me pray for death to release me from it !”

She covered her face with her hands for a minute ; then she stood up, and with the same calm expression she had borne all through, she said,

“I don't often give way, but we must not come on these points again, for you see I am foolish enough to let the memory of the past still shadow over the present.”

CHAPTER XI.

LADY GRANT'S ENTERTAINMENT.

It was the last night of the year. The night set apart for the private theatricals at Lady Grant's.

All was perfectly ready; yet still the utmost bustle and confusion prevailed, as it always does on such occasions, there are so many concerned in it, that each seems to add to the bewilderment of the other. Besides, there were about four hundred people to be first stowed away, and then entertained. Not only were there all Lady Grant's own friends, but each performer had two or three cards a-piece to distribute amongst theirs.

The drawing-room floor was raised at the furthest end from the stage some ten feet, the

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rows of seats rising gradually from the first few benches quite in front, that all could see alike. Each person had their number marked on their cards, so that with a little patience every one could find their appointed place. All the guests, however, had to enter at one door, the door opening into the adjoining room, the other one being closed up with seats. They were all marshaled in as they arrived, by a man accustomed to such work, and the only difficulty he found was in preventing people pushing one before the other, so that he occasionally forgot the number of the ticket he had taken from the person he was attempting to pilot to their place.

Every one had been requested to be punctual, so that almost every one arrived at the same time. Maud Kennedy and her husband had just come in. Maud, with her commanding look and striking beauty, was the observed of all eyes as she walked in—walked in as if she were a queen, surrounded by her courtiers. Her eyes wandered with a dreamy anxious look over the sea of faces that were before her, and a sudden blush mantling over her

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cheek showed the one she was seeking—seeking not unconsciously, but unwillingly—was there, and not far from her. He rose, and stepping over an empty bench, offered to help her to her seat, the individual whose business it was, being at the very furthest end of the room, endeavouring with civil speeches to make people contented with their distant places.

“Thank you,” replied Maud, “our numbers are 54 and 55, and therefore I think they must be at the other side of the room.”

“Yes, but fortunately not at the other end. There they are. I think if you get in at this bench, you will only have to pass those three ladies, whereas by going round you will have a dozen at least to battle with.”

Maud and her husband followed Archibald Blake's directions, and she giving as little trouble as possible to the three ladies she had to get by; yet for all that they looked at her with black and angry countenances. As people always greet the last person who enters a pew—considered to be already full, or quite full enough—at church, as if each already in it were receiving a personal injury, and the un-

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fortunate last an interloper. However, they were seated now, and seated comfortably; moreover, no one could pass them. Maud was not sorry their seats were too far off from Archie's to admit of conversation. She could not talk to him as to an ordinary person, so best not to talk at all.

The stage was brilliantly lighted by gas footlights and by a line of jets each side. The room itself had but a few dozen of candles placed in branches against the wall and between the windows. Every now and then some one amongst the audience recognized a face peeping behind the stage curtains, and merry remarks were being made, followed by joyous peels of laughter. Sir Martin and Lady Grant were both amongst the performers, so that the duties of hostess were left to be dispensed by Mrs Blake.

Mrs Blake, however, had not yet made her appearance. The truth was, she had met with a trifling accident, though had she heard any one term it trifling, she would have denounced them then and there as the most heartless and unfeeling of mankind. The

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Blakes had only just taken possession of their new house in Gloucester Place ; they had hurried up on purpose to be present at their daughter's grand entertainment ; though there is no doubt poor old Blake would far rather have remained at the Old Manor House in peace and with plenty, than be whirled up to London—he hated railway travelling—and then be doomed to a town life. But the little man had no will of his own ; he was merely a necessary article for the cumbrous wife to drag after her. His life, too, was a valuable one, she did not want him to die ; but there was not much fear, for he was a wiry little fellow, not half so likely to depart this world as herself ; still she took all the precautions she thought necessary for keeping him above ground. If he died his pay as a retired civilian ceased.

But to go back to the accident. The servant had been sent for a cab, Mrs Blake giving strict directions for him to examine it well as to its being clean, and so forth. They had not their own carriage up yet ; but being possessed of one they did not feel the reluct-

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ance to appear in a hack-cab at their daughter's house that the Hardys had experienced on the occasion of their dining in York Place. The cab came—a very clean one—and Mrs Blake, by dint of great exertion and pulling herself up with both hands, as well as gentle help from the servant, succeeded in getting in; but no sooner was her whole weight resting on the bottom, than it gave way, and through she went as far as her knees, her feet coming in contact with the muddy road, for there had been a hard frost during the day, with snow, and now it was thawing rapidly. This was little in itself, but the crash—for it made an awful crash—startled the horse, and off the beast set. There was nothing for it, but for the old lady to make the best use of her fat legs, and keep up as best she could with the abominable brute. Her screams were terrific; had she been undergoing murder they could not have been louder; that, together with the little, faint voice of Mr Blake, imploring the cabman to exert himself and stop his horse, made the man use all his force to pull him up, which he did very quickly—fortunately he

was on the box. However, the distance performed by the stupid brute and the lady did not exceed twenty yards; but twenty yards under such circumstances were surely enough.

Some people gathered round the cab when it was stopped, but Mrs Blake, infuriated by pain, as well as anger against the cabman for having such a wretched old cab, and against the footman for not having seen that the bottom was secure against coming out, saw nothing but her little husband sitting on the door-steps literally doubled up. He could not help it, he was convulsed with laughter. He laughed till every bone in his old body ached again. Had his wife been able to get at him, the chances are she would have shaken him till every one of them had been nearly broken, but she could not get out, she could not draw her legs up again. She had only supported her massive person at all by resting her two elbows against the seat behind her, and pressing her back against it as well; and now she was, in no mild terms, desiring her husband to come and pull her out. The people who stood

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looking on were at first under the simple impression that the horse had started before he was wanted to do so, and at a rather rapid pace ; but now that it was standing still, they perceived two large white things protruding through the bottom of it, and they began to comprehend what the disaster was, and to account for the riot the lady was creating inside. But with the understanding they were seized pretty much in the same manner Mr Blake was. The servant had very wisely rushed into the house ; he knew if his mistress caught him laughing he would be sent about his business in double quick time, so he was visible nowhere. It really was very hard upon the poor lady ; besides, she was in pain, and no wonder, her legs were horribly cut and bruised, and her feet in the same plight from her rapid run over the dirty, stony road.

“ Can't yer get the lady out, some on yer, instead o' gazing, at her as if yer'd paid a penny a peep, and tooked yer time accordingly ? ” This was the cabman's wise suggestion.

“ I'm blest if she ain't taken root inside

there!" remarked a boy with a great big milliner's box slung across his shoulders.

"Ain't yer all ashamed of yoursels, to be a laughing there at the poor critter, instead o' trying to help her out?—Molly, ain't she a strapper!" This was an aside to a companion, but the woman seemed to have some feeling, for she took hold of poor Mrs Blake's arm and gave her a pull.

"Lord, woman! You will dislocate my shoulder. Where's my husband? Where's that bad, heartless man, who can sit and laugh at his poor wife in such a manner?" *She* didn't laugh this time.

The bad, heartless man at last got up, but in actual pain, for he had over-laughed himself, there was no doubt of it. With the aid of some strong men in the crowd, Mrs Blake was released from her perilous position, but not before the entire bottom of the cab had been forced out. One might as well have attempted to get an inflated india-rubber ball from out of a small-necked bottle—easily enough pushed in—as to have attempted bringing back those legs through the apertures

they had forced themselves through. Mrs Blake, as long as she lived, never got inside a cab again.

So they were late in arriving at the Grants, for a fly had to be sent for, and whilst it was being prepared, Mrs Blake had to re-dress her extremities, and bandage and plaster up her wounds; to say nothing of the amount of abuse she lavished on her innocent—at all events, of the accident—husband. The consequence was when they arrived they had a couple of chairs placed for them close to the door where they entered; for the seats appor-tioned to them had long since been taken possession of; and, moreover, the “Idle Man” had commenced.

It took about an hour to get through with it. It was not a bad piece, and Lady Stoneham and Owen Blake acted admirably. The next piece was the well-known farce of “Lend me Five Shillings.” Shortly before it was to begin, Owen made his way from behind the scenes and joined his brother; he saw his father and mother by the door, and nodded to them; he did not try to get to them, for

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he knew if he did, Mrs Blake would not let him go again. He was ignorant, you know, of her accident, or he might have con-
doled with her.

“Come across to the Kennedys, Archie ; I want to say a word to Maud.”

Archie was but too glad. So the brothers threaded their way through the closely packed audience, without meeting the black looks from the ladies for squeezing against their dresses, that they might have done had they been less good-looking young men, or that they certainly would have done had they happened not to be men at all. It is astonishing what a fuss we make over little trifling annoyances if occasioned by people we dislike, but that we give no thought to if we like them.

“I say, Blake,” said a middle-aged man a seat or two behind the Kennedys, “can’t you tell some one to open a window, it’s confoundedly hot !”

“I’ll see,” replied Owen, who was the one spoken to.

“A little bit would do, you know, for it’s a cold night, and the rooms will soon cool.”

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Owen beckoned to a servant, who was standing to the right of the stage in case of being wanted.

“Shall you mind it, Maud?” asked Owen, “it will just blow down on you, I am afraid.”

“Oh no, I shall be glad of it. It is very close.”

So Owen gave directions that the upper part of the window should be opened a few inches. From the heat of the room, and the wet that had previously got into the grooves, the window stuck. The man pushed and pulled, but failed to move it. At last he got on a chair in order to get a better purchase over it; when suddenly a great crash was heard, the window was broken to pieces, the servant's hand having slipped and gone through it. It was a large long pane of plate glass; to save himself from falling—for he lost his balance—he clutched one of the curtains, bringing it in contact with the candles; in a moment it caught fire and blazed up rapidly and furiously, the wind, which was high, rushing through the broken window helping on the work of destruction.

There now ensued a scene of terror and dismay that baffles all description. The flames in a few minutes formed a lining to the one side of the room; the dense crowd pushing and crushing each other towards the opposite direction, hoping and trying to make for the door, but the door was closed up: only those near it knew that. Those behind them, thinking it the nearest point of egress, kept pressing onwards, and so blocking up some fifty or sixty people who might otherwise have got out. No one seemed to think of attempting to extinguish the fire, the only thought was to escape. To escape through all those closely-arranged benches filled with human beings, screaming for help that was not coming, seemed to one or two at the far end of the room, and who had not yet lost their presence of mind, utterly impossible, and yet to remain without one struggle for safety was equally so.

The instant Mrs Blake saw the accident happen, she seized hold of her husband's arm, and before he knew what she was about he found himself in the street, without the least

comprehending why. Mrs Blake had had disasters enough for one night, she had no notion of the evening being finished off with a worse one still. But she did not go home ; now she was in safety she wanted to hear the result. All her children but one were there ; she could not leave till she knew they were safe.

The flames were now lapping round all within their reach, the benches at the side near the windows were already enclosed in their fearful grasp ; one poor girl's dress had caught, and but for the violent and instant means taken by a man near her, it might have been her last night on earth ; as it was, she was fearfully burnt. Her cries were terrible, they sounded clear even amidst the tumult that existed.

“ Maud, trust to me, do nothing yourself, I will get you out ! ” Archie spoke so low it might have been a whisper, but the words rang distinct as a bell in the ear they were intended for. Maud was very near to where the fire first began, but she had never moved. She knew Archie Blake was near her, she seemed to feel therefore she was safe, or that they

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would not be parted. Her husband was gone from her side, she had not seen him go, but when Archie spoke to her she missed him. "He has got out," she thought, and he never crossed her mind again.

The heat was now becoming intense, but Maud never moved. Presently she felt as if she was being lifted off her feet, and she remembered nothing more till she found herself in the street with Archie supporting her. She had fainted. Perhaps it was well she did, for Archie was able to get her out more easily and more rapidly by carrying her than he could have done had he been obliged to make way for her as well as himself.

"Have all escaped?" was her first question.

"I believe so, I trust so," he replied.

"Your sister, and Owen?"

"Yes, all dear to me are safe."

"Oh, how the flames are roaring. What a fearful sight! Can you take me away from it, Archie?"

"I will directly, Maud."

She did not see his face, or she would have

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been startled ; but the tone of his voice made her think something was wrong. They were leaning against the railings of a house some ten doors higher up than the Grant's, and on the opposite side of the road.

“What is the matter, Archie? Are you hurt? Were you burnt?”

“A little, not much ; I shall be right in a few minutes, but the pain and the heat we went through makes me feel a little sick and giddy.”

They stood apart from the crowd, and the crowd, anyway, were too much occupied with the sight before them to waste a look on anything else. But had it been broad daylight, and had all the mob there assembled been gazing at Maud, she would not at that moment have heeded them ; she was unconscious of everything around and about her but the one by her side—the one who had saved her life—and who in the greatness of her terror she thought perhaps had sacrificed his own in the act.

“Archie, Archie! Tell me where you are injured? My God, take him not from me!

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I can bear all, I will bear all; but spare him!"

She threw her arms round him, her white arms glittering with the jewels that decked them. She drew his face towards her, for he had turned it away, and gazed at him in an agony of fear and love.

He saw it all—he knew all she suffered; and for one moment he wavered whether he should not give himself up to the intense happiness that was now within his grasp. But something whispered to him her own words, spoken only a few weeks back: "You must help me to bear, not to make my burthen heavier." Would he not, if he took advantage of wild words, uttered almost in delirium, make her burthen heavier? Ay, he knew Maud well enough to feel that it would become so heavy, she would sink under its weight. No, he would be strong, and shield her in her moment of weakness. He removed her arms gently—tenderly, and holding her hot hands in his, reassured her. His foot was injured, but not much, he said, nor could he tell how it happened. He was anxious to get

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her home, but how? He could not walk with her, his foot would not admit of it; besides, her dress was not fitted for walking even under such peculiar and terrible circumstances; as to finding her carriage, he might as well have attempted to seek for a lost coin amongst a crowd of Italian beggars; every one seized upon anything that could be called a carriage, no matter whose, and drove off in it. The various coachmen offering no opposition, arguing, with some degree of sense, that their masters or mistresses would do likewise, and take what came first. But this did not help Archie; even at such a moment, it struck him as being better not to drive with Maud in a stranger's carriage, and yet he did not like the thought of her going home alone in such a way.

“I wish I could see Owen again!”

“Why, Archie, he is safe, is he not?”

“Yes, thank God, I saw him in the street just as we got out. But he could take you home.”

“Oh, Archie, do not leave me, let me stay with you till the crowd has a little dispersed;

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and then we shall get away easily ; we shall find a carriage, for you must not walk."

She clung to him as she spoke, for some four or five men passed by at the time and stared at her, not unnaturally.

"Can I do anything for you, sir?" asked one of them, who overheard the last part of Maud's speech.

"Yes, my good man ; if you will get me a carriage or cab, that I may get this lady home, I shall be greatly obliged."

"I'll get one, sir."

"Maud, you will catch your death of cold. You have nothing over your shoulders, I never noticed it till now."

"No fear, Archie ; I am too hot to take cold. I am only afraid about you."

"Then, dismiss your fears, Maud, at once. I shall be right enough to-morrow."

Not a very long time elapsed before the man, true to his word, brought a carriage ; not Maud's, but that did not matter. She got in, and Archie, seeing her safe in a comfortable carriage, murmured a "God bless you," and promised to send Owen over to her the next

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morning. He rewarded the man, gave the coachman the direction where to drive to, and then in a moment was lost in the crowd. Maud, when she could not see him any more, gave one glance up at the smoking, and in some parts still burning, mass before her, and then covering her face over with her hands, endeavoured to gather together her scattered thoughts.

CHAPTER XII.

A TERRIBLE LEAP.

IT was fully half an hour before the carriage that was taking Maud home, succeeded in threading through the multitude assembled in and near Portland Place. The screaming and shouting was deafening ; that partly arose through the women, who were being crushed by the crowd, which every now and then heaved on one side, bearing down all before it that was too weak to stem it.

Why women will always push into a mob, very often, too, with infants in their arms, is something quite incomprehensible ; but so certain as a mass of people are congregated together, so certain is it that women and children form three-fourths of their number.

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Maud was thankful beyond measure when she reached York Place. She had had no time to think over anything that had happened, and she was still too confused and bewildered. It was a long time before she was calm enough to call to mind the moment she had given way uncontrolledly to her feelings, and spoken words she would have given her right hand rather than have uttered.

It was past midnight when she found herself safe, and free from any personal injury, in her own home. Her dress, however, had not escaped so well—it told of what the wearer must have gone through—how it remained on her at all was the marvel. However, the dress cost her very little thought. She was greeted by astonished looks and inquiring eyes, for the York Place household were ignorant of the calamity that had happened; and to see their mistress in the plight she was in, and alone, and, moreover, arriving in a strange carriage, was enough to startle them into curiosity.

“Has Mr Kennedy been home?”

Maud did not expect to find him there,

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but she thought he might have gone home to see if she were safe, and of course, not finding her, he would return in search of her.

“ No, ma'am.”

“ Not been in at all ? ”

“ I think not, ma'am. I will inquire.”

“ Do, and send Dobson to me.”

Mrs Kennedy went into the little back room, her husband's smoking room, the moment she came in ; for she knew there was a fire there, and now she was beginning to feel terribly cold. She looked round, and saw, standing on the table, a case containing four bottles, each partly full of spirits, a tumbler, spoon, sugar, and a lemon ; and on the hob a kettle with water boiling, just near enough to the fire to keep it at its then heat.

“ He can't help his tastes, I suppose,” she unconsciously thought. It passed through her mind simply because her eyes rested on these objects. A well-coloured clay pipe and a jar of tobacco likewise stood on the table. She had not been in this room more than once or twice, and never when her husband was in it. She disliked the atmosphere, and every

object in it was objectionable to her refined mind.

A knock at the door and Dobson appeared.

“Law, ma’am, what have you been about?”

Maud’s haughty distant manner never cured her maid of a disagreeable familiar way of speaking she had; but she knew the girl did not mean it, and that she was attached to her, therefore she put up with it, though it often tried her temper.

“Is there a good fire in my room, Dobson?”

“Of course there his, ma’am. Come hup to it, ma’am. Hit’s better than sitting in this nasty smoky place. Hi declare I can’t tell how gentlemen can like to make such chimneys of their throats.”

“As it is not a matter that concerns you, you had better not trouble yourself about it.”

“But, ma’am, what have you done to that beautiful dress? I declare if that new white lace isn’t hevery hinch of it in tatters, and—why, ma’am, your wreath’s gone!”

“There has been an accident at Lady Grant’s. There was a fire. Well, Gilbert?”

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“No, ma'am, Mr Kennedy has not been in,” replied the butler, who had just come back. “But the carriage, ma'am—you did not come home in it?”

“No, Gilbert.”

Maud was compelled to give a rough outline of what had happened. “And now, Gilbert, I should like you to go at once and inquire where Mr Kennedy is; look for him till you find him, for he probably has not heard I am safe, and is still looking about for me. I shall wait up till you return, so let Dobson know the moment you come in. I should think you would not have much difficulty in finding him now, for I trust the fire is quite out, I think it must be, and the crowd probably dispersed.”

“Oh, ma'am, do take something,” urged Dobson, when Maud was seated in her comfortable warm wrapper over the fire in her own room. “You will catch your death of cold if you don't; just let me heat you a glass of port wine.”

To get rid of Dobson and be at peace, Maud consented. An hour and more passed,

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and still she sat there waiting, but Gilbert did not return, nor Mr Kennedy come home. Maud could hardly be said to think, she was in a kind of dreamy stupor ; if she had one thought more clear than another, it was thankfulness that her sister was at Endlemere ; for had she been in town, there is no doubt, notwithstanding all Sir Philip Langley's objections, she would have been one of the spectators at Lady Grant's that night ; and who could tell whether she would have escaped as she herself had done ? Three o'clock struck, and Maud was aroused by a slight sound ; some one had come in ; she got up and listened outside her door, for she began to wonder now that Mr Kennedy had not returned. It was so much more natural that he should, when he did not succeed in finding her anywhere, go home to inquire if she was not there. But she heard nothing but Gilbert's voice speaking to Dobson.

She called to her maid ; the stillness of the night made her voice sound clear and distinct in the hall below.

“ Mr Gilbert, you hear she's calling me !

I can't go, I can't go. You must come; I tell you—hi shan't go!"

"You are a fool, Dobson! How can I go to your mistress? If she wants me, she'll send for me. Go up directly, I tell you."

The tone of authority Gilbert spoke in made Dobson go; in fact, she knew she must any way; her mistress had again called her, and she knew Mrs Kennedy disliked having to wait on any occasion, no doubt she would like it still less at three in the morning.

When Dobson appeared, Maud turned to question her. But Dobson threw her arms up in the air, then brought them down again till they reached her looped-up curls, which she clutched convulsively, and then she said, between a cry and a scream,

"I can't, ma'am, I can't, so there's no use in your hasking me!"

"Can't what, Dobson? What is it you can't do?" Maud spoke calmly, with a calmness she was far from feeling; but she wished to quiet her foolish weak-headed but kind-hearted maid.

"I can't tell you. Hask Mr Gilbert, he can tell you, but hi can't; and—hi won't!" and she began to cry piteously.

"Tell Gilbert to come up-stairs and speak to me."

Dobson fetched him directly.

"Hi told you you'd have to come, you hobstinate man! I haven't told her, hi couldn't."

"Gilbert, something has happened; tell me quickly what it is, and as shortly as you can."

"Mr Kennedy has met with an accident, ma'am." Gilbert looked pale and distressed, he spoke very low, but Maud heard him distinctly enough.

"Not—not dead?" Her lips were as white as the driven snow, and her breath came short and quick.

"No, no, ma'am, not dead!"

"Thank God!" she exclaimed.

She sank down on a chair, and covered her face over for a moment; the next, she roused herself; there was much still to learn, she felt that, and, perhaps, much to do.

“Where is he? Tell me all you know at once.”

“I could see and learn nothing at the house itself, ma'am; which by this time can be nothing but a shell; for the wind got up and blew, so they couldn't get the fire under; they thought they had at one time, but in a minute or two after it broke out again furiously. I then asked at one or two of the houses near, but all they could tell me was they feared lots of people were sadly burnt, and two were dead, both women. So then I went to a policeman, who was warding off the crowd from getting too near—the bits of blazing timber were flying about in all directions, and every one seemed wild, yelling and screaming awfully. I said I wanted to find a gentleman who had been at the party; he said he supposed if he were safe he would be found at home, but when I told him I had come from home, and he had never been near it, he told me he heard there had been a gentleman who threw himself out of the window in order to escape; and that some one had picked him up and carried him to a house on the opposite

side. I went and found the house ; some one in the crowd standing near us, who had helped carry him, and heard me inquiring, came with me. The first thing I asked was if they could tell me the name of the gentleman they had taken in. The servant told me they did not know it, and that he had been insensible ever since he had been there. But they let me in to see him, and it was him, ma'am, it was my poor master ! He did not know me. There were two doctors with him, doing all they could for him ; and the master of the house — I don't know his name — desired me to tell you he hoped you would go as soon as you liked, and remain with him, for he must not be moved ; the doctors said it would kill him outright if he were moved."

Maud listened, feeling a rushing sensation in her head, as the short details were being told. It is difficult to say what she thought or felt, her brain was so confused ; there was a mixture of regret and remorse ; but not for one instant did she think that, perhaps, now she was about to be released from the tie that

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had cast such a blight on her young life. When she uttered the cry "thank God," on being told her husband was not dead, it was in all honesty and sincerity. She would have recoiled from any other feeling had it arisen in her heart, but it did not. For all the bright, happy futures that in this uncertain world could be anticipated, she could not have wished for her husband's death. Perhaps few gave her credit for this—but very few people get credit for even good deeds, and still less good intentions, in this world.

Maud was one of those rare characters—most rare amongst her own sex—who considered that doing right, whether pleasant or not, was the only alternative for any one. It was not optional, at least with her. If she saw which way her duty lay, she followed it; if ever the reverse occurred it was either through ignorance or from some undefinable influence against which she felt powerless. But her errors from her earliest childhood had been such, that they were not likely to weigh very heavily on her, even with her strong feelings on the subject.

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“Will you get me a cab instantly, Gilbert?”

“The carriage is in, ma'am ; I think I had better go round to the stables and order it. I might find some difficulty in getting a cab at this hour ; and the carriage can be got ready in a quarter of an hour.”

“Very well, perhaps it will be best.”

Maud dressed as rapidly as she could. She got very little help from Dobson, for Dobson's fingers refused to be of any use to her, they shook, and she cried and moaned so, that poor Maud was thankful to dismiss her and do for herself.

Stretched on a bed hung round with old-fashioned curtains, and in a large, long room at the back of the house, lay the shattered body of Joseph Kennedy. His clothes had been ripped off him, the only method of freeing him from them ; for his groans, when touched, were terrible to hear. Two medical men of well-known repute had done all that science and art could do for the moment, and that was not much—they had as yet but ascertained what had to be done. He was con-

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scious now, but he was looking about in a bewildered manner; he could not tell who those two solemn-looking men were standing over him; nor who that neat, middle-aged woman with a white muslin apron on was, standing by the fire. It was some minutes before he could even partially recall what had happened; then when it all flashed across him, he closed his eyes with horror at the remembrance of it. Then also he recollected that he knew nothing of his wife, whether she had escaped or not.

“Is she safe?” he asked, in a moaning tone. He thought they must know who he meant—so they did now; for it was after Gilbert had been.

“Yes, Mrs Kennedy is safe, and is coming to you,” replied the oldest of the two men.

“Coming to me—where am I?”

“In Lord Grayson’s house.”

But poor Joe Kennedy knew nothing of Lord Grayson, and at that moment did not care; otherwise, as we know, a lord always held a certain importance in his eyes, that a

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plain squire could never lay claim to. But I doubt if a duke, then, would have gained more deference from him than a drayman.

There was a very gentle knock at the door, and the house-keeper opened it. A minute was occupied in whispered inquiries, and then Maud Kennedy was admitted. The two doctors gazed in utter amazement at the beautiful girl as she entered. Could she be his wife? If so, what on earth made her become it? The same thoughts flashed through both men's heads. Maud, with a proud—she could not help it—but graceful bend of the head acknowledged their salutations, and passed by them to the bed-side. She stooped down and gently touched the poor man's forehead with her lips. It was an impulsive act from a feeling, pitying heart. It was the first kiss she ever gave him.

“ Oh, Maud,” he murmured, “ God bless you for that ! ”

She now turned and inquired of the doctor nearest to her, what injury her husband had sustained. His reply was, unheard by the poor creature himself, to beg her to step to

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the other end of the room ; he could not tell her before him. She thought by this all hope was over, and that his life was drawing to a close.

“Is he in danger?”

“Not of his life,” replied the medical man ; “he may live on, he probably will live on, but he will never walk again, never be able to move his limbs again.”

Maud shuddered, and clasped her hands together as if in pain. It was very dreadful to hear.

“To tell you he would die would, I feel, almost be a mercy ; for to live in the only state he ever will live in, will be worse for you to witness than death, worse for him to bear, a thousand times over.”

“He can be moved to his own house?” Her voice sounded hollow ; it was with difficulty she spoke at all.

“To-morrow, not now. When I say to-morrow, I mean to-day, for it is nearly five o'clock, but it will be better to leave him till the middle of the day, and I will see that he is properly conveyed.”

“And continue to attend him,” said Maud, courteously.

“Have you any family physician?” Maud shook her head. “I shall require assistance,” he said.

“Who is that other gentleman—is he not a doctor?”

“Yes; that is to say, a surgeon, like myself. He is a very clever man, I could not desire any one better.”

“Then pray request him to act with you.”

Mr Saunders bowed, and Maud returned to the bed-side. Joseph Kennedy's eyes were wandering about restlessly; the pain, which for a moment had abated, now was increasing, and at last became so much worse that a narcotic was administered, and he became more tranquil, and soon fell asleep, but it was a restless, uneasy sleep. His wife never moved from his side till the time came for him to be removed. It was a terrible business; his cries of pain were something dreadful to hear. Lord Grayson was most kind and sympathizing; he urged upon Maud how much better it would be if she would let her husband remain there for the

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present; the whole house should be at her service. He was a childless widower, and therefore no one's liking to consult but his own. But Maud declined gratefully, yet firmly; she felt sure her husband was better in his own home. The very fact of Lord Grayson being alone, and accustomed to the methodical routine a solitary existence is usually attended with, would only make him feel the confusion such a plan would entail, a great deal more than if he had a family.

Besides, Maud knew Lord Grayson well enough by name; he was the then Lord High Chancellor of England, and to turn such a man's house into a hospital was totally out of the question. He required the peace and quiet maintained in his house in order to fulfil his duties; that was therefore another reason, had one been wanting, to determine her not to intrude a moment longer than could be avoided. On leaving she held out her hand to him, and thanked him in an earnest tone, for his great kindness and attention to her husband under so terrible a calamity.

Lord Grayson was a courteous old gentle-

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man, but perhaps if Maud had been less beautiful, he might have been less anxious to offer his hospitality, or to claim permission, as he did, to call and inquire after Mr Kennedy.

To any one—who is no one—it is of real importance to be a member of parliament, for it makes him some one at once. It is such a very easy and always satisfactory manner of explaining who a man is. So when Lord Grayson asked who the Kennedys living in York Place were, the reply that it was Joseph Kennedy of Harpton Banks, and member for Ashfield, was quite sufficient, there was no need to ask more.

The day after the fire, and the day after that, and so on for several days, the papers teemed with accounts of the calamity, many of them differing, all of them incorrect. Indeed, it would have been as hard a task to have given a true description of it, as it appears to be to give of a battle. On such occasions every one sees with their own eyes, each differing, none agreeing; yet probably each may be right in their own way.

Hammond came posting down the next

day, with his long legs and loose hair, to inquire what really had happened. Joseph Kennedy had not then been brought home, so he received the account from the butler.

“Threw himself out of the window! and left his wife to get out by any means she could; why, the fellow deserved to have every bone in his body broken for his selfish cowardice.”

This Hammond exclaimed mentally. As arrant a coward as ever walked himself, he yet saw clearly, through the beam in his own eye, the mote in Joseph Kennedy's.

“His spine is terribly injured, sir, besides the bones that are broken,” said Gilbert. “They say he will never walk again.”

“Ah, poor Kennedy! He'll be here soon, you say?”

“I expect them every minute, sir.”

“And how did Mrs Kennedy escape?”

“To tell the truth, sir, we none of us know. Seeing her safe, we never thought of asking; at least, I did not, and I don't think Dobson did, or she would have told us.”

“I wonder if he will die,” thought James Hammond, as he paced up and down the

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drawing-room whilst waiting the arrival of the unfortunate man. "I suppose he has made his will—I must see to that without delay, at all events. If he leaves me a good round sum I don't care a rush how soon he goes, for I'm getting tired of being at his beck and call, though it pays well, there's no doubt of that. But he's deuced sharp, all the same. Then that business of the five hundred; I didn't come out of that as neatly as I should have liked, but it might have been worse. If he's going to die, I needn't trouble myself about paying off his handsome wife, which I should like amazingly to have done; I should like to have brought down her confounded pride a peg"—and so on, and so on, till he heard a heavy dull tramping sound ascending the stairs, and he knew they had come.

When the news reached Endlemere, which it did in a letter from old Lady Langley to her son—as he, in order to avoid being present at Lady Grant's, had gone off for a couple of days to his own place—I am afraid to own that the most predominant feeling amongst all assembled there was a hope that Maud might soon

be free. There was at first the natural horror and consternation such a catastrophe was sure to excite, but when that subsided a little, and all the details had been entered into, then possible and probable results were discussed.

“I am sure it is to be hoped, for his own sake, he won't live,” said Isabella. “Now, Philip, don't look as if I were talking treason, for you must confess it would be a glorious day that saw Maud free from her bonds. Dear Maud ! she is so good, she deserves to be happy.”

“Some of these days,” said Langley, “you will have some kind friend wishing me dead for your sake.”

Isabella looked up at first reproachfully, but it soon changed to a sunny smile and loving expressions, as she said, “I love you, Philip, no one could wish me a happier fate than being your wife.”

“My darling ! God grant you will always think so.”

“It seems a special interposition of Providence that you were not there, Isabella, for I am quite certain you would have done some-

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thing as mad as poor Mr Kennedy did," said Mrs Mackenzie.

"No, I should not, Mac; besides, Philip would have been by to take care of me."

"You don't know where I should have been. Let us be thankful that we were not there, and that none dear to us are lost. It is quite sad enough that poor Kennedy has broken every bone in his body, and that my sister has burnt her hand and arm."

"Lady Langley does not say how Maud escaped," said Mrs Crawford.

"No; merely that she was unhurt."

No one ever heard till years afterwards how Maud escaped.

CHAPTER XIII.

THREE YEARS LATER.

MISS KENNEDY had a very nice little house in Upper Belgrave Street. She was very happy there, had everything—except Marion—her own way; and Marion had a governess and masters, and was getting on as well as Marion was ever likely to get on; for she hated lessons, she hated music—that is, practising; what is termed strumming she liked well enough—and, above all, she hated dancing. However, by dint of scolding and sometimes coaxing, she got through what she called an amazing amount of study; what Miss Betsy called a few stupid lessons.

Marion was not growing up so pretty as she promised to be when a very young child.

Her features were growing too large, and the clearness of complexion, which was one of her great beauties, had given place to a sallow look, that in a fair skin is very objectionable, worse even than to a dark one. A good deal of the father was evidently showing itself. However, as every one said, it did not much signify what her face was, her fortune would render her beautiful in most people's eyes. Money will be an attraction—is an attraction that few can resist. It covers a multitude of sins ; it hides blemishes that stand out all too plainly when not gilded over with genuine metal ; yet the veil is as flimsy as a bank note itself, and only disguises the real object till the wished-for possession is won.

Marion and her aunt were always at war, as they always had been. Both were to blame ; Marion took delight in opposing every wish and desire of Miss Betsy's, and Miss Betsy never left the child a moment's peace.

One day Marion owed her aunt a great grudge, and she resolved—to use her own expression—to pay her off for it. The affront was, that on Sunday, a day Marion invariably

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spent with either Mrs Crawford or at Joseph Kennedy's, she was not permitted to go. There was a very good reason for the denial, as she had a feverish cold and was not fit to go out; but Marion thought otherwise, and rebelled accordingly; however, Miss Betsy so far gained the cause that Marion remained at home; but the hours she spent there were devoted to revolving in her mind how best she could punish her aunt in consequence, and not to reading proper books, as Miss Kennedy had desired, and as the governess had suggested. For the governess never did anything beyond suggesting; she knew in a few years Marion would be a great heiress, and she consequently argued it would be well to secure the affection of the child in order to be certain of the patronage of the woman. She little thought that Marion, child as she was, felt the most unbounded contempt for her; and, but that it suited her to have her own way, and manage instead of being managed by her governess, she would have so spoken of her as to cause Miss Kennedy to pack her off then and there.

Miss Kennedy made a point of going to

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church every Wednesday evening during Lent, and it happened to be Lent now ; so that on Wednesday at half-past six Miss Kennedy was busy dressing herself for the usual evening service. Marion, a most unusual occurrence, was in her aunt's room ; and seemed anxious to help her, and was altogether so obliging that Miss Betsy kissed her on going out, and told her to have tea ready when she came home ; in short, they seemed on most amiable terms. When on the stairs, Marion ran after her with her bag ; Miss Kennedy always carried a black silk bag to church, containing her prayer-book, a pocket-handkerchief, a fan, and a bottle of smelling salts.

“ Dear me, I forgot it ! Thank you, child.”

Miss Kennedy trotted off to the church in Eaton Square ; it was not more than a couple of hundred yards from her own house. She was a little late, service had commenced, and all was very still within. Miss Kennedy had two sittings in a pew in the centre aisle, but on Wednesday one was generally occupied ; for it was known Miss Kennedy always came alone. She passed by an old gentleman and

took possession of the second seat. After the lapse of a minute, she opened her bag, just wide enough to admit her hand, that she might take out her book, when suddenly she gave a scream, and threw the bag from her. It came down on the bald head of the old gentleman—who was devoutly kneeling—with tolerable force : remember there was a book, a fan, and a smelling-bottle in it. He turned his head instantly, his face red with anger, and asked her what she meant.

Had Miss Kennedy gone mad ? She stood bolt upright, as pale as a ghost is generally represented to be, her whole frame shaking, and evidently shaking from fear. Many eyes were now turned towards her.

“ Sit down, ma'am ; pray sit down,” said an old lady in a pew behind her. “ This is very unseemly, very unseemly indeed ! ”

But Miss Kennedy neither heeded nor heard her.

“ Let me out, let me out ! ” she exclaimed, and not in a quiet tone either.

The old gentleman had now picked up the—to him—offending bag, and was handing it

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to her much more politely than he at first had felt inclined to be, for now he thought her crazy, and that the best plan was to give her her bag and let her out. But no sooner had he taken it up than he, with a shout and an oath, forgot all about where he was, and pitched the bag right into the centre of a pew on the opposite side of the aisle.

“Did it bite you?” asked Miss Kennedy, who now appeared quite as sane, at all events, as her bald-headed neighbour.

“No—o—o—o!” he replied, with a horrible shudder.

“Is it a snake?” she asked again.

“Ye—e—e—s.”

The congregation began to think a couple of lunatics had escaped, and found their way into the midst of St Peter's most respectable congregation. A pew-opener now came up, and requested them to go out quietly.

“Well, I may as well go,” said the bald-headed gentleman; “I can do no more good here. As to praying, I couldn't do it; besides, that infernal reptile must be loose.” So with a shivering, shuddering sensation, he dived

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under the seat for his hat, and took himself off.

Not so Miss Kennedy. However, she being a woman, the pew-opener thought she could turn her out, but Miss Kennedy was not to be turned out so easily.

“ Give me my bag. Give me my bag, I tell you ! ”

“ I know nothing about your bag ; you go out peaceable, or else I must call the police to make you.”

But there was a confusion going on in the other pew now ; a confusion less boisterous but more alarming. A lady had fainted away, another had jumped on to the seat, and stood there gazing downwards with starting eyes, and holding her dress so closely round her, that she looked something like an umbrella with a human head to it. A third had rushed wildly out of the pew down the aisle, and fairly out of the church. This proceeding first drew the eyes of the congregation to the spot. There was one gentleman besides these three ladies ; he was diving down ; for a moment he was invisible, and when he raised his head again, so he did his arm, and in his

hand he grasped a snake—in truth, it was only an eel—but to the frightened people it was a snake, a horrible snake!

He had had the courage to seize it, after a good deal of scrambling on the floor of the pew, but when he caught its slippery, slimy body, he could not hold it, and rather than let it go again into his pew, he with a sudden jerk threw it from him; he aimed at no particular spot, his only object was to get rid of it; but as fortune would have it, it came in contact with the sober face of the curate. In a moment every soul in the church prepared to rush out. The clergyman, hardly knowing what had happened, but having some vague idea some one was attempting his life, came to a sudden stand-still in his duty, and without waiting to look round or make the slightest inquiry, he leaped over the reading-desk and rushed—his white surplice flowing behind him with the rapidity he went—into the vestry, and slammed the door after him.

The scene that followed was such that probably no one ever witnessed within the walls of a church before. Every one con-

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sidered themselves in some unknown danger, and to get out was their main, indeed their only, object. Miss Kennedy was the single exception ; she had seen the viper—the reptile—that had caused such an unprecedented scene—safely lodged in the parson's quarters, and so she resolved to make a push and get her black bag. There could not possibly be any more in it, or she would have left it and her property for any one who chose to take possession of it. So she made a push through the crowd, to get to the spot where the old gentleman had flung it. There it was, her bottle broken to shivers of course, but her other things were right enough, and she now prepared to follow with the rest.

But one or two had seen what she did ; had seen her take possession of the bag that any one might have thought bewitched, and they whispered it to others, till all round and near knew her to be the cause in some way of what had occurred. How poor Miss Betsy stemmed the storm that now raged around her, she could never tell ; nor could she remember how she got home ; lucky, indeed, for her, it was

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so near. But she never was known to put her foot inside St Peter's again. She willingly lost the money she had paid for her two sittings. A few days after that, in fact, the first day that the church was opened again, a young lady between ten and eleven years of age went up to the beadle, and was heard to ask what had become of the eel that had caused such a commotion on the previous Wednesday.

"Law, Miss, it was a very fine one, and me and my missus eat it for supper."

"Not a bad ending, Boo, was it?" said the young lady, turning round to her companion.

"Ah, it was very shocking of you, Miss Marion." But Boo said it as if she thought Miss Marion had done something very clever indeed.

Fortunately, Miss Kennedy was diverted from the fright she had sustained, directly she got back to her own house. The servant did not seem to think it strange her mistress had returned so quickly; if she did, it was not at that moment a matter of sufficient interest for

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her to heed it. But she instantly handed a note to her, that Miss Marion had received, and desired should be given to her aunt as soon as she came in. It was from Maud Kennedy, asking Marion to go over to York Place as soon as possible, and to request Miss Kennedy to accompany her. Maud never wrote to Miss Kennedy, she always, any communication she had to make, did so through the child.

“Has Miss Marion gone?”

“Oh yes, ma'am; she ordered the carriage directly, and went; she must be there by this time.”

It was Marion's carriage, and Marion's house, and Marion's everything; yet Miss Kennedy very naturally disliked the child to act as if they were. So she was very angry now at her having ordered the carriage; though she would have been doubly angry had she taken a cab. The course she would have liked her to pursue, would have been for her to have waited till she returned from church, and that they should have gone together.

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Miss Kennedy trudged off on foot. It was a pleasant walk across the park, though rather a long one, and, moreover, it was getting dark; but Miss Kennedy had no fears; she was not, in truth, a likely object for any insult to be offered to her, and she had nothing beyond a couple of shillings in her purse, so she went boldly, and arrived safely at her brother's house.

A different house it was now, to what it had been when Maud first went there as a broken-hearted, miserable wife. Four years had elapsed since her marriage, and a little more than three since the dreadful accident that poor Joe Kennedy courted, through the dread of meeting what he believed at the moment to be a certain and terrible death. There he was, still living, if being in this life can be called living, a wretched object, rarely free from pain, totally incapable of moving, and hoping that each day might be the last to dawn on him. But not yet, not even yet, had his time come, he must endure a little longer, and then—he will be at rest.

Maud, if not a loving wife, had been a

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gentle, tender, patient nurse. For three long weary years had she tended him with the same care, the same thoughtfulness, as if she had no other object in life to think of.

The three years had not brought any great change to those concerned in this story. Isabella Crawford was now Lady Langley, a happy wife, a proud, doting mother. Mrs Crawford still retained her own little home at Kensington; and Mrs Mackenzie was still her trusty friend and comforter; but the greater portion of her time she passed at Endlemere, being almost as fond of her grand-children as she was of her own. If it had not been for Percy, the probability is she would have lived there entirely. But it was very necessary to have a house of her own on his account. He still was at Eton, and growing up a fine, generous, manly youth; his great object was that, by judicious management, he might yet take his mother back to Lee Ashton. The affairs relating to it were in good honest hands, so there was every hope entertained that it might yet be so.

When Marion Kennedy reached her

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uncle's house, her first inquiry was if he were worse ; for it was somewhat unusual to send for her and her aunt. Maud had often asked her to come by herself ; still not at that hour ; altogether, the child felt anxious, for she was as fond of Joe Kennedy, perhaps fonder, than ever. No, he was not worse, he was just the same ; so she went up with a quick, light step, where his two rooms were situated, both at the back of the house, and communicating ; one was fitted up as a sitting-room.

He was always wheeled into the latter on a sofa towards mid-day, and back again to his bed-room at night. He was lying as usual, doing nothing. However, it was not an hour for employment, as it was too dark to see to do anything, yet too light for candles ; still, whether light or dark, his only diversion was conversation. He delighted in visitors ; he listened to any news with the utmost eagerness ; he entered into political questions with as much interest as if he still represented the borough of Ashfield—that borough, by the way, returned two Conservatives now, Sir Philip Langley having been elected without

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opposition, on Joseph Kennedy's retirement— he listened to his wife reading the 'Times,' with a greediness she could not understand. Every trifling case that was argued in the law courts, he wished read. Often, when it happened to be a cause Archie Blake was pleading in, he was more interested in it, and made her go over it again—she nothing loth.

Oh, it was a weary life that he passed, often suffering such pain that he was debarred from enjoying the simple pleasures he could command. But he bore it with strange resignation: to those who knew him well, it was unaccountable how he could be so cheerful. And for this he was indebted to his wife; she had taught him to be resigned; she had softened his misery as much as lay in her power. Without being one of those "religious people" whose best and most devoted acts seem to be the distributing of tracts,—she was what they pretend to be, the helper of the destitute and the comforter of the afflicted. Without show, Maud Kennedy was a true Christian; yet, I doubt much whether she could have herself borne in the same manner

what she taught her husband to bear. We all know it is easier to preach than to practise.

“Alone, Marion?” said her uncle, as she stooped down to kiss him.

“My aunt will follow, I suppose. I left Maud’s note for her to see; she was at church when it came. It’s Wednesday, you know.”

“Oh yes, and she always goes on Wednesdays.”

“Yes, if they are in Lent or Advent—not otherwise. I can’t think what she does it for, it doesn’t do her a bit of good. She comes back just as cross as when she went.”

“Well, Marion,” said Maud, who happened to be out of the room when she arrived, “you’ve not taken long to come. Is your aunt here?”

“I don’t think I ever am long on the road when I’m coming here or going to Kensington; it’s such a comfort to get away from that dull place, where I hear nothing but scolding from morning till night. She’ll be here presently,” Marion added quickly, seeing Maud about to speak, and imagining it was again to know where Miss Kennedy was. “At least, in

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about an hour; don't you know it's Lent, and it's Wednesday?"

"Then, she can't be here till eight o'clock," remarked Maud. "I think you had better let me take Marion down-stairs," she continued, addressing her husband, "or you will be tired with her chattering, and not able to arrange all you wish to do."

"No, don't leave me," he replied, in a fretful tone. "I like to see you and hear you. I won't talk, I will only listen."

But there was not much time for talking or listening either before Miss Kennedy appeared. She had perfectly recovered from her fright, but not quite from its effects. She looked more sallow than usual; and Maud remarked it, but only by saying she did not look well.

"I doubt if you would look well either, Mrs Kennedy, had you gone through what I have."

Then Miss Betsy gave a detailed account of what had happened. Strangely enough the sudden summons to York Place had, for the time being, driven the eel quite out of

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Marion's head ; but now when her aunt was telling of the horror and consternation that was the result of her foolish trick, she could not help laughing, laughing till the tears ran down her face ; even Joseph Kennedy enjoyed it ; only, poor fellow, he did not dare to laugh, the motion would have brought on some of his worst pains. Maud, sober, respectable Maud—far more so now than she had ever been before—condescended also to be amused ; in short, Miss Kennedy met with no sympathy ; therefore, having given vent to her anger, and vowing if she thought it had been a trick—that it could have been anything but a trick she did not pretend to say--if she could only find out the culprit, she would have them punished by the law of the land, whatever that law saw fit to inflict. She then turned to her brother, and in a somewhat sharp tone, said,

“ What did you send for me here, at this hour, Joe ? ”

Joe thought a moment ; the eel story had scattered his ideas a little. Presently he said,

“ It was to Marion I really wished to

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speak ; only I thought you had better be present when I did so. Marion, you know, child, your father left you a large fortune? And—”

“ Oh, yes, uncle ! And I am to have it all to do what I like with as soon as I am grown up, and—”

“ Marion, do not interrupt your uncle,” said Maud, “ he is not strong enough to keep pace with you, if you go on at that rate.”

“ Not quite to do what you like with,” continued her uncle, “ but that is not the question now. What I want you to tell me is, supposing you were to die, Marion, to whom would you like your money to go ? ”

Marion had never thought of such a contingency. To die was quite beyond her calculating powers.

“ Well, uncle, no one ! I don't mean to die. I shall like to keep it myself.”

“ Marion is a great deal too fond of money, in my opinion,” put in Miss Kennedy, “ she thinks of nothing else, and is always talking about it. That fortune of hers is the ruin of her.”

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"Ah, Marion," said Joseph Kennedy, in a sorrowful tone, "I, at one time, thought, as perhaps you do, that money is everything. It is a great deal, child, but not all. What is the use of money to me now?"

"Well, uncle, it gives you a fine house, lots of servants, good dinners, doctors, and all sorts of things."

"Yes, child, it does that; but what is the use of a fine house or servants to me?"

"Well, the good dinners are." Marion was decidedly practical.

"Don't you think to be as I once was, to have the use of my limbs again, or even—yes, even without that, to be free from pain,—that I would give all my fortune, everything I possess?"

"But that would be very selfish of you, uncle, for then Maud would have no comforts, nothing at all."

"You are only wasting breath, Joe, in talking to her in that way," said his sister, "she'll never change. As long as she lives she will love money better than anything in the world."

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"No, I shan't," said Marion, snappishly.

"Well, Marion," said her uncle, "time will perhaps teach you that a large fortune is but a glittering bauble, and attractive enough at first ; but its glitter ceases to fascinate when there is no health to enjoy it. But once more I must ask you, supposing you were to die before you came of age, that is, before you are twenty-one, to whom would you give your money ? Don't fancy I think you are going to die, or likely to die, but it is necessary for me to know—at least, I wish it. Young as you are, you are old enough to understand what I mean."

But I don't think Marion did quite. Her eyes filled with tears, and her lips pouted out, as she said,

"Why, I thought you would get it all when I'm dead."

"Yes, Marion, so I should, but—I have not much longer to live, and when I am gone, if anything happened to you, your aunt Betsy would have everything—Harpton Banks as well. Would you like that ?"

"No, I wouldn't."

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Then, before saying more, Marion looked round at her aunt, and something in her face made her sorry she had spoken so sharply. That look was worth something to Miss Betsy. Perhaps looks are often of more consequence than we imagine.

“I should like Percy Crawford to have Harpton Banks and all my money, except what aunt Betsy has now ; I should like her always to have the same.”

“You are sure you wish all you say ? Think again, child. Would you not like to give Mrs Crawford something ?”

“Oh, Percy would do that.”

“Now, I think you have learnt all you desired to know,” said Maud, “so let me ring for Gilbert. I am sure you are tired. Your head will suffer to-morrow if you do too much to-night, for it will prevent your sleeping.”

“Ah, to-morrow ! I wish I could do to-night all I wish to do. I should sleep more peacefully. I ought not to have put off such a matter till the last. Well, well, there's no use thinking about it now, but I wish it were all settled.”

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“None,” said Maud. “The best plan is not to give another thought to the subject till you are obliged.”

When Joseph Kennedy was moved into bed, he became restless and uneasy, he could not shake off an anxious, nervous feeling that oppressed him. Gilbert asked him what he could do for him, but he replied, nothing; it was the mind not the body that made him turn his head from side to side on his sleepless pillow. Yet sleep was what he wanted; if he could only get sleep, and sleep till the morrow, but the greater his anxiety, the more he courted it, the farther it seemed from him.

“I cannot leave you like this, sir; let me give you one of your soothing draughts.”

“Ah, do, Gilbert.”

“Would you like me to call Mrs Kennedy, sir, to read to you a little? She can't be gone to bed yet.”

“No, no, Gilbert. She has enough reading in the day-time, she must be tired of it by night.”

Suddenly, as the servant was going to

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fetch his medicine, Joe Kennedy called him back.

“ Gilbert, come here ! Bring me a pen and ink; and a sheet of paper.”

“ But, sir, you can't write—you will—”

“ Do as I tell you. Bring pen, ink, and paper—make haste.”

Gilbert, in silent amazement, did as he was desired.

“ Hold it up for me, Gilbert, and support my arm.”

With the utmost difficulty, and with no small amount of pain, did Joseph Kennedy write some half-dozen lines. When he had finished he lay for a moment as if exhausted, and then he said,

“ Go and call Mrs Watson up here, and don't tell a soul in the house anything about it. Mind you don't, Gilbert, and tell Mrs Watson she must not either. Now, go and fetch her.”

Once more Gilbert did his master's bidding, but no longer in such a state of wonderment, for he guessed pretty correctly what it all meant.

Mrs Watson, a portly dame, very soon

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made her appearance; she was out of breath when she reached her master's room, but she soon recovered herself, and asked him how he felt.

“Thank you, Mrs Watson, just the same—you know I am never better. Now, what I want you to do, is to look at me sign this paper, and you too, Gilbert. Now, hold my arm up again; there, so,—that will do. Now, do you see; that is my name, and I have written it.”

“Yes, sir,” replied both servants.

“Now you are both to sign your names underneath, and say you witnessed we write all that—do you hear?”

“Yes, sir,” they again both answered.

Then they both signed, James Gilbert first, and Sarah Watson afterwards.

“Anything else, sir?” asked Gilbert.

“No, that's enough. Thank God, thank God! Now it is done I shall sleep, and soundly, I think, for I feel very tired. Good night, Mrs Watson, good night.”

“Good night, sir; I hope you will have a good night's rest.”

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“Fold that paper up, Gilbert, and seal it,” said Joseph Kennedy when Mrs Watson was gone. “Don’t take it out of the room, do it here, before me. I don’t think you would read it, Gilbert, I trust you quite; but by accident, without intending it, you might see some part of it, and I don’t want any one to know what is written there till I am dead.”

Gilbert sealed up the paper, and laid it down on a little table that always stood by his master’s bed-side.

“Your draught, sir; here it is, you had better take it.”

“Yes, I will take it, it will do no harm, give it to me; but first, place that paper under my pillow. So, that is right; thank you. I’ll take the draught now. Good night.”

“Good night, sir.”

CHAPTER XIV.

DISAPPOINTED HOPES.

THE following morning Joseph Kennedy was found dead. Death, the doctor said, must have taken place for some hours, for his body was quite cold. It was not unexpected by them, they only wondered from the state he had latterly been in, that he had lingered on so long; but to every one else it was a shock, a terrible shock.

Maud was in her own rooms, reading a letter just received from her sister, a long letter full of her husband and children, giving details of little Phil's precociousness, and Agnes' beauty. Her mother and Mrs Mackenzie, who had been staying at Endlemere, were to return to town that day, and Isabella hoped her sister would be able to meet them, or send some one

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to meet them, at the station. Mrs Crawford would go back sooner than necessary, Isabella said, in order to have everything ready for Percy when he came home for his Easter holidays. Then came inquiries after Maud herself, and what she had been doing, and how Mr Kennedy was, and if she could not manage to get away for a week and go to Endlemere, it would do her so much good, and the country was looking so fresh and green, and the flowers were out, and the trees getting well covered with leaves, and so forth.

“Ah, I daresay it would do me good, but my place is here, I cannot leave whilst he so depends on me.”

Perhaps a wish crossed her at the moment that he did not so depend on her ; if so, it was natural, and she was but human, after all. Whenever Maud sat still, unemployed and indulged in thought, Archibald Blake instantly came before her. She continued to avoid him, and so she rarely saw him ; she had felt latterly more than ever the necessity of meeting him as seldom as possible. Her husband's state, her peculiar position in consequence, all forced

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on her the obligation of keeping out of temptation. Yet school herself as she would, contemn her weakness as she tried to persuade herself she did, it was all in vain, her heart would beat, her hand would tremble, and her face would tell tales, whenever she saw him. But she permitted herself to think of him—of the old days gone by, few and short, but happy moments that she had basked in the sun-light of his love; yet all was over now, nothing remained of that time but its memory,—its memory that was still so dear that she at times thought that to indulge in it as she did must be sinful. She questioned herself as to whether she had any right to cherish even the remembrance of the love that had once been hers, the love that something within would keep whispering was still hers; or else, would she so cherish it? Ah, there lay the secret. She felt an inward conviction he still loved her, or she knew her proud, haughty nature would scorn to cast a thought on one who thought not of her. These were daily reflections with Maud; they formed for long weary years the sole interest of her life.

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“Oh, ma'am, you're wanted, please—oh directly, directly!” exclaimed Dobson, entering her mistress's room with small show of ceremony.

“Whoever wants me must wait,” replied Maud, quietly; “and, Dobson, I wish you would remember what I have told you about knocking at my door; I dislike exceedingly your coming in without.”

“Lord preserve us, who'd think of hever knocking hat such a time! you must come, ma'am, you must. Well, if you won't, he's dead then! There, now will you come?”

“Dead! Who is dead? What do you mean, girl? What are you raving about?”

Maud's first thought, first fear, was about Archie. He was uppermost in her thoughts when thus interrupted, and so, without waiting to consider the folly of Dobson coming to her at that time in the morning to give her such tidings of one that was not known in the house, she thought he was the subject of her terrified exclamations.

“I haint raving, ma'am,” said Dobson, beginning to cry—tears were easily brought to

www.libtool.com.cn the surface with her. "I tell you he's dead in his bed, and you hought to come down, ma'am ; you hought !" continued Dobson, in an injured tone.

"Do you mean—Mr Kennedy ? Dobson, is he worse ?" Maud was very pale.

"Worse ! Why, ma'am, you won't understand me. Hi don't call it worse. Law no ! Hit's better has it is. Poor gentleman, he'll never have no more pain now." And again the tears flowed.

"Leave me, Dobson, for a few minutes, I will go down directly." Maud spoke very calmly, very quietly, but Maud never showed on the surface the depth of feeling that stirred her beneath ; never to those dearest to her, still less would she to servants.

When she was alone she turned the key of her door ; she wanted, and must have, a few minutes undisturbed by aught in the outer world. She stood for a moment with her arms hanging straight down and her hands clasped ; her face turned up, and her large soft eyes fixed on the ceiling, as if she would see through it, through, through all, and read the

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inscrutable meaning of God's ways ; then she fell down on her knees.

“ Oh God, make me to feel rightly ! ”

She uttered that short prayer with deep fervency. She well knew her weak point ; she knew where she might fail, and she earnestly implored for help against it. And her prayer was heard, she did *feel* rightly. There was no fear of her actions, they had all been right ; but the feeling was not under her own control, and she dreaded falling short. If a passing thought crossed her, that now she was free—free to love, and to love without sinning, it did so without herself hardly being aware of it.

Death must cast a heavy gloom wherever its shadow falls ; even where it becomes a boon, a release from bodily suffering, from constant pain, it causes a terrible blank, and so it did in poor Joe Kennedy's house. It is astonishing how lenient we are apt to be with the dead ; their good points are magnified four-fold, and their bad ones almost entirely lost sight of ; and it was so in this case, as well as in most others.

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Joseph Kennedy had lived without being greatly loved by any one, and he died without causing bitter grief to any, even to those nearest, yet all had a kind word to say for him ; all, some little kind act on his part to mention and call up in his favour. Perhaps little Marion was his sincerest mourner ; she probably felt the greatest heart-ache that his death caused, for the child was very fond of her uncle. His sister merely expressed her surprise he had lived so long. His wife—she told Lord Grayson, who was with her within an hour or two after the news reached him, that it would be selfish to wish him back again ; his life since that terrible night had been one of unceasing suffering. She was right, it would have been selfish.

“ I can do nothing for you, Mrs Kennedy ; you are quite sure ? ”

“ Nothing, thank you. It was most kind of you to come. I telegraphed immediately to my brother-in-law, and I expect him at any moment.”

“ Ah, Langley ! He is a good fellow—a thorough gentleman. I came really to see if

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I could be of any use, or I should not have intruded at such a moment. But remember, Mrs Kennedy, if you ever do want my friendship, I mean in a serviceable manner, you will find it is at your command. And you know," he added, in a lighter tone, "some people think the Chancellor's friendship worth having."

"Lord Grayson's friendship is worth having," she replied, taking his proffered hand, "and I will not forget that I possess it."

"God bless you, dear lady, God bless you." And the old man left her.

In the afternoon James Hammond, accompanied by Stephen Lowe, arrived, according to previous arrangement.

"Holloa, Gilbert! What is this for? You look as gloomy as an owl. Has Mrs Kennedy taken leave of absence and gone off to the country, that the house is shut up?"

Gilbert shook his head. "No, sir. There's bad news for you, sir,—the master's dead!"

"Dead! Good God! What, Joe Ken-

nedy?" Hammond's sharp-featured face looked like chalk, and his keen eyes almost glared at Gilbert.

"Ay, sir, he must have died in the night. He was quite cold this morning, when we first discovered all was over. You know, sir, he never would allow any one to sleep in the room with him. But won't you step in, gentlemen? perhaps Mrs Kennedy will like to see you, Mr Hammond."

They went into the dark dining-room first, and then into the little back room, as being able to see better.

"You can tell her I am here, Gilbert. I don't suppose she will want to see me," he continued, when the servant left them. "Lowe, this is a terrible business. By Jove! if I'm not done! Just a day too late."

"Perhaps he has made a will," said Mr Stephen Lowe.

"Not he! No, I've urged it on him long enough, and often enough, but till yesterday I could never get him to consent. I suppose it was a feeling that he wouldn't last long made him give in at last. Hang it! My evil

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genius must be at work, to have such a piece of ill-luck befall me."

"I always thought, Hammond, you would meet with some disappointment with that man. You built up your castles too high, my friend. You fooled me at one time. I half believed I was going to make a thundering good thing out of him; but he was precious sharp; it was very hard work to bamboozle him."

"You did pretty well, at all events."

"Yes, when he was green in the possession of his money, but the devil a bit did I find it answer after."

"I say, Lowe, just fancy, that old scarecrow will get all his fortune."

"His widow must get her thirds."

"Must she? I'm sorry for that. I should like to have seen her without a shilling to her name. I owe her a dozen grudges that I meant to have paid her off with interest."

"And now?"

"Well, I don't quite see my way. I may try and injure her in Blake's eyes, that's all that is left me."

"You had best leave that alone; for if I

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know anything of character, Mr Blake is not one to be playing tricks with. You will get the worst of it, Hammond, if you interfere there ; better not anger a lion if you have to go inside his den to do it."

"Damn it ! I'll marry Miss Betsy. I can kill her afterwards."

"Take care, Hammond, I am a lawyer, remember. But I don't think you would get the opportunity, for I don't believe she would marry you."

"Mrs Kennedy's compliments, sir, and she is not well enough to see any one," said Gilbert, coming into the room ; " but if you will wait a few minutes Sir Philip Langley will come down and speak to you."

"Very well, Gilbert." And Gilbert vanished.

"What can Langley want here, I wonder?" said Hammond, striding up and down the room with his hands in his pockets, and thereby drawing up his trowsers, making them at least three inches shorter than they were already, and they only came a little below his ankles at best.

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"Mrs Kennedy most likely sent for him."

"I wonder she did not send off for that Apollo-faced lover of hers."

Hammond spoke spitefully, more so, perhaps, because he felt his words could do no more injury than letting fall a double-edged tool into a sack of sand.

"I think I may as well go; there's nothing for me to do here, and plenty to do at my office. I may carry back the draft of the will, I suppose?"

"Harpton Banks goes to that little vixen Marion Kennedy," continued Hammond, not heeding anything Lowe said. "The right thing in this world is to do wrong; I'm certain of that. It always succeeds!"

"Well, Hammond, you've not found it so. Look at you now. Why, you never did a right thing in your life, did you? Well, never mind, you needn't own it unless you like; but admit, at any rate, that it does not always answer. Look at Mrs Crawford; if your story about her is true, she has not finished off very gloriously."

"Well, she's jolly enough, isn't she?"

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“No, I don't think she is. I saw her a few weeks ago, and I don't think if that governess had not been with her, that I should have known her; she has grown a worn-out, broken-down woman, and she used to be a handsome, cheerful person, looking almost as young as her daughters.”

“Ah, that's only because she knew her secret was discovered.”

“But if she had never had the secret, she might have been happier.”

“Well, it won't do for you to moralize, Lowe, for I don't know a greater scoundrel than yourself!”

“Good-day,” said Lowe, taking his hat, and some long-looking papers that stood up inside it.

Hammond was in a great fury, because he found himself what he called “sold.” Death had stalked in full four-and-twenty hours too soon and balked him of his prey. Death is an enemy all have to make place for—besides, none care to have a personal fight with it, so it always has its way, as it had now; and James Cooper Hammond's intentions were all

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defeated. Yet he did not care to quarrel with Stephen Lowe. He was a friend that had stood him in good stead once or twice, and might again, so he added with a forced smile,

“But I can beat you, don't you think sô?”

“Yes, I do, and I yield you the palm,” was the reply given, much more earnestly than was expected or liked.

Then the lawyer left, and Hammond remained alone with his thoughts ; not pleasant ones by any means, but they were soon interrupted by Sir Philip Langley's entrance.

“How are you, Hammond ? This is a sad business, but one cannot regret that the poor fellow is released ; he led a life of perfect torture ; but I am sure you will feel very grieved, very. It is hard to lose a friend of long standing.”

“Yes, Sir Philip, it is very. I have lost a valued and dear friend in poor Joseph Kennedy. Can I be of any use in any way whatever ?”

“Thank you, I think not. There is not much to do, at any rate for the present. I

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can give all the necessary orders touching the funeral. You will attend of course?"

"Certainly, I should wish to do so. Does Miss Kennedy know?"

"Of her brother's death? Oh yes, Mrs Kennedy sent her maid there this morning. She merely said she expected it."

"It will be a wonderful change for her."

Langley looked up, and with a surprised look in his calm face, "I should not think she will feel much difference; it would have been had she never had the charge of Marion, but five hundred a year added on to her present income is of course something, and she may let it accumulate, and not touch it, but it is hardly enough to cause any great change."

"Five hundred a year! It must be upwards of eight thousand."

"What are you talking about, Hammond?"

"Why, I thought she would have got the whole of it, but Lowe says his wife must get a third."

"You are labouring under some strange mistake. His wife comes into every shilling

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her husband had to leave, except the legacy to his sister."

It was Hammond's turn now to look surprised; but surprise was not the word, he was dumbfounded for a minute or two, and when he regained the power of speech he said,

"Was there a will then? There can't have been a will," he added, decidedly. "Only yesterday poor Kennedy begged me to be here to-day, and bring Lowe with me, that he might make his will."

"As if something warned him of his approaching end, he made Gilbert last night get him pen, ink, and paper, and he wrote in a short and clear manner the way he desired his fortune should go, and Gilbert and Mrs Watson, the housekeeper, witnessed it. It was a great mercy he did so, for it would have been an iniquitous piece of injustice to his wife if he had not. She has been a good wife to him, through trials and sorrows few women would have borne so well and nobly." There was no use in contradicting Sir Philip, for he might prove to be the only trump card he had left. There did not appear

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either as if anything would be gained by quarrelling with the rich widow, so he let the eulogy pass. Only one thing, he determined to give up his idea of making Miss Betsy into Mrs Hammond; consequently, it is to be supposed, if she had lost the chance of a fortune, she had gained the chance of living. And James Hammond left the house with a little better notion of the vanity of human designs.

The following day, a note, with a narrow black edge to the paper, was brought to Mrs Kennedy. Her face flushed up crimson as she recognized the hand-writing, and her bosom heaved with emotion; and yet there was nothing in the simple, natural words she read to call all that forth. There were merely a few lines; it said,—

“I could not hear of the sudden termination to the fearful calamity that befell Mr Kennedy three years and a half ago, without writing you a line to say if in anything or in any way you can make use of me, I pray you will, as you would of your own brother.—A. B.”

She took up a pen and wrote,—

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"Thank you for your kind offer. Philip Langley is with me.—M. K."

She sealed it up, and rang the bell. Dobson appeared.

"Is Sir Philip Langley in?"

"Yes, ma'am."

Maud considered for a moment, and then said, "Ask him, if he is disengaged, to be kind enough to come up and speak to me."

"Hup here, ma'am?"

"Yes, up here."

Maud's heart was fluttering unpleasantly, and it felt up near her throat, quite in a wrong place. She did not like speaking to her brother-in-law; but she thought it right to do so, there was no one else she could speak to, so she resolved to let no false pride prevent her. She wished at that moment she had Mrs Mackenzie by her side. But she could not go out under present circumstances, and sending for her would have occupied too much time. Sir Philip came up immediately.

"Philip, come in for a minute and shut the door."

Maud then turned her face away from him,

for she was so placed that the very little light that came into the room fell full upon her, and she felt she could talk better if he could not see her tell-tale countenance.

“ I have just received that note, Philip,” and she handed him the one she held open in her hand ; then she tore open the one she had written herself and sealed up, “ and read that also.”

Sir Philip did as he was desired, and then gave them back to her.

“ Well ? ” she said.

“ Well, Maud ? ”

Had she seen the half-comic, wholly amused expression on his face, she would have been intensely angry ; but she saw nothing, for, as I said before, she avoided looking or being seen.

“ Is there any reason my reply should not go ? ”

“ None under the sun, that I can see.”

The tone of his voice now made her raise her eyes and look up at him.

“ Philip ! ”

“ Maud ! ”

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“Oh, do not jest, this is not a time for that! Philip, I do not wish to have to reproach myself hereafter for anything; and I fear to trust my own judgment, but I can trust to yours; then do not turn into ridicule what to you may only seem fit for it, but to me is all important.”

“My dear Maud, forgive me! For a moment, I confess, the matter seemed so trivial, I could not understand why you made it worth a thought, but I do now. Never fear, Maud, trusting your own judgment; depend upon it, it will never fail you; and I doubt your ever having to reproach yourself for anything you may have done; I never knew one so less likely to have cause. Give me the note, I will see that it reaches safely, it will be better than giving it to your servant.”

“Thank you, Philip, thank you a thousand times.”

Sir Philip was at the door, and was just about to leave the room, when he turned back as a sudden thought struck him.

“Maud, you intend going back with me to Endlemere, do you not?”

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There was no reply, so he continued, "I think it is the best thing you can do for the present."

"I don't know, Philip. I think perhaps I am better here. My mother will be in town so soon now, perhaps she would rather I remained."

"She would have been up, as you know, yesterday, but your telegram made me persuade her to remain till I got back. But I think if you will return with me, she would be content for Percy to pass his Easter holidays at Endlemere, the boy himself, I am sure, would prefer it."

"Naturally. The poor fellow hates London, and it seems hard he should be doomed to pass all his holidays in it. If you think that I had better go with you, I will; but you will have such a house full, that it will make you and Bella so uncomfortable."

"No fear of that; Bella will be satisfied, I am sure, whatever plan is proposed, if it takes you there. But there is another point: I think it desirable you should go as soon as possible over Harpton Banks, and remove your own

things. You know the furniture, and, in short, everything but the house and grounds, belongs to you. I dare say Marion will like to live there, and if so, I should not imagine the Chancellor will oppose it. It was fortunate your husband made her a ward in Chancery; it will save much anxiety about her."

"Yes, it was as well, I believe. Philip, I should like all the furniture, and plate, and linen, and, in fact, everything but a few trifles, to be moved to Lee Ashton. I want to give it all over to my brother. You know the place sadly wants doing up, and I should like to have it done. Of course his guardians won't object and can't, but they might refuse to let him live there. What I should like is this—for me to rent it, and for my mother to live in it, and for Percy to spend his holidays in his own home."

"And you to live there also?"

"Oh no, mamma would not like that, I am certain. She would fancy I was mistress of the house, and that she was only my visitor. You know she is touchy on those little points ;

besides, Philip, I should not like to make Lee Ashton my home again. The remembrance of the few happy and many miserable days I have spent there would render the place now painful to me."

"But the happy days will come again, Maud."

"Ah, well, we don't know," she said, dreamily, and with a sigh.

"However, you have now yourself given a very good reason why as soon as the funeral is over you should go with me to Endlemere. Besides, Maud, for a few weeks, at all events, after what has occurred you are better with your own family. This house would be a dreary place for you to stay in alone."

"Philip, I have been 'alone' from the first moment I ever set my foot in it." She spoke in bitterness; now that her burthen was removed she seemed to feel what its weight had been, with greater force than when she was actually bearing it.

"Your husband was kind to you, Maud?" Philip spoke hesitatingly, for he knew Maud's pride brooked no questioning on that point.

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“You were ill-matched, but he was very, very fond of you.”

“Yes, ill-matched! His own words.” And she well remembered the occasion they were spoken on. “Oh, he was very kind to me, good to me in every way; but—I did not make him happy—I could not, Philip. I did try; oh, none know how hard I tried, but he is gone now, poor fellow; and the regret that I did not do all I might have done is a sad feeling to bear with me through life.”

How many of us have felt the same, like Maud, when too late. It will be well for us if we never have more on our consciences than she had.

CHAPTER XV.

CLOUDS BLOWN OVER.

THE slanting rays of the setting sun were casting a crimson glow over the Surrey hills, whilst the great harvest moon was slowly making its appearance; but though a little later she would assume her bold brazen face, just now she looked pale and delicate; she was modest in the presence of the sun.

On a high hill—Goff's Hill, as it is called—about ten minutes' walk from Crawley, one of the prettiest villages in all England, there is a pleasant-looking house, not large, but surrounded by well laid-out gardens, crowded with flowers that perfumed the air around. The drawing-room had large low windows that opened on to a covered terrace, though

it was hardly grand or dignified enough to be called that ; and beyond it was the soft green velvety lawn.

Sitting on a garden chair—the most uneasy of all seats ever invented—was Maud Kennedy. She looked very beautiful, more beautiful than she was when we last saw her—for then she was vexing herself with foolish thoughts which were natural at the time, and it was equally natural now that she should have outlived them. And though she wore that hideous institution, a widow's cap, it seemed to become her—the hard harsh puffs coming against her soft pale face, seemed to make the line of beauty more lovely still. A great deal of the haughty, scornful expression, that of late years had become a part of her face, had now left it, though not quite. The old look returned if aught occurred to vex her, but it was but fleeting. No, what seemed now a settled expression was sad and melancholy. Sorrow had passed over her with a heavy tread, and had left its mark, which is ineffaceable. This evening, however, there was a restlessness about her manner not usual with

her. www.libtool.com.cn She rose up from her seat, and walked up and down once or twice the length of the lawn, every now and then stooping to pick a flower, which as she continued her walk she deliberately pulled to pieces.

Marion came bounding out of some shed or barn that, though hedged out of view from the house, was yet visible from the lawn. Marion and her aunt had been on a visit with Maud for nearly a month. Miss Betsy got on better with her haughty sister-in-law than she used to do. Maud was less proud to Joseph Kennedy's sister after his death. Besides, she had a feeling that by being kind to her now she made some atonement to his memory for her many shortcomings in his life-time. So that Miss Kennedy began to think Maud was very fond of her, and she began to soften too in consequence, and to think that really she was not the proud unapproachable being she had hitherto considered her.

Marion was dressed in a white frock, trimmed with black ribbons; she was looking wonderfully well, whether it was that white suited her, or the bracing air of Goff's Hill had

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brought a colour to her cheeks, or perhaps a contented, self-satisfied feeling that she was richer than ever, and that Harpton Banks was hers, had so elated her, that her looks rose accordingly.

“Maud, Gilbert wants to know how long you mean to wait? At least, he didn't say it in those words,” she added, as she noticed Maud's displeased expression, but she said—

“Why does not Gilbert come to me himself, if there is anything he desires to know?”

“Well, he was coming, perhaps he is coming, but I got here first, so I thought I would ask you.”

To this Mrs Kennedy made no reply, she merely turned her head in the direction of the village, and strained her eyes and ears, but to no purpose, nothing was to be seen but the pretty view; nothing to be heard but the singing of the birds and the chirping of the grasshoppers.

“Marion, come here! You untidy child, you never will be fit for anything as long as you live but to give people trouble.”

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This was from Miss Kennedy, whose head suddenly protruded from one of the bed-room windows.

“I can't come, Aunt Betsy ; never mind the things, Boo will put them away. What's Boo for but to attend upon me ?”

And with that the young lady disappeared again into some out-of-the-way place, and probably where she had no business to be. Miss Kennedy knew it was in vain to say more, the child never paid the smallest heed to her, unless it accorded with her own wishes. But she turned to Bradley, who was standing by her, and said,

“There's no use, I suppose, Bradley, in trying to change her.”

“She is spoilt, Miss, by her money. If she had not a penny she would be a sweet child.”

Rarely did Bradley speak about her young mistress, for it had become now a very sore point. Bradley had lavished a world of love on the child, and had tended her with such care, such devotion, that few children meet with from any but their own mother, much less

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from servants ; and Bradley met now with no love in return. She used, but not now. Young as she was, money was Marion's idol. It was partly from her disposition, but principally the fault of her education. She had had governesses, weak, silly women, that talked incessant nonsense to the child as to what she could do when she was grown up, with all that great wealth ; and that every year she was richer and richer, for her fortune was accumulating, with the exception of what was devoted to her present expenses. So poor Bradley was disappointed in the one object on which she had, not only concentrated all her heart's affections, but had devoted her life to. But poor Bradley was only like her neighbours all the world over in that respect. Are we not always disappointed if we fix our hopes on one object ?

Reader, did you ever build your faith—
did you ever give your whole heart's devotions—
—did you spend the sunny days of youth—
did you give up all you possess for one particular being, without finding, to say the very least, that they fell short of what you ex_

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pected? If not, the mist has yet to be wiped off the glass you see them through; the hard outline of human nature has yet to become visible to you. If death does not step in and take your idol from you, you will live to learn it is but clay.

But there were many excuses to be made for poor Marion. She had no one whose heart was sufficiently interested in her to force her to learn right principles. This could not be expected from a woman in Bradley's class of life. Miss Kennedy was unfit for it, both from temper and ignorance. She saw her faults, but she was utterly incapacitated for correcting them; besides, she did not care enough for the child to make the effort, had she been. Mrs Crawford was not in a position to do it. She did her best when she had her with her to point out her failings and errors; but it does not do merely to mention them in a gentle tone once a week; it may have effect for the moment, but it will not eradicate them. Besides that, the little heiress was not so rich in love as she had been on her first arrival in England. Those to whom she

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was still very dear had dwindled down to two, Mrs Crawford and Bradley.

That is not many for a child to have to love it. Later in life two true hearts devoted to us we should consider a mine of wealth, but the young look for numbers. They have generally brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts, and cousins, all, of course, fond of them. The quality of the love is not inquired into, that matters little if there's the quantity.

Marion had quality which she did not appreciate, but she missed the quantity. Fear, incessant fear, kept Mrs Crawford from seeing the child as frequently as she might have done. Perhaps the being now she most dreaded learning her terrible secret was Sir Philip Langley; and what added to her constant dread of his hearing it, was that she knew he and Hammond were acquainted. Daily did she live in the expectation that he would come and tell her she must do something—what she could not conjecture—or else he should blazon forth all he knew. Marion, therefore, lost that chance of being taught to think less of herself and more of others. At the best of times, a

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hard lesson for any one—most of all a child—to learn.

The sun had set. Maud was like an uneasy spirit, wandering about in the twilight, dressed in her heavy, deep mourning. At last, a welcome sound met her ear. It was the train approaching the Crawley station, bringing the London passengers from the junction at Three Bridges. You will, perhaps, be surprised to hear that all this nervous anxiety, this restless watching, was for no more important a person than Owen Blake.

Owen Blake, who had once again come home from India; and this time not on leave, but for good; his health had at last forced him to resign the service. He had not heard of Joseph Kennedy's death before he sailed, though he was not surprised later to hear the news; for he knew the state he was in when he left England, and he wondered, as most others had done, that he had lingered on so long; that was the marvel, not his death.

He wrote to Maud immediately on returning, not condoling, he could not have done

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ediction, she did
as always fond of
as a child, and she
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as past nine, and
to make a move.

walk to-night, Maud,
" she said. " Look at
full moon to-morrow,
? And it's as light as
go."

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I couldn't go to bed
such a dinner; why, aunt
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ask Miss Kennedy to let

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that a bit more than other people had done, not excepting those who knew nothing of her story; but a very nice letter, all the same, steering clear of congratulation, which he considered a very difficult task to perform. The letter was forwarded to Maud at Goff's Hill; for Owen had sent it to York Place. Maud wrote back, saying how glad she should be to see him again, and would he go down and see her and stay a day or two with her? So this was how Owen was expected, and at last arrived, though a good hour behind the time,—but that is nothing for the Crawley train.

After the ordinary forms of greeting had been gone through, which were sincere and warm on both sides, and one or two hurried questions asked and answered, Owen was escorted by Gilbert to his room, to prepare for dinner.

“We must make Marion dine with us to-night, Miss Kennedy, four are better than three; besides, the child is such a chatter-box, she will talk for us all,” said Maud.

Miss Kennedy of course assented; and

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Marion fulfilled Maud's prediction, she did talk for them all. She was always fond of hearing her own little voice, as a child, and she had not one whit got over the liking yet. Dinner was over; it was past nine, and Marion thought it time to make a move.

"You won't get your walk to-night, Maud, if you don't make haste," she said. "Look at the moon—it will be full moon to-morrow, isn't it big and bright? And it's as light as day almost—oh, let's go."

"It is time for you to go to bed, Marion," said her aunt.

"Oh, I must have a little walk—mustn't I, Maud? Besides, I couldn't go to bed directly after eating such a dinner; why, aunt Betsy, I should have the nightmare, and rush in to you and frighten you out of your wits."

"You have nearly worried me out of them as it is," replied Miss Kennedy.

"I may go, Maud—may I not?"

Maud would just as soon she went off to her bed; but the very feeling that she did not want her, made her ask Miss Kennedy to let

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her go for a few minutes. Maud wished for a quiet walk and talk with Owen, alone ; however, they went, the three of them, not Miss Kennedy, she was afraid of rheumatism or ear-ache, or something equally disagreeable, so she stayed in the house.

“Owen, you are not afraid of the night air?” asked Maud, suddenly standing still.

“Oh, dear, no, not such a night as this ; it can't possibly hurt. Why, it is as warm as indoors,” he replied. “What made you come to such a quiet primitive spot?” he asked.

“It is a very pretty place,” replied Maud.

“Yes, but you must feel it dull.”

“Not more here than elsewhere. I stayed with the Langleys for six weeks, then I returned to town, but I could not bear being there, so I took this house for three months, and brought Miss Kennedy and Marion down with me.”

“Does it belong to any friend ? How did you hear of it ?”

“It was advertised in the ‘Times.’ I never even came to look at it.”

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Owen looked round at Maud. He could see her plainly enough; the moon was brilliant that night; its light, perhaps, made her look a shade paler, that's all; but it could not produce that sorrowful expression. He puzzled his brain to understand why it was there. He wished Marion in her bed, he could not talk before the child, but on ordinary topics.

"What are those hills we see?" he asked abruptly.

"The Surrey hills."

"But this is not Surrey, is it?"

"No; but the two counties, Sussex and Surrey, join just beyond the village. There is a tree planted on the spot."

"The village of Crawley?"

"Yes. I am sure you will think it very pretty about here. When I drive you to-morrow through Ifield to—"

"Marion, come in, child. It is long past your bed time. Bradley is waiting for you, she has been twice to see why you did not go up-stairs."

"Oh, not yet," pleaded Marion. "It's so nice here."

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"Yes, directly," said Miss Kennedy, and Owen Blake liked her from that time forth.

"Does not this moonlight walk remind you of that night at Lee Ashton, when you and I wandered out and escaped from the hot rooms, and the crush and crowd in them?" said Owen. "You had a ball, you know, that night."

"Yes, I remember it well," replied Maud, in a low voice.

"Do you remember our conversation, too? Poor Archie! He has had as bad a time of it, pretty nearly, as had our ancestor Jacob." Maud did not speak, so he went on. "He came with me to the station, and he told me to ask you, Maud, if he might come and see you."

A bounding, thumping, tumultuous sensation commenced at Maud's heart. Did Archie, then, still love her? Would he ask to come and see her if he did not? And yet, she had heard—on what she considered good authority—a rumour that he was going to be married. The cause of Maud's sad face is no longer difficult to understand, now. Possessed of an

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enormous fortune; young, beautiful, and, above all—yes, reader, above all—free, what could make her so sorrowful? So asked the world. For the world knew Maud Crawford's marriage had not been a love match, though they knew nothing of the real facts concerning it; still, they knew enough to prevent their thinking she was mourning her husband.

Maud wanted to answer Owen, but she did not know what to say. She could think of nothing that would sound sensible or reasonable, to her notions, at least, and so she was still silent. Owen was confounded.

“You do not answer, Maud. Is it that you would rather he did not come—that you would rather not see him? Is it that you desire the past to be blotted out from his memory, as, perhaps, it is from yours? He told me, if I found it so, to say that he would return you the pledge he still holds—that he held with your consent—and that nothing should ever make him part with but your own desire.”

“But, is it not true then, that—what I heard?”

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“What do you mean? What did you hear?”

“I heard, Owen, he was engaged to Miss Hunter, and that they were to be married this autumn.” When Maud once broke the ice, the words flew rapidly enough from her lips.

Owen laughed one of his own joyous laughs.

“Is it possible, Maud, that you have lived in London so long, and yet believe the rumours you hear of people’s marriages or any other gossip? Why, they marry people, and divorce them, and kill them; why, they will go even so far as to bury them, without more foundation for what they say, than they had when you were told that Archie is thinking of leading Miss Hunter to the hymeneal altar.—Are those the words they used?”

“I can’t laugh,” said poor Maud, in a faltering voice.

“Dear Maud, how can you have been so—?”

“You are not deceiving me, Owen,” she said, interrupting him, and in an anxious tone.

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“Deceiving you! Why, Maud, what motive under heaven could I have for doing so? You know I love you as dearly as I do my own sister, perhaps, Maud, even a little more. Your love for my brother, and his for you, has caused a stronger link to attach me to you than you can imagine. You do not know how I love Archie!”

“Yes, I do, Owen, I do!” But, she thought *he* could not imagine how *she* loved him.

“The Hunters are old friends of ours, as you know,” he continued, “and Lady Hunter has had a suit pending in which Archie was retained, and in which he took more interest than he might have done in an ordinary cause. It took him a great deal to their house, but beyond that, I am sure there was nothing. Archie no more thought of Miss Hunter than I did. So you see what the world considers sufficient ground to build a report on. Never trust to what the world says, Maud, for, if you do, you will invariably find you are deceived.”

“You have made me so happy, Owen, so

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happy, that I cannot realize the truth of it yet."

"So this then was the cause of the gloom." Owen said this more to himself than to her. "Yet, if I know you, as I fancy I do, your pride would not have let you continue caring for one that you thought had ceased to care for you."

"No, Owen, I suppose it would not long; but my pride—I don't know what has become of it lately. Pride and everything else seemed buried in the belief that I was born to suffer sorrow upon sorrow."

"Then dig up everything again that is worth having, for it seems to me you were born to be a very happy woman. I don't deny you have had sorrow, but what a blessing to you that you have passed through it and not got it before you; which you surely would have had, were it not gone by. For we all have our troubles, Maud, all of us; believe me, they come sooner or later."

"Why, Owen, you talk as if you spoke from experience. *You* have had no sorrow—no heart sorrow, I mean. It was vexing, of

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course, your having to pass some of the best years of your life in India, a country you disliked, and that did not agree with you ; but that is not like a gnawing pain at the heart, that makes life hardly endurable."

"Maud, I have had my cross to bear as well as you have—a heavier one than yours, for I trusted and believed, and was bitterly and heartlessly deceived. But never mind me," he added, in a gayer tone. "I only tell you this to prove that all suffer."

"Owen," and Maud laid her hand on his arm as she spoke, "any woman who could deceive one so true, so honest, so noble as you are, could not be worthy of your love."

"Perhaps not—admitting, Maud, I am all you say ; but that knowledge will not heal a wound once made ; it may, when the wound is healed, help hide the scar, but that's the utmost it can do."

"Dear Owen, the wound is healed ?"

"Yes, Maud, thoroughly, thank God."

"You will tell me some day all about it ? You have known all my sorrows and joys, Owen ; I must know yours."

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“Some day. Some day, when you are my sister.”

A bright, beautiful smile lit up Maud's face as she turned and looked at Owen in reply—but his own was sad; the remembrance of his one great sorrow in life always cast a gloom over his features. In pondering over the past, he often wondered what it was that caused it to create such a bitterness of feeling within him. His love was dead, then why not everything connected with it? Yet, what had ceased to exist, still left its sting.

Is the being we love aught else than a dream? Is it really them we love? Is it not rather an idea of our own conception, a sentiment of our own hearts? Is not the whole within ourselves? Those worshipped idols, in whom we live, to whom we surrender ourselves wholly and entirely, without a reservation, without asking for a return, it is ourselves that create them, and we do but worship the work of our own creation. We endow them with beauties unseen by other eyes, with virtues that exist for none but ourselves, and then we set up our idol and bend the knee to

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it. How otherwise explain the illusions of love and its mad credulity ?

It was getting late, and quite time the moon-light walk should come to an end; besides, it was not very prudent in Owen staying out so long in the night air. Just as they reached the door leading into the little conservatory, which led them at once to the drawing-room, Maud stopped.

“Write to Archie, Owen, and tell him I am the same now as when we parted in the school-room, at Lee Ashton, on the night of his sister's marriage; and tell him if he wishes to come down he can do so next week, when I expect my mother will be here—he can come with her, if he likes.”

Owen took Maud's hand and pressed it in his own. It was all the answer he gave.

That night was the happiest Maud had ever passed. Her present joy was heightened by the terrible suffering she had gone through. There was a sudden clearing away of all the dark clouds fate—and her own anxious mind of late—had gathered round her. Her future stood out once more clear and bright as the

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noon-day; there were no doubts, no fears to cause the lightest mist to shadow over the fair prospect—all looked sunny, all promised happiness. A little patience, a little more waiting, and her dearest hopes were to be realized.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

SEVEN years—to the young this will appear a long, long while, but it is little enough when viewed in retrospect—have passed since the conclusion of the last chapter. Seven years of almost uninterrupted happiness to those principally concerned in this story, and so it is I am bringing my tale to a conclusion at this point, for who shall say what sorrow may not be in store for those who have been favoured so long? Besides, happiness, however delightful to experience, is a monotonous subject to write on. It is always the same—it always bears the same face. It is sorrow that is rich in varieties, and we have daily experience of

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the multiplicity of shapes and forms it chooses to come to us in.

It was Christmas day in the year 1855, but as opposed to all our English notions of a Christmas as water is to ice. But, then, our scene is laid far away from this ; we have wandered south, and in order to find those in whom we are interested we must travel to Hyères, a small town situated on the coast of the Mediterranean, between Toulon and St Tropez, the former lying to the west, the latter to the east, and being twelve miles from the one and nearly double from the other—St Tropez.

Hyères has much to recommend it to one class of people, and that is, climate for thorough invalids, but it does not do for those in good health ; they weary into sickness from the intensity of its dullness. Not a thing to do, not anything to look forward to but the daily post, and Sunday, when all English people manage, however ill they may be, to creep to church ; there they hear a prosy sermon, and can contemplate a tablet erected to Sir Eardley Wilmot, Bart., now deceased, who did

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much towards the erection of the building, and—each other; which, after all, is generally the inducement of the million, especially on the Continent, for attending divine service.

But there was service on this day of course, and the bare white-washed walls of the little English church at Hyères looked quite gay and pretty with the various appropriate quotations from Scripture which were placed in semi-circles round the three sides of wall that enclosed the altar, all written in Olive leaves—a somewhat dead green, but some red berries enlivened it, and made it look as near to the holly as those who with an immensity of trouble desired it should do.

Archibald Blake—now Sir Archibald Blake, M.P., and his wife, Maud, Lady Blake, were amongst those present. Both had been long enough in the place to be well known, and on their quitting church after service was over, numerous were the inquiries for their invalid brother, on whose account they were there. Besides, there was a little attraction attached to the Blakes from, in the first place, their having a handle to their name, and, in the

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next, that they were possessed of a very large fortune ; both things very rarely met with at Hyères, and consequently they were duly appreciated ; that is, made a great deal of and very much bored.

“ It is very hot, Archie,” said Maud, as she took his arm, and they were walking slowly towards the Hotel des Iles d’Or, where they were located, and which was situated in the most charming spot to be found in the whole place.

No wonder Maud complained of the heat ; it was hot. The sun was shining with all the brilliancy that we northerners sometimes see in August, the sky a deep, deep blue, and all around looked bright and beautiful.

When they were in their own rooms, Archie stood at the window looking out, whilst his wife was taking off her bonnet ; she joined him very soon, and went and stood beside him. He passed his arm round her waist.

“ It is warm,” he said, “ the warmest day we have had for weeks.”

“ I hope it will continue,” said Maud ; “ I

think Owen is better, don't you? His cough is less troublesome, and his appetite is certainly improved."

"Maud, if Owen were not Owen, I should be jealous!" And as Archie spoke he drew his wife's face near enough for his lips to press hers.

Maud smiled. "You have to thank Owen for having a wife, or, at all events, having me for your wife, and I have to thank him for being the happiest woman in this beautiful world. Archie, I often think how thankful I ought to be, I have not a wish under heaven, not one!" And she looked up in her husband's face with eyes beaming with love and pride—pride in him, all other pride was gone.

"Not even to have a peep at little Bella, and that young rebel Archie?"

"Yes, to have them with me would be great pleasure, and the more so that all people told us about the danger to their health in bringing them with us, was pure nonsense. The children here seem as healthy and strong as they could possibly be in England. Nearly

every one but ourselves have their children with them."

"Yes, Maud, it does make it more vexatious; however, it was chiefly your fault, you would listen to what the 'world' said, and now you see the consequence. I would have brought them."

"We shall hear of them to-day, Archie. I don't think any mother loves her children more dearly than I do, and yet, my darling, you are dearer to me than all—all beside."

"I am often astonished, Maud, when I think of the past and of all we went through, that it did not crush our feelings and deaden them too much ever to feel happy again."

"Nothing, Archie, could crush or deaden my love for you."

They stood silent now, watching the scene before them. It was a bright prospect. Across the road and on a slope was a large garden with orange and lemon trees in thick abundance, and all laden with their richly-coloured golden fruit. Beyond, and stretching to the east, was the dark blue Mediterranean, which forms a bay at this point; to the west,

and exactly facing Hyères, and about three miles distant from it, stand out in bold relief the three islands, commonly called the Islands of Hyères, though they each possess a local name. On a point of the mainland jutting out into the sea, is a house known as *L'Hermitage*, from its having been the residence of a hermit for many long years. But the chief attraction is the church attached to it, a fine old piece of architecture, *Notre Dame de Consolation*. The interior is covered with Ex-Votos—representations of miraculous cures and escapes vouchsafed to people by the intercession of *Notre Dame*—such is the common belief, not alone amongst the poor and ignorant, but amongst the educated and wealthy. The two together form a mass large enough to make it appear imposing enough in the distance, and as it stands on a height, the effect is increased.

“We have not yet been up to the Hermitage, Maud; when do you mean to go?”

“It is too rough walking, Archie; when you think that the people do not like to let

their horses go, you can hardly expect me to do it."

"They are a lazy race. What a country this might be if they would but work a little. But they leave all to nature."

"And she is wonderfully generous to them," said Maud.

Owen Blake now came in. A sad change had come over him, poor fellow, more marked to those who knew him but slightly than to his own friends. But the doctors said a winter in the south would put him to rights. Owen, however, stoutly refused, he hated the Continent, he hated the long journey; but he hated ten times more than all the thoughts of being alone. Then it was that Maud and her husband resolved to offer to go with him. The children were the only drawback; they had been told by some stupid, ignorant people that it was perfect destruction to children; and the idea of leaving them was dreadful. However, both felt as if they ought to make a sacrifice for Owen, and at the same time hide from him that they did so. It was therefore arranged at last that Mrs Crawford should have

them with her at Lee Ashton, where she had resided ever since the death of Joseph Kennedy, through Maud's arrangement, which Sir Philip Langley had had carried out. Mrs Crawford was delighted to have them, and Maud left with her heart at ease as to the care her children would get during her absence.

"Oh, Owen, you have the letters! The post is in early," said Maud, as Owen displayed a great packet of them, and a pile of newspapers into the bargain.

"Yes, and what will you give me for a piece of news, received in one of mine?"

"Why, you don't mean to say, Owen, you have kept these whilst you read your own?" said Maud.

"I came to the door, peeped in, and you both looked so happy, I thought it a pity to disturb you."

"It was a great shame of you," said Maud, with just a slight touch of annoyance in her voice.

"Maud, you are in my power; if you get cross with me and don't behave yourself, I will

tell Archie how I found you moping and pining one day, just because he started off to his chambers without—”

“Hold your tongue, Owen,” said Maud, laughing and placing her white hand to his lips, which he instantly kissed.

“Here, give me the letters, if you two are going to fight, because I can read them in the meanwhile,” said Archie.

“But my news! won't you give me anything to tell you?”

“What do you want for it?” asked Maud, taking up one of the letters which she saw was in her mother's handwriting.

“Five francs, Lady Blake, or, if that's too much, a kiss will do.”

“Really, Owen, your impertinence is beyond anything. Archie, he does not value my kisses so much as a five-franc piece.”

“Well, you shall have it for nothing then. William is going to be married!”

“Nonsense,” was Maud's sensible exclamation.

“Then I will answer for it she has loads of money, whoever she is,” said Archie, look-

ing up from his letter. "William won't marry for love."

"Well, there may be a little of that as well; but you are right, Archie, as to the money—there is no lack of it. She is young and pretty enough, too. Now, Maud, you know her very well—can't you guess who it is?"

"I am stupid at guessing, Owen. Is it Miss Ingram?"

"Miss Ingram! Now, really, Maud—"

"Not Marion Kennedy!" said Maud, suddenly.

"Yes—Marion Kennedy. What do you think of that?"

"Well, I don't see anything to be astonished at," said Archie.

"William is wonderfully lucky, for she is a nice little thing."

"More lucky than she is," said Owen. "William is too selfish to make any woman happy."

"But, Archie," said Maud, "he is much too old for her. Just think of the disparity in their years."

“It is on the right side, at all events,” replied her husband.

“Oh, I have a long account of it in mamma’s letter. She seems very pleased at it, indeed. I think mamma used to be afraid Percy might take a fancy to her, but his college life appears to have shaken all his boyish love out of him. She says she thinks Marion likes William, chiefly, because he is Archie’s brother.—Archie, do you hear that? Did you ever make love to Marion, that her affection for William is a mere reflection of what she feels for you?”

But Archie did not hear, he was immersed in business letters; one especially from his friend, Lord Grayson—who had fulfilled his promise to Maud, and proved his friendship by using his all-powerful interest with the Premier to obtain the Solicitor-Generalship for her husband, the very day it became vacant—in which he told him that he thought very shortly the Attorney-General would be raised to a higher and permanent post; and, therefore, he might bask in the hope of his own ascent on the ladder of public fame.

Archibald Blake's career at the bar had been one continued success, and there seemed no likelihood of the tide turning; it was still rising, and each wave appeared to wash up some good thing for him. Like his wife, he could hardly be said to have a wish ungratified in his public any more than in his domestic life.

"They are suffering terribly from the intensity of the cold in England," said Maud, "everything seems frozen up, even to their intellects, for I never read such stupid letters. Excepting about my darling children, there positively is nothing in them worth reading."

"Here is another addressed to you," said Archie, handing her a small, thin note, which was enclosed in one to himself.

"Oh, it's from dear Mac! Now I dare say there will be a little news." There was silence for some minutes. "Isabella has another baby! Good gracious me, why, it is her sixth, and four of them boys! What will she do?" Another pause, and then with a sudden exclamation, and a panic-struck countenance, Maud seized her husband's arms, and

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said, "Archie, Mr Hammond has killed himself."

"Then, the earth is rid of one of the greatest blackguards, to use a mild term, that ever walked," he replied, calmly.

"But what a horrible thing for him to have done! And no one knows yet what he did it for."

"Does Mac say how he did it?"

"Yes, he shot himself."

"Depend upon it, we shall hear he has been defrauding some one to such an extent that he was likely to be found out, and so he has escaped this world's justice by putting himself beyond its pale. He was a bitter enemy of yours, Maud."

"Mine! Was he—what for, I wonder? You know, Archie, he was to poor mamma, for some reasons unknown to me, and which I never cared to fathom, but I can't think why he should have been so to me. I never did him any harm."

"That is not required, Maud, in order to make an enemy. Perhaps he imagined you were the cause of his not coming into a large

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fortune, which he may have expected. However that may be, he came to me one day and intimated that he could do you some injury—or rather that he could save you from the world's scorn, if I chose to make it worth his while."

"Good gracious, Archie! What did you say?"

"Say!—I kicked him out of my chambers, and told him if ever he dared show his face there again he would regret it."

"And you never told me this before?"

"Why should I? It escaped my memory till the fellow's name and the news of his cowardly death recalled it again.—Where's Owen?"

"He went out just now, saying he was going to the Hospital, as he terms *La Promenade des Palmiers*. Did you not hear him—about ten minutes ago?"

"No. He is right about that walk, it really depresses one to see the numbers of sick and dying people that congregate there just at this hour. We had better go and join him, and make him drive to *La Castille* with us."

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“You don't mean to say, Archie, you want to go to that *château* again; really, I can't think what you find there so attractive.”

“Well, the flowers, Maud. To see the profusion of flowers, all in bloom, that there are there at this season, and to think that in our own country they are not to be found but in the very height of summer, and some of them not at all, unless under glass, is, I think, attraction enough. The house is a wretched place, and as like a barrack as it well can be. But we can go the drive by the sea, if you like—at all events, let us go to Owen.”

The Palm Tree Walk, as it is called, is but a few minutes' walk from the Hotel. It is a small terrace facing the south, with an unintercepted view of the sea, the hills to the west all covered with fine large cork trees, and the flat land spreading before it, looking like one vast forest, but of a dark dingy green, excepting when the wind blows, and then it bears the appearance of snow-covered trees, for the trees are all olives, and the back of its leaf is very light, hence the illusion. The spot is sheltered from the only cold wind that ever

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visits Hyères, the *mistral*, which answers pretty well in its effects to what our English east wind does. So it is here that those in search of climate congregate together from about twelve till four. It is a dreary sight; very, very rarely is one seen there that has not the stamp of consumption marked very distinctly on their faces. Often was some one noticed there one day, and missed the following, and in a few more the oft-told tale was repeated, that he was gone, gone from amongst them for ever.

“Owen, will you come for a drive?” asked his brother, as he came up to him with his wife on his arm.

“To *La Castille*, Owen,” said Maud, with an amused expression, “in order to give you a little variety.”

“Thank you; anything is better than this. But supposing we take a walk to-day instead of a drive. How I wish I could get up there,” said Owen, looking wistfully up at the old ruins on the top of the rock immediately behind the Hotel des Iles d’Or. “There must be a glorious view from it.”

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“Not so fine as you may think,” said Archie. “I suspect there is just as good a one from the Hermitage, and there you can get, because we can drive there; though they don't care to take us, according to Maud.”

“But we will make them, Owen, if you have the fancy—shall we go this afternoon?”

“If you are both inclined,” replied Owen.

Both were ever inclined to do anything that he wished, so they went. It was not a long drive, but a very toilsome, disagreeable, jolting one, the large stones that covered the whole way, rendering it truly unpleasant for man and beast.

After strolling about on the top of the hill, on which stood the church and house, all in a wretchedly dilapidated state, for about half an hour, they prepared to return.

“I am glad it is done,” said Owen. “One feels in going to a place that one ought to see all there is to be seen, even if as little worth the trouble as this is.”

“The view is all it can boast of,” said Archie, “and that certainly is very fine.”

They now jolted down again, and they got into the Hotel by four, the last moment invalids ought to be out in those warm southern places, for the instant the heat of the sun goes down, a coldish air seems to blow.

The table-d'hôte dinner was at five, and most people preferred dining at it, to being served in their own rooms. The former was invariably bad, but the latter considerably worse, for you got things cold, and only others' leavings.

There were no English in the house but themselves, all had rushed off to Cannes or Nice for their Christmas. But there was a wonderful attempt made to provide a piece of roast beef in honour of the English family, but it was a sorry representative—the plum pudding was better. It helped to amuse them at table, and gave a subject for conversation however.

About a month later, Maud was in her little sitting-room, writing letters to England, when her husband came in and handed her a letter to read.

“There is something to give my ambitious

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wife pleasure," he said, standing leaning over her chair as she read it.

"Oh, Archie, this is good news!"

"Did I not tell you it would please you? But I must go to England, Maud."

"But you won't leave me?" she said, looking up anxiously.

"What will become of Owen, then? I shall be back in a week or ten days."

"As long as that, must you be?"

They had never been parted since their marriage, so it seemed very hard to Maud to be separated even for that period.

"My darling, travelling day and night, I can't get there under two days."

"I almost wish, Archie, the Attorney-General had remained such, till we had been able to go to England all together."

"I have a letter from William, Maud. He is to be married in April, they have put it off, hoping we may be back by that time."

"Archie, are you pleased with William's choice?"

"Do you mean Marion?" She nodded

assent. "Yes, why not? They are well suited, I think. She imagines herself invaluable on account of her money, and he thinks her the same for the same reason. I do not believe, Maud, my darling wife, that they will ever find the happiness we have. Their hearts are set on gold, and ours—"

"On each other," said Maud, interrupting him. "But surely, Archie, you don't go so far as to think wealth is a disadvantage?"

"No, dearest, far from it. Though I often wish, Maud, you had come to me penniless. I never should have married you, had we not loved each other before you had any fortune. No, money is no disadvantage, but it cannot make happiness, you can bear sad testimony to that—but neither will it mar it, and in many instances can increase it, in so far as it enables one to do things that without it would be impossible. But I believe this, that there is more real happiness amongst those who have to work for the support of their families, and where promotion, in whatever profession they may happen to belong to, is of importance; than amongst those who have no need to

labour, and who care not whether they are the clerk or the chief.”

“Though we are rich, Archie, I still wish you to be great. And if it pleases God to spare all dear to us, and continue health to us, what more can we desire ?”

“Nothing, my darling, but money can't help us in that.”

THE END.

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