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TROUBLESOME DAUGHTERS



TROUBLESOME DAUGHTERS

BY

L. B. WALFORD

AUTHOR OF 'MR SMITH: A PART OF HIS LIFE,' 'PAULINE,'
'COUSINS,' ETC.

"TRUTH SEVERE,
BY FAIRY FICTION DRESSED."

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
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PART IV.



TROUBLESOME DAUGHTERS.

CHAPTER XIII.

WOULD IT EVER END?

“Come what, come may,
Time and the hour runs through the roughest day.”
—*Macbeth.*

OF all that followed that terrible revelation Evelyn could never think in after years without a shudder.

He was, as we have said, by nature benevolent—nay more, he was the last person in the world to behold suffering with indifference; and to have thus, by his own thoughtlessness, wantonly endangered the life of a young and beautiful girl, to all of whose attractions he was keenly alive, and who had returned his affec-

tion with an ardour which it had needed greater strength than she possessed to expel from her bosom, filled him with a distress which knew no bounds.

For some minutes he hung over her in speechless agony, expecting every moment to feel the quivering form he held relax, and the heart cease to beat; but although with closed eyes she lay powerless and terrified in his arms, respiration and consciousness remained.

The dark stream, however, which oozed without intermission from between her parted lips, might increase and strangle, were she once to swoon away. He saw the danger, kept her head well up, supported her back, and looked round in despairing quest of assistance.

Unhappily it was next to impossible that any one should go by that way; and even should so unlikely an event come to pass, there remained the probability, which was, alas! wellnigh a certainty, that he and his helpless burden must still be unperceived from the cliffs above. A short time before, he had noted all this, had exulted in the loneliness of the spot, and in the charm of such a scene for disclosing his love; now he would have given all he possessed for

the hope of being overheard. Twice he raised his voice vainly, then with a sickening sense of further effort of the kind being useless, held his peace, and strove to gather together his energies to meet the desperate emergency.

A sea-bird jabbered overhead : he looked up at it with interest ; his senses seemed numb.

How should he and Kate ever, unaided, regain the haunts of men ?

Whither should he turn, even should he succeed in carrying the unhappy girl, a dead-weight in his arms, across the barren headland ? No cottage nor hut was near. He thought he could be sure that no habitation of any kind had been passed by him and his companion on their way to the cave ; and he now recollected, with an additional pang, that the path they had traversed then, had been felt the want of by the inhabitants of the district, on account of the road being farther away from the shore at that part than was usually the case. It ran through the hills for a mile or two ; and the path—a mere rough, grass-grown track—had been made for the country people, who used it as a short cut across the projecting piece of land.

Where the road was,—how near, or how far away,—he knew not.

It was obvious, however, that something must be done, and that speedily. The rain had cleared off, but still the short November day would ere long draw to a close, and there was nothing to be gained by delay. He durst not leave her under shelter of the cave while he went in search of assistance, lest haply he might find her dead on his return; and to remain in a state of inaction when every moment was precious, was sheer pusillanimity.

He rose to his feet, and lifted her in his arms.

Slender though she was, when he came to raise the light figure wholly from the ground, his courage sank at the recollection of the distance he should have to traverse.

Fright, joined to other emotions, rendered the hapless Kate absolutely powerless; and though she retained just sufficient knowledge of what passed to be aware that her companion was bearing her up the cliffs, and even to know why he paused when unfastening the gate through which they must pass into the fields above, she was beyond making any opposition to his will, or any exertions on her own behalf.

Indeed she, as well as Evelyn, believed her injury to be fatal; and whilst resigning her mortal frame to his trembling clasp, the poor stricken child was endeavouring inwardly to collect her thoughts, and commit her soul to the keeping of her Heavenly Father.

Very slowly and painfully Evelyn made his way along.

On looking back upon that dreadful hour, he could recall every little incident,—every obstruction which dismayed him,—every halt which delayed,—every turn or winding which gave food for a momentary hope.

With what an anguish of impatience his eye-balls searched the empty landscape !

Not a human being anywhere.

The sweat broke from his throbbing brow, and his muscles grew rigid and stiff under the unceasing strain; but he set his teeth, and would neither stand still nor sit down to rest.

Was ever one little mile of a length so infernal? Would it ever end? Would he be able to hold out till it did?

From the first she had remained absolutely motionless, only settling down more and more heavily in his arms at every step he took; and

the dark wet streak which trickled down his shoulder, beneath the place where the head hung over, spread and deepened.

Then the rain came on again, and maddened him.

He could not shield her; and in the blinding shower he could scarcely see where to tread, or how to pick his way. A squall of wind which had also crossed the sea, and now confronted him, blew the cold drops into his eyes, and he had no hand free to clear them away. His hat flew off, and he had to let it go.

He could, however, see the road at last, and in that vision there was a ray of comfort. It was something to feel that he had from the first taken the right turn; and although, when reached, no dwellings were even then visible along its straightforward course, which could be traced for a considerable distance on either side, he would not allow himself to dwell on the fresh disappointment. It was one, but he tried not to think it so.

A dark object, which might be a man or woman, moved beneath a clump of trees by the wayside, some quarter of a mile in front. Hope revived. He took that direction, and struggled

manfully forward, raising his eyes now and again to assure himself, as well as could be done through a veil of mist, that he had not been mistaken and deluded by a rock or overhanging bough. He thought not, and the event proved him right. The object or objects—for it seemed there were several—were plainly not inanimate. They parted to one side and another, some cowering further beneath the welcome shelter, others betaking themselves to the side of the stone wall which ran parallel to the road. He conjectured that they would resolve themselves into a group of labouring men who had not cared for a wetting, and who had been working in the open fields close by. The presence of so many was doubly reassuring, since it indicated the proximity of a village, or at all events of a farm with attendant cottages. Turning over in his mind the various modes of obtaining speedy medical aid, and confident of enlisting in his service the group who were now within a few hundred yards, Evelyn disdained to consider the fatigue he had already undergone, and even endeavoured, in spite of the elements, to assume an easy walk as he approached the thicket.

He rather wondered that his approach excited

so little curiosity. He expected every moment that the party would run out to see what was the matter; and his temper suffered a little as nearer and nearer he drew, and still no voice hailed him. He thought that if any of them had been in his place, had carried a freight as helpless and as heavy——Ha!——All was explained. It was but a herd of dumb animals from whom he had been expecting sympathy and amazement. Half-a-dozen black cattle, indistinctly perceived through the brushwood, had deceived him.

Something like a sob stuck in Evelyn's throat.

Overhead the clouds continued to empty themselves pitilessly, and to his excited fancy the form he held grew to be swathed in a clinging, dripping shroud.

She shivered, and his pulses stood still. Was that tremor the passing of the spirit? Was it a dead woman whom he would have to show as the victim of a foolish hour?

Thank God, no! Her breath still fluttered upon his cheek as he bent it towards her; and a low moan, which sank away into a sigh, gave further assurance to his dizzy brain and ringing ear that she was yet alive.

But, that ascertained, he durst not pause a moment longer. His limbs must not give way, when weakness at such a time might be rued for ever, and when—horrible reflection!—the distance he had already gone might prove to be nothing compared with that which he had yet to go.

Another turning, and another empty waste of moorland.

At length, and truth to tell, just when Evelyn could have endured little more, he heard the sound of wheels on the road behind, and a light gig, driven by a solitary occupant, pulled up at once on overtaking wayfarers too evidently in need of assistance. They were at once taken on, and informed that within a mile—a distance that was nothing to the speaker, but which even now could scarcely he heard of by the exhausted and anguished Evelyn without dismay,—within a mile, they would find the house of Mr Brewster's farm-bailiff, or "grieve," as the term is, a married man, whose wife, a sensible middle-aged person, was to be depended on for rendering the young lady every service. Accordingly, into the hands of this worthy he had ere long the wretched satisfaction of resigning his charge; but unable, when the time came, to analyse his tortured feelings,

it seemed as if that moment of renunciation set the seal upon all his misery.

Until then he had had her to himself,—now she was in the care of others. They had taken her from him. It was their part, not his, to watch over that colourless cheek, that dim and clouded eye; theirs to note each little point for hope to work upon—or otherwise.

The busy, important face of the grieve's wife was inexpressibly distasteful.

She would tell him nothing, made out that she knew nothing, and shook her head whenever he addressed her.

But at least he could fetch the doctor, he said.

“Atweel,”—the head was shaken as usual,—“atweel, sir, ye may try. Ye can speer after him, ony gait. But he's no' like to be at hame; he seldom is at hame i' the daytime. It'll be pit mirk 'ore ye get to the hooss forbye.”

“Can't I ride? Haven't you a horse?”

“Ou aye, sir, we've a horse, nae doot——”

“Well. Can't I have it?”

“Gin ye wull, sir; but it's a lang ride, and maybe there'll be little use——” He swore under his breath, and ran for the horse.

.

Kate was not in such danger as they all imagined. Her system had had a shock, and the circumstances under which it had been received were seriously against her ; but whilst Evelyn—who remained, as long as he could with decency do so, at the Muirland Farm—scarce dared ask each day how the patient was, for fear of the answer he might receive, he had in reality no need to have been so terror-stricken.

Even the doctor at length pronounced that Miss Newbattle was doing well ; and, at the expiration of a fortnight, she was brought over to the Farm, one fine mild afternoon, to be nursed back to health and strength under the tender care of wise old Dame Comline.

Before this event occurred, however, Evelyn had left the neighbourhood. Assured of there being no danger now apprehended, he had seen that the only thing for him to do, both for Kate's sake and his own, was to quit the field for the present. Her recovery must of necessity be slow ; and although all resentment was now at an end—insomuch, indeed, that grief and love had begotten a new resolution in his breast—he felt that he had nothing to do at present but to wait.

To have remained hanging aimlessly about in the vicinity, would not only have occasioned remark which might have led to unpleasantness, but would only too probably have hindered the very end which it was his object to promote. He must not a second time have to feel that he had harmed the girl he loved; and deeply moved as he was by all that had passed, he was now only anxious to do the right thing—act as it behoved him.

Again and again he asked himself what he had been thinking of to bring about such a situation, and it seemed as if he could obtain no explanation of his late behaviour that was worth the having.

He had nothing to say for himself; he had given way to a mere whim of the moment, to an impulse arising out of the desire to avoid a family scene,—such a scene as might be anticipated, should all come out, and Miss Newbattle's hand be formally demanded of her father. He had been fascinated by the young beauty; one thing had led to another, and he had found it easier to submit than to struggle;—but the idea of putting an abrupt end to all the romantic delights which had cast such a glamour over

the Muirland Farm, and of going back to Carnochan to raise a commotion and bewilderment there, was so unpleasing to one who had never voluntarily done a disagreeable thing in his life, that he had been fain to look about for some loophole through which he might escape from the dilemma. Kate—beautiful, bewitching Kate—he must have; and the prospect of having her without being badgered and baited, wept over and wondered at, was enchanting. He had called it a glorious notion, and had never given the matter a second thought, except in so far as to deliberate on the means by which he might bring it to pass.

But how miserably the whole had ended !

He had almost hated her when she had turned from him, putting out her hands to keep him off her, as she left the cave; he had felt ready to die for her the next minute when he knelt on the ground by her side.

And now that he could no longer see her, hear her, nor even reside under the same roof, he cursed his late folly with a bitterness that knew no consolation; and a deliberate purpose—probably the first he had ever formed—took

up its place within his subdued and heavy heart.

There was nothing that he could now do for his love,—and nothing that he would not have done.

Alas that his silly pride, which had never troubled him in his life before, should have been so wantonly officious at a moment when everything was hanging in the balance! A whisper of renunciation, a penitent look, had been all that was needed. He knew Kate; he had seen her fiery and indignant before, and he had seen her more dangerously cold and sullen. But he had never failed to win those lovely features back to smiles or tears, or both; and was it likely that he should have been less successful on an occasion which was all in all to her, than on others?

He ground his teeth to think how like an idiot he had acted. He had been blind, besotted, mad. He had seen a girlish creature,—a frail thing,—a trembling, sobbing, loving woman,—and had disdained to mark the flashing eye and stormy blood which might have warned him to beware.

Had he only recognised in time the certainty

that he could not shake her resolution, he could—he felt sure he could—have himself yielded, and have brought her then and there to his arms, melted and all-forgiving.

But he had been incredulous. He had not been able to believe in such obstinacy; and even up to within the last few minutes of the interview he had not despaired. He had been absolutely unable not to hope. It had been an experience so novel, so extraordinary, that it had not been until she had turned her back upon him and had left the cave, that he had believed in his ill-fortune.

At every solitary moment there rose now before him a vision of her beautiful agonised countenance, as she bent on him the reproachful gaze which accompanied her “Oh, Rupert, did you really mean that?” in answer to the taunting words wherewith he had sought to bring her own position and its cause to her memory. With shuddering self-disgust he recalled that cruel “*you*,” and the quickness with which its meaning had been apprehended. Then, he had seen the anguished shade pass over her soft young brow; and it afforded little consolation now to recollect that he had striven to repair the mischief when too late.

She had listened to no more ; she had silenced him—waved him from her side ; and she had preferred to face the angry elements to remaining longer in his presence. She could have chosen no surer method of riveting her image in his memory.

But love, sorrow, and repentance were now alike of none avail, since life and death—or so at least all believed—were trembling in the scales ; and aware, as Evelyn alone was, of all that had preceded and been the cause of the unhappy girl's illness, he could not but acquiesce with readiness in the restrictions imposed by the doctor and nurse ; and not merely this, but also mentally add to them others, the necessity for which he only could perceive.

He forbade all who were in attendance on the sickbed to question the patient as to anything connected with her seizure, giving for the prohibition such reasons as amply satisfied the Comlines ; and further, aware that his remaining in the neighbourhood would in itself be an agitation and disturbing reflection, should the knowledge of his having done so come to her ears, he departed of his own free will.

A few enigmatical sentences, a momentary

emotion at the last, he was betrayed into ; but on the whole he went through the ordeal bravely, and got off unsuspected, in the exchange of cheery farewells and hopes of future meetings ; and it was not until he passed on his way the lonely house by the roadside, within whose walls poor Kate still lay feeble and forlorn, that he pulled his cap over his eyes.

CHAPTER XIV.

A CONFESSION, AND A COMFORTER.

“ Now I feel I can love but one, and that one has deserted me.”

—MELMOTH.

“ Bide a bit.”—*Scotch Proverb.*

IF, previous to his departure, any fears had been entertained by Evelyn lest one of the other Miss Newbattles, or even Lady Olivia herself, might have been sufficiently alarmed by the communication received from the guardians of the disgraced daughter and sister, as to hasten to the Muirland Farm in person, these were needless.

To be sure, they were all concerned about Kate,—as much concerned as they could be expected to be about a member of the family who was always in trouble one way or another, and who really might have managed to keep out of mischief, in a place where she could see nobody and go nowhere.

It appeared as if she never would learn sense. And the Comlines too, to whom she had been entrusted—how tiresome of them not to stop her pursuing those wild ways which Alice had pronounced to be so unladylike, and from which Lady Olivia had done her best to turn her refractory young charge. The idea of letting a delicate girl take long rough walks in such weather! Any one could have foreseen what the end would be—no constitution could stand it.

They were very sorry, of course. It was poor Kate's own fault,—but still they were very sorry. Lady Olivia sharply taxed her eldest step-daughter with want of feeling when the usual singing-lesson was gone through with Mademoiselle on the morning after the news came; while Alice and Bertha, in their turn, sneered at the prodigious correspondence which issued from the boudoir. They said to each other that they knew what that meant. Any one could have told, that just at this time of year, when nothing was going on worth recording at home, and when no news was stirring abroad, an event so thrilling as the sudden and dangerous illness of one of her dear Mr Newbattle's dear daughters was a perfect godsend to Lady Olivia.

Full particulars of her anxiety and distress were given, no doubt, in every perfumed sheet ; and they smiled to each other as they caught the trail of her eloquent pen in the effusive utterances which were for Mademoiselle's benefit at luncheon, and in Mrs Popham's cross-examination of the next person she met after their step-mother had left. Mrs Popham clearly wished to know how much to weed out, and what might hold good, of the communications received from headquarters. Everybody liked to stand well with Mrs Popham, who was a great woman in her way,—great enough to take under her protection the black sheep of any fold. In utter disregard of Lady Olivia's dislike to the subject, she had sturdily inquired after Kate on every opportunity after Kate's dismissal, and had not failed after a time to add to her " And how is *my* friend Kate ?" the " And when is she coming back ?" which should, if possible, shame them into sending for her.

Now all was smooth again in that quarter ; and Mrs Popham, who had been rather shunned of late, was told the whole truth—that is to say, Lady Olivia's whole truth. It should not be concealed longer, she said, from such an

old and valued friend of the family, that the poor dear absentee had been for some little time in an anxious state of health,—not ill, not even ailing, but still not herself. To this, there was not the smallest doubt, was attributable that irritation of the nervous system from which they had all suffered at Carnochan. They had suffered, every one of them; and in order to effect a diversion, and see what a change of air and scene would do,—together with a little bread and water of affliction, she mentally added,—they had sent dear Kate, as Mrs Popham knew, to the seaside. No one could understand the poor child's terrible temper: so uncertain, so peculiar as it had been,—Mrs Popham might perhaps have heard hints, since such things do come round through servants and tradespeople; so she thought that now,—now when the whole was comprehensible, when Kate had broken down altogether,—it was only right to say a word.

Sea-air and quiet had been, as they believed, doing their full amount of good,—her step-daughter had been with the children's nursery-governess, the one they had before Mademoiselle Pierrepont, a most wonderfully kind and atten-

tive person, quite homely, but so trustworthy and dependable,—and they had had such nice letters of late, so much happier and brighter, that they had been looking forward to receiving the dear child back at home almost immediately—when all at once came the sad intelligence.

It was most disappointing, most heartrending.

Their dear mother had, as Mrs Popham knew, been a great sufferer, and some delicacy of constitution, she feared, it seemed to be only too probable, her daughters had inherited; but of course—and a great point was made of this—Mrs Popham would consider the whole communication strictly confidential, for herself alone.

(It would be ruin to have it get abroad that they were a sickly set, thought Lady Olivia.)

She felt, and with reason, that her auditor was to be relied upon. Mrs Popham was well aware that she must accept such golden truths as Lady Olivia chose to communicate, tempered with alloy, and that the beaten track of fact would be left at every turn, for side paths of sentiment; but she accepted what she could get, heard without a smile of Mr Newbattle's pangs, and let pass without a sarcasm Lady Olivia's own.

“There she goes to her Mrs Popham again,” exclaimed Alice one day, as she and Bertha watched the carriage roll off Pophamwards for the third time that week. “Mrs Popham must think her mad. The way Lady Olivia monopolises *our* friend is really absurd. Sits up beside her, and speaks to no one else, whenever Mrs Popham comes here; and drives away there by herself whenever she gets the chance. Kate’s illness has been a piece of luck to her: she was not in Mrs Popham’s good books lately, I am sure, Bertha,—I suspect about this very affair of Kate,—so now she is putting all straight. She has gone to talk of the ‘poor sufferer,’ and the ‘poor lonely one,’ you know; she will make out that Kate has been in danger of breaking blood-vessels all her life! Bertha, did you see how she appropriated that letter this morning, and fussed over it—begging whoever was reading it to return it, as soon as done with, to her,—Miss Comline’s letter, I mean? That was because it is to be shown all round,—to Mrs Popham first, then to the Maclures, and so on, round the neighbourhood. Even Mr Maxwell, whom she is not over civil to at other times, will be favoured with a view. Oh, our dear

step-mother's prestige will not suffer by the affair, you may depend upon it."

"A very nice account," pronounced Mrs Popham, to whom, as divined, was submitted the primary perusal; "and it must be a comfort to you all to know that the invalid is in such excellent quarters. I suppose by this time you would be permitted to see her?"

"My dear Mrs Popham, I should not think of asking it! I know too well. Absolute quiet is as essential after an attack of this nature as the most skilful treatment. Mr Newbattle says he would not have her disturbed for the world."

"Not even by Alice?"

Alice had been over at Dunness the day before, and had confided in her dear Mrs Popham that she was most anxious to go, but could not obtain permission.

Alice would really have liked the job.

If the sick girl would have turned to her at this time, depended on her, refused all other attendance, and begged to have her pillows smoothed by no other hand, Alice would have done her part well, and enjoyed the position.

But Kate, who had never seen in her sister anything to inspire such tenderness as could

alone have justified her in making such a stipulation, so far from desiring the presence of any of her own family, seemed, in her weak and nerveless condition, to be more afraid of their proposing to come to her than of anything else they could have suggested.

Accordingly, the message which Alice had half expected never came; and although she averred to Mrs Popham that want of her father's consent alone prevented her setting forth, she took but scanty measures to obtain it.

Kate was left in peace.

She clung to the motherly dame, who seldom left the sick-chamber, with the dependence of a helpless babe, — “amaist fule-like,” said the much-affected Mr Comline, with the tears in his eyes: there was no indifference, no self-absorption now; and as soon as sufficient strength returned to enable her to become aware of the demands her state made on the time, care, and watchfulness of one and all, it was appreciated so earnestly and deeply, that all former arrears were well repaid in the outburst of her gratitude.

“Dear Mrs Comline, how good you are, how much I love you!” would spring spontaneously

from her lips from time to time ; and was, we may be sure, very delightful to the nurse's ear.

Presently it became, "How often I have vexed and grieved you with my ill-humour and peevishness, and how patiently you have always borne with me ! I have never had a cross word nor look from any one of you ; and I—oh, how I have deserved it ! How I must have tried you ! Yes ; don't say I didn't, dear granny"—for such was the affectionate title now bestowed—"because you, as well as I, know better." And she would weep pitifully.

"But when am I to get well ?" she asked one day. "I don't want to be well for my own sake ; I am quite content to lie here in this little white bed, with all my pretty things about me, and that beautiful sea to look out upon, and the sunsets to watch for every evening,—but I know you will all like to have me down-stairs again. You are trotting up and down this little staircase all day long now, granny ; I am more troublesome one way and another than when I was very ill, am I not ? Never mind, I am getting strong fast ; I shall soon be fit to come down. And I am not going to sit and sulk in the chimney-corner as I used to do, naughty

girl that I was. I mean to be so diligent and useful. As long as I am allowed to stay here, I intend to knit, to sew, and to read aloud to you all. Oh, dear granny, I don't want to go away for a long time yet. I am going to be so industrious that you will quite miss me when I am gone. No, I am not going to speak about 'gone.' I have leave to stay, and you are willing to keep me, and that's enough. Won't you give me things to do? I am longing to show you how busy I can be."

"That ye will,—that ye will, my bairn. No' to talk sae muckle, ye ken," in a tender tone of reproof, as to an infant. "We'll hae the doctor at us if we dinna mind what we're about. Oo ay, ye'll knit an' ye'll spin——"

——"Spin! Oh no——"

"An' what for no'? 'Deed ye couldna sit up to guide the wheel a while yet; but bide a wee, and we'll see ye baith laithe an' hearty, wi' the Lord's blessin'. Eh, my dear, I ne'er cast my e'e upon your wheel stannin' there, dumb an' still, in its neuk, but what I mind on the Captain——"

"Not now," said Kate, gently. "I don't want to 'mind' about any one now. I mean

just to lie still and rest. I only spoke about myself because I wanted you, and Lizzie, and kind Mr Comline, to know how very, very sorry I was——”

“Noo, noo; whisht, my lambie, whisht——”

“You offered me a home when my own father——” She stopped anew, with trembling lip.

“Whisht noo, my bairn,” reiterated the nurse, authoritatively. “This is no’ the time to be speakin’ o’ your faither. He kenned his ain business, nae doot, an’ it’s no’ for us to judge. An’ a’s richt noo, whatever may ha’ been wrang,—that’s ae thing. But as for the gudeman, an’ Lizzie, an’ me, forbye Captain Evelyn——”

Again that low sound from the pillows. But the old woman had made up her mind to speak. “He bided lang about the place, Miss Kate,—he did indeed. He didna negleck you, as I fear ye misdoot he did; an’ sair, sair hearted he was, as a’body could see. But, my bairn, there wad hae been a when idle clashes an’ heed-waggin’ frae t’ain and t’ither wha hae been about the place, an he had been here yet; an’ ye ken, ye were no’ to see freens, nor naebody. He bit to gang.”

“Oh yes, oh yes—of course. Why do you tell me that?” said Kate. “Of course he had to go. Why should he stay? He had had trouble enough with me as it was.”

“Trouble enow? I’se warrant he thochtna that. Trouble? Ay, he had baith dool an’ trouble in plenty, when he feared,—but nae matter, nae matter. I was only fain that ye suld ken, my dear, that ye were no’ negleckit: I thocht maybe——”

“Did he tell you how it happened?”

“Ay, ay, an’ a’. Ye were doun atween the heughs at the cave, an’ ye had faun to talkin’, an’ bided lang; an’ syne ye rose to gang your ways, an’ a’ in a gliff ye stood still in a dall-drum like, an’ made neither cry nor moan, but jist fell back i’ his airms!”—wiping her eyes. “The puir bit thing! to be taen like that! And he had to trail ye a’ the road to Garstang,—think o’ yon!—an’ an even-dounpoor owerheed! Ane wad hae thocht ye wad hae had your morth o’ cauld, an’ ye had it frae naethin’ else! Waes me! The Lord be praised that ye’re alive this day.”

“Did he say——”

“Nae mair, nae mair. He tell’t us, though—

the gudeman an' me—what he had tell't yoursel'; though we kenned na that he had—that he was here o' his ain free will, naebody kennin', and that naebody bit to ken, forbye. Eh, we was stounded! It was a' dune for the best, Missy, —a' oot o' the kindness o' his heart; though it gied us baith a dinge to hear it! Aweel, he was a weel-meanin' callant; but the farkle was ower sair set for the likes o' him to unredd it. The wark was ower muckle for him. The Lord wad tak it in's ain Hands, wi'oot ither folks meddlin'; for ye ken, my dear," added the good soul, pensively, "o' Him, an' through Him, an' to Him are a' things."

A few tears lay on the pale face that watched her while she spoke.

"Yes," said the invalid, after a while. "You are right, granny; the work was too hard for him, and he did not set about in the way he should have done. If he had told me at the first that he had concealed from them his coming——"

"Eh, my dear, what's that ye're sayin'? He didna tell ye? Ye didna ken? But he said ye kenned——"

"Yes, yes, I knew," said Kate, with a deep

blush—"I knew—when too late. Had I sooner suspected the truth—but it does not matter now; neither he nor I can undo the past, and I will not blame him, when I too—I too——" she stopped, much agitated.

"Ahem!" said Mrs Comline, softly. "But what set him to be sae sly, I canna see. He had nane to fear, I trow. And he tell't ye naethin' till——?" interrogatively.

"Till the evening before he left us for the second time. He went back to Carnochan, you remember,"—and the speaker raised herself on her elbow as she spoke, while the tone of her "you remember" showed too plainly that she at least could never forget. "You remember, don't you, that we had arranged for another day's fishing, and it had to be given up because Rupert thought he had better not stay? That was because I sent him away. I would not keep him here, as soon as I found that he had come to us secretly. I had been so pleased to think he had braved them all for my sake, and that they could not stop him,—and that though they might punish *me*, he could set every one at defiance. Oh, you don't know how disappointed I was to find that he had

invented excuses, and made up a story to satisfy Lady Olivia, and that he had never said one word about me, to her or to any one!"

"And sae ye suld ha' been. The truth bit aye to be spoken——"

"Yes, yes," impatiently. "Yes, of course," sighed the sick girl, more gently, a minute afterwards. "But don't you see, dear granny, that it was a difficult truth to speak; and Rupert cannot bear to give any one pain. Directly I spoke to him, he promised to do what I required, and you know he did. He set off at once—the very next morning."

"But he did nae mair."

"No, he did no more. And when he came back, and told me that he had done no more, what did I say to him? Did I reproach him? Did I turn away from him? I tried," continued Kate, as though to herself,—“I tried to chide, and I could only smile. To have him back again,—that was all I cared for. When he took my hand, and told me that he had disobeyed my wishes,—that he had not had the courage to face his angry mother on my behalf,—and that he had come to confess his fault and pray for my forgiveness,—did I need to be

entreated? Oh no, he obtained it only too easily. I only felt his hand holding mine, and saw that I must not look into his face. I had not a word of anger for him; for somehow—somehow, whatever he did was right. I trusted him—I trusted him——”

“My bairn,” said a kind, firm voice by the bedside,—“my bairn, I understan’. I’m an auld woman, an’ my days are numbered. Say your say, an’ cry your fill: a sair heart’s no’ to be hinnered o’ its freedom. Ye’ll thole your burden the easier an ye tell the auld wife what’s carkin’ wi’in; for though I’m nae Job’s comforter,”—with a conviction that the patriarch had been deeply benefited by his,—“an’ though I’m naethin’ mair than your ain auld carline that’s vexed for ye,—just to tell will ease your heart’s-caud in itsel’, my dear.”

The flood-gates gave way as she spoke. “Don’t be vexed for me, don’t be vexed for me!”—sobs, moans, gaspings for breath. “I—I—don’t deserve it. Come here, come close to me, and I’ll tell you all: and, granny, dear granny, turn away your head; for—for—for—oh, I can’t help it—I can’t help it,—I love him still.”

Granny had no need to turn away her head,

unless it were to hide her own tears ; but of all she said then and thenceforth, nothing seemed in the ears of the hapless girl more apt, more to the purpose, more fraught with silvery threads of consolation, than the one short and emphatic injunction—"Bide a bit and see." She never once mentioned to husband or daughter what passed on this occasion. When Evelyn's name occurred in conversation, as was pretty frequently the case at that time, she was busy with her yarn, her knitting-pins—anything that she had about. So often and suddenly would he be mentioned by one or other in family conclaves—so varied were the conjectures as to his late behaviour, and so wide of the mark the comments passed,—that many another, more versed in diplomatic wiles, might have been betrayed by sheer surprise into imprudent demeanour ; but this innocent-faced, simple-minded, pottering little old woman, with her cheery voice and open brow, was never at a loss.

How should she know anything of the Captain? He had never been near the hooss sin' the gudeman himsel' seed him to the door. He had written, to be sure he had written. Aweel, they had a' seen the letter.

Ou ay, he had gaen awa'; an' what for suld he no'?

"Is it likely," she would question briskly, "that a gentleman o' the Captain's stannin' wad be hingin' aboot an auld farmhoose in Gallowa, when there was nae mair fishin' to be had in the burns, an' nae bonnie Miss Kate to beguile awa' his time? Like eneugh he missed her; sae did they a'. But it wad hae been an unco-like thing for a braw young gentleman, brither or no, to hae been dallyin' roun the doors o' the Muirland Farm till Miss Kate was aboot again! Hoots! It nicht be mony a day 'ore that cam' to pass. Missy was doin' brawly—she was as weel as they had ony richt to expeck; but what then? She had nae need o' freens speerin' after her, Captain or no Captain." . . .

"Missy tell me tales? Ay, that she has, an' plenty. But gin ye think I'm gaun to deave the lave wi' a' the idle bits o' havers that comes frae the puir bit bairn,—an' her lyin' there sae white and feckless,—ye're i' the wrang gait. Aye, aye,—gie her time, an' please the Lord, she'll come roun' wi' the spring, like the gowans."

The spinning-wheel was out of its accustomed corner when Kate came down at last.

“Best tak’ it tae the neist room,” suggested Mrs Comline, who was superintending the preparations for the great event. “It’s no’ for sick folk to be haudin’ wark wi’ spinnin’-wheels. Missy maun just sit i’ her ain corner, an’ read her book, an’ tak’ her cup o’ tea.”

And nobody but Missy herself knew what the edict meant.

CHAPTER XV.

“ IS HE IN GALLOWA ALANE ? ”

“ It were better to have no opinion of God at all, than such an opinion as is unworthy of Him ; for the one is unbelief, the other is contumely.”—BACON.

WEEK after week passed, and but slow steps had been made towards re-establishing the strength of the patient.

It is probable that all the wear and tear undergone by a system originally delicate, previous to the rupture of the blood-vessel, had now its effect in preventing a more speedy recovery. Before her illness Kate had been at a low ebb,—living on excitement, on feverish joys and sorrows,—exerting herself by day and lying awake by night,—wearing out her frame with mental emotions and bodily exercise,—and taking neither the support of rest nor of proper food.

Time alone could repair the mischief done.

“And indeed,” said Lady Olivia, as she lay back in her barouche at Brighton, and thought how convenient it was that Kate should have been prescribed the strictest quiet and seclusion at the very time that Marjorie had been ordered sea-air,—“indeed, my dear Lady Julia, the whole arrangement is quite Providential. Our poor invalid is as well off as she could, by any possibility, be under the circumstances. The most excellent people to stay with, who quite devote themselves to her comfort; the best of doctors; and two nurses, one or other of whom never leaves her. Think what it would have been if my step-daughter had been taken ill at——do look at that frightful bonnet, dear; did you ever see such a deformity? And, by the way, the girls want some things; we had better drive to Hannington’s. Oh, it is quite a relief to my mind to think that my poor dear Kate is so well taken care of.”

Brighton was full, and nothing could be pleasanter than to drive from shop to shop, choosing novelties of every kind; to take a turn next along the cliffs, and drop in to have a cup of tea at one house or another on the way home.

Lady Olivia had not enjoyed herself so much since the spring-time in Edinburgh; and that her husband, on this occasion, remained at Carnochan, did not interfere with her peace of mind. She had him fast there—he was hers now, for better, for worse; and she beamed upon the world as Lady Olivia Newbattle, a fresh young married woman, with two dear little girls,—quite a different person from the waning Lady Olivia Evelyn, with nothing new nor interesting about her.

She thought it an excellent arrangement that she should bring with her Bertha and Marjorie, accompanied by their governess, and that Alice should stay behind with her father.

Alice, who thirsted to be once more supreme in the mansion where she had reigned so long, and who knew nothing of what she renounced, never having been at a gay watering-place in its season, was moved perhaps, in this instance, more by ignorance than pliability. Whilst her step-mother was communing with herself as to how she could induce this young lady, who was always thinking of the world and its charms, to renounce the present opportunity for entering upon them, Alice, whose eyes were fixed on

London, and who knew nothing of Brighton, was, with equal inward perturbation, reckoning up the *pros* and *cons* of her being permitted to remain where she was.

Both endeavoured to conceal their pleasure when an agreement was eventually arrived at. "If you wish it, my dear," said Lady Olivia, with emphasis, "and if your father approves, I have nothing further to say. I am willing to take you; but if you prefer to stay, it is your own affair—or rather, it is for your father to decide."

"I could not think of leaving papa all alone."

Probably she knew what she was about. The winter months at Carnochan had no terrors for one who was but too well used to them; and with carriages, horses, servants, and her father once more at her disposal, she wanted no fairer prospect. Lady Olivia had engaged for her being taken out in the spring; and since she could tell Susie Popham so, and dwell on the theme in her own mind with certainty, she was content to wait, and resume once more the life she had been leading up to the time of her father's second marriage. It was delightful to sit at the head of the table again.

Permission from Mr Newbattle was further obtained for a friend to be invited, to whom Alice was in her way attached,—a girl who in no wise interfered with whatsoever she chose to do, say, or appear—one to whom the pretty young Miss Newbattle was an object of sincerest admiration and involuntary flattery.

Sophia Wilkinson was delighted to come, so all was right; and it must be confessed, that with two nice young companions always in good-humour, and with the absence of every annoyance (which was insured by giving them their own way in everything), there came a wonderful sense of peace and quiet into poor Mr Newbattle's life.

His plan for transferring every trouble on to a wife's shoulders had not exactly answered.

Before Kate was got rid of, the vexatious girl would accept no dictum except from his own lips; and to him Lady Olivia had frequently to refer with dilated eyes, both in and out of his children's presence. And even Kate's ejection, though it had brought relief for the time, had not effected all that he had been led to expect.

There was still the wrangle about the post-bag in the morning, and the nuisance of having

to open it himself, because his lady would not sit by and see it handed to his daughter, and Alice made a fuss about its being carried past to Lady Olivia's empty chair. Lady Olivia talked of "sitting by and seeing it taken" to Alice; but the fact was, that her ladyship was but rarely down when the letters came.

What, then, was to be done?

He himself was the proper person to give out the correspondence, his wife asserted; and his lame response that hitherto it had been always done for him, served him in no stead.

He did not know where the key was.

Well, Alice could keep the key, and hand it to him when the bag came in.

It ended in this, that sometimes one, and sometimes another, went through the ceremonial; that the grey-headed butler, who had grown used to bring it to Miss Newbattle, doggedly refused to remember he was to do so no longer; that father and daughter connived, whenever they durst, at his disobedience; that there was a perpetual bustle and secrecy, an affectation of innocence, and thrusting of the great leather pouch under the table, if in the wrong quarter, when the rustle of Lady Olivia's train was

heard; and that he was glad when the nuisance was over, every day of his life. He hated letters at all times,—they were no good to anybody,—and he would willingly, but for his newspaper, have made an arrangement to have them delivered only twice a-week.

Now he could get his newspaper in peace, and not be forced to give heed to sheets of trash first,—since his daughter, who had passed all her life with him, naturally understood that he was not to be pestered. None of them had ever expected papa to listen to a letter before Lady Olivia came, and they could not help giggling to each other occasionally at the squire's rueful face under the daily infliction. He could not make his new wife understand his old ways.

The tea - making had also been a fruitful source of division.

He had either to wait and wait for his cup at breakfast, and get it harsh and bitter from standing too long, in the end,—or he had to undergo a quick look, an “Oh, you have got your tea? I hope it is right,—I hope you have enough sugar? I was hurrying as fast as I possibly could to get down, but you have been beforehand with me.”

Certainly Lady Olivia's move to Brighton was not altogether a source of regret.

He got Alice to let him know what they were going to have for dinner, as he had done in other Decembers, when time hung heavy on his hands. He did not put on dress-clothes of an evening. He slept in his arm-chair as long as he chose.

His daughter had no need to exaggerate—and accordingly she did not do so—when she triumphantly informed the absentees that papa and she were getting on as well as possible, and that papa was quite glad that they should stay away another fortnight, or as long as Lady Olivia liked.

It suited Lady Olivia to stay away ; but she did not, naturally, relish having the leave thus granted. She might enjoy her lively afternoons along the shore, and declare there was no place in the world to compare to Brighton in the early winter, and think of Carnochan in her own mind with a positive shudder of distaste ; but she was not altogether pleased to be permitted to absent herself for as long as ever she liked. She laid it by in her own mind, that it would be as well to have Madam Alice out of

the way as soon as it could be done. By hook or by crook, the young lady should be presented, introduced, and married the following summer, since it would never do to let her get the thin end of the wedge in at Carnochan again.

Bertha and Marjorie, Lady Olivia found tractable enough under Mademoiselle's supervision, — all three being enchanted with the change, and the novelty of being among crowds of people, and carriages, and shops, at a time of year which, to the young ones at least, brought recollections of nothing but dreary monotony, one dull grey sky rolling over their heads after another, lessons and walks unbroken by any variety, and rabbits every day for the early dinner.

Mademoiselle little knew what she escaped by missing that mid-day meal at Carnochan in December. Naturally, it was the first to suffer from the end of the game season—and the barrenness of the garden and the poultry-yard ; and although, under the new *régime*, we cannot say but that matters might have mended, since Lady Olivia was a luncheon-eater, it certainly, so far, bore to the minds of Bertha and Marjorie

no other interpretation than that of pies and parsnips.

Kate, at the Muirland Farm, fared a great deal better.

On the little table by her side the daintiest of dishes, contrived with skill born of tender thought and care, were daily to be found. No trouble was too great to be taken either by the farmer in collecting the materials, or by his wife in cooking them. Of wild-duck, woodcock, and such dainties, sent in by the Castle Kenrick factor, with whom Mr Comline was at this time most particular friends, the larder was never empty; and they were done to a turn—they were uncovered smoking on rounds of toast by Missy's arm-chair.

“ Let the lass there serve my young leddy ! ” exclaimed the worthy dame one day, a neighbour having expressed surprise at finding Mistress Comline on her knees before the fire, toasting-fork in hand. “ My certie, no ! Nor Lizzie neither. Lizzie has nae likin' for cookery-wark. Ilka bit and sup Miss Kate takes is frae my hand—I can tell ye that, mistress ; and little wad I grudge to be ower the pans a' day an she wad eat what she gets, puir thing ! ”

“ Folks say she was ower het ahame, an’ that that was why she left Carnochan,” replied the woman, a gossip.

“ An’ whaur heerd ye that, mistress ? ”

“ I was doon at Kirkeudbright ten days syne.”

“ Then gae back to Kirkeudbright, an’ tell the folk there that they hae been dingin’ ye wi’ clavers. Missy gangs hame to Carnochan sae sune as she can travel that faur. She was here for a time,—stoppin’ wi’ my dochter—Lizzie was governess to her ain wee sisters,—and this befell oor bonnie visitor. That’s the story. Mak’ what ye like o’t.”

Dame Comline was no simpleton.

She would contrive to get rid of any chance caller before Kate came down-stairs of an afternoon, which was usually about three o’clock. The fire would be blazing brightly, the room all tidied and fresh ; the arm-chair would be placed in the ingle-neuk, and the little brown teapot on the hob,—after having dined at noon, by which time the invalid was quite ready for her repast, tea at three o’clock was neither extraordinary nor unwelcome.

Neither the farmer nor Lizzie would be present, it being understood that one person’s com-

pany alone was desirable for the still weak and spiritless girl during her first few hours below ; so, long before any one else invaded the parlour, Missy would have had her tea, and her toast, and her fresh egg, carefully put by from among the last laid, and supposed, therefore, to be most nutritious as well as appetising. While the repast went on, Mrs Comline hung about the room, watching with radiant or sorrowful face, according as the viands were eaten, or left ; and as soon as the tray was done with, it would be carried out by the old woman herself, who would presently reappear, all trimmed up for the afternoon, ready to sit calmly down, and either chat or dose, as required.

It was no uncommon thing, at those times, for her to find the slight fragile form bending over clasped hands, and to catch the glitter of brimming eyes in the firelight. It was not without good cause that the room was kept cleared of all intrusion during those brief twilights. And the old nurse would watch in silence, never encroaching on that confidence which had been bestowed, as it were, involuntarily. It was not for her to speak. Sooner or later the bowed head would turn of itself to lie upon her bosom.

Up to the time of her illness, Kate had only known the farmer's wife as a kind, useful, cheerful old body, whom nobody had a word to say against, and whose smile shed no uncertain light over her broad, homely countenance.

Now it was incredible to her that she should ever have preferred even her friend Lizzie, or the worthy Mr Comline, to her devoted, tender-hearted, delicate-minded attendant. Never was there a finer, more subtle sense of sympathy shown than by that old Scottish peasant woman.

Lizzie was good, and sensible, and kind, and it was Lizzie whose part she had taken, and for whose sake she was under sentence ; but Lizzie could not, she now saw, compare in native pith and power, nor yet in sweetness of disposition, with her mother. The farmer was sterling and straightforward, but he wanted the superiority of his wife. It amazed Kate. How blind she had been !

She shrank from quitting hold of that strong and loving hand.

How should she go back to the old life, into which every hour brought its trial and temptation, and not fall ? In her own home what darts

of bitterness, anger, and malice might not the tempter have in store?

“How shall I,” said she, sadly, “when I have no one to speak to, no one to help me,—how shall I get the better of these? It is so easy to think we can withstand our evil thoughts when there is nothing to call them forth,—but I know how it will be as soon as I go back, granny; and how shall I do then?”

“Did ye no’ withstaun’,” said the old woman, solemnly, “greater than they in that day when the Lord sifted ye as wheat, and ye fell no’? Did ye resist then in your ain strength, my bairn? And is it waur, think you, to say i’ the Lord’s name to your prood tounge, ‘Peace, be still!’ or to say it to your torn heart? What is it ye hae to win through that can be evened to what ye hae cam’ through a’ready? Strengthen yersel’ i’ the Lord, my dear; cry upon His name i’ the day o’ your need. He wha’s hearkened ance, will no’ shut His ears anither time. The Lord is gude, a stranghold i’ the day o’ trouble, an’ He kens a’ them that trust i’ Him.”

Or again, “See ye no’, Miss Kate, ye munna be oot o’ the battle ower lang. When the armour is laid down it grows rusted, an’s for nae

gude when it's wanted neist. It's a hantle the better for being aye in use. It's no' in ae place, nor in t'ither place, we're to rest in this warld; the rest, my bairn, is wi'in the saul. What, an' the storm rages, an' the waves beat hard upon ye? The Lord's ain munna be feared. Can He no' haud ye in the hollow o' His hand? Is He in Gallowa alane? Ou ay, there's a lang life afore ye yet maybe, my dear, and mony a warstle wi' the flesh, 'ore ye can look back wi' thankfu' e'e across the threescore years and twa that I see ahint me."

"I am not eager to have a long life, granny."
(Of course not, poor child,—the old story.)

"Ye mayna be eager, but ye may hae it for a' that," observed granny, astutely.

"It is not for myself I am afraid——"

"I ken, I ken. It's no *for* yoursel', but o' yoursel', ye fear. Ye think to fa' frae grace, because o' the temptations ye forecast. But, Miss Kate, my dawtie, that's just the want o' faith that's noo creepin' in, sin' nae ither whisper o' Satan can fin' its way. There's nane here to moil ye and deave ye, and nane to lure ye to sin wi's beguillin' tongue,—and sae ye maun be tried this gait. Ay, ay; the auld

serpent'll no' let us be, t'ane way nor t'ither, sae lang as we're o' the Lord's side; and it behoves us, my bairn, to be ready,—aye ready."

At other times she would speak more lightly. "See what they'll think at Carnochan when they get back sic a douce young leddy, sae cheery, and couthy, and lightsome. They'll no ken it's the same Miss Kate wha gaed awa in ill-will. Hoots! my leddy hersel's maybe taen the rue o' her crankrums, an's learned to mend her ways. Folks kenna hoo they hae their ain hand in ilk other's misdoins'. We misca' mony a ane when half the mischief lies at oor ain door. When ye gang hame——"

"Oh!" with a sigh.

"Hoots, fye, then! that's no' the way to look afore ye, Missy," cheerily. "Na, na; time was when ye were keen eneugh to gang——"

"And you know why, or at least partly why. That I might vex them, and defy them, and prevent them from triumphing over me. It was—it really was. And now that I see my wicked purpose aright, I would put it from me altogether. I would not indulge an unkind thought: I would keep away from the place——"

“ It’s no’ by keepin’ awa frae the place ye’ll do them ony gude. It’s by gaun back amang them—them that’s your ain kith and kin—wi’ a subjected speerit and a cheerfu’ coontenance. It’s by haein’ a kind word for ane, an’ a glint o’ the ’ee for anither, an’ by settin’ an example o’ meekness an’ patience before thae bits o’ bairns, your sisters. See, Miss Kate, let them hear ye misca’d an’ no answerin’ again, an’ negleckit an’ no’ gloomin’, gecked at an’ bearin’ it a’ for the sake o’ Him wha bore His cross for you,—and that’ll be the lesson ye can baith learn and teach at Carnochan. And wha’s to say but what, when my leddy hersel’ finds that glowerin’ een an’ grumphin’ answers arena rife, she’ll be sweer to stir them up again ? ”

“ It’s not what Lady Olivia says,” replied Kate. “ It is the things that she does. She treats us as if we were children.”

The dame smiled.

“ And you know,” continued the young lady, “ that Alice and I are not children now. Alice has been at the head of papa’s house for years ; and we have never had any one over us,—our governess, Miss Mitchell, had nothing to do

with us except in school-hours; and she had gone several months before your Lizzie came, —so that we had got to feel quite grown up, and to spend our time just as we liked.”

“And that didna do?”

“Oh no; Alice was not allowed to practise in the drawing-room, and I was stopped reading the library books; and we had to say each day where we wanted to go, and if we would walk, or ride, or drive,—instead of just running in and out, as we used to do. We had never before teased each other with questions,—each one used to do just what they chose. Alice used often to take it into her head to set off in the pony-carriage about ten o'clock, and have an hour or two's shopping at Kirkcudbright, and look in for luncheon at people's houses coming back. Papa never minded, but Lady Olivia made quite a fuss. And she was just as tiresome about me. Why could she not let me alone? All I wanted was to be allowed to say for myself what I liked,—not to be invited here and there. What I liked was to stay in the garden, or to go out in the boat by myself in the afternoons, and to have long delightful walks when the light was going,

and the dew was falling, and everything was most beautiful——”

“ Ahem ! ” said Mrs Comline, significantly.

“ It was cruel of her to stop me, was it not, granny ? What did it matter about dinner ? I did not want dinner at that time of day. I always had what I wanted along with the children at one o’clock ;—and to be brought in for dinner ! ” No words could describe the scorn of her “ dinner.” Dinner does not go for much at seventeen.

“ Noo, Miss Kate, I maun tell ye the truth. Gif my leddy had let ye alane, as ye ca’ it, an’ taen nae heed o’ siclike doins’, I for ane wad hae said she had muckle to answer for, baith to God an’ man. As to your sister Miss Alice, I speak no’ o’ her, for I kenna gentlefolks’ ways, and nathless it wad seem simple eneugh that she should step in to see her freens i’ the bygaun,—it michtna be richt, for a’ that ;—but, my dear, ony ane that was set ower ye, and wad let a bonnie young thing gang stravagin’ up and doon the countryside her lane i’ the gloamin’——it’s no seemly, my dear ; an’ what’s mair, it’s no safe.”

“ Safe ! ” Kate opened her eyes in amazement. “ Safe ! My dear granny, I know every road and by-path——”

“Ye may do that, and——”

“And I have only once been frightened by a bull, and never by a drunken man !”

“Drucken men are no’ the warst. There’s tramps, gipsies, pickpockets——but nae need for mair : bairns like you maun be guided by aulder folks, an’ be thankfu’ ye kenna why nor wherefore. Ye’ll believe me, maybe, when I tell ye, Missy, that your leddy mither did her fair duty by ye on that heed ; and ye maun promise me, my bairn, — gie me your word, an’ I ken ye’ll no brak it,—that ye’ll ne’er need her to speak ’tye anent that matter mair. I couldna sleep i’ my bed at nicht an I thocht sae fair a lamb ran the risk o’ meetin’ wi’——”

“Wolves,” said Kate, with a faint smile. “I never met but with the one. You did not scold me then, granny.”

“If I didna, the gudeman did. I mind he flyted me, onyway ; an’ we ay keepit an e’e upo’ ye, forbye. But ye ken, Missy, ye wadna thole a word frae onybody then ; an’ ’deed, I was that frichtit for ye, that I wad scarce hae hinnered ye o’ your wull, whate’er it turned to. Eh, my dear, you *are* changed, to say naethin’

o' your bit white facie and fingers that I can see through. But ye maun mind and be carefu' o' your health,—you that hae gotten it back sae sairly. It'll be mony a day afore ye're what ye was again, mind ye that.” And thus, with no apparent effort, she would glide away to something else.

She would not show that she avoided Evelyn's name,—she would even refer to him when it became evident that the thoughts of the sick girl were dwelling on some reminiscence which it would be well to ease her of; but if it were merely a casual observation which arose out of the topic of the moment, she would allow it to pass. To speak of him often, would have been to feed the fancy with the poisonous food of recollection and regret; to mention him never, would have been to drive these to strike their roots downwards among the fibres of the very heart itself.

CHAPTER XVI.

BRIGHTON AND CARNOCHAN.

“Our time in towns seems short to pass, and long to reflect upon ; in the country the reverse.”—SHENSTONE.

THE only one of her step-daughters for whom Lady Olivia entertained any real affection was Marjorie.

Now Marjorie was pretty, with large blue saucer-eyed prettiness ; and she had smiles and winning ways which were at the command of every new-comer. Bertha, indeed, was wont to allege that all persons were alike to her little sister, and that she would make friends with a chimney-sweep for a sugar-plum ; but then Bertha thought it hard—harder now than it had ever been before—that Maidie, who was two years her junior, and whom they all looked upon as still a baby, though she was in reality eleven years old, should be so much brought

forward under the new government, whilst she herself remained in her pristine obscurity.

Maidie had never forgotten the day when she had first stood by Lady Olivia's chair, and had been fondled, and kissed, and passed from one to another as a little angel. Her appearance had been so infantile, that endearments and flattery had not even been conveyed in asides; and the recollection was one of enchantment.

To the astonishment of all, she had flown to Lady Olivia, whom all the rest were meeting with armed neutrality at best, on her arrival at Carnochan, and had then and there hailed her as "mamma."

Who could help being pleased?

In the fervour of her first enthusiasm, indeed, the dear girls had been assured that the bride would not wish them to bestow on her, and far less would she think of exacting, such an appellation; they should not, she begged them to understand at once, be called upon to forget for her their own departed parent. No, she would rather be looked upon in the light of an elder sister, one who would join in their amusements, and take part in all their projects; and she had even meditated suggesting that in the family

circle the prefix to her name should be dropped, and she be to them simply "Olivia."

Prudence stepped in, luckily. She was not a very far-seeing woman, but still she stopped short of this.

And now that eight months of her newly-wedded career had gone by, and time had shown that the dead mother was in no danger of being supplanted, and that the question of the elder sisterhood and "Olivia" had been disposed of also, "mamma" had a pretty sound from little Marjorie's lips.

Although it was not entirely on the little one's account,—not quite so entirely as was to be supposed at least,—that the Brighton trip was undertaken, still there was an outline of truth in the maternal anxiety.

Marjorie was growing fast, and she was not robust,—as indeed none of the sisters were. She might droop before any one was aware; and Lady Olivia was just beginning to fuss and arrange, as Evelyn had communicated to Kate, when the illness of the latter nipped the project in the bud. As long as the one sister was in real danger, the supposed delicacy of the other could wait for its share of attention; she could only

look at the child, and sigh, and observe, half spontaneously, half diplomatically, "I hope and trust nothing will go wrong here next;" but no sooner were satisfactory tidings received from the Muirland Farm, than she pinned her husband to the promise extorted from him previously, and carried through her scheme.

Marjorie was now by her "mamma's" side constantly.

She admired and believed in Lady Olivia, whatever the others might say; and as a natural consequence, she was the object of an amount of endearment and indulgence, which surprised Lady Olivia herself. "If I had but her alone," she would now think.

"Such an engaging little thing," she would whisper to one and another, making the very most she could of the phrase; for indeed it was something now to be able to say a good word for any one of Mr Newbattle's daughters—even Bertha, such as she was, weighing down the wrong scale. "But this is really such an amusing, bright little creature. I do assure you, I quite dote on her. I could not love that child more if she were my own,—she *is* my own indeed. I look upon her as such, invariably. You

will say I spoil the little darling, I suppose? Well, perhaps. But who could help it? She is made to be a pet."

If such was Marjorie's vocation, she must be given the credit of fulfilling it to admiration.

Even when most indignant at the preference so openly manifested, Bertha's spleen vented itself, not on the favourite,—as is commonly the case with jealous and defeated aspirants to honour,—but on the deserving person. She was impotently furious with her step-mother; but as for Maidie,—Maidie, who was so chirpy and bright, so unconscious that all was not as it should be, that everything was not going to her sister's mind as it was to her own,—it was not in human nature to take up the cudgels against such a blossom.

Bertha, however, had certainly no better cause for thinking kindly of Lady Olivia since coming to Brunswick Square than she had done before.

All went on with outward decorum; and the recollection of Carnochan would have been sufficient to hush any clamours on the part of the disaffected one, even had Mademoiselle not been by to keep all smooth with a high hand, as well as by soothing representations,—resolved that

Miladi should find the little household in good order at Brighton, whatever they might be elsewhere : but still Bertha had her grievance.

She learned to know what the frequent step at the schoolroom-door meant, and to anticipate the message that Miss Marjorie was to be ready to drive out with her ladyship in half an hour or so.

She had a conviction that when the sapphire-blue velvet pelisse and hat came from Hannington's, over and above the dark merinos which had been ordered for the little girls' daily wear, no second pelisse would be found at the bottom of the box. She knew, without asking, whom the one was for.

The merinos were despised in her eyes from that time, although they were neater and smarter than anything she and Marjorie had ever possessed for that season of the year before. Usually they got along in the winter without many new frocks. There were but few neighbours about after Christmas, and the weather was sure to be bad, keeping them at home a great deal ; and there were old things to be worn out,—so that really nice and fashionable warm clothing was to the girls a novelty.

Bertha was not surprised to find that Alice

had been greatly charmed with the parcel which Lady Olivia had been ready enough to despatch—an easy way of being civil—for, in truth, it contained what seemed to Miss Newbattle the handsomest outfit she had ever had in her life. But then she had not seen the sapphire velvet, the plumed hat, and the daintily-embroidered socks, gloves, and other accessories to match, which transformed her little sister into a model for a dressmaker's album. It was all very well for Alice to write her gushing note of thanks, and for Lady Olivia to show it to Mademoiselle, and for Mademoiselle to tell her, Bertha, afterwards, that Alice's toilette was no better than what Miladi had bestowed on her, yet Alice was charmed, whilst she was *ingrate*.

Bertha saw what she saw, and Mademoiselle might say what she would.

And then, of course, Lady Olivia had her cheerful excuse.

“ You like the pelisse, Mademoiselle ? I felt sure you would. The poor child must have *some* change, you know, when she goes everywhere with me. And she is to have as much of the open air, without being over-fatigued, as possible,—those were the doctor's orders. Nothing

can be more in accordance with them than carriage exercise. As for your other pupil, Bertha knows that I must not take a great girl like her away from her lessons. The dear child," looking fondly at Marjorie, who came dancing in with her little fur-tipped boots, muff, and gauntlets all complete; "she looks already many degrees better for this delightful air and her little holiday. Do you not think so, Mademoiselle?"

Mademoiselle most solemnly did.

"Brighter,—rosier,—more life and vivacity in her altogether."

"*Assurement, oui; plus d'espièglerie*, Miladi, *n'est-ce pas?* Dat is what we do all see. Miladi has great—great honour in de little Marjorie."

"She must be ready at half-past two," Miladi would then respond, well pleased. "The days are so short now, that we must never be later in getting out. And perhaps, Mademoiselle, you and Bertha would like to go to the promenade concert on the parade this afternoon?"

Miladi was too good; they would like it very much.

When they had thus obtained permission to attend, Mademoiselle and Bertha could stay out to a late hour, and in such wise were benefited

by Lady Olivia's thoughtfulness; but the concert was not deprived of their presence, even if nothing had been said at luncheon on the subject. In the latter case, however, they were obliged to be back in time for Bertha to be strumming exercises on the piano with all imaginable diligence as her step-mother passed the schoolroom on her way up-stairs, and for Mademoiselle to be bending over her needle-work in case Lady Olivia should think fit to present herself for a moment in the doorway and receive a French compliment on her latest toilet. That was all the difference they made. And to be sure, they considered it was but fair that they as well as others should have their recreation, their variety. . " *Le monde est le livre des femmes,*" the gay Frenchwoman would exclaim. " My pupil does right to profit herself by this opportunity. *N'est-ce pas, mon ami ?* The *savoir faire*, the *savoir vivre*, are not to be taught by books. One must see *de société*; hear conversation; make friends,—all these one must do to be the *femme comme il faut.*"

And accordingly she acted; she and Bertha went to every twopenny-halfpenny *fête*, show, or what not that came within their reach; en-

joying themselves prodigiously, and picking up divers choice acquaintances, of whom there was no need to make mention to Lady Olivia.

Lady Olivia would rattle up to the door soon after five o'clock, when everything was as it should be in the schoolroom ; and Maidie would come bounding in, all glee and vanity, telling how one lady had said this, and another that—how one had praised her curls, and another her curtsy,—ending by shaking her boxes of bonbons in Bertha's face.

Almost invariably she had had her tea out ; she thought herself quite ill-used if, by any chance, she were brought home before the lamps were lit in the streets ; and finding Mademoiselle and Bertha over their frugal repast, was a delightful climax to an afternoon's dissipation. They would be regaled with her accounts.

On their "leave out" days, when they were late, she laughed at their appetites for toast and jam, and at Mademoiselle's occasional petition for a poached egg, necessary after the amount of fatigue she had undergone. The saucy miss turned up her nose at eggs and jam : coffee, chocolate, and sweetmeats, with plenty of ice-cream about them, was what she was accustomed

to ; and bread and butter, cut thin off a brown loaf, was the only kind tolerable.

That Mademoiselle and her companion were not so nice in their choice was, however, scarcely to be wondered at, since walking about in the keen frosty air for hours would make most people hungry. It was wonderful what the two went through and throve upon ; hither and thither, up and down, escorted by the friends above-named, the little brisk brunette and the lanky school-girl took an amount of exercise that was positively amazing,—and took it, moreover, right under the nose of Lady Olivia. It never once occurred to Lady Olivia to wonder why it should be necessary for the governess and her pupil to remain out for an hour and a half after the concert was over, on the days they had her gracious permission to attend ; and even if she had given the matter a thought, when Mademoiselle was so much obliged, and they had enjoyed their little treat so heartily, and had thought it so kind of Miladi to offer them to go, it would have been quite impolite to ask questions.

For her own part, she was glad enough if such a poor little affair amused her good Mademoiselle.

She and Marjorie had pleasant afternoons

too. Somebody had given the little girl a doll ; and the doll was so like its mistress, that, as Maidie held it in her arms, the ladies opposite—for Lady Olivia was sure to pick up a Lady Something-else upon her drive—would nod, and smirk, and say pretty things to each other about the baby-picture ; and the more her step-mother found that Maidie's yellow curls floating over her blue pelisse attracted attention and notice, and the oftener she had to say to the gay colonel or the jocose baronet, “ Oh, fie, you naughty man ; what ideas you do put into the child's head ! Pray, don't talk nonsense to a girl of her age,”—the better she liked to have such an ornament to her barouche.

It renewed her youth to be the guardian of such a young thing. She almost forgot her own mature son, and her other tiresome step-daughters, and felt as if the little hand which was so confidingly put in hers as they sailed in and out of drawing-rooms, was the only one she knew about. The carriage now never went out without a small figure on the back seat, and another smart tippet and frock were bought.

Bertha could not stand this.

“ I shall just tell Alice,” she said ; “ I shall

just write to her, and see what she will say. It's not Lady Olivia's carriage; it's *our* carriage, —papa's and ours; and I have only been in it once since we came! Maidie goes everywhere, and I go nowhere!"

Mademoiselle, however, got her pupil subdued, after some half-an-hour's trouble. What would the *petite* have? Would she desire to leave her own poor Mademoiselle to spend her afternoons all by herself? Would she prefer to have the little Marjorie as their companion, which would necessitate their taking the country walk, the dull *triste* stroll over the downs, or the stupid round in the square? Would she like to quit all the gay splendid shops and the pleasant company on the promenade, besides the band, which gave them music so enchanting?

Had not Mademoiselle, moreover, permitted Bertha to accompany her and Fräulein Lebrunn to purchase their new muffs and palatines, and to help in the selection of the ribbons and flowers for their ravishing bonnets? What of the nice little parties? The pleasant *réunions*? They were not for infants like Marjorie; and assuredly Bertha would not have been so well amused in the barouche.

Now Bertha should dry her eyes, and they would go out and buy a nice brown muffin for their tea that evening,—which was done, Mademoiselle standing treat.

The muffin came up smoked. That infuriated Mademoiselle.

Her moffin was spoilt—unfit to be toch. It was a shame, a waste of good food that was unpardonable. No one cared what was served up to the schoolroom; anything was good enough for her and pupils; the only attention that was paid to any one in the house was paid to Lady Olivia.

She would tell Miladi of the neglect.

She did, and no muffin ever again made its appearance ill-done for the children's tea, the moment chosen being a happy one, and the petitioner serving up with the complaint a suitable garnishing of flattery and submission. But although Lady Olivia took up on this occasion the cause of the oppressed, she never forgot afterwards, if Mademoiselle chanced to be in bad odour with her, that she was "a greedy creature," and "quite devoted to her own selfish comforts."

In the height of her swing, and with every-

thing about her as she would have it, Lady Olivia scarcely found time to remember how hard it was that her darling son should absent himself from England at the very time of her coming south. Now and then it did indeed occur to her that he had been used to be rather fond of a run down to Brighton; and as she reflected on the subject, she wondered what could be the inducement which could make a man in his senses spend the remainder of his leave in Algeria when he could be anywhere else?

But certainly she neither pined for his letters, nor pestered him with hers.

It was only at Carnochan that he was of first-rate importance,—only when he had no competitors but her boudoir, her correspondence, and Mrs Popham, that she found he had a superior hold upon her affections.

Amidst gayer scenes he would undoubtedly have been welcome; she would have liked to have had him to chat to at her breakfast-table,—to have met him, nodded to him, pointed him out as her son Captain Evelyn, on the pier and on the cliff,—and further, to have read his name in the list of those present at the even-

ing gaieties, to which, in the absence of any excuse for doing so, she could hardly go herself.

Above all things, Lady Olivia was a model of propriety, and she now rigidly abstained from evening diversions; but to have been represented as it were, and not to have felt quite "out of it" when the next morning's chronicle showed who had been where the night before, would have been gratifying.

Rupert, however, was not necessary to her at Brighton,—she had consequence enough for a mere watering-place; added to which, she had amusement and variety, and, above all, the sweet sense of having (as she told Lady Julia) done her duty in thus quitting her beautiful home, and her best of husbands, for the sake of his sweet little girl.

The effort, joy to tell, had not been made in vain. *That* was the reward she had; and it was reward sufficient to make all renunciation easy. Her darling Marjorie looking like herself again,—what more could she desire?

Which, being interpreted, meant that the self-sacrificing lady could do without her son, and that Mr Newbattle was just as well away.

Mademoiselle would be interrogated from time to time as to how she liked Brighton?

“Miladi, *j’en suis ravie*,” Mademoiselle would then reply. “So gay, so *débonnaire*, so Paris-like a spot I have not seen since I come to this country.”

“Indeed? Yes, you are right; it is very gay and pleasant.” (“A good soul,” Lady Olivia would reflect. “She is contented with little. Not always troubling and teasing, as some governesses do. Her accent is perfection,—Lady Mountford remarked on it the other day,—and she looks well and dresses well. She is really a most creditable person to have about. It was an excellent idea, that of bringing her.”) “Pray, however, Mademoiselle,” aloud, “do not permit Bertha to stand in front of the shop-windows as I saw her doing yesterday. I was really shocked. I saw her when we first went out, and when we returned a long, long time afterwards, she was still there. You, my good Mademoiselle, do not understand our English ways. With us it is not *comme il faut* to inspect millinery from the streets. We do not even turn our heads as we pass. *Me comprenez vous?*”

“Miladi, *je vous comprends*. I understand

for the future. *Pour moi*, yes, it is true that I have been in blame *par mégarde*. I did permit the poor Berta to herself amuse for a few moments with some of the *bagatelles*, the *nouveautés* that are put out at this time of year in so charming a spectacle. Berta is not *un enfant gâté*; she is *très docile*, obedient, industrious. I think sometimes she is *un peu triste*. I take her to de leetle show——”

“Take her to the promenade, by all means.”

“Miladi is too good. We will go to the promenade *avec beaucoup de plaisir*. The sun shines, and it will drive away all de *vapeurs*. Come, my Berta, let us hasten to be diligent, to complete our tasks, and make ourselves ready. *La cadette* goes with Miladi, *n'est-ce pas?*”

La cadette did, and so did some one else who was rather fond of Lady Olivia's chariot just then.

This was a small, dark, sallow-complexioned young man, with a very magnificent walking-stick. Mademoiselle and her charge dubbed him Monsieur Silverstick, and it diverted them to perceive how often this ugly little Monsieur Silverstick was found lolling back on the cushions beside Marjorie.

“*Que fait-il donc ?*” Mademoiselle would exclaim, curiously. “I do not comprehend that Miladi should have in attendance a gentleman so young, so undistinguish, so ordinaire. . . . He is what you call common—volgaire,” she would break off suddenly, being marvellously quick and discriminating on such a point.

She would laugh to herself, and hold up her hands, as the barouche went by, with its new occupant, serenely satisfied to all appearance, staring vacantly abroad from his perch. She would put little questions to Marjorie as to where he was picked up, where put down, and the like.

Marjorie could answer these, and she could give the new friend's name, and show that it was prefixed by no title—Mademoiselle's easiest solution of the problem—but she could do no more; and the more odd it was in Lady Olivia to trouble herself about the attendance of a satellite from whom no credit could apparently be derived, and whose companionship could scarcely be supposed to afford any pleasure, the more Mademoiselle put her wits together to unravel the mystery.

At length Fate helped her.

About a fortnight after Monsieur Silverstick's appearance on the scene, Lady Olivia came straight from the drawing-room to the school-room—in itself an event—one wet and boisterous afternoon, and cried gaily, “Guess, children, who is coming? You are to have a great surprise, *mes enfants*. Come.”

Now, to tell the truth, the reputation for strict discipline which Mademoiselle Pierrepont was so keen to cultivate, might somewhat have suffered on this occasion had not the speaker, all panting and smiling, burst in open-mouthed—if such a phrase were not derogatory to Lady Olivia's dignity—and been too full of herself and her communication to notice anything amiss.

Mademoiselle, with her arm - chair drawn round so as to be full in front of the glowing hearth, piled to overflowing, which shed a delicious warmth throughout the apartment, had her head imbedded in the soft cushions, her feet on the fender, and her book on the floor,—for having satisfied herself that the day was too bad for either herself or Lady Olivia to venture out, she had settled down for the afternoon, and had shortly before simmered off into a gentle

slumber. The children had pulled down the window-curtains and made with them separate houses, wherein each might dwell and read her story-book in solitary grandeur, and they now peeped forth from between the folds, with elfin locks straying over their brows, and dusty smears on their cheeks and fingers.

There was nothing precisely reprehensible in the scene, but there was a pervading atmosphere of jaunty looseness, a devil-may-care look of comfort and laxity, that was not altogether in keeping with precise schoolroom etiquette, and that was instantaneously perceptible to any one with a delicate sense of the fitness of things.

Such a sense had Mademoiselle. She leaped from the arms of Morpheus, and a long band of her excellent brown hair tumbled off.

Even the titter which the accident gave rise to,—the blame of which Bertha instantly prepared to charge to Marjorie,—was lost on Lady Olivia. Her entire attention was engrossed by some inward prospect, some consideration of a nature so agreeable that it rendered her insensible to the serious and comical aspect of affairs alike, and she addressed herself to the

party generally, with the utmost indifference to the wild and threatening aspect of the unlucky governess, and without bestowing a glance on the ruffled frocks of the little girls, or the dishevelled state of matters generally.

“Guess, children,” she repeated, waving in her hand a letter which the post had brought in a few minutes before. “Guess who that is from, and who will be here to-morrow !”

Marjorie flew to her. “Are we to guess, mamma? Then I shall guess—Rupert. Oh, I know it must be Rupert,—and he is always so nice and good-natured, that I am sure he will take me for a drive in one of those delightful little carriages we saw yesterday——”

“Stop, stop !” Lady Olivia had called a halt three times before she had a chance of being heard. “Stop, stop, stop !” cried she, laughing. “Not so fast, little parrot; your tongue flies like the wind! But you will have to think again, Marjorie, for your first guess is wrong.”

“Is it not Rupert?” said Marjorie, dolorously.

“No. I wish it were. At least—that is to say,—well, guess again.”

“Kate, my own dear Kate——”

“No,” said her step-mother, in a different tone.

It was Alice, and at the name it must be confessed that every face fell.

Even Mademoiselle looked crestfallen; since Mademoiselle, no less than the younger ones, had, after the first moment of bewilderment and consternation, conceded to Miladi's tidings the degree of interest which had appeared to be their due; and whilst keeping aloof from the guessing-match between her pupils, she had watched for the end with considerable eagerness. She had never before seen so much excitement and hilarity manifested even by her volatile patroness, and felt prepared for a disclosure of importance. But Alice!

Dejectedly she now repossessed herself of her faithless tress, and stared after Lady Olivia as she quitted the room.

Only Alice! The whole three were mute with disgust and disappointment.

What was there in Alice's arrival to make a stir about? Alice was nothing to anybody. Lady Olivia must have been crazed to rush up-stairs and startle them all out of their

senses because of an event so natural and so uninteresting.

And that she should speak like that, and look like that! And set them to guess, and all!

“Only stupid old Alice!” pouted Marjorie, as the door, on which the eyes of the trio were fixed, remained shut, and no portly, radiant figure reappeared, as they half expected to see it do, to tell them she had been hoaxing, and that the riddle remained still unread. “Only stupid old Alice! It was very unkind of mamma to disappoint us so.”

Mademoiselle, however, began shortly to suspect that there was more than met the ear in such unkindness.

CHAPTER XVII.

LADY OLIVIA PROSPERS.

“ For instance, yonder matron who appears
Softly descending in the vale of years ;
And yet with health, and constant care bestow'd,
Still comely, *embonpoint*, and *à la mode*.”

“ Getting, enjoying all that can be had,
Amused with trifles, and at trifles sad,
While hope still whispers in her willing ears,
‘ Soul, thou hast goods laid up for many years.’ ”

—*Essays in Rhyme.*

“ So now *I* shall be taken out for drives in the afternoons, and Maidie will be left to walk,” observed Bertha, presently.

In spite of all that Mademoiselle could say, Bertha knew perfectly well which of the two modes of exercise she in her heart preferred ; that though it was all very well to walk up and down among the gay crowds for a time, she often was tired and sick of it before she got home ; and that though her brown merino frock

and cape were pretty enough for the little parties, in the little fusty rooms, where Mademoiselle laughed and chattered, she would fain have exchanged the former for sapphire-blue velvet and fur, and the latter for the brilliant scenes which Marjorie frequented.

“That you won’t,” retorted Miss Goldenlocks, saucily. “You can’t go with my mamma. She won’t take you.”

“I don’t want her to take me; Alice will take me.”

“Alice may take you if she likes: I wouldn’t go with Alice; she doesn’t know any of the nice people we know, and she wouldn’t go to any of the nice houses we go to. I shall go with my mamma.”

“With *your* mamma,” cried Bertha, in scorn. “Who do you mean by your mamma? You think because Lady Olivia dresses you up like a rag-doll, and pampers you, and spoils you, that you are bound to pretend to love her.”

“*Taisez, mon enfant,*” cried Mademoiselle, awakening from her reverie; “Berta, what is that you say? *Fi, donc!* recollect yourself, *ma petite*. What is all this for?”

“Because Alice is coming; and I am only

telling Marjorie that she need not think that now she is going to be let off her geography and her verbs every day, and to be taken out at all sorts of hours," cried Bertha, with a savage recollection of the usual summons coming in the morning as well as in the afternoon, of the day before.

"Oh, *le pauvre enfant!* Berta, you are *trop impetuoss, trop vehement*. See, the little one weeps," for the blue eyes were filling, and Mademoiselle, in common with everybody else, gave in the moment Marjorie cried. "Oh, Berta, Berta, I am ashamed for you. Do not mind, my leetle Marjorie; she is vexed, and knows not what she speaks of. We will learn the geographie and the verbes another day, all the better for having these nice little drives and parrties first. Who can work without play?"

"*Souviens toi, mon ami,*" she would whisper, aside, "that if the little one goes with such naughty words to the *belle mère*, we have to be blamed,—I as well as you; then Miladi is no more *gracieuse*, and I have no leave to purchase the little moff with tassels which did you so delight in the shop-window yesterday. Say no more to Marjorie, foolish one."

Alice came, and Alice was received with open arms ; while, for the next two days, rings at the door-bell were incessant, and meant milliners, dressmakers, and parcels of all sizes and shapes. Miss Newbattle was rigged out from top to toe, and looked charming.

Next was arranged a little dinner-party, and a select afternoon ; after which, in rapid succession, followed drives, rides, going out in the evening,—Miss Newbattle's name everywhere,—and Mr Pollaxfen's. Mr Pollaxfen was Monsieur Silverstick.

He came about the house more than ever now, and was properly presented to Mademoiselle, who was always, as Lady Olivia said, creditable, and to whom she invariably made a point of introducing her guests in French. Mademoiselle found Miladi's French adorable—though it gave her a curious sensation at the back of her neck to hear it. She would, however, smile valorously, and reply in her broken English, which permitted Miladi the double pleasure of comprehending and correcting. It did not strike Lady Olivia as curious that *she* never needed correction ; and yet she would hardly have trusted herself, alone and unaided,

to reside and make her way in a foreign country. That, she would not; but still she did like to talk the charming, expressive language occasionally, and avowed that with *une vrai Parisienne* it was a pleasure to exchange so much as a passing observation. When in company she was wont to forget, and begin a sentence with "*Tenez, mes amis,*" and then break off to laugh, and protest they had such a strict martinet of a governess at home, that they dared not for their lives talk anything but the language of languages in her presence.

Mademoiselle was a first-class piece of show at present in her ladyship's estimation; and aware that she was being trotted out, the sharp-eyed little brunette would shake out her feathers, rise to the occasion, and gallantly do her best,—chatter and bend to order when brought into prominence, and subside into silence and devotion to the luncheon-table, precisely when the right moment for doing so arrived.

"It is her dinner, you know," Lady Olivia would put in a considerate aside. "Mademoiselle gives each dish its due consideration. The French are invariably particular, and, between

ourselves, our good Mademoiselle is *un peu gourmande*. *Mais que voulez-vous?* it is her only fault."

She thought it a most respectable one, as well as convenient, since it did not appear to her that any one could be thus assiduous and discriminating at the board, and be good for much else at the same time. She did not consider that some minds are capable of giving attention to more than one subject at once.

Whilst Mademoiselle was engrossed by her sauce and her sippets, was it likely that she should note anything of the little scene which was passing between Alice and Mr Pollaxfen?

While her long fingers were picking, and peeling, and popping her walnuts into her sherry, who could suppose that the nice fresh fruit was not the first object with her for the moment,—still less that she let that whole nut fall from her hand under the table, in order that she might see how Lady Olivia's pretty speech was taken?

No one,—no one: how Miladi would have stared could she have seen what took place in Mademoiselle's private apartment presently! Mademoiselle was dancing about the floor.

“*Je n’ai pas inventé la poudre,*” cried the clever creature, in ecstasy, “*mais je pense ce que je pense. Je pense que M. Pollaxfen n’a pas une femme. Holà!*”—with, shocking to relate, her forefinger at her nose,—“*j’y suis! Holà!*”

So fairly had she hit the mark, that she had no need then nor afterwards to veer to the right or the left of it. Let us go back a little and see.

Mr Pollaxfen was young, rich, and unmated. He had come to Brighton knowing nobody, and had stumbled on Lady Olivia Newbattle at the outset.

Here was a prize fallen at her feet. She looked around, and saw an open field and no competitors: none but herself knew the mine which she had sprung, and which she strenuously concealed from view, even from the view of her daily associates.

She took sweet counsel with herself, and weighed the matter well.

Why should she, having a marketable commodity to dispose of, wait for the opening of the Great Fair? Why not steal a march on the other buyers and sellers, by coming to terms

privately with a dealer? Most satisfactory bargains were made in this way. A great deal of trouble and expense was saved; and though she had pledged her word that Alice should be in the whirl of the next London season, that was not to say that she might not be both introduced and presented—on her marriage.

As to Mr Pollaxfen, he was short, squab, stuffy-looking,—he would assuredly not fail to admire Miss Newbattle, who was slim and fair. He was astray and lost among the mob,—he would surely hail with effusion a guiding hand out of it. He had nobody to care for,—he would accept the one provided for him.

At the end of half-a-dozen days she had all this in her mind's eye; but she waited another week in order to make tolerably sure, before taking such a step as sending for her step-daughter to come all the way from Scotland, that she would not have brought her on a fool's errand.

Mr Pollaxfen was well watched, and the conclusion was satisfactory.

He agreed with his patroness in thinking that there was not a girl in Brighton worth looking at; he found the place abominably slow; he

thought of taking himself off if nothing better turned up;—the fact being, that people had not found him out, and he was neglected on all hands.

Lady Olivia knew what she was about in consequence. He was not honoured with introductions—passed on to Lady This and Lady That—set afloat on the gay stream, as he could have been by a touch, a breath.

Nothing of the sort.

He was sympathised and condoled with, and—kept close.

He thought it quite a hit getting himself established in the back seat of the carriage of a lady of rank and *ton*, and seeing her saluted by the great “cards” of the place. He was willing to take his fashion at second-hand in this manner, and to believe that all was as she pointed out; that the people they saw and met were so stupid, there was really nothing afoot worth going to; that the balls were so dull that she had felt it was not worth while to ask for an invitation for him; and that concerts and “afternoons” no young man would care for.

He did not quite understand, but he swallowed it wholesale.

He went to the public assemblies, and certainly did not find them amusing. The few partners he could muster found out that he danced badly, and flew from him to the arms of the officers with whom the place was swarming.

He could not even find time to tell them that he had two country-seats, and a house in Town,—possessions beyond probably what any other man in the room could offer,—and they would not have cared if he had.

He should have told his tale to the mammas,—and he avoided the mammas.

He did not know his business at all, nor how speedily such a communication would have set him on his feet; and it is even possible that had he been enlightened, he would have refused to accept the position pointed out. He wanted to get on his feet without assistance, to make his way by his own merits. He wanted to be in the thick of the game,—to be flying round and round with the girl in blue, or sitting in the window-recess with the girl in pink. These beauties would not look at him. No wonder that after a time he did not find them worth looking at.

Then he had to fall back upon the theatre;

and though the theatre was well enough, it became objectionable because of the feeling that he was there since he could get on nowhere else.

A fortnight of such reflections was enough for any man. He was disgusted with the place, and was about to retire from such unhappy hunting-grounds, when he came to see Lady Olivia and tell her all about it, one quiet Sunday afternoon.

“Oh no,” cried she, when the announcement was made. “My dear Mr Pollaxfen, you don’t say so! I am in despair. Positively you must take back your words. I cannot spare you, and I must tell you why. Here is my eldest step-daughter, Miss Newbattle,—such a lovely girl, and just out,—coming to Brighton immediately, coming all the way from Scotland, and expecting endless gaieties. I shall have unbounded trouble with her, and you must really stay to help me. She will want to go everywhere,—girls are insatiable, you know,—and I shall really have to exert myself, little as I care for amusements on my own account. I must escort her to balls, theatres,—I don’t know all what. Think of that, and have pity.”

The young man pricked up his ears.

“You see,” continued Lady Olivia, confidentially, “I don’t mind saying it to you, Mr Pollaxfen, because I feel sure you will understand and feel as I do; and the truth is, I do *not* think it is nice, the way our young women of the present day are allowed to go on. Waltzing away with every man they meet, without having the smallest idea of whom or what he is! It is a mere introduction, and then—without our knowing anything whatever about their partners—off they go, and we are obliged to sit still and look on! We have no power of preventing it. It is a different thing altogether when it is a friend of one’s own in the question”—softly—“some one really to be trusted and—and—for instance, *you*,—I could trust my daughter with *you* anywhere.”

(“Ha!” thought Pollaxfen, “then I should have a pink or a blue girl all to myself, should I? And the deuce take those consequential puppies who sneered at me before!”)

“If you would go sometimes with us,” continued Lady Olivia. “If Miss Newbattle might sometimes *begin* with you, so as to get on the floor before she was snapped up by one and

another, I should have time to look round and——”

“Yes, certainly,” cried Pollaxfen, enchanted. “Delighted, I’m sure, Lady Olivia. Delighted, of course.”

“And there would still be a seat for you in the carriage.”

“Thanks, I’m sure, very much. I hope I don’t crowd you, though, and all that sort of thing?”

“Not at all. So you see, you must really not think of going away.”

“Oh, well, I won’t. That’s to say, if you are sure I can be of any use, don’t you know? If you let me go about with you and—and feel I’m of any good?”

It was worth the *coup*. She summoned Alice by the next post.

Alice was a good deal astonished, but she made no resistance. The sweets of power at home were beginning to pall; and in Lady Olivia’s letter, the gaiety, festivity, and fashion of Brighton, which had hitherto been kept rather in the background, were now brought forward and dwelt upon in a manner that could not fail to be enticing. It was argued, moreover,

that since Lady Olivia was already there, and had made such a number of nice acquaintances, and had found the town so much more lively than she had expected, it was really a pity that Alice should not reap the advantage. And finally, she was assured that the present expedition should in no wise interfere with, or take the place of, her season in London.

That being understood, Alice assented readily.

Poor papa, whom she could not think of leaving five weeks before, was now a very secondary consideration;—indeed, he might be said to be out of the running altogether, for Lady Olivia forgot to mention his name, and Alice forgot to pounce upon the omission.

He had, however, no objection to make, and only one amendment to propose.

Why should not Kate be recalled when Alice left? He did not care to be left alone; he wanted somebody,—whom it was, evidently it did not much matter.

Besides which, if deserted altogether, he would have to write both to Brighton and to the Muirland Farm. Terrible to think of! By Kate's coming—and he supposed she would now behave herself—he would be relieved from the

necessity of conducting a correspondence with her; and she would, moreover, undertake the one between himself and the other members of his family.

Kate, however, to whom Alice wrote—not unwilling to do so without reference to Lady Olivia—was by no means strong enough to be removed from the Farm. Her recovery was steadily going on; but they durst not consider it complete, nor expose her to the risk of losing what ground she had gained, by making any change in her present mode of living. Mr Newbattle was forced to write his own letters, and be content with making them as few as he could.

Nobody, indeed, wanted much of him at this juncture—everybody everywhere being pretty fully occupied with their own devices.

Lady Olivia's, at least, answered.

Pollaxfen was caught at once; and having been enlisted, as it were, under Miss Newbattle's banner from the first, he looked upon her with an eye, not only of admiration, but of possession.

"I hope you won't find the place dull," he began, immediately—having dropped in, as he

had arranged to do, on the morning after Alice's arrival. "I do hope you won't find the place dull."

Could he have seen Carnochan and the rabbits, the endless rain, and the importance of the post-bag, he would not have been so solicitous. But having found Brighton wellnigh intolerable himself, and knowing that nothing worse could well befall him than to go through another opening fortnight in its gay circles, he was, in all good faith, a little uneasy.

Alice did very well: she rather fed the idea than otherwise. Oh no; she was sure,—kindly, and rather more emphatically than was needful,—she was sure, quite sure, she should not.

"There are lots of people here, you know," said Pollaxfen.

"Yes; so I see." Driving from the station, she had been nearly stunned by the roar of carts, carriages, organ-grinders, muffin-men, and general hurly-burly, and could cordially respond, "So I see;" but the next moment she blushed, perceiving what he meant. "From the papers," proceeded Miss Newbattle, easily, "I saw Brighton was full."

"And—and there's lots going on, you know."

“Is there? What is going on to-night?”

“To-night? Oh, by Jove!” said Pollaxfen, taken aback by such sharp practice. “To-night? Well, really, ’pon my word, I haven’t thought, you know. Concerts, and balls, and that sort of thing, I suppose.” (“Dash the girls,” he commented, inwardly; “they can’t be quiet for a single night!”)

“I think, my dear Alice,” said a soft voice near, “unless you very much wish it, that we will make this night our one exception. As Mr Pollaxfen says, we have not thought about it. We are all free, as it happens;—suppose we dine quietly together, and talk it over? You will not mind, my love, staying at home for once, I am sure; and if Mr Pollaxfen will take pity on two lonely women——”

Of course Mr Pollaxfen was charmed. “I— I don’t myself care to be always on the gad-about, you know,” he said, candidly. In his own mind he thought it would be a great deal nicer to be sitting comfortably in the cosy little drawing-room with his bird in his hand, chuckling over its capture, than even displaying so fair a prize to curious beholders.

All things thus in training, the gentleman

was presently dismissed—his company being superfluous that afternoon, in the press of business which followed. Marjorie was also abandoned, since the day was to be devoted to shopping, and Lady Olivia affirmed that it would not be good for the child to sit still in the carriage outside, whilst she and Alice were making purchases within, and that coming in and out of the heated shops would be still more likely to give her a chill.

Undoubtedly she was right, and her restriction was only prudent; but to the little one's ear, already excited and suspicious, it seemed as if the blight of Bertha's prophetic utterances had already fallen.

Nor was she altogether mistaken. True, she was still sent for, and still taken out if the day were fine, if nothing particular were in hand, and if Lady Olivia thought of it. But she was no longer indispensable,—Mr Pollaxfen was everything.

He would return with the ladies from their drive—Lady Olivia usually came home to her own afternoon tea now; and whilst no one else was to be admitted, since she required a good rest before entering on the fatigues of the evening,

and would sometimes even slip away up-stairs,—making that plea an excuse,—Mr Pollaxfen was no intruder. He was not to go because she did; and he liked to stay all the better when she was not there.

In the gay evenings which followed, his highest aspirations were gratified.

He saw himself in the long mirrors of the ball-rooms dancing with his girl as other men danced with theirs. He saw her admired, looked at, and longed after, by other hungry outcasts like unto himself as he had once been, and he heard her refuse the hand of a heavy dragoon.

Life could yield no more—so far.

Perhaps if he had known all, he need not have felt that glow of triumph, that thrill of ecstasy. For the simple truth was, that Alice, who had never been properly taught to dance, was mortified to find that when chance gave her a partner who excelled, she not only could not get on with him, but felt convinced that he could not get on with her. She found him tardy in beginning again after a halt. Moreover, the idea of taking up the thread of the dance was not alluring to herself, for being

unaccustomed to the rotatory motion, it made her giddy, and Mr Pollaxfen seemed to be the only person to understand this, and to see that a little jog up and down, and a good deal of standing about in different quarters of the room, was the proper thing to do.

This was as much as Alice cared to undertake, at all events ; and feeling peculiarly light-headed and uncomfortable at the moment of being assailed by the monster in scarlet and gold above alluded to, he met with a flat refusal, to the unconcealed delight of Pollaxfen. From that moment she had him.

“And it is really too bad of you, you cruel girl,” Lady Olivia would exclaim, “to rob me of my own particular production, my discovery ! Mr Pollaxfen is quite my discovery ; no one here knows anything about him, or——” with a shrug of her shoulders. “Before you came, you mischievous creature, he was quite my slave, my tame cat ; ran, fetched, and carried for me. Now, I never have a word from him,—never. But don’t be too vain, my dear Alice ; your reign, too, may be cut short, *chérie*. He is much struck by that second daughter of Colonel Bartlett’s — the tall, handsome one. He told me

last night that she was much admired ; and *that* always means that a man himself admires."

She certainly had the art of managing, where too much delicacy of treatment was not required. Even had Pollaxfen been aware of her tactics, so enamoured was he of all she did, that instead of rebelling, he would, in all probability, have plumed himself on having so fine a woman on his side. The aid of an earl's daughter in his love affair was not to be thought lightly of. With her for his mother-in-law,—dash it, he would surely be allowed to call her so?—and her son, the great Captain Evelyn, in the Life Guards, for his brother-in-law, he would be able to snap his fingers at those grinning dragoons. A Guardsman was worth a score of dragoons.

Confound them, they would laugh at the other sides of their mouths when they saw him arm in arm with a swell ! They would know how to keep civil tongues in their heads when they found that the lady, whose dress one of them had sworn at him for trampling upon, was his own affianced bride !

This last incident had taken place shortly before. Alice, with her head upon an epauletted shoulder, had been swung past Pollaxfen, who

had stepped eagerly forward to arrest her progress, and deliver Lady Olivia's message that time was up. Lady Olivia, by the way, had also seen Miss Newbattle and Captain Defour, and it was in consequence of the sight that time was up.

In his haste, or awkwardness, her messenger had got his foot entangled in the lady's train, and she had fallen on the floor. We, who are aware of Miss Newbattle's anti-waltzing proclivities, may have a suspicion that the sudden stoppage, and withdrawal of her partner's supporting arm, had at least as much to do with the accident as the detention of a flimsy muslin skirt; but the gallant Defour thought otherwise, and it being after supper, the comments of that inflamed champion of the sex were neither reserved in quality nor stinted in quantity.

That his orbs of vision were partially to blame was also obvious, since they mistook Pollaxfen for a servant, and induced their valiant owner to address him as a "fellow," to order him out of the room, and to implore his lovely partner to disregard all such "impertinent interference."

Pollaxfen did not come the worst out of the affair.

He said not a word, but picked up Miss Alice,

put her hand within his arm, and marched her off, despite the stuttering imprecations and threatening gestures of his rival.

But he could not forget, however much he might affect to disregard these. He had been called by an opprobrious title, and no one about had seemed at all surprised. Was it because they had the impudence still to look down on him? Something whispered that no amount of champagne would have blinded Captain Defour into taking Lady Olivia's son for a menial.

Well, since it was so, he burned to have Evelyn on his side.

Of this unknown being his ideas were of the vaguest, but they were exalted to a pitch surpassing the veneration he had ever before felt for mortal man; and he now told himself that, backed by such a personage, he could resent suitably the insult he had received. Without revealing the whole to one who had not been present, and who therefore needed not to be informed of aught that was offensive to the speaker, he could easily introduce the name of Defour, and could then proceed by degrees to poison the mind of his future relative against the drunken scoundrel. It would be a fine

thing to do, and he ruminated with impish satisfaction upon divers things that people might be said to have said, and whispered, and nodded about. He thought he could put quite enough matter together to settle the dragoon conclusively, if only he could gain Evelyn's ear and aid.

The chief point was, would Evelyn abet him, and take his part? If he would, and would be as kind, gracious, and jolly as his mother, there was nothing that he would not do for Evelyn. In return for being pushed on, and held up, he would make the grandee welcome to the best of everything he possessed. By turns he saw himself enacting the part of town and country host: in London waiting—and keeping a whole circle waiting—for the honoured guest who should grace his best dinner-parties; later on in the season, escorting his visitor over fields of stubble to the hottest corner; swearing at his keepers for empty bags if needful; if not, pooh-poohing good ones as the inevitable result of having so renowned a shot in their company. Evelyn should have his own rooms both in Palace Gardens and in Lincolnshire. He should ask whom he chose, and they should be free to

come and go. Gad ! he should be master, and more !

The idea was intoxicating, and possessed him completely.

The more he reflected upon it, the more he revelled in it, the more he thirsted for the hour of his triumph.

Dash those epauletted boobies,—he could twirl and pirouette as well as they if he chose, and he would like to see their faces when it came out what he could do besides. He could bring down his bird.

And it was about time he let fly.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOMELY PLEASURES IN THE OLD FARMHOUSE.

“Those joys clasp us with a friendlier arm, which steal upon us when we do not look for them.”—FELTHAM.

UNTOWARD winds, however, now set in from a new and unexpected quarter.

On the very evening when Pollaxfen's clumsiness in the ball-room called forth the abusive contempt of the heavy dragoon, and when subsequently he made up his mind to be revenged, and that speedily, on the ill-nurtured sot,—on that very night, a little later on, Lady Olivia penned him a note forbidding him the house.

The ladies, on their return from the ball, had been confronted on the staircase by a florid little elderly gentleman, who had rapidly explained that he had been summoned to the house during her ladyship's absence, by the alarming illness of one of the young ladies.

Both Lady Olivia and Alice had at once thought of Marjorie.

It was Bertha, however, who, persistently ignored as a rule, had on this occasion contrived to give herself prominence. She had caught the scarlet-fever, which, unknown to Lady Olivia, was unusually prevalent in the town, more especially about such parts of it as had been more than once visited of late by Mademoiselle and her charge; and after several days of unacknowledged misery, the child had all at once become so ill as to terrify her governess. It had been easy to pooh-pooh, and prescribe for de leetle chill which the foolish *petite* had caught by forgetting her neckerchief on the so cold afternoon; but it was not so trifling a matter when the shivering girl refused all food, had a skin like fire, and began to wander in her speech. Inquiries and future supervision must be endured; the doctor must be sent for, and the verdict he gave was, that the case was tolerably severe, and that the house must be put into immediate quarantine.

“Of all the tiresome things!” cried Lady Olivia, inwardly; and as for Mademoiselle, she had a reprimand which, though far short of what

she deserved, was the sharpest her patroness had bestowed on any one for months. Carelessness, reprehensible and disastrous, there must have been somewhere ; the child had been taken where she had no business to be in the first instance, and had then been neglected, and the malady allowed to take hold in a manner it could not have done, had it been brought under proper notice at once.

It was all true—truer, perhaps, than the speaker was aware of : she said it because she felt she must say something,—must let out some of the inward steam which was boiling and fretting under a sense of restriction and injury, rather than because she expected to gain any real advantage from a scolding which was decidedly too late in the day.

And Mademoiselle, who knew all this,—knew both why she was rated, and how well she merited the rating,—apparently let it all sink in—only reserving to herself the right of letting it sink through. With a little shake of her petticoats, and a tiny shrug of her shoulders, behold, Lady Olivia's rebuke had left no trace on that sandy, slippery conscience ! She was sorry for Bertha, sorry for herself, and honestly

sorry to have put a stop to the fun which she foresaw for one and all from Mr Pollaxfen's suit : but sorry for her misconduct, repentant of her untrustworthiness ? Not a whit.

Nor was Lady Olivia more single-minded. She was annoyed, vexed, and put out—she was not tenderly solicitous.

Kate's broken blood-vessel had given her a kind of sorrow ; Marjorie's delicacy had affected her with a kind of anxiety ; but that Bertha — plain, insignificant, uninteresting Bertha—should arrogate to herself the right of thwarting her step-mother at the very zenith of her success, was beyond everything outrageous.

Had Pollaxfen spoken, or had she been absolutely certain that he would speak, Lady Olivia might have been more calm ; but matters stood just at this point, that it seemed as if a hair's-breadth might turn the scale. Parents know the moment,—it is an awful one.

All going on prosperously, every meeting productive,—nothing absolutely accomplished, yet everything to be hoped for,—and then, just as the vessel, full sail, is speeding joyously forwards on her way, to have her thrown on her

side, helpless, powerless, and etiquette-bound—oh, it passes the patience of women!

And this woman was, as has been shown, amiable only so long as she was omnipotent. She could have shaken the hapless invalid, instead of having to inquire, with a decent appearance of maternal feeling, after her state; and, used to fiction as she was, it was almost beyond her powers to keep up the pretence of its being on Bertha's account that both she and Alice were so much depressed.

“We cannot but be anxious, Dr Weatherbow. Pray, when do you expect the crisis? How long does the fever usually run?”

“Oh, we won't talk of a crisis, Lady Olivia. It has been a smart attack, but your young lady is getting through it nicely.”

“Is she in any danger?”

“No,—certainly not; so far as we can see at present.”

“You cannot say how soon she will begin to mend?”

“I cannot say that for a day or two yet.”

“It will be a long time, I presume, before—before——?”

“Not so very long. In a week or so——”

“Dear!” cried Lady Olivia, joyfully, “only a week or so? I thought, I imagined, scarlet-fever was much more serious.”

“Oh no, my lady,—not in a straightforward case like Miss Bertha’s. It will be only a matter of nursing and patience after the next week or two. Keeping up her strength,—that will be the main point. If there is no relapse, no drawback, she will be able to sit up a little each day, and so on, and so on; gently, gently. Change of air, from one room to another, is a great refreshment; you will find a patient keeps up her spirits better when she is moved about——”

(“*Her* spirits!” thought Lady Olivia, who saw herself duped, for she had imagined he meant that the whole thing would be over, and the house free again, after a week or two. “*Her* spirits! She has taken a nice way of keeping up *mine!*”) Aloud—“But, my good doctor, you will excuse me, I know, for pressing to have some sort of answer, some idea as to when we may look for a real termination of this illness? I am here, as you see, all alone with the girls, away from my husband and home, and I cannot but be anxious to know about my return; Mr Newbattle will want to

know if we cannot fix some time or other for it."

"We can't do that, Lady Olivia," very decidedly.

"Can you not even hold out hopes?"

"Oh yes, very good hopes. If all goes on favourably; no cold caught, no return of the fever, no one else,"—he beamed pleasantly over this,—“above all, no one else catching the infection——”

Lady Olivia gasped.—“Catching the infection? Dear, dear, dear! There is that to be thought of, too. Is it likely to run through the house?”

“No need why it should,—no need at all; by using disinfectives, and taking ordinary care. It—ah—usually *does*; but that we need not take into account. The present, my lady, the present, is all we have to deal with; the future we must leave to the future,” conscious of a pious sentiment.

“And in the meantime we must go nowhere?”

“And nobody must come to you.”

He left Lady Olivia as gloomy as ever.

There is no need to dwell upon the doleful time which now supervened.

Mademoiselle had the best of it; for Lady Olivia, unable to pick up chat and amusement for herself, and debarred even from her usual resource of letter-writing, since people do not care to receive letters from an infected house, — of which fact Dr Weatherbow considerably reminded her ladyship, when he found her one day at her davenport,—Lady Olivia, we say, being deprived of all occupations but her daily aimless drive, was very willing that poor Mademoiselle, whose vivacity and intelligence now made her in divers ways an excellent companion, should keep up her health by daily walks, during which she ferretted out all sorts of odds and ends of gossip, and permitted herself to observe numberless small details of dress and novelty wherewith to regale Miladi. During their term of imprisonment Miladi quite depended upon the “sociable creature.”

Do as they would, however, the days dragged.

Brighton was no longer attractive; they were shunned by their acquaintances, and the doorbell seldom rang. The only comfort was, that no one else fell sick, and that, though each morning the doctor insisted on a special review of Marjorie, ran his eye over Alice, and even,

in the plenitude of his dissatisfaction, made inquisition into the appetite and nerves of Mademoiselle, he was fain to own that they were all in good condition.

A month passed: Bertha was well, and all eyes turned eagerly to Carnochan.

Their return was fixed for the last week of February; and a few days before it took place, Kate was, with infinite care, many injunctions, and not a few tears, restored to her home and her father.

Yes, Kate was there, and not even to herself did Lady Olivia say that she would have been equally well pleased to have found her still absent,—that, had a prolonged stay on the coast been recommended, permission to remain at the Farm would have been granted readily; but it must be confessed that she looked at Bertha with no friendly eye as she reflected that, but for her, she need never again have had the whole four of her troublesome daughters at once in hand.

Marjorie, having been wild and unruly on the homeward journey, was included, it will thus be seen, in the category. Undoubtedly, there were four,—each as bad as the other, at this juncture.

They were really a set to have to deal with,—an untamable, unmanageable crew.

What with their delicate constitutions and wayward dispositions, their beautiful persons and untutored minds, they were a quartet whom no one would need to envy her, if they knew all.

It was well enough to be complimented on pretty Alice and lovely Marjorie, and to feel that she had in reserve a beauty surpassing either of them: but good-looks will not keep people in good order; and however tractable and amenable to authority Miss Newbattle might have been at Brighton,—where, indeed, Alice had fallen into her step-mother's views with surprising docility and aptitude,—it was plain that the temptation to be otherwise than pleased and obedient had been absent. Lady Olivia's superiority of fashionable experience was indisputable; and there could be no precedents invaded, no ancient laws set aside in that new and untried region,—as had been the case among the old familiar scenes.

Being of importance, and having everything done avowedly for her, and on her account alone, it was no wonder that Alice could be complaisant. There was even nothing to be sly

about. She could not circumvent Lady Olivia, when Lady Olivia was solely bent on furthering her own desires, — nor cut in before her step-mother, when the step-mother herself stood back. She even grew a little ashamed, and moderately attentive to the elder lady; and there was never a difference between them.

But at Carnochan, unless Mr Pollaxfen speedily made his appearance, clouds were sure to creep up over the landscape again.

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Kate, meantime, had been spending a peaceful, if not a very lively, winter at the old farmhouse.

It was not such a winter as Evelyn had drawn to tempt her fancy. There had been no daring, frolicsome excursions by sea and land, no exploits to thrill her pulses, no moonlight scenes to make her heart beat; but to one who had just escaped a great danger, and come out of a great trial, the even tenor of the life she had been leading throughout the last few months had been healing, restoring, all-sufficient.

She seemed to require no companionship beyond that of her faithful nurse, and the sensible, affectionate Lizzie. Lizzie could read with her, and enjoy, in her way, the books which

were to Kate her all in all; they studied together, making steady progress in German and French, and devoting a portion of each day to some standard work in one or other of those languages. They rubbed up what little of the sciences they already knew; and Miss Comline, who had more taste for these than for works of the imagination, pushed ahead vigorously, dragging her pupil after her by the sheer force of her own energy.

An application for such books as were necessary had been made to Mr Newbattle, and granted: he had even, in the pleasure of being able to say "yes," without being called upon to do anything more, bidden them stint themselves in nothing which could give the invalid pleasure, or do her good.

Under this head, then, could they include a small telescope?

It must be confessed that it was wanted more for Miss Comline's benefit than for that of her companion; but then, since Lizzie sighed for the possession,—not openly, but still Kate knew she did,—to gratify the desire became at once a prime object with one who loved to give, even when to generosity was not added gratitude.

She wanted the telescope. She, for herself,—because it would give her dear Lizzie pleasure. Therefore, why not order it? What was a telescope? She would have said, “What was a coach-and-six?” with equal contempt, and equal knowledge.

But still, something whispered that Kate Newbattle, who stood so sternly out for truth on matters great and small, must be steady to herself in the slightest, and it ended in a separate request being forwarded, and the telescope being sent down by the squire’s orders, almost before they had allowed themselves to expect his answer.

No answer, indeed, ever came. He had been talking to Maxwell, his lawyer, with Kate’s letter in his hand,—had told him what was wanted, since inquiries had been made after the invalid,—and Maxwell, who happened to be travelling up to Edinburgh that very afternoon, went, in his business-like way, at once to Adie’s, and executed his commission. But for this lucky chance, no more might have been heard of the telescope, which appeared, however, next day at the farm.

It gave unending pleasure.

They had it out on every clear night, carefully set, and bright as polish could make the brass. By its side they would learnedly discourse and quote, search their 'Keith on the Globes,' turn up references, and draw plans and charts of the heavens, till the farmer would aver that "it beat a'" to hear them. He would listen, at times, with his mouth wide open, and a lurking smile about the corners, betokening incredulity and amusement, not unmingled with derision,—but he never interfered.

If bidden himself to come and have a peep, he dutifully obeyed, resting his hands on his knees, screwing up one eye, and feeling involuntarily for the trigger, as the attitude reminded him of fingering his ancient firelock; but he never could see what he was told he ought to see.

He liked, however, to look, uttering the while short exclamations of wonder and pleasure; and encouraged by even so much appreciation, they would further attempt to enlighten his understanding, and to this end would cast about for something easy, some such simple sop as "Jupiter, as compared with our Earth"—they always now talked of "our Earth," and wrote it

with a large E,—“as compared with our Earth, Jupiter is the size of an orange compared to a pea : the sun, as compared with both, is the size of a globe two feet in diameter.”

This, however, was too much. He would not demur to the most hideous statement,—they might say what they would, and he would respect their feelings, and repress his own,—but, once out of the ken of these fanatics, and safe among his stacks and his yard, his black bull and his “yowes,” he would laugh until his throat was sore. It was as good as a play, he thought.

“Ay, ay,” he would complacently agree, when it was pointed out that the colour was coming back to Missy’s cheek, and the spring to her step, “she’s no’ that bad. She’s no’ dwining. She’s but a puir bit gloit at the best o’ times; but what o’ that? We mun be thankfu’ for what we can get. There’s nae croichlin that I can hear, and nae pingin that I can see. Naethin’ to gar us fear, praise the Lord! And gif it’s thae books and siclike that set Missy up, and she’s no’ trae to learn sic nonsense, e’en let her hae her fill, say I. We mun cross her at no gait. But, preserve us! a when idle havers

to tak' that haud o' a bonnie lassie,—it's beyont me! Na, na; I'm ower auld; I canna come Jupiter."

Whenever they tried him again after that, he had but the one answer: "I'm ower auld; I canna come Jupiter."

Sometimes of an evening, or in the "fore-nights," as he called them, when darkness drove him within doors before supper-time, he would listen to Lizzie's reading, especially if Kate chose for them a drama.

There was something in Shakespeare that he said he could "tak' haud o'." 'Hamlet' "garred him grue"—and apparently it was a pleasant sensation; the argumentative eloquence of the rival orators in 'Julius Cæsar' engaged his attention wholly, not a point made being lost upon him; but the 'Merchant of Venice,' take it all in all, was the favourite.

In it he was absorbed, to the exclusion of every other interest.

If a door creaked, or the dog stirred, or his dame did but alter the band on her spinning-wheel, while it was going on, his hand was up, and his "Stop a wee, I didna catch it. Your pardon, Lizzie, but that noise—and I'm dull o'

hearin', mind ye," made the reader go over the passage afresh.

He sighed, he groaned, he breathed heavily. He took heart of grace, he cocked his head on one side, he cried "Aha!"

The head pressed forwards, the eyes distended, the lips protruded.

Finally, as the climax was revealed, he threw himself back in his seat, dashed his hands down upon his knees, and laughed till the roof rang again. "That dings a',—that dings a'! Whae wad hae thocht it,—whae wad hae believed it? That deil o' a Jew,—aweel gudewife, there's nae ither word for him, glower as ye may,—to hae his cantrips coupit, after a'! Gude guide us! To hae his cantrips coupit, after a'!

They did not try their audience with 'Romeo and Juliet,'—though perhaps, if any one had known what were the pages over which a certain dark head was most frequently bent in private, it might have been found that they were none of those with which Mr Comline was regaled.

There would be a wonderful shine in the girl's eyes after those solitary readings: the book would lie open on her lap afterwards, while she

looked no more at it, but gazed steadfastly into the dim distance across the waters, her lips moving softly the while, as though she were replying to sweet sounds and whispers. Her cheek would warm if questioned as to how her quiet hour had been spent. Why should it?

Lizzie could not guess what these things meant: she had no eye for such subtle, shadowy signs. There was surely no harm, nothing of which to be ashamed, in being found engaged in the study of one of Shakespeare's masterpieces; she even proposed that they should occupy an evening with it,—Kate should be Juliet, and she herself Romeo.

Why did Kate turn from the proposition with an excuse, and almost a shudder?

It hurt her friend. It seemed to intimate that Miss Comline's rendering of the scenes would fall too far below the ideal formed by such a lover of the piece. The point was not pressed,—for indeed poor honest Lizzie felt the rebuff to the bottom of her heart, and was never known to mention the subject again,—but even when awakened to the fire in her sweet friend's eye and the enthusiasm on her brow, she could not penetrate their cause. They told of a world into

which she could not enter, and of hidden springs whose very existence to her were unknown.

On higher and holier subjects, also, the young girl's lips were sealed to all but her old dame. To granny alone could be confided every new fear, doubt, and anxiety, since to granny alone had been whispered the secret of her heart. Counsels of sympathy from one who knew not all, from whom the root of the matter had been kept back, could be of but small, if indeed of any value; and for Kate—the shrinking, sensitive Kate—to have intrusted to a second person the story of her ill-fated love—and that person Lizzie Comline—oh, not for worlds could she have done it!

What, Lizzie? Lizzie, who was so excellent as a daughter, so solidly superior as a companion, so irreproachable as a preceptress; Lizzie, who had never needed to be found fault with by any mortal being, and who, it might be presumed, must have found some difficulty in finding a shortcoming wherewith to charge herself,—tell Lizzie of her weakness and her woe! Honestly, she could have poured forth her tale with a great deal more of confidence and comfort into the huge red “lug” of Mr Comline.

There are times when common-sense, of the kind wherewith the farmer's daughter was permeated through and through, is of less than no avail, and in the present instance it was positively *de trop*. It was too much for this poor Kate. She knew what it portended, or rather what would have been its certain verdict, had her trembling lips whispered the truth. She would have been told that she had "done her duty," which, in Miss Comline's estimation, amounted to an adequate amount of praise for any sacrifice. She had done her duty,—that was all.

And, alas! it was not all. There was still a past to be dwelt upon, with feelings so mingled that they could not pain; and there was a future, which was wont to steal unawares into lingering day-dreams, and startle into wild blushes and shamefacedness, when its presence there was recognised. There were times when the vigilant guard over thoughts sweet and dangerous, which she surely meant to keep always, and did keep truthfully and valiantly from day to day,—there were times, however, when such a watch could be maintained no longer. She could not lie awake at nights, lis-

tening to the "sough" of the wind among the cliffs, and the ceaseless beat of the heavy breakers on the shore, without thinking of Evelyn. How often had he bade her hearken to the weird sounds! How inseparably were they henceforth connected with his memory! This and that tender look and tone had fallen to her lot while gazing with him over that restless waste of ocean which lay stretched beneath her little window. He had been wont occasionally to unbar the shutters of the old parlour below, and call to her to come and look at the scene. At such moments almost each of the few words he uttered would be fraught with a significance all its own.

And how she had counted over her treasures afterwards; seeing the smile and hearing the whisper again and again, throughout the dark hours that followed; weaving them fantastically into her dreams, when sleep at length overtook her fevered frame; changing them sometimes to cruel mockery, sometimes to idle fripperies, but waking ever with the true delight hidden safe in her heart,—her real, absolute, priceless possession!

Might not an eye, albeit a watery one, be

cast now and then over such happy hours? Must her tears be treason?

Assuredly in Lizzie's judgment they would have been. She would have been brought back as an erring lamb to the fold; she would have been gently rebuked,—her spirit braced anew, according to the youthful Calvinist's idea of such a reinvigoration; and for the future she would have been kept to her guns with a rigour that would have been all the more oppressive that it was intangible and righteous.

But from granny nothing was hid; granny never looked surprised; granny guessed where, in its little book tied by the spun thread, nestled the rose which she had herself found under Evelyn's pillow after his departure, and had then put wonderingly into Missy's hands: granny knew all, and said nothing.

'Deed, she was but a slow auld wife hersel', and took her time about a' thing; an' 'deed, she thocht it was the best way. "Naethin'," she observed to herself, "was ever weel dune that bit to be dune a' at ance; an' what for suld she be in a peyvee about her bairn? The Lord an' His Holy Bible, an' time an' the telescope, gude

fresh butter an' eggs, an' the bricht spring sunshine, wad do the wark."

"Bide a bit;"—she would further nod sagaciously, and peer with merry eyes over the rims of her spectacles as she noted one little improvement after another. "Bide a bit: the end's no yet; an' it's for nae hand but that o' the Ane that's abune a' ken, to take the helm heft, an' guide the bit boatie through the troubled waters. Whae can say what's in keepin' for oor Missy yet?"

Kate began to go out and about again;—to creep down to the shore when the sun was warm enough, to wander on Lizzie's arm over the heathery moor above, and to come in from her rambles hungry and sleepy like an infant. By-and-by she went with fresh vigour to her tasks. To Shakespeare was added Chaucer and Spenser; to Schiller, Goethe; to Keith, Herschell and Davy.

There was nothing vulgar nor debasing in such a life. Lady Olivia needed not to have been surprised, as she was, to find that after six months spent among the lonely Galloway moorlands, her step-daughter had not deteriorated. The atmosphere which Kate had been breathing

was purer, healthier, more refined, than that from which she and Alice had come. The mind that had been straining after thoughts beyond its own narrow range, was not likely to have shrunk and dwindled; the soul that had been touched by a live coal from off the altar of the Most High, could not thereafter cling more closely to the dull earth.

All was otherwise.

Kate was enriched in mind, lovelier in person, transformed in spirit.

“But dreadfully delicate-looking,” reflected her eldest sister, who at this juncture felt so entirely superior to the other three, that she classed them all as children in her own mind. “Dreadfully thin and delicate-looking. And, good heavens, what a gown!”

She was truly sorry for Kate, and affectionate towards her, when it came out that the bustle of reunion, with all its attendant emotions, had proved too much for the fragile form, who had scarcely voice for speech, or limbs for support, when she stepped forward as the carriages drew up,—and that almost immediately afterwards restoratives had to be put in force and repose resorted to. She was quite grieved to find that

their father, — and Mr Newbattle looked, to confess the truth, rather put out of his way, — was the only addition to the party at dinner.

He could not be got to ask questions and follow up allusions, both of which Kate could have done if she would. Poor Kate!

With pity was mingled a delicious sense of patronage. It would be only kind to amuse the poor girl; and since she had had none of the sport, she should at least enjoy it second-hand. She should hear the whole story from beginning to end. Even the preliminaries, extending to the dull wet morning on which Lady Olivia's letter had been received, to its effect upon her own mind, to the journey up, and the first impressions of the gay watering-place,—even these should be fully entered into. She would skip nothing, since everything was of importance. How could she expect her auditor to comprehend this and that, unless all that led up to the situation had been properly explained?

About Mr Pollaxfen, for instance, and that little scene between him and Captain Defour. Unless Mr Pollaxfen had been simpered about

beforehand, and Kate had been given to understand how much he had been with them, and what pretty speeches he had made, and what this one had said, and that other had thought, and what she (Alice) had felt throughout it all, —unless these details had been properly presented to the mind of her sister, the significance of the whole affair would be lost.

And Alice had thought a vast deal about Captain Defour and the ball-room encounter,—quite as much as Pollaxfen had. His very name had thereafter caused her to perk her head and bridle; and although it is quite possible that the gallant captain would have been unable to tell the next morning whom the lady was with whom he had been dancing when a vulgar fellow ran up against him and knocked him down (such was his recollection of the affair), both the blooming Miss Newbattle and her veritable admirer set him down thenceforth as the defeated aspirant.

Alice had soon been able to call to mind numerous occasions on which Captain Defour had shown jealousy of Mr Pollaxfen; and in the light of the new revelation, she was nearly sure that it had only been the terrors of such a dan-

gerous rival which had prevented his proposing to her long before.

Even Lady Olivia had smiled to herself as she encouraged the idea. Anything to give Pollaxfen consequence; and if the young lady chose to take the matter thus, very well—very well indeed. She had not herself noticed anything, but she was not obliged to say she had, and it was easy to assent, and leave to her step-daughter the trouble of putting together conjectures and conjuring up reminiscences.

That sort of thing Alice was clever at, and with practice her memory and ingenuity developed. She had quite a creditable little history now wherewith to regale her poor sickly sister; and felt, to the depths of her soul, the glory of posing as a heroine to one who was as innocent as a babe unborn of the meaning of the word except in books, and on whose sympathy she could certainly count,—since, if Kate was anything, she was romantic.

Balls and routs, concerts and drums, might not go for much with a novice who had never attended one of them; but let her introduce a whisper of Pollaxfen, and give a hint of all the hopes and fears, heartburnings and jealousies,

connected with his name, and she could reckon on seeing her auditor flush and pant as of old, when Kate “spouted poetry in the dark.” No better recipient of a confidence of this kind could be wished for ; and with the delightful importance of having one to make, and the conviction that it would be so happily received, it was hard to have to wait even until the following morning for the conference.

It may seem strange that she should have been so eager, so blind, and so satisfied,—but she was all three. To have had a satellite of her own, a presence following her wherever she went, an arm at her disposal in all assemblies, bouquets and opera-boxes unlimited, had been quite enough at the time ; to have the recapitulation of her pleasures was sufficient thereafter ; and although she felt that it had been grossly stupid and tiresome of Bertha to defraud her of more,—of the honour and glory of returning home a *fiancée* after her first campaign,—still, even as it was, she could plume herself upon the past, and hope with tolerable confidence in the future.

She was early in her sister’s room next day.

Kate did not rise till noon, and the sunshine

made the apartment bright and pleasant, even without the fire which blazed in the grate.

“How comfortable you look!” said Alice, taking her seat on the bed. “I see you have had your breakfast, so now I am going to stay a little, and tell you all we have been doing. I shall begin at the beginning, and you must say when you are tired,—for I know you are not to be tired,—and then I will stop, for the present, and take up the thread of my discourse again another day. Really,” with a laugh of retrospective excitement,—“really, where there is so much to tell, I hardly know where to start from. What do you most care to hear about?”

(“What you are least likely to tell me,” said Kate to herself, though outwardly she only leaned back on her pillow, and smiled so gently that Alice was afresh startled into an uneasy feeling of subdued compassion. “No one will think I have any interest in Rupert, and I may have to wait, wait, wait for long before I hear his name. And when I do hear it, worse still; for I have promised not to betray myself, and I must keep my word. O Alice, you may have much to tell, but I have at least as much to hide!”)

PART V.

CHAPTER XIX.

“HERE’S AN UGLY MESS!”

“Perhaps the truest way to quench one passion is to kindle up another.”—SHENSTONE.

THE reader will judge whether Miss Newbattle, however, did not also on some points choose to keep her own counsel. She certainly did not accurately describe Pollaxfen: he figured prominently throughout the narrative, but he was not personally dwelt upon, and it soon appeared that whatever he might be or become to the narrator, he was at present only one of the innumerable accessories of her triumph. She had meant to make rather more of him to Kate, feeling by no means sure of Kate’s attention and sympathy otherwise,—but now, when it appeared that her sister was not only tolerant and attentive, but fairly well amused and eager, she threw Pollaxfen into his proper place, and

launched out hither and thither into all the details of her three weeks' absence. It was so delightful to find some one who knew positively nothing of it all, and yet to whom the little history, in all its virgin gloss, might be confided safely.

While the business was going on,—while every hour was occupied, and dressing, driving, dining, and dancing was the order of each day,—the relation of what was passing was not to be thought of: neither time nor inclination were to be found for the task. It had been, “Oh dear, poor Kate has not had a line for ages;” or, “Papa really must be written to by Bertha, or somebody;”—and no exertion followed. The idea passed out of mind, none caring to be reminded themselves, nor yet to stir up the memory of another.

In consequence, only the briefest and bald-est of summaries had found their way north.

The bare mention by Alice of being “very gay,” and of being “taken about everywhere by Lady Olivia,” although it might be in a general way satisfactory, could not be said to convey minute impressions on the subject to either Mr Newbattle or to his second daughter; whilst

the notes received from the sometime prolix and diffusive Lady Olivia herself, were confined to limits still narrower: she made an inquiry or two, mentioned the weather, and apologised for being in haste.

But now—now that all the whirling, fluttering vision had receded into the shadowy past, and that the recollection of what it had been was all that the fair *débutante* had to dwell upon, it was a great thing to have Kate to talk to.

She looked bright and pretty as she entered on her self-imposed task.

The whole episode had been so new, so enchanting, so like fairyland; the transition from Carnochan—dull, grim, leafless, and eventless—to Brighton, teeming with life, vivacity, and excitement, had been so sudden—such a perfect transformation-scene—that she could hardly even now look back upon it without going into raptures. Into the heart of the fray she had been plunged at once. For her there had been none of that miserable hanging, nameless and friendless, on the outside of the Paradise within view,—none of that sense of defeat and injury,—which had nearly driven Pollaxfen from the field. She had found him there as well as Lady

Olivia, and from the moment of her arrival all gates had been open.

With such a chaperone, and such an aide-de-camp, she had not been in Brighton three days before she might have been there all her life. Her driving-suits, her ball-room trains, and her opera-wraps, could not more entirely have converted the exterior of the country girl into that of the *habituée du monde*, than had the society in which these had been worn recast the mind.

She was now superior to astonishment, to admiration, to everything, on her own account; but she was willing to excite such sensations in those who had been less fortunate. "You have no idea," prefaced every sentence.

This poor shadowy-looking, ethereal-browed sister, who lay back so languidly and contentedly on her pillows, accepting, if not actually inviting, the overflow of confidence,—verily, she, fresh from her sickbed and her backwoods, could have *no* idea of what had been going on. What, for instance, would Kate have thought of wearing black satin plumed hats with scarlet bows, and pelisses all trimmed to match, at church on Sundays, and going for a drive after service, as on other days? How

odd it would have seemed to her to have looked in and beheld the evenings which followed, when Alice and Lady Olivia, all primmed up over their good books, sat on sofas ready for the visitors, whom it was understood might drop in, and who certainly did drop in, to the tune of twenty or thirty,—at which time Mademoiselle and the little girls would come down to tea, and there would be music—supposed to be sacred—and conversation not by any means equally limited.

Mademoiselle had been great on the Sunday evenings. She had discovered with effusion that Miladi had left behind at Carnochan the terrible, *triste* Scotch Sabbath, and that she understood, almost as well as though she had been *une vrai Parisienne*, how to make the most of the day. True, Miladi had gone to church, but church-going was a lively affair at Brighton, and nobody had cared to miss it. One saw *tout le monde* there. One could judge how one fashion suited the face, and another the figure. One heard appointments made, and little invitations whispered aside. One could observe Mr Pollaxfen and Alice.

All this had ravished Mademoiselle, and had

not come amiss to Miss Newbattle,—but she felt a conviction that it would have greatly startled Kate.

She did not, therefore, enter on such scenes. Since her auditor had for once been kind,—since she had not checked the current of narration by a provoking apathy, or by the invalid's plea of weariness,—she would not, for her part, bring forward anything distasteful.

She was indeed astonished at the patience with which she was listened to. Even when it was apparent that the topic did not suit, that it had nothing in it congenial, she was invited to go on, and polite attention filled the place of reciprocity.

It was really strange: she could scarcely believe her senses.

Alice did not know, that among the denizens of that lonely region where her sister had been sojourning, kindly interest in each other's interests was studiously observed by one and all. At Carnochan in the old days, although inhabitants of one home, members of one family, each of the sisters had gone her own way; none had questioned another, nor helped another, nor taken any manner of heed what was done by

another. Self-reliance, self-containment, had been the regulation of their life; and however unsociable had been such a mode of existence, it had satisfied them, knowing, as they did, nothing better, purer, higher.

Lady Olivia’s assaults on such a system of independence—which were on the whole well meant and much needed, if somewhat sharply enforced—were resented, as has been shown, with bitterness and valour. She could not understand their indignation; they could not tolerate her efforts at reform. She was unwise, and they called her interfering; masterful, and they declared her cruel.

Altercations were endless, and the four at length learned to look back upon their old time when “a’body reigned wha could,” as to a royal immunity from every evil under the sun.

But it had certainly never entered the head of Alice—as it had not entered that of Kate until within the last three months—to consider that a family of dissimilar tastes, habits, and fancies might enter cheerfully into each other’s concerns, even though those concerns were of no moment to the one, which were all in all to the other,

and might readily rejoice in successes which were incomprehensible.

This sort of intelligent sympathy was unknown at Carnochan.

There it had been of late: "How tiresome! Alice *will* go out riding just when I wanted her to finish that book, that I might change it at the library for the one I have been waiting for so long;" or, "Where is Kate? Full of some nonsense or other up-stairs, I suppose. Do make her leave it, and come down."

Even the children had caught the tone. "How *stupid* of Marjorie to care still for a doll!" would elicit the equally scornful retort because Bertha had ceased to romp and play.

No one thought of urging Bertha to frisk for company's sake with the little one; no one suggested that it would have been hard on Alice to have to forego her favourite amusement on a fine afternoon because Kate wanted a book finished, or that Kate in her turn might have been invited to disclose what that "nonsense" was she was presumed to be engrossed with, instead of being incited and wellnigh obliged to lay it on one side.

These humours had been all that was gained

by Lady Olivia’s attempt to make the household hang together more. Since they had been interfered with by her, they no longer respected each other’s rights; and matters were so far from being mended, that they were one vast rent at the moment when poor rebellious and sore-hearted Kate, the worst of the bunch, was cast forth, Jonah-like, to hush the tempest.

But at the Muirland Farm, Lizzie, who scarcely knew a sheep from a goat, farm-bred though she was, would with ready tact and insinuating suggestions draw from her father’s lips the record of his daily hopes, anxieties, and cares; how he thought of arranging one thing and another; which of his few fields he proposed to clear with turnips, and which were already prepared for oats; what additions he intended making to his stock,—the Muirland was, like most of the West of Galloway farms, almost entirely a grazing one,—and what animals he thought it advisable to get rid of.

In return, the farmer would persistently make inroads into those mysteries which baffled him and pleased his lassie,—lay his huge head on one side with profoundest attention while she

spoke,—and inquire deferentially even after that Jupiter whom he could not “come.”

Both would smile on granny when the ball was in her hands next, and her homely difficulties and successes were recounted. None were uncheered, wrapped in self, unexpectant of sympathy.

It seemed to Kate quite natural now that she should, with cheerful alacrity, enter into the recital of her sister’s enjoyments; and since she desired nothing less than to play the part of chronicler on her own account, there was no hindrance to the “And what happened next?” and “Did you really do that?”—so musical to the ear of a historian.

“I was just sitting with Kate, and giving her our accounts,” Alice explained, when at length she went to the boudoir. “She was so much interested that I could not get away sooner.”

“How is she to-day?” inquired their step-mother.

“Very well. She is getting up now.”

“Is she coming down-stairs?”

“No; she is going to her own little room—the triangle. Papa has had all her books and things put back there,” said Alice, demurely.

“ Oh ! ”

Neither then nor afterwards did Lady Olivia offer any objection to the room being called Kate’s, and used by her. She had the sense to know when she had been defeated.

Presently it was—“ Mr Pollaxfen comes on Saturday, Alice.” Alice looked for more.

“ Your sister being still so delicate, she will, of course, be unable to accompany you everywhere : she must not be over-fatigued, nor run the risk of taking cold. At the same time——” she stopped, at a loss how to proceed. (“ At the same time,” she wanted to say, “ remember that what was all very well at Brighton, when you and I were alone, and under no supervision, will hardly do beneath the eyes and among the ears at home. Mr Pollaxfen may even turn restive himself, if usurped too barefacedly. It will be decorous, wise, in you to hold back a little at this crisis,—just so far, at least, as to draw him on—just so much as to say, ‘ Whatever I may suspect, I do not *know* on whose account you have come here ; and until I do, you are not to perceive whether your coming is of any avail or not.’ ”)

Something of this, not so plainly put, but

sufficiently intelligible, did at length filter out, and was topped with, "And so, my dear, make Kate of all the use you can. Get her to sit with you in the room sometimes; get her to sit down and chat. If she were to fly away, as she used to do, at the approach of a stranger, Mr Pollaxfen would think it so extremely odd."

Alice understood, engaged for Kate—mindful of the newly-found compliance which was now to prove so valuable—and passed on the hint. For her sake, would Kate be friendly to the guest?

Saturday came, and with it Mr Pollaxfen.

No other fair one had consoled him for his loss in Alice. Nothing had occurred to subdue in his bosom the gusto with which he still gloated over his anticipated crushing of Defour.

It was provoking, cursed provoking, that his vengeance should suffer such delay—that he could not have the *éclat* of a speedy and gorgeous bridal on the very scene of his primal obscurity. That was a nuisance; and he had not felt sufficiently sure of his footing to write, either. He was not a man (no, no; knew a

trick worth two of that),—he was not a man to commit himself, until he *was* sure; but he was prepared to wait, since there was nothing else for it.

The moment he was summoned, he came; and he was met on the threshold by Lady Olivia and Miss Newbattle with all the *empressement* due to *their* friend, who had come on *their* invitation. That was enough; his assurance returned full tilt, and never again left him.

Kate was not in the drawing-room until just before dinner; and it was with considerably raised expectations, derived from divers long and confidential interviews wherein this hero had figured, that she at length turned the handle of the door.

At first no stranger was visible.

There was her father, there was Alice, and there was Lady Olivia——oh! Behind Lady Olivia’s ample draperies was a short, broad, little, bow-legged man.

Her entrance made all the party turn their heads; and she became aware that “another daughter” was being named, and that her hand was being eagerly taken by a hand not so very much larger itself; and it needed

not a whole minute's reflection to make her aware that she must prepare quickly for being asked what she thought of Mr Pollaxfen? If taken at unawares, she would assuredly betray her shock.

This, come what might, was the very last thing which must happen.

What! Hurt poor Alice in such a matter? Wound her in the tenderest point? Oh, not now—now, when she too well knew what those words meant, should thoughtlessness betray her into cruelty. Something, somewhere, somehow, must be found to his advantage. She must find out that he was pleasant, amiable, clever, if she could not say fine-looking nor distinguished. She must discover good-humour, or at least common-sense, if every other quest proved a failure.

But what a mean little figure it was! What attitudes, what legs! Do what she would, she could not keep herself from criticising the newcomer from top to toe; and in every survey was found fresh cause for marvel. Was this the man who had been the central point of her sister's elysium? Had the best of Alice's joys and hopes indeed circled around that little, ordinary, fidgeting puppet? Could that unmelodious voice,

issuing through its teeth, in endless “Don’t you knows?” and “That sort of things,” ever have been softened to a tender tone, and been hearkened to with charmed ear? Impossible, incredible!

He was nearly buried in his chair, twirling round his heavy watch-chain as he sat. Was that the style in which he usually made love?

Certainly he was talking to her sister, and certainly at the moment he could do no more than barely talk; but there are ways of doing everything. For instance, where were his eyes all the time? As often as not, she caught them leering round to where she herself was stationed. If not on her, they were on the wall, the chimney-piece, the ceiling, anywhere and everywhere,—but always wearing the same air of restless curiosity and vulgar interest.

And Alice had seen Rupert,—knew his look, his smile, his voice.

Not as Kate did, not as it had been hers to behold and listen:—to watch beside him among mountain-torrents, to blush beneath his gaze under the murky sky, to sob upon his bosom in the ocean cave,—those memories were all her own; but still——. Well, she would not be

too hard on Mr Pollaxfen. It was certainly not his fault that he was neither tall nor handsome ; that instead of being gifted with Evelyn's towering shoulders, square chin, and fine expressive eyes, he should slope downwards from the neck, have little, wandering, light-coloured orbs of vision, and should tuck his incipient beard into his cravat as though he were ashamed of it.

She was ashamed of herself for noting such unfortunate defects ; for to be sure, who would affirm that the soul of an intellectual giant has not many a time been found in a pigmy frame, and he might have much knowledge, even although his catchword were " Don't you know ? "

It was certain that he could not smile, but he might be able to laugh.

When Rupert smiled and laughed at once, it was a look of mischief, *diablerie*, what not ? Ah, such a look ! A look that poor Kate had learned to watch for and tingle beneath.

Now it haunted her.

Never since their parting had he seemed more present to her than on this particular night : try as she might, she could not drive him from her thoughts. Unheeding the vacant nothings which passed, unmindful of Alice's request that she

would bear her part in all, more and more silent she grew,—until, wrapped in contemplations, which caused her to start and change colour if addressed, the babble and chatter on every side fell, at length, like empty noises far in the distance, upon her inattentive ear.

“Kate, my love, Mr Pollaxfen has spoken to you three times!”

Kate was very sorry and very red.

“She is such an absent creature,” explained Lady Olivia, pleasantly, “that she often misses what is going on. It is no ill compliment to you, Mr Pollaxfen.”

“I only came to inquire whether I might remove this table,” said Pollaxfen. “Miss Newbattle would like to put her work-basket upon it. If it is not wanted——”

“Oh no.”

“You do not work yourself?”

“Not very much. A little.”

“You are fond of music, I daresay?”

“Ye—es. But I don’t often hear it.”

“Well; but you will give us some, won’t you?”

“I? Oh no. Alice,” said Kate, hastily—
“Alice sings, but I don’t.”

“Kate is our bookworm, Mr Pollaxfen,” chimed in Lady Olivia, picking him up as it were, and putting him on the right rails. “Kate is our student. She is longing at this moment, I am sure,”—laughing—“to run away from us all and shut herself up in the library.”

“Indeed?” replied the gentleman, rather at a loss. (A bookworm, was she, this sister-in-law to be? By Jove, he had never seen such red and white anywhere! He would not have minded having her at the Brighton assemblies, to take turns with her sister for him. But a “bookworm,”—eh? He did not see that, quite.)

“Well, a library’s always a comfortable room in a house,” proceeded he, after the momentary pause required for the above reflections. “You can get it well warmed, don’t you know? And it shuts in snugly at night, with green curtains and shaded lamps, and that sort of thing. We have rather a good library at one of my places in Lincolnshire; but at the other one,—at Grayfield Hall,—it is much too large. A library should not be too large, you know, should it?” to Lady Olivia, whom he knew by experience would always listen to him on the subject of his “places.”

Formerly, it will be remembered, she had encouraged Mr Newbattle on the same tack ; and it is probable that the defunct Evelyn had been likewise drawn out, and smiled upon. It was one of the provoking idiosyncrasies of her son, that, having as good a “place” as anybody, he never mentioned Evelyn Towers.

“I am so glad you are fond of your library, Mr Pollaxfen. My son is different.”

“Oh, well, I don’t know about being fond of it, Lady Olivia. I tell them to keep it up.”

“That is just what Rupert will not do. No one is allowed to enter his. Indeed, all the best rooms are shut up from one year to another.”

“Are they? Oh!” said Pollaxfen, with his old awe strong upon him. “It’s the best way, no doubt. Captain Evelyn can’t be expected to stick close to a humdrum old country house ; he is safe to be asked about a lot.” Already he felt a pride in saying it ; and the sentiment being to her mind, Lady Olivia would not cavil at the expression.

“But still,” she said, plaintively, “when a young man has large estates, he ought not to absent himself from them altogether. Although Rupert is my own son, I must condemn him.

Now, he has actually rejoined in London without being once at the Towers !”

(“ Rejoined. I did not know that,” said Kate to herself. “ I am so glad I stayed up and heard this. But what shall I do, or say, if they ever speak to me about him ? How shall I ever meet him as a stranger,—I who know him so well—so well. But rejoined ? That means I am safe yet a while ; and it means—it means——”)

“ Really, Kate, you foolish girl, I must speak to you again. You are worse than ever to-night, my love.”

There was real annoyance in Lady Olivia’s tone. (“ Mr Pollaxfen will take her for a fool,” she thought, “ sitting like that, with her hands on her lap, staring into the fire. She had better go to bed, and then I can make up some sort of excuse for her.”)

The suggestion was followed only too gladly.

“ And I hope you won’t be so tired to-morrow,” said Pollaxfen, as he lit her candle and wished her good night, staring hard all the time. (And again he thought within himself, “ Dash it, she would have made a figure in the Rooms,—that she would !”)

Every day now there was something or other going on; some picnic or riding-party was formed for the afternoons, and people came to dinner in the evenings. Every day Lady Olivia thought Pollaxfen would speak out, and Alice felt almost shy if left by chance alone with him.

Why did he not?

He was satisfied with everything. The connection was as desirable from every point of view as he had considered it to be at first. Lady Olivia was as complete a woman of fashion, Captain Evelyn as valuable an ally, Carnochan all that he had been led to expect it.

But the wretch had something which he called his heart, and which was now giving him warning of its presence every hour; for it said loudly, “Here’s an ugly mess! I came here to marry Alice, and I have fallen in love with Kate.”

CHAPTER XX.

THE MAN WOULD NOT LET HER ALONE.

“ Fear to do base, unworthy things is valour ;
 If they be done to us, to suffer them
 Is valour too.”

—BEN JONSON.

KATE was the only one of the family to find out what had happened.

It was not that she was ineffably penetrating, nor that they were the reverse,—it was simply because Pollaxfen, bent on running no risks, and resolved not to lose an actual for the sake of a possible good, continued to play in public the part of a suitor to the Miss Newbattle on whose account it was understood he had come, while in secret losing no opportunity which chance and Alice’s sisterly injunctions threw in his way, of insinuating himself into the good graces of the one who had in all innocence

stolen his affections. One or other of them he certainly would have.

When Kate came in, looking glorious, after a stroll round the lake or through the daffodil fields, he could scarcely keep his hands off her. He longed to throw himself on his knees, and lay down everything he possessed at her feet. He crept into corners of the room, in order that he might feed his amorous eyes by stealth; and he hunted Alice to the piano, for no reason but that he might get her out of the way.

She had never inspired him with a like passion.

He had liked her as well as he could have liked any pretty, fashionable damsel who had been, as he would have said, "cracked up" by Lady Olivia, and whom he had purchased and made over to himself, as it were, by his agreement to remain at Brighton on her account.

She had answered every requirement of the place. She had been able to take rank with any of the girls going, and had not only placed him, as her admirer, on a par with the dragoons, but had given him the pull over them. Their flirtations had been mere froth and soap-bubble, with no solidity, no basis underneath. He had

laughed to think how little the dashing mustachioed gentleman knew what was going on.

And then he had not forgotten that he was going in for the eldest of the four daughters. He did not put much faith in Lady Olivia's hints about heiress-ship,—in cases of this sort, queer wills were often made, he considered,—but still, there was the place and the property, and Alice herself had informed him quite guilelessly that Carnochan had nothing to do with Lady Olivia, nor with anybody but herself and her three sisters.

“But when your father dies, I suppose you would have to turn out, wouldn't you?” he had delicately observed in reply.

“When papa dies,”—Alice looked duly solemn,—“when papa dies, the estate comes to *us*. I don't know how, but I know it does.”

It was enough. Carnochan was neither here nor there: he was not going in for money—he would take it if he got it—a Scotch place with old pictures and heirlooms was always respectable,—but if it should turn out that the girls had only a life interest in the estate, or something of that sort, it would not bother him.

Since his Miss Newbattle was the eldest, if

there were to be any difference made between the sisters, it would be to her advantage; and with this conclusion he was well content.

Lady Olivia had been equally so. She was certainly doing well for Alice, as she had done well for herself,—not considering two wealthy commoners unsuitable mates for an Earl's nearly portionless daughter. Alice would have a better dowry than her step-mother had ever had; but then Alice, though passably good-looking and sprightly, was not in any way remarkable. In securing to her the large rent-roll of Pollaxfen,—and she had taken good care to have no mistake made on that point,—the astute woman of the world had been convinced of the soundness of her policy. No one knew better than she did, that it would have been difficult to do as well amidst the uproar of London.

Both having been thus moderate and clear-headed, they had got along amicably.

Lady Olivia was not enamoured of her friend, but he might pass muster viewed from special stand-points; while Alice, regarding him from these, as directed, — as the medium of untold delights,—had been easily led on. “Certainly, I hardly expected that she would give me so little

trouble," reflected her step-mother, who indeed had had a vision of girls who *would* dance with second sons, and appeal to their parents' feelings when informed of a desirable but unpalatable offer.

Alice, on the contrary, had accepted her Pol-laxfen without a word.

And since such becoming docility could not have been counted upon, all the more self-congratulation did the delighted projector of the scheme bestow upon herself.

Once or twice, even she had marvelled at its success.

To Kate, who was quick-witted enough when roused to notice, there was something exquisitely ludicrous in the way in which Lady Olivia,—who, whatever might be her shortcomings, was a gentlewoman bred and born, and who was thus alive to every trifling vulgarity of her guest, every surreptitious bite of his nails and movement of his toothpick, as well as to the unceasing twirl of his watch-chain,—strove to suppress her perception of them.

As he advanced in familiarity, as he became domesticated at Carnochan, the man's real nature began to appear.

At Brighton he had been seen at his best. With his smart clothes and his curricie, he had put on himself a gloss;—he had exerted all his energies to cope with the place, its habits and customs: and though even there he had been felt to be below the mark in breeding as well as ability, it was not until the closer contact of quiet country-house life stripped from his back the last shreds of the lion's skin in which he had sought to drape himself, that he stood to the world confessed, a vicious and ill-nurtured ass.

Perhaps, had it not been for the perturbation of the young man's mind, and the fluctuations of his resolution at this time, he might have managed to keep up appearances a little longer; but full of his own thoughts, his wily devices, and his clandestine passion, the art of pleasing generally was too severe a strain to be added to the other complications.

He could not stand that. No, by Jove, he could not! The old woman must go to the wall, when he was bothering his brains out between the two young ones.

He would sit on Lady Olivia's sofa, chewing his nails in silent meditation, without bestowing a thought on her, as he reflected on his last re-

buff from the beauty. He would take up a book and laugh over its absurdities, rather than attend to her conversation. When he was weary, he would yawn in her face.

She was only too thankful if no one else saw.

Furtively she would steal a glance at Alice, and draw a sigh of relief if Alice's head were turned the other way. Alone with her step-daughters, she avoided the subject, talking fast and gaily on anything and everything but Mr Pollaxfen; and neither his mind nor his manners ever received a comment from her lips.

But she could not so entirely school her face : she could not invariably be on her guard, as she would fain have been, in that quarter.

She did what she could. She smiled, chatted, and laid herself out to make things bright and pleasant with persevering assiduity ; but it was more than mortal woman could do, she thought, to keep her face clear of every evidence of the vexation which was continually being excited anew.

And thus it came to pass that daily intercourse with the unconscious visitor became an effort needing all the strength of her strong will to maintain smoothly, and that in her voice and

eye there was a habitual mingling of complacency and disgust—a struggle when he was by to turn upwards the corners of a mouth which were for ever turning down, that to one of those present, at least, needed no interpretation.

She was dying for the marriage, not more for the sake of being able to tell all her thousand and one friends and allies of the eligible union her sweetest daughter was about to make, than for the release it would bring from a posture of affairs which she was beginning to find intolerable.

Not more intolerable was it to her than to Kate.

Kate, as we have said before, had become alive to what Pollaxfen was about ; and though all, more or less, may be understood to have secretly fretted at the tedium of his lackadaisical and dilatory courtship, so unlike the rapid advances he had made at Brighton, the object of his surreptitious tenderness was the worst off among them all.

This had been at first merely an annoyance : she had supposed he, in his way, meant to be friendly to Alice's relations, and that he did not comprehend at what point the friendliness might

very well stop; that he imagined he might best, by compliments and obligingness to the circle, pay homage to the lady of his choice,—and therefore she had endeavoured to put up with him.

She had even put up so well, that his courage and confidence had risen high; and when it became apparent that the gallantries with which she was besieged were not extended to other members of the family, and that they were also not meant to rise to the surface,—were not for Alice's eye,—what was she to think?

He could not catch her alone but what he would say something he had no right to say. She could not meet him on the stairs, nor in the gallery, but he would have a pretext ready for detaining her. They could not bid each other an ordinary "Good night" but her hand must be squeezed.

"Mr Pollaxfen, are you not coming to church?" inquired Alice, it being Sunday morning. "We are late as it is."

He had a headache: he would stay at home, he thought.

As soon as the party had set off, he was upstairs hot-foot to Kate's room, whither he had

seen her retreat, protested that his headache had arisen purely out of sympathy with the one he had heard her avow, begged for a book, and remained for an hour. He was in great spirits, the ailment being manifestly a sham, got up expressly for the purpose of making the most of so excellent an opportunity.

Down he sat by the open window.

How delightful it was to listen to the church-bell ringing in the distance when—one was not going. Ha, ha, ha! Was he very wicked to say so? He hoped she would forgive him. He was afraid he had told a bit of a fib, but the temptation to remain behind, since he had discovered that she was doing the same, had been too great for his principles. Church-going in Scotland, when no one was there whom one cared to look at, was uncommonly slow, she must allow.” (A languishing expression was lost at this epoch, since the lady kept her eyes fast on the volume in her hand.)

“Pray don’t read. It’s the very worst thing you can do, if your head is *really* bad,” protested the assailant, with an accent on the “really” that was insulting, although he did not mean it so. “I don’t want you to bother

about me, if you will only allow me to stay here with you. To breathe the same air as you do," with increasing boldness, "is all that I or any man could desire."

It was more than Kate could stand.

"Mr Pollaxfen, I am very sorry, but I must be alone."

"I would not even speak——"

"Your being in the room is too much. I am obliged to be rude; but, as I cannot entertain you, and as it cannot possibly matter to you what room you are in——"

"Indeed it does, though."

"Then I will leave you this," said the young lady, rising; "you will find books and other things."

"Oh, I say, don't go."

She was gone as he spoke, and ere he could get out more.

"Hum!" reflected Pollaxfen. "Ha! Perhaps, stroking his chin, thoughtfully, "perhaps I had better have gone to church, after all."

By next day, however, he was at it again.

Kate had gone out by the garden-door about three o'clock. He knew that she was not allowed to remain out above an hour, and he marked the

direction she took. Then he came in and sat down to the writing-table.

“Do you not ride this afternoon?” inquired Lady Olivia, coming in equipped for a walk to the village.

Ride? Well, a ride, he allowed, would have done him all the good in the world, and there was nothing he would have liked better; but——and he pointed to his unfinished letters.

No; he must give up pleasure for that afternoon, and stick to duty. The post must not be allowed to go out without his letters, and he would not have them done under an hour and a half. There were such a lot,—and he eyed them disconsolately. He jumped up in the most obliging fashion the next minute, since Alice appeared in her riding-habit, and no one but himself must put her on her horse. It was not until she was mounted that she observed a groom was in attendance on the one which had been placed at Mr Pollaxfen’s disposal. Pollaxen had been round to the stables, and made his arrangements previously,—since he had made up his mind to have another venture, even before he knew what was to happen.

The groom understood not to appear too soon;

and while nothing could exceed the regrets of Miss Alice's squire in being thus forced to provide a substitute, he had not above a minute's space into which to compress them.

How he laughed to himself as he made short work of the letters afterwards!

He did not omit to have them sent—he was too wary to incur any foolhardy risks; but a few lines in as many notes, and a couple of orders which were done in a minute, made up a creditable pile when he rang for the butler to take them away. Thus, if the man were asked afterwards whether Mr Pollaxfen's letters were in time, no answer to rouse suspicion would be returned.

Then the writer stepped out, all in a flutter at his own prowess, and its uninterrupted success; and with a sensation of mingled delight and terror, which was quite a new experience, started in pursuit of the cruel fair.

He had not far to go. He saw her before he had proceeded a couple of hundred yards, returning from her walk, sooner than he had anticipated, probably because the wind was cold. With an uneasy conviction that she would yet pass him and make for the house, if he gave

her too long time to think about it, he slipped behind a bush, intending to step out quickly as she came near. Prudence had her reward.

Within a few paces of his retreat the object of his chase turned off, and entered a side-path leading to the old-fashioned kitchen-garden, which, being sheltered by high walls all round, was doubtless sought with a view to remaining out a little longer without fear of being chilled.

Swift as thought he followed: he had her in a trap now.

Taught by his lesson of the day before, he did not on this occasion exceed at first the limits of bare civility. Admiration of the spring flower-beds, interrogations, and comments, procured him at least a decent show of tolerance: would he keep to this, his company, she reluctantly felt, might be endured for Alice's sake; and although inwardly disconcerted, she hardly knew how to deny his repeated requests for "one turn more." "Don't let me tire you, but I have not seen this path yet," even met with an assenting bend of her steps towards it.

When Alice came home, which she did ere long, and found her bird flown, it gave her no surprise to find him being shown the new green-

house, though it did for a moment strike her as peculiar that he should look so exceedingly sheepish and guilty over so simple a matter.

As it happened, he was detected at the precise moment of venturing upon one little *tendresse*, his first. And to be thus caught, and to have his answer interrupted by the legitimate recipient of his *petits soins*, whom at the moment he imagined far enough away, was, it must be allowed, confusing and vexatious.

Perhaps, however, he did not know when he was well off; perhaps he was lucky in the deprivation: at any rate, any surmises that might have arisen in the mind of Miss Newbattle were set at rest by one glance at her sister's face.

Kate had been making one of her speeches, Alice thought,—snubbing the poor man, who had had no notion of the firebrand to which he would set a light should he inadvertently choose to air any theories at which so haughty and self-opinionated a young madam could take umbrage.

It was a pity. Kate had been so much softer and gentler of late. She had been quite mild with her step-mother; and sisterly, and roguish, and merry with Alice. It was really

a pity that she did not like Mr Pollaxfen. When pressed, she had not been able to say more than, "You know, Alice, you and I never did like the same people—except Mrs Popham."

"Very true," Alice had assented; "but everybody cannot be Mrs Pophams. And I think that for my sake, Kate, you might try at least not to dislike—and that is something with you—one who is so much to me."

But could passive neutrality be possible in such a case? The man would not let her alone.

At length even Alice perceived that her sister was admired, and forebore to press for forbearance. Whatever might be her conflicting sensations on finding the two together, with troubled and averted looks, in the greenhouse, displeasure against Kate was not among them. She was rather amused on the whole. "I warned you," she said gaily afterwards, in answer to the gentleman's clumsy explanation, and assertion that he could not succeed in making friends with her sister. "I warned you. She is a very tinder-box when she is taken the wrong way."

"But what am I to do?" cried poor Kate, in despair of aid, and agony of soul, when, a few days after this, the sighings and oglings of

the treacherous Pollaxfen developed into downright love-making—"what will be the end of it?"

She had held her peace as long as she could, trusting every day that something would occur which should either ease her of his persecution, or betray him to Alice; but her silence had only served to render her tormentor more audacious and more sly. He felt that his double-dealing was connived at, understood,—that she was willing to be made up to secretly.

If not, why had he not had to run the gauntlet of reproaches and frowns from the slighted Alice?

Sometimes he was almost ready to court these;—it would be too delicious to have both the young ladies pulling caps for him. But it would be unsafe: he respected Kate for her reticence, and concluded that she was as clever as himself. He told himself that he was up to her game. This was it. They were to go on as they were doing yet a little longer; and then, as soon as she had sufficiently drawn him on, they would together turn round, and fling their engagement in the faces of the rest of the family. An idea more titillating to his vanity could not

have been conceived; and the offspring of it was that cool assumption of an intelligence between them, that unblushing, taking-all-for-granted tone, which set her blood on fire, and made her at times scarcely able to contain herself.

That poor unsuspecting Alice should continue to be duped by a man so faithless, so mean, so vicious, and so vulgar, was not to be borne. The day of revelation came.

Poor child, perhaps she might have managed better. Perhaps if she had been older and calmer, she might have kept her sister's arm afterwards round her neck. Alice had been quite playful and affectionate when summoned by her "grim-visaged Katherine" to hear her tale; had felt so sure of hearing nothing unpleasant to herself, whatever little tiff there might have been between her lover and Kate,—and she concluded some such had taken place,—that the opening words had hardly startled her.

"I have something to say about this friend of yours, Alice," began the eager, choking young voice. "He is not the man you take him to be, dear. He is—he is——"

"He does not hit your fancy," replied Alice,

easily ; “but then we discussed that before. You have something else to say, surely ?”

“Indeed, indeed I have! It is not that he does not take my fancy ; he has taken yours, and that is enough—wretch that he is——”

“Kate !”

“I—I must tell you. I have kept it to myself till now——” A break.

“Well, tell me.” Alice smiled.

But her sister was silent. How should she make things understood ?

“Now, you dear unreasonable thing,” continued the elder young lady, with her little air of superior wisdom, “do you just listen to me. I see plainly enough how it is, Kate ; and of course I am vexed, and wish you could think differently. But I do not expect that you will. You find Mr Pollaxfen tiresome because he does not take much notice of you, and stupid because he cannot be interested in your concerns——”

“Stop, you are wrong. He *is* interested—too much interested—oh, far too much. It is that, Alice, that which I wish to tell you of. You do not know the interest he assumes, and the things he says ; and he comes after me, and

follows me, and will not let me alone. He is false to you—false to you.”

“Kate, Kate, what do you mean?” Alice gave a little hard laugh. “What whim is this? You are dreaming, you strange ridiculous girl,—dreaming. Come, rouse yourself,” laying her hand on the shoulder from which the encircling arm had been withdrawn; “shake your wits together, and think what you are saying, *ma chère*.”

“I do think—I both think and know. Alice, would I speak thus if I were not sure, only too sure, that what I say is true? My poor Alice, I am not dreaming; I wish I were. Alice, if you knew all, you would detest and despise this man as I do. I loathe him. His very touch——”

“You are flattering; but I do not see what his touch has to do with *you*. Do not be so warm, Kate; you may be sorry by-and-by, you know.”

“If I could only get you to believe me!”

“Why should I believe you?”

“Alice, answer me,—do you really care for him? Can you care for him?”

“That is a question,” said Alice, reddening,

“which you can hardly expect me to answer, considering the very unhandsome terms in which you have just spoken of—of our friend. At any rate,” stiffly, “I care enough for Mr Pollaxfen to beg that in future you will keep your opinion of him to yourself.”

“Do you mean that?”

“I certainly do. I never,” continued Alice, drawing herself up still further,—“upon my word, Kate, I never heard such extraordinary language used before.”

“Extraordinary language! But——”

“Well? But what?”

“What language am I to use? How am I to make you listen to me?”

“There is no difficulty in that; I am listening to you now.”

“But you will not believe me?”

“No; that I can’t promise to do.”

“At least I must speak; oh, I have been too long silent already! I have borne it day after day,—and you don’t know what it has been to bear,—and yet I felt all the while that it must come at last to this. He pursues me,” she broke out, passionately; “he hunts me from place to place; I am nowhere safe from him.

It does not matter where I go, or what I do, he is sure to find some way of forcing his company upon me, directly he thinks he can do so unperceived. He is blinding you by affecting to pass me over without notice whenever you are by; but directly,—the very instant that your back is turned, he is by my side, saying things that are odious to me and treacherous to you. Alice, dear sister, it is the truth; indeed, indeed it is! Alice, will you not believe me now? It is for your sake, only for your sake——” She stopped: her voice had risen almost to a cry, and one responsive look, one tremor in the countenance that remained unmoved before her, would have brought forth a stream of tears and kisses, loving words and tenderest tones,—all, in short, that was finest and sweetest in a heart that had itself been wrung.

But the fountain was frozen even as it welled up within. With lips only a shade paler than was their wont, and without other trace of emotion, Miss Newbattle rejoined coldly, “You are very foolish to excite yourself thus: you know so little, and have seen so little of the world, that you ought to be more guarded. People

who have been more in society would be a great deal more cautious about taking up such absurd misapprehensions."

"Misapprehensions! It is no misapprehension."

"So you think; but I am of a different opinion, and I have at least as good a right to judge as you. Most people, indeed, would think that my opinion was the more valuable of the two, considering that I have had *some* little experience——why, my dear Kate," she broke off, scornfully, "if it were not so absurd an idea from beginning to end, I could prove to you in a dozen ways that you are under a mistake. There was that affair between Mr Pollaxfen and Captain Defour——"

——"Yes, I know; but——"

"But I can assure you *that* was not the only one. He was constantly making people jealous; for——although perhaps I should not say it——I was very much admired, and all kinds of men wanted to be introduced. And the girls were just as anxious to know Mr Pollaxfen. It was quite his own fault that he knew so few people; he often told me so. It was only when *I* went, that he cared to go to the assemblies and other

things. He devoted himself to me wherever I was at Brighton——”

——“Has he devoted himself to you since he came to Carnochan?”

“That is different. That he wishes to be on friendly terms with all my people, is one of the clearest proofs of his having a—a——you really ought not to press me like this. It is not delicate. I do not like to say all I feel on such a matter. It is to me as plain as possible that poor Mr Pollaxfen has been guilty of the unpardonable offence of being civil to you for my sake,—and you, with your unsophisticated ideas, have taken it amiss; and now, because I happen to keep my senses, and decline to participate in this frenzy, you are indignant with me;”—for Kate had turned away.

“I am not indignant,” she answered, sorrowfully. “How could I be? It is you who may well be indignant with me, if——”

“What does it matter? In either case it is nonsense, and the less said about it the better. I am not angry with you, although—as you say yourself—I might very well have been; but you must really drive such a notion out of your head as quickly as you can.”

“If I can, I will.”

“That is right, — that is the best way. It never does to harbour fancies. As Lady Olivia says——”

“But, dear Alice,” taking her hand, “you have my promise; will you give me yours? You will not forget my warning; you will watch for yourself, and not allow him to hoodwink you as he has been doing? I mean,”—hastily, as her sister frowned,—“I mean, you will at least find out whether he *is* hoodwinking you or not? And if you find that he is——”

“Pshaw, Kate! I thought we had done with this. Now, you are growing flushed again, and yet you know that you have been warned to avoid excitement of every kind. For your own sake you ought not to work yourself up into a state like this; and it is too ridiculous into the bargain — it is a mistake from beginning to end.”

Such was the tone she was firm in taking.

Whether or no to believe in so gross an imposture on Pollaxfen’s part, and in such a terrible fall from her own high position, she could not tell, but at least she would affect incredulity. The strain was severe; and she drew a

long breath as she passed out of her sister's presence, and sought the solitude of the park, feeling as though she must be alone and unperceived whilst chewing the cud of such bitter meditations. But in the very path which had been chosen for the purpose, whom should she encounter but Pollaxfen himself?

All was changed within a few short minutes.

It appeared that he had actually been on his way to seek her—that during the past half-hour, throughout which he had been alternately denounced and defended overhead, he had been closeted with the father of the combatants in the room beneath, and he had been taking the surest means of vindicating his character in the eyes of at least one of the two. He had been demanding from Mr Newbattle the hand of his eldest daughter; and poor Mr Newbattle, who had been told that he was to expect this miserable hour from the first day of his guest's arrival, would have been only too thankful to have given him the hands of all four, and have done with the matter, would he but have requested them through the medium of Lady Olivia.

He had never known a minute's peace,—or

so he himself thought,—since he had had this interview hanging over his head. He had tried every means to evade it, wondered why he needed to be consulted at all, assured his lady that she had full powers from him to accept anybody she liked for any one of the girls, and declared that, between Maxwell and the estate, he had no time to attend to domestic matters.

All such excuses were blandly ignored by his wife, and they finally resolved themselves into hasty retreats out of sight whenever Pollaxfen appeared during the daytime, and unsuccessful attempts at sleep when unavoidably left alone with him after dinner in the evenings.

He had, however, been caught at last, and the thing was done. He went straight to the boudoir to report the terrible business well over, and the accepted suitor made for the park. The rebuff he had received from Kate that afternoon had been such an one as even he could not get over; and with the swiftness of cunning, he had anticipated the disclosure which he had felt convinced must follow. He had seen it in her face, and had in his own mind vowed savagely that he would “chuck it down her throat again.” By Jove, he would!

He would cause the haughty miss to believe that he had only been amusing himself at her expense, and that she had overstepped the mark in supposing him stricken by her charms.

He would teach her to give herself airs to him, he would. After bothering him off and on for a good three weeks, to dare to turn round upon him like that at the last!

He went straight into the library and sought Alice's father, and Alice met him as narrated, coming subsequently to look for her.

Everything proper was said, and said so effectively, that Kate's testimony went to the winds. It positively must have been the delusion her sister had asserted it to be. She had the evidence of her own senses, and she declined to receive any other. The only effect of the outbreak was to make her wonder within herself whether Kate could have been quite—quite herself when she made it. She had always been fanciful. The excitement of the past three weeks, — and perhaps there had been a little anxiety on her (Alice's) account besides,—might have fixed her mind rather too intently on one point. At any rate, Alice, who inherited her father's love of peace and easy humour, re-

solved to forget what it was awkward to remember, and to keep in the background of her own memory what she could benefit nobody by communicating to others. She did not, as will be seen, adhere subsequently to so wise a resolution, but at the first the only mild triumph she permitted herself was conveyed in asides, such as this: "You see, my dear Kate, you were a ninny after all, though you meant it for the best. You should really be a little less vehement and less positive in your assertions. Be more circumspect when you go into the world, Kate, or you will get into scrapes, I can tell you. Now, just fancy if I had taken up what you said, and had gone off to Harold,"—Harold was Mr Pollaxfen's Christian name,—"and had confronted him with your report! He would have thought me mad! He cannot bear flighty and quarrelsome people. And do you know what he told me to-day?—that he must own he had seen from the first that you were a young lady to beware of. Those were his very words. He was quite afraid of you, he declares; for you seemed to him to have such a cross, forbidding, old-maidish look. You must have put it on when

you took that fancy into your head, you know ; and by the way, that reminds me that I meant to tell you how *entirely* your conjectures must have been groundless from the very first, for he says himself that if there is one thing in the whole world he detests more than another, it is a blue-stockings ! ”

CHAPTER XXI.

WOULD EVELYN COME?

“That name for ever dread, yet ever dear,
E'en in his absence I pronounce with fear.”

—POPE.

Now that Pollaxfen had actually spoken, he was restored to Lady Olivia's favour: his dirty boots were permitted to rest upon her velvet footstool, without being the subject of reproachful glances, ill-concealed; and he might yawn when he pleased.

He had done his part and fulfilled his contract: accordingly, he had established a claim to forbearance, which, however slovenly, ill-bred, and upsetting he might be, was not to be set aside.

“Alice, my love,” she could now say, “we must begin at once. We cannot be too methodical; these matters should all be done system-

atically. Your own relations and your father's old friends, he and Kate must take in hand—it is not *de rigueur* for you to have anything to do with the announcements: as to people generally, I will see that no one is neglected. Then we must get to the *trousseau* as quickly as possible.”

This was enough to condone the gravest errors. The man who had put it in her power to say this, might have been pardoned for walking knee-deep in mud, and laying his feet on her ladyship's own lap afterwards, had he so chosen.

Everybody felt the same.

The dessert after dinner, which had perceptibly waned after the first ten days of Mr Pollaxfen's stay—and which, in the sombre stagnation of the past week, had been reduced to two bald dishes of oranges and biscuits, without even the addition of any pretty little glasses of bon-bons to fill up the interstices—now blazed up afresh. The footmen, who, on divers pretexts, had shirked their best liveries during the cold March winds, resumed them with scrupulous punctuality.

Mademoiselle reappeared in the evenings.

She had found these so insupportably dull of

late, that the company below, sitting in different quarters of the great stiff drawing-room, had been abandoned for Rousseau and her *peignoir* in the warmth and solitude of the deserted schoolroom up-stairs. But now that affairs had taken a new turn, since arrangements were being made, letters discussed, and since Lady Olivia was once again in good humour, it became worth her while to make her toilet, and descend.

Every one seemed rejuvenated except Kate. Poor Kate!

If Pollaxfen had been insufferable before, he was almost more so now. True, he could not, as hitherto, cause his defenceless victim to fret and fume, and wish herself back at the old farmhouse a hundred times a-day: he could not make her dread when the hour came for her ramble or her ride, lest he should find some excuse for being her companion, and some opportunity for making himself repulsive. Nor could he, by thus filling her mind with horrible thoughts and fears, render it unable to find—even in her quiet hours, her books, and musings—a solace. He could in this way no longer make her life miserable, but he retained the power of doing so in another.

Out of his defunct passion had sprung a new and opposing one. Since he had ceased to love, he hated ; and no annoyance, which he fancied might be felt as such by the girl who had spurned him, was too trifling or too despicable for malignity such as his to descend to. She could not make a suggestion which he would not immediately oppose, and she rarely opened her lips that he did not find in what she said something at which he could sneer or cavil. This was, perhaps, a trifle ; but surely it was a more sad and serious matter that each day which saw revealed new traits of meanness, arrogance, and ill-nature, showed them in the man who was to be Alice's husband.

Alice's husband ; and how about Alice herself ?

All the newly-begotten ties which had been formed between the sisters were now irrevocably snapped in sunder. All the little kindnesses, the sisterly closetings, the genial trifling, which had of late sprung up between them,—all of this was at an end. It was as though a rude hand had parted the two, and held them back from reuniting with inexorable grasp,—as though there was for ever in the space dividing each

from each, the hideous, leering, watchful visage of Pollaxfen.

His ascendancy over his betrothed increased hourly. Presently it was plain that the vain simple girl had not been above dropping a hint of what had transpired between her and Kate, and that whether it had been a spontaneous confidence, or—as was more probable—one wormed out of her by artful leading questions, he had succeeded in reassuring her entirely; he had vowed and lied, until he had smoothed away the last shadow of uneasiness. And to be sure, the past spasm of doubt and jealousy had done more towards making him worth securing, than had all his previous attentions. Had he searched the wide world through for something to raise him in Miss Newbattle's opinion, something to make him appear to advantage in her eyes, he could have found nothing of more effectual aid than Kate's communication. At one stride he had become worth his weight in gold.

He was now nursing his position carefully.

Having had the satisfaction of receiving her virgin heart, he would, he fondly hoped, in future have the power of wounding, through it, that of the haughty lady he aspired to humble.

Nor did he altogether think amiss.

That he should lie in wait for opportunities, out of which to coin revengeful speeches, was pitiful, but it could be endured ; but that Alice should make haste to recapitulate them, was both sad and sickening. Alice thought it an excellent joke to do so. She and Pollaxfen found it quite amusing to go over in private the "last act of the tragedy," as they called it. He was playfully taxed with having too successfully attempted to mislead, with having been unwarrantably hard-hearted in carrying out his resolve to throw everybody else off the scent, at the expense of a poor deluded girl ; and in return he affected regrets, and scouted blue-stockings.

"Upon my soul, you know, I wouldn't have done it," he would protest, "if I had had the slightest idea that what was fun to me was death to her, and that sort of thing. Upon my life, I wouldn't. But you see it wasn't until you told me——"

"Oh, I did not say 'death,'"—Alice would complacently correct the expression. "I only said that you were a very naughty man, and that you did not know the harm you were doing."

In truth, she had hardly realised at first what she said. Bewildered by so many rapid transitions of feeling, by the sudden plunge from blissful security which Kate's revelation had seemed to threaten, and anew by its resumption on a solid basis, consequent on her meeting Pollaxfen in the park immediately afterwards, she had let more escape than she was aware of. He had easily understood the whole.

“ Well, but you see, it was really most uncommonly awkward for me,” he would resume, “ and—and uncommonly hard on me too. She let you fancy all sorts of gammon—I mean nonsense—for no earthly reason than just to set you against me ! Now I call that not square, you know. You can't be astonished if I do have a kind of grudge against Miss Kate after that ? ”

So far from being astonished, his auditor appeared to share the feeling.

Whenever a chance offered for Pollaxfen to let drop some word or phrase more than usually galling, she would hang her head to smile, and steal a glance afterwards to see how far the taunt had struck home. She took no pains to hide that it had pleased her. Ostentatiously she

would call the speaker to order in a whispered aside, but the accent of her remonstrance would be so little short of encouragement that it almost bade him go on and prosper. Indeed, such an understanding, so entirely their own, and so peculiarly appreciable by both under the circumstances, seemed to cement their union more than anything else could have done ; and to spite the meddlesome busybody who, half out of folly and half out of knavery, had tried to come between the two fond hearts, became a daily amusement. In this light the affair was looked upon by Alice at least ; and so open was she in her display of the gratification it afforded her, that scalding tears of generous anger and disgust were not unfrequently drawn from the eyes of the sister who beheld and understood the whole.

It was an added bitterness, that she seemed to have brought the venom on herself. Why had she been so impetuous ? Why so hasty ?

By the exercise of a little more patience, or by simply holding her tongue, all this display of petty spite might have been avoided. Alice would be Alice still ; that she could be willing to marry such a man as Pollaxfen showed her

incorrigible ; but at least the sisters might have remained friends, and parted with goodwill on either side.

Over-haste had undone her. She had meant to trample a scoundrel beneath her feet, and, behold ! she had placed the scoundrel on a pedestal, from which he put out his foot at her. Must integrity always suffer ?

The next minute she would blush for herself that this should disturb her mind, when far, far worse was befalling poor misguided Alice. What was Pollaxfen as an antipathy, compared with Pollaxfen as a friend and companion for life ? Forebodings, which daily deepened, made her heart chill at the very thought of Alice. Even her own hopes and memories receded reverently before this ever-present shadow.

Without troubling itself as to what Kate thought or felt, however, Carnochan gave itself up to rejoicing. No one else saw anything but the most brilliant sunshine in prospect : Bertha, whose tedious tasks were lightened, and who was permitted for the nonce to cater scraps of news for Mademoiselle wherever she could,—and Marjorie, who made friends with Pollaxfen on the strength of a packet of sweetmeats,—were

neither of them more exuberant in spirits than were their elders.

“Rupert will certainly come down this time,” cried Lady Olivia, when invitations for the wedding were being issued. “I have made quite a point of it, Alice; and though he may only be able to get leave for a day or two, he is so good-natured that I am sure he will agree.”

“Oh, I say, I hope he will,” said Pollaxfen, who was present. He showed no signs of going away, although Lady Olivia thought he might very well by this time depart in peace to make his own arrangements: the wedding-day was drawing on, did he mean to remain at Carnochan all the intervening time?

However——she would be complaisant even if he did. No one could have everything. That he set so high a value on her son was always one point in his favour, and his aspiration was smiled upon.

“Of course he would not come for every one,” she said. “Captain Evelyn does not care to rush in at every open door; but I think, I hope he may choose to make an exception in dear Alice’s favour.” This was what Alice liked, what kept up the flow of her good-humour:

to find that everything connected with this supreme event was in a way belonging to her, made her look upon it with that steady satisfaction which it was so desirable it should inspire. Lady Olivia, who could not for her life have married Pollaxfen herself, was just sufficiently fearful of her step-daughter's turning restive some day or other, to be careful in the minutest points. Thus, instead of saying that her son might come in order to please *her*, it was, she was strictly bent on declaring, in dear *Alice's* favour that she alone expected he might be induced to break through his rule.

"Well, we must make it worth his while," replied the bridegroom-elect. "Get some pretty girls together, and all that sort of thing. Alice, what appearance will your bridesmaids make? Have you any nice, fair, blue-eyed beauties?"

Black-browed Kate was sitting near the noodle.

"There is your sister," said Alice, properly.

"And Marjorie," added Lady Olivia, laughing. "Quite a fair, blue-eyed beauty, and your great friend, Mr Pollaxfen."

But Pollaxfen looked serious.

"Lucy ain't much," he said; "she's fair,

but she's big and fat. Who else have you ?”

“Two of my second cousins, two other Miss Newbattles.”

“Rather too many Newbattles, I should say,” with a rude laugh. “Newbattles are well enough, but you can have too many as well as too much of a good thing. Have some one besides Newbattles.”

“Susie Popham.”

“Ah, there's a girl !” cried Pollaxfen, enthusiastically. “*She'll* do. A pretty, lively, jolly little creature, who gives herself no stuck-up airs and nonsense. She is the very one to suit Evelyn.”

Three things in the speech offended Lady Olivia. Why should Miss Popham be praised for not giving herself airs to the Newbattles ? It seemed as though Pollaxfen placed himself and the Newbattles on a lower level,—whereas her husband's family was—was very nearly, if not quite, equal to the Pophams, and she of course was, in her own person, far superior. Then she did not care to hear her magnificent Rupert vouched for by a person of Pollaxfen's kind, and she hated to hear him called “Evelyn.”

“Since my son comes—if he comes at all—to please Alice,” she remarked, coldly, “and not to run after pretty bridesmaids, it will not be of any great moment to him whom he meets. He has plenty of society at all times.”

“But of course he would like to have some one amusing—not a dull, stupid dummy, with nothing to say for herself; that was what I meant,” explained Pollaxfen, with an insolent glance at the object of all this. “If Evelyn is my best man, I am in a way responsible for his being looked after, and enjoying himself, don’t you know?”

“Indeed? Do you propose asking my son to be your best man?” said Lady Olivia, with a variety of feelings, for this was the first she had heard of it. The easy and appropriating “Evelyn” was now explained; he had so entirely familiarised himself with the idea, that it had found expression involuntarily, although he had not intended making the announcement so soon. He had meant to keep it to himself until an answer had been received to Lady Olivia’s invitation. Thus, true to himself, he would run no risks that could be avoided. But he was now committed.

“Well, I do,” he said. “That’s to say, if you think it will be all right—if he won’t take me up short, and call it a liberty, and all that sort of thing. I don’t want to do anything that would give offence, of course.”

“Rupert is the last person in the world to take offence where none is intended,” replied Rupert’s mother, mollified, and yet dubious. She pondered another minute, and then looked up briskly. “It could do no harm to try. And, in order that you may have time to provide another in case of refusal, suppose you write at once ?”

“I didn’t think of writing, Lady Olivia. What I had in my mind to do was to run up to Town the end of this week, and see Evelyn myself.”

“Oh yes ; a very good plan.”

She saw no way of preventing it.

Yet she would have preferred her new friend’s not being inspected at close quarters before the wedding-day, when little could be seen and less heard of him, and when he would probably behave much as other men did ; she had a conviction that her son would not admire her choice.

In her mind's eye already she saw Pollaxfen cringing, servile, insufferable,—and would have given the world to have been able to say to him beforehand, “When you are with a person you think much of, don't rub your hands, and answer as if you could not presume to have an opinion differing from his, and don't giggle in that deprecating obsequious way of yours at every second word he says.” As it was, she had to let him go unschooled, and could but conclude ruefully, “Unless Rupert catches his name, he will take him for a tailor.” She did not, you see, know that Rupert's tailor was a very fine gentleman indeed, compared with Harold Pollaxfen.

It was, however, something to get quit of Harold at Carnochan. He was not, as has been shown, a good guest, and he was still less happy as an *ami du famille*. He seemed to have the power of being in every room at once,—of establishing himself in the library, of infesting the hall, and of sprawling at full length in Lady Olivia's boudoir at one and the same time.

He never had anything to do, and it did not appear as if he were even as properly unsociable, and desirous of no company but that of his lady-

love, as would have been admissible under the circumstances. Quite the contrary. He liked family conclaves into which he could insert his opinion with the rest—circles of sitters all occupied with the same subject. Nothing connected with the all-important wedding-day was uninteresting to his ear—no considerations, however trivial, were beneath his attention. To burrow in the largest chair he could find, twirl his watch-chain, and enter into details that would have driven another man frantic, was his favourite mode of passing the time. Get him out of doors they could not ; and to Lady Olivia, who had always been in the habit of managing her own concerns without advice or interposition from anybody, the continual presence of an inquisitive, prying listener, who let nothing escape him, and ferreted out the meaning of every allusion, was more intolerable than she could or would avow.

She still had her qualms of anxiety about Alice, and that alone bore her up ; and now, when the London project was mooted, she felt that whatever were its evils, it would still be better that Pollaxfen should be mistaken by her son for a tailor, than that her step-daughter, on

her part, should find that she had mistaken him for a gentleman.

“You are certainly an excellent deviser,” she said, therefore. “Rupert will be glad to make your acquaintance; and undoubtedly you stand a better chance of succeeding in your kind desire if you undertake it in person, than if you trust to a letter. My belief is, that he never reads letters. If you see him face to face, he will hardly decline, for no one ever knew him say a disagreeable thing in his life.”

“That’s the sort of fellow for me,” cried Pollaxfen. “I hate your proud, airified gents, all strut, and nothing to go upon, like those vapouring swells we met at Brighton. Much they had to vapour about, I’ll be bound! It’s always those who *have* the least that puff out the most. When a young lady takes to fancying herself, you know, and thinks all the chaps she comes across are dying for love of her, the chances are, that she’s the very one they all funk, and wouldn’t touch with a hot poker.”

(“He grows worse every day,” thought Lady Olivia.) “Kate, my love,” said she, presently, “where are you off to? You are not think-

ing of going out of doors in this easterly wind ?”

“Would you rather that I did not ?” said Kate, meekly. She was often wonderfully meek with her step-mother now, looking on her as the link between Carnochan and the absent Evelyn, and the vehemence of their past disputes seemed incredible. She had no desire to quarrel with Rupert’s mother, apart from her resolutions to keep the peace on other grounds, and every day saw her now let things pass that would formerly have provoked censure. It came quite easy on the present occasion to inquire, “Would you rather that I did not ?”

“Certainly I would. It is not fit for any delicate person to step outside to-day. Were you quite well and strong, quite your hardy old self again”—she liked the marrying man to think them a hardy set, although to Mrs Popham they might “cause endless anxiety on account of their health”—“I should say nothing was worse than stopping in the house,” proceeded she. “I recommend fresh air for everybody who can take it. Huttering over a fire,”—with a pointed glance at Pollaxfen, who was as close beside the fender as he could get,—

“huttering over a fire, only makes people all the colder afterwards. Now a good brisk walk,—but not for you, my dear; for you that would be a risk.”

“Oh, but Miss Kate is above all risks,” cried Pollaxfen; “she is a venturesome young lady, and delights in dangers. You must not expect prudence and discretion from learned ladies, Lady Olivia.”

Something had made him peculiarly alive to the beauty and spirit of the girl that day; perhaps it was the constant mention of Evelyn’s name which kept throwing up new variations of colour and expression into her changing countenance. She could not trust herself to take any part in the conversation; but neither could she help following it, though every new turn it took made her hot and cold, burn and shiver.

No wonder that Pollaxfen, goaded by the sight, racked his brains for speeches that were so curiously meaningless and venomous, that they made one at least of his other auditors stare.

“I will stay at home, then,” said Kate, now almost gratified by the care evinced in a pro-

hibition which she would once have resented, —and the tone of her reply was such that it elicited a hearty “That’s right, my dear,” and an approving look, which was almost too much. After the spiteful innuendos and titters of Pollaxfen and his bride, the unconsciousness of Lady Olivia and her little word of approval were estimated at treble their value:

But all alike were forgotten presently in the one absorbing thought, “Would Evelyn come?” Every fibre was quivering with apprehension, dismay, and terror; but was there not underlying each, a keen throb of some other emotion, which had no name, and yet was akin to all?

She thought there was not—she knew there was.

She wept, and taking a little packet from her bosom, kissed it. She stood for an hour gazing in silence from her window on the waning prospect, with eyes that saw not, ears that heard not.

Pollaxfen had no power to touch her then.

The sight of her serene brow that evening, and of the softened tender lip, which had been only curled and updrawn for him, chafed her enemy more than he could tell. She reminded him, he

thought with a shudder, of a picture he had once seen, representing the martyred Joan of Arc tied to the stake, and looking round with a holy calm upon her executioners. Just such another Maid of Orleans he could have fancied he saw before him.

What though every feature was now in repose, had he not seen those eyes flash and flame, that nostril spread, and that brow contort? He was not taken in by all that well-contrived appearance of saintliness and superiority. She was no supernatural being, this shamming Kate. Dash it! he would do anything, give anything, for one good slap at her!

But how to get it, was the rub; and the question was one to make him grind his teeth with unavailing vexation.

Suddenly a thought occurred to him.

"I say," he whispered to Alice, "you are not thinking of giving Evelyn your sister to look after, are you?" His mind was always running on the one topic,—so was hers: there was no need to explain to what he referred.

"On the 21st?" replied she, understanding immediately. "Certainly we are. That is the right thing to do."

“ Well, all I can say is, I should not do it, right thing or not. Evelyn is a man of the world, accustomed to smart, stylish girls, with no end of fun and dash about them : he would be quite nonplussed by having such a——”

“ A what ? ” said Alice, who was still a sister, and had enough sisterly feeling left to speak quickly. “ A what ? ”

“ Well, I don’t want to say anything that you would dislike ; but that Kate is a caution ! She is enough to cast a damper over anybody, —look at her now, mooning in the window corner. I have tried her on every subject—talked till I was tired,—she told you herself of the efforts I had made,—and I never could get her to take the slightest interest in anything. She is as heavy to get on with as a lump of lead. There now, that’s the truth. Evelyn won’t thank you for giving him a problem of Euclid to work out—ha, ha, ha ! ”

He had been told of Kate’s having been unknown as yet to the recently-acquired brother ; and the ghastly idea had arisen, that when once seen,—and seen, as must be the case, under every advantage,—his gay Guardsman, who was so much to him, might absolutely — and there

was horror in the thought—commit the same error into which he had himself erewhile fallen, and with happier results. He might love, and be loved.

On this he spoke.

“Of course, if he can be satisfied with a dull, namby-pamby miss as a companion, he may admire her as he would a statue,” he went on. “She has a sort of good looks; but no life—no spirit——”

“Kate no spirit!” said Alice, laughing.

He had contradicted himself, as he often did. He was driven so wild 'twixt one passion and another, and was so sore put to it to find the means of gratifying any, that he often hit on opposing statements, and came to grief between them.

“None, unless she is angry; I grant you, enough and to spare then. But she can hardly explode at our wedding,—or at any rate, it must be internal combustion, if any. You and I,” with a significant smile, “may suspect it is there, but no one else will. I say that it is quite on the cards that Evelyn may take to her——”

——“Rupert? Oh no.”

“You think not?” eagerly. “Well, I dare-

say you are right. But he is uncommonly thick with you all, is he not ?”

“He and I are great allies, if you mean that. He rode with me nearly every day——”

“Oh, I say, I should have been jealous.”

“There was never anything of *that* sort,” said Alice, with dignity. “We were only easy and friendly ; neither of us ever had to be spoken to. But still I was the one he liked best of us all. Every one knew that.”

“But he had never seen Kate ?”

“And sending me that magnificent bracelet was really too kind,—quite a proof of the interest he took in my marriage. I do hope, Harold, you will succeed in getting him to be your best man.”

“But why should Kate be best bridesmaid ?”

“Why should she not ?”

“She is so absent ; she is sure to go wrong, and put the others out.”

“Nonsense !”

“Miss Popham would do far better.”

“I can’t put Miss Popham before my own sister.”

She was willing to back him up in any small treasons, to hear and relish his sarcasms, and to

report faithfully their effect on their subject ; but in public she was Miss Newbattle, and the first bride of the family,—and everything connected with her nuptials must be done decently and in order.

“ Well,” said Pollaxfen, losing temper at last, “ I must say I think it is deuced hard—that I do. Here have I been and given in to every single thing you’ve asked of me, and never asked anything back. I have let you fix the day, and invite the people, and settle where we are to go afterwards—have everything your own way as pat as you like,—and now, when all I say is, don’t go and inflict your numskull of a sister upon a man like Evelyn, you insist on doing it!”

Over this they had their first wrangle, but it was a low, suppressed, limited affair. Neither wished the matter to come to the surface, and presently it was hushed up.

Alice held to her point, convinced that whether Kate were a numskull or not—and she let the word pass without a comment—she would still be the proper person to stand next the bride, to hold her bouquet, and draw off her glove. On her own wedding-day she must be first ; and since all eyes would surely on that occasion be bent

on her, and she must monopolise the lion's share of the public attention, it seemed to her not only immaterial where her sister was placed, but that it would be foolish in the extreme to disarrange the order of her bridesmaids on Evelyn's account.

Rupert would of course be looking at *her*, not at Kate. She liked to think that he would certainly admire her through her Brussels veil, and pay his respects afterwards to Mrs Pollaxfen with more deference than he had ever shown Alice Newbattle. She thought quite enough of her so-called brother to make his presence on the all-important day—which was to be so emphatically *her* day—a matter of some moment. He stood forward prominently among the figures by whom she saw herself surrounded, whenever the gay scene rose in visions—as in truth it did perpetually—before her complacent eyes.

The idea of making such an absurd alteration as Harold proposed !

He had to give way. He had the fear of Lady Olivia and of the laughter of the dragoons before his eyes. Married he must be to somebody, now that he had gone so far ; and to appease his betrothed, who was certainly not

implacable, he, in his own phrase, “caved in.”

He indemnified himself inwardly, however. They might get the better of him with their cranks, and their formulas, and their precedents, and beat him down because he knew nothing about such matters, and had never had any one to tell him,—he might be made to conform, and be as good as told that it was not for him to judge,—but, alone with himself, he slapped his thigh in triumph. “Dash it!” he exclaimed, “I’ll put a spoke in her wheel in spite of them all! See if I don’t!”

PART VI.

CHAPTER XXII.

PRESSING THE POINT.

“ More water glideth by the mill
Than wots the miller of.”

—*Titus Andronicus.*

POLLAXFEN lost no time in setting about his errand.

Brushed up, spruced up, fitted out in his very best, he stepped into a hansom on the morning after his arrival in London, and only stopping by the way to purchase and don a hat which should be up to the august occasion, drove to the direction given him by Lady Olivia.

Captain Evelyn was at home, and he was shown into a room, full of sunshine and spring flowers, wherein sat the object of his dearest hopes (the truth must be told, however unflat-

tering to Miss Newbattle), to whom he made himself known before time had been given for any such mistakes as had been anticipated by his patroness.

“Ah,—have you had breakfast?” said Evelyn, looking from beneath his eyelids. He did not care for the appearance of his visitor, and thought it was too early in the day for a man of that sort to be going about.

Breakfast! Pollaxfen thought this was a dandy indeed, and in no whit resented the supercilious inspection. It was delightful to him, whose father had been off to the mill by six o'clock every morning of his life, to be talking to a man who asked him at noon if he had had breakfast; and he noted down the remark, even while modestly replying in the affirmative, and feeling that it was not for him to ape such gentility.

“I had mine three hours ago,” returned Evelyn, curtly. “But no one else has. When did you come up?”

“Last night only. I took the liberty of waiting on you, Captain Evelyn, the first thing I did, as your mother Lady Olivia assured me that I might do so without being considered

intrusive; I was afraid of finding you out if I came later on. I hope that you will now allow me to say—to express the—the great pleasure I feel in the prospect of being in—in a manner connected with so distinguished—a—an officer.” All of which was creditably run off, needing only here and there a correction, as above seen. It had been conned and got by heart days before.

“Thanks. Very good, I’m sure,” replied the distinguished officer, somewhat nonplussed. He had nothing half so fine to say in return, and could not help thinking the gratification was rather lop-sided.

“Lady Olivia assured me that I should not be taking a liberty,” reiterated Pollaxfen, vaguely. He had not ceased to fidget in his chair, roll his eyes around, and spin round his watch-chain for a minute. “I happened to be in Town just now; come up to look after things, and see people, don’t you know? And Lady Olivia”—she was always good to fall back upon at a pinch—“I told Lady Olivia that I would call if she would answer for it that you——”

“Oh yes. The sun’s in your eyes, isn’t it?”

“Not at all—not at all. Well, perhaps it is,

just a bit. If I may move a little this way,—oh, pray, not you—I am so sorry to be a trouble,” as his host somewhat negligently pushed a chair towards him. “Yes, this is better. There is so much sun outside to-day that—that I see you get all the benefit. How very—very—the sun is, to be sure; and what an uncommonly nice handsome room you have got here. In the way of everything, and looking out upon the Park——”

——“Hot, out?”

“Well, yes—rather. A little different from Carnochan. When I left there yesterday morning——”

“You left Carnochan yesterday morning!” said Evelyn, lifting his head with a start. “Did you—do you come from *Carnochan*?”

“From Carnochan, yes. Shocking cold there, I do assure you. Frost on the trees, and ice on the roads, and all that sort of thing. A wind that made the marrow in my bones congeal as I drove to the station. Quite a change after we crossed the Border, though; and as we neared Crewe——”

“I had no idea you had come from Carnochan. All well there? All of them at home

again, eh? What are they about? When are they coming to Town?" He was another man, —alert, animated, curious.

("I shall get on now," thought Pollaxfen. "Dash it! if you only know how to take these swells, you can always make something of them; but the difficulty is to know how to hit it off at the first.") Aloud, "Well, Captain Evelyn, they are not thinking about coming to Town just now, I should say. You see, there are other doings in hand, and one other small arrangement"—facetiously—"in which I am especially concerned, that has got to come off——" He paused to be congratulated.

"I had no idea you had been at Carnochan," pursued Evelyn, as though nothing had been said. "I knew they had gone back—Lady Olivia and the rest of them;—her letters are somewhere"—rising to look among a litter on the mantelpiece—"but it's no matter; she never tells me anything that I care to hear," thinking not of his visitor at the moment.

"Just so—just so," said Pollaxfen, feeling it only rational that so great a man should let family matters slip. "I understand. Oh yes; I have been at Carnochan for the last six weeks.

I went down as soon as I was invited ; for owing to the scarlet-fever——”

“Scarlet-fever? What scarlet-fever?” quickly.

“Bertha——”

——“Oh, Bertha.”

“Who did you suppose it was? Alice had had it as a child,—and a good thing too, or there might have been the mischief to pay. As it was, it was as unlucky a piece of work as could have been ; but for it, we should have been spliced long ago, and there would have been no occasion for this confounded Scotch trip. That’s to say,” a little red, “of course it was all very nice, and that sort of thing, you know,—and the place is pretty, and I enjoyed myself uncommonly ; and the family, I’m sure——” with one of the bows Lady Olivia had dreaded.

Evelyn, however, neither saw nor heard.

“Well, and who was at Carnochan?” he inquired impatiently, having only waited for a break. “Did you find them all there? Was the party entire?”

“Oh, quite. It was very entire indeed,” with a weak sneer. “Nobody missing, and nobody over. Not a soul to be seen but themselves—dead time of the year, Lady Olivia said. But

it was all one to me : going there, as I did, for reasons of my own, other people would only have been in the way."

"Kate has been ill, they tell me," said Evelyn, getting up to draw down a blind. "Is she better?"

He saw that it was useless to beat about the bush further. If he wanted information, he must demand it point-blank.

"Better? Oh yes, she's better. She—she is well enough," said Pollaxfen, unable to look quite as cool as he could have wished to do. Not that it mattered, had he known as much,—Evelyn being taken up with his own looks, and dreaming of nothing less than of inquisition into his neighbour's.

"You saw her? She is able to be down-stairs? She goes about, then?" said he, more briskly.

"Oh, bless you, yes! She goes about plenty; she is always going about. There is nothing to hinder her."

Then he dropped the subject for the present: he meant to have more drawn out of him by-and-by, but not then; he had other business in hand first.

"You'll be down on the 21st, Captain Evelyn?"

“The 21st? That’s the wedding, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it is; oh, you know that. Oh, I hope that your remembering that is a sign that you are really disposed to honour us with your company. I assure you Alice expects it. She would be——”

“I don’t know if I can.”

“They all hope you will. Lady Olivia has talked of nothing else——”

He caught a smile, and stopped short, wondering if he might dare to wink. “Oh, well, you know,” he said, “she can’t help it; she can’t help sometimes being a bit prosy, poor woman.”

“Who are you talking of?” said Evelyn, with a stony stare.

(“Dash it!” thought Pollaxfen, “that was a cropper! There is no knowing how these tinder-boxes will take a thing.”)

He was scarlet to the roots of his hair, and knew not which way to look, nor how to put things to rights again. “I—I beg your pardon. I say, wh—what a fine view you have out here,” stammering hoarsely, “and al—altogether a first-rate situation. My own house in Palace Gardens”—the thought of it was an electrical

restorative,—“it—ah—has no view at all to speak of,” he finished off quite calmly.

At last he unfolded his mission.

It created unquestionable surprise; but he had been prepared to combat objections, and even a negative, since it was indispensable to the rounding off of the fashionable chronicle of the wedding, that the best man of Harold Arthur Caractacus Pollaxfen, Esq. of Lime Fields, Lancashire, and Grayling Hall, Lincoln, should be Captain Rupert Evelyn, 2d Life Guards.

It would have saved him some trouble, if it would have made him also start and tremble, could he have understood all that was meant by the debating silence with which he was being listened to, and the thoughtful pull of his companion's moustache, as he looked now on the floor, now from the window, and now at Pollaxfen.

As it was, nothing interrupted the latter's eloquent appeal; and he bobbed up and down in his chair, edging it inch by inch along in pursuit of his object, little recking what he was about.

“It would really be the kindest thing,” he wound up at last; “for though I have plenty of

friends of my own, I promised Lady Olivia" (she would never be "poor woman" again), "and Alice, and all of them, that I would bring you. That was to say, I would if I could, of course—only if I could, mind; for I knew you would be full of engagements. Kate——"

"Well?" said Evelyn, raising his eyes—"well?"

"Hum!—ah, I've forgotten what I was going to say; 'pon my word, I have. You don't know Kate? She's not grown up yet, and rather a—a country bumpkin sort of girl,—she's not much; but there are to be *some* uncommonly pretty bridesmaids, I can tell you."

"Worth coming for, eh?" There was a lurking good-humour in the tone; it was really encouraging.

"Oh, I should say so,—rather. I told Alice to get them. There's a Miss Popham—a splendid girl——"

"Susie Popham? Oh!"

"You know her?" All at once he was small on the subject. He had meant to make a great deal of Miss Popham, and had held her in his hand as the winning trump to be played, directly there should be a round of bridesmaids; but

“Susie Popham? Oh!” spoilt all. There was no mistaking the tone, nor its interpretation.

“Yes, she is one,” he went on, however; “and Mr Charles Newbattle’s daughters, distant cousins—very fine girls, I believe—are others; and—and a sister of mine,—but I mustn’t say anything about her, I suppose? and——that’s about all, I believe—at least, it is all I can remember. There may be more, for Alice was to get a lot together——”

“It is quite tempting.”

“You may believe that. I hope we shall tempt *you* though; that’s what I care about most. You could get away, couldn’t you, if it were only for the day?”

“Possibly.”

“Well, then, how is it to be? What am I to say? I have not written down yet; I would not write till I could give them your answer, one way or other. What shall it be?”

“Tell them,” said Evelyn, after thinking for some minutes, then he stopped afresh.

“What?” cried Pollaxfen, fairly jumping on to his legs,—“what?”

“That I will.”

.

“Delightful! Is it not?” cried Lady Olivia, when she heard the joyful intelligence. “Everything is indeed going on well, Alice. Oh, my dear,” to her husband, “Alice has just heard from Mr Pollaxfen that he has seen Rupert, and that Rupert has agreed to be his best man at the wedding, and come down with him the day before. Really, we are lucky people; we have no cause for complaint. Nothing but acceptations from everybody. It seems to me that if we go on at this rate we shall hardly know where to put all the wedding-guests.”

In her glee and triumph she was quite the Lady Olivia who had charmed and won the laird of Carnochan a twelvemonth before; and so young and handsome did she appear, that the flame which had, it must be confessed, smouldered drowsily within his bosom for a good while past, broke forth again in some measure.

“Why, my dear,” said he, with a little gallant air, “to look at you, one would think you were going to be married yourself.”

Of course he was chidden and bantered; but he found his favourite dishes on the dinner-table that night, and not a word was said although he dozed the whole evening through afterwards.

“Mademoiselle, you have seen my son,” continued Lady Olivia, who could scarcely contain herself at having this crowning piece of good fortune awarded to her exertions. “Oh yes; you had just come to Carnochan when he paid us his first visit. Marjorie, when I told you, last time we had a surprise, to guess who was coming, who did you think of immediately?”

“I don’t know, mamma. Oh yes, I do, though—Brother Rupert.”

“Right this time. Brother Rupert is coming for the wedding.”

“Then he will see Kate,” responded Marjorie. “You know, mamma, that he has never seen Kate, though I used to tell him about her. I showed him her photograph, and he said she was not like any of us; and then, what did he do but steal it——”

“What, what, what!” said Lady Olivia, laughing.

“*Fi donc*, Marjorie!” reproved Mademoiselle, in the same breath.

“Well, I don’t know who did, then,” asserted Marjorie, roundly, “for I never could find it afterwards. And you know, Mademoiselle, I told you at the time.”

“But, *ma chère*, think what it is you say! You have taken it out yourself; you are always change those poor photographs.”

“I have only changed them three times since then, and——”

Everybody laughed, and nobody heard the end of the sentence.

“Very bad evidence, I am afraid, *petite*,”—Lady Olivia shook her head merrily. “Little people who are always pulling their books to pieces, must expect to lose one now and then.”

“I never lost it,” said Marjorie, obstinately.

“It is at the back of another, most likely,” suggested Alice, with a faint inflection of annoyance in her tone. “And such a one as it was! That horrid old thing with a skirt like a chess-board——”

“*That* was not the one,” cried Marjorie, indignantly; “it was the beautiful one that was done at the wedding—the one that I cut you off.”

“What in the world does the child mean?” laughed Lady Olivia.

“I’ll tell you, mamma,” replied the “child” for herself. “Alice and Kate were done together, and Alice was so bad that they were all de-

stroyed; but I got one,"—with all the glee of successful roguery,—“and no one knew, and I just cut Kate off, and pasted her on to a new card, and it was just *beautiful*. But I never let any one see it, till the last time Rupert was here; and then I did so want him to know what Kate was like, that I showed it him as the very greatest secret, and he told me to put it in my book, and then he stole it!”

Everybody could now recollect that a card had been missing, but to scold Marjorie was unthought of.

“As if any one would care to take away the likeness of a person he had never even seen,” said Alice, scornfully. “There is nothing to get red about, Kate.”

“No, indeed,” assented Lady Olivia, quite diverted; “Kate may wait for the culprit to clear himself, as the charge cannot be said to be substantiated. Nevertheless, little Marjorie, if the big brother has been playing the thief, he must be brought to justice, for who can say what might go next,—your pink shoes, or my musical snuff-box? We shall all be open to suspicion from such a sharp little detective, if Rupert be not cleared.”

Marjorie saw no joke in it.

“I am sure he really did,” she told Kate, afterwards. “I will tell you why. Because whoever else I wanted him to look at, he wouldn’t,—he just said, ‘Very nice,’ or something of that sort, and kept turning back and back to that very one of you. And I told him that he never cared to see any of the others; and he only laughed, and said that he could see all of us every day he was here, but that this was his only way of seeing you. Then when he went away he called me up to his room, and told me to bring my book; and when he gave it me again, he had shut it fast; and he said I was not to look into it for two whole days, and that I should find something then. That splendid one of himself,—that was the something he had put in; and I never found out till long, long after,—not till we were at Brighton, and I was putting in the new ones that people there had given me,—that you were gone. As if it could have got at the back of another,” cried Marjorie, indignantly, “when I had them all out ever so often! I just know it was Rupert, whoever says it wasn’t.”

“You ‘just know,’” said her sister, glad to

have something to take hold of. "What an expression, child!"

"He had no business to steal yours, even if he did put in his," said Marjorie, unheeding; "but I'll get it back when he comes to the wedding," resolutely. "It is *my* photograph, and he must be made to give it up."

Kate, however, got the little girl pacified, and insured her silence on the subject, by insisting on the absolute certainty that there was of her only being laughed at for her pains, if she again introduced it. To be laughed at, Marjorie did not like any more than did her betters; indeed, she was at the age when children are most sensitive on the point—old enough to be mortified, young enough not to know what to say. Her tongue was thus tied effectually.

And she had done no mischief, since no one but the sister concerned had the most glimmering perception of there being any basis for the fabulous indictment, and since in Kate's eyes the crime was only too venial. She certainly petted and fondled Marjorie extravagantly that day, and gave her things more intrinsically precious than the lost likeness. The world was flooded for her with a new light since the morn-

ing. She found no interruptions irksome, and no restrictions unkind. She trotted high and low on errands, with feet that scarcely felt the floor beneath. She moved on air.

And what was the meaning of it all?

Oh, it was very plain, very easy to be understood: it was so delightful to be rid of Pollaxfen, and to see Alice more like her natural self again; and with a happier state of mind had come the feeling that the prospect before her sister had been darker to her distempered imagination than it might prove in reality;—and then Lady Olivia was quite inoffensive for the time being; and she was herself getting so well and strong, and at her own dear, beautiful home again. Surely nothing more was needed to account for a light heart?

For some days it lasted; then came the reaction.

Upon what was she building? When she picked to pieces the fabric woven of day-dreams and night-wakings, she found it float away into thin air.

Mademoiselle was the kindest person in the house to Kate just then. All the rest were too busy to notice anything amiss; but there were

reasons why the little lynx-eyed brunette took a special interest in observing how Meess Kate comported herself at this juncture. We have said that no one of the family at Carnochan found out Pollaxfen's baseness, with the exception of the insulted girl herself: but Mademoiselle Pierrepont was not of the Newbattle family; she knew all about it.

It entertained her hugely.

But then, what was she to make of this burning brow and these flushed eyelids, with which Monsieur Silverstick, an ape—*canaille*—*bête*—had surely nothing to do?

She was, for once in her life, fairly at a loss. All going on well—no quarrels, no worries—and yet the sunshine gone from one face which had so lately been irradiated. It must be that Kate was fonder of this sister, who was so soon to leave them, than she had ever shown herself to be.

“She is lonely and sad, this poor *petite*,”—a cold hand would be laid gently over the heavy brows,—“her sister goes, and she is left *solitaire* in this so *triste* Carnochan, to roam about these dark gloomy woods all day long. Cheer up, *mon enfant*; you come next. Miladi will soon

have another *belle-fille, aussi charmante, plus belle que Mademoiselle Alice*, to introduce. She brings you out next season, *n'est-ce pas?* You are not eighteen till July? *N'importe*—what are a few months, more or less? We will see that Miladi will so herself consider, and that you go *chez Londres* with her *toute de suite*.”

“I do not care to go, Mademoiselle. I prefer to stay here.”

“You prefer to stay here! Here! *Mais ce n'est pas possible!* It is not to be believed! *Ma chère*, you are ill, sick, strengthless; I see you often with the tear in your eye. That Mr Pollaxfen did annoy you much,—that, I did see for myself. Ah, *pardon! oui, oui, ma petite*, certain it is best not to speak of such things. I did not mean to offend.”

“I am not offended,” said Kate, in some surprise; “but, Mademoiselle, I assure you that I am not thinking of Mr Pollaxfen with a tear in my eye,” smiling at the idea; “he is not very polite to me, but——”

“*Mais oui*,—yes, truly; yes, I comprehend what it is you would say. It is nothing to you whether he is polite or not; he is polite to no one, he is——”

“Alice’s future husband,” said Alice’s sister, quickly. She would not allow a breath of disparagement against the man whom she, of all others, had reason to think slightly of, and her tone expressed its meaning plainly.

Mademoiselle gave her a queer look. “True, true; *précisément*,” she said; “and as Alice’s *futur* you will now only give yourself leave to look upon him.”

“Could I ever have looked upon him as anything else? You do not imagine——” She bit her lip.

“*Non, mon amie*, I imagine nothing. But I see something else—*autre chose*—which is not imagine at all. *Comment?* Ah, so; we speak of this not more. We will be so discreet—*prudent*,—we understand what we understand.”

In short, she understood to hold her tongue, and that was the great thing. From her secure vantage-ground she had, as we have said, had a bird’s-eye view of the affair; and had there been anything going forward in the evenings, she would not have found Rousseau and the *peignoir* more attractive; but the evenings had been utterly unprofitable, since it was not in the

formal circle, and amidst the platitudes which then passed, that languishing murmurs could be safely launched : and accordingly, to the evening hours Pollaxfen had trusted for maintaining his position with regard to his avowed lady-love ; but all the tricks, the shifts, the turns of the game, had been manifest to the quick-witted governess, who, when once on the track, had many a time doubled on the pursuer and dogged him, when he was dogging and worrying Kate !

She longed now for a little confidence, just to show how clever she had been, and to have the odd holes and corners of her chart of the scheme filled up. There were one or two little points as to which her present companion alone could have satisfied her ; and above all, she yearned to hear to what pitch the traitor had gone, before she had met him (accidentally !), infuriated and checkmated, after his final effort. She had run up against Monsieur ere he had had time to quit the spot.

Vain, however, was it to hope for any relenting in the severe young face. “ For at least, she shall not talk of it to me,” thought Kate.

“*Eh bien,*” continued Mademoiselle, presently, “it is not Carnochan, and it is not M. Pollaxfen, and I am not to know what it is. I do not like to see this poor little cat so thin and white. She was stronger, better, when first she arrive; she is too much alone,—she thinks, and gets no rest, *n’est ce pas?* But she must not sit down and weep. Ah, *qu’est ce à dire?*” compassionately. “She breaks down at nothing!”

“You are right, my kind Mademoiselle; I break down at nothing—nothing whatever. I am foolish and weak. You see yourself that I am not fit for gaieties.”

“*Vraiment, non; pas à présent.* But my dear Meess Kate, you have one, two months in which to convalesce, to grow well. As soon as this wedding is over—*oui, oui*—I say no more. She is confuse, bewilder,—she has been *en retraite*; and the noise, the talk, and all that is so *bruyant*,—it is too much.”

Presently she went away, and came back radiant, with a brimming glass of port - wine in her hand.

She had begged it from the butler; and it quite touched the poor soul, who had her good

points as well as other people, to find her little offering received with so much gratitude.

“What it is to have a heart!” she exclaimed mentally in her own language. “For my part, I am not *éprise* with any one, however agreeable, obliging, and polite, if they have no heart!”

CHAPTER XXIII.

POLLAXFEN IS CARRIED OUT OF HIS DEPTH.

“ A lie is troublesome, and needs a good many more to make it out.”—TILLOTSON.

WITHOUT the assistance of a heart, however, or even of those attributes which the gay French-women considered next in value, the bridegroom-elect was contriving to progress fairly well in his new suit.

He certainly was diligent enough, in season and out of season. Evelyn was wooed far more industriously than Alice had ever been ; and to be permitted to call and take an arm-chair, to be nodded to when met, and allowed, on one occasion, to act as entertainer, was all the aspirant looked for in return.

He was tolerated, and that was enough.

It may indeed be questioned whether even

that satisfaction would have been his had it not been for the sake of the very girl towards whom he now nourished a sentiment of the deepest aversion, and whom it was an object with him, second only to securing Evelyn's support at his marriage, to traduce and create a prejudice against.

Had there been no Kate in the question, it is more than doubtful whether any tie formed by Evelyn's mother would have been strong enough to have made such an intimate endurable to him. There would have been no rudeness,—as Lady Olivia observed, no one had ever heard her son say a disagreeable thing,—but he would have been perfectly able to defend himself. On Kate's account alone he forebore. He would not flout the man who was to be her near connection, and who had, moreover, given him such an account of her restoration to health and strength as would have taken him to Scotland ere long at any rate.

The opportunity, coming with the information, made him owe something to so timely a messenger.

It wanted but two days to the 21st. The two were together in Evelyn's rooms discuss-

ing the topic, which seemed to have equal interest for both ; and Pollaxfen held in his hand a magnificent pendant, as to the taste of which he wished to have his friend's opinion.

“It's to be worn on the day, you know ; while I am about it, I may as well do the thing handsomely. I think it is rather neat, this.”

The neat article was a blazing mass of brilliants ; and in so far as diamonds are always worth looking at, it was certainly superior in its external to its internal attractions, which consisted of the features of the donor.

“I have got Alice here, you see,” continued Pollaxfen, opening a locket attached to his watch-chain ; “and so I thought she ought to have me. This is a first-rate likeness of her ; have you seen it ?”

He handed it across.

“Very good,” pronounced Evelyn ; “but not so good as Kate's.” He had been thinking of Kate all day, excited at the near prospect of seeing her again, and unable to resist the inclination to bring in her name whenever a chance offered. Had Pollaxfen been almost any other than what he was, he might, and it is probable he would, have heard the whole story ; but as it

was, there was no getting nearer it than drawing occasionally to the introduction of subjects likely to call up her image.

“Not so good as Kate’s!” repeated Pollaxfen. “I don’t know that at all.” He had never seen one, to his recollection; but that was immaterial. “I don’t know that at all,” said he. “Of course you will say, however,” correcting his asserting tone, “that I am no judge. Neither I am; but still I may be allowed to say that, to *my* mind, whatever others may think, Alice’s is incomparably the best,—and, if I may add as much, that she is also the best subject.”

“Of course,” said his companion, with a laugh, —“of course.”

“You don’t agree? But they tell me you have never seen your other sister?”

“No sister of mine, my dear fellow,—I leave that felicity for you. Sisters are not in my line. I”—with a peculiar and significant emphasis—“I would not have her for a sister, if I could.”

It was an odd thing to say; and stranger still was the manner in which, after saying it, the speaker smiled to himself, paused, seemed to listen, and look at something in front,—paused

a full minute,—then, with the smile still on his face, turned, appeared to recollect where he was, and addressed his companion: “She’s rather a pickle, this Miss Kate, is she not?”

Pollaxfen shrugged his shoulders.

“Kicks over the traces at times, eh?”

“I believe you,—rather.”

“What a reprobate!” continued Evelyn, with the same mocking voice that had formerly denounced “naughty Kate” to her face. “What a nuisance in a quiet household! Poor Lady Olivia! It must be a trial to have a step-daughter of that sort.”

“That it is! Just so. I am sure it is.”

“Some one ought to reason with the young lady, and bring her to her senses.”

“He would be a bold man who would undertake it, I should say.”

“A bold man, eh? A bolder man than you, Pollaxfen? You were not ‘bold’ enough, I suppose?”

He seemed to enjoy the suggestion. He had never been so genial, so jocose with his visitor before; and there was an unguarded sparkle in his eye, and an evident relish for the subject, which struck Pollaxfen all at once.

“Impossible,” he thought. “Impossible.” Yet do what he would, he could not rid himself of the idea that Evelyn was either under the influence of liquor or of love.

The former ?

No. They had been dining, it was true, and were sipping their claret together as they chatted,—during the repast they had had a glass or two of champagne, and some sherry, but that was all ; there was nothing to account for the suddenness of this jovial tone, this relaxation of formality in a man who had undeniably held him hitherto at arm’s length.

No, it could not be wine.

Love then ? Not love extant, but love prospective, — the sort of amused interest which might easily be induced by hearing much of a handsome, mischievous girl who was shortly to be thrown in his way ? Even this was alarming enough ; he actually trembled to think of what might be the effect of Kate Newbattle on an imagination already prepared.

Kate in the flesh Evelyn might never have witnessed, but it appeared that he was sufficiently acquainted with what her countenance must be to enable him to laugh ironically at

the bridegroom's proper declaration in favour of her sister.

Nor could Pollaxfen help a sudden memory recurring at this most unfortunate epoch, of how he had himself been affected by his first view of that beautiful countenance. Vividly there came back upon him his first startled consciousness of something wrong, the faint struggle with honesty and honour, the speedy yielding to temptation, and then the delicious dream too soon and rudely dispelled.

Now he could think of nothing more to say.

Evelyn, however, himself—poor silly moth—took another flight round his candle.

Assuredly he was off his head in thus paying court to danger, talking of the very subject he ought to have let alone, and betraying himself in every sentence. Had his companion not been so full of his own business, and so eager to find an opportunity for transacting it, without seeming to do so, he must have seen far more than he did. As it was, he merely felt that the other was warmed, exhilarated, and in the mood to be confidential,—and that, accordingly, now was his time.

“I tell you what,” began Evelyn again,

“don't let them take you in by what they say of Kate. Kate is a beauty——”

“A beauty! Oh, dash it, no!”

“No?”—he had no conception of the tone in which he spoke. “*No?* I tell you she is a beauty, such as you have never seen——”

(“He is drunk,” thought Pollaxfen. “Certainly he is drunk.”)

“She is brave, generous, good,” continued the speaker. “She is clever, brilliant,—she is full of poetry and romance,—an ornament to any society,—an angel in any house——”

Pollaxfen breathed hard. “You forget,” said he, softly, “that you have never seen her.”

He was met by a stare. Evelyn had forgotten the man's presence. Perhaps, though not what could be called confused with wine, his brain was not quite so clear as it might have been at a cooler moment: he was certainly taken by surprise at the interruption, at being thus pulled up short in the midst of his panegyric; and it was not for several seconds that he was apparently able to comprehend what he had been saying amiss.

The blunder discovered, however, he still continued to stare, but the expression of his face

altered,—the eyes remained fixed on his companion, but a new intelligence dawned within them; the corners of his mouth distended and began to part, and finally he burst into another of the noisy laughs that had at first aroused attention.

Pollaxfen thought it well to smile. “I am sorry for you, Evelyn.”

“Thanks, I’m sure. Never mind what for.”

“You have formed such a charming picture in your own mind, that it is a thousand pities it is—only a picture.”

“Only a picture, is it? Oh!”

“What a splendid imagination you must have!”

“Splendid. I always had.”

“But what made you fasten on the idea of Kate Newbattle, to dress it up in such gorgeous colours?”

“Why not? I know that she is handsome. I am ready to find in her every other virtue.”

“How do you know that she is handsome?”

“How do I know? Look here.” Some irresistible impulse prompted him to produce the very portrait with whose loss Marjorie had charged him. He had deserved the imputation—he had stolen it, as she said; and unable

to resist the inclination of the moment, he now brought it from an inner apartment, and held it out to the sceptic with triumph in his look. "There!" he said; "I want no other evidence."

"Pooh!" said Pollaxfen, trying hard for contempt. "You admire that?" ("And half in love with the bit of pasteboard already," as he covertly marked the expression with which his companion suffered his eyes to rest for a minute on the too-well-remembered features. "This will never do! How did he get it? Why did he not say before that he had it?") "You admire that?" was, however, all that he could trust himself to say, aloud.

"If ever I admired anything in this world, I admire that."

"Good gracious! you don't say so! Well, upon my word, it's uncommonly disagreeable—really I don't know what to do. You seem so hard hit, or rather you *might* be so hard hit,—for, of course, it's all moonshine at present, and that sort of thing,—that—hum—ha—you put a fellow into a regular fix, don't you see? That's to say——"

"I never saw a finer eye; and such a lip! such a brow! A mixture of passion and sweet-

ness, storm and sunlight,—one moment all fire, the next——”

(“Raving, I declare! I must look sharp,” muttered the watcher, scarcely knowing what to make of the scene. “It must be hot and strong too, confound it all!”) Aloud—“Really, you know, I can’t help it; a fellow feels so deuced awkward when it comes to this. I wish you wouldn’t, Evelyn,—upon my soul, I do. I don’t want to be forced to make unpleasantness, especially considering that I’m just entering the family myself; but still it’s—it’s—there is such a thing as—as—don’t you know?”

“As what? I say, you had better be off now, hadn’t you? You are going somewhere to-night, and you’ll be late if you don’t.”

He was now eager to be alone, to indulge in reverie, to give himself up to remembrance, and the delirium of love and hope which had been rekindled by the sight of the beloved and beautiful face, joined as it was to the thought that within a few hours’ time he should again behold it animated with life and feeling, in smiles, in blushes, and in tears. He could not longer be hampered by playing a part; he

must be rid of spectators, of every jarring presence.

“I had been going to the theatre,” replied Pollaxfen, accentuating the “had,”—“I had meant to see——”

——“Nine o’clock. You’ll be late, but you’ll come in for the after-piece. Good night; see you to-morrow.”

Had the emergency not been so desperate, the hint would have been too broad to have been disregarded; but the bull-dog blood in Pollaxfen was up, and he would not relax his hold.

“To tell the truth, I have got something on my mind, which I can’t, in conscience, go and leave unsaid. Never mind the theatre to-night. Hang it all, what is it to give up an hour’s amusement for the sake of a friend?”

“If you mean *me*——” said Evelyn, with a bitter-sweet smile that finished off the sentence perfectly.

Pollaxfen reddened.

“Oh, I see; of course I’m to go, and that’s all about it. But it’s deuced hard that you won’t listen to me, when it’s all for your own sake that I’m trying to tell it you——”

——“It? what?”

“If it hadn’t been for the way you went on about her to-night, I should have held my tongue. But after what I have seen, and knowing what I do, it would be a shabby trick to leave you in the dark. We are both men of the world,—dash it, don’t look like that!—*you* are a man of the world then—I don’t pretend to be,—but still I would do you a good turn if I could, and all I have to say is, whatever happens, keep clear of Kate Newbattle.”

“*All* you have to say!” broke out Evelyn, with an oath. “It’s not enough, I suppose? What are you up to, I wonder? What’s the meaning of all this insane pretence of mystery, and melodramatic humbug? What’s at the bottom of it?”

“There’s no pretence,” retorted Pollaxfen, angrily. Then he recollected himself, and took refuge behind a sulky scowl. “I have done all I could to get your ear before, and at last you turn upon me and snarl, as if it were my fault that I had to speak in a way to make you attend.”

“Get on; never mind.”

“Am I to speak out?”

“Speak out; the plainer the better. Only be quick about it.”

“I’m not one of the family yet, you’ll say, and have no business with the family secrets, especially as it appears you have not been intrusted with them; but if you haven’t been told about Kate——”

——“That she broke a blood-vessel in the autumn.”

“That was the beginning of it. No uncommon thing either; but the fact is, she has always been excitable and queer,—and whether it was the loss of blood, or something of the kind—that’s what the doctors say, at least—she’s been as mad as a March hare ever since. Stop—I don’t quite mean that,”—for Evelyn had sprung from his chair,—“she’s not wrong except on certain points. If you were to meet her, you would think her as sane as anybody; but touch her on—well, I’ll show you how it was. She had only just got home when I went down, and she behaved like other people, I thought, and I had no notion of anything wrong; but she nearly played the very deuce with me afterwards, for it turns out that her craze is, that everybody she meets is in love with her; and no

sooner did I appear than she began making eyes at me, and following me everywhere, and pestering my life out! That wouldn't have mattered, although it was a nuisance; but what must she do next but go to Alice,—to the girl I was courting, d'ye see?—and make believe that I was the offending party!—*I!* There was quite a scene. Poor Alice was the one to be pitied the most—for of course at that time she hadn't had proof positive that I was on the square with her; and though she knew well enough the state her sister was in, she couldn't at first take in all that she was up to. Oh, Kate was violent and positive to a degree, Alice told me afterwards. Luckily, I got an inkling of what was going on,—for she took me to task herself when Alice tried to put her right. Ha, ha, ha!—upon my word, I felt quite the gay Lothario;—but I can tell you it was no joke to my own poor girl. Why, we were all but engaged before ever she left Brighton! I had been after her from the very first, dangling at her heels the whole time she was there, and had made no bones about it! A fellow there,—a Captain Defour,—tried to cut in before me, but he soon had his nose put out of joint, I

can tell you. Alice would not look at him !
He——”

“ Let Defour alone. Go on.”

“ Oh yes, I'll go on. Well, I tell you, I went straight ahead from the very first. As soon as they left Brighton, so did I ; and as soon as ever they were ready for me, I went to Carnochan. Everybody supposed it was Alice who took me there—and a deuced good right they had to suppose it, too. Well, that's about all ; for directly I got the hint, as I say, I went for it at once. I wasn't going to stand any nonsense, and that sort of thing, though I was sorry for the poor simpleton, who—who—well, we won't be too hard upon her, only it was uncommonly nasty for us all, you know.”

“ Well ? ” said Evelyn, in a hard, dry tone.

“ Kate doesn't speak to me now, and just as well she doesn't ! Alice says she will hardly yet allow that I haven't used her badly. Look here,” pulling a letter out of his pocket, which he had carefully placed there some days before,—“ look here,—oh, you may see the whole letter if you like—only miss out the little bit of affection at the end,” with a smirk ; “ but here's the part I want you to see, because you ought to

know that I'm telling you only the plain truth, and that Alice will back me up. This came to-day from Alice. See," pointing with his finger. "Now read that."

Evelyn read in Alice's unmistakable large sprawling hand, of which he had had a specimen only the week before: "Kate is more extraordinary than ever *about you*. She would stop our marriage even now, if she could. But we don't need to mind, do we, dear? No one can come between us now."

That was all. It had been penned in a cross fit, consequent on finding that her exuberant anticipations of a blissful career as Mrs Pollaxfen had been met only by a mournful gravity on the part of her sister. It had given a little malicious pleasure to confide to Harold that Kate was "extraordinary."

"And so you see," proceeded the owner of the letter, recovering it, "that I aint speaking off the book. Alice knows what she's talking about when she says Kate would stop our marriage yet if she could. I suppose she thinks that I am hers by right, and she does not stop to consider where poor Alice would be if that were the way. Was it likely that I would

have gone all the way to Kirkcudbright if I hadn't been in downright earnest about Alice? Lady Olivia knows how I took up with her from the first, danced with her, rode with her, tooled her about to churches on Sundays, and went the whole bag of tricks. I had no more idea of not having Alice than of jumping over the moon! I never once gave a thought to Kate."

"You—did—not?"

"No, rather. Before I would have taken up with such a cursed shrew——" he stopped, recollecting himself. "A fellow can't help being riled a bit,"—every minute his language grew more offensive, as though to keep pace with the grossness of the sentiments for which it was a medium,—“when you remember, Evelyn, that she had nearly done me as bad a turn as woman could do, you can't wonder that though she is only an imbecile—well, of course, I shouldn't say that——”

——“Have the goodness not to say it again.”

“Well, I won't; but you mustn't be down on me for a word. I make all the allowances I can, but I was put into a pretty hole as it was, nearly choused out of my girl, and made a fool of before everybody! Who's to be cool and

easy upon that? It's about as much as I can do to keep in, when I'm at Carnochan; and if you had not begun about her looks, and her, I don't know what all, and put my back up with your——”

“Let *me* alone, will you? There is no need to bring me in.”

“I only wanted to point out why I spoke, Evelyn; you needn't snap me up like that. It's hard lines when a fellow is trying to do you a kindness that you should treat him as if he were a cur.”

“You *are* a cur.”

“Sir!” cried Pollaxfen, starting.

“I say you are a cur, and you ought to have a muzzle put upon your confounded mouth for the rest of your days. How many more people have you gone to, bragging of your conquest, curse you? It was a nice thing to do to go to a house, and have both sisters at your beck and call, wasn't it? I wonder you were content with only the two! There's another not much younger, and if you had played your cards well, she might have made a figure in the tale too.”

“Captain Evelyn,” said Pollaxfen, with a vain attempt at being dignified, “this is not wh—

wh—what I can possibly submit to. I m—
m—make allowances——”

——“Oh, you have made allowances all round, we know—allowances for Alice, allowances for Kate, and now for me. Confound your allowances! Be off!”

“You will be sorry for this, Captain Evelyn.”

“Or you will.”

“What I have done to deserve this at your hands, I cannot imagine,” said Pollaxfen, desperate at the sight of such an ending to all his machinations. “It was you yourself who obliged me to speak—to tell you the story——”

——“Which I don’t believe a word of.”

“You listened, at any rate.”

“Listened? I had to listen. How should I know what I was going to hear?”

“Why should it put you out so? It was all hushed up and kept quiet. No one knows a thing about it,—about our—our interest in the case, except Alice and me. She won’t thank me for telling you,—for they are all determined to let out to no one what is the matter,—but then what could I do? I’m going,—you need not point at the door,—but if you will only think it over quietly, Evelyn,——”

“No more of that. Don't you call me ‘Evelyn’ again. ‘Think it over quietly’? This is what I'll think when I think it over quietly, that if what you have told me has a grain of truth in it, you are the meanest hound on the face of the earth ever to let it blister your lips; if you have made it up, you're a liar. Go out of that door, and never let me set eyes on you again.”

“Certainly I shall never tr—trouble you more, Ca—Captain Evelyn.”

The door closed behind him.

Evelyn rose, bolted it, and staggered back to the mantelpiece. There he laid down his head upon his arms, crying like a child.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AND HAS BOTH FAILURE AND SUCCESS.

“ But it is not the lie that passeth through the mind, but the lie that sinketh in and settleth in it, that doth the hurt.”—BACON.

HE tried not to believe the story, but alas! it was too plausible.

Loathing as he did the vile informer, he could not, when freed from the contamination of his presence, preserve the aspect of disdainful incredulity which had served him in such good stead for the hour of trial.

For this was what he thought—“ Of that disturbed brain, of that unhinged mind, I am the cause.”

The thought was torture.

He it was who had led his poor Kate on to the knowledge of good and evil, instructed her in the great arts of love and misery.

She had learned easily; he had taught thor-

oughly. He had found her a simple school-girl ; he had left her an agonised woman.

And the result was this. She had come to fear every man who approached her ; to fear,—not to love, as Pollaxfen would have had him believe, but to fear and to shrink from.

As she had found Evelyn acting a part up to the very moment of his declaration, it had seemed to her that others, whilst feigning themselves to be mere neighbours, friends, relations, might, with equal suddenness, reveal a passion. Could this lover of Alice's, this goggle-eyed, pig-headed toad, have dared to assume towards the beautiful Kate some of those brotherly ways which—pah ! was it possible that he had ? And could she, poor, bewildered, dazed child, have fallen into the cruel mistake which had revealed her state to him, from any odious pleasantries of his ?

He thought it over, writhing every new moment under a new torment. But, think as he might, it seemed as though no other explanation was possible.

Alice's letter, and Pollaxfen's frequent reference to her,—the facts that were all too patent to be disputed,—one after another wrung his heart with throes indescribable.

And there were other features of the case which had terrible power to bear it out, as they recurred to memory.

All that had been said of the excitable temperament, well known to Evelyn, was true,—too true. Had he not himself cautioned her, in those bewitching days when she had sat by his side to be chidden and admonished,—had he not then bade her have a care lest the hot blood which boiled so readily, did not bring her into trouble, deeper than any she had yet experienced?

He had wisely counselled; but how shortsighted had been the policy he had ultimately pointed out!

The very silence regarding him, and all that had passed between them, which he had enjoined, and which he had known at the time would be sacredly kept, had inflamed the malady, if it had not actually originated it.

With no outlet for her feelings, and the necessity for preserving reticence upon every point connected with the episode of which her mind was full,—with, in addition, the constant strain of keeping watch in case of sudden revelations,—she must have had more laid upon her already overcharged brain than it could sustain.

It had given way, and only now he had learned as much; only now, when, happy in his constancy, his love, and his hopes of a new success, he had been gazing upon the fair prospect before him with beaming eye, it had shrivelled away as a parched scroll.

There was something noble about Evelyn.

He did not bewail his punishment; he did not feel that he was being severely handled for having attempted to take what was at worst but a timorous and foolish course; nor did he say to himself, as many a man in his place would have said, that he had done no harm, that he had acted as straightforwardly under such a temptation as the most rigid moralist could have expected.

He had, he might have thought, treated Miss Newbattle fairly. He had made her an honest offer; and had she closed with it, and carried out its conditions, she would have been considered by all,—even by those who might not have approved of the manner of her doing so,—to have made a brilliant match.

He was wealthy, well-born, courted and run after wherever he chose to turn; and it must be allowed that when the first idea of wedding

poor neglected Kate entered into his head, he had looked upon it coldly.

He had felt it would not do.

But he had been caught ere he knew what he was doing. Her beauty had dazzled him, her spirit had enchanted him.

He had found himself fast bound; and had then, and only then, discovered that there was no possible reason why he should not do as he chose, since it was certain he would have no cause to repent.

But whilst preserving just so much coolness of judgment as had enabled him to take the future into consideration, and decide that he would not have occasion to rue in after-life the impulse under which he was acting, he had not been disposed to let slip the coveted pleasure of the moment.

His fancy had fastened on the idea of possessing this forlorn, beautiful, wild-eyed creature, in the very height of her desolation and abandonment by her own kindred; of raising her to the throne of his arms from the very midst of the mean surroundings with which it had been purposed to abase her; of making that life, which was so listless, weary, and ungenial, all

at once a trance of happiness, far beyond what any one of them—his mother, or her father, or sisters—in their miserable devotion to self, could form a conception of.

In him his Kate would have found her all; in his being, hers.

He would have been her companion as well as her lover, her friend and sympathiser as well as her betrothed. She had hitherto been misconstrued, misguided, silenced,—she should have been so no longer. At her true value she should have found one to rate her at last. His peerless Kate! The decision once arrived at, he had yielded himself unreservedly to the delightful vision, and had never for an instant forecast the manner in which the proposal had eventually been taken.

The Comlines, he had opined, would need a little management—he must volunteer considerable explanations and asseverations; but that his sweetheart,—she who had shown herself of late obedient to his slightest look, submissive as wax beneath his touch,—should thwart him at the outset, had been incredible.

And now, in looking back upon that hour, through which so many strange and conflicting emotions had succeeded each other, one feeling

alone filled his soul to the exclusion of every other, and that was anguish for her.

If ever remorse was unselfish it was his.

Even the pang of having been himself the author of her misery, was presently swallowed up in the thought of that misery itself; he was not unworthy of the heart he suffered for.

Some time elapsed before other recollections and considerations could intrude themselves, but at length he was sufficiently himself to reflect in some dismay on what would be all the separate results of his rupture with Pollaxfen.

The man who could reveal once, was not likely to be more reticent again.

He had done his best to blacken poor unwitting Kate since he had conceived his love-affair to have been endangered by her, even although it had come forth ultimately unscathed; how much more would he rage against both her and her self-constituted champion, now that Evelyn had discredited him, sworn at him, and turned him out of doors!

Supposing that his statements, exaggerated and loathsome though they were, had still the basis of truth which their recipient shuddered to think, in too great likelihood, must be con-

ceded them, it would be in the power of the despised wretch many a time to gibe at and taunt the defenceless girl.

That would be one result of the past hour.

And then how about the wedding?

Go down—having quarrelled with the bridegroom, and thrown up the post which everybody knew he had accepted? It was not to be thought of. Pollaxfen himself would be in something of a plight, which was in its way satisfactory,—and unassuming as Evelyn was, he had just a touch of grim pleasure in escaping from having his name linked with that of the mill-man's son,—but as soon as Carnochan was cleared of the obnoxious presence, should he not repair thither and find out for himself the worst?

Had his own feelings alone been consulted, this would undoubtedly have been the next move; but what if the mere sight of him should be too much for the poor child? What if she should be rendered still more distraught by the sudden apparition of the man she had loved and had driven from her, than even by being a perpetual witness of all that had passed between Pollaxfen and her sister.

The sight of those two in the height of their

billing and cooing had doubtless recalled scenes and recollections which had led to a development of the frenzy within; and if so, what might not be dreaded from the sight of him?

No one could help her, as no one had warned him,—since none but themselves knew what these things meant. She had had to stand alone, and she had given way. He durst not think of it.

And what use to speak? Lady Olivia could put him off, as she had done hundreds of times before, if he endeavoured to elicit information from her.

Alice? But he had the testimony of Alice already.

Kate herself? Alas! on such a score her voice had no weight.

And then he did not, as we have said, doubt that Pollaxfen was so far to be relied on, in that he had stated facts to which he had given his own colouring.

That he nourished an enmity to the object of his tirade was self-evident, but it might be that his doing so was explicable by his looking on her as a half-crazed creature who had been caught in the act of undermining the ground

which he was studiously working upon. It was intelligible that he should have been resentful after such a discovery.

And again, there was Pollaxfen's having followed Alice from Brighton at a time when he had certainly never beheld her sister, as well as Alice's radiant little note, and her confiding tone in the very composition which had been shown to Evelyn. Oh, the evidence was damning—damning!

As for Alice, how could she bring herself to marry such a man? How could his mother have had the face to raise a joyful noise over such a union?

He felt bitter and wrathful contempt for both.

They were a couple, he said. For the future he would have still less to do with the former than he had ever had to do with the latter; it was one comfort that hereafter he would not need even to know Mrs Pollaxfen when he met her. But although at intervals such speculations and self-gratulations flitted across Evelyn's mental vision, they never remained; one thought alone lay like a load at the bottom of his sorrowful heart—Kate, poor Kate!

How merry and mirthful he had been but one

short hour before ! How joyously he had told his acquaintance lately of his intentions of running up North for a wedding, laughing to himself at their lugubrious inquiries as to the possibility of his being able to get off, and at their condoling with him on his being impressed on such a service of boredom.

Get off, indeed ! He had been counting the hours between the present one and that of departure, in his heart.

They had marvelled at his stoicism. Evelyn, they said among themselves, could go through anything ; there were no limits to his powers of endurance. He would make a spree out of a funeral, if nothing better offered ; and a wedding being certainly next door to a funeral, he was only true to himself in being airy at the prospect.

Then they took ten to one that he would back out at the last.

Evelyn had roared when he was told of this, and had kept the ball going. He had never alleged that he would not back out, but the idea had seemed to tickle his fancy prodigiously, all the same.

He had told everybody he came across what he was going to do. He had stopped old Andrew Macculloch, whom he had not spoken to, for

years, to have a chat about the Galloway country, whence Macculloch came. He had allowed Pollaxfen to hang about him, and had awed down remark and disparagement by the simplicity of his protection. Evelyn's wedding, as it was called, had been the joke of the hour.

Then Pollaxfen had fussed, and bustled, and hunted up trains, and made an ado about everything.

Rooms? Yes; Evelyn had allowed that rooms might as well be written for to the inn, for one night. On the next, one of the two would be far enough away, and the other would be installed at Carnochan. He had given out readily that he would be in no hurry to return to Town; that he would certainly have to stay and cheer up the doleful people left behind.

People always were doleful after a wedding, weren't they? Well, it would be an act of charity to console them in their bereavement.

And as he had thus spoken, he had in his mind's eye stood with Kate by his side in the oriel window of her turret-chamber, and taken her out upon the lake beneath, and whispered in her ear amid lovely woodlands overspread with blue-bells. . . .

All was over now.

Nothing remained but dust and ashes of the beautiful fruit he had so nearly gathered.

Nothing was left but the image of a sorrow-stricken maid dumbly enduring her burden of grief, and irresponsible for what she did when goaded by its torment.

Durst he risk inciting a fresh outbreak?

Knowing what he knew, he felt he dared not. That, at least, she should be spared. Perhaps Evelyn was wrong,—knowing what we know, undoubtedly he must seem so; but he was at least honest,—and that he was unable at the moment to think with calmness, or to reason at all, should not surely be reckoned against him.

Pollaxfen could not have chosen a better moment for instilling his poison. His auditor had been previously animated, uplifted, off his guard,—it followed that the sudden shock threw his blood into a ferment which he could not master. Self-sacrifice—and self-sacrifice on Kate's account—was the only idea that seemed to do him any good; and alas! he pitched upon the unfortunate notion that, by checking the impulse which would have sent him to her side, he could benefit her most enduringly and unselfishly.

But where else to go? What to do? How to get away from it all?

Even the petty shafts of innocent jest and laughter over their fulfilled prophecy which would assail him from his intimates, would be galling; while the graver astonishment of slighter acquaintance, their questions and comments, would be insufferable.

Of course he could say that he had quarrelled with Pollaxfen, and say no more; but this one phrase would inevitably have to be repeated some fifty times a-day.

And it would be talked about, and allusions would be made to it, and the whole might get to Pollaxfen's ears, and set his tongue wagging in a self-defence which might lead to anything.

No, he had better be out of the way for a time.

He looked around him. During the bygone week he had somehow or other connected every object of note within those four walls, with the thought of Kate.

He had mentally checked off what he should take with him when he left his bachelor-quarters, and what he would get rid of. He had wondered if she would fancy his favourite picture, and how she would take to his dog.

Oh, he had not much doubted what the upshot of this wedding journey would be!

The bare sight of all the familiar surroundings to which he must now attach himself afresh, was grating, sickening.

He could not do it. He could not go on in the old way.

Something fresh must be found, some new ground must be broken.

Before the following night he had entered into arrangements for exchanging into a regiment about to start on foreign service.

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And Kate, all unsuspecting, was on that same April evening quietly gathering ferns and leaves in the Carnochan woods, and loading her baskets with feathery moss which must be brought home and thrown into water to soak for twelve hours, before it would be deemed fit to deck the chambers for the gala.

Neither of the little sisters, who were supposed to be giving their aid, were half so blithe or so efficient. Marjorie was tired out, and Bertha as usual had her grievance. They would have left the long sprays that were out of reach, and found others; or, at least, they would have

looked about for less inaccessible places to surmount than Kate did. She minded no trouble, found no wall too rickety, no ditch too deep.

Marjorie was not half so mud-bespattered and draggle-tailed when the three came in, nor had Marjorie a third of the bloom upon her cheek.

The weathercock had veered round again, you see. She had got over her first ecstasy, and its first reaction. Nothing she could now do or say could avert the delicious danger, and it was so near—so near. She hugged her secret to her heart, conning over every probability, spelling out, as it were, every syllable, of the scene to come.

It was easy once more to enter into the minutiae of pomp, which were so dear to the bride-elect, and to skip with the little ones about the house. It seemed quite natural to be useful and necessary; and for the demand, "Where is Kate?" to be heard imperatively from one and another.

To run off to her room, to escape the hubbub and traffic which were going on everywhere else, was the last thing to be thought of. Why, there was Mademoiselle calling for assistance in her grand design for the bride's toilet-table; and

there was Bertha with a message from the gardener, with whom she had undertaken to co-operate, respecting the floral arches and flowers for the banquet; and there was the schoolmistress waiting "just to know how Miss Kate would like the children to stand around the gateway, and at what precise moment they should be marshalled ready to throw their bouquets on the carriage-roof?"

Lady Olivia had taken care that nothing should be left undone which would give *éclat* to the proceedings. Mademoiselle had approved of the *trousseau*, and Alice herself was contented, and taking the full benefit of all.

Since it was so, Kate had no longer a right to fret.

"She is quite a help," testified Lady Olivia, in the end; "she really is. So wonderfully altered—so improved! My dear," she observed, quite affectionately, on the wedding eve, "do not over-fatigue yourself; you have been running about for every one all day long. Go to bed, Kate, and do not rise too early."

Ah! she had no cause to rise early—the day was long and sad enough.

CHAPTER XXV.

“FROM HOPE’S SUMMIT HURLED.”

“From the first dawn of reason in the mind,
 Man is foredoomed the thorns of grief to find ;
 At every step has further cause to know
 The draught of pleasure still is dashed with woe.”

—KIRKE WHITE.

HAVING done so well with Alice, it was but natural that Lady Olivia, who was now fully reinstated in her own opinion as the model step-mother, should turn her attention with increased complacency to the superior charms of Kate.

Kate the prodigal was a very different person from Kate the insurgent. The contour which had been admired by Lady Olivia, even when seldom seen exempt from passion or from moodiness, could not now be thought too highly of. Its expressiveness, its animation, were commented upon, its varied play was noted only as an increased attraction.

She had seldom now, she declared to herself, to find fault of any kind with the girl who had once been in perpetual disgrace.

Kate spoke to her properly, looked at her properly, and would remain in the room with her for an hour at a time.

This was quite a new thing indeed ; for it had been one of the grievances in the early wedded days that none of Mr Newbattle's daughters would associate with his wife more than they could help, and it was hardly pleasant to be shunned even by those whom she might herself have chosen to shun. The way that one after another would shuffle out of the room on various pretexts, directly their step-mother appeared,—and the way that Kate would march past, head in air, without any pretext at all, — had been more mortifying than any one had ever known, especially since listeners had always been as indispensable to Lady Olivia as correspondents.

It was undeniable that she had been sinned against. Whatever had been her own failings, the children had not been guiltless. They had drawn themselves together in opposition even before she came amongst them, and had begun

to treat her with contumely from the very first week after her arrival.

Alice, who had endeavoured to compass this end by stealth, and Kate, who had withstood her to her face, had of course been followed by the younger ones,—even Marjorie deserting, when it suited her, to the enemy’s ranks; and when it is remembered that they were four to one, and that they had the secret support of every member—in and out of the house—of the Carnochan establishment,—it will be felt that some excuse must be made for their solitary opponent, when in desperation she had resorted to strong measures. Undoubtedly, a better woman would have acted otherwise—would have seen that the daughter, if separated from her family, was suitably established elsewhere—and would have let no opportunity pass of bringing her to reason, and reinstating her as soon as it was desirable in her home; but being what she was, excuses must be made for Lady Olivia.

Her fair bevy had plagued her life out.

But now—now that the past year was to be blotted from remembrance—now that all things had turned out so inconceivably well,—who could say that events had not justified her policy?

She had not shown wisdom nor humanity. Ha! But she had got Alice off her hands, and had brought Kate to her bearings!

She chuckled to herself as she saw that her eldest, if not her most formidable antagonist, was now all amiability and deference, seeking her opinion at every turn—convinced of having been well guided, pleased with herself, and proud of her position.

She laughed in her heart as she laid a hand on Kate's shoulder and whispered a direction, which met with the most earnest and immediate attention. It was about Rupert's room; and she experienced a feeling of proud satisfaction in the thought that she would soon be able to point out her triumph to her son, who had gone so far as to suggest—a thing he had never done before—that she was not on the right tack with the turbulent damsels: Rupert should see now.

She longed to have her little crow over him.

He would probably admire Kate, but she was not afraid of this. A London man,—and a man who had, moreover, the *entrée* of many of the best country seats in England,—could hardly be susceptible to mere beauty, and have escaped matrimony so long.

She looked to him to help her with this dark-eyed belle. Kate should do better than Alice, for whom Pollaxfen had been good enough. With the prestige of her sister’s early and excellent establishment in life, her chances would be doubled, moreover. This, added to her own charms, to Lady Olivia’s reputation, and to Captain Evelyn’s password, ought to bring her into notice at once.

(“That is all,” said the profound woman of the world to herself—“that is all that can be said for any untried daughter. She may succeed, or she may not. She may make a hit at the outset, or she may go pottering on among second-rate houses the season through, and be nowhere at the end of it! If that should happen to be the way with Kate, it would scarcely be of any use to try her again. Country houses would be better; and indeed, were it not that she is striking as well as handsome, I should be disposed to let London alone, and go in at once for the country. It would be a pity, however, not just to see, first. Should we discover afterwards that she might have made a mark in Town, I should never forgive myself for having failed to do her justice; besides which, she

would have nothing to talk about, and might be thought dull. With a little, even a very little knowledge of society, a clever girl is improved, and a stupid one learns to pass muster. Kate is certainly clever; I was quite astonished at her last night.) Kate, my dear," aloud, "what was that book that Mr Popham was talking to you about after dinner? But never mind now; you must tell me another time, when we have done with this wedding. There is no time for reading, nor for anything else, at present. Only don't forget."

"I am afraid," said Kate, "that I have forgotten already. But I know what it was about, and will ask Mr Popham for the title the next time I see him."

"Who would believe it of you, to forget a book that you and Mr Popham were so full of?" cried Lady Olivia, jestingly.

"But I had not read it."

"He told me he was quite surprised at the extent of your other reading, at any rate, and desired to know if all the others were as well informed. I wished I could have said they were; but I did my best; I told him you were all devoted to literature,—for Mr Popham thinks

so much of literary people, you know. And so you have forgotten all about the book? Really you must be excused, however; any one might be excused amidst such a hubbub as we have going on.”

The lapse of memory pleased her in two ways. It showed, she thought, that a fair amount of amusement and festivity was all that was needed to wake up her dreamy student to the realities of life, and it showed that some one else could forget besides herself.

She had “forgotten” the night before, what the sprightly allusion made by her step-daughter, which called forth the applause of the table, meant. She had had to have it explained; and there had been a momentary mortification, in spite of the sober reflections which afterwards pointed out that nothing could be a greater addition to a *débutante’s* bright eyes than the reputation of saying smart, clever, witty things.

Mr Popham had been bent on drawing out his young friend, who had been permitted, “just for once,” to dine there in room of Alice, whom etiquette detained at home as her bridal day approached; and Kate had been so gay and brilliant, and had done so well on the occasion

altogether, that beholding her the cynosure of all eyes, had justified in Lady Olivia's opinion all her former predictions.

The success of this almost unknown daughter had been unqualified. She had been made to speak, and she had spoken as only Evelyn had ever before heard her; forgetful of self, full of her subject, sympathetic with her audience, she had caught up suggestions, flashed out repartees, drawn all the gentlemen round her, and reduced all the ladies—with the exception of Mrs Popham, who could hold her own with anybody, and who was charmed with the scene—to hopeless silence.

Lady Olivia had pardoned even this—had accepted even such a position, after a brief rumination over what it portended. Her brow had cleared, her smiles had broken out again; she had realised the greatness of her luck in getting Alice out of the way, and having her hands free for a new campaign, as she had never done before.

Kate had enjoyed her party, as any one would have done.

The pleasant looks and approving laughter of the company had all been nice, and new to her. They had reminded her—oddly enough,

of some one, of whom no reminding was needed.

It was strange, but it was true.

No one present had been the least like Evelyn; neither in appearance nor manner could any have competed with the gay Guardsman; but nevertheless, throughout the evening she had experienced a thrill of the same emotion—a poor, weak thrill, but still of the same nature—that his presence had been wont to excite. The fact was, that all homage was novel to one who had never until within the past six months experienced what such a thing was; and that any admiration, which was sufficiently respectful and refined, could not be unwelcome. She was no Stoic. She would fain have been made much of, fondled and beloved,—but there had in by-gone years been no one, with the exception of the Uncle George before named, to whom she could turn for a caress. He had died, and the blank had been filled,—oh, more than filled by Evelyn. Evelyn had looked at her as none had ever looked, and spoken as none had spoken,—and as a consequence, every word or glance which aroused a pleasurable emotion in her bosom, instantly brought up his image.

That image was never far to seek ; and now, now when he was so soon to be himself before her, could she fail to be all tingling with the thought ?

. . . The marriage-day came and went.

Bells rang, flags flew, healths were drunk, and the newly-married pair were sent forth amidst rejoicing and uproar, benedictions, and every imaginable din,—and, as night drew on, a lonely girl crept to her couch, and watered it with her tears.

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Pollaxfen blustered freely. He had never, he said, been played such a d——d scurvy trick in his life ! That came of depending upon the caprices of those confounded aristocrats, who could behave decently to nobody but one of their own set, and who treated a plain man as if he were the dirt of the earth !

He had asked this Captain Evelyn to be his best man on Lady Olivia's account, who, poor woman, had always been civil to him, and whom he thought it would please to have her son complimented. It was not for his own sake that he had been hunting out a swell,—no, dash it, that it wasn't ! What did he care for a swell ?

What did he want with Captain Evelyn, or any of his d——d lot? Wasn’t it enough that he had been obliged to give his old friend Shangles the cold shoulder, all to keep in with the New-battle faction, who were bent on having one of themselves for the post of honour,—but that he must be compelled to fall back on the mercy of dear old Shangles at the last moment?

Evelyn, he swore, had jumped at the invitation, had put off a host of engagements, and had been as proud as Punch of being asked; and then all at once something better had turned up, or he had taken a huff,—nobody knew what it was,—but he had thrown the bridegroom over with as little ceremony as if he had been an old shoe!

Dash it! he wished he had never gone near the cursed, insolent puppy!

He would take precious good care another time before he got himself into such a mess!

If ever he were caught speaking to Evelyn in his life after this, he wished he might be, &c. &c. &c.

This was principally for the benefit of Shangles and Grubber, who were ready enough to listen, having been pleased at half a day’s notice

to fill the post rendered vacant by the defection of the greater man.

To both of them telegrams had been sent on the morning after the scene between him and Pollaxfen, since the dread of the latter had been overwhelming lest he should have to travel northwards by himself, and to spend many hours, both on his journey and afterwards at the little inn at Kirkcudbright, without the company of any one to whom he could confide the history of his ill-usage.

A "best man" would, of course, have been forthcoming, as soon as his want was known at Carnochan,—among some of the guests gathered there, one would speedily have been relegated to the position; but it was not so much to hear another step than his own march up the long drawing-room in which the ceremony was to take place, nor to divide with another the attention of the assembled company, that was required by the forlorn knight, as some one before whom he could safely rail at the author of his disappointment.

That privilege would have been debarred him by the presence of a delegate from Carnochan; but with Shangles and Grubber he was all

right. Since both had responded to his appeal, it became necessary to select one, and the lot fell on Shangles—Grubber being thus reduced to the back seat of the carriage, and to following in at the hall-door as best he might.

Presented to nobody, and known to nobody, the wretched supernumerary was thereafter entirely overlooked, and would certainly have had to go in to the breakfast that followed by himself, had it not been for the French governess.

Mademoiselle Pierrepoint saw the dilemma, and with the true spirit of her race, rose superior to circumstances, and lifted the embarrassed and dumfounded Grubber with her.

She sent in before her the two little Popham girls, whom it had been proposed that she should take under her wing, and approached the window recess to which Pollaxfen’s friend had retreated. “We are both strangers,” she said, with the prettiest little bow and smile in the world. “Where so many friends meet, strangers cannot expect to be remembered. Shall I ask for your arm?”

Grubber “twigged” her, in his own phraseology, immediately. He saw it was the gover-

ness; and had he been another Pollaxfen, there is no saying how he might have taken such an overture,—but happily for himself, as well as for the lady, he was not ill-natured.

He thought the idea excellent, tucked Mademoiselle forthwith under his arm, and conducted her to the dining-room with as good a grace, and with considerably more pleasure, than if she had been a duchess.

He felt quite at his ease; and that he had not done since his eye fell on Shangles in Pollaxfen's room at Long's hotel, and he had been then and there unceremoniously informed that Shangles was to be preferred before him.

He had seen at once that there was thus no niche for him to fill; and though he had made no objection to going down even as a hanger-on and outsider, he had shrewdly suspected that Pollaxfen would treat him precisely as Pollaxfen had done.

No one had cared to ask who he was; and during all the commotion consequent on the conclusion of the marriage-service, he had remained passive. That did not matter—he could stand that. He had no ambition, no desire to

be put forward ; let him but be as other people were, and that was all he wanted. Since he saw plenty of others standing neutral, he was well enough content to do the same.

But then the move began ; and from the deep window-recess he had furtively watched couple after couple file past, while thinner and thinner grew the crowd,—yet nobody came near him.

He had counted the numbers left, while the dew mounted to his forehead. Suppose they were odd ?

He did not know how to count the little girls. Was he to have a child to take in ? It would be only one degree better than having to stalk along by himself, an uninvited, undiscovered unit.

Barely, however, had the horrible alternative presented itself, ere he saw the little pair trot off, and found himself confronted by Mademoiselle.

Governess or not, she was somebody ; she had saved him from the pit which had a moment before seemed to gape beneath his feet. With her, he looked like the rest of the company ; he, too, had a mate. What if her English was broken—who was to know that ? And as for

her dress, she was a long way better tossed off than the majority of the ladies present.

“Go it, Mademoiselle!” he exclaimed, inwardly. “You and I will make a right-down good meal together, anyway.”

“Now then, you choose—you choose,” he would exhort from time to time. “Here is the *menu*,—this fine flowery thing with all the break-jaw words in it, you know. What is to be? You say, and I’ll get whatever it is. What about that bird with its great long feathers all over the table? What do you say to it? Fine feathers make fine birds, you know; let’s go in for the bird, you and I.”

Or, “Here are peaches done up in wet cotton-wool? Oh, it’s called a *blang-mange*—whatever that may be. The *blang-mange* seems to have been in a mill down-stairs, and got the worst of it.”

Or, “I wonder when we are to get some cake? The bride has got to cut the cake, you know; I wish she would remember that we have had it staring us in the face for the last hour and a half, and that human nature can’t stand much more. The smell of it is good enough; but I think we’ll all agree that smell without taste isn’t everything.”

With such pleasantries his companion was entertained ; but although no more of Mademoiselle’s partner and ally is here worth recording, we shall find him coming to the front again by-and-by, for he and his neighbour made such friends over their long-tailed bird, and their *blang-mange*, that on meeting each other again five years afterwards, and finding that she was then in want of another situation, he procured for her one which met every requirement.

Her pupil was a cousin of his own, wealthy, orphaned, and requiring tuition on divers points unconnected with literature. Mademoiselle Pierrepoint could be of assistance socially as well as intellectually ; and so well did Mademoiselle suit the young lady’s taste, and that of her guardians, that no gratitude was too much for the relation who had procured for them such a treasure.

Now Grubber was poor, and lazy, and very vulgar ; by no merits of his own could he have pushed his way in the world ; but this one kind action, this remembering and interesting himself in the acquaintance of an hour, since she had come to his rescue at a pinch, proved, as will presently be told, to be the making

of his fortune. Let no one undervalue good-nature.

To return, however, to Carnochan, *en fête*.

However much chagrined inwardly by the defalcation of her son, Lady Olivia was sufficiently mistress of herself to hear the tidings with outward composure, and to check, by the power of her eye alone, the torrent of angry abuse which Pollaxfen would have given the world to have dared to pour forth.

She suspected that Rupert had thrown up his engagement in disgust, and she was hardly surprised, and not at all indignant, that he had done so. Closer approach to the man, whose associate he was to appear, had shown him Pollaxfen in his true colours; and recollecting the boots, the nails, and the yawns, Lady Olivia shuddered to reflect on what those colours must have appeared.

She ought never to have let the bridegroom be seen; she should have prevented his going to London at the outset; and she bitterly took herself now to task for not having been able to hold out a little longer, and to keep him to herself, and to those who had already been undeceived, rather than be quit of his

odious presence at the expense of enlightening Evelyn.

“I told you how it would probably be,” she now undauntedly averred. “My son is not to be depended upon. He has his own friends, and his own engagements. That he agreed to your request at first showed his willingness to oblige, but you must recollect my warning you not to reckon on his being able to carry all his intentions into performance. He seldom does.”

No warning of the kind had ever been given, but since there was no question but what she had said a good many things on which no heed had been bestowed, the unlucky Pollaxfen could not now, he felt, “tick her off.”

“If he had told me slap out——” he began.

But this would never do. He must not look like that, nor speak like that. People would notice. “I understand,” said Lady Olivia, in her blindest tones. “I can quite understand, believe me, my dear Harold. It has been an inconvenience,—but we will not now regard it. You have done so well, retrieved your position so excellently. Mr Shangles has been an admirable substitute, I am sure; and he has only had to take charge of our school-girl

Kate, for whom it does not in the least matter,"—she could not resist the taunt; "and your other friend is quite happy with Mademoiselle."

He was not allowed even to look annoyed. He had to sit up by Alice's side, and make his speech, and bow and smirk, as though everything were going exactly as he would have it; and conscious that he was smarting under the destruction of his most cherished hopes, that he had failed in every essential point of his so-called success, he had yet to enact the joyous bridegroom, drink healths, swallow banter, and carry off his blooming fair one, as though not a ripple stirred to break the harmony of the hour.

Not a single word could he edge in of what he had resolved to say.

"It was Rupert all over," pronounced Lady Olivia afterwards. "He never meant to come from the beginning; he must only have said 'Yes' because he did not know what other answer to make. He is really too soft-hearted. I have no doubt that Harold was absurdly tiresome and pressing—as he always is—and would not let my poor boy alone. Rupert cannot bear to be run after. Certainly, it would have been better for him to have put down the suggestion

at once, to have let us all understand what we were about,—for we were quite taken in as it was. But, upon my word, I cannot blame him, although I—I who know my son so well,—I was as much deceived as any! Well, it does not signify now; and I think I can answer for it, Kate, that when you and I go to Town presently, we shall not be treated by this negligent young man as poor Harold Pollaxfen has been!”

But the smile of confidence died away from the parent’s lips as she opened the envelope in her hand.

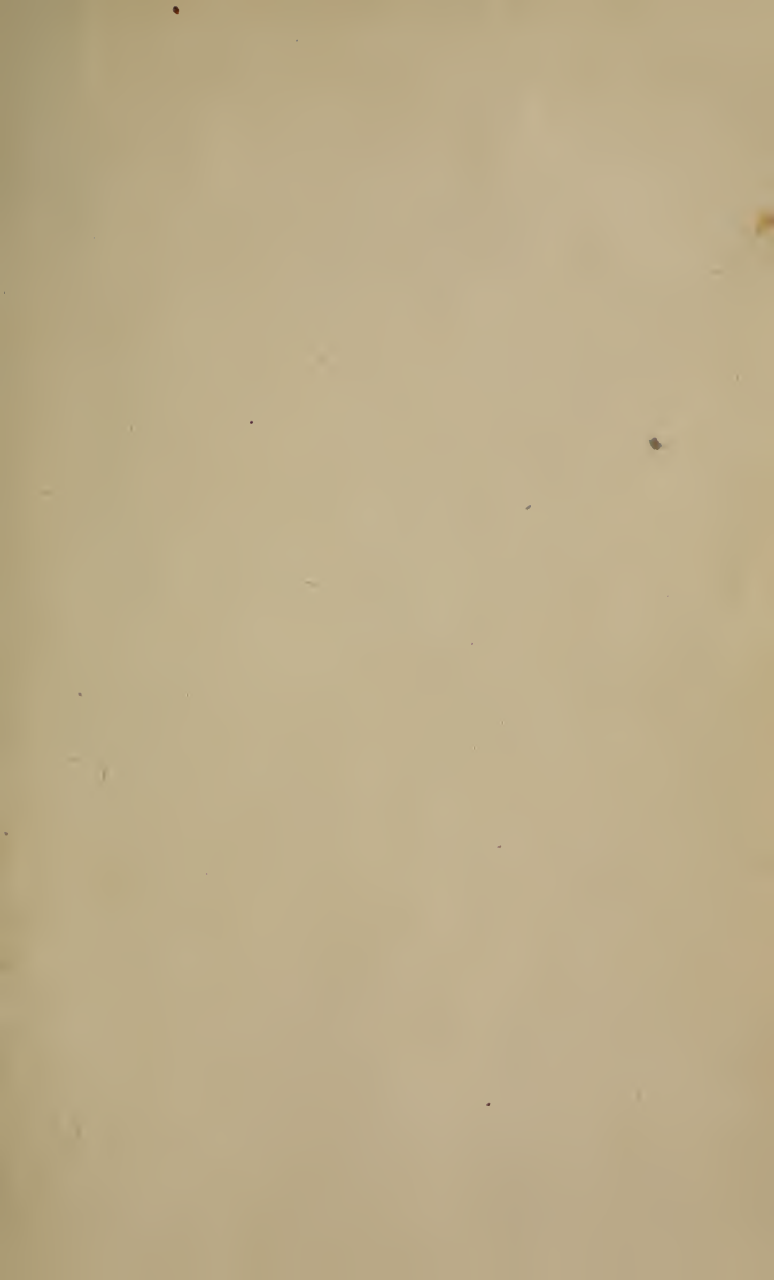
She had not noticed, as she was speaking, that it was directed in the handwriting of her son, and the intelligence it contained was enough to make her grave on the instant.

Evelyn was about to join the troops which were on the eve of departure for the East; and as he had only twenty-four hours wherein to get ready, he stated succinctly that he should not be able to take leave of any one.

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