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THE WAY OF THE WORLD.

A NOVEL.

BY

ALISON WELLD.



IN THREE VOLS.

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THE WAY OF THE WORLD.

CHAPTER I.

“Und fragst du noch warum dein Herz
Sich bang in deinem Busen klemmt,
Warum ein unerklärter Schmerz
Dir alle Lebensregung hemmt”

GOETHE.

HE was gone from me, my love, my dear Arthur, my betrothed husband. Dear he was to me, and I might whisper my secret to my heart now without shame. But I did not love him better than I had loved him, when it was a secret to be guarded even from myself; to be guarded, above all, from the dear eyes which might look down into my heart of hearts now. There was no feeling there which did not tend to him, as the sunflower gazes upwards to the

planet it loves. Arthur Leigh had left me, and that parting, the first, and following so quickly on the rapturous moment in which we had pledged ourselves to unite our lives, was a source of intense suffering ; unaccountable and extravagant it appeared, when I thought how soon I was to see him again. In two days—but then we do not always count time by the clock. Dear reader, do you not remember a time, long, long ago, like a dream now it may seem, but a very sweet one, when the absence of a few hours from the side of the beloved one was an eternity of pain? Gentle matron ! you would not like to have your husband at home all day now ; and as for him, the deceiver ! depend upon it, he is not quite so sorry as he pretends to be, when he looks at you packing up his portmanteau for that business journey which must be undertaken by himself.

But I was not a wife, and Arthur had only been my lover since yesterday. I was depressed and sorrowful at his going, anxious and doubting, I knew not why. If I had yielded to the crying impulse of my heart, I

could have thrown myself at his feet, prayed him with tears and supplications not to leave me ; told him that I augured no good of our parting ; that the interim would be one of peril, perhaps of fatal death to our love. But my heart refused to ease itself of its burden. I was timid and abashed in Arthur's presence this morning. I am sure there was no change in myself ; no link in the chain of feeling which connected the joyous delirium of last night with the reality of the present moment was broken. I had never slept ; my thoughts had flowed in one continuous current of blissful emotion. Still I could not speak. The time pressed. Arthur had come down stairs late ; our interview was hurried and embarrassed ; he seemed impatient to be gone.

I suppose that most men of habitually cold and indifferent demeanour remember the tempest of passion and emotion, to whose compelling force they have bowed their heads, with a certain degree of shame. In the reaction that follows, they are more impassible and proudly shy than even is their wont. The pitiless eye of day is a stern heart-searcher. With one fiery

glance, it dispels the veil of romance and fancy which kind night's loving hand drew around us, and with the swift sharpness of thought, it has laid our faults and follies bare in all their startling magnitude. Oh! that morning's awakening, either to repentance or to recollection. We are arraigned before the bar of an inexorable judge; our own conscience, our own deeds and words, are our accusers; there is no hiding ourselves in dark corners; that steadily burning torch follows us everywhere, and drags out our reluctant confession. What have we done?—what have we said? We had determined to be upon our guard. Ah! but think of the moonlight! Traitor that she is, she wiles our confidence from us, and then, with heartless treachery, she uses our misplaced trust against ourselves. Then, even the most self-controlled are not always masters of themselves; they hate and despise the weakness to which they have yielded; and in the desperate effort to regain the pinnacle of isolated pride from which they have fallen, they think little of trampling the clinging parasites which are wreathing themselves about its base, unless,

indeed, they are very much in earnest; and was Arthur Leigh very much in earnest? It was an unworthy thought, from the woman he had vowed his love to. I tried to drive it away. I silenced it, but it would not be banished. Care, like a deadly serpent, had twined itself about my heart; its passionate throbbings of love and outgoing confidence were stifled in that fell embrace. The cold, clammy coils pressed heavy upon me; the head of the monster nestled at my heart; it was slumbering now; but a movement, a struggle even to shake it off, and I felt that I would be crushed in its folds, or that the venom would shoot through my veins, and mingle its poison with the current of my new sweet life. Something of what was passing within me I must speak.

“I wish you were not going, Arthur,” I said.

“Do you think I wish to go?” he answered, and his lips touched mine.

“No, I think you would like to stay with me; but are you sure you will care quite as much for me when you come back?” I hung

breathlessly on the answer which I awaited. It did not come, not at least as a direct reply.

“Why, Alice, it is only two days; what can happen?”

“Many things; you may find out that you have made a mistake.”

“Sceptic, you ought to think me infallible.”

“And if the time was to come over again, would you say everything to me that you said last night, just in the same words?”

“I could no more say a thing twice, exactly in the same words, than I could undertake to write my name twice without a hair’s breadth of difference. What did I say? I told you that I loved you, did I not?”

“Yes.”

“Well, what more would you have?”

“I don’t know. Do you love me as much as you loved that other girl you once told me about?”

“God bless me, Alice,” he said, in angry impatience, “are you jealous of a woman who has half-a-dozen children by this time; or do you think that a man approaching thirty loves like a raw boy of nineteen?”

“I am not jealous, Arthur; and I don't care whether you love me more or less than you loved her.”

“Then why, in the name of folly, do you ask such ridiculous questions? You want to goad me to something, Heaven knows what. Tell me at once, do you want to be freed from your engagement?”

The serpent at my heart stirred; then its grip fastened closer upon me. I shuddered.

“Oh, no, no!” I exclaimed, in terror and agony; “and, Arthur, love me just as much as you like, I would rather love most, I have so little in the world besides you, and you have so much; you are not angry with me, are you?”

“No, you little fool;” and he put my hair back, and held my face up, as if I were a child. Then he kissed me again and again, in a caressing, soothing way. I did not like it. I missed the passionate, long, lingering pressure which had gone into my soul, and had thrilled me to the very depths of my being last night; and when he turned down the bend in the avenue, and I saw him no

more, a shuddering chill went through me, as if an arrow of ice, launched by an unseen hand, had transfixed my heart. The old superstition says that we are shaken by that mysterious horror, if we walk over our future grave.

Sumnor Hall was changed. There was the bustle of pompous preparation through the house all that day; there was a sort of excitement among us, that heartless excitement of eager curiosity without sympathizing interests. The preparations were very magnificent; but it was more like the pageant of a royal reception than of an honest welcome to friends. The Vernon Harcourts, (Helen's future relatives,) were expected; and with them, a gay party of London fashionables. Whatever dignity might accrue to Sumnor Hall from the presence of these distinguished guests, the dulness, which is, unfortunately, but too often the inseparable companion of grandeur, increased in a more rapid ratio still. Their shadow was broad, and beneath it we reposed, I trust with all fitting humility and thankfulness; but I think we all felt it to be rather chilling, and shivered, as we thought with longing of the

sunshine. Of course in secret ; in public we dared not presume to be otherwise than deeply grateful ; only Miss Bulland, using the privilege of a strong-minded woman, ventured to murmur a faint dissent, and she got no further than to ask me if I did not think we were all getting as glum and stupid as mutes at a funeral. Indeed, I did think so ; and I agreed so heartily with her, that I think she was almost horrified at her own audacity and mine. I did think once or twice that the great people themselves would gladly have unbent a little ; that it would have been a sensible relief to them to shake off the trammels of a purely conventional life ; that the solemn, decorous state bored them, in fine, as much as it bored us. But Mr. and Mrs. Falkland were of a different opinion. Their pride was gratified by the illustrious alliance ; they were evidently a little awed by the dignity of their future relatives ; and they laboured with painful assiduity, and with perseverance worthy of a better cause, at the thankless task of making a counteracting impression. Of the less important visitors, the walking ladies and gen-

tlemen on my little stage, I intend to say nothing. They are lay figures ; let the reader hang what draperies upon them he will—nothing that is not of the richest and most costly, of course.

Of the Vernon Harcourts alone, my genteel pen can condescend to speak ; I wish my humble means would allow me to use a gold one when I treat of such august people. Mr. Vernon Harcourt himself was by no means an imposing personage. His manner was restless and undignified ; affable even to obsequiousness, he had mean, pinched features, and an habitual uneasy smile. If he had been Mr. Brown, or Mr. Smith, we lordly people would most probably have voted him “ a low person,” “ a common man,” “ a member of the inferior ranks ;” in a word, we would have drawn that decided line of distinction between him and our august selves, which is, of course, never arbitrary, but just, real, admitted absolutely and uncompromisingly in heaven as well as on earth. But Mr. Vernon Harcourt was a different sort of person. He had an establishment in Park Lane—princely, so I was given to

understand ; and his mansion in ——shire vied in splendour with any hall or castle which his noble relatives owned. For his relatives were noble, as the ingenious reader has already divined, else why make such particular mention of him ? Mr. Falkland lived in a fine house ; if that was all, my uncle lived in a fine house also ; at least, it had been so once ; and yet I do not select either of these worthy persons for special distinction ; the reason is obvious, they were plebeian. The best blood in England ran in the veins of the Vernon Harcourts ; to tell the truth, I heard of little else than blood just now—blood in all degrees of comparison ; we were as sanguineous as a party of ogres. Though my experience of polite society was too slight to make my opinion of much value, lords and honourables not being quite so plentiful in my colliery home in the North as might have been desired by a well-regulated mind, I am bound to observe that, in my poor judgment, this superfine current bounded rather slowly in the veins of these illustrious beings ; in a word, that Mr. Falkland's favourite guests were very dull people indeed.

Whatever Mr. Vernon Harcourt wanted in noble bearing, he had a wife who did her best to compensate for his deficiencies. Lady Catherine was stately and solemn, I had almost said awful; she was haughty and overbearing, and I think never so much so as when she condescended to be gracious. She was tolerant of Helen, contemptuously civil to poor Mrs. Falkland, while with her host she assumed the most delightful airs of charming ignorance, and affected compassion on the subject of his business avocations, and his hardships in having daily to exchange Sumnor Hall, in its summer freshness, for the dusty city and crowded 'Change.

There were two sons and two daughters of the family, besides Cecil. "Mr. Norman Courtenay Vernon Harcourt," — I love to give the whole name—was sulky, silent, and supercilious; evidently possessed with the opinion that his gifts of birth and fortune fully exempted him from the trouble of making himself generally acceptable by the practice of any such insignificant virtue as good-humour. Augustus, the younger son,

was vapid and inane, but not otherwise objectionable. The girls, one about my own age, the other a year or two older, were pretty and fashionable, great talkers and inveterate flirts. I was quite solitary among all these people. Mrs. Falkland and Helen were fully occupied with their new guests; and May Leslie, to whom Lady Catherine had taken a fancy, as heart-weary worldlings often do to something that is fresh and simple, yielding to her aunt's entreaties, devoted herself to the amusement of his Grace of ——'s haughty daughter.

I had been very happy at Sumnor Hall. If ever I had suffered from depression, as was the case at rare intervals, it was rather from a constitutional tendency, daily becoming weaker, than from real sadness. Now all was changed. The shadows of my life lay deeply upon me, shadows of the solitary years I had spent at Hirst Hall, and, deeper still, of that terrible sorrow of my young life. It was very strange that I had never thought of my uncle's warning, never thought that I was different from the other girls, that indelible disgrace had stained

my name ; that perhaps it attached itself to me ; that if it were known, all these people, kind, courteous, and hospitable, might shun and despise me as an impostor. I magnified the evil through the false medium of my own fears ; but it deprived me of my rest, it haunted my waking and my sleeping dreams, it hung upon me like the shadow of a great fear. Arthur must know ; would it change me in his eyes ? could he love me still, when he knew that death only had saved my father from disgrace ? And oh ! my father, the dear memory that my heart held sacred, did I wrong him in the cowardly shrinking which made me dread to mention his name to my lover ? It was like a dream, to be sitting here among this gay company, to compare my present life with my life at home, to carry that weight of care in my heart, and to speak and smile as usual. A dream it was, my whole life seemed a dream ; my engagement might have seemed a dream also, but for that one reality—the gold ring, with its green stone, “ the colour of faith and truth,” which Arthur had placed on my

finger the morning that he went away. And his letter—ah! that priceless gift to the loving heart, the first love-letter—what a theme for sweet fancies and rapturous imaginings! It breathed upon my cloudy fears, and they vanished; it handled my misgivings, they fell to pieces before that touch. Arthur laughed at my doubts, which he said ought to have been on his side rather than on mine, considering what a dangerous rival he had left in the field in the person of Sir Montagu.

Poor Sir Montagu, always accustomed to play the great man wherever he went, he was in a most forlorn plight just now, suddenly seeing himself reduced to a state of insignificance, as unwelcome as it was unusual. The star of the Vernon Harcourts was in the ascendant, and Sir Montagu was compelled to hide his diminished head with the best face he might. Miss Osborne's flirtation, to all appearance, had come to a summary conclusion, and the shipwreck of her hopes had resulted in an entire breach of friendship with myself. For the last fortnight she had never spoken to me—only once did she break the silence,

and then to tell me with a sneer that she withdrew her claims in favour of my superior attractions, and that she wished me joy in the brilliant conquest I had made. I believe she looked upon me as an arch-traitress.

I was sorry for her ; I think my new-born happiness had made me charitable—if she could only have known how very far I was from wishing to interfere with hers. I was sorry for Sir Montagu, too, and, though I scouted the idea that Florence had conceived, as something too utterly absurd to be worth a moment's attention, I thought it was a pity that by her own conduct she seemed in a measure to justify her suspicions. Sir Montagu, having no one else to talk to, talked to me, while Miss Osborne flirted violently with the younger of the Harcourts. I certainly preferred the company of my own thoughts to the baronet's sententious prosing. I did not like to hear his name mentioned with mine, and yet it did not signify much. Arthur would return in a day or two, and I knew that he would suffer no intruder to come between us. Sir Montagu, meanwhile, imparted to me a good deal

of architectural and agricultural information, which, had I been a landed proprietor, I have no doubt would have proved extremely useful; but, as I had no broad acres to call my own, his valuable remarks were wasted. He confided to me his sentiments about the Harcourts, which were extremely unfavourable, bearing with peculiar severity on the young men, whom he pronounced to be a pair of shallow, empty-headed coxcombs.

Arthur was away much longer than I had expected. The two days lengthened to three, to four, then to a whole week. I had that at my heart which made me brood with self-inflicted torture over this delay; I fought against it, I held the serpent by the throat in fierce, defiant grasp. I thrust that evil head, with its forked tongue and its baleful glances, away from me with desperate force; but its scaly folds were wreathed round me, and they lashed my heart into an agony of pain. I could not write to Arthur; he had left me no address; his letter only bore the post-mark, "London." I could not ask any one in the house. Miss Ross may

have guessed my engagement, but no one else did ; I was glad of it, for I could not have borne inquisitive glances at every mention of his name.

If ever in my life I have wished to be rich, the object of my ambition has always been a large country-house, peopled with a numerous and not too select a circle of friends. There is no life, to my thinking, so pleasant, so animated without effort, so observant of all the amenities of social life, and at the same time so perfectly unconstrained. Those who do not assimilate can avoid each other, without being rude ; congenial spirits can associate, without incurring the charge of exclusiveness, and the solitary minded, the human pelicans, can enjoy their isolation, unmarked and unreprieved. In a smaller house it is different. The inmates must consort together, however little they may have in common ; you cannot absent yourself from the circle without bringing down the just displeasure of the worthy persons whose company you forswear ; you cannot form a friendship, still less an attachment, without attracting universal attention, and affording matter of

amusement and anxious speculation to every one in the house. This is not desirable. However gratifying it may be to know that we are entertaining our friends, we would still like to choose our own method of administering to their happiness. So, as I have said, no one knew that I was engaged to Arthur Leigh ; and I was glad of it, though it made my weary watching more hard to bear. He came at last, unexpectedly to us all.

It is evening, and we are all seated in the great drawing-room. It is so large, that, standing at one end, you look small to any one at the opposite extremity, and it is quite a formidable undertaking to cross it. It is very magnificently furnished, and as pompous and uninhabitable as state apartments usually are. It is a perfect July evening. " On such a night did young Lorenzo " and his " pretty Jessica " talk over their loves on that grassy bank, bathed in the moonlight, which shone on Portia's mansion till it gleamed out white and pure like a fairy palace. We have shut out the night and the sweet moon ; the heavy crimson curtains droop in massive folds over

the windows ; a brilliant chandelier, glittering with a thousand starry drops, floods the room with its soft lustre. Lights are burning by the dazzling marble groups which are scattered about in graceful profusion ; they glow like shrines on which devout hands have kindled their votive offerings of waxen tapers ; the fair forms of Italian statuary might be the saints before whom reverent worshippers bow. In the long mirrors, the great room, with its wealth of splendid luxury, seems multiplied again and again ; but the eye seeking for change need not weary itself with that often-multiplied scene of pomp. Folding-doors, widely thrown open, lead into a gay conservatory, where exotics charm the sight and fling delicious fragrance on the heavy-laden air, while above, gleaming like an orangery, gilded cages swing amid the intertwining wealth of dark glossy greenery. The long boughs climb along the roof, and hang down their graceful tendrils so low, that they meet their own reflection in the marble basins of the sparkling fountain. Birds of strange climes, their soft many-tinted plumage folded in rest, roost on the bars of

their golden prisons ; they are the silent sentinels of that fairy garden. The gurgle of the water is very cool and refreshing, when you can hear it above the laughter and the hum of voices ; it springs up straight and sharp like an icicle, and falls back in plashing murmurs, scattering a shower of silver spray from its jewelled crest. Gay groups are scattered about the room ; some recline in graceful languor on the luxurious couches ; some cluster round the piano ; a few gentlemen, standing on the hearth-rug, either look out on the scene, or, narcissus-like, gaze complacently on their own reflections in the mirror. There is no fire ; there are other mirrors in the room ; there is no particular occasion why they should stand there, except that the hearth-rug always is the spot in English houses where gentlemen " most do congregate."

I am seated alone, in the window recess. Miss Ross is near me, but she does not approach. We rarely speak to each other now. The reader knows how my laudable design to apologize to her was frustrated in the very act ; and I can explain nothing now till I tell her of

my engagement to Arthur. No one is between me and the conservatory. I look at the silent flowers, and listen to the bubbling of the waters, till its murmur grows indistinct. It fades into the distance ; I hear it sounding as if far away, and my thoughts go with it. The scene expands before my eyes ; the walls of the conservatory melt away ; and I see a gorgeous garden, spreading wide and vast, till its winding walks are lost in the closing branches of the arched avenue of trees. Orange groves shine out in golden fruitage ; bright birds are pluming their rainbow wings, or carolling their songs of joy and liberty ; stately palms lift up their broad, feather-crowned heads, motionless against the blue sky ; glowing flowers bloom in tropical luxuriance half-way up their shining stems. I am dreaming.

I awake by a sudden effort, and try to fix my attention on the company in the room. I am too far away to hear what they are saying ; but I can see by their gestures who speaks and who listens ; and I know by the smiles on the girls' faces when flattering homage is whispered into their ears. It is

weary work watching them. I move the curtain aside, and look out into the garden. Everything is soft and still; it is as bright as at noonday; the heaven is clear and cloudless; the moon rains down her beams; and earth and air are drowned in that sea of light. It is just like the night a week ago, when Arthur and I walked together; only it was darker then. I am glad that not even the calm face of the moon looked upon me when I told Arthur that I loved him. Am I dreaming again? Do I hear his voice? Has he indeed come in answer to my faithful thoughts? I hear the door open; there is a confused murmur of surprise and welcome; above the stir I distinguish the low, clear tones of the one voice I care to hear—Arthur, *my* Arthur. My love has come back to me. I have dropped the curtain now; I am looking straight into the room. I see the quick glance that he darts round; in a moment he has taken in every form and every feature; not mine, for I am sitting in the shade,—but he will come to me soon. Every one is looking at him; how different he is from them all; in my eyes he is

like the soul come to quicken these listless, apathetic beings. Mrs. Falkland flutters up to him ; he is bending down to her with a smile ; she takes his arm. Could she not have chosen one of those idle young dandies for her escort ? I know Arthur would have come to me.

The people stop their desultory talk to look after him ; the young ladies bend their heads together, then shoot quick, bird-like glances at him, and stoop to chatter again. Augustus Harcourt appears to inquire of Helen about him ; I can see that she colours and looks furtively at Cecil when she answers. A look of interest comes even into Lady Catherine's hard, handsome face, usually impassible and expressionless as a mask ; Mrs. Falkland and Arthur stop before her chair ; I think they must have met before ; Lady Catherine looks wonderfully animated. A mist seems to obscure my vision, and my head swims. The beating of my heart is painful ; I can almost hear it, but I try in vain to still its throbbing. I cannot keep my eye from straining after him ; I am looking at him alone ; but I see every one else in the room as if in the dream.

of a clairvoyante. It is all I can do to hold the mastery over voice and limb. I could cry out to him ; I could go to him ; but a great trembling comes over me : if he called me, I do not think I could move. A gentle hand is laid upon my arm, and a quiet voice speaks in my ear. It is Miss Ross. She says very gently, "My dear child ! Alice, my dear, speak to me."

She has broken the spell, and I thank her from my heart. I can breathe freely ; I can answer her quite composedly. I shudder to think what folly I might have committed if she had not interrupted me so kindly, and I am very grateful for the deliverance. Arthur may come to me when he likes, or when he can ; my impatience has quite vanished.

It is well for me that that highly-wrought tension of the nerves is relaxed ; if my excitement had lasted till Arthur came, it must have maddened me. Everybody seemed to have a design upon him, or else fate had a design against me—I do not know which. Lady Catherine must needs introduce him to her daughters. I suppose she thought she

was conferring an immense distinction upon him in so doing. Honoria assumes her favourite Cleopatra air, imperious but tender; and little blue-eyed Lucinda looks up in his face with her baby smile, and lisps out her softest accents in answer to his words. Ah! young ladies, you may practise your graces on some more susceptible heart—they have no charm for Arthur Leigh. Then Mr. Falkland lays hold of his newly-returned guest, and has a very great deal to say to him. If Arthur had been a hero returning from battle, or if he had had a tale to speak “of most disastrous chances, of moving accidents by flood or field,” as eventful as the story of the Moor whose witching words beguiled the soft heart of Desdemona, he could hardly have been in greater request than he seems to be to-night. At last he is free; the scattered groups of idlers have fallen back into their old positions; no one marks him or myself. He is coming this way; and in spite of lately restored composure, I am unnerved again. Not till he is bending so closely over me that I can feel his breath on my cheek, do I venture to look into

his face. It is perturbed and anxious, and his brows are knit. He wore that expression just a week ago to-night, when he came into the school-room in his impatient, restless mood. Miss Ross has not yet quitted my side. She looks steadily at him, with stern and grave inquiry. It is a strange thing to see Arthur Leigh avoid meeting an eye that questions his; but he only answers Miss Ross with a single angry, half-defiant glance. He stamps his foot, and mutters something wrathfully, as he takes my hand and signs towards the conservatory.

“I’ll tell you what, Alice,” he said, as soon as we were out of her hearing (she had risen when we did, and moved away in another direction)—“you must break with that woman instantly. Do you hear?” he asked, for I remained silent.

“With Miss Ross?” I inquired, very unnecessarily.

“Yes, with Miss Ross. That system of espionage is perfectly intolerable. I declare she is nothing better than a domestic Jesuit.”

“I don’t know what you mean.”

"Is she your self-elected champion, or have you yourself confided your interests to her keeping?"

"Arthur, I have not the least idea of what you are talking about. I have no interests to confide to Miss Ross."

"Then why does she interfere with what she has nothing to do with? Has she warned you against me?"

I was silent.

"I insist upon knowing."

"Miss Ross knows nothing of our engagement," I answered, very slowly and unwillingly, feeling at the same time as if I were acting very dishonorably. "She did certainly tell me once, that I ought not to come into the school-room in the evenings, if you came too."

"For what reason?"

"I suppose she did not think it proper."

"Was that all? There was no fault in me, I fancy, which made my meeting you, when I chose, objectionable?"

The words "selfish," "guilty selfishness," rang in my ears. I could stand the cross-questioning no longer.

“You must not ask me any more questions,” I said. “I thought you would have had something more pleasant to talk about, when you have just come home.”

“In a moment,” he answered, with a smile. “I’m of a very inquisitive disposition, and I shall be outrageously jealous of all your secrets. What answer did you give Miss Ross?”

“I fear I was very rude to her, and we have not been nearly such good friends since.”

“Then don’t be good friends again. I want no rival.”

“But she has been very kind to me, Arthur,” I meekly suggested.

“Nonsense!—a governess is naturally glad to have some one to talk to.”

“Arthur!” I said, with a sudden impulse, “that is the first unkind or ungentlemanly thing I ever heard you say.”

I was instantly frightened at my own boldness. I thought he would be angry at such unwonted audacity. But no. He looked curiously at me for a moment, as if he were amused with the effect that my words had produced on myself. Then he laughed. “So you

have quick eyes to detect a fault, I see. Well, it was very abominable — ‘ungentlemanly,’ as you justly remarked. There, let us dismiss the subject. Will you sit down? No one will miss us in the drawing-room, I daresay.”

He placed a chair for me in a vacant place, surrounded by tall, flowering shrubs, and stood opposite to me, with his back against the wall, and his eyes looking, not down upon me, but straight across, through the climbing plants that darkened the windows. He spoke in quick, desultory sentences, mostly interrogatories, abruptly changing the subject, sometimes without waiting for my answers.

“Why did you never write to me while I was away?” he suddenly startled me by asking.

“I did not know where you lived.”

“You might have addressed to me at the club.”

“But I did not know the club’s address either. I am not a conjuror.”

“I dispute that, but no matter. Why did you not ask?”

“Because I feared I might be asked in return why I wanted to know.”

“Does no one here know why it might be natural that you should write to me?”

“Of course not.”

“Oh! indeed. I thought young ladies always confided that sort of thing to each other; or is it only when you have rejected a man that you hold him up to public derision?”

“I can't tell. I only know that I have not held you up to public derision.”

“Don't be sarcastic; for you know I have no chance with you. I think, perhaps, you ought to tell your friends. It might be as well,” he continued, rather doubtfully.

“Oh, no, if you please,” I answered in alarm. “I should not like to have all those people talking about me.”

“Well, just as you like;” and I knew that he felt relieved when I negatived his proposal.

“And what have they been doing here since I went away?” he asked, after a pause.

“Nothing,” I replied. “It has been very dull and disagreeable. I have done nothing but wish for your coming back again.”

“I stayed away longer than I intended, I'm aware,” Arthur answered. “I think I'm

like a wild beast. When it once gets a taste of blood, it grows ravenous for more. When I once get to London, I never can make up my mind to leave it."

"What a horrible simile! Is it so very pleasant?"

"What?—London? Oh, it all depends. It is well enough, when you get among friends that you care about."

"Then your friends must have been very delightful people, I suppose. I wonder that you could tear yourself from their agreeable society."

"Don't you? It was wonderful, was it not? What do you suppose was the magnet of attraction that brought me irresistibly back?"

I did not choose to hazard a guess. "I suppose you were staying with a very charming family," I said, instead.

"What makes you think that?"

"Just because you spoke about friends, I should like to hear about them."

"I am sorry I have no list of the members of my club."



"Oh, I don't take the slightest interest in the club."

"In what, or whom, then? You are a perfect sphinx."

"In nobody," I answered, considerably abashed, when I found where my curiosity had landed me.

"Confess you have a very bad opinion of me, Alice," Arthur proceeded, "and that you don't place the slightest faith in my constancy. I'm infinitely more generous. Pray, how has Sir Montagu Brook been amusing his leisure, during my absence?"

"I'm sure I don't know, and I don't care. He ought to be indicted for a nuisance, he is so tiresome and prosy."

"Ah! then the Hon. Florence is flying at higher game, I presume. How do you like the Harcourts, and the rest of the fresh visitors?"

"I don't like them at all."

"Nor Sir Montagu? I'm afraid you are becoming misanthropical. I rather like to see the house well filled; we were getting a little dull."

“Were we?”

“Not you and I, of course; but the general tone of the place was somewhat monotonous.”

“I thought you liked quiet. You professed yourself a hermit not very long ago.”

“And you remember what you told me, that my fancy for the monastic life was a temporary whim, or some such thing; you were right.”

“I am afraid you are very fickle.”

“Perhaps I am; I never thought of that. And so you have been pining in solitude, in the midst of all this festivity, have you?”

“It does not suit me; I suppose it is because I am not accustomed to it, that I am so stupid and silent; I can't help it.

“You are too self-conscious.”

“What does that mean?—that I am always thinking about myself?—then I must be selfish.”

“No, my darling, no; and don't look so mournful, or I will think that I would have done better to stay away. Come, a walk will do you good, and you need not risk your neck to-night; this window opens on to the lawn.”

“No, not to-night,” I said, detaining his arm; “let us go back into the drawing-room, you will be missed.”

“So will you.”

“No, nobody cares to see me, I’m a mute—an automaton.”

“Then I think I can touch the spring that makes the dumb speak, and the marble live,” he said, as I stood up beside him. He put his arm round me, and kissed me, and for the first time since the night of our engagement, I felt serenely happy.

“And you must be an automaton no longer,” he continued in the same tone (my ear was sensitively quick to the modulations of his voice now, and I loved to hear him speak as he was speaking then). “I want to be proud of my wife, as well as to love her. I want other people to know her as she is.”

“But I don’t care for other people. I love only you, and I want to be yours alone.”

“My own love! I want no one to share that treasure with me.”

“And you will promise to be content with me as I am; and you will try not to feel

ashamed of me because I am not so witty or so animated as other people?"

"My love, only be like yourself; and be as shy as you like, so long as you give your whole love and confidence to me."

"You know you have all my love—now you had better go into the drawing-room."

"Let us come then, if we must."

"I'll come in a moment; just leave me here a little while, please."

Mrs. Falkland joined him as he strolled through the room. She began to unfold to him all her plans of gaiety for the next few weeks, and to appeal to him for advice. He entered with spirit into the discussion, while every word fell chill on my heart.

Oh! why had I ever left Hirst Hall? I confessed with repentant sorrow that my uncle had judged wisely for me, when he warned me against leaving my quiet retreat. And yet I ought to have been happy. Arthur had returned to me, he had been loving and tender, but was he content, as I was, in the assurance that he had sought and won me for his wife? What was I doing here?—Proud of me!—

Arthur Leigh's pride must be easily gratified, if the thought of me could excite such an emotion in his heart.

True, he had promised to love me, just as I was ; but he had not given me that sweet assurance till he saw that I was sick and heavy at heart with disappointment. And there was one condition yet, which I had left unfulfilled. My love was his, but he had demanded my full confidence, and I had still one secret reserved from him. I must tell him, but not to-night. It might be that I had built my fair castle of happiness on the sands ; I dare not risk its slight foundations with the storm of grief and despair which that disclosure might awake. At least, not now, God help me ! Perhaps, by to-morrow night my life might be cold, and loveless, and desolate once more.

CHAPTER II.

“ Oh ! heaven,
Were man but constant, he was perfect ; that one error
Fills him with faults.”—TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA.

“ Where hearts have once mingled,
Love first leaves the well-built nest ;
The weak one is singled,
To endure what it once possest.
Oh ! Love, who bewailest
The frailty of all things here,
Why choose you the frailest ?
For your cradle, your home, and your bier.”

SHELLEY.

LOVE is no hot-house plant, no sickly exotic. It refuses to be urged into unnatural development ; artificial heat and delicately tempered air destroy the vitality that they would nourish into vigour. You may force a growth of leaves and weak drooping tendrils, but you

stifle the fair flowers ; you kill the heart of life within. Do you wonder then that the leaves turn pale, till they are white with the whiteness of what is dead ; that the clinging tendrils, blindly stretching out their arms for the support that they cannot find, shrink back upon themselves, till they waste away, or breaking, drop unheeded on the cold, hard earth ?

Love may bloom into purple beauty, like the heath on the mountain-side ; it may blossom like the rose in its waxen loveliness, or, hidden among its own foliage, it may nestle like the violet, only known to mortal senses by the breath of its fresh odour. But the free air of heaven must blow upon it ; it must be watered by the early and the latter rain, and fostered only by the life-giving heat of the sun.

Is there a canker at the heart of the rose ? Little use to prune it with careful hand ; its doom is sealed, and it must die. Has the blast of the whirlwind broken the heavy-laden boughs of your fair tree, and shaken down the blossoms that the blighting breath of the frost has spared ? Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground ? Would it bear fruit, rich and

mellow, do you think? Could you hope to rejoice in the harvest that crowneth such scanty promise? My love was dead.

Not my own, God only knows what deep root it had taken in my heart; but another's love had been grafted upon that passion, and the scion refused to bloom in an alien soil. I might water it with the tears of my strong sorrow;—the bitter drops wrung out of my soul's agony only scorched the waning life they would have revived; I might breathe upon it in sighs of pain; its delicate petals shrivelled, as if the hot air of the malaria had blasted them. I might cry aloud to heaven for its refreshing rain, but the sky was of brass, and the clouds mocked me, as they passed with their burden of blessing over my head. The dream of my life was over—Arthur loved me no longer.

He was mine in word, but not in deed. True, the form that held us together was unbroken, but the spirit of it was dead. What remained for me but to cancel the bond, now that it had become a galling chain, instead of a tie woven in gladness, fastened and confirmed in faith?

Shall I revive the memory of a grief which time has long since healed? Shall I play again the second act in that short drama of passion and pain; watch with steady eye the fading of that poor vanishing love; mark its fitful bursts of galvanic life, its death-struggles, till the curtain falls on its dark night of nothingness? The task would not be difficult. "While we are under the influence of passion, we only feel, but cannot describe; when all is over, all—all—and irrecoverable—trust to memory—she is then but too faithful;" so spoke one who felt much, and suffered deeply, who, dying untimely, crushed into his experience an age of pain—of joy—of wild love, and of heart-weariness, before many men have awaked to the earnest truth of their mortal life. Yes, it would be easy to fulfil that task. It would be but to question memory, and sounding through the arched vaults of past years, her answers would come, more distinct and truthful perhaps, than if I were asking her about the events of yesterday.

Cui bono? Why should I dwell upon the

story? Arthur Leigh loved me no longer; that was the burden of all I thought and felt, and the truth was as palpable at the end of these weary weeks of hopeless watching, as it was when it first flashed upon me in its terrible reality. I knew he did not love me. I knew the secret of our estrangement, before he had confessed it to himself; and hushing, with a strong effort, the tumult in my own heart, I could watch the storm that raged in his; I could follow every varying mood of his mind, and note the sudden impulse which prompted the slightest change in his demeanour. He was kind—not invariably so. At first, in the fierce struggle of angry impatience which tore him, harsh words would break from his lips, hardly suppressed sneers, which quivered in my heart like venomous shafts. Then came a brief respite, like a dream of peace, of such exquisite gentleness, of such tender pity, that but for the passionless repose of that calm, I could almost have believed that he loved me still. But the storm had done its work of desolation, and the calm only showed me the wrecks of my happiness drifting in the surge which, in

the hour of wild warfare, had engulfed them from my view. What wonder if at last, worn out by the exhaustion of the conflict, he grew cold and indifferent, unloving himself, while he checked the gush of love which welled out of my full heart into his ?

Let me do him justice. It was no fickle fancy for another that had changed him ; it was no fancied change in myself. It was not because he compared me with other women, and finding me wanting in certain qualities and certain attractions which he prized, had learnt to feel ashamed of the wife he had chosen in a momentary impulse of undisciplined fancy. Love makes no such mercenary estimate ; out of its own abundance it supplies all that is wanting in the beloved, or rather, in generous credulity, it refuses to recognize any want, and believes that there is nothing good, nor worth possessing, but what it has sought, and triumphantly won. Arthur had never loved me. He had deceived himself as well as me. He had done me no wrong ; in a moment of unguarded passion, he had mistaken an impulse for a rooted feeling ; and

if the punishment of the error must be mine, it was only because I was the weaker of the two. If he had told me that he did not love me, if he had taken back the promise which was still mine, and with it the heart which he lent me for such a little season, I could have let it go without a struggle; I could have borne my lot in silent anguish.

But my heart refused to give up its dear treasure unasked. It had lost the substance; it clung with only the more desperate tenacity to the worthless shadow. I could have died for him—I think it cannot be difficult to die for those we love—I could have died with him, and in the rapturous delirium of the moment which ended our lives together, I could have welcomed with a shout of exultation the death which left no room for change.

And yet I could not give him up. I loved him so much; I knew that his fate for good or evil lay in my hands; and yet, I could not speak the word which was to make him happy, but which would leave me—ah! it was in my own selfishness, my own vanity, that the obstacle lay. I could have sacrificed myself for him,

but I would not perfect his happiness simply by standing apart, and withdrawing my shadow from his sunshine. It was too hard a task—he was my heart's life ; and the death-in-life in which all my future years must be passed, without his love to quicken me, was a doom which I dared not contemplate ; still less dared I pronounce it on myself.

Then, with fatal sophistry, I tried to reason myself into complacency with my guilty neutrality. He had other interests, other ties to life ; let him content himself with them ; and in the end my unwearied love, my unchanging fidelity, could not fail to secure to him a happiness more enduring, if less infinite than any he could dream of now. I had risked my all on one chance ; if it failed me, I had lost my all ; no ray of promise could ever dawn on the night of my despair.

Amid all these changings of purpose, I never once thought of what I *ought* to do, of the plain duty that lay to my hand, ready and waiting to be fulfilled. It was very plain—so plain, perhaps, that I overlooked it. To release him from a promise too hastily uttered, to bid

each other farewell, as two friends who had walked together for a little while in pleasant pastures, whose paths in life diverged henceforward.

How dare I, with my weak human eye, look with reckless boldness into the inscrutable future, and tell which road would be strewn with roses, which planted with thorns? The old fairy fable tells us that the thorns change into roses under our bleeding feet, when we tread them with firm, unflinching step. I might have been happier in doing right; perhaps duty only *seems* to frown when he looks most darkly upon us; the thistle that he tenders to our acceptance, if grasped with a steady hand, may change into a royal sceptre; or, more hopeful emblem still, it may blossom out in beauty, like the almond rod of the Levite. But I did not do my duty, and, as much oftener happens with us, I tried to elude all knowledge of it; or I dreamt away the practical energy I so much needed, in some vision of future compensation, some doing evil that good might come out of it, a good which might more than redeem the wrong that I was

inflicting on him whom I loved more than my own life.

Meanwhile, the outward current on whose breast we were all sailing flowed on pretty smoothly. If I was unhappy, no one heeded it ; Miss Ross had left Sumnor Hall, to visit her friends ; and no one else had sufficient leisure to bestow upon me, or had care sufficient for me to look below the placid surface which hid in its unseen depths such a storm of grief, uncertainty, and despair. And if Arthur was unhappy, no one knew it but myself. He was brilliant and animated ; he seemed the presiding genius of the house. Like Saul among his brethren, he moved among these London dandies and stalwart country squires. Witty, gay, and accomplished, with his rare personal beauty, his cultivated taste, and his exquisite refinement of intellect and bearing, in my mind he was a hero of romance ; he might have sat among the proudest paladins who gathered round King Arthur's table ; he might have been a knight of chivalry, when chivalry was not an empty name, but a sacred calling.

I was not singular in my admiration of Arthur Leigh. I have spoke of Helen's sentimental fancy for him, and of her vain attempt to inveigle him into a flirtation. I am sure that both the Harcourts would willingly have bartered their eyes, black and blue, for a kindly glance from his; indeed, with disinterested generosity, they already bestowed upon him as large a portion of these orbs as they could conveniently spare, in the shape of innumerable glances, respectively killing and tender. Lady Catherine, haughty and repellent, had smiles and compliments for Arthur Leigh; she patronized every one in the house, but she never attempted to patronize him; in fact, she humbled herself to him, she courted him; but then, it was for her daughter; and it is wonderful the sacrifices of which motherly love is capable, and the condescensions to which motherly love will stoop.

I was sitting beside Lady Catherine and Mrs. Falkland one day, when I heard of the honour to which she destined Arthur Leigh—no less than to be admitted into the family of the Vernon Harcourts, and to occupy

the distinguished position of son-in-law to the daughter of a hundred dukes. Lady Catherine was knitting a purse, and in the absence of a more eligible candidate, I found my unworthy self promoted to the rare privilege of holding her skeins of silk while she wound them. Lady Catherine owned a pair of immense cold, steely, grey eyes; they gleamed with a sort of fierceness, at least the expression might have been fierceness, if it had not long ago been tempered by dignity and deportment into a severe patrician calm. I was placed opposite to her, in the direct line of their radiance, while she talked of Arthur Leigh; so the reader may imagine that, under such circumstances, I was not quite so comfortable and unabashed as—say as Lady Catherine herself; for any one more perfectly self-possessed at all times, and in all places, than her ladyship, it was never my good fortune to see.

“He is really charming, that dear Arthur Leigh!” Mr. Harcourt’s lady-wife remarked; “it is quite a pity to see such a promising young man as he is throw himself away in the country.”

“Indeed it is,” Mrs. Falkland meekly assented, as Mrs. Falkland always did assent to every remark that Lady Catherine chose to make; “just what I have so often said.”

“I’m sure I could make something of him,” her ladyship proceeded.

How my heart rose up in rebellion to hear her talk of “making something” of Arthur Leigh!

“Your ladyship would form him perfectly,” was the reply. “But then you know, dear Lady Catherine,” the rich merchant’s wife went on, “he is poor—comparatively speaking, quite poor.”

“Comparatively speaking,—but then, the Grange is a fine property,—and with a rich wife, and influential connections, Arthur Leigh might soon hope to recover his old station, that is, with the aid of his own energy and talents; and you know, my dear creature, he *is* a gentleman, though he has been in trade.”

Mrs. Falkland flushed up, and even Lady Catherine lost her self-possession in consternation at the terrible mistake she had made.

“And in a humble way too,” she went on; recovering herself with remarkable celerity, “not one of the merchant princes, like our dear Mr. Falkland, who, of course, take rank far above men of Arthur Leigh’s position; but, really,” she continued, invoking a smile of winning good humour, “I cannot allow you and Mr. Falkland to look down on my *protegé* any longer, for, to tell you the truth, I intend him for my son-in-law.”

The skein which I was holding for Lady Catherine fell from my hands. I did not heed the look with which she favoured me; I was too glad to hide my face by bending down to pick it up—too glad to have some excuse for my burning cheeks, when, after as much delay as possible, I raised my head. Mrs. Falkland seemed equally astonished.

“For your son-in-law, dear Lady Catherine?”

“Yes, for my son-in-law,” dear lady Catherine replied, nodding her head playfully, in her delight at the impression she had made upon her auditors; “Honorina likes him, and Honorina is not an ordinary girl, and therefore

she must not have an ordinary man for her husband."

"And it is quite a settled thing?" Mrs. Falkland asked, apparently more bewildered still.

"Oh! dear, no!—and pray don't mention it."

I suppose she must have thought I was a cipher, so I did not consider myself included in the prohibition.

"Indeed, from what I contrived to gather one day, in conversation with Arthur, I fancied that he seemed to be fettered by some unpleasant tie that he did not find it quite easy to break. He is too old to have formed one of those foolish, rash, *young* men's engagements; you don't know of any?"

"No," said Mrs. Falkland. "I think I can undertake to say Arthur Leigh is *not* engaged; but you do surprise me,—I thought you would have had higher views for a wit and a beauty, like your charming Honoria."

"My dear!" returned her ladyship, still playfully, "I have six daughters, and as his grace has often said to me" (Lady Catherine always spoke of her noble parent as his grace),

“‘Catherine, you must not expect to make peeresses of all your daughters;’ my two eldest have married well, *very* well, with my approbation, and, I admit it, with my advice. Honoria is headstrong, and I really feel inclined to let the poor girl have her own way. I wish it had been arranged a little earlier, and we could have had her and our sweet Helen as brides together; such a charming contrast they would have made! But, however, we will hope that Mr. Leigh’s engagement only exists in my imagination; we must help him into Parliament, or his grace must get him a place; and then I think there will be nothing to prevent them being happy. Thank you, my dear.”

This was my dismissal. I left them in a frame of mind that I hardly like to remember—in a rage of pride, jealousy, and mortification that never stirred my heart before or since. This, then, was the secret of all Arthur Leigh’s coldness! That he did not love me, I had known long; but that self-interest and ambition had influenced him against me, that I was an obstacle in his path, a dead-weight

upon his advancement, above all, that he had dared to speak of his engagement to me in such terms, was what I had never dreamt of. He might have spared me this ; he might have told me of it himself. I would not have stood between him and the fame, wealth, and honour which he coveted, much longer. Nor would I do so now. I would set him free to marry the woman he did not love, for I knew he did not love her, however he might value the solid benefits which she secured to him. I would renounce him—it would cost me nothing to do it now. In my burning indignation I said that I hated him, and I believe I did hate him in that brief passion of wrath. My brain seemed on fire, and my heart swelled till I thought it would burst. I wanted fresh air and solitude ; I could only find them out-of-doors. I rushed through the hall ; in the door-way an arm suddenly laid across my path impeded my progress. It was Arthur Leigh who detained me. He was leaning against one of the pillars of the portal, shadowed from the sun by the massive stonework overhead, his hat off, and a cigar between his lips. He seemed to be enjoying

the tranquil beauty of that summer afternoon, in a frame of mind as indolently peaceful as the day itself, when he was interrupted by my unexpected appearance.

I know I am a coward ; here was the opportunity for indignant, defiant explanation that I had sought. I was standing face to face with him ; he had drawn me round in front of him, and was looking at me with wonder and curiosity. Well he might, for I think I must have worn a peculiar expression ; but I dare not speak, I could not utter the angry words that were welling to my lips. He seemed so placid and unmoved ; his quiet face calmed my turbulent spirit, as waters quench flames. It is always difficult to oppose excitement to unruffled serenity. Besides, he looked kind ;—ah ! just as he used to look in the old, happy days, which I seemed to have outlived ages ago. He spoke first.

“ Well, where are you going ? You seem in a great hurry.”

“ I am going out. I am in a hurry. Let me go.”

“ Then let me go too ; we have not had a walk together for a long time.”

In a moment he dropped my arm, and looked into my face.

“You are not ill, Alice, are you?”

“No, walk on. I’m quite well.”

“But your hand trembles like a leaf, and you can hardly breathe. Has anything frightened or annoyed you? Tell me.”

He placed me on one of the garden-seats as he spoke, and waited for my answer. I could not sit still; I was too excited to rest; speak I must.

“Nothing is the matter,” I cried out impetuously; “only I have been listening to those women talking till my brain reels. Tell me if it was true what they said. I don’t care how wretched it makes me, but I must know.”

My strength seemed to be forsaking me. The false prop of angry pride gave way, and I only knew that I was miserable and humiliated. I sank back on the chair from which I had risen, and sobbed aloud in the vehemence of my grief. Arthur walked away a few paces, then he came back, and sat down beside me. He pulled down my hands

from my face, and said very gravely and kindly :—

“ You must not excite yourself so much. Ask me anything you wish. I promise to withhold nothing from you that you have a right to know. Only remember this,” he continued, and there was a threatening accent in his voice, which warned me against trifling with him, “ I expect you to receive my words as true; and I tell you that I know of no confession which you are at liberty to extort from me, that should make you wretched.”

I felt angry, and yet perplexed. I was cowed by his manner. He had taken a vantage so lofty, so far above my impetuous violence; and yet I knew at the same time that I was right, that he owed me an explanation of Lady Catherine’s words. I wished I had said nothing of it at all; yet how could I be silent with such a secret?

“ Well! Alice, you summoned me to the bar, and it seems that the cross-questioning has to come from me. Who were you listening to? You know the proverbial ill-fate that befalls listeners?”

I felt my courage rise at the taunt ; but pride forbade me to justify myself.

“ To Lady Catherine.”

“ Well ; and what are her ladyship’s news ?”

His coolness stung me to the quick. For an instant, an idea of revenge flashed upon me. I would tell him the terms of condescension which Lady Catherine had used in speaking of him ; I would make his proud heart feel something of the mortifications that he was daily and hourly inflicting upon me. The thought came and passed with the quickness of a flash of lightning. I was glad that I had resisted it ; my own honour was bound up in his ; and the blow that glanced upon him must wound me to the heart.”

“ You will be angry when I tell you, and with good reason ; for I know, if it had been true, I should have heard it first from you. She said that you were to be her son-in-law, that you were to marry Honoria.”

“ And you believed it ?”

I was silent.

“ If you had ever loved me, Alice, you would never have lent a moment’s attention to such

idle talking. I feel highly flattered by Lady Catherine's good opinion; but I would not marry her daughter, even if I could not find another wife in England. I thought you had more faith in me than that."

"Do you think you have given me reason lately to place full faith in you?" I could not help asking.

There was an embarrassed pause, then he laughed slightly.

"Well, I promised to make full confession, and I am bound to say I have not been exactly what you had every right to expect—not been a devoted lover, in fact. But you can forgive, at least I think you can. Let us both agree to forget all that has passed. You overlook my shortcomings, and I will never remind you that you might have been more generous. Will you try?"

I knew I was doing wrong, but I could not resist the promise of new love and joy that entered into my heart. It stole up into my brain, and in that moment I had a new revelation—I first understood how happy I should be as Arthur's wife.

"I have nothing to forgive—I'm very selfish and exacting. Oh, Arthur, I wish I did not love you so much!"

"Never say that. Those who are to fight the battle of life together have need of all the love they can bring to help them on their weary marches. I may put yours to a test you little dream of, some day. I may wear it out."

"You never can do that."

"Can't I? Well, we'll be married, and I'll love and cherish you for ever."

"For ever!—that's a long time."

"For seven years and a day, then. We can take a new lease of love after that. Now, are you quite happy?"

"Yes."

"And you have no more ugly questions to put to me?"

"No."

"Then don't shun me, as you have done hitherto. You never come into the gallery now—you never come near me at night. (Nor do you ever come near me, I thought.) Come into the old school-room sometimes.

Miss Ross is away, and no one will disturb us. And now, as you have consented to acknowledge my authority—”

“Your authority!”

“Yes. Don’t you mean to obey your husband, my child? And he orders you to go and lie down till dinner time, or I foresee you will be ill; and let Lady Catherine prattle at her own sweet will for the future—you need not mind her.”

He kissed me as he parted with me. I had reason to remember that embrace. It was the last time that our lips ever met.

Does the reader believe that I spoke truly, when I told Arthur Leigh that I was happy? Were a few kind words, a few vague assurances, sufficient to restore to me the security I had lost?

It is not thus that our deepest heart-wounds are healed. We may bind up a slight hurt, and leave it to the kindly influence of nature; but the keen knife, that divides a life from a life, does its deadly work too well; the gashes drain our heart’s blood, and it is only after the lapse of years that we can

pass our finger over the scar, and not quiver in answer to the touch of pain. I was silenced, but the question that I had most at heart was unanswered. Had Arthur really spoken of his engagement to me as a burden which he would willingly shake off?

I do not know whether it was by accident or design, or whether it was merely the result of my own cowardice, but in talking with him I was utterly powerless in his hands. Whatever doubts I might determine to have solved—whatever remonstrances I might be resolved to urge—he opposed an invincible front alike to reproach and inquiry. There was no weak point on which I could assail him—he had a quiet, but irresistible art of effectually turning the conversation into another channel; and I was obliged to yield, and to watch the subject that lay next to my heart gradually receding from my view, till I had forgotten it entirely in my desire to please him. It was weak and wicked to give up the reins of my being so unreservedly into a mortal hand—to worship the human rather than the divine—to set the creature before my eyes in the place of the

Creator. A smile from Arthur Leigh was more to me than the voice of conscience—than the unalterable laws of right and wrong ; and it is rarely that we cast ourselves, and our lot for weal and woe, on the frail support of a fellow-being's love, but the reed fails us, and we are left alone, crying in our perplexity for the God whom we have forsaken. I was more unhappy than ever ; and I do not fancy that Arthur Leigh's felicity was without a flaw, though he had more power in concealing his emotions than I had. Then he brought something of the creed of Islam into his daily practice. His fate was appointed to him—he would accept it, and reconcile himself to it as best he might. The yoke had been relaxed for a moment—he had refitted it to his shoulders himself—the pressure might gall him, but he would wear it, and none should know how he secretly chafed at the burden.

I have lingered long on this part of my story. We do the same in our acted life. We can bear our sorrow bravely, when it is with us ; but we meet it with lingering and unwilling steps—we would fain put off the evil day which

we know must come at last. For a little while all seemed well between us, but it was only in seeming.

The unequal conflict ended at last. I had often met Arthur, as he had proposed, in the school-room; to little purpose, for we talked at rare intervals, and with effort. He brought his easel there, the picture-gallery being rather a favourite resort of the company at present. I remember well the morning of which I speak. Arthur was nervous, irritable, and distraught.

After a few vain attempts, he flung down his pencils, and paced moodily up and down the room.

“I can do nothing to-day,” he said at last. “I wish you would sing to me.”

“I can’t sing; but I hear Miss Osborne performing down stairs, if you want music.”

“I don’t want hers,” he replied curtly. He went to the window, and drummed idly with his fingers on the panes.

The rain poured down in torrents. The fair, level garden was inundated, and the trees in the plantation hung their drip-

ping branches, heavy with the weight of waters.

“No going out to-day, and the billiard-table is sure to be engaged,” Arthur said—“suppose we take a book.”

“Very well. What will you have?”

“Anything you like. The more savage and cynical it is the better.”

“Oh! no, if you please—something humanizing.”

“Well, as you like. No woman ever had a taste for satire.”

“We get so much levelled at us, in our daily experience, we like a little variety in our reading. Shall we read Goethe?—and you can entertain yourself with my bad pronunciation.”

“He'll do. Here, give me the book.”

It opened at “Clavigo.” I would rather have chosen another play.

“Have you read this?” Arthur said.

“Yes, but it is disagreeable. Let us choose something else.”

“Does ‘disagreeable’ mean unsentimental? I should think it does, from the slight recol-

lection I have of the play. Come, begin. Clavigo—Carlos—Clavigo is the interesting lover, I presume. That's my part; of course. He stabs himself, don't he, at the end of the chapter? Well, it falls to me to begin."

"No—you shall be 'Carlos.' You wanted something cynical, and the part of the human Mephistopheles will suit you exactly."

We could hardly have chosen any subject so fatally apposite to our own case; every word went home to our hearts with such terrible conviction of reality. For weeks past we had been acting the very drama that we were reading; the arguments with which the tempter plies his vacillating friend against marrying his poor little French love were exactly such as, I am sure, Arthur Leigh had brought to bear against his marriage with me. We read on, with averted eyes and growing embarrassment; neither of us liked to pause; it was too like an acknowledgment of an undeniable truth. When Clavigo confesses that "one soon tires of women," I could not help looking at Arthur. A flush mounted up in his forehead, and he muttered, "Confusion!"

When Carlos answers in return, that "they are monotonous," Arthur pronounced the sweeping criticism "Trash!" and was about to shut the book. But a purpose had been forming itself in my mind. I felt that a crisis in our unhappy love was at hand. I would have been worse than weak now, if I had wavered or delayed.

"Go on," I said, "I think it is admirable, and so true!"

He muttered something like an oath between his teeth; my breath came so fast and thick, I had hardly voice for my part. At last, Carlos closes his vehement exhortation against his friend's marriage with these words:—"To love her, was natural; to promise marriage, was folly; to have kept your word with her, would have been madness."

"The devil!" Arthur exclaimed, stopping short; and he started up, and flung the book to the other side of the room. In another moment he would have left me; something within me compelled me to speak—the whole event of our lives might depend upon it. I

went up to him, and stopped him, as his hand was on the lock.

“ You recognize its truth, now, I think.”

“ Be silent !” he exclaimed, shaking my hand roughly off his arm ; “ I beg your pardon,—I mean, you must let me go. I want to be alone.”

“ In a moment,” I answered. “ But I must speak first. This has been a weary struggle for us both, Arthur ; for you, in trying to kindle the ashes of a dead love ; for me, against the selfishness which indulged itself at your expense. We are both tired of it ; it is time that it should end,—time for you, as the play says, to stop, before you have been mad.”

“ What do you mean ?”

“ Nothing that is not quite plain. You can pause before you hurry into madness ; and it would be madness in you to marry me, when you don't love me.”

“ How do you know that I don't love you ? If ever I spoke truth in my life, it was when I told you that I did. Even then you did not believe me.”

“ I believed you then. It was true then.”

“ And now ?”

“ You see that toy ?” I asked, pointing to a gay painted plaything which lay broken on the floor,—“ little Gertrude prized it as dearly as her life, the day before yesterday ; she sets no value on it now.”

“ Well, what of it ?”

“ We, elder children, cry for our toys, and fling them aside when we’ve got them. Did you ever win anything in your life that you had set your heart on, and find that you cared much for the prize when it lay in your hands ? Think before you answer me.”

“ You will have the truth,” he said, desperately. “ Well, then, take it,—I never did.”

“ And the more easily you win anything, the more worthless it appears when won, I suppose. You might have loved me better, perhaps, if I had withheld my love a little longer.”

He broke into incoherent exclamations.

“ You are going too far ! How dare you say that I’ve ceased to love you ? Have I ever, by word or sign, given you reason to believe that I did not wish to fulfil my engagement ?”

“ You do not wish it, nevertheless ; only your false code of honour forbids you to be honest enough to tell me so. It would have been better, if you had told me at once that you had mistaken your own heart. There might have been suffering, but no blame, except to the evil fate that forbade us to be happy together. Now, we have both done wrong ; for weeks past we have been trying to believe a lie.”

“ Tell me at once that I lied that night ; you think so in your heart.”

“ I don't. You liked me, and, led away by the impulse of the moment, you magnified that liking into love. You were a little jealous, besides, of Sir Montagu.”

“ Sir Montagu !” he exclaimed, turning sharply round, “ you don't mean to say. Great Heaven ! Has all this something to do with that fellow ? I declare I won't give you up !”

“ There !” I said, drawing back from his passionate grasp, with a smile that I could not suppress ; “ I believe you could almost love me again, if you thought you were threatened with a rival. No, your jealousy of

Sir Montagu is as unfounded now, as it was then."

"Then tell me at once what you mean by all this."

"To give you back your promise,—it is long since it has been utterly worthless."

"I won't take it; break your own, if you like; you can't force mine back upon me."

"You must take it;—try, it won't be difficult; it is only to affix your signature to a form that is filled up already."

"I tell you I won't. You ask impossibilities. You want more love than ever was in man's heart! What would you have from me?"

"Not your love; though I could have prized it very dearly. But I could not marry you, unless I felt that I had it in my power to increase your happiness. Now, I would be a curse to you rather than a blessing. I want you to answer one more question," I continued, after a dead silence between us both; "and, Arthur, you must answer me truly. Have you not often wished for the opportunity I offer you now?"

“You have no right to ask me such a question.”

“I think I have.”

“Then if you insist on it, I *have* often wished that we had never entered into this engagement. What matter? There’s not one man in a thousand who does not repent, at one time or another, before his wedding-day.”

“But not as you have done. Fears and doubts will intrude upon our brightest and best-founded prospects of happiness. You awoke to repentance the next morning, and you have never ceased to repent since. You think it is not so, just now, because you are kind and generous, and you don’t like to break a tie that you formed too hastily.”

“Will it hurt *you* to break it?”

“That is no matter now; you must think of yourself, of your honour and duty, if not of your happiness, before me. We can still be friends.”

“Friends !” he repeated, in a voice of bitter sarcasm; “I like your notions of friendship. This is all madness; you don’t mean what you say.”

“ I do.”

“ Then break off your engagement yourself. I won't.”

“ It is broken already !”

“ It is not !” he said, passionately. “ Say no more just now ; you will see me to-morrow. Lady Catherine has invited herself and the whole house to the Grange. I won't hear another word now ; to-morrow you will tell me you have forgotten this folly.”

“ Dear Arthur ! what good can there be in protracting misery ? If I promised to marry you this moment, you would regret, before the evening, that you had not taken back your word, when you could do so with honour,—you know you would.”

He paused irresolutely, then turned, with a laugh, to the volume of Goethe that lay on the table.

“ What is it that the fellow here says ? ‘ *Ich bin ein kleiner Mensch,*’ so am I—I don't know what I want. If you said you would marry me, I would repent, as you say, before the evening ; but—I cannot give you up.”

“Then I must do it myself!”—And, oh! the bitter pang of that moment, the deadly wrench when I tore my very heart-strings from the fibres of his! “And when you forgive me for this, Arthur, for I see that you are angry with me now, you will know that I have done right.”

He did not speak.

“You must think of me as a friend who will always love you, and take a deep interest in your welfare; and, dear Arthur, I would have you remember that your love was unspeakably precious to me, and that I thank you for it from my heart. You have been very kind to me, and you have created for me the purest happiness that I have ever known in this world. I owe all my joy to you, and none of my grief,—over that, neither of us had any control; perhaps it came to punish me for being so happy. I want you to remember this, not now, but at some future time, when you can think kindly and dispassionately. Now, I only ask you to say one word, that you forgive me all the misery I have caused you.”

I lingered for a moment, but he made no answer. He sat before the table with his head bowed on his hands. I stooped down and pushed back the clustering tresses of bright hair that fell among his fingers. I kissed him on the forehead; and I saw that the veins were knotted, and that they started out like blue cords. I stopped a moment to place Goethe on the bookshelf; he rose suddenly, and brushed past me, saying, in a low, hurried voice:—

“To-morrow. Remember I take no answer till to-morrow.”

I did not see his face, and as I turned with a quick movement, the door closed behind him.

CHAPTER III

“Fairest—why fairest wife? am I not fair?
* * * Most loving is she?”

TENNYSON.

I REMEMBER the rest of that day like a dream. I could realize nothing of what had happened; it seemed so strange, impossible, and incomprehensible. We read of persons who, urged by a desperate extremity of mortal peril, have performed feats of physical daring so tremendous, so far beyond the capacity of their normal powers, that one effort seems to prostrate their energies for all time to come; reason gives way sometimes at the bare recollection of the danger they have escaped. In the hour of my extreme need, I had summoned

to my aid every faculty of mind and will ; I had showed them the deed which they must do ; the task was accomplished, but my soul was left paralyzed by the shock. I had had a blow, and it had stunned me. I had done what was right ; of that I was certain ; but I was not endowed with a properly-regulated mind ; else the approving testimony of my own conscience would have afforded me all the consolation I required, and a little superfluous hilarity besides.

I saw Arthur no more that day, for he left Sumnor Hall immediately after his interview with me. Lady Catherine said, that of course, he wished to superintend the preparations at the Grange for her visit next day.

I resolved not to join this party, though I should have gone, if Arthur had not insisted on my presence, as a pledge of the renewal of our engagement. No one would speculate on my absence ; we all did just as we liked at Sumnor ; and it was no unusual thing for a guest to decline joining any party of pleasure. Lilian Graham was expected the next afternoon,

and Mrs. Falkland observed to Helen that perhaps she had better stay at home to meet her, the time for their return from the Grange being uncertain.

"I don't intend to go out to-morrow. It would be a pity for Helen to stay," I said, seeing that Helen demurred a little.

"But, my dear, would you not like to see the Grange?" Mrs. Falkland replied.

"I have passed it when riding; and I have some letters which I must write."

"And, really, Miss Hope," Sir Montagu, who was close at my elbow, explained confidentially, "there is nothing to see when you do get there, nothing at all. Indeed, the most conspicuous thing about the place is the remains of the burnt house; that may all be very picturesque, I dare say, but I don't think it can be a very gratifying spectacle to the owner. I like a ruin, myself; a real genuine ruin, you know; that was the only thing wanting at Lightcliffe; so I made one."

"Made a ruin, Sir Montagu?" I asked, in great surprise.

"Yes, Miss Hope," he answered, twirling

his moustache with the most composed gravity; "indeed I did; and a very fine ruin it is, I assure you. The remains of an old chapel, the plan drawn from a real old chapel, on my Yorkshire estate; when the ivy takes firm hold of the stone, it will be perfect."

"And quite genuine, too!—that must enhance its value."

"Quite genuine, as you say, Miss Hope; copied from the original, taken from life," and Sir Montagu laughed heartily at this feeble joke.

I was utterly wearied out that night, and I slept long and heavily. It was late when I awoke, and even then I felt too languid to rise. I did not leave the room till I heard the carriages drive away with their gay party to the Grange—then my thoughts flew unbidden to Arthur Leigh. In what sort of mood would he play the part of courteous host that day? That he would smile and make no sign of the trouble at his heart, I knew. Would he look for me? Would it pain him to see I was not there? Well may we pray against wandering thoughts! Thought is free; and we

may as well forbid the needle to turn to the pole, as try to check its bent; mine spurned my weak endeavours at control; the tangled fibres of my heart began to lift themselves up, as the torn-down ivy raises its clinging tendrils when the storm is over; and it was round the prop from which they had been severed, that they began to twine.

It was a day for morbid brooding. The heavy rain of yesterday had ceased with this morning's dawn, but thirsty earth had already drunk deeply enough of the draught that Nature's kind hand had proffered to her; she refused to drain the overflowing abundance. Pools of water stood in the shining gravel, and in the rich black soil; the high grass in the park lay prostrate, in heavy swaths, like sheaves cut down by the scythe of the mower; the air was sultry and still; soft, steaming showers fell at intervals during the day, and rose again in mists from the smoking soil, or floated lazily along its surface. The sky was of a dim, faint blue; and the yellow, watery sun looked palely through the vapours. I felt weary and still; for my slumber, like the dead rest of opiates,

had stupefied, rather than refreshed me ; still, I recognized the positive necessity of active motion. I must tire out the ceaseless cravings of my mind by physical fatigue, if they would not be silenced at my bidding ; and I spent the whole of that weary day in wandering through the picture-galleries and the gardens. Did I repent of what I had done last night ? Humbling as the confession is, I did. I had only thought of Arthur yesterday—now, I thought of myself. I had meant to be firm ; I had ended in being obstinate. I had forced him from me ; now, I would give worlds to bring him back. While he was labouring with heart and hand to bridge over the chasm between us, in reckless defiance I had hurled down the plank which was to unite us ; not seeing, in my rash blindness, that that slight footing was the only stay between me and the gulf of misery which raged beneath.

A sudden thought, of inexpressible gladness, seized me. It was like a gleam of torchlight flashing out in a dark vault, showing, indeed, the deadly blight of the place, the dank, dripping moisture plashing down in

sullen drops on the hollow-sounding earth, the black and green mould on the stained walls, the terrible living things that crawl or climb in the foul, festering air; but disclosing also—oh! heavenly mercy!—the path that leads into golden sunshine, and into the gladness of free-blowing breezes. And *was* a ray of heavenly sunshine that pierced into my black night of misery, that joyful recollection that Arthur had refused to accept my resignation. Again, with the desperate grasp of forlorn hope, I clung to the conviction that he loved me. Resolved to know the whole truth, I would find it out for myself. I would banish all delusion, either of doubt or of self-deceptive hope; calmly and dispassionately, I would study the effect that my voluntary absence to-day had worked upon his mind.

Still, I was glad of this absence; for I knew, if I had gone this morning, agitated, and hardly knowing what I did, I must have fallen into one extreme of fatal folly; either of groundless confidence or equally groundless despair. My heart felt lighter, the day had brightened, the sun looked out in triumph; the wet grass

and the dew-laden flowers sparkled like jewels on the fragrant earth ; a vigorous breeze springing up had scattered the vapours, and chased away the rain-clouds from the broad smiling face of heaven. A long walk was with me a panacea for every evil, mental and bodily ; surely the often-proved remedy would not fail me now.

It did fail me ; at least, the chance of trying it was lost ; but only to give place to a real and long-looked-for pleasure. A carriage drove up to the door ; there was a confused sound of voices in the hall, and I ran down stairs, to find Lilian Graham listening to a flood of apologies from the clerical Mr. Finnis, the butler, who was deploring, in gracefully-rounded periods, the unfortunate absence of Mrs. Falkland and the young ladies. Lilian uttered a cry of delight when she saw me ; and we rushed into each other's arms in an ecstasy of that exuberant affection which ladies and Frenchmen do especially cultivate. My beautiful Lilian was more beautiful than ever ; taller, and with an air of free, graceful pride that sat well on her flexible figure. I had parted with her a child ; now she was a

woman ; an intenser fire in the full, dark eye, something strange and different, I knew not what, had come to temper the arch vivacity which still flashed out unchecked. It might be the heart-learnt lessons of experience ; it might be merely the "coming and going of the wind" that "brought pleasure there, and left passion behind." I listened long to her gay talk, but listened in vain for the tender confidences of which poor Helen had always been so profuse. Lilian was quite fancy-free. I insinuated the question at last.

"How suspicious you are, Alice!" she said, "and what a change, too! At school, we dared not utter a syllable of such frivolity in your presence ; you used to treat the *beau passion* and its unhappy victims with the most killing scorn."

"I have learnt toleration for every phase of human folly."

"*Vive la philosophie ! et la chère philosophe, aussi !* Ah ! I read your secret. You are like Valentine in the play, doing penance for contemning love ! You surely must be in love yourself. Now, I know you are ; and it

will be just like you, if you have not a confidant. Now do tell me; I must and will know."

"Nonsense! what absurd fancies you have," I answered, with a throbbing at my heart that convicted me of subterfuge; "you are much more likely to be in that predicament than I am. Tell me,—how many French hearts have you broken?—No, French hearts don't break, they are only grazed.—How many melancholy-eyed signori have your glances set on fire?"

"It would be a long tale to tell," Lilian said, with a laugh, "and little matter now, seeing I have come home heart-whole, much to dear old papa's satisfaction. You should have seen *ce cher papa*, Alice; he has an orthodox horror of foreigners, like a true Briton as he is. He was half distracted between his fears about my health, if I came home, and his fears about my heart, if I stayed away. Wasn't I a dutiful daughter to regard his prejudices so obediently? I shall make up for it now; I intend to follow your example, and to fall in love here. I know you're in

love; don't blush. Tell me about the people here, like a good girl."

"The people? Well, there are Mr. and Mrs. Falkland, Helen, a Miss Osborne, Miss —"

"*Mon Dieu!*" Lilian interrupted; turning away her head, and holding up her hands with a deprecating gesture that was extremely French (indeed, her continental life had almost denaturalized her; she had French ways, and poured out French phrases with extraordinary rapidity). "I don't want to know about the women—women in a country house see more than enough of each other, don't they? Oh! Alice, who is that? What a handsome man!" she exclaimed, flying to the window, as a horseman galloped up to the door, and in a rapid survey, in which he seemed to take in the whole front of the house at a glance, singled out our window, and bowed. I hastily pulled Lilian back. It was Arthur Leigh. She was quick to detect my confusion.

"Ah! I see; I am sure that must be *le beau seigneur!*" and in a clear, ringing voice

she warbled forth some absurd French canzonet, apostrophizing an "*amant fidèle*."

"Be quiet, you ridiculous little goose! and don't lose your heart to that *beau seigneur*, as you call him, for you have a powerful rival already—a young lady twice as handsome as you, twice as tall, with blacker hair, blacker eyes, and beautiful rosy cheeks, which, I can tell you, are much more attractive than cream-coloured alabaster."

"Do you think so? How I wish I had brought some Paris rouge home with me; but, you see, I am tired with travelling, and paler than usual, perhaps."

"You conceited little thing! I wonder if you brought your vanity home from Paris with you. I think not; I fear it was deeply engrained before. Here are the carriages."

Of course, when Helen flew up-stairs, there was a repetition of the performances through which, as I have hinted, Lilian and I had already gone, followed by variations on a less enthusiastic scale, as Miss Graham was introduced to the other ladies of the party. I took advantage of this diversion to retreat to my own

room ; and when I returned to Lilian, after performing a speedy toilette, I found that young woman in a state of great perplexity. The unwonted feat of dressing herself had engulfed her in a hopeless slough of despond ; an "*accès de malheurs*" had befallen her, she told me, and difficulties seemed multiplying fast, when my friendly hand interposed to deliver her.

" Oh ! you dear, beneficent creature !" she exclaimed, suddenly turning round, as I entered the room,— " I was just going to sit down and cry. Do help me. Did you ever, in your life, see such a scene of horrible confusion ?"

" I never did," I answered, with perfect sincerity. " Why, you have turned the contents of your boxes bodily on the floor !"

" And I can't find a thing that I want. Mather—(that's another of papa's antediluvian prejudices, he would not let me bring a French maid home)—Mather wanted to visit her friends, and I was weak enough to give my consent. Besides, this is the first visit that I have made since I came back to Eng-

land, and I did not know whether it would do to bring my own maid. Is it the custom? Have you yours?"

"I? You must think me strangely altered to cultivate such an appendage! But all the other fine ladies have their own maids, so you can send for yours. Let her have her holiday first, though; I'll officiate in the meantime."

"Oh, she was to be at home again to-morrow; but if you will help me to-day, I shall be very much obliged to you. I don't know how you dress yourself without assistance. I think I'll put on that pink silk; or—let me see."

"The pink silk, and no other," I said, decisively; "come, you have no time to lose."

"You don't think I would look better in that white crape?" she said, suggestively.

"The pink silk," I reiterated, with still greater resolution,—“what a lot of flounces!"

"Yes," she answered, shaking them out with her small hands, "they wear twenty or thirty little flounces in Paris just now. Alice, do you think I might steal a flower out of the conservatory for my hair?"

“Your hair wants no flowers. How can you fasten them among all those curls?”

“Oh, perfectly; I always wear one just in here—look,—just a single white flower. Do get me one.”

“I’ll go, but under protest that I am sinning against my conscience in encouraging your love of dress.”

I heard voices in the conservatory as I went in. A thick screen of shrubs concealed me from the speakers—but I knew them to be Arthur Leigh and little Alfred Falkland.

“What is all this stir in the house about?” Arthur asked.

“Oh, it’s just some of these girls, as usual,” Alfred returned, contemptuously.

“What girls?”

“Oh, all of them, they are all alike, except Miss Hope.” (“Thank you,” I ejaculated mentally.) “They are always after some folly. I hate girls.”

“By the way, do you know where Miss Hope has been to-day?”

“She hadn’t come down stairs when they set off to your house. I am sure you had

enough of them without her ; I know I pitied you when I saw the carriages drive away. Miss Hope," he went on, communicatively, "Alice I always call her, is generally the only one down in decent time of a morning. I've never had to take my breakfast alone since she came ; but I've not seen her to-day. I've been in Morton, myself."

"But you have not told me what the stir is about yet?"

"Well, it's just those girls ; they've got another among them, that's all. Miss Graham's her name. I've seen her ; and she's a regular beauty, and an heiress too. I say, Arthur, my boy, I would make up to her, if I were you. She's twenty times prettier than that Honoria Harcourt ; and all the Harcourts have horrid tempers."

Arthur laughed heartily. "What do you know about Miss Honoria, young gentleman?"

"I know the mother wants you to marry her ; I wouldn't, though, if I were you. I can't bear Lady Catherine and her damned airs."

Arthur, like a judicious monitor, seemed to reprove the improper word.

“Well, she does give herself airs. Guess what she told me—that I was taking a great liberty, when I called you Arthur; that’s because she intends you to be her son-in-law.”

I do not deny that I lingered much longer in the conservatory than was necessary, and gathered many more flowers than I needed. Nevertheless, Lilian contrived to press them nearly all into her service, and with the remainder she insisted on adorning me.

We entered the drawing-room together; Arthur was standing at the window, still talking to his young friend. He bowed slightly as he caught my eye; but I noticed his visible start of surprised admiration when he saw Lilian. I knew she must delight his artistic eye and fastidious taste. He laid hold on May Leslie as she passed him, and said something earnestly to her. She looked up in his face, and laughed; in a moment after, she brought him up to where we sat, and introduced him to Lilian. I thought she would have flushed or turned pale; no, there was no reason why *she* should feel emotion at the sight of Arthur. She bowed quietly and courteously, and talked

quite as unconcernedly as she did with me. I think he would have taken her down to dinner—at least, he looked disappointed when Mr. Falkland, by way of doing honour to the new guest, claimed the privilege for himself. The rest of the company had already paired off. Arthur and I were left facing each other. He looked steadily at me, and seemed to expect that I would speak. He could hardly have avoided offering me his arm ; but just at the critical moment Master Alfred, who was extremely elated on this, the occasion of his first introduction to the Eleusinian mysteries of the late dinner, suddenly presented himself as my escort.

Unsuspecting youth ! he little knew from what embarrassment he had relieved us both. Mr. Leigh, meanwhile, was left to bring up the rear by himself ; and my youthful escort threw me into paroxysms of nervousness by continually looking back, as we went down stairs, and addressing satirical observations to his solitary friend. The dinner-hour was very long and wearisome, though, to do Master Alfred justice, he exerted his conversational

powers to their utmost for my entertainment. I listened and smiled with tolerable composure ; and, I think, a wild notion darted through his brain, that it was just possible I might be in love with him.

After dinner, Lilian and myself, with Helen and a few of the younger ladies, gathered in the recess of one of the bow-windows. In a few minutes I noticed Mrs. Falkland waving two jewelled fingers to me. I interpreted this pantomime as a signal of invitation. I was right—she smiled and nodded as I drew near, and pointed to a low seat beside her own. Her conversation never was worth very much—to-night it was unusually deficient in interest. She was in raptures with Lilian, and moreover very curious about her. “She was sure she had seen some one like her ; was she connected with the Grahams of Graham’s-town ?” “I did not know.” “With the Lacys of Chelmsford, then ? She was extremely like Lady Adeline Lacy ; her portrait was in the ‘Book of Beauty,’ if I wished to judge of the resemblance.” Then Mrs. Falkland meandered into her accustomed channel of recollections, and

I knew I had nothing to do but to sit still and listen ; her talk would flow on interminably. Then the gentlemen began to drop in—Arthur Leigh first, as usual. His quick, comprehensive glance, which I had been accustomed to see rest upon me, swept past me now, and lighted with evident pleasure on the group beside the window. How beautiful Lilian looked, with her round, white arm resting on the handle of the open French window, the hanging tendrils of the climbing plants, blown in by the breeze, playing among her dark curls, waving to and fro on her marble forehead, which only shone the fairer in contrast with the shade they threw.

Soon Mrs. Falkland wearied of my company ; then I drew a little nearer to the group. They were all very merry. The ball of gay jest and light repartee flew quickly from one laughing speaker to the other. Lilian's smiles waxed brighter, and her colour, usually somewhat pale, flushed with the delicate tint of the rose-leaf, as her animation increased. There was a rare and subtile charm about her radiant beauty, that, I think, men must have found

particularly captivating. There was little depth of earnest feeling in her face—none of the delicately-traced lines of strong thought, which deepen into graver furrows in after-years. I have seen them in exquisite perfection only on one, perhaps two female faces of marvellous beauty ; the still spiritual loveliness was so intense that it was almost painful. But Lilian's mobility of feature varied with every shade of feeling that crossed her mind ; you would have bid every changing expression remain fixed for ever ; no picture would have done justice to her face ; a marble bust, still and passionless, would have been best, and the gazer might have supplied the winning smiles, or the pensive tenderness, from his own recollection.

How changed she was, as I compared her to myself ! At school she was clinging and timid—she was accustomed to lean entirely on me. Now she was fearless and daring. She had far outstripped me in the social race. How was it ? True, her beauty far surpassed mine. Beauty is powerful, but it is not omnipotent. I had more brains than she had ;

my intellect was better cultivated, more impressionable to lofty ideas ; my nature was deeper than her's, more truthful and more constant ; still, meeting as rivals, I knew that she must vanquish me. Already I felt as if that haughty little foot was on my neck, or as if I was bound as a captive to the chariot wheels of the conqueror.

What was the charm ? Facility ? Tact ? Adaptation ? I suppose so. I drew nearer, and listened to the gay talk. Very trivial it was, very shallow were the criticisms which passed so freely, very ignorant were the remarks that were sometimes hazarded by the fair speakers. I could have spoken more to the purpose in a single sentence than any of them did in ten ; and yet I could no more have imitated that light, airy interchange of mirthful talk, nor, indeed, have talked at all, with so many listeners hanging on my words, than I could have lectured on the origin of evil, or discussed the national debt and the best scheme for paying it off.

And Lilian smiled more brightly, and listened with even more rapt attention, when

Arthur spoke to her ; and they gradually withdrew a little from the rest of the party ; and he bent over her, and spoke low and softly ; and her sweet eyes dropped till the long lashes swept her cheek ; and—and—I was sick at heart, and could look at them no longer.

The party was breaking up ; Arthur had not addressed a single word to me. Mrs. Falkland joined Lilian. Then he looked quickly round, and walked straight up to where I was sitting. I was alone in the corner of a couch, beside the fire-place. He did not sit down—he stood straight before me, bending slightly as he spoke.

“ You insisted on an explanation from me yesterday ; I demand one from you now.”

I did not answer ; but something, the hope that had been growing up within me through the hours of that long summer afternoon, fell dead out of my heart, sinking fathoms down into the wide, deep waters of sullen agony.

“ What am I to understand from your absence to-day ?” he asked again, steadily and ruthlessly.

“ I told you I could not come.”

“And I told you that I could take no answer from you till to-day. I wait for it now.”

“I have nothing more to say. Your promise was worthless, and I gave it back to you.”

“Then it is of no use wasting words : you have done this of your free will—you have released yourself from a tie that you found irksome.”

“And you too. Good night !”

I held out my hand. He took it passively, glancing down for a moment at the other, which hung down by my side. I did not understand him at first ; then I remembered that I still wore the ring he had given me. I drew it off, and gave it to him without a word.

I never paused till I reached my own room. Helpless and hopeless, I seemed to stand alone, a solitary wanderer in the centre of a vast, burning prairie. Round me, hemming me in on every side, rolled swiftly on the fierce, swirling waves of flame. Nearer and nearer, with a roar of exultation, the red billows of living fire gathered to meet each other from the corners of the earth. The green circle round me

narrowed. I felt the furnace breath upon my brow ; it stirred my hair ; the scorching tongues of flame leapt up and wreathed me round in amorous fury. Blind and dizzy, I sank prostrate before the resistless might of that tempest of wrath. Years might have passed over my head, when I awoke from that long swoon. I was aged, blasted in heart and hope, but I was calm ; and, oh ! that calm ! God of mercy ! I cried, give me anguish rather than this dumb senselessness—this mockery of existence without vital life.

I had passed through an ordeal, but it was of fire ; it had scathed every gentle feeling, seared every quickened impulse of my brain. In my hour of triumph, I had given no thanks to the Giver of all good ; in my time of doubt, I had asked no counsel of my Father in heaven ; in my sorest need, I had lifted up no prayer for mercy ; and now He had forsaken me. I was left alone by God and man ; and in my unutterable desolation, I first felt the bitterness of despair.

CHAPTER IV.

“ Però, s’alcuna volta i ’rido o canto
Facciol ’perch ’i ’non ho se non quest ’una
Via da celare il mio angoscioso pianto.”

PETRARCH.

It is not always good to be alone with our sorrow. We think so while we are suffering. Like the wounded deer, carrying his dying anguish to the loneliest forest-glade, so we, covering our bleeding heart-wounds with trembling hands, would bury ourselves where no curious eye can scan our grief, no cold ear hearken to our bitter groans and sighs. The garish noon-day sun is an unwelcome intruder; the sweet softened light of morning and evening is too bright; and we call upon friendly Night to wrap her black mantle round us, to give us solitude at least, if she cannot

give us rest. But it is better for us to be driven out into the world, to meet the good or evil that fate has in store for us. Grief strengthens us, if it is not nursed too tenderly ; we may have been worsted in the first conflict, but, if we rise up from the dust with a strong purpose and a bold heart, we will be better able to bear the brunt of the next shock ; it may shake us to the centre, it will not utterly overcome us. Perhaps it is best for us, though the ordeal is of the hardest, to be obliged to smile through our heart-break ; that enforced hypocrisy may be seasonable medicine to our sick souls sometimes.

I remember once seeing a series of sketches, wherein, under a thin veil of allegory, the poet-artist had portrayed the history of a life. Very slight were the outlines, but powerfully suggestive ; every reader might give them his own version, might multiply them thousand-fold into ever-varying pictures, for the canvas was the world, and the story was the drama of human life. The light of the morning stars shone around the new-born babe, but

soon "shades of the prison-house began to close about the growing boy," and their lustre was quenched. Superstition and folly ministered to his tender years ; the cares, the riches, the pleasures of this life trooped round his path before the dew of his youth was dry. He sat beside the waters of thought ; he gave his heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven ; but Nature refused to yield her secrets, and in the sore wail of his vexed spirit, the bitter heart-cry of Faust, testing his intellectual wealth, and finding it dross, was echoed in the breast of the disappointed student.


He loved, but he was deceived where he had trusted ; and his own constancy failed him when the heart he had won was true. Avarice baited his golden hook, and pleasure shook her glittering torch before his eyes. He did not see the sharp dart that must pierce him with its steely point of pain ; he did not know that the dazzling light was but the meteor-glare of the *ignis fatuus*.

The boy became a man ; his Lehrjahre were ended. What was the lesson they had taught

him? To say of laughter, it is mad; and of mirth, what doeth it? To know that in much wisdom is much grief, and that he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow; that the world is a bitter enemy; that he who would prosper in the selfish strife must present an unmoved front to its jaundiced eyes of suspicion—that lip and brow must betray no sign of the emotions for good and evil that rage beneath the surface of ice.

He fitted the mask to his face, cold, hard, and expressionless. He looked out on the world with cast-iron visage. Friend and mistress gazed in startled horror on the face they had loved; but it never melted into tenderness, it never glowed into passion, it never more grew solemn under the thought of its pledged vows. Gradually the marked outlines faded, the mask moulded itself closely and more closely to the features; it concealed them; they blended into one at last. The end was gained, and the hardened worldling could look on those whom he had wronged, feared, and envied, with the same impenetrable, unanswering stolidity.

We must all wear the mask at some period



of our life ; necessity casts it for us, and the “untaught, innate philosophy, which, be it wisdom, coldness, or deep pride,” we all learn under some form in the rough school of experience, commands us to wear it. Shall we not, then, O my friends, learn to wear it smilingly ? There are curious eyes, and to spare, watching to see us wince, to see the lines of our smooth brow distorted with pain. Shall we not, then, O amiable fellow-sufferer, disappoint them ?—disarm our frowning enemy with a pleasant face ? We cannot always walk the margin of life’s river with “cambric handkerchiefs in our hands, sobbing and sighing, and making signals to Death to come and ferry us over the lake ;” we cannot always be hurling back defiance at the world, with scornful eye and sneering lip. Let us smile then ; in a little time the mask will smile too. We will meet the merry face in the glass ; we will smile again in answer to that inviting cheerfulness ; we will forget the vulture that is gnawing at our vitals—what do we know ? We may even end in being happy ; by long-seeming, we may learn to be

what we seem. I was unhappy—granted ; but for all that, I had to take my seat at the breakfast-table next morning ; I could not excuse choking sobs, and tear-laden eyes, by telling that assembled company that Arthur had flung me off, and that I was desolate.

It was not such a very difficult task which I had to perform, after all. I was always quiet—it was merely to be quiet still—to check the voice of my passionate lamentation, till, in the midnight solitude of my chamber, I could cry aloud to heaven with a long and bitter cry. Arthur Leigh only could have known that I suffered, and I did not care to bid defiance to his scrutiny. “Where love once hath breathed, pride dieth.” I did not blame him ; no proud resentment stung me to cloak my pain under the veil of unnaturally exuberant gaiety.

I did not blame him, and yet it pained me to the heart to see how soon he could forget. I saw the same looks, the same words and smiles, which had been wont to spring unbidden to his lip and eye, in answer to words and smiles from me, called up for another ; the same, I have said, but intensified to a

degree which created for them a new character. I had pleased and interested him, flattered him, perhaps; but I had never charmed him, as Lilian did now.

Truly love is a hypocrite. Arthur hung upon that child's lightest words with a rapturous reverence, which betrayed unmistakably that the sentinels, judgment and reason, had fallen asleep at their posts. He used to argue with my opinions, contradict them, and generally warp them into the same channel as his own. But I liked that friendly antagonism better than the unworthy submission to which he had subjugated his proud heart now. He had shown himself to me as he was, with all his angles and irregularities. He softened down all these asperities for Lilian; her gentle hand met nothing but the smoothest surface of lover-like humility.

Arthur was neither a practised nor a skilful hypocrite. With the world in general, he only put forth half his nature; and strong in his careless pride, he troubled himself but little about the curious speculations regarding the deeper secrets that lay hid beneath that cold


exterior. But with the little girl who now hung about him, who nestled up to his heart, and pouring out the whole of her artless confidence, seemed with her sweet eyes and winning gestures to invite his in return, it was different. He could not be harsh and sarcastic with her; could not talk of his favourite books and art, Lilian neither knew nor cared anything about them; besides, I fancy that true lovers, like the "lords of ladies intellectual," grow tired of "scientific conversation;" their books are each other's eyes, and their only literature is love-lore. So, as I said, Arthur had a good deal to hide, and a good many counter qualities to cultivate; the lion had lain down like a lamb, and the royal beast must tease his shaggy hair and tawny mane into the softest and fleeciest wool.

And little Lilian herself. Perfectly accustomed to piquant French gallantries and languid Italian sentimentalisms, she was flattered, delighted, and rather puzzled with the grand, chivalrous homage that she was receiving. If she had come but a few days ago, if she had taken the homage which I once called mine, before my

reluctant lips pronounced its sentence of dismissal, I must have hated her. And now, guiltless towards me, as I was forced to confess she was, I felt far more bitterly against her than against Arthur Leigh. Lilian was not selfish, but from infancy she had been the single and cherished darling of her home; her sympathy had, as it were, been thrown back upon herself, and now she was exclusively engrossed by the absorbing happiness of her first love. I thought that if she had been in my place, and I in hers, I could not have failed to see that my friend was weary and unhappy. I would have remembered that like vinegar upon nitre, so is he that singeth songs to a heavy heart. But Lilian saw nothing of this. She was not unfeeling, but she had never probed her own heart very deeply; and it was hardly to be expected that she could look below the surface of another's. She warbled her little melodies unceasingly into my ear; and of all ditties in the world, and of all listeners to select for her audience, surely kind fate might have spared me the ever-recurring mention of Arthur Leigh's name.

For it was of him that Lilian prattled, and I, her chosen friend, was, of course, her confidant.

Lilian was very fond of me, in a certain way. She still guarded a small corner of her heart for me; Arthur ranged at will over its rich preserves; and he might have had my poor little corner also, if he had claimed it. She chose my company when he was absent; but he was very rarely absent now. The ancient domestic reigned in undivided supremacy at the Grange; and his business in London seemed dismissed from his mind entirely. She used to hang about me in a pretty, caressing way; and not being at all demonstrative, at least, not in public, I was sometimes at a loss what to do with the white arms that were flung round my neck, and the dark, curly head that nestled on my shoulder. And regularly, at night, as soon as she had taken off her gay dress, with her flowers and costly trinkets, she would come to my room. I could very well have dispensed with these visitations; in her presence I dared not relax the curb behind whose stern, restraining pressure my swelling heart beat rebelliously. She



would curl herself up into my favourite easy chair, and talk till her voice grew indistinct, and her head fell upon her breast then, when I shook her up, she would protest that she *could* not, she *dared* not, go to her own room ; she was sure she should meet some one—she had told her maid to go to bed ; she did not like putting out her candle herself ; she would lie at the very furthest corner of the bed, if I would only let her sleep with me this one night more. Of course, I was obliged to yield a gracious consent, however unwilling I might be ; all the talk was of Arthur Leigh, and continued to remain so, in spite of my repeated protestations.

“ Arthur Leigh again ! ” I exclaimed impatiently, one night, when the invariable subject was started ; “ I wonder the very bats that flit past the window don’t learn to hoot out his name ! ”

“ They could not choose a prettier one ; but it should be sung by nightingales, not shrieked by bats, you unpoetical thing ! Oh ! Alice, is he not grand ? He has the *vrai air noble*. I call him the Chevalier Bayard, *sans*

peur et sans reproche, faithful in love as in war."

"Faithful in love! God save the mark," I muttered to myself; but Lilian's quick ear caught something.

"What, Alice?" she said, half rising from the couch on which she lay.

"Oh, nothing! I was only saying I have no doubt he is faithful in love; he has never yet been tested in war, I believe; and, indeed, I was not aware till this moment that he was in love."

"Alice! did I ever say he was?"

"Hush! not so loud, or Bayard may hear us; he may be watching his armour in the moonlight, according to the custom of knights; and it is natural that he should perform his vigils beneath his lady's chamber. I think I'll shut the window."

"You don't mean to say he's there!" Lilian exclaimed, bounding from the sofa, her curls and white wrapper streaming far behind her.

"Lie down, you little goose!" I answered, and pushed her back among the cushions. "Pray, do you expect him to serenade you

to-night? I can encourage no such doings in my room."

"Is he there, Alice? I must just have one peep at him."

"No, he is not there; he is where you ought to be—in bed. I hear him snoring."

"Snoring!" Lilian repeated in high disdain, "I am sure *he* does not snore."

"Does he not? Did his nurse tell you?"

"His nurse?"

"Yes; nurses are usually very conversant with their foster-children's peculiarities. I have seen his nurse; she's a very fine old lady."

"I do not know what you are talking about," Lilian said, crossly. "I'm sure *your* friend, Sir Montagu, is much more likely to snore than Arthur."

"I have no acquaintance with Sir Montagu's nurse, so I can't argue the point."

"What fun it would be to see you Lady Brook, Alice."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes. He is immensely rich, and I can see he admires you; besides, Arthur says so."

“ Arthur says so ?—does he ?”

“ Yes, he does, for I asked him.”

“ Then I wish you and Arthur would attend to your own affairs,” I exclaimed, in a great rage; “ and the next time that Mr. Leigh presumes to take such liberties with my name—”

“ Oh, Alice !” Lilian broke in, imploringly, “ I’m sure I did not mean to offend you. But you don’t like Arthur ; I wish I knew why.”

“ Because he does not like me, I suppose. ‘ We love those that love us,’ as we used to write in our copy-books. The sentiment is not very new, but it is perfectly true.”

“ But Arthur does like you, Alice.”

“ He does me great honour.”

“ He is always talking about my school-days, and if you were my friend, and what sort of a girl you were, and that sort of thing. It is not very interesting conversation. Do you know, at one time, I was almost inclined to be jealous of you ?”

“ You certainly were putting yourself to wilful pain. I hardly thought you would have selected *me* as an object of mistrust.”

“But that was not true, Alice,” she interrupted, eagerly, “if you are thinking of what you once told me about Honoria Harcourt. I asked Arthur myself.”

“And told him what I said, I suppose. Thank you. What did he say?”

“Something very like what you said of him a minute ago,” Lilian answered, with rather an embarrassed laugh.

“That he wished I would mind my own business. Very gentlemanly, indeed; I feel deeply indebted to you both.”

Here Lilian began to cry. Tears could not soften me. I had spent all mine on myself. I was silent, grim, and pitiless as fate. Lilian’s sobs ceased when she found I paid no attention to her.

“You are very unkind, Alice; I don’t know what has been the matter with you lately; you are quite changed.”

“Not so much as yourself. You have got far past me; that is why you do not find my society satisfactory. You are a fine lady, and a beauty; you have been courted, admired, and flattered, while I have sat at home poring

over books, or wandering about a dingy village. I wonder you are not ashamed to speak to such an unfashionable savage. Is Mr. Leigh not afraid that such rough contact may rub the down from his butterfly's wings?"

Lilian was sobbing again, but in anger this time. She gathered her draperies about her with the air of a tragedy-queen; and biting her red lips furiously, in her efforts to control her tears, marched grandly to the door.

"Now! now! you know it is of no use to quarrel with me; you'll want me to-morrow to stick the flowers in your hair, the way Mr. Bayard likes to see them. Come back; the ghost will be walking; it is sure to catch you by your long train, as you are disappearing into your room."

She suffered me to lead her back to the sofa, decidedly held in check by a wholesome fear of the spiritual phenomenon.

"It is not because you say disagreeable things, Alice, but it is the sneering way you have got lately, that I don't like. I know you

are very clever ; Arthur says you are ; and I told him I was very stupid and ignorant, but he said he did not care ; clever women are apt to be vicious."

" I'm sorry I don't please Mr. Leigh. Will you kindly enquire of him, from me, what my peculiar vice may be ?"

" Oh ! Alice, don't misunderstand me. Arthur thinks a great deal of you ; he says you have very fine artistic taste. He said that when he was showing me his sketches to-day. I knew nothing about them ; and, oh ! he did tire me when he talked about the pictures. He did not know, of course, for I pretended to be deeply interested. Have you ever seen his pictures ?"

" I have seen a few of them," I answered, with admirable gravity.

" And are they not beautiful ?" Lilian asked, enthusiastically.

" Very. His female heads are faultless. Now don't you think you had better go to bed ?"

Lilian's yawns were more eloquent than any verbal reply.

“ Now do, Alice,” she said, as she kissed me, “ be the same as you used to be ; lecture me as often as you like, scold me for any faults.”

“ It would be of little use, as there is some one at hand to undo my work, by telling you that you are perfect. First let me whisper something to you before you lie down.”

Lilian shook her head in reply.

“ Then you will promise to tell me as soon as ever it happens ?”

“ Perhaps it may never happen.”

“ Nonsense ! it will happen, and you will say ‘ yes.’ ”

“ Ought I not ?”

“ You ought to do exactly as you feel inclined. Good-night.”

Lilian pulled the bed-clothes about her, and was asleep before I had put out the candle.

The ingenious reader has doubtless already divined the nature of the question which I whispered with such modest secrecy into Lilian’s ear. This question was mooted on all sides at Sumnor Hall just now ; and if the

interesting young people themselves had cared at all about it, they might have enjoyed the pleasure of knowing that their contemplated union gave universal satisfaction. Miss Bul-land, who was an inveterate match-maker, and perfectly disinterested, since a coronet would not have tempted her to resign her comfortable independence, had "seen how it would be from the very first." The seer's gift comes to many people when the vision is before their eyes.

"Who would have thought it of Arthur Leigh?" she said to me, one day, in loquacious confidence; "such attention! such devotion! he is a perfect paragon of a lover. I'm sure such flattery is enough to turn any young lady's head."

"And heart, too, I think; Lilian's seems to be won."

"And yet, you would wonder what brought them together; but, I think, people always do marry for the sake of contrast. Arthur is just the sort of man to be an ideal hero to a lovely little beauty like your friend. Some of us fancied he was paying his addresses to you,

once; but, of course, that must have been a mistake; and, indeed, it would never have done; you are much too quiet for him. Miss Graham, on the contrary, brings him out wonderfully."

"Love works wonders," I remarked, oracularly.

"And after all, my dear, you have drawn the prize. Lightcliffe Chase could swallow up a dozen Granges."

"But Lightcliffe Chase will never swallow up me. It wants choicer fare; and I'm going to be an—I'm going to be like you, Miss Bulland."

"Well, my dear," the single lady returned philosophically, "I'm very comfortable, thank Heaven! but you have neither my good spirits, nor my good temper; and if you don't marry, I think, when you come to my years, you will hardly find yourself such an enviable person as I am."

I did not envy Miss Bulland, nor the life she led. With her maid and footman, her snug little income, her carriage when she was in London, with the best accommodation and

best company at the watering-places, which her soul loved ;—hers seemed to me to be but a poor life, after all. No husband, no child, no beloved one, on whom to concentrate the outgoing affection of her woman's nature ; dependent on unflinching good-humour, on untiring readiness to oblige, for her dearly-earned popularity ; it was but a selfish kind of affection that was bestowed upon her ; and I, in my vain philosophy, thought that I would rather sit solitary at home, in my own chimney-corner, than be a favourite with the world, that would drop me out of sight if my equable cheerfulness, or my powers of doing it service, failed me. But when we are young, we would fain be sought for ourselves, rather than for our qualifications ; it is only when we are adepts in the world's Exchange, that we learn to bring our credentials in our hands, and barter them cheerfully, and with business-like keen-sightedness, for as much as they are worth.

Lady Catherine alone withheld her approbation from Arthur Leigh's wooing ; and no one was sorry for her ladyship's discomfiture. Of all exhilarating spectacles, there is none which

affords more pure and unmixed satisfaction to the human mind, than the contemplation of an arrogant person "well taken down." Indeed, when we consider the humanizing influence which the misfortunes of our best friends not unfrequently work upon us, we may admit that the effect of our enemies' disappointments is something electric. Lady Catherine scowled ferociously on "that dear Arthur Leigh," now; and glared savagely at Lilian, under her bushy eyebrows: if a glance could have withered Miss Graham's beauty, she would have been fair to look upon no longer. "His Grace's" amiable daughter never spoke of her but as the "heiress," in sarcastic reference to mercenary designs on Arthur's part. She asked me, —yes, in her uncontrollable wrath, she even condescended to ask me,—if I thought Sir Mordant Graham knew of the artful plot that was laid against his innocent child; adding, that Mrs. Falkland's negligence in allowing such bare-faced fortune-hunting to be carried on under her eyes was most unjustifiable. I respectfully suggested that as this fortune-hunting was only apparent to her ladyship, I thought

Mrs. Falkland's blindness ~~must~~ be excused; and when she proceeded to throw out further insinuations against the honour of little Lilian's Paladin, I ventured to remind her that "the Grange was still a fine property;" and, still quoting herself, that "Arthur Leigh *was* a gentleman, though he had been in trade." Her ladyship was one of that not uncommon class of persons who fancy that remarks made in the presence of their menials and inferiors are not heard, at least not understood by those ignoble persons; and I think her astonishment at my unprincipled audacity fully equalled her indignation.

Honorina did not sleep upon a bed of roses during the period of her lady-mother's mental disquietude. Lady Catherine had awakened groundless hopes in the poor girl's mind; now she revenged upon the daughter, who, to do her justice, had tried her best to fulfil them, the failure of these hopes. I observe that in this strange world many very worthy people follow her ladyship's example. Surely pure disinterestedness is a myth. We plan schemes of aggrandizement for our friends, actuated by

genuine benevolence no doubt, but I think our own commission on the profits is rarely forgotten, else we would be sorry, not angry, when our Alnaschor's basket of brittle ware is broken.

Lilian Graham's were not the only matrimonial affairs which were discussed at present. It seemed odd that I, who had little enough thought of marrying or courtship, should be in some measure implicated in all the love-affairs which were going on. From whose brain the idea first originated, that Sir Montagu Brook had tendered his troth to me, I do not know; suffice it to say, such was the prevalent opinion. I received congratulations on the elevated fortune that awaited me, from all quarters, and in all tones of feeling, genuine cordiality excepted. Nor was it to be wondered at. None of these worthy people thought me as good as themselves. True, I was admitted, without a dissentient voice, into the pale of their daily occupations and amusements. They went much further (out of pure good nature) in the spirit of fraternization than Shylock, actuated by the strongest self-interest,

did in his dealings with his Christian rivals. They would not only walk and talk, but they would eat, drink, yea, and pray with me, but they would not marry with me; nor would they permit their friends to form such a mesalliance, if they could help it.

Sir Montagu did not care for me; still he did intend to do me the honour of marrying me. Miss Osborne had wounded him in his most assailable point, his vanity. He would revenge himself for the slight,—he would take a plebeian bride, one who, without fortune, family, or influence must need look up to him with unquestioning reverence; one who would have no will but his; to whom his lightest word would be as binding as the unalterable laws of the Medes and Persians. Then, he was doggedly obstinate; and the opposition he met—for all the ladies, with kindly interest in his welfare, did their best to save him—only confirmed his resolution.

I did not like Sir Montagu; he loved to command, and in an inferior nature like his the lust of power invariably develops itself in tyranny. He talked, but it was to please himself,

not me, of his position, his fine houses, his estates ; if he had been conversing with a girl whom he considered his equal, he would not have spoken so ; and that ever-present conviction served to make his attentions only the more disagreeable. Why did I not discourage them, then ? I tried to do so, but Sir Montagu was too obtuse ; he believed too thoroughly in his own pretensions, to comprehend the possibility of such an affront.

He had gone out for a ride one morning, with some of the gentlemen. Before he went, he asked me to accompany him on horseback the next day. I agreed.

“And alone,” he whispered, with a most insinuating smile, as he rose. “I have something to say particularly affecting the happiness of us both.”

This decisive remark completely took me by storm. I would have retracted my consent, if he would have stayed long enough to give me the opportunity ; and I bitterly repented the folly which had allowed him to address me in such a manner. I spent the whole forenoon bemoaning myself, till I was suddenly

disturbed in my unpleasant meditations. A card was put into my hand. I read "*Mr. Warren Hope.*" A pang of terror seized me. My first thought was of my uncle. It was long since I had heard from him—perhaps he was ill—dying. I ran down stairs, trembling and sick with fear

"Oh! Warren, what is it? Is uncle Rupert ill?" I exclaimed, in breathless eagerness.

Warren was standing with his back to me, surveying himself in the mirror. At the sound of my voice he turned round, cool, and self-possessed, a benign smile playing on his benevolent face.

"No," he answered; "but, really, it would be worth while to be ill, were it only to meet with such delightful sympathy. He is quite well; but, if he were dying, I am sure this artless proof of your affection would be an infallible elixir!"

I know nothing more mortifying than to be betrayed into an expression of unwonted emotion in the presence of a person who answers you with mockery instead of sympathy. I was angry with myself, angry with

his manner, doubly angry with his presence here at all.

“What do you want here, then?” I asked, very ungraciously.

“Can you not guess?” he returned, still speaking very blandly.

“I certainly won’t trouble myself with guesses on such an uninteresting subject,” I rejoined. “I’ll be obliged to you, if you’ll tell me at once what your business here is, and go away. I’m engaged.”

“You’ve been a long time away, Alice,” he went on, with ineffable sweetness. “Can you not understand that I have been longing to see you—that my impatience made a further delay intolerable?”

“No, I can’t,” I replied, bluntly; “and I don’t believe it. Why did you leave Hirst?”

“The ostensible reason of my journey is a business visit to London. As you perceive, I have just turned a little out of my way to see you.”

“You have forgotten your last conversation with me, Warren, I think; it was not friendly enough on either side, as far as I recollect, to

offer much promise of pleasure in the next meeting."

"I am glad you remember that conversation, Alice; I intend to repeat it again with better success on some future occasion. All's well that ends well. Our drama will end well some day, I trust. In the meantime, I am here on a chivalrous, I hope a quixotic errand. I have come to extinguish a host of imaginary rivals. Heaven grant that I may find them turn into windmills!"

"When you have made yourself quite as absurd as you possibly can, Warren, perhaps you will go away," I replied.

"Presently," he said, a look of anger clouding his face; "not till I have fulfilled the purpose I came for, though."

"What do you mean?"

"I want you to introduce me to your friends. Do you hear?" he said, raising his voice, for I had given him no answer.

"Perfectly; you need not alarm the house."

"Do it then, if you please, now."

"I shall certainly do nothing of the sort. No one here wants to make your acquaintance."

“I understand ; you do not think me good enough for the society *you* may adorn. You would do well to forget your pride, cousin Alice.”

“It is deeper rooted than you think ; your conclusion is right, though you’re mistaken about my motives. Here, as everywhere, your presence is disagreeable to me. I wish I was not obliged to acknowledge you as my cousin.”

I spoke angrily, I dare say. Warren’s countenance grew black.

“You are ashamed of me, of course. How could it be otherwise, considering whose unsullied name you bear ? *I* do not want to enter as a guest into any house under false pretences. I was not in earnest about an introduction to your friends, but I am now. You will present me to them. Refuse, and I’ll see your hosts myself, and tell them a story that, I have no doubt, you have taken good care to keep a secret. Ashamed to acknowledge me as cousin, are you ? As I live, I will never let you acknowledge any other man as husband !”

I would have answered him with daring

defiance ; but the door opened, and Mrs. Falkland entered the room. In an instant Warren's face, dark with anger, was beaming with engaging smiles. Mrs. Falkland looked at me ; so did he ; and I was most unwillingly compelled to perform the introduction.

Nothing could have exceeded my cousin's courteous demeanour. Mrs. Falkland, always enthusiastic, was evidently charmed ; and, to my horror, she instantly invited her new acquaintance to stay at Sumnor till after the wedding. He declined the invitation, with profuse expressions of gratitude. " He must be in London that night," he said ; " at Hirst Hall in three days ; they had missed their dear Alice so much," he further remarked, " the temptation of coming to see her, when he was so near, was quite irresistible."

Mrs. Falkland asked him to stay till the afternoon at least. To this request he returned a gracious consent ; the bell was rung ; and his carriage was ordered to be put up in the stables. The luncheon-bell rang at this moment. Warren would join the party, of course ; he offered Mrs. Falkland his arm, and I fol-

lowed them. Sir Montagu was waiting at the dining-room door ; he spoke to me, and Warren looked round ; Mrs. Falkland and he made way for us to pass ; and I felt that my cousin watched me till we had taken our seats.

When we were gathered round the table, I could not help comparing my cousin with the other young men of the party. I had always held his personal graces rather lightly. Since I had come to Sumnor Hall I had often been painfully conscious of my own inferiority to the high-bred, elegant women, so graceful in bearing, so perfectly polished in manner. Warren's acquaintance with the ways of civilized society was even less than mine : of course, I had prepared myself to feel thoroughly ashamed of my relative. Then I was bitterly and justly indignant against him ; and my anger would, doubtless, have led me to exaggerate his defects. But even my unfriendly eyes could detect no want of refinement in his bearing.

There is a certain perfect finish of manner, that, I think, is only co-existent with high birth, thorough breeding, and life-long

practice. It is the privilege of caste, and we look in vain for it amongst our order. Warren, in his unruffled serenity, his finely modulated voice, the unbroken repose when he was quiet, and the noiseless grace of his more active movements, was, I was obliged to confess, the nearest approach to this nameless perfection I had ever seen.

And then he was cleverer — there was more power about him, signs of a much wider and deeper practical experience than in most of the people round the table. The other men were handsomer, of a finer physical development, much more gay, *debonnaire*, and fluent; but Warren looked their master. He made himself very agreeable to every one, very brotherly to me. I think he wished to create the impression that we were on such perfectly good terms that the time for ceremonious civilities was long past between us. How I hated him!—and I was forced to wear a mask of cordiality. He suited himself to every one. He was a hard-working business man with Mr. Falkland; they discussed politics very ably; Mr. Falkland was

much interested in the mining question, and Warren gave him a great deal of practical and, I hope, valuable information. Warren's manner to women was rather peculiar—under another phase, of course, than the striking peculiarity which had so astonished me on our first acquaintance. He did not favour the ladies of Sumnor Hall with any of the remarkable expressions of sentiment with which he had answered my friendly greetings, when he first came to Hirst. He was very demure and deferential, his homage being tempered with a sort of respectful melancholy. Not the abstracted, self-engrossing melancholy which is so much in vogue amongst young men of the *blasé* school—it was the reverential sadness which bows us down in the presence of superior beings.

Women do not like to be told they are divinities, but we never object to have the possibility of our angelhood gently insinuated. That was what Warren did to-day; I think that the Peri at the gates of Paradise must have worn the sort of expression that he assumed. Everybody was charmed with him.

Helen Falkland was sentimental; and my cousin's expressive sadness struck a kindred chord in her nature. I had never seen her sweet blue eyes look so languishing since the morning when they had filled with bidden tears, in the ungrateful task of softening Arthur Leigh. Little Lilian laughed and chatted to him with perfect unreserve, stealing mischievous glances at me from time to time. Lady Catherine had, I am sure, never in her life received such full and unquestioning allegiance; consequently, she was unwontedly gracious. I don't fancy that the men were quite so charmed with this calm, imperturbable hero, nor did Warren seem in the least abashed by their want of cordiality. Only Sir Montagu appeared to look on him with curious interest; Warren returned his scrutiny, he listened to every word that the baronet addressed to me, and watched eagerly to catch my embarrassed answers to confidences more than usually tender and impressive.

At last we rose from table, some of the gentlemen remaining, Sir Montagu and Warren amongst them. Then, the mantle of War-

ren's great glory fell upon me. The ladies gathered round me, flattered him, raved about him, maddened me with questions. "He was so clever, so charming, so delightfully peculiar! Had he any secret sorrow?" Helen was sure "something must be preying on his mind;" would I not try to persuade him to return to Sumnor Hall, after he had finished his business in London? "What a pity that he should be oppressed by the cares of business! So exquisitely refined he was, they were sure such occupations must be most uncongenial to his nature!"

I listened to this meaningless chatter with complex feelings. Of late my social standing had been somewhat questionable at Sumnor Hall. None of us like to be looked down on. Our philosophy may be great; but it generally fails in the attempt to lay a basis of solid self-respect, which no amount of polite impertinence can shatter. Warren had redeemed my credit; I was mortified at the false pride which made me rejoice in my suddenly reinstated popularity; mortified that it should be he who was to confer this obligation upon me. He had insulted.

me on the point on which of all others I was most sensitive; and he was still here, talking to Sir Montagu. I knew that no such trifling object as his own family honour would weigh against his obstinate and malevolent passion. I did not care for myself; I had never acknowledged the disgrace with which the world had branded us, but I rebelled at the thought of my father's memory being degraded by Warren. I hated him with hatred too deep for words, but if I could have purchased his forbearance by a look, I would not have accepted it at his hands.

He and Sir Montagu were walking together on the strip of turf that bordered the grey base of the house. The curiosity of the ladies was gratified, and I was left alone. If I had approached the window, I could have heard every word they said. They remained out about half-an-hour; Sir Montagu looked flushed and angry when he came in, Warren composed as usual; it was only my practised eye that could detect any sign of elation. Sir Montagu threw himself down on a chair in a distant corner, with a very unwonted companion for him—a book.

Warren moved about the room, courteous and affable; but he did not speak to me, nor did he look my way till it was time for him to go. He listened with polite gratitude to the regrets of the assembled company; took a very elaborate farewell of me, dwelling at some length on the loneliness of Hirst Hall, in my absence. There were a good many people standing about; I observed that they whispered and smiled to each other, and looked at me; but I was too desperate; my mind was too full of a growing purpose to heed them. When he was gone, I went straight back to the place where Sir Montagu had been seated, immersed in his studies. He was not there; I pushed open the door of an inner room; he was stamping up and down, in a state of great excitement, muttering to himself, and, I think, garnishing his conversation with a few choice specimens of Warren's favourite lexicon of blasphemy. He looked exceedingly discomposed on my entrance; I, on the contrary, never felt less nervous.

“I think you and my cousin seem to have

improved your acquaintance very fast, Sir Montagu," I said.

"Ah, yes, Miss Hope," he answered, hurriedly; "he seems a very good fellow; by Jove! a capital good fellow; on my honour now, a doosid good fellow."

"What was he telling you in the garden? You seemed very much interested."

"Interested—was I? Really, Miss Hope, I don't know; upon my word now, I can't say what we were talking about."

"I fear I shan't be able to ride with you to-morrow, Sir Montagu; you wished to speak to me 'alone, and on a subject affecting the happiness of us both;' there is no opportunity like the present."

"That was all very well then," he muttered uneasily, "but it's different now; I did not know then what I do now."

"What do you know now?"

"I believe you know what I mean as well as I do, Miss Hope; I would rather not tell you, but if you will insist upon an explanation, it is not my fault. You had better let the subject drop; I went further than I should

have gone; that's all; it's not fair to press me."

"If I understand you rightly, you meant to do me the honour of making a proposal of marriage to me."

"Well, I did. I don't mean to deny it. You know I liked you, Miss Hope; I might have looked as high as I liked for a wife, but I would rather have had you than any woman I ever saw, though I might have married a duke's daughter."

"A duke's grand-daughter, I think you mean,"—but the shaft was lost on Sir Montagu.

"I might have married where I chose," he repeated; "I knew you were beneath—nobody particular, I mean; they told me that over and over again," he added, with a short laugh.

"Who told you?"

"The women, of course—Lady Catherine, Mrs. Falkland, and that set. They didn't want me to marry you," he went on, with exquisite *naïveté*, "they said your friends were coal-merchants, or some such infernal low thing. They wanted me for one of their own

girls. I don't care; I would have married you, in spite of them all, if it hadn't been for to-day—and—and, Miss Hope," he continued, getting tremendously excited, "I'm very sorry, but it must be all over between us; I never regularly committed myself, you know; and if I had, I wouldn't have considered myself bound to hold to it."

"To hold to what?"

"Why, to the engagement, of course," Sir Montagu cried, aghast, as if he thought I had been suddenly bereft of reason.

"There never would have been an engagement, Sir Montagu. If you had offered me a diadem, I should have refused it, as decidedly as I would refuse your baronetcy now. Hush! I know you've never asked me; that's what you were going to say. And your look says also, that you don't believe any woman would be such a fool as to reject such substantial glory. What I tell you is true, nevertheless. I don't want to know what Warren Hope said to you; he persuaded you, I suppose, that an alliance with me would be a blot on the stainless escutcheon of the

Brooks : I shall never forget the distinguished compliment you have paid me, and I wish you joy, and better success in your next wooing."

I need not say, that before many days were over, every guest in the house knew the story which had lost me a title. What that story was, how garbled and exaggerated, I never cared to enquire. I did not blame Sir Montagu ; he was obliged to account in some way for the cessation of his attentions to me. I did hear two young guardsmen (very young, of course, the ingenuous creatures were) call him a "d—d sneaking scoundrel," for not allowing it to be understood that I had refused him. But in experience and worldly wisdom I was twenty years older than these gallant heroes, though they were both *blasé*, and I knew better than to look for such Quixotic generosity. Sir Montagu retired for a brief space to his Yorkshire estates, where, doubtless, a loyal tenantry basked in the sunshine of their chief's presence.

Arthur Leigh was the only individual at Sumnor Hall who changed much in his bearing towards me. Since our engagement was

broken off, we had only interchanged the most distant civilities. Now, he was gentle, kind, and untiringly attentive. But I was hard and bitter, and I repelled his advances with fierce disdain. I had felt no indignant pride for myself when he slighted my love, but it swelled strong and rebellious in my heart when I thought of my father. I would have left Sumnor Hall immediately, had it not seemed like the confession of a disgrace, which I was too weak to bear.

I bid defiance to every one. I would have been almost glad if any one had insulted me, so that I might have given way to the fierce passion within me, by hurling back scorn with all the weight of wrath of which I was capable. But every one was perfectly civil. Arthur seemed pained only, not annoyed by my rudeness ; and I sometimes wondered if it was in compliance with his wish, that Lilian rarely left my side in public, even when he was present, and when it was natural that they should wish to be together. In spite of all, I felt lonely and unhappy ; I had a sort of faint, weary longing for the

wedding-day to be over, not to be at home, for Warren was there, and wherever he was, that place was hateful ; but because I feared that my powers of endurance might fail me. All the active misery of my life had come upon me at Sumnor Hall ; I was wearying to escape from a place which must be connected for ever with such painful recollections.

CHAPTER V.

“Those wedding bells! those wedding bells!”

HOOD.

“Lass mein Aug’ den Abschied sagen,
Den mein Mund nicht nehmen kann.”

GOETHE.

It is Helen’s wedding-day: one of those glorious autumn mornings, when the golden flush of summer has deepened into more gorgeous beauty. The bridal day of earth is past, but she is more heavenly fair, in the perfect maturity of her motherhood, than when, on her marriage morning, she wore her green robe, and her June crown of roses.

My bed-room looks into the orchard. The waxen blossom on the trees, pearly white, or glowing with roseate blushes, has long since disappeared; but the rich promise has only died

to live again in the abounding luxuriance of the harvest. Soft, velvety peaches, half-hidden by their clustering leaves, bask against the southern wall, the red bloom on their sunlit cheeks burning purple. Ripe, shining apples, golden and streaked with glossy red, hang heavy on the overladen boughs, or drop silently, borne down by their own weight. Through the half-raised windows of the vinery, I can see the rich clusters of blooming grapes, and I think of the vines of Eshcol, and of the rare samples of the goodly Promised Land, which the faithful spies brought home: their wearied eyes must have rested on just such luxuriant masses of purple and green.

But we have little time for the picturesque, though hours might have been spent studying the harmony of the many-coloured trees. Hardly a leaf has fallen yet; but the summer tint of verdure is gone, and the dark, old woods rise glorious in their imperial pomp, crimson, scarlet, and deep brown. In such a flood of rich colouring would Paul Veronese have delighted to dip his magic brush. The solitary black beeches, sombre, while the delicate greens

of summer were yet untouched, are a relief to the eye now, from that exuberance of brilliant hues. And we have little time for moralising on the transitoriness of earthly beauty, though the short-lived summer flowers have already begun to drop, and the fallen rose-leaves lie like a white carpet upon the dark earth. It is the wedding-day, as I have said, and no one, to whose happy fortune it has fallen to be the inmate of a house in which that domestic tragi-comedy is performed, needs to be told that we were all engrossed by the preparations for the ceremony. I was dressed long before any one else, and I went to Helen's room, where I remained till we started for church, in spite of numerous flying visits from Lilian, beseeching me to come and give my opinion on her dress, bonnet, the most becoming distribution of her curls, and so forth.

The reader knows that I tried to bear Lilian no ill-will, that I listened patiently to her confidences, and gave her as much of my company as she desired. Still she was my rival — my successful rival also, or else the argument would have been null ; for, in general,

I think we are inclined to be very tenderly affectionate to the dear friends whom we have supplanted ; we chuckle over them in secret ; and it is only natural that our soul's laughter should express itself in benevolent smiles. Lilian was my rival ; and there were times when her presence was perfectly unbearable to me ; it was so this morning ; and when she came to Helen's room for the half-dozen time to inveigle me away, I told her sharply to be gone, and not to trouble me.

We were all ready at last, and Miss Bulland, on whose active shoulders devolved the superintendence of the day's proceedings, inspected the bridesmaids like a troop of soldiers, and pronounced herself tolerably well satisfied with the appearance of Helen's maiden attendants. I did not want to drive to church with Lilian, so I remained upstairs till all the ladies had gone. Master Alfred alone remained to escort me. He was very grand indeed, in a shining white waistcoat, with a gold chain, a perfect dressing-case of jewellery tastefully disposed about him. I thought, at first, that it would be rather a bore to seek out subjects of con-

versation suited to his tender years, but I did that precocious young gentleman an injustice, which the advanced state of his intellect little merited. He was the sole representative of the family dignity in the carriage; and Master Alfred cherished rather extensive ideas concerning the family dignity: Sumnor Hall must have been a rare social school, judging from the extraordinary development of this little lad's opinions on the subject of rank, and the advantages of rank and position.

"I knew everybody would be out," he exclaimed, in unbounded delight, as he looked on the crowds of well-dressed tenants and shouting children who lined the road; "we are the great people here, you know, Miss Hope. Now, if you will just look out of that window, I will sit at this; and mind, bow to them, it gratifies them, and they all know me; they are sure to cheer when they see me pass."

I complied, at least so far that I took the seat which the young master of ceremonies pointed out for me; but I found it much more amusing to watch his manœuvres

than to cultivate popularity. He might have been a royal prince, from the condescension of his smiles and bows. His velvet cap never rested from describing graceful circles in the air. If courtesy could have won hearts, I think all Sumnor must have been ready to die for the young chieftain. But, alas! for the ingratitude which is too often the sole recompense of our good offices, poor Master Alfred's blandishments were suddenly brought to untimely conclusion. A pair of stout corduroyed peasant boys about his own age, who, I believe, had "licked" the young aristocrat in more than one fishing excursion, when he had waived his dignity for the sake of the forbidden sport, made contumelious grimaces, and uttered derisive howls when he honoured them with a salute of extra solemnity. Alfred shut the window with a snap, and drew the curtain in immense indignation.

"A set of boors!" he exclaimed; "wait till I go to Eton; I'm going to Eton next half, you know; I'll learn to fight there. All Eton fellows fight, and I'll make the little beggars feel the weight of this arm;" and he

pulled up his jacket-sleeve, and held the round, childish wrist close to my eye for inspection.

“It’s a very terrible arm, Alfred; I hope you won’t hurt them very much.”

“No—I’ll not punish them very severely—but I must give them a lesson. Such insolence is quite intolerable; but you can expect nothing else, now-a-days; the levelling spirit of the age is perfectly horrible.”

I knew that remark well; Mr. Falkland and Mr. Harcourt were both equally decided about the levelling spirit of the age; and as for Lady Catherine, to hear her talk, it might have been supposed that the people were in flat rebellion against all that is noble, and of good repute in the land.

“All that you see, as far as ever you can look, belongs to papa,” said Alfred, in a moment or two, during which his wrath had quite subsided, and he waved his arms to give expression to the magnitude of the prospect: “and it will all be Frank’s some day.”

“How would you like to be Frank, to have such a fine place?” I asked.

“The place would be very well,” he answered, musingly; “but I don’t know. No—I don’t think I would like to be Frank. I’ll tell you something, Alice; but you’ll promise never to tell anybody, will you?”

I vowed eternal secrecy.

“Then I think Frank is rather a fool,—don’t you?”

I did not express my acquiescence, whatever I might feel. Alfred did not wait for an answer.

“But he’ll make a very good country gentleman when he marries and settles down. He’s booked for May, you know. Now, she’s a very nice girl; but she would not do for me exactly.”

“Why not?” I asked.

“She’s prettyish, and she’s a dear little thing; but she wants style—style is what I admire in a woman, Miss Hope. Now look at Florence Osborne,—isn’t she a beauty? with her dark hair, and her handsome sloping shoulders. And the way she comes into a room too!” the young connoisseur continued, kindling as he spoke,—“I declare it’s quite

grand to see the way she makes her dress sweep! Why don't you make your dress sweep?—why don't all ladies? I suppose," he added, reflectively, "it must depend on their legs."

My repeated bursts of laughter surprised, but did not altogether please my young companion. I answered as gravely as I could, that Miss Osborne's dress did sweep most gracefully, but that I rather suspected the art came by nature, and an imitation would not be at all elegant. Master Alfred thought I might possibly be right; then he suddenly continued:

"But I tell you who's a beauty, though I don't say she's such a stunner as Miss Osborne; and that's Miss Graham. I think, if it was of any use, I could be jealous of Arthur Leigh; but, of course, no girl could resist Arthur. When I'm a man, I'll behave just like him. I'll pay no attention to girls, and they're sure all to be in love with me."

"Is everybody in love with your friend Mr. Leigh?"

"They all would be if he gave them any

encouragement; and I can tell you what," he went on, nodding his head sagaciously, "a great many more are in love with him than he cares anything about; that stupid Honoria Harcourt was; and, oh! Alice, I wish you could hear me tease him about Miss Graham, it would make you die of laughing."

I thought that an excess of mirth on that subject would hardly endanger my life.

"You seem to be on very intimate terms with Mr. Leigh, Alfred."

"I should just think I am; he's the jolliest fellow in the world; I can give you no idea of him,—such a brick! and so good-natured! I wish he had fallen in love with you. I like you better than Miss Graham. It would have been such fun to have had you for a neighbour."

This was flattering, but not agreeable; however, at this juncture we arrived at the church, and my friend's remarks came to an abrupt conclusion. It seemed very beautiful to me—that marriage-service, which I now witnessed for the first time. And a deep, almost divine revelation came over me, in

which I seemed to catch glimpses of the sacred, unswerving truth, by whose holy maxims we ought to regulate our daily lives, which we often neglect altogether, or, with cowardly, futile attempt to make peace with our conscience, distort to fit our own purposes.

Seeing Helen stand with her lover at that marriage-altar, and hearing these solemn vows, in which, with mutual faith and good intent, they pledged themselves to love and cling to each other through all changes of fortune, I remembered that so Arthur Leigh and I might have stood, and have taken such vows upon ourselves ; and I shuddered to think that we would both have been forsworn. I might have fulfilled my part of the bond—he could not ; and we would both have acted falsely, for the secret of that fatal inability would have been palpable to us both. And yet, how I had had to wrestle with my heart before I could break the bond ! I had refused to see the truth, deceiving myself with the vain hope of happiness in the end.

I remember that Professor Teufelsdröck, in

one of his quaint fancies, pictures a scene of courtly pomp—king on his throne, councillors at the board, gold sticks and gold-laced lacqueys in waiting. Suddenly, by a transformation more miraculous than any that ever entered the brain of pantomimic artist, crown and royal mantle, peers' robes and ermine, plush !—Oh ! heaven ! what an eccentric professor !—every stitch of human apparel falls from the astounded wearers, and every shivering son of Adam stands face to face with his brother man ; and only by royal speech and royal thought—not by jewelled diadem and furred mantle—shall you know the king from his majesty's *valet de chambre*

My imagination carried me further, and I thought that, if we were stripped of our robe of flesh, and our naked souls, with all their hidden loves and hatreds, their secret jealousies and artfully-veiled ambition, unmasked, confronted each other, and read each other's purposes as clearly as their own, what astonishing revelations there would be, and how widely altered our mutual relations would prove ! We carry guilty secrets in our breasts ; and

when I heard that awful opening charge, I thought how many listen to these tremendous words in silence, when silence is perjury. Not before men, but before the tribunal of God—before the bar of their own consciences.

I did not take the bride and bridegroom before me as the text of my gloomy moralizing. Helen was sincere as far as she could be ; she had been in love a great many times. She had sent out a good many heart-ventures, which had ended in shipwreck ; but what remained of the treasure was pure, virgin gold. Love must be faithfully dealt with ; and, like the talents in the hands of the good servants, it may bring in ten times its own value. But, speculate rashly, and the rich gains you anticipate will end in loss. If a girl's heart is frittered away in idle flirtation, it is not always her fault ; it is the fault of the world, which offers her no better pastime than such trifling.

Lilian stood beside me, and I think she knew Arthur Leigh was looking at her, though she never lifted her eyes. I did, and I read that glance for her, which she was too timid to in-

terpret for herself. I recognized in it the utter impossibility of my own marriage to him ; and yet it was hard that our paths in life must lie separate, that fate forbade him to be happy with me, yet intertwined my happiness so inextricably with his, that where he had been dissatisfied, I must have been miserable.

Hard too, and yet I would not have had it otherwise, that I must love him still ; yes, never so much as now, when pride and womanly dignity bade me hide the feelings which it would have broken my heart to drive out. I knew it could not last ; I only asked for a little respite. When the time came that I dared not think of him longer, but as the remembrance of a glad dream, when he was married to Lilian, I felt that my will would be equal to my duty ; I would crush out my love, and with it the hope and gladness of my life, but not yet ; the idol to which I had bowed down was so noble and beautiful, and I *must* cast it down from its high estate ; but not yet ; and once again, the imploring cry broke from my heart—not yet.

Arthur would marry Lilian, and they would be happy. He loved, and, what was necessary to the permanence of a love like his, he was fascinated with her. It is a dangerous risk for a woman to trust her happiness to a love so strongly excited by imagination; but I trusted that in Arthur's affection for her there was a sure foundation of regard, and that it would endure, even though the superstructure should fade, like "the cloud-capped palaces" which the enchanter's wand called into transitory life. And for my own future? I was going home, to my uncle's silence or cynicism, to the *agrémens* of my cousin Warren's continual society; to Harry's murmuring letters and unsatisfactory visits, to the collieries, the dreary, blighted country walks, and—that was all—yes, all. But then, I was looking on the dark side of my life. I painted it in its blackest hues. I "turned each cool grey shadow into a world of fears," and I refused to look to the East, where the sun was rising; or to the West, where shone the moon and her evening star. But, "sufficient to the

day is the evil thereof," I thought, as the carriage stopped, and the long, dragging hours of festivity which were to be endured, before night folded her wearied children in her arms, rose up in grim procession before me.

The wedding guests were scattered in gay groups about the drawing-room, or walked to and fro on the terraces and the lawn. I took Miss Ross's arm, and we wandered about together. Alfred came to us, and whispered to me in an awful whisper, "That's the Marquis of St. Omers, and there is the Marchioness too!"

I followed the direction of his eyes till they rested upon a tall, handsome, fresh-looking gentleman, very like the well-known portrait of the "Squire," presented to him by the united subscriptions of his grateful tenantry. Her ladyship, the Marchioness, was a fair Saxon beauty, slightly *embonpoint*, very graceful and high-bred. Their presence was decidedly ornamental, and, of course, extremely gratifying.

Miss Ross had only returned to Sumnor the evening before; and as we walked, most of the

inmates of the house came up to welcome her back ; among others, Mr. Arthur Leigh, with Miss Lilian Graham hanging on his arm. Arthur smiled his usual frank, shall I say rather self-satisfied, smile, and held out his hand. Miss Ross gave him the tips of her fingers, and bowed very haughtily. She looked so severe, and Mr. Leigh looked so discomfited, that I could not help laughing. Miss Ross vouchsafed a scrutinizing look at Lilian, and we walked away.

I cannot undertake to be a very faithful recorder of the proceedings of the breakfast ; I mean, of the proceedings of the titled and honourable exclusives, and, of course, it is in them alone that the genteel reader is interested. These distinguished individuals, in company with the " Massive Service of Golden Plate," occupied a cross-table at the head of the room ; Miss Ross and I meekly took our seats at the lowest end of the board ; but we were not rewarded for our humility, for the master of the feast never dreamt of such a thing as bidding us go up higher. It was a very slow and stupid affair, and I was heartily glad when it

was over. Miss Ross asked me to come to her room to rest; I was tired, and it was a great relief to escape from the hum of voices down stairs. She sat down to her work, and, for some time, the monotonous one, two, three, as she counted the stitches of her tapestry, was the only interruption to the silence. I looked out of the window. The scene was like one of Watteau's pictures; there was a band playing at intervals in the gardens, and clusters of handsome gentlemen and finely dressed ladies strolled about the lawn, or drew their gilt chairs into circles.

The Marquis sat with Mrs. Falkland under a fine spreading elm. Mr. Falkland, with the Marchioness and Lady Catherine, walked together; Sir Montagu Brook had returned to his allegiance, and looked especially delighted with the gracious smiles which the dark Florence bestowed upon him. Then the master of Leigh Grange appeared, with little Ialian clinging to him. I saw him bend down towards her, and point to a quiet shady walk, with expressive gestures. She laughed, shook her head, then seemed to consent, and they

walked away in the direction he had indicated.

“He would think that I had been complaining of him, Miss Ross, when you were so cold,” I said, turning into the room.

“Who, my dear?” she asked, calmly; and for the moment, I had really forgotten that “he” might have a wider signification in her eyes than in mine.

“Miss Ross, I want to talk to you. No—go on with your work; I don’t want you to look at me; you were quite right when you told me that I should not come to the school-room at nights.”

“But you would not listen to me. You were angry when I warned you.”

“People always are when they get advice they don’t mean to follow. You know what the poem says—

‘The prophet of good or ill
Meets hate from the creatures he serveth, still.’

It’s always the way—but I did listen to you; and I was coming one night to beg your pardon for being so rude. You were not

here—and what do you think was the consequence of your absence?”

“My dear, how can I tell? Are you jesting, or are you in earnest?”

“I’m sure I don’t know myself; but are you not anxious to hear the result of your infidelity to Beethoven?”

“I think I can guess it; but you may tell me.”

“Spare my lacerated feelings! You may imagine what an enraptured idiot I made of myself, and how I exulted in spirit over you and your suspicions. Well! the sweet youth was only moonstruck after all; he came back to his senses in the morning.”

“Do I understand you right?” Miss Ross asked, much bewildered; “did Mr. Leigh really refuse to fulfil his engagement the next morning?”

“Not quite so fast as that; you remember the night he came home from London?”

“Yes; and I distrusted him, from that hour.”

“So he perceived; and a pretty temper his lordship was in with me about it; I forget

whether he swore at me or not; I rather think he did use a little forcible language before he asked me how I was; I should have led a charming life if I had married him, should I not, Miss Ross?"

"You may thank heaven for your escape from such a fate."

"But I can't. And he's not a bad man, Miss Ross, he did his best to love me; he would have married me. It was I who broke off the engagement; he would not hear of it at first, not for, oh! not for a long time—not for full four and twenty hours; then he saw Lilian Graham, and then he could not even wait to be off with the old love, before he was whispering soft speeches to the new divinity. But I have not broken my heart, as you see; and if ever I am engaged again, I'll put on my bonnet, and go straight to church as soon as the affair is arranged. Fickle people should have no time allowed them to change their minds; and all men are fickle, are they not?"

"I should be sorry to think so;" and I heard Miss Ross sigh faintly as she spoke.

My curiosity was on the *qui vive*. I sprang

from my seat, and pulled away her work, begging her, with many prayers, to tell me all about it. She evaded my enquiries for some time ; but I was urgent ; and she told me an interesting tale. Let me premise, first, that Miss Ross was an interesting person. I have spoken of her as Arthur Leigh's senior ; but then, Arthur Leigh was quite a young man, and I choose to call Miss Ross quite a young woman. She is a young woman still, though ever so many years have gone over her head since she was governess at Sumnor Hall ; and her heart will be fresh and young, even though she should die a centenarian. Hers was a very simple love-story. She was engaged—had been engaged for years ; but her lover, a clergyman, was poor, and her own riches had taken to themselves wings, and flown away. She had prior duties, she told me ; and I guessed hers was the history of many a good and brave woman—wasting her strength, her youth—beholding the possible future of happiness receding ever more and more distant—in order that the selfish and idle might not be startled from their sleep of easy

luxury. She changed the subject very soon.

“And it is on that little ogling, flirting butterfly, is it, that Mr. Leigh has bestowed his valuable affections?”

“Dear Miss Ross! is that darling Lilian you speak so disrespectfully about?”

“Is she your darling? I did not know that.”

“She was my darling,—and, on principle, I try to think so still. Pious people, you know, when they are in a bad humour, delude themselves into the belief that they are not angry, only hurt; and I, following this Christian example, encourage the amiable fallacy that I don't bear the least ill-will to the beloved friend who has supplanted me. I'm Esau, Miss Ross; but we are better bred in these degenerate times than they were in the grand Old Testament days. We don't cry out against Jacob with an exceedingly loud and bitter cry when he takes away our blessing; we cherish unexpressed malice and hatred in our hearts; and we slay him with words, not with weapons of war.”

The entrance of darling Lilian herself at this juncture brought my eloquence to a summary conclusion. She came in fresh and smiling, as usual, flushed with exercise, and, perhaps, with something besides; for had she not just left Arthur Leigh? Miss Ross scrutinized her coldly from head to foot. Lilian had a happy gift of never perceiving when her company was not exactly desired; perhaps it was because she was so accustomed to be courted that she could not comprehend the possibility of the opposite contingency. She nodded patronizingly, but quite kindly, to Miss Ross. Lilian was the only child and heiress of Sir Mordaunt Graham, and she could not help it, if she was rather condescending to a "poor governess."

"What a fortunate chance it was that I found you here, Alice. I could not live through that horrid dinner-party, so I excused myself to Mrs. Falkland; and I think she is not sorry, because there is such an immense party already. I'm come to carry you off to my room, and we'll sit cosily there, till it's time to dress for the ball."

“ You have come to your *dernière ressource* just a little too late. I’m going to stay here.”

“ Then I’ll stay too. May I not, Miss—” here Lilian looked appealingly at me—“ Miss Moss ?”

“ Ross !” that lady corrected, quietly ; “ certainly, you may stay here. Alice, my dear, I promised Mrs. Falkland to meet her, in her room, at this hour,”—and Miss Ross glided away, in a very stately fashion.

“ What a disagreeable woman !” Lilian remarked, as soon as the door was closed ; “ and how very proud and lofty she is ! Nobody would say she was a governess, would they ?”

“ If you mean that it is an exceptional thing to find a governess a lady, I agree with you that nobody would.”

“ Now you are cross, and I am sure I did not mean to say anything against your *new* friend. But I am sure you must have noticed how unpleasant she was to Mr. Leigh.”

“ Did he notice it ?”

“ Yes, I’m sure he did ; and I don’t think he was at all well pleased. He evidently did

not like to say anything about it ; but I was determined to know the reason."

" Well ! and what did he say ?"

" He very nearly got angry,—just think of that ! I'm sure he could get into a fine rage if anybody provoked him ; and he said, when I wanted an excuse for abusing him, I ought to go and ask Miss Ross for his character. What can she know about him ?"

" Something very outrageous, I make no doubt ; and, of course, you said you would ask her immediately."

" How do you know that ?" Lilian asked, laughing.

" I judge from precedents."

" What are precedents ?"

" You had better ask Mr. Leigh. Where did you go with him to-day ?"

" Just where everybody else did, I suppose," Lilian answered.

" No, you did not, for I was watching you out of the window."

" Oh ! Alice, what a shame !"

" To sit at the window ? I was very much entertained. If you were ashamed to walk

alone with Mr. Leigh in the chestnut avenue, you ought not to have gone."

"I'm not ashamed of it, Alice," Lilian broke out impetuously; "and you are in one of your disagreeable moods to-day; and it is your favourite amusement to make insinuations against Mr. Leigh."

"Well, we won't quarrel about him. He's tall enough to fight his own battles. What did he say to you?"

"What absurd questions you ask! What should he say to me?"

"Yes—what should he say to you?—that is just the question. Pray, has he said it yet?"

I do not know how the suspicion which prompted the enquiry entered into my mind. I had never thought unworthily of Arthur Leigh before; but was it possible that he could be trifling with Lilian, as—no, more guiltily than he had trifled with me.

"I won't tell you anything!" Lilian answered, pouting, "at least, I mean I have nothing to tell. What do you mean to wear

to-night? I have got a new dress from Paris. I mean to enjoy myself thoroughly; and I intend to get up a violent flirtation with everybody I dance with."

"Thank you," I answered, with much gravity.

"What have you to thank me for?"

"Simply for the amusement you intend to afford me. I shall sit in a corner by myself all night. Miss Ross won't be there, and I shall have no partners to flirt with, were I ever so much disposed to distinguish myself in such a line. Now, I shall have the pleasure of looking at you; it will be as entertaining as private theatricals."

"I believe, if you were to see your best friends killed, Alice, it would amuse you—that is, if they were to die funnily," Lilian retorted, angrily.

"I was not aware that there was any question of killing in the present case. Duels are quite out of date, or I would fancy you were going to set your rivals by the ears. What is the matter? Don't cry, else your eyes will lose half their brilliancy. Who are you going

to flirt with?—and who are you going to make jealous?—for I understand that is the amiable motive for flirtations in general.”

“ You will be shocked when I tell you,” Lilian said, with a laugh ; “ but then, you are such a prude ; I want to make Arthur Leigh jealous. Oh ! it would be such a triumph ! I believe he likes me ; but he would let me go to-morrow, if he thought I would demur about accepting him. I would accept him, and he knows that as well as I do ; but I should like to make him just the least bit jealous. Do you think I could ? ”

“ Indeed I do not.”

“ Then I'll let you see you are very much mistaken.”

“ Don't be a vain little goose ! It is a matter of perfect indifference to me whether Mr. Leigh chooses to enact a modern Othello or not, and it is hardly worth while losing your lover for the sake of convincing me of what I don't care about. You might possibly annoy him very much ; but if he saw you were acting at him, it is my belief that you would see or hear very little more of him. Now, if you will

quietly think over your intentions for a little while, I'll dress myself, and I'll come back in time to superintend your grand toilette."

Lilian's room was littered, as usual, when I came back ; and her perplexed maid (how sincerely I pitied that luckless Abigail !) was evidently driven to the verge of insanity through the freaks of her young mistress. I saw, at a glance, that she had been made to alter all the trimmings in the Parisian ball-dress, and that it was now her pleasing duty to restore flowers and ribbons exactly to their original positions. The half-distracted creature looked at me with eyes of mute thankfulness, when I entered the room. I had mediated more than once in her behalf. I wonder, is it an essential element of female nature to tyrannize over the lady's maid ? Lilian's cheeks were flushed, and her eyes burned with eager excitement, as she issued her directions.

"What is all this ?" I asked, in the most strong-minded manner I could assume. "Your dress was perfect ; you've done your best to spoil it ; so leave Martha alone now, and don't do any more mischief."

"I've thought it over, Alice," she whispered.

"Well, and what is your final conclusion?"

"To leave the flirting alone; but I may dance, may I not?"

"I suppose the ball is given for the purpose of dancing; why should you not?"

"He does not, you know; do you think he will mind?"

"I don't think he has any business with what you do; dance all night, of course, and enjoy yourself."

Lilian's toilette was completed within five minutes of two hours; the sternest cynic might have pardoned her vanity, as she stood before the mirror in a rich white satin, with lace floating in clouds about her, and diamonds flashing on her neck and arms. Still I could not help being amused with the exulting sigh which she softly breathed; no words could have expressed satisfaction so absorbing, so intense. I got up, and stood opposite to her. I suppose I had my vanity too, only mine was bitter, while hers was sweet; and I did not like to stand by her side, only to pay an

enforced and involuntary tribute to Arthur Leigh's good taste.

"Well; it's satisfactory, is it not?" I said, when I had contemplated her for a while. "You are dreaming Joseph's dream, are you not? You already see the eleven bridesmaids, like his eleven brethren, making obeisance to your surpassing charms."

"You are laughing at me, as you always do; but I don't care to-night;" and Lilian tossed her head in the pride of her conscious beauty.

"What magnificent diamonds! Oh! why did not kind heaven make me an heiress, so that the blaze of my jewels might have come to my aid, when the lustre of my eyes failed me! Are these all your family diamonds?"

"Not quite all of them," she replied, gravely. "I have a cross; it's very beautiful; but I'm afraid I cannot manage to find room for it."

"That is a pity! I have a string of jet beads; you can fasten it to them, if you like, and it will serve you for a rosary."

"What would be the use of that? Jet would not look well."

“Oh! I don't know—only, if I were standing where you are, looking so beautiful, and awaiting such dazzling triumphs, I don't think I should be the worse for praying against the pomps and vanities of this wicked world. Yes, I should wear the rosary, and a skull and cross bones, as pendants, to remind me that I am not an angel, though I might be tempted to believe it, by hearing the fact repeated to me so often.”

Lilian bit her lips. “Alice, come here,” she said, trying to draw me alongside of her.

“Alice, stay where you are; so wisdom lifts up her voice and cries. I know what you said to yourself just now,” I answered.

“What did I say?”

“You said this:—‘Alice is envious of my beauty and of the admiration which I will excite. That is why she tries to sneer at gifts which she does not possess. I'll silence her, by showing her how enchanting these gifts really are. She shall stand side by side with me before the mirror, and mark the contrast between herself and me. I'll strike her dumb with vexation; I'll deprive my dearest friend

of the consolation of giving vent to her bitterness in words.' That is what you thought, my pretty Lilian ; only thought is quicker than speech, and you are rather surprised to see a sudden idea expand into so many words. Well, the band has been playing about half-an-hour. Shall we go down stairs?"

She took my arm without a word, and we descended the stairs in silence. Arthur Leigh was pacing the corridor through which we must pass to the ball-room. He looked bewildered, as well he might, at Lilian's dazzling appearance. He gave her his arm ; and I could not but yield obedience to his mute gesture, and join him on the other side. It was strange to be so near him, and yet so far apart ; strange, but wonderfully familiar, to feel my hand rest upon him ; I thought he must mentally have compared himself to Sinbad, and me to the Old Man of the Sea.

Lilian was claimed by an expectant partner before we had crossed the threshold of the door. Arthur led me to a seat, and stood beside me in the old fashion, half leaning on the back of my chair. How beautiful Lilian

was! I seemed to see no one but her. My eye followed her, as she whirled rapidly round the room; and when I lost sight of her in the crowd, it was only to watch more intently for the dark, curling hair, and the flashing light of her jewels. Vanity, excitement, and the intoxication of her triumph flushed her cheek with a varying glow of rare delicacy, and brightened her eyes till they shone as radiantly as her diamonds. Of course, her lover must be delighted. I ventured to look round. Arthur's eyes were fixedly bent on the ground; he might have been a statue, and his face might have been carved in stone, it was so still and changeless. Did he share in Lilian's success? He never seemed to heed it; I wonder if he felt that it separated her from him.

Thanks to him, this same graven image, which stood guard behind my chair, I had no chance of dancing. I had refused so often, to please him, in the old days, when a look from him was sufficient to lead me as he willed, that the most persevering of my admirers had tired of asking me. Some of the new men

looked as if they would not have objected to dance with me ; but Helen was gone, and Mrs. Falkland never left her comfortable seat in the corner ; so, owing to that sociable custom which forbids persons who are assembled for their common edification and amusement to exchange a syllable with each other, till a few cabalistic words of introduction have been muttered, those ingenious youths were compelled to stifle the burning desire they felt to make my acquaintance. - Besides, Arthur seemed immovably fixed by my side ; and I fancied I must have been sometimes mistaken for a lunatic at large, and Arthur Leigh for the dangerous being's keeper. At last he roused himself from his stupor. I felt his hand stir, and then press heavier on my chair. I have often wondered whether it was a natural gesture, or a sentimental trick, that habit which Arthur Leigh had of bending down when he spoke to you. It was very queer and disturbing—you could not help fancying that you were about to be made the recipient of a soul-thrilling confidence. He was speaking.

"You are not going away to-morrow?" he began, in a low, tragical tone.

Speaking glance and deep-toned accent could not move me now.

"Yes; I leave at half-past six in the morning," I answered, with intense cheerfulness.

He was not quite so lugubrious when he replied—

"You should stay a little longer—everybody should stay; the bride gone, and all the excitement over, will leave us so dull."

"And I am so particularly lively myself. I've no doubt I would prove a most cheerful acquisition. No, I think I may go without diminishing the general hilarity much."

"The next time I see you, Miss Hope"—he paused.

I felt positively angry. It was heartlessness to Lilian, if he merely wished to beguile a long evening with a passing flirtation,—worse than heartlessness to me, if he wished to rekindle the ashes of a dead love in my breast. I determined to let him see that his magic rod had lost its power to conjure.

"I shall be old, probably. I shall have

grey hair. Perhaps I may wear a front. I shall have grown stout, I hope, it looks respectable. I shall wear rustling black silk gowns, and I'll have Mrs. Alice Hope printed on my cards."

"Alice! do be serious."

"Old age is serious, is it not?—old maiden age particularly so."

"Don't!" he said, almost with a groan. "I wish to Heaven I had never seen you?"

"Why?—what harm have I done you?"

"None—nothing but good. I felt it the first day I saw you. Why could I not have gone on loving you, as I did then?"

"Simply because you could not, that's all."

"Have you forgiven me?"

"I have nothing to forgive. You did what you were compelled to do,—you followed the natural bent of your own genius. It's no sin for a man to labour in his vocation, you know."

"What's mine?"

"Your vocation? Oh! you're the King of Hearts,—are you not?—the Knave, perhaps you will say, in your present mood of contrition."

“I wish I could think you were happy.”

“Why should you mind?”

“Because your happiness is dearer to me than my own,—because I feel as if I had destroyed it.”

“You are hardly generous; you have withdrawn yourself and your own happiness entirely from me. Why force me to remember what I am trying to forget? You are independent of me. You refuse to believe that I have cast your chains from me.”

“Alice! Alice!” he exclaimed, passionately, “you don’t know me; you judge me cruelly, harshly. Do you think it is my own miserable vanity that I am trying to feed?”

“Mr. Leigh!—Arthur—pray don’t,” I interrupted, for he was speaking so excitedly, I was afraid of him, “it matters little now what we think of each other. If you care to know it, I shall always think of you kindly. Do leave me.”

“Not while you are so cold and hard. Can’t you speak one word to me in the old way? I tell you, it is because your face, and your voice, in all their sadness, haunt me

night and day, that I must speak. Only tell me that you are happy."

"Are you?"

"Not till you give me the power. You can, by a kind word or smile. You know how I love that girl—Heaven knows why or wherefore; but I love her. I believe she loves me, but I dare not ask her to be mine till you set me free."

"Set you free, Mr. Leigh? I renounced my feeble claim upon you long ago. What do you mean?"

"Set me free from remorse and recollection, that's what I mean; you curse me with your sorrowful, wistful eyes."

"If you are reproaching yourself, Arthur, for any fancied wrong you have done to me, I implore you, for the sake of the love you once bore me, to banish all such feelings. I won't deceive you. I am not happy; my heart was too deeply stirred to beat calmly again so soon. But the best comfort to me will be in the thought that my friends, and you, the dearest of them, are happy. You must ask Lilian to be your wife to-night. Promise me

that you will. Go now ; and, Arthur, say good-bye to me now. My warmest wishes and sincerest prayers will always be for you. God bless you ! and grant you all the happiness in your marriage that I could have wished to crown your life with. It was not our fault ; we can't understand why ; some day, perhaps, these things will be clearer to us. Now go. Lilian is disengaged ; and remember, I send you with my free heart."

He wrung my hand tightly, and crossed the room without another word. He cut his way straight through the smiling girls and their bland partners ; one or two youths against whom he came in rather rough contact looked fiercely at him.

He went direct to Lilian's chair, separating the curled dandies who had gathered round the beauty. She gave a quick start of pleasure and surprise when she saw him. I don't think she had been flirting with the laudable design of annoying him ; she had merely been enjoying herself, and had forgotten all about him. He spoke to her ; she laughed, and held up her ball-card to him, pointing to a long list

of unfulfilled engagements. His appeal, whatever it might be, was repeated more urgently. She rose, took his arm, and after a few more turns up and down the room, they disappeared through a door leading into another suite of apartments, out of the way of the dancers. I took a mute farewell of Arthur Leigh, as I lost sight of him and his companion. I resolved to see and speak to him no more.

The hours rolled away, and the spirits of the dancers began to flag. The marquis and marchioness had gone, and the rest of the guests began to shrink away in haste, like ghosts trooping back to Hades before the morning crowing of the cock. Happening to see Mr. and Mrs. Falkland standing together, not very far from me, I took the opportunity of making my formal adieu.

“So you are really determined to go. Well, I wish we could have persuaded you to stay a little longer,” Mrs. Falkland murmured, in tones so faint, so entirely devoid of interest, that I did not think it necessary to make any reply to her politeness, particularly when I

considered that this was the first intimation I had ever received of her desire that I should prolong my visit.

“We shall always be delighted to see you, Miss Hope, at any time you may be in the neighbourhood,” Mr. Falkland said, with rather more animation than his wife had expressed.

I replied that I was very much obliged to him, and we all shook hands.

I had been a long time at Sumnor Hall ; I had no reason to expect that my hosts would deplore my absence ; still, one does not like to be so entirely dropped out of memory, as I knew I should be before I was half-way home. What matter ? I was not much more warmly attached to them than they were to me. It was not for the sake of Mr. and Mrs. Falkland that I found it difficult to tear myself away from their house. I nodded to Florence Osborne as I passed ; and I felt certain, by the radiant happiness in Sir Montagu’s face, at least in so much of it as was visible through his beard and moustache, that he had made election of a Lady Brook that night.

May Leslie ran after me, and kissed me affectionately on the staircase. My *preux chevalier*, Master Alfred, had secretly decamped to his pillow some time ago. I did not see Lilian when I left the ball-room. I opened her bedroom door, but she was not there, only her maid, who looked very sleepy, and seemed drearily disappointed, when she found that I was not her young mistress come to relieve her lonely watch. On entering my own room, I was startled by the sight of a white object, in flowing raiment, curled upon a large arm chair. It was Lilian, and she was asleep. She woke up with a start, looked at me for a moment with a bewildered stare, then seemed to recollect herself.

“Oh! it’s you. What a long time you have been, Alice! I came here to wish you good-bye, and happened to fall asleep.”

“And I went to your room to wish you good-bye, but you were not there. Do you know somebody is waiting for you?”

“Oh! no, Alice,” she exclaimed, getting suddenly excited, “surely not. What can he want?”

“Hel—why, I meant your maid; she looked most dismal. How have you enjoyed the ball?”

“Never mind the ball, nor Martha either. You will let me sleep here to-night, won’t you?”

“No; I would only disturb you in the morning. Besides, I’m dead tired; and I never rest so well as when I am alone.”

“Good night, then.”

“Not quite yet. You did not come here only to say, ‘Good night’ to me. You need not tell me; I know already; you are going to be Arthur Leigh’s wife; and I hope you will both be very happy.”

“Do you think we will?” she asked, looking down. “You never seemed to think well of it.”

“Of course you will be happy—you love each other.”

“I think he loves me.”

“I’m certain he does.”

“How do you know?”

“Oh! I’m a wizard; and I know a great many marvellous things.”

"I wish you were going to stay here, Alice, I shall feel the want of you so much."

"No, you won't; you would find me very much in the way; now, kiss me and go to bed; and if you can find time, write to me."

"Of course I shall; and you won't object, if the letters are all about one person?"

"No, no. What else should you write about?"

She stopped at the door and held up her hand. A hoop of pale, misty pearls glistened on her finger. She pressed it to her lips and laughed. So did I, though I did not feel particularly inclined for mirth; for I thought of the emerald ring I had worn but a few weeks ago, and I could not help wondering what Mr. Leigh had done with it. Perhaps he thought it ominous to make it serve as the symbol of his betrothal twice.

I was too tired to think, too tired to feel even. For the second time my heart died within me—died quietly, without pain or passion, for the life to which it had revived was so faint and fitful. It was quite light when I

threw up my bed-room window ; the sky was pale, silvery grey ; in the east the sun was rising in dim yellow and misty red. Everything was still and coldly pure ; the lawn was white with hoar-frost ; there was a breath of ice in the morning air and in the thin veil of rosy vapour, already tinted by the rising sun. The noon-day rays would thaw it into summer warmth, but it was the first melancholy harbinger of coming winter. I packed my trunks, and put on my travelling dress. It was within an hour of the time when I must start. I lay down on the outside of the bed ; my head swam and my limbs ached ; I did not know how tired I was till I stretched myself out with a sigh of profound weariness. I was just falling asleep, when the servant knocked at my door, to inform me that the carriage, which was to take me to the station, would be ready in a quarter of an hour. I would have given the world for a reprieve, but none was likely to come, so I was obliged to drag myself up. The house was quite quiet. I looked into the ball-room as I passed. The benches were all piled up in stacks against the wall ; there was

a sickly smell of oil and faded flowers ; a few candles still flickered in their sockets.

The pleasantest sight I saw that morning was Miss Ross's trim figure and smiling face, which beamed upon me as I entered the breakfast-room. She was going to the station with me, she said. I took it as a matter of course ; I was too stupid to thank her for her thoughtful attention. The morning was beautiful, and the drive in the open carriage very exhilarating. The sun poured down his rays warm and strong ; the frost had melted, or was glittering with a changeful sheen, like diamond dust ; the early breeze blew cool and fresh. A few original remarks on the beauty of the weather, the landscape, &c., formed an apology for conversation. Miss Ross hazarded a few sentences about the pleasure it would give my friends to see me again ; but as I could not agree with her, the reflection which her words excited had not exactly the cheering influence which she had hoped to produce. We parted with mutual good wishes, and faithful promises to write to each other ; she was to tell me everything that happened at

Sumnor Hall that could possibly interest me. That was my stipulation; but I shrewdly suspected that my correspondent would use her own discretion respecting the persons and events that she introduced into her letters.

CHAPTER VI.

“Composed in sufferings, and in joy sedate,
Good without pride, without pretension great,
Just of thy word, in every thought sincere,
Who knew no wish but what the world might hear,
Of softest manner, unaffected mind,
Lover of peace, and friend of human kind.”

POPE.

I WAS retracing the road which I had travelled in hope and exultation but three short months since. Now I neither hoped, feared, exulted, nor desponded. Wearied nature demanded revenge for last night's vigil, and I slept soundly for two or three hours. It was high noon when I awoke. The glorious autumn morning had failed to keep her fair promise; a thick, drizzling rain was falling. It poured almost all day, and the temperature grew sen-

sibly colder. It seemed almost like a different latitude, after we had passed the rich pasture lands of the southern counties, and had entered among the flat fields which stretched for miles round my home. It was late in the afternoon when we crossed the borders of —— shire. The rain still fell silently, the sky was one sheet of leaden grey, blank and motionless—none of the fitful cloud-shadows flying, which give an eerie melancholy to the evening of a stormy day. The heavy columns of smoke from the collieries could not rise; they were borne back by the weight of the air, and rolled in black waves along the wet earth.

We stopped for the last time at a small road-side station. I was the only passenger who alighted. There was a solitary figure on the platform. Not my uncle, as I had hoped, and I was glad to find that it was not Warren; for I was sure he would have been there, if he could have summoned sufficient resolution to come unmasked into my presence. The stranger was a younger man than my uncle, and not so tall. I had no time to examine him further. He left

his post by the lamp, and advanced towards me, eyeing me doubtfully. Through the station door that led into the road I saw a gig standing. My uncle did not keep a gig when I went away. This must be quite a recent acquisition, and this person was doubtless his servant.

"You are Miss Hope, of course," he said, coming up, with a very awkward bow, speaking nevertheless with a perfectly correct accent.

"Yes. Did Mr. Hope send you to meet me?"

"Mr. Hope would have come himself, but he is not quite well just now."

"Just see to my boxes, then—two black trunks, with A. H. upon them, in brass nails."

The man lifted up his eyes, and looked curiously at me. He had very fine eyes, dark, liquid, and beaming. He passed his hand across his lips, evidently to conceal a smile. I thought him impertinent, and I added imperiously,

"And be quick. It is too cold a night to stand in the rain."

I passed through the door, and mounted

into the gig. My boxes appeared presently. There was room for one of them behind; and the other, under my superintendence, was conveniently adjusted, so as to leave about as much space for the driver as might have accommodated a half-grown monkey. The drizzling mist had ended in heavy rain, and the prospect of a drive of six or seven miles in an open vehicle was not at all pleasant.

“You should have brought a conveyance from Whorlton,” I said; “I shall be wet through before we reach Hirst Hall.”

I was indeed very slightly clad. I had brought a shawl with me, which, according to invariable custom, I had lost on the way.

“It only began to rain here about an hour ago,” was the answer. “Will you put my coat over you?” he continued, taking off the loose, rough great-coat he wore. I tied that voluminous garment round my neck, *à la* Mrs. Gamp, and, as my companion sat on the side from which the rain blew, and in a manner sheltered me from the blast, I was quite as comfortable as I could have expected to be under the circumstances. I heard from him

that my uncle had not been well, "nothing serious, he trusted;" he assured me that I need not be in the least anxious, and I wondered what business he had to express an opinion, or to trouble himself about my feelings. "His nephew appeared extremely attentive," was the next information tendered to me, to which I vouchsafed no answer. I did not want to hear about Warren, or his good actions. The dripping branches brushed us as we drove up the long sombre avenue. The door was open; a cheerful fire burned in the hall; kind, darling cousin Warren was standing in the doorway to meet me, and the affectionate creature, in the ardour of his welcome, actually rushed out into the rain that he might help me to alight. He was nodding and smiling very sweetly. I did not take the slightest notice of him. Aversion lent me agility, and I sprang out of the gig at a flying leap, alighted several yards beyond him, and ran through the hall, leaving the unlucky coat, I have reason to believe, lying on the wet gravel. I stopped at the door of my uncle's study, and knocked before I went in. He

was sitting moodily by the fire ; books and papers were scattered on a table beside him, but he was not occupied with anything. I was shocked to see the ravages that illness had made upon him. His features, always harsh, were gaunt and wasted ; his cheeks had sunk from the high angular cheek-bones ; his eyes were hollow, and burned with a fierce unnatural light. He seemed really glad to see me. He rose from his chair, shook me by both hands, and kissed me for the first time since the day my mother died.

“ You have been ill,” I said. “ Why did you not send for me ? ”

“ It’s nothing, and I’m all right now. But I can’t congratulate you on your own appearance. South country air does not seem to agree with you.”

He drew me full in front of the lamp, and looked very steadily and sadly at me.

I felt myself turning scarlet under his scrutiny.

“ That’s a little better,” he muttered ; “ do you intend to settle here now that you have come back ? ”

“Yes, for ever!” I exclaimed eagerly. “I wish I had never gone away. You advised me to stay : do you remember?”

“I think I do ; but I am not going to remind you of that now. By the way, what have you done with George?”

“George?—ah! the man. I suppose he is in the kitchen or the stable. Do you want him?”

My uncle gazed at me in open-eyed wonder. “In the kitchen, child?—who in the world are you talking about?”

“About the man who drove me down. Your coachman, groom, or whatever you call him!”

“Alice, what have you been doing?” uncle Rupert asked, greatly disturbed : “that’s Dr. George Beresford, the best gentleman and the best man of my acquaintance, or of yours either, I’ll be bound.”

I took the matter much more coolly than my uncle did, or indeed than I might have been inclined to take it myself a few months ago ; for, in spite of my democratic principles, my declared allegiance to virtue and talent, in

opposition to wealth and rank, I had forgotten myself a little, I daresay, among the good company at Sumnor Hall, and I did not think that an accidental insult to a colliery doctor was an error of vital importance.

I laughed. "I'm very sorry, I'm sure, but it was dark, and Æsculapius did not present a very fashionable exterior. I thought too—"

"You thought—you thought," my uncle repeated impatiently, "if you had been wrapped in Egyptian darkness, you might have known that Dr. George was a gentleman, as soon as he addressed you."

"I did observe that his accent was very good. But I fancied that he came from another part of the country. The dialect here is so abominable; at Sumnor Hall all the servants spoke better than ladies and gentlemen do here."

"I hope Sumnor Hall has not spoiled you, Alice," he said, dryly; "you won't take very kindly, I fear, to our rough ways and rough language, after the rose-coloured gentilities that you've been accustomed to latterly. You are a fool, as I verily believe all women are."

Glitter and glare, it will take the best of you captive, and wile away the most faithful heart among you. You are like your—like the rest of your sex!"

Uncle Rupert threw himself into his chair with a heavy sigh. I knew that the ghost of dead love, and dead hope, had started from its grave to confront him. I knew that he was thinking of my mother, thinking how he had loved her, recalling, with bitter vividness of memory, how winning words and dazzling fascinations had wiled her heart from its loyalty to him.

"You condemn me too hastily," I said, "for a mistake that might have happened to any one. Glitter and glare are very pretty, but my eyes are aching, and they want relief. And, after all, Sumnor Hall is not a fairy land of dazzling refinement. I might have fallen into the same error there. I'm sure half the middle-aged gentlemen looked exactly like the butler. I daresay, after all, Dr. George won't mind very much."

"On that point you may set your mind quite at rest," my uncle answered, with great dignity.

“And I left Warren at the door. I am sure he will do every thing civil.”

“Humph !” growled my uncle. “Dr. George would be ill off if he had to depend on Warren’s courtesy.” And I immediately divined that my amiable cousin was jealous of his uncle’s favour for his new friend. Just at this moment, the youth in question made his appearance alone, and smiling, smiling with all his might. He drew a chair for himself close beside me, and looked over me at uncle Rupert.

“It is quite pleasant, sir, to see Alice at home again, is it not ?” he said, taking my hand, which I snatched away. “You won’t know how much you have missed her till now that you have her here again.”

“You have been very attentive to me, Warren. No one could have been more so,” my uncle said, with an evident effort. “I keep very early hours just now, Alice ; I think I’ll wish you good night.”

He took his candle, and shook hands with me. Warren was standing at the door as he passed. He listened till uncle Rupert had

terness. But I think I have proved to you that I cannot live out of your sight."

"Nonsense," I replied, quivering with indignation ; "I wonder, Warren, that you dare speak to me in that way."

"Love dares anything," he said in a low tone, "and I love you, Alice—I love you with all my heart."

"You have taken a strange method to show it, then."

"What have I done?"

I would have died rather than let Warren know of the humiliations I had undergone through his agency.

"It makes little matter. Let it suffice that I look upon you as my enemy. I wish to have no open quarrel with you. In public you can speak to me, if you choose. I shall answer you as I would answer any indifferent person. But otherwise there can be no intimacy between us. I shall look upon every advance from you as a fresh insult. I shall try to forget your existence, and you would do best to follow my example."

While I delivered this harangue, Warren

had stood looking down upon me with demeanour as unruffled as if I had been paying him the very finest compliments.

“And you think I can obey you?” he said, with an incredulous smile, taking hold of my hands with a grasp of whose firmness I had no idea till I attempted to shake it off. “I can no more help loving you than I could help telling you of it three months ago. You have never forgiven me since that day; you were angry when I came to see you at Sumnor Hall?”

“Do you think your visit was calculated to gratify me,” I interrupted, “if I had nothing else but the violence of your manner and language to complain of—”

“But that is not what you complain of,” he said quickly. “I was provoked. I made the journey on purpose to see you. I might not unreasonably have looked for a welcome. You are too generous to bear me ill-will for a trifle like that. You think you have a graver cause of offence against me.”

“Have I not?”

“I should be sorry to think so. Could I do anything to hurt you?”

“You have not succeeded. But the will was not wanting—only the power.”

“I’m glad of that. Setting my personal feelings aside, I should have been sorry if you had risked your happiness for any one so unworthy of it.”

“Who are you alluding to?”

“You are resolved to put no confidence in me. Stay, you must listen. You are angry because you think I gave certain information to Sir Montagu Brook. So I did, but I did not give it unasked. It was better for you that he should know it then. If he had loved you as he ought to do—as I love you, Alice,” he added, dropping his voice; “do you think he would have asked such questions, or that the answers would have changed his purpose?”

I did not believe a word that he said.

“You establish a very good case, Warren,” I said. “If I exposed the flimsiness of your present argument, you would be at no loss for another. But I’m not convinced. Either I have not heard the truth from Sir Montagu, or from you. I think unfavourably enough of

Sir Montagu, but I believe him to be a man of honour.”

“ If any one but you, Alice, had made such an insinuation against me—”

“ Well, what would you have done? I wish no exception to be made in my favour. This is affected delicacy; you forget how often you have favoured me with the expression of your genuine sentiments.”

“ And for all I have ever said or done, I heartily ask your pardon. It is in vain to plead for favour, or even for common justice from you. You may know me better some day; till then, I agree with you that it is better for us to meet as strangers. I’ll obey you, except in ceasing to love you, and, thankless business as it is, I must go on with it to my dying day. Good-night, and God bless you. I may say that, I suppose, without doing you any harm.”

I was quite bewildered. I could only return his good-night in a much more meek and compromising fashion than my real feelings dictated. I felt as one often feels on the evening of an eventful day, light-headed, and

hardly able to realize my true position. I seemed to have lived through years since the morning. The preceding day had had no night; the wedding, the ball, my last conversation with Arthur, and the long journey which separated me for ever from him, had followed upon each other in such quick succession, that my overtaxed brain could hardly support such a rapid sequence of images. I felt indifferent to most things, and to most persons. I was regardless of myself and of my future fate. My soul had hungered and thirsted after intenser experience of life, with the craving need with which the children of Israel in the wilderness had lusted after flesh. I had cried out for action. The power of quick thought, of vivid emotion, had lain stifled within me, and I had longed to give it breath. My prayer had been answered, but it had not been offered in God's name, and it returned on my own head as a curse, not as a blessing. And yet, dearly purchased as the experience was, I would not have foregone it; bitter as was the agony of remembrance, I dwelt upon it, lingering upon the pain with such minute analysis of its throbbing

and spasms, as I had never vouchsafed to the recollection of pleasure.

I rose late the next morning, and wandered listlessly about the house. I did not see my uncle and Warren till dinner-time. After dinner, my uncle asked me if I would like to go to the library, to look over his new books and periodicals. He was himself going down to the village, to meet some people on business, and would return in an hour. Warren asked my permission to accompany me; to which I graciously replied, that of course he could go where he chose, but that, if *he* sat in the library, *I* should wait in the dining-room till my uncle's return. He only answered this civil speech with a grave bow, and disappeared in my uncle's wake. I retired to the library in great triumph, registering a mental vow, that as long as my cousin chose to be insufferably obsequious, I would never relax in my rudeness to him. I had not been seated among the books for more than ten minutes, before my friend of the preceding night, Dr. George Beresford, entered unannounced. I was rather at a loss what to

say to him, thinking that an apology which must necessarily include an explanation of my mistake, would be rather worse than the offence itself. So, feeling rather embarrassed, I rose to leave the room, under the pretext of seeking for my uncle. Dr. George would not hear of such a thing; it made no matter; he could wait; if he did not see my uncle at all that night, it was of no importance.

“And don't let me disturb you,” he continued, seeing that I was still moving to the door, “this is not a business visit—indeed, as I happened to be passing, I thought I would look in to assure myself that you had not caught cold from your wet drive last night.”

I naturally thought that the man was laughing at me, or that he wished to administer a gentle reprimand, under the form of polite attention. But no, his face betrayed no symptom of lurking mischief. Let me try to sketch that face as I saw it that night. He was sitting opposite to me, the table was between us, and the lamp-light shone full upon him, bringing out his dark features in strong relief. It was a grave, thoughtful face, younger in this softened light than I had supposed it

to be at first. I could not guess at his age ; it might have been anything between twenty-five and fifty ; his face was bronzed, and there were strongly marked lines in it, but they did not seem to have been furrowed by years. The expression was good, beaming with intelligence, rather than flashing with intellect, like—well, I could not help it, Arthur Leigh was my standard, and it was by him that I judged the rest of his noble sex. I have spoken of his eyes; very sweet and clear they were, lustrous too, shining with a dewy light, not at all like the glancing splendour of—there again, but I will have done with these comparisons ; how should brilliant grey and dark brown eyes have anything in commons ? To finish my portrait. These said eyes were surmounted by straight, well-marked eyebrows, a broad, rather prominent forehead, across which lay a heavy horizontal sweep of black hair, already, for I saw them gleaming in the light, streaked with silver threads. Either I am no portrait-painter, or my model had few salient peculiarities. In shape, in the drawing of the features, it was indeed quite an ordinary

face. I could not, however, help noting the sensitive nostril and the firm, full lips. In repose they expressed little but quiet power, but they were very *mobile*, and I judged that the mouth was more accustomed to relax into smiles than to harden into sternness. But if it lost anything in strength by its feminine flexibility, the want was more than redeemed by the firm rounded chin, cleft straight down the centre with a strong, deep line. Such was the gentleman whom I had mistaken for a groom, whose kindness I had rewarded by throwing his coat under his own phaeton wheels, and who was now heaping coals of fire on my head by assuring me, in one of the sweetest voices I had ever heard, that his visit was for the express purpose of assuring himself that I had not suffered from the drive.

“It is very kind of you to think of me,” I replied; “I am perfectly well. I hope you are no worse yourself.”

“I?—thank you. Oh, no, I am tolerably weather-proof by this time. But *you* are not accustomed to exposure; and I assure you I have reproached my own thoughtlessness very

much, in bringing that open gig for you on such a night."

"Indeed, it was very kind of you to come at all, and you know you entirely shielded me from the rain, and at your own expense, too."

"I was very glad to be able to do Mr. Hope a trifling service," he replied, rather dryly.

"You are quite right to disclaim a service done to me," I replied, "for you must have thought that I received it very ungraciously."

"Not in the least," he returned, with a slight grave bow.

"Then," I pursued, "you must have conceived a very bad opinion of me beforehand, if you accepted that as my natural behaviour. I was very rude and selfish; I did not even thank you for your coat. I believe I—"

"Dropped it in your hurry to see your uncle; it was quite natural."

"I hope it was no worse."

"Oh, no," he answered, cheerfully; "the coat resembles its master; it is shabby and a good deal worn, but it has reached that comfortable period of decline, when a little extra hard usage does not tell upon it. A dry brush sets all to rights."

Surely I had no right to expect anything more than this. It could not have been an intense personal gratification to Dr. George to see his coat rolled in the mud. He had done all, and more than all, that was required of him, in being quite good-humoured about it. But there was something in his simple words that did not please me. Was it possible that my slight experience of the language of high-flown unmeaning gallantry (and at Sumner Hall I had heard an infinite heap of polite nonsense) had so vitiated my taste, that I could not listen with patience to courteous, unvarnished common sense? Dr. George must have been a keen observer; he looked up at me, a smile of quiet humour lighting his eyes and playing round his lips.

“I have said something wrong, what is it? You must excuse my bluntness. I am no courtier, yet I ought to have remembered how one courtier acted in a similar case. But then Sir Walter Raleigh was a gallant gentleman, and his cloak was costly enough to make the knightly courtesy noteworthy. It would have been but a poor compliment to have offered you mine as a foot-cloth.”

“Then you think that those are the sort of compliments I value? But you forget that Sir Walter’s homage was paid to a queen.”

“And mine? There, you see you have made another opening for me, but I don’t even try to take advantage of it, as a readier-witted man would. I am no orator, as—”

“Warren is,” I suggested, I do not know why.

“Well, we’ll say as Warren is. I have heard your cousin tolerably eloquent at times.”

“Do you like him, Dr. George?”

“Who? Mr. Warren?”

“Yes—who else? Do you like him?”

“Why do you ask me? You are more competent to judge of him than I am.”

“No, you are quite mistaken. Men show themselves under such different aspects to each other from what they do to us. What do you think of him?”

“I’m sure your cousin will show himself in his most favourable light to you,” was the evasive reply; “you had best content yourself with the view he presents to your own eyes.”

“But I don’t like one-sided views,” I an-

swered, obstinately ; “tell me what your opinion of him is.”

“But I don’t consider your question fair either to your cousin or to myself. I have seen very little of him ; I have never had a single confidential conversation with him, and I have only been here three weeks.”

“Three weeks !—and your judgment not formed yet ! My opinion of any one never alters after first sight.”

“Do you speak advisedly ?” he asked, with a smile.

“Yes—I make up my mind at once. For or against—I accept no medium.”

“And are you never deceived ?”

I paused ; the right answer did not come quite readily this time.

“No,” I replied, rather doubtfully, “I think not. Changing circumstances sometimes appear to alter characters, but they remain the same in reality ; they are only modified, or they are developed in different phases.” I had been turning over the books as I spoke. “My uncle reads a great deal,” I said.

“And you are his reader. You read a good deal yourself also, I suppose.”

“Yes—I have nothing else to do. Here, where one has neither amusement nor occupation, it is an absolute necessity; don't you find it so?”

“I'm not quite destitute of occupation,” he said, smiling again; “indeed, I have sometimes rather more than I can manage.”

“Yes, of course you have; but amusement, you must find rather a dearth of that.”

“I do not know,” he said, musingly, busily cutting the leaves of a magazine meanwhile; “we who don't shine in the world have this advantage, that we can afford to despise it when its gates are shut upon us. I find a great deal to interest me here. My work lies among a class of people with whom I have never come in contact before.”

“Then I should imagine you would wish to withdraw from their proximity as soon as possible. The pit people are thoroughly uninteresting, more so, I think, than any other class of the peasantry.”

“More uninteresting, perhaps, than the romantic peasantry of your acquaintance?”

“What do you mean? I have never lived among poor people, except those about here.”

"I was alluding to the rose-coloured villagers you may have sympathized with in the course of your novel-reading. You had novels, I suppose?"

"Yes—but not goody novels."

"Is that the last new school? Then, probably, you may have seen a very charming class of peasants singing in opera choruses? Gentlemen cross-gartered, like Malvolio, in sugar-loaf hats and crimson shoulder-knots, ladies in striped petticoats and unquestionable *chaussures*. Did you think their counterparts were to be met with in real life?"

"My experience has been less extensive than you think; I never met either the counterparts or the originals. I never saw an opera but *Norma*, where, as you know, there are only melodious Druids and white-stoled priestesses. I lived in Elysium for a month after I heard Grisi sing, the real world was so prosaic afterwards."

"I dare say it was. You are too young yet to have discovered the romance of reality."

"Is there really any romance in reality? I'm afraid it is not because I'm too young,

but because I have not the seeing eye, that I cannot find it out. I can see it no more than I can see the beauty in our daily paths which the poet creates about him. You think I'm wrong; you would remind me who bade us call nothing common or unclean; but you would find it difficult to convince me that there is anything in Hirst to excite interest."

"I think you are wrong, and I hope to convince you of it some day. You would be astonished if you looked a little more closely into the inner life of these people; if you saw what practical talent there is among them, what keen insight into truth. You would find it difficult to deceive them. They can see through shams, and they know perfectly whether you believe in your own words or not. And, as for romance, believe me, there are tragedies as terrible, and comedies as droll, or as humourously pathetic, played in your humble village, as any that Shakspeare ever imagined. Then, for what you call interesting—"

"Don't say that," I interrupted, "I'm ashamed of such a word—it is so young-ladyish."

“ And that means everything that is charming, *n'est-ce-pas ?* ”

“ No—it means everything that is worthless, and frivolous, and silly. Well, what were you going to say ? ”

“ Simply that there are refinements among them of which you have, perhaps, little idea. Have you ever heard the village band play in the evening ? ”

“ Yes ; but I think you often find that love of music, a certain class of music, is developed most strongly in the coarsest natures. ”

“ You are determined not to be moved in favour of my poor clients ; well, victory without opposition is but inglorious warfare. Suppose I were to tell you that I have at this moment in my possession a sketch of a female figure, earnest, beautiful, and serenely thoughtful as a Madonna, done by an intelligent lad down there, of about fifteen, what would you say ? ”

“ I would say that I am ready to take all the other perfections of your *protégés* on trust. ”

“ I'm glad of that. Then I may hope for success in my plan ? ”

“Your plan? You surely don’t mean to say that you have been leading me on all this time only to inveigle me into a hidden pit that you have dug of malice aforethought for me? What is your plan? I may as well know the worst at once.”

“The worst is nothing very alarming. Our rector, my namesake—of course you know him?”

“Oh yes, dear old man! Surely he has never been guilty of an original idea?”

“Well, I am willing to take the onus on myself. We find that the education of the children, their religious education, for there is a day-school, is very much neglected. On Sundays they run wild. Now, these abuses are rarely mended without the help of ladies. You are the only lady in this neighbourhood, and you could do a great deal of good, merely by a little kindly superintendence.”

I was in no mood at that moment to second these philanthropic schemes; I preferred to sit at home and brood over my own sorrow. I was angry with any one who attempted to break the shell of egotistical repining in which I wished to encase myself.

“I am sorry you have given yourself so much trouble for so little purpose, Dr. George,” I answered; “if you had been better acquainted with me, you would have known that I am the most hopeless person possible to apply to. I have not the power, and I don’t think I have the will. I would rather stay at home and read.”

He looked very much disappointed.

“Of course it was merely a suggestion; I had no thought of dictating to you. Are you angry?”

“No; you only made a mistake in thinking better of me than I deserve; you will not be long in finding out my shortcomings.”

“I am inclined to think differently myself. Perhaps you may change; you said yourself that circumstances affect character. An intellectual throne is a very grand isolation; but—did you ever read the ‘Palace of Art,’ Miss Hope?”

In these days, the great laureate did not yet reign in the high court of poesy, “so royal, rich, and wide,” where he now holds his individual state; therefore, the question was not so absurd as it might be in this

enlightened generation, who have thrilled to the passionate outcry of Maud's lover, or exulted in the martial music of the cavalry charge.

"Yes; but surely you don't imagine that even my feminine vanity exalts itself to an isolated throne of intellect. I read *pour me distraire*. Reading is the best thing that offers itself to me. You like books, I'm sure."

"I should be very ungrateful for the pleasure they have given me if I did not. Does not some one say that a good book is as good as a good friend?"

"Better, I think, it must be."

"Perhaps you don't know what a good friend is?"

"Perhaps I don't."

Perhaps Dr. George intended to instruct me on the subject. He seemed to have a taste for imparting information. Uncle Rupert opened the door at this juncture, and I took the earliest opportunity of withdrawing.

It was a wild, gusty evening; the trees in the plantation were tossing and training their

branches; the pale moon looked dimly out from the rapidly driving clouds—

“How restlessly they gleam, and speed, and quiver,
 Streaking the darkness radiantly.”

The night was warm, though stormy, for it was a fierce west wind that blew, and I wrapped a shawl round me and went out into the garden. It was pleasant and exciting to be driven before the fresh breeze, like the withered leaves, “yellow and black, and pale and hectic red,” which were fleeing like ghosts before the blast. There was a sound abroad, like the rushing of many waters, “deep calling unto deep at the noise of the waterspouts.” That raving wind must have driven the ships at sea, fast along the foaming furrows, they cut through the waves that night.

I was not the only inmate of Hirst Hall who found something kindred to an unquiet heart in the roaring of the tempest. Warren was pacing the garden walks, utterly indifferent, so it appeared, to the skyey influences. He had neither hat nor great-coat on; his head was slightly bent, and he looked very gloomy and

disconsolate. He was walking so as to meet me. He did not see me till we were within a few paces of each other; for a moment he seemed inclined to turn back; then he came on. He joined me, and we walked side by side for a few minutes.

"Are you not afraid of getting cold?" he said at length.

There was nothing in this simple remark at which I could take umbrage, and I answered, "No; I am wrapped up, but you are not."

"It makes no matter about me," he answered, very tragically.

"But I think it does," I persisted; "besides, it would have been quite as easy to put a hat on. Will you come in? Dr. George is here."

"That's a temptation," Warren growled. Then he said aloud, "I thought as much; I recognized his hat."

"You must have an eye for a hat," I answered; "how do you know it is his? Is there any distinguishing characteristic about it?"

"None that I know of, except that it has

been guiltless of nap for the last six years, and that the rim is battered to shivers. You are apt to notice these things when they are intruded on you day after day."

Warren hazarded these criticisms with such intense gravity that I laughed outright.

"Has he brushed his coat yet?" Warren asked, still walking on with solemn, downcast eyes.

"Yes; and you will be glad to hear that it did not suffer in the least."

I do not know what doom my cousin pronounced on the doctor and his upper garment, in the few cabalistic words that he muttered. I can venture to say that it was not such as any gentleman, or coat either, if it had had the power of choice, would have selected of un-biassed free-will.

"Has my uncle been with him all this time?" he asked.

"No; uncle Rupert only came in a few minutes ago."

"Then he has been sitting with you—do you like him?"

"Very much. I think he is very good and

sincere. I don't know why you dislike him ; I thought you would have been glad of a companion—it is so solitary here.”

“ I prefer to choose my own company.”

“ Of course ; so do I.”

“ And that reminds me of the aversion that you have expressed to mine. You are kind to bring it to my recollection. I ask your pardon for intruding upon you.”

Warren bowed with a stately air. In another moment he had disappeared down one of the side walks. I really acquitted myself of intending any allusion to him in what I said. True, I did not want his company, and had told him so in no very courteous terms an hour before. But I was in a repenting mood that night ; had he stayed another moment, I should probably have called him back. But he had taken me by surprise ; he was gone in the desperate haste of his pride, and very soon I was glad that I had suffered him to go. A recall would have enforced a reconciliation, and I felt too strongly that Warren could never be my friend. The obnoxious hat had disappeared from the hall when I re-entered

the house, and the study was dark. So I carried my books to my own old sitting-room, and spent half the night in the company of my cheerful fire and my cheerless thoughts.

CHAPTER VII.

“ But when we got in and beheld the green curtain that veiled a heaven to my imagination—that was soon to be disclosed—the breathless anticipation I endured !—”

CHARLES LAMB.

DR GEORGE and Warren were not good friends. There was no avowed hostility between them. I do not suppose that they had ever been intimate enough to quarrel ; there seemed a tacit recognition that there was something utterly alien between them. Dissimilarity of character is not always incompatible with a certain degree of cordiality ; in this world we are often obliged to mask our hatred with a smiling face, and to bridge over the moral gulf with a decent show of courtesy. Very frail may be the plank which spans the chasm, and the friendship which rests on such a tot-

tering basis is certainly not worth much ; but the lazy-going world demands a level surface for its dainty feet. Warren and the doctor were bound by no ties of interest or policy. My cousin had no motive to conceal the gentlemanly scorn with which he looked down upon the colliery doctor, and Dr. George, being utterly indifferent to his opinion, never sought to propitiate him. Prejudiced as I was, I felt naturally inclined to lay the whole blame of the enmity on Warren ; still I could not help seeing that Dr. George, gentle and charitable though he was, was capable of holding very strong opinions when his mind was once made up. Warren scowled at his antagonist, vindictive hatred darkening his face, while Dr. George calmly overlooked his foe, with a resolute ignoring of his very existence, which, I must confess, had I been Warren, I should have found inexpressibly provoking. But Warren had much too good an opinion of himself to be abashed by such slight tokens of aversion ; consequently he was not annihilated by the disapprobation of an enemy whom he affected to disregard.

Warren had altered very much since I first knew him. I could hardly believe that he was the same person, sullen, suspicious, and resentful, quick to take offence, and unmeasured in the betrayal of his ill-will, who had disappointed me so much on his first arrival. His variableness was gone. He was cool, quiet, and active, still unweariedly attentive to business, and it must have pressed heavily upon him, for he seemed to have the whole direction of my uncle's affairs in his hands now, and by their conversation I discovered that they were engaged in commercial schemes of vaster importance than any affecting the management of the collieries. He was icily cold to me, but splendidly polite; as if I had been a princess, and he the humblest of my vassals.

Unless our natures are very bad, or unless the flames of our ill-will are fed by continual aggravation, it is impossible, I think, to exist in a state of continual discord with the daily companion of our lives. The dweller under the same roof as ourselves, who sits opposite to us at table, by whose side we kneel in church, with whom we must interchange countless

acts of civility and kindness, cannot well be our deadly foe. I do not think that we rightly estimate the value of these small courtesies, those conventionalities against which we cry out as insufferable formalisms. They are the kindly luminaries which make our social life cheerful. What would it be without them? Something like those savage, nights so exquisitely depicted by Charles Lamb, before the peculiar household planet, the candle, was invented, and when our ancestors perforce lay about and grumbled at each other in the dark. These trifling courtesies are the golden keys which unlock the kindly humanities of our hearts, and often, too, they bar out the fierce passions which would raise our hand against every man's hand, and every man's hand against ours.

This preamble will prepare the reader for the information that after a time I magnanimously forgave my cousin Warren, and though we might not love each other, we gradually settled down on those decent terms of amity which our relationship warranted. It was to him that I was indebted for all my external pleasure.

It was not when I first came home, weary and crushed in spirit, that I thought about pleasure. When I was sick of the world and its cares, I was content to spend whole days in a passive stupor, bending over the fire, as if in its fairy pictures I could rebuild the shattered castles of my happiness. But life is not dead within us at twenty; we cannot reconcile ourselves to a passionless peace while desire and wonder are quickening the beating of our hearts, and kindling the brain, whose fiery heat we have vainly tried to reduce to temperate calm. The event which *would* disturb my quiet while it was in abeyance, took place at last—Lilian was married within a few months after I left Sumnor Hall. I was invited to be her bridesmaid, but of course refused, only wondering a little how Arthur Leigh would like to have seen me standing by his bride at the wedding altar. I was very glad when Arthur's marriage was over. I could not help it, that the interval was an ordeal of weary suspense. Now I turned the key on despised love and useless regret; I had turned my dead out of my sight.

Quiet study had lost its charm, and I rebelled somewhat against Dr. George's plan of usefulness. It was early enough in the day yet, I thought, for me to play the *role* of domestic missionary among the colliers. I wanted amusement, something that would stimulate without fatiguing me, that would entertain me without enforcing the penalty of exerting myself in return.

It was with a feeling of something like longing that I began to study the columns in the newspapers, headed "Amusements."

Warren, who went everywhere, used to entertain us at dinner with an account of the performances, musical and theatrical, which he had witnessed the evening before, and I observed that his eloquence always grew more animated when he discovered that my attention was riveted by the details.

"I wish I could go," I said, mournfully, one day, when he had been enlarging on the sublime performance of Don Giovanni, which had been played at Whorlton the night before.

"Why should you not go?" Warren asked.

"Uncle Rupert would as soon think of going as of flying, and he would not let me go alone."

“It’s not very likely he would. I could go with you.”

“Would you?”

“You need hardly question my will; it all depends on yours.”

“And uncle Rupert’s?”

“His is soon gained. I’ll tell him now that I am going to ride into Whorlton, and I shall bring a coach back for you.”

Uncle Rupert, rather to my surprise, made no objections, and Dr. George took quite a paternal interest in my eager anticipations. He asked me, with a certain degree of irony, if I cared to hear his opinion of Warren now, to which I replied, “Certainly not;” that I had made use of my own powers of observation, since he had been so disobliging as to refuse me the use of his. Before we set off, Warren and he exchanged a few passages at arms in the usual amicable fashion; the *casus belli* being that the doctor commanded Warren in rather an authoritative fashion to take care that he lost no time in getting a coach when the opera was over, as I had a slight cough, which presumptuous interference

Warren thought fit to resent by launching a quick discharge of anathemas at the head of his rival. Warren preserved his habitual taciturnity during our drive; he quite frightened me by his awful politeness, and the solemn attention which he vouchsafed to any chance remark that I made; so, in a very short time I was reduced to silence.

I had never but once been in a place of public amusement, and that was when I heard Norma, at the age of fourteen. The impression that it had left on my mind was grand, but indistinct; the singing, the acting, the triumphant harmonies of the orchestra, the dazzling splendour of the great London theatre, had left a confused mass of images in their wake, beautiful but indefinite.

The theatre was nearly full when we took our seats. The smiling expansive ladies, gay in ample cloaks of brilliant dyes, and in head-dresses of enormous breadth, which gave them a peculiar look of being all head, formed quite a remarkable spectacle to my unpractised eyes. I was quite below the mark of fashionable toilette, in my loose black velvet jacket, with

no ornament save a pearl comb, which had belonged to my mother, in my hair. I think it must have been Warren's evening dress, and neatly arranged hair, that made him look so stiff. In my experience, I have often observed that men congeal and thaw according to the degree of untidiness at which their hair stands. At last the curtain rose on

“ The glorious city in the sea ;
The pleasant place of all festivity ;
The revel of the earth, the masque of Italy.”

It was Venice—the scene was a masked revel. The first act of Lucrezia Borgia had begun. Theatre and audience faded from me. I forgot where I was. I forgot every thing except the scene that was passing before my eyes, as, with tears, pity, and breathless terror, I followed the terrible drama from its brilliant commencement to its tragical close. My sympathy throughout was with the ill-fated duchess, guilty, but how grand, how regal in her guilt ! How the stately dignity of the imperial lady softens into a mother's tenderness, as she sighs her song of love over her sleeping son ; how our

hearts go with her in the yearning agony of that supplication, swelling with the burden of her stifled anguish ; to an intensity of pathos beyond expression, I mean the song in which she replies to the story of her son's early life. How that awful cry for mercy rings in our ears, as one by one her relentless accusers sternly and shortly hurl back the tale of her crimes on her sin-stricken head, till the last fatal blow, the revelation of her guilt to the man who loves her, the son whom she loves, crushes her with its fell force, and we are almost glad when she lies prostrate, covered by the mountain of her shame ! We hold our breath with shuddering horror, as with baleful glances, or terrible hints of a purpose which needs no words more significant than her gestures to lay bare its desperate meaning ; the Borgia warns her husband that he has seen Lucrezia weep too often. What can words, such feeble words as the faded memory of years supplies, say of that tremendous climax of passion and despair which the human eye, unless lighted by the fire of genius, and the human voice, unless fervid with the richest

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melodies of the sweet south, can hardly express. It was expressed, and with glorious, soul-satisfying fulness of perfection, that night. I shall never forget that burst of acclamation, when the Duchess—her wonderful beauty kindled to unearthly majesty by the sweeping splendour of her jewelled robes—confronts her husband in his palace, and demands vengeance for the foul outrage under whose bitter truth she writhes. And oh! the agony of that terrible suspense, the horror of that avenging fate which forces her to be her own avenger, the wild despair! and the wilder hope! There is one flash of light in the darkness when the Bacchanalian chant wells out fresh from the joyous heart of the brilliant Orsini; then the mournful cadence of that gloomy warning strikes like a death-knell on the festive mirth; the flashing torches die out in the darkness, and La Borgia, the stern incarnation of vengeance, confronts the victims she has murdered, and the son whom by fatal error she has murdered as well.

I could neither see nor hear more; in the terrible extremity of that last scene, endurance

seemed to give way—the stern woe—the frantic love—the mother's desperate cries for the succour that will not come—the forgiveness that will not save—the vanishing life—and the dumb desolation of death.

I could not speak, as we were driving home. I could not have borne to hear a word that night, lest it might break the entrancing spell of that mighty effort of genius. Warren said, next morning, that it was pretty well gone through, and supposed that as I was so much gratified, I would feel inclined to return again that night; at least, he added, if my doctor did not prohibit the exposure to night air.

I went again and again to entertainments at Whorlton, with Warren as my escort. The rigid gravity of his demeanour on these occasions was something edifying to behold. Whorlton was one of those towns where every body knows every one else, and where a stranger can hardly appear at a place of public amusement without attracting a certain degree of attention. Smiling *matres familias*, happily encircled by the family group, would bow from their box in the theatre to Warren; then the whole

party would turn their eyes and opera-glasses on me. My cousin would return their salutes with rigorous ceremony, and then fix his eyes straight in front of him, apparently quite unconscious of their further notice. More especially chilling was he to the young men who sometimes accosted him. I remember, one night, when Warren was waiting for me at the door of the cloak-room, hearing a party of ingenious youths rally him with playful humour on the subject of his companion, ask him how long he had been married, and earnestly petition for an introduction to his wife. To these facetious remarks Warren only vouchsafed reply, by curtly recommending their authors to go to the devil, and as soon as I made my appearance, he seized my arm and strode through them with such a martial air, that they, being peaceably-disposed young men, fell back before him utterly abashed and confounded. Warren was very arbitrary about the manner in which he chose to oblige me, and took good care that I should feel how entirely dependent I was on his will for amusement. For example, he would take me out one night, and leave me

at home another ; and I always observed that in his report the next day, the performance and the performers never surpassed themselves so immeasurably as when I was not present. I had firmly resolved never to ask him to take me anywhere, and I think he was as resolutely bent on compelling a petition from me. Our contest ended in a compromise.

“You ought to have been there,” he said once, when he was telling me about a concert at which all the performers had been first rate, and where they had all played and sung their masterpieces.

“Ought I? Well, it certainly was not from inclination that I was absent.”

“I’m very sorry. I am sure I should have been only too glad to accompany you. Why did you not mention it?”

“Because I don’t want to tease you,” I answered. “When you don’t make the offer yourself, I naturally suppose that you have some other engagement, or that you want to be alone. You are the master, and I pick up the crumbs of entertainment that you throw down to me.”

Warren protested that there was no time when he was not ready to please me ; to which I replied that there was no time when I was not at leisure to be pleased ; and in this amicable fashion our difficulties ended.

It was not these distractions only that changed my home life. Sometimes I did not see Warren for a whole week. He had rooms in Whorlton now, and he lived there a good deal. Still the unbroken solitude in which my uncle and I rejoiced was at an end. Dr. George was our constant guest. There was something curious in the friendship, springing up so suddenly and strongly in a man of my uncle's cold and undemonstrative temperament, which existed between him and his visitor. It was so different from the common intimacies of men of the world ; they could neither help nor serve each other ; it was simply the kindly and mutual recognition of two noble natures. And Dr. George's was indeed a noble nature, tender and true as it was lofty and strong. Some men rise with the occasion ; they feel and act grandly in a grand cause, and under the influence of a lofty enthusiasm ; but Dr.

George had that innate nobility of heart which elevates the simplest duties ; his was the matured excellence of a pure and good life. " When the ear heard him, it blessed him ; and when the eye saw him, it gave witness to him."

The gentle reader must know that I had at length begun to visit in a mild way among the people in the village, and also that the school which Dr. George had recommended to me, and which he had originated almost entirely himself, was in a brisk and flourishing state ; but my ministrations were now trifling, and certainly need not have been mentioned here, had it not been for the opportunity they gave me of noting Dr. George's universal and well-earned popularity, of hearing his skill, his kindness, his thoughtful delicacy, and his quick sympathy lauded on all sides. Sometimes I met him at the cottages. I saw how gratefully the eyes of the sufferers seemed to follow him, how the most querulous murmurers were soothed into silence by his magical influence ; and I often wondered what was the secret of this wonderful power of diffusing happiness. He did not strike me as being a

peculiarly happy man ; in his usual mood he was thoughtful, even to sadness. Was it possible, I thought, that he could be quite contented in his present position ; that, skilful as he was in his profession, and young, for he was still a young man, in spite of his stoop and his scattered grey hairs, he was content to let the world and its honours go by, and to settle for life in the retirement and insignificance of a colliery village ?

I saw so much of Dr. George, he came on such intimate terms to the house, and his manner was so cordial and inviting, that in a short time I felt as if I had known him all my life. I was under much less restraint with him than I was with my uncle ; I liked him to come ; it was something new for me to have a friend at home. He often dined with us, that is, when my uncle and I were alone ; and we spent the evenings in the old fashion, talking and reading in the library, except that now uncle Rupert invariably fell sound asleep in his arm chair, and left his guest and myself to follow our own devices. I think I must be of a peculiarly inquisitive disposition ; if I take

an interest in new acquaintance, my first impulse is to find out something about their past history, so much at least as suffices to account for their present circumstances; and now I felt anxious to know whether it was a good or an ill wind which had blown George Beresford to our out-of-the-way Hirst.

He was talking one night about an old woman, one of the female patriarchs of the village, whom I was in the habit of visiting, and who worshipped Dr. George with a reverence amounting to idolatry.

“I intended to have had a chat with old Jenny to-day,” he said, “as I had half-an-hour to spare. But when I lifted the latch of her door, I saw that she was engaged in an animated conversation with you; so I put off my visit, finding that she was so much better entertained.”

“Do you know what we were talking about?” I asked. “You should have listened; you would have heard the sweet notes of your own praises. Would you like to know what she said?”

“If you like to tell me.”

“She said she was sure, if the queen knew about you, she would send for you. Indeed it is the prevailing opinion in the village that you will receive a royal commission some morning.”

Dr. George laughed. “A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country. Mine must be an exceptional case. Perhaps I might not have met with such good fortune elsewhere than at Hirst.”

“I don’t know that. Why don’t you try?”

“‘*Et tu, Brute!*’” he muttered, in an aside. “What would you have me try to do, Miss Hope? I’m very well off here.”

“There’s nothing good, but seeming makes it so,” I answered. “I don’t think that, if I were you, I should be quite satisfied to be buried in a place like this, where no one knows me.”

“And supposing every one knew me, what then?”

“Why, you would rise in your profession—you would become rich and famous.”

“I thought you did not put your faith in a carriage and three thousand a-year.”

“Nor do I, no more than I believe in a gig and respectability; but since there are such pretty baubles as carriages and thousands to be won, I don't see why those who deserve them should not wear the prizes.”

“I am content,” he answered, with a sigh. “I see by that impatient gesture that you despise my spiritless supineness; but if you don't care personally about pomps and vanities, they are hardly worth striving for, while you have no one to share them with. Then, as years go on, your activity fails somewhat. ‘Feelingly sweet is stillness after storm,’ so Wordsworth sings; and after a restless life, you do feel inclined for quiet.”

“You have chosen your repose in an odd fashion. I think of you always as a very hard worked man. Dr. Leighton had two assistants—you have none.”

“But I have a much smaller district under my care than Dr. Leighton had. Yes, my time, as you say, is pretty well occupied. I have as much to do as I can manage, and a little time over for my own pursuits is all I want.”

“What are your favourite pursuits?” I asked.

“I was merely alluding to the study of my own science.”

“Oh !” I ejaculated, feeling rather disappointed.

My companion laughed again.

“You would rather have heard that I did a little furtive poetry or painting in my leisure hours, would you not ? If I had said my art, instead of my science, you would have been rather more interested.”

“I am interested,” I answered ; and added, very solemnly, “Yours is a very noble and very valuable profession, Dr. George.”

“That remark is delivered *ex cathedrá*, and from a sense of duty ; but I thank you for your amiable motive. It is natural that you should like what excites your imagination. You are young ; but at my age the imagination is either dead, or, as in the case of men of genius, it is schooled into the ruling principle of their lives.”

“Why do you take such a pleasure in fancying yourself old ?” I inquired ; “you say you are too old for so many things.”

“For all that belongs to youth, I certainly am ; for the dearest gifts that are vouchsafed to man, for happiness that I have never known, that I never can know now.”

I wondered what he meant. Could he be referring to some unfortunate attachment? My romantic imagination, disappointed a few minutes ago, revived and whispered “Yes.” Certainly, Dr. George’s love affairs were no business of mine, but my curiosity was strongly excited.

“I suppose you will allow that you are a few years younger than my uncle?” I said.

“Yes,” Dr. George answered, wonderingly ; “well, what of him?” he asked, turning round to survey that respectable gentleman, who lay fast asleep in a chair by the fire, with a large red handkerchief thrown gracefully over his head.

“Well—he might have been married two years ago,” I replied, and I felt rather ashamed at having hazarded such a pointed allusion to what I supposed to be my companion’s thoughts ; “he might, indeed, if he had chosen. I should have had an aunt, and you

would, probably, have been sitting at this moment in Mrs. Hope's drawing-room."

"That would have depended on Mrs. Hope's good-will. May I ask what the obstacle was, if it is not a secret?"

"There is no secret; nor was there any obstacle save uncle Rupert's insensibility."

"In a word, I suppose he felt that the time for youthful feelings was past, that he was too old. You have been rather unfortunate in your illustration."

"Well, you must have your own way," I replied, feeling equally provoked at him and at myself. "If you choose to believe yourself a living commentary on the last chapter of Ecclesiastes, I can't help it; and I am sure I have no objection!"

Dr. George looked rather astonished.

"Indeed, Miss Hope, I would only be too glad to think with you if I could—if I could persuade myself that the time is not yet past—" he was speaking very slowly and thoughtfully.

"Oh, that is your affair, not mine," I interrupted, not caring to discuss the subject of

what it might be that time remained for. "You were speaking of having led a restless life; have you travelled much? Tell me all about it."

"It would take a long time to tell. I have travelled so far and so long, that I am very glad to settle at last."

"I think I should have chosen a prettier retreat."

"Perhaps I might, if I could have made my own choice; but a poor man must take the chance that offers to him. The pretty retreats were all forestalled, and I had no time to wait."

"Don't you like the town?"

"A town like Whorlton is not much to my taste, I confess. A doctor in a small place requires to possess the faculty of adaptation in a very high degree; and it is years and years before a man with neither influence nor fortune can make headway in a large town."

"Where did you begin to practise?"

"I went out to India as a young man."

"Did you, really? Then, perhaps you saw some service?"

“I was with the troops in the hill country while the fighting was going on. I should have been in India still, if I could have endured the climate. I dare say it is about the only place in the world where I could not manage to live.”

“A friend of mine, who was married lately, went out to Calcutta. I hope India will suit her and her husband, for he went intending to make a fabulous fortune in a very short time.”

“Not as an assistant-surgeon, I presume?”
Dr. George said, with a smile.

“No,” I replied, quite gravely; “I don’t know exactly what he is, but I hope he will make his fortune.”

“I am sure he has my best wishes.”

“If I wanted to make a fortune, I should go to California. Did you ever think of going there, among all your wanderings?”

“Not only thought of it, but I went.”

Neither his face nor his voice changed, yet I felt in a moment that I had touched some dissonant string. I felt deeply mortified at my idle curiosity.

“I beg your pardon,” I said, “I am sure

you must think me very impertinent and inquisitive."

"No, no, Miss Hope, not at all. You wonder, perhaps, whether I made my fortune. I went poor, and came back poorer. It made no matter; those for whose sakes I sought riches were beyond the reach of them when I came home."

I only remembered at this moment that Dr. George wore deep mourning. I did not know what to say; I could not pursue the subject, and I did not like to seem indifferent, when, for the first time since I knew him, he had alluded to his personal experience.

"But I need not trouble you with my private affairs," he said; "I have made you look quite grave. You wanted to hear something of my travels—what shall I tell you?"

"Nothing that you tell me troubles me," I replied, "only I am sorry that my thoughtlessness has revived painful recollections. What happened when you were away?"

"I came back to a desolate home. Fever had been raging in the village where my mother and sisters lived, and, as I told you, for

the first time after many absences, there was no one to welcome me back.”

I cannot describe the fathomless grief and the stern, resolute struggle with emotion in his voice and words. I had never imagined that that grave, quiet man had known such sorrow ; I had wondered at, and sometimes pitied, the solitude of heart and life in which he lived, but I had never dreamt of the terrible blow which had left him lonely.

“ No one ? ” I said, involuntarily.

“ I should not say that ; I meant no *one* in England, for Arthur was away.”

“ Arthur ! ” I exclaimed, as much startled as if there were only one Arthur in the world.

“ Yes, my brother. I wish you could see him, Miss Hope, I know you would be friends.”

“ Is he like you ? ”

“ As unlike me as you can possibly imagine. He is brave, handsome, and clever, and as generous and openhearted as the day. I never saw him in any company to which he could not suit himself. I should like to present him to you.”

I could not help thinking that the brother

who had decked his idol in so many perfections was himself, perhaps, the most worthy of the love which he laid so ungrudgingly at this Benjamin's feet. I inquired where Arthur was. "He was in Gibraltar, with his regiment," Dr. George said; and I think he would have talked further on the topic so near at heart, but at this moment uncle Rupert roused himself from his peaceful slumbers. He gazed upon us with the benevolent air which elderly gentlemen are accustomed to assume on the first recovery of consciousness after awaking. He made his customary apology, and hoped that I had done my best to entertain our visitor. This was a customary remark also, for he was extremely tenacious about the degree of attention that was paid to his friend. When Dr. George had left us that night, my uncle began to talk about him. I had been accustomed to hear him speak of his favourite with friendly warmth, but I was certainly not prepared for the startling revelation which followed on his friendly encomiums.

"I am very glad to hear you say so," uncle

Rupert remarked with great fervour, after I had fully agreed in the praises which he lavished on his chosen friend. "I would rather hear you speak so of him than of any one else in the world; and if I could see the purpose fulfilled that I have in my heart for you two, Alice, I think I could die happy."

"Good gracious! what do you mean?" I exclaimed, startled out of all composure, while at the same time a horrible presentiment, an explanation of many trifling circumstances which had often puzzled me, came to the aid of my understanding only too truly.

"I mean, Alice," he answered, with a voice in which agitation betrayed his sincerity, "that I want to leave you a protector. I know that my life is uncertain, that I may die at any moment, and it is the dearest wish of my heart to see you George Beresford's wife."

When I spoke, it was to assure him that I only wanted to live with him, and to entreat him with tears not to speak of dying.

"But it is best to look steadily at what must certainly happen," he answered, "and

in any case your marriage to George won't shorten my life."

"But I can't marry him," I suggested, harshly.

"You can't marry him!" he repeated, with sudden sharpness, "whom do you intend to marry, then?"

"No one."

"I'm glad to hear that at least," he replied, sternly, a look of dark suspicion, which had flitted over his face, passing away; "why can't you marry him?"

"Because I don't care for him sufficiently; besides, I have no reason to believe that he has ever thought of me but as a child."

"Men don't generally think women of your age children," he replied, gloomily; and I may remark here that my uncle not unfrequently treated me as a child himself. "Of course I have no wish to force your inclinations, Alice," he continued in a softer tone; "but I did hope that it was as I thought."

"I'm very sorry," I said; "but he was so kind and friendly, I daresay I have got into the habit of talking more to him than I ought to do."

“Nay, the fault was mine,” he said, sadly. “I don’t ask you if you have formed any prior attachment; only remember, that if it is the case, I’ll never withhold my consent to your marriage—if,” he added, with a significant look at me, “I can give it conscientiously. I might have been prepared for this; I suppose it is not in woman to give her love both wisely and well.”

“But you are not angry,” I said, evading a theory of whose truth I had had bitter experience.

“No, no, child, what have I to be angry at?”

“And Dr. George knows nothing about this?”

“He does not, and I hope that, for his sake, as well as for mine, you will entirely forget this conversation.”

I promised to do my best, but the task was impossible. Nor, in spite of what my uncle had said, did it seem easy for him to fulfil his part of the compact, and not to be angry. I saw that I had disappointed a cherished scheme; he was not a man to bear contradiction to his will with a good grace. Moreover,

the idea that he had compromised his friend's dignity evidently rankled in his mind. My uncle never reverted to the subject, and it was impossible for me to know whether the matter had ever been discussed between the two men. I strictly reviewed my own conduct, but I could not find much to blame. I had been more frank and unreserved with Dr. George than our short acquaintance warranted, but then I had only regarded him as a friend; had it been otherwise, I should have been chill and more embarrassed. We had no more quiet after-dinner talks. My uncle suddenly became very wakeful, and I could not help questioning with some misgivings the depths of those slumbers which I had fondly hoped to be so profound. It was all very painful and disagreeable; my slowly reviving happiness vanished, and I began to hold strong opinions respecting the unequal distribution of weal and woe in this world.

CHAPTER VIII.

“How now! how now! mad wag. What a plague is
thy quips and thy quiddities!

But, Hal, I prythee, trouble me no more with vanity.”

HENRY IV.

EVIL is always comparative, and in the experience of real trouble, I was soon to learn how slight my present annoyances were. One morning in the beginning of the year, I received a letter from Harry. Uncle Rupert was not in the room, or he would have been roused by the exclamation of surprise to which I could not help giving utterance. The letter bore the Whorlton post-mark, and its purport was to summon me to meet him there. He told his story in a few desperate words, without comment or excuse. He had been expelled

from college ; he supposed that it was all quite just, but there was no use in talking about that now ; he would tell me more when I came. He gave me his address in a part of Whorlton of which I had never heard the name. I set out on my walk immediately after breakfast. It was a brilliant winter morning, clear and frosty. There had been a light fall of snow during the night ; it crackled sharply under my feet ; far away as I could see, the white level fields lay sparkling in the early sun, and the black branches of the leafless trees, but yesterday sombre and barren, bent gracefully under their feathery burdens, light and spotless as the foam-crest wreathing the waves. The air was perfectly still and clear ; earth was silent like an enchanted land, as I pursued my solitary walk ; now and then a solitary waggon, its heavy wheels describing shining furrows on the snowy causeway, interrupted the long stretching vista. Single brown birds dropped with a rustling flutter from the hedge by which I walked. In summer this hedge blossomed luxuriantly with woodbine and wild roses ; now every tiny

twig bore its own weight of snow, and the shining haws gleamed out like scarlet spots staining the ermine. Beyond the hedge ran a straight, fenced-in burn; I could hear the iron tinkle of the bubbling water beneath the thin coating of ice; before the noon-day sun rose hot in the heaven, I knew that it would have burst its frail bond, and be rushing on unchecked, in the gladness of new-found liberty. I heard and saw these things without marking them. I had Harry's dreadful letter in my hand, and read it again and again, but in the abrupt brevity of his announcement, it was more meaningless than if it had hinted more and told less. Nor were the letters which I had received from him lately at all more intelligible; he had never affected to take much interest in his college studies, and in answer to my questions about his prospects, he had either returned evasive answers, or had passed them over entirely. It was a narrow, dingy street, in one of the low parts of Whorlton, within a short distance of the wharves, to which Harry had directed me. The houses were mean and dirty, the ground floors being principally oc-

cupied by the petty provision shops and marine stores which exist in such abundance in the shipping neighbourhood of every port town. Harry's lodging, which I was to recognize by the sign, "Higgins, General Retail Dealer," was one of the most uninviting-looking abodes even among these wretched tenements. Indeed, I must have supposed I was mistaken, if, in the midst of an animated colloquy with a gentleman whom I took to be Mr. Higgins himself, and who asseverated with much blasphemy that he had never heard of such a person as Mr. Hope, I had not heard a hurried exclamation from some one who threw up a window overhead (I was standing with the pious Mr. H. at his shop door), and in an instant after, Harry rushed down a rickety wooden staircase, and, roughly pushing past the astonished landlord, dragged me back through the shop. We went upstairs, followed by unmeasured remonstrances from the retail trader, directed against gentlemen who came to respectable houses, and called themselves *out* of their names, Harry, meanwhile, explaining to me that he had at present as-

sumed the *alias* of Mr. Jackson. The reason of this skilful manceuvre was not quite plain, considering that Harry was altogether unknown here; nevertheless, he evidently regarded it as such a very fine stroke of policy, that I could do no less than commend his caution. He shut the door of the wretched little room which he tenanted, and flung himself down on a chair beside the table, resting his head on his elbows.

“Here’s the sofa for you, Al,” he said, “but take care—it has only three legs. I hardly expected that you would come, do you know.”

“You might have known me better,” I replied. “Oh, Harry! what have you been doing?”

Harry was in a perverse mood, and the only answer I could extract from him was, that, whatever it was, it was done now, that he had heard more than enough of his shortcomings lately, and that if I had only come to reproach him, I might as well, and better, have staid at home. Then he fell to drawing lines on the table with his penknife, and poured out a

string of the most absurd questions—cross-examining me about the condition of my pony, about his sweetheart Mary, and whether she was married yet—criticising my dress, teasing me for compliments about the improvement in his own personal appearance, which, indeed, I might have paid with great sincerity. I was reasonably annoyed at his unpardonable levity. I had been prepared to soothe him if he were in a state of sullen despair, or to reason with him if he were defiant, but I had not expected this utter callousness; it did not strike me then that it was the mask of deep-seated anxiety. I sat still and listened, while he went on with his rambling discourse, hardly waiting for an answer, and with his head bent down, intent on his work of demolition on the table. He reached the climax at last by inquiring whether Warren's whiskers were grown, and immediately added, "Warren won't be sorry about this, will he, Alice?"

"If you think that your ill-conduct or ill-fortune will please Warren," I replied, "you are certainly doing your best to gratify him."

"Come, Alice, darling, don't be cross,"

Harry answered, looking up at me with a bright smile; "I counted on you, at least, even though all the world turned against me."

"But the world has not turned against you," I urged; "you are your own worst enemy. But I did not come here to reproach you; tell me what I can do for you."

"Oh, I don't know, I'm sure," Harry replied, throwing back his arms, as if to dismiss the ridiculous question to the winds; "I sent for you to tell me."


"And I don't even know why you are here!"

"Oh! if that is what you want, I'll make a clean shrift in no time. But you'll hear nothing very good; so, if you are shocked, it's not my fault."

There was nothing particularly heinous in Harry's college transgressions taken separately; but their name was legion; it was in their number that their magnitude lay. He did not dispute the justice of his sentence of expulsion; he had been threatened with it over and over again; he did not know how it was; after every fresh scrape he made a vow to reform; he really believed he would have

reformed, if they had given him another chance; but he did not know, it might just have been the same story over again.

He grew excited as he talked, and quickly passed to a stage of fierce recklessness, which I vainly tried to calm. He declared that he would never face uncle Rupert again; he wished he had been sent to sea when he was ten years old; then, if he had disgraced himself, nobody would have been the worse for it. But there was still time; and then he declared that he had only sent for me to wish me good-bye, that he had been wavering all night between enlisting and going to sea, but that his mind was quite made up now, he would seek a ship, and never trouble any one again. I did not know then that such desperate resolutions are not unusually adopted by young gentlemen who have been so unfortunate as to get into trouble, and thrown aside at the slightest indication of a change of fortune. I thought Harry was in earnest, as, indeed, at that moment he was. It was not till after long and earnest supplications from me that he consented to abandon the idea; indeed, I think



he rather liked the idea of taking what he conceived, to be a high moral ground. I am certain that he believed he could entirely expiate his offences by accepting the queen's shilling, or by taking his place before the mast. I could not persuade him to take a more decent lodging; his present abode was quite good enough for him, he said. And again, I think, a notion crossed his mind that he was performing an acceptable penance; besides, he was in debt; and again, at the mention of his debts, Harry's stoicism soon gave way. He must go; it was a shabby trick, he knew, after all that uncle Rupert had done for him; but he could not help it.

"When people are dead, you know, Alice," he said, "their relations don't care what they spend upon them; and this is something of the same sort; so, I dare say, when I'm gone, uncle Rupert will pay without much grumbling, and if he won't, why, nobody will be ruined, that's one consolation."

"But you have given me your word to stay, Harry," I persisted.

He demurred; then he reiterated his promise

of remaining, but declared that nothing would induce him to go back to Hirst ; he hated the place, he hated the collieries, and, above all, he would never submit to be placed under Warren. I forbore answering any of his inquiries respecting my cousin, further than, rather maliciously, to laud his steadiness and industry. Harry coolly rejoined that he had no doubt Warren was quite as bad as he was, only that he was such a confounded double-faced hypocrite, nobody but the father of lies could tell the half that there was in him. I asked Harry what I must say to my uncle ; in answer to which, he gave me the pleasing assurance that by the time I reached home, or by to-morrow at the furthest, the whole story would be communicated to him by the heads of the college. After the lapse of two hours, I found myself as much perplexed as I was when I set out on my morning walk from Hirst. Suddenly a bright thought struck me. Harry only listened to me with undisguised impatience ; perhaps Dr. George might have more influence with him.

“ Harry,” I said, “ will you think seriously

over your affairs to-day?—and if I can persuade a friend of uncle Rupert's to come to you to-night, or to-morrow, will you see him?"

Harry looked queerly at me.

"A friend of uncle Rupert's! And pray how have you so much influence with uncle Rupert's friends? He is your lover, I'll bet—no, I've taken a vow against betting—I'll take a Quaker's oath that he's your lover, Alice."

"I neither came here to listen to you talking nonsense, nor did I come to be insulted!" I responded, with overwhelming sternness. "Dr. George is a friend to whoever needs one, and I should think no one is in greater need of judicious advice than you are just now."

"Dr. who, did you say? You don't mean to tell me that you are talking about that superannuated idiot, Leighton? Why, the old fellow would lose his head before I had half driven the meaning of my being here into it!"

"I did not mean Dr. Leighton; but I don't see why you should not speak respectfully of him."

"Peace go with him. But who are you talking about?"

"I don't care to tell you now; you are determined upon your own way."

"Now, darling, don't be severe, or I must retract my word, when I said that you were the best sister who was ever thrown away on a good-for-nothing brother. If it is not Dr. Leighton, who is it?"

"His successor, Dr. George Beresford."

"Beresford," Harry repeated, musingly—"not a bad name. Well, don't fear that I'll tease you about *him* any more. I look higher for you, I assure you, than a colliery doctor. Do you know, I had made up my mind that you would captivate some tremendous swell when you were away? Now you did—you are blushing!"

"Keep to the point, if you please. Dr. George has great influence with my uncle. He is very kind and tolerant. Will you see him—that is to say, if he will consent to come?"

"Well, for your sake, I'll do the honours of my princely habitation to him. It's an odd

notion, is it not, to minister to a mind diseased with an M.D.? Don't you think you had better send the parson with him? Why do you give him his Christian name?"

"Our clergyman's name is Beresford also. The people in the village always call him Dr. George. I wish you would get me a coach from the nearest stand. I shan't have time to walk home before dusk."

"We'll put this young gentleman in the way of turning an honest penny," Harry, who was now standing by the window, responded, and throwing up the sash, he hailed a boy who was passing, and commissioned him, in consideration of the fee of sixpence, to procure a coach. "You see I don't know where the stand is, and I don't want to show myself," he added. "When will you come back?"

"I'll come to-morrow."

"Do, and then we'll have a serious talk, and decide on what I am to do. I'll work like a galley slave. I declare I'll hire a wheelbarrow, and vend my landlord's cabbages and apples in the street. There's your coach. Good bye, and God bless you, darling," said

Harry, pronouncing this benediction with a true paternal air. He escorted me down stairs, driving before him, in our passage from the door, a swarm of ragged children, who had collected round the coach, gazing at the unwonted spectacle with as much curiosity as if it had been a Noah's ark. They raised a yell of acclamation as I drove away; and the last thing I saw was Harry's bright face nodding at me from the window, which was so small that his nose and eyes seemed set in it as in a frame.

My drive home in the chill, darkening afternoon was very depressing. The red January sun hung low in the sky, casting broad crimson reflections on the white fields, tinting the gnarled stems of the trees with a rosy glow. Otherwise the landscape was dreary indeed. The smooth white road, so fair with its carpet of soft down, when I passed that way in the morning, was trodden into black mire, and the coach dragged slowly through the heavy ruts. I was tired, and rigid with cold; my spirits fell every moment as I left Whorlton behind. Harry had alternately provoked and

enlivened me ; he was so odd in his tribulations, and took such cheerful views of his own case—as cheerful, indeed, as if he had been contemplating the predicament of some one else—that in his presence I could not look steadily and seriously at the matter. Now I saw it in its true light ; I dreaded the consequences of uncle Rupert’s anger ; he had never looked leniently upon Harry’s follies, and now that they deserved a graver name, I could expect no tolerance for him. I was passing through the village, deep in these gloomy meditations, when suddenly I saw Dr. George coming out of one of the cottages. Without a moment’s thought, I stopped the coach and called him. I could not account for the impulse which prompted me to summon him, nor for the thrill of inspiriting confidence which went through me at the sight of the kind, pleasant face.

“ Have you five minutes to spare for me, Dr. George ?” I asked.

“ As many as you like ; am I to get into your coach ?”

“ No—we’ll dismiss it here. You are go-

ing to dine with us ; walk with me as far as our house."

" You have come from Whorlton, I suppose ?" he said, as we walked on together.

" Yes—that is what I wanted to talk to you about." And then I told Dr. George my whole story, and by the time I had ended, I think I had thrown my burden as entirely on his shoulders as Harry threw his on mine.

" You must accept the usual fate of obliging people, Dr. George," I said, by way of apology ; " I should think your friends rarely forget you when they are in trouble."

I always spoke as I felt to Dr. George ; he never made polite replies for the sake of speaking ; his innate worth of nature rang so true, it needed no gilding to enhance the value of the metal. On the contrary, when Warren was in a benign mood, I could hardly ask him for a glass of water without getting a high-flown speech in return. Dr. George simply said, " I'm very glad you have remembered me. What would you like me to do ?"

" I don't know in the least"—and, indeed, I did not ; " Harry is such a troublesome boy."

“And the trouble seems to come upon you, I think.”

“It does just now, for I am so concerned about what uncle Rupert will say. Harry is so headstrong, and it is impossible to lead him except by kindness. My uncle is kind, but he is not gentle, and he never thought well of Harry. Harry knew that, and I think it had a tendency to make him reckless. Do you understand?”

Dr. George nodded assent, and I proceeded in my tale.

“Harry did not go willingly to college; he only chose it because he disliked the idea of living at Hirst, and because uncle Rupert would not consent to his going into the army. I should fancy that young men are exposed to quite as great temptations at college as elsewhere; uncle Rupert, however, seemed to think differently; but then, he has lived so much out of the world, that he regulates his opinions by theory instead of practice. You will think I am very conceited, talking this way, when I have seen so little myself; but while you are young, you have an intuitive knowledge of things be-

longing to your age; I dare say, when uncle Rupert was a young man, he was not behind his time."

"Does he know about it yet?"

"I hope not. And now can you guess what I want you to do?"

"Do you wish me speak to Mr. Hope?"

"Yes, if you don't dislike it very much."

"I told you I was glad that you had applied to me, and I meant what I said; but don't you think that you have more influence with your uncle than I have?"

"I am quite sure not. Uncle Rupert thinks there is no one like you, and you can hardly have known him for six months without discovering that he holds the inferior sex in very rude estimation."

"He is heretical, is he not?"

"I don't know. But about Harry."

"You may depend on me for doing my best, but don't build too strongly on my success."

"Oh, you will succeed, I am certain. And now, have I given you any idea of what sort of a boy Harry is? You and I have each a favourite brother!"

“Yes—and perhaps we both think of them as we wish them to be, rather than as they are. I feel as if I knew your brother already; he must be a fine fellow, in spite of his—we’ll say, of his eccentricities. I should like to know him.”

“Would you really? I’m so glad.”

“Certainly I should.”

“I’m almost ashamed to tell you what I have done, Dr. George.”

“Threatened Harry with a visit that you don’t think he’ll relish very much; is it not so?”

“Not exactly; but I gave a promise in your name which I had no right to give.”

“Would you like me to see your brother or your uncle first?”

“Then you really mean to do both? I think if you were to see uncle Rupert first, you could tell Harry what he said. I don’t know what I should have done without you.”

“You would have missed me as little as you would if you were never to see me again. The idea of our mutual necessity exists solely in our imagination. Can you give me your brother’s address? I must find your uncle

now, so as to have time to reach Whorlton to-night."

I gave him Harry's letter, and he left me—I pondering as much on his last words as on the mission he had gone to fulfil. How uncompromisingly he asserted his independence! "The idea of our mutual necessity exists solely in our imagination." Was that his opinion? Then it was a pity that my uncle had not heard this stern assertion of self-reliance before, in his own fancy, he presented me so generously to a gentleman who did not want me. Of course he did not love me, and I knew that I did not love him; and yet something whispered to me that if it had been as my uncle had said, and if Dr. George had chosen this moment (the moment now gone for ever) to tell me all that was in his heart, I, softened by his kindness, and with the new-born regard kindled by gratitude strong within me, I do not think I could have said no to the request which would probably have followed the confession.

I was in the dining-room when my uncle came in, alone, by which I augured that Dr.

George had been successful in his mission, and that he had gone to negotiate with Harry. I tried to judge how the ill news had affected my uncle ; I looked at his face—it was a countenance more in sorrow than in anger, but I started, for I had never seen the aged look so visible as it was to-night. He looked ill and care-worn, and my heart smote me. I had only thought how his anger might be turned away, not of the disappointment to his own hopes, and the fresh pang which this new disgrace must inflict on his sensitive pride. It was not till we were quite alone that he referred to the subject which was present in both our minds.

“George has promised to come here to-morrow morning ; you must see him, and decide what is best to be done,” he said, with a weary sigh.

“What more can be done than you have done already ?” I answered, my mind taking its colour from his own depression. “I am very sorry it should be so. I have lost all hope in Harry.”

“Don’t say that. I lost hope in him too

soon perhaps, or this might never have happened."

"Yours has been a thankless task."

"We need not talk of that now, nor of what might have been if we had acted differently. God will judge us all by the light that he gives us to walk by. All we can do is to redeem the evil, as far as lies in us. George is going to Whorlton this evening."

"He is very kind, but I knew he would do anything to serve you."

"Do you believe in your heart, Alice, that I am the incentive?"

"You and his own goodness of nature combined."

"You have eyes and see not. There's another hope at an end."

"I am glad you have spoken of it," I said, summoning courage, "because you must be gratified to hear, for Dr. George's sake, that you were mistaken."

"How do you know I was mistaken?"

"Dr. George thinks that it is nonsense to believe that we are necessary to each other. That is as much as to say he can do very well by himself—that he does not want a wife."

“I don’t exactly see your logic,” my uncle said, rising, and drawing his chair to the fire. He leant back his head, turned from me, and we spoke no more that night. His unwonted gentleness was inexpressibly painful to me. The fire of his manhood quenched—broken in spirit and in energy, he seemed to be merely the wreck of what he was. I would rather that he had been implacable than have heard these mournful confessions of an error only too late discovered. There is no more bitterly sorrowful revelation than to find that our life has been a mistake, that our noblest purposes have failed because we ourselves have thwarted their course. It seemed to be no effort to me now to consecrate my life to our kind father in everything but name. I resolved that, however farther Harry might go wrong, and I felt that I dared not trust in a reform prompted by impulse, my uncle should, if my endeavours could effect it, be spared the renewal of this night’s trouble.

Dr. George arrived early the next morning, before my uncle had come down stairs. I saw at once that there was good promise in his face.

I must have astonished him by my enthusiastic greeting, but I was hardly master of myself, and his appearance was such a relief to the strain of feeling which only now relaxed its tension.

"I have thought of you all night," I exclaimed. "It is very kind of you to come so early."

"I feared I might prove an untimely visitor. Well, I have seen your brother, Miss Hope; and never fear for him, he will do you credit some day."


"Poor Harry! I'm glad you think so. I confess I am not very sanguine."

"The first thing you must do is to get him into more decent lodgings."

"Is he not in a dreadful hole?"—and I could not help laughing as I recalled my first introduction to Mr. Higgins' domicile, the circumstances of which I repeated to Dr. George.

"It will never do for you to go to such a place," he said gravely.

"Oh! I don't mind that in the least, but I'm persuaded Harry will never do any good there, people of his mercurial temperament are so apt to take the tone of their belongings; but it will be very difficult to move him."



“So I perceived, but he must move.”

“He is there on principle. He is quite a Roman Catholic in practice. You must have seen that he thinks he is doing something very meritorious in making himself as uncomfortable as possible.”

“We must find him some more effective means of making restitution. What can he betake himself to? He seems to have a deeply-rooted prejudice against Hirst.”

“He always had. Now, I’ll tell you my plan, but I’m afraid that it may not meet with your approbation.”

“Am I to give my opinion, then, or to listen in respectful silence?”

“You are to give your opinion, but you must weigh it well, for I am resolved to follow it.”

“You put me in a very responsible position.”

“Well, listen, because it affects me, too. Harry and I can’t do better than emigrate.”

“Miss Hope!”

“I knew you would be surprised—so would I, if any one had hinted such a thing to me before this morning. Indeed, it was only last

night that I determined to devote my whole life to my uncle. But I think the best thing for him will be to get rid of us both—and he has you. You intend to stay here, do you not?”

“I have no present thoughts of making a change, certainly.”

“And you have none now, I hope,” I continued, carefully avoiding my companion’s eye. “I have made up my mind to go to America. Far into the backwoods, I mean. All my dreams lately have been of—

‘Larger constellations, burning, mellow moons, and
happy skies,
Breathing of tropic shade, and palms in clusters, knots
of Paradise.’”

I want to see the primeval forests and the ocean lakes. They say a strong arm and a strong heart are all that are wanted there. Harry has a strong arm, and I must fortify my heart.”

This project was no fanciful vision of the moment. It had grown up silently within me, though this was the first time that my

thoughts had been brought to the test of speech. I felt excited.

“This life has disappointed me. I am sick of its petty conventionalities, its poor aims, and the worthlessness of these aims when they are realized. In the strong new world we will have no time to sit poring over our miseries, and gauging our capacities for suffering. We will have simple pleasures, not the vitiated amusements into which we are driven by very weariness of spirit. Disappointments that go near to kill us here, won't touch us there. Look at uncle Rupert. Do you know what was the beginning of his odd, isolated ways? It was a love disappointment. He would have been different now if he had had active adventure to distract him. And yet he is not weak. Can you imagine the whole current of a man's life being changed for such a reason?”

“I can imagine it well.”

“Really. But where have I wandered to? You should have called me to order when I began to ramble. I'm waiting for your verdict.”

“You must not ask me, Miss Hope. I really can't advise you,” he said, hastily.

I was rather surprised.

"I wish you would," I said. "Have you no opinion?"

"I have a very strong opinion, indeed. Are you really in earnest?"

"Quite—now what do you think?"

"I think it would be a greater disappointment to your uncle than I can express. Besides, I question whether your brother would consent."

"Oh, if you think uncle Rupert would look upon it in that way, there is nothing more to be said. I would have very little doubt about Harry. I am only afraid of his doing what he threatened yesterday. He was quite bent on enlisting, or on going to sea. Did he say anything to you about it? I lay awake half the night thinking about it. Suppose he were to be gone when I reach Whorlton to-day?"

"My dear Miss Hope," Dr. George returned, with a smile, "depend upon it you need be under no apprehensions. When young gentlemen proclaim these desperate resolutions, they have no more notion of acting up to them than a young lady, disappointed in love, has of fulfilling her threat of taking poison."

“What an idea!” I exclaimed. “Are young ladies ever so extremely ridiculous?”

“I have heard so, though I can’t say that I ever met with an instance in my own experience. Does your brother expect you to-day?”

“I suppose so.”

“I must be in Whorlton this morning. May I drive you over?”

“I shall be much obliged to you; but you will come to see Harry, won’t you?”

“Certainly, if you wish it.”

The letter from —— College, whose arrival Harry had predicted yesterday, came this morning. My uncle handed it over to me without reading it, bidding me let him know what answer it required. I thought that Dr. George would be the best judge of that. I gave it to him as we were driving down to Whorlton, and took the reins while he was reading it. It was a long letter, and I feared that it must contain an awful catalogue of offences. When he had finished, he asked me if I knew what the contents were. I said I did not, and added that I would rather not know, as I supposed they were anything but gratify-

ing. There was nothing that Harry had not told him already, he replied, and I felt much relieved to hear it ; for since I left Harry I had been haunted with the idea that he had kept back the worst part of the truth from me. I asked Dr. George if Harry had told him about his debts. He said that I need not trouble myself further about them, as Uncle Rupert had declared his intention of paying everything. Harry had made out a list of what he owed. The sum was very much smaller than I expected ; but the satisfaction which I could not help feeling was immediately checked by the dissatisfied look which my companion wore. Dr. George's was a very tell-tale face—the gravity, approaching to sternness, which compressed lip and nostril, and hardened the lines on his brow, could not be concealed under the mask of forced indifference.

“What is the matter?” I asked ; “surely you don't think he has been very extravagant? I was prepared for a list twice as long.”

“So was I.”

“Then why do you look so grave about it? Don't try to smile ; you were never intended

for a hypocrite. I know you have doubts about something."

"I should only displease you if I told you what they are."

"Well, what matter? My displeasure can't, surely, affect you very much."

"Then, Miss Hope, I very much fear that this," and he tapped the paper which he held in his hand as he spoke, "does not contain half of what we ought to know."

"But Harry gave you to understand that it was all, did he not?"

"He did, certainly."

"Then, surely, Dr. George, you don't mean to accuse my brother of telling a falsehood?"

"I warned you that I should only displease you," he replied, quietly.

"But I never supposed that you could think anything so cruel and unjust. Certainly, you've not seen Harry under a very favourable aspect; but I hardly think you are warranted to lay such a charge as that against him. You will allow me, however, as I know my brother rather better than you can do, to believe that he speaks the truth."

“Don't you think that it is you who are rather unjust now?” Dr. George asked.

I was ashamed of my ill-humour. “Do forgive me ; that is, if you can, after you have done so much for me.”

“You were quite right to defend your brother.”

“No, I was not ; I was quite wrong. Is every one you serve as ungrateful as I am ?”

“My dear Miss Hope, I have no claim on your gratitude.”

“You don't enforce it, you mean. Well, it would never do if there were not a few people in the world who do good, hoping for nothing again.”

“And I hope nothing,” he said gravely. “You are right.”

I had a strong suspicion that I had said something wrong ; but no matter. I had no time, just now, to study the variations of George Beresford's mood. He put up his gig at a livery stable, and we walked together to Harry's lodgings. I did not see my polite friend of the day before, and we passed straight up stairs. “Mr. Jackson's at home ! Walk in,

ladies and gentlemen," Harry called out in his clear, ringing voice, as we knocked at the door. What a scene there was! The breakfast-things were still standing, partly on the mantel-piece, the remainder on a tray pushed into a corner of the room; the apartment was strongly scented with cigar smoke; it was very close and musty. Dr. George, with medical foresight, immediately opened the window.

The table, the floor, and every chair in the room were littered with books and papers, and in the midst of this mass and confusion Harry sat, serene and smiling, with pen and ink, and several blank sheets of paper before him. He lifted up his head, tossing back the thick masses of his bright brown hair, as we came in. He was dressed with superlative care, and in the very height of fashionable morning toilette. I was half angry, half amused, at this display of foppishness. I thought that at that time and place he might well have dispensed with his gold sleeve-buttons, his ring, also that a coat rather more the worse for wear than his present garment would have been quite good enough. But he was so

handsome when he looked up at me with those great audacious blue eyes, the wild fire that danced in them tempered by the long, dark lashes. Harry was naturally very fair; but his clear, healthy complexion was browned by out-of-door exercise. He had a daring, rather haughty air, softened by irresistible good humour, fine distinguished-looking features, and a perfectly-formed mouth, but its expression was faulty; it was neither bad nor weak, but it was so restless, I never saw it compressed into resolution; the short upper lip curled slightly, and disclosed such a row of regular, brilliantly white teeth, you could hardly have wished to see it close, even for the sake of the character the face might have gained. This was Harry's portrait. He looked like a banished prince, as he rose to greet us with as much composure as if he had been receiving us in a palace. My poor Dr. George did not appear to advantage beside him. I had never noticed any defects, when Warren, with his usual amiability, pointed them out; now I saw, for the first time, how weather-beaten and shabby his exterior was;

that his wristbands were ragged, his clothes ill-made and ill-fitting. He looked care-worn and time-worn ; he had borne the burden and heat of the day till he was travel-stained and heart-weary ; he had fought the battle of life bravely and well, but the scars of the conflict were upon him still. Dr. George set a chair for me out of the draught of the window, and Harry pushed his fingers through his hair again, and cleared off his papers from the table with a deep sigh of relief.

“What are you doing, Harry ?” I asked ; “you look very busy.”

“Because I *am* very busy,” he answered with great importance. “I’ve been at work since six o’clock this morning. I’m glad you’ve come,” he continued, “turning to Dr. George ; I want to consult you about—about matters, in short, which Alice can’t exactly understand.”

“I’m at your service,” Dr. George returned, with a slight smile.

“Well, my mind is quite made up,” said Harry. “I’m going to be a coach.”

“A coach !” I exclaimed.

“A college tutor, my dear,” Harry explained, with a condescending air; “we always call them coaches,” he added, by way of making himself quite intelligible to my understanding.

“But, Harry, you cannot go back to college,” I suggested, meekly.

“Are you a fool, Alice?” he replied sharply, and Dr. George said, “Hush!” in a low voice.

Harry lifted his eyebrows slightly, and regarded the author of this gentle reproof with an air of ineffable scorn. “I beg your pardon, but you might as well tell an escaped convict that he would do well not to go back to prison, as give me that unnecessary piece of information. Now, my plan is this, if you will have the goodness to listen to me,” he said, crossing his fingers authoritatively. “I intend to coach men in the long vacation; and for the rest of the year, I shall give private lessons in the classics here.”

I looked at Dr. George. He was struggling to be grave. The quiet mouth did not even curve, but gleams of irrepressible humour were lighting up his eyes. “Have you considered the difficulty of getting pupils?” he asked.

“A situation in a school would hardly suit your plans for the long vacation, and few men in Whorlton are classical students.”

“So much the more need have they to be taught, then,” Harry answered lightly. “Indeed I consider that rather in my favour. I’ll supply a want in the place; and then, my terms are exceedingly moderate.”

“What have we here?” Dr. George asked, taking up one of the many sheets of paper on which Harry had been scribbling.

“That’s my prospectus,” Harry replied, coolly. “Read it. I flatter myself I’ve hit the thing off pretty well.”

I crossed the room to where Dr. George was sitting, and read over his shoulder as follows: “A young man, of prepossessing exterior, and moderately good character”—(“I did not like to brag,” Harry, who had joined us by this time, interposed, “and I thought I could not say first-rate”)—“who has received the advantage of an excellent classical education, under the auspices of that distinguished scholar, —— ———” (“The old boy would hardly thank me for giving his name; I must

think how that has to be filled up," Harry said)—"Professor of Greek and Latin at one of the most well-known colleges of our glorious university, is desirous"—("The young man, I suppose?" Dr. George remarked, "but we have travelled a long way from him")—"is desirous to fill up a few hours of his time daily, by giving lessons in the humanities to the nobility, clergy, and gentry of the neighbourhood." The rest of this notable advertisement was in unfinished sentences. There was a pathetic appeal to the mercantile classes; the prosaic nature of their lives was feelingly hinted at, and the refining influence of an hour or two of nightly converse with the poets and sages of mighty Greece was strongly insisted upon. Then followed a quotation from Shakspeare, in which, for the wonder-working power of music, the wonder-working power of poetry and philosophy was substituted. The remuneration was delicately and gracefully insinuated; and, in conclusion, parties who desired to avail themselves of the inestimable advantages now offered to them in Whorlton for the *first time*—(the italics were Harry's)—

were invited to address themselves to H. H., No. 129, Dover Street. Harry explained that now he considered himself fully authorized to resume his own name.

I knew that Dr. George could smile, ay, and laugh too ; I had seen him do both ; the smiles came oftenest ; but that the gift of "inextinguishable laughter" was in him to the extent to which it developed itself at present, I had no idea. So must Homer's gods upon Olympus have laughed, as Professor Teufelsdröck in that solitary burst of mirth, the one laughter-fit of a life, which shook the rafters of his lofty, lonely garret. Partly out of sympathy, and partly out of real amusement, I laughed too ; and Harry, after a few instants of great discomposure, joined with such unrestrained hilarity, that Mr. Higgins, amongst his eggs and cabbages down stairs, must have thought that his eccentric lodger, and his lodger's friends, had lost their senses.

"What do you two see to amuse you so much?" Harry asked, becoming suddenly very grave.

Dr. George again took up the unlucky

paper, I suppose with the intention of commenting on it ; but he only shook his head, and laughed again, more heartily than before.

“Come, now,” said Harry, “don’t, like a good fellow. Alice, you’ll be in hysterics in five minutes! What improvements can you make upon it?”

“Put out the moderately good character, you modest youth!” Dr. George recommended.

“That’s now done,” Harry said, briskly, putting his pen through the words ; “but I’m not immaculate, you know.”

“But you’re not bound to criminate yourself ; you may as well let it be taken for granted that your character is beyond question ; and setting aside all faults in the wording of your advertisement, who do you think is coming to such a disreputable place as this to receive your valuable instructions?”

“Harry, do seek some more respectable lodgings,” I interposed.

“I shall do no such thing, Alice. ‘If the mountain won’t come to Mahomet, Mahomet must go to the mountain.’ I’ll buy a seedy coat and hat from some old Jew clothesman ;

I'll take my books and papers under my arm, and with a green cotton umbrella, with a horn handle—I'll be the very beau ideal of a shabby-genteel tutor—I'll go to the people's houses myself!"

"But why are you so attached to this place?"

"Necessity has no laws. I occupy these commodious apartments at the rate of five shillings a-week. If that thief, Higgins, wasn't such a soulless brute, he would take it out in Greek and Latin. People never know when a piece of good luck comes in their way."

"I'm sure you're an example of your own theory," I said.

"Don't hit a man when he's down, that's mean," Harry said, carelessly. "Dr. George, I want to have a little business conversation with you; just step in here," and Harry flung open the door of a bedroom, corresponding in splendour to the sumptuous apartment in which he sat. "Alice, my dear," he continued, putting on his grand air, "we are not going to talk secrets—just to run over a few business matters, which, of course, won't interest you."

I submitted quite meekly, hardly daring to

answer Dr. George's look, lest Harry should perceive it, and fancy himself insulted. Of course I knew that the important business referred to his debts ; and I did sincerely hope that he would confide the whole secret of his embarrassments to Dr. George. They came back in about ten minutes, Harry evidently in high spirits. We took leave of our host then. He shook hands with Dr. George, patronizing him with the most delightful air of superiority ; any one not acquainted with their relative position might have imagined that the doctor was the culprit, and my brother his kind friend and judicious counsellor. Harry kissed me, and held me back for a moment to inform me that he was ready to give me away as soon as Dr. George chose to ask me in marriage ! Dr. George was half-way down stairs by this time, and I have no doubt that he heard every word of this gracious permission. He said everything that was kind and inspiring about Harry as we drove home ; he made no allusion to his debts, but urged me strongly to use my influence in persuading Harry to leave his lodgings, insisting on the impossibility of my visiting him there.

“Your cousin Warren has rooms in Whorlton; could they not live together?” he suggested.

“They would quarrel in a week, I’m certain; and it is very unlikely that they would even consent to such an arrangement.”

“Are they not good friends?”

“There is certainly no love lost between them, Harry’s disposition is so entirely antagonistic to Warren’s; and as for Warren himself, I think he likes no one in the world.”

“No one? I think you do him injustice there. I think it might be advantageous in some respects, if it could be managed. Your cousin is so steady, he would be at least a safe companion for your brother; and,” he added, after a pause, and looking straight before him, “I can’t help telling you that you underrate your influence with your cousin as much as you misunderstand his feelings towards you, that is, if you include yourself in the list of those whom he regards with hostility. He chooses to regard me as his enemy, therefore my interference would only make matters

worse; but I'm sure he would be glad to oblige you."

"I have no wish to be indebted to Warren," I answered.

"Well, we need be in no hurry," Dr. George said, more cheerfully; "your brother is hard at work, and quite safe for the present. 'Time and the hour run through the roughest day;' and we'll trust that time has good things in store for him."

We were at Hirst Hall by this time. Dr. George declined my invitation to dine with us, having, as he said, a busy evening before him, with all the arrears of the day to make up.

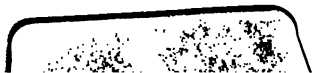
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