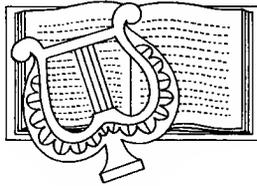


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“A SAGE OF SIXTEEN,” “A MERE CHILD,” ETC. ETC.

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P A U L I N E .



P A R T I. IN THE HEBRIDES.

Sound itself was silent,
Save when the Atlantic swell—offspring of some dead storm—
Heaved up a billow to its memory.



CHAPTER I.

A GAELIC CONGREGATION.

“SEINNIDH sinn chum cliù agus glòire Dhé——”

Such were the words which, startling in their effect and portentous in their signification, broke upon the ear of Pauline as she entered the parish church, after a walk of three miles in length, under the noonday rays of an August sun.

Enigmatical as was the sentence, its immediate effect was only too apparent.

Every collie present cocked his eye, leered at his master, and straightway composed himself to sleep.

The master's face was ministerwards; it was serious, and devoutly attentive. In his hand lay the family Psalm-book, and the unaccustomed thumb was being prepared—how, we need not specify—for its weekly duty of turning over the leaves. The service had begun.

What was Pauline to do?

The door had groaned and closed behind her, the atmosphere was that of the innermost recess of a range of hothouses, and there was two hours' endurance of it in prospect.

Well might her spirit sink.

The colliers could understand Gaelic, though they might not follow a sermon—*she* could not interpret a word! The dusty rays of a burning sun were grateful to their panting frames—*she* was suffocating! Each of *them* had his own appointed place—*she* was a stranger! In every way she was worse off than a dog!

How tired the poor girl felt! How hot, how disappointed, how cross!

The bare contemplation of that two hours' martyrdom made her shudder, and prompted the desperate suggestion that she might, even at this pass, escape. The object of her journey was lost, the expedition had proved a failure; but her heart rebelled against so great a punishment.

Could she by any means avert it? Dare she draw on herself the eyes of all those bowed heads, with the chance, too, of a snap at her heels from some canine bigot set to guard the door? or, more terrible still, a sudden cessation of those dissonant sounds in the pulpit?

Courage said "Yes;" Fear said "No;" and Fear had it.

She must endure to the end, put on perforce the outward garb of decent attention, patiently await—ah! with a wild, weird, rasping cry, the sweet Psalm of David uprose.

Pauline shuddered from head to foot.

Mentally, as at that hour, she listened to the peal of cathedral chimes, and the mellow chant of white-robed choristers, and—measured the distance between her scat and the door.

A pause, another rapid jangle of incomprehensible phrases, a distraction of the worshippers, and the stranger had flown; she stood once more in the sweet, fresh, fragrant air outside.

With a long-drawn breath of relief, Pauline stopped for a minute to gaze on the scene around her.

A broad stretch of blue water lay at her feet, calm as glass, and to all appearance motionless, yet every minute laying bare more and more of the rocky tangle which overspread the beach, interspersed with shallow bays of smooth and glistening sand.

Thin fringes of birch and alder trees skirted the shore, and overhung the broad white road which encircled the island. Sloping backwards from these, and with gradually increasing monotony, dreary wastes of moor, bog, and ravine carried the eye up to the ptarmigan-haunted peaks above.

Towards this prospect Pauline cared not to look. Her eyes were fixed on the pale, dimly-defined horizon; on the tiny islets which seemed to disdain and shrink from the water on which they rested, so carefully did they draw back their pointed headlands from contact with it; and on a large cutter yacht, which had cast anchor in the bay the night before, and which as it lay broadside, showing every spar and rope reflected, might have offered a prominent object for a painter's pencil.

She had watched the white sail of the vessel as it passed Gourloch on the evening before, and mourned its loss in the panorama which the sun, setting, spread nightly before their eyes. The white wing had been folded just as the heavens were lighting up, and it was folded still.

Not a sound came from the sea, and the strange discordant music within the little building alone broke the silence over the land.

Now must Pauline gather up her courage, and take to the road again.

There it lay, glaring in the fierce noonday heat, sheltered only here and there by the birches, and displaying itself in the distance in a barefaced extent of more than a mile in length, over a hillside, empty even of the shadow of a rock.

Pauline sighed. This was, in plain terms, more than she had bargained for.

When, against the persuasions of her relations at Gourloch, she had made her way to the little Highland church, she had been supported by a feeling of satisfaction, complacency, self-approval if you will, and her aunt had pled in vain.

“My dear, be persuaded. It rarely happens that our own service is put off, and for once we can read our Bibles at home. Such a long walk in this weather, and it is not our own church either!” murmured the lady, feeling a little ashamed of using such an argument.

“I suppose it is much the same, auntie; I never can distinguish between them.”

“You have not studied the subject, my dear. But, however, that is not my real reason for wishing you to give it up. It is not fit for you to walk so far. Elsie has gone down to the shore, and taken her books with her. Come, let me find you something to read out of the library.”

“Thanks, dear auntie, but I should like to go.”

“You know, my love, how gladly I would send you if I could, although it is not our way to have the horses out on Sundays; but really the grey is too lame to be used to-day.”

“I always walk, thank you; we never think of driving at home.”

Quietly and decidedly the stronger will had put aside the weaker, and, if she rued it, the blame was her own.

That “*Seinnidh sinn chum cliù agus glòire Dhé*” (Let us sing to the praise and glory of God), fell upon her ear like a knell. Nor was she, on reflection, better satisfied with the hasty and precipitate withdrawal, which must have seemed to scorn the simple gathering. How could she do it? She had been dazed, bewildered. She was almost, in her confusion, ready to re-enter.

But no! It was too late.

And then above and beyond the obvious causes for

discontent previously narrated, it was no easy matter for Pauline to own that she had been in the wrong.

She would have to own it now, easy or difficult—both wrong in going, and wrong in coming away; she would have to walk in, dusty and dishevelled, two hours before she was expected, and make her humiliating confession. Her aunt would commiserate, and Elsie would rally her; of the two, she preferred the idea of being laughed at, and decided that if her cousin had not quitted the shore on her return, she would seek her out, and they could make their *entrée* together.

With this there flashed a bright idea into Pauline's head.

The tide was still on the ebb, the short cut across the rocks would be passable. The prospect of this, with the sudden reaction of surprise and pleasure it inspired, gave a fillip to her spirits, under which she set off. More than a mile could be saved by crossing the bay, and the long ridges of rock, matted with tangle, and thickly strewn with mussels, limpets, and other shell-fish, afforded a tolerably secure footing.

Soon she quitted the road, and with light and active steps began to thread the mazes of the rocky territory.

All went well for a time.

True, she had frequently to retrace her path, and more than once narrowly escaped immersion in a hidden pool. Occasionally, too, she found herself perched upon an apparently inaccessible height, from which the descent was fraught with peril.

Still, with bare hands clinging to each projecting point, and dainty toes feeling tremulously for security under treacherous sea-weed—too often but the veil of a pitfall—the advance continued.

It grew worse and worse. Her limbs began to ache, her face was burning shelterless under the sun—for, alas! that last spring had snapped the parasol in two—when she came to a full stop. "What shall I do?"

The poor wayfarer was tasting the experience common to explorers of short cuts.

It would seem as if short cuts are haunted by false-hearted sprites, who delight in tormenting such as venture unwarily within their bourne. Try one across fields, and you find half-a-dozen hedges in your way, each backed by a ditch and threaded by a wire. Follow an innocent-looking footpath, as did Christian and Hopeful in the allegory of allegories, and if you are not lodged in the castle of Giant Despair, you are straightway landed in a farmyard deep in mire, from which you look in vain for exit. View all the plain before you, and prepare to tramp it comfortably over a close-shaven, heather-burnt moor, and behold! an artful swamp lurks concealed, with moss and bog-myrtle and cotton-rush flowering on its surface!

Pauline, too far gone to retreat, came to the woful conclusion that another mistake had been committed.

The rocks, which at first had been mere ridges easily traversed, now seemed actually to tower above her; the pools expanded into miniature lakes, and intercepted her path at every turn; while both feet and hands were smarting from contact with the rough and jagged surface.

Suddenly she became aware that she was not alone.

Leaning over a narrow strip of water which ran up between two ledges, was the figure of a man, so intent upon gazing into the crystal pool, that he was apparently as unconscious of her presence as she had hitherto been of his.

His hat was thrown off, and a suit of grey rendered his person so little distinguishable from the smooth surface of stone on which he lay, that had he not changed his attitude on Pauline's approach, she might have been still nearer than she was, without detecting anything unusual.

She turned to escape, her foot slipped, and down she went.

The stranger started, drew himself up, and stared at the apparition. How had she come? What did she want? What was she doing now?

An answer to the last interrogation was self-evident. She was helplessly trying to steady herself on a stone which vibrated to every inclination, her parasol protruded

from a crevice many feet below, and her long dress placidly floated on a neighbouring pool. Clearly she was in need of assistance.

“Wait a moment; allow me to help you.”

Sooth to say, Pauline had no choice but to wait. She was careless as to the fate of her parasol, and ignorant of the misdemeanours of her robe; but to quit that tottering pedestal, when one false step would precipitate her into a briny gulf, was more than she cared to attempt.

Both hands clutched the rugged wall in front, he advanced, and one was unwillingly loosened and put in his.

“Take care! Not that one! This side! Ah!”

She was in! That last exclamation was called forth by a stumble, a moment’s floundering on the slippery surface, and a splash.

The next instant he had seized her other hand, and, by main force, pulled her up beside him.

“Thank you,” said poor Pauline, ruefully.

Short of a desert island there could hardly have been a more extraordinary and secluded spot for two well-dressed, well-bred, and well-looking young people to be standing hand in hand, whose acquaintance barely extended over a previous forty seconds or so.

The man saw the joke; the woman did not.

The hand which he held responded to his clasp, with a fervour born of insecurity and fright; the other held on by his arm.

“Grips me like a vice,” thought he. Aloud, “I hope you are not hurt?”

“Oh no—not much—thank you. The water is quite warm.”

“Your parasol is in the hollow down there; I had better fetch it.”

“Pray don’t. Don’t mind. It is of no consequence whatever.”

“You will lose it; you will never find it again if I do not bring it now. If you can just stand still for one moment, I will jump down.”

Now the malice of this suggestion consisted in the fact that to stand still was one of the last feats the unlucky fair one was likely to accomplish. The rock on which they stood was so cut up into detached and knife-like edges, that, even as she spoke, she swayed backwards and forwards, pinching his arm spasmodically with each oscillation, while every movement threatened another plunge.

"I shall take the opportunity to collar my hat," reflected the young man, "if she is ever going to let go, that is to say. Suppose you sit down for a moment?" to his companion.

As this proposal was accompanied by some assistance, it was feasible, and he was free.

And now, for the first time, it occurred to Pauline to look at the person with whom she was fraternising.

As his back was towards her, she naturally contemplated it first. A good back, broad-shouldered, straight, and supple, well set off by the odd sailor-like blouse of grey.

Now he was poking his head down the chasm from which, but nearly out of reach, the parasol poked up its head appealingly to him. Yes, a good head, too; a nice round head, covered with dark, smooth, soft-looking hair. Last of all she obtained a view of the face.

"Ah! what a pity!" cried the girl, inwardly; and with furtive glances she continued to scan it till he came back to her side, successful in both his quests.

For the face was—bad.

"May I ask which way you are going?"

Pauline could hardly tell. The idea of retracing her steps was scarcely to be borne—to push on seemed hopeless; she faltered and balanced the *pros* and *cons* in her mind.

At last her tale was told.

"I was nearly let in for that Gaelic service myself," said her companion; "my men found it out, however, and warned me at the church door. So you are on your way to Gourloch?"

"Yes; I was told one could cross here when the tide was out."

"I should doubt it."

"You think it would not be safe to try?"

"Hardly."

"Considering," reflected the young man, "that you were staggering about like a new-born calf a few minutes ago, and are only happy now because you are sitting down."

"Then I must go back the way I came. Thank you," said Pauline, with dignity. She could be quite dignified as she sat on the rock.

He hesitated, and looked towards the sea. "The men are here. Will you let them put you home? Of course I shall accompany the boat," he added, hastily.

Pauline (aside).—"And pray, who are *you*?" Outwardly, she only followed the direction of his eye with hers, and saw what she might have seen long before if she had looked — a large, beautifully-appointed gig, manned by four tidy British tars. "You are very good."

"Not at all. I shall be delighted to be of any use."

"It is barely half a mile beyond that headland; you can see the tower from here."

"What a tremendous round it must be by the road! Five or six miles, I should say."

"Not quite so far, but still——"

"Long enough. You would not do it under an hour and a half."

("I am wet, besides," considered Pauline, who was wetter than she could well confide to a stranger; "and I am tired. And if I refuse and turn back, I must accept his escort over the rocks, for I could not possibly go crawling and falling about, as I did when there was nobody near. What a disastrous expedition it has been from beginning to end! Shall I accept? I wish I knew. The boat does look charming, and sailors are always nice, but I don't altogether like him. Still, if I return, he will come too; and if I go in the boat there will be all the others. I wonder which would be best or worst?" A

pauc. "The boat is best.") "Thank you very much, if you are quite sure I am not taking you out of your way——"

("Married," decided the man—"married, and a woman of the world, or she would not be so cool upon it. I never said it was not taking me out of my way. However——") "Not in the least. Let me help you down."

"I cannot imagine," said the young lady, as they stood waiting for the boat, "how you did not hear me before I was so close to you; I made enough noise."

"I heard sounds, but thought my men had come ashore. It was not likely to be any one else, you must acknowledge."

"I did not hear any sound; you took me altogether by surprise."

"And had I not been there, should you have struggled on?"

"Yes, I think so. I don't like giving up what I have once begun."

"You might, if you had had good luck, have been a dozen steps further on by this time! I am sorry I retarded your progress."

"I am very much obliged to you." (Gravely, as with this protest, "So far as you have done me a service, I am bound to acknowledge it; otherwise, as yet we are strangers. Don't make jokes.")

The boat's crew now pulled alongside, and she was handed in.

"Delightful!" exclaimed the weary pedestrian to herself, as they sped over the water with a swift noiseless rush that in a few seconds left the promontory from which they had embarked far behind. "I cannot help being glad I came. It could not be avoided; I had no choice. The men look respectable, and he is a gentleman, whatever else he may be. What an odd adventure! Poor little Elsie! how she would have enjoyed it! I wonder if she will be down at the shore when we come in! No one else will, it is to be hoped. Ah! how pleas-

ant—how very, very pleasant it is! Now we are going over sand and shells; there scuttles off a little green crab under the weed. It is quite shallow too. Are those oysters, or only their shells? How beautiful are these great trees rising to the surface, and spreading themselves like feathery palms or giant ferns! Far, far down they go, into that deep, dark, invisible pit. If we were to upset here, I should be drowned. I should go straight to the bottom, and never rise again. Ah! I am glad we are off that hollow; the sand is rising again.” Thus dreamily her thoughts wandered on, as she hung in silence over the side.

“Might say a civil word or two,” inwardly commented the steersman, when some time had elapsed. “I thought all Scotch girls could talk.”

“Is not this beautiful?” said Pauline, turning round.

“Very.”

“Nothing can surpass the scenery of the west of Scotland.”

“Nothing.”

“Especially on a day like this.”

“Certainly.”

She had made her attempts, it was his turn next.

“I hope you are comfortable?”

“Perfectly, thank you.”

“You must be tired?”

“A little.”

Discreet, if neither edifying nor original. The lady’s turn came again.

“When I come to Scotland I never want to go away; and yet when I am away, I hardly care to seek it out again.”

“Just what I have felt. But is not this your country?”

“No.”

A pause.

“My home is in the south of England,” said Pauline, feeling herself ungracious; “it is—different there.”

He acknowledged a difference, observed that he too was a stranger, and another spasmodic silence ensued.

Then with a gasp of relief they simultaneously rushed into the old, old topic of the weather.

Weather past, weather to come, weather at sea, weather among mountains; English, Scotch, and Irish weather; the climates of all countries,—were discussed with an animation that left nothing to be desired.

Meantime the mental commentaries so ran:

“A fine creature. A nice womanly woman. A good daughter, good sister, good wife—oh! indeed! no wife at all,” as his eye fell on the ringless left hand clasped round the parasol—“no wife at all; wrong for once. Be that as it may, you are a wifely, motherly, daughterly girl, and I like you!”

“And you are an odd kind of man, I don’t know whether to like you or not.”

“Hollo! Hollo! Hey!”

“Tom!” ejaculated Pauline.

“Tommy!” cried her companion.

With that they turned and faced each other, the meaning of which was, “Pray what do *you* know about Tom?” and, “Pray what do *you* know about Tommy?”

“That is my brother,” said Pauline, smiling.

CHAPTER II.

ONE OF THE WILD BLUNDELLS.

“His face was of that doubtful kind,
That wins the eye, but not the mind.”

—*Rokeby*.

“Well, you are a nice girl to go out for a *pleasure-trip* on the *Sawbath-day*!”

Astonishment and exclamations having been exchanged, the new-comer thus began.

“I did not, Tom. I went to church, and came back by the shore.”

"Went by land, and came back by water."

"There is no crossing after all, or else I tried it too far down. I don't know where I should have been now, if I had not been most kindly rescued."

"By him? Many thanks," said the boy. He could not have been much over twenty, and was a smart, hearty, merry-go-round sort of a creature, with a loud voice and a laughing eye.

("What! You don't know him? Oh!") in answer to an aside.

"I say, Blundell, you must come up and have Sunday dinner. That is the house among the trees; no distance, you see. I only turned up myself an hour ago; got a boat and ferried across at the Ross; and now my aunt says I should have stayed where I was, and not have travelled upon a Sunday. After my going to church too, on purpose to say that I had been!"

"You have been at church? Where in the world did you find one?"

"Close to the ferry on the other side."

"And how did you manage to arrive here an hour ago?"

"Well, I did not stay the *whole* time you know; I slipped out after the first fifty-five verses of the 119th *Psalm*! Eh, Polly?"

Pauline did not laugh.

"Your sister would have been glad to have been in your place, I daresay. There is nothing but Gaelic at Gourloch Point to-day."

"Is there not? I wish I had been there. I like to hear them screech and squall; it sounds as if you were sitting down upon a bagpipe. But you will come up, won't you?"

"Thanks very much, but I must get back—the men are waiting. You will excuse me, I know."

"I have not yet thanked you——" began Pauline. He smiled, lifted his hat, and was gone.

"I knew he would not come," said Tom, hospitably, "or I should not have been so keen to ask him. I knew

that would send him off. What a queer old cracky fellow he is!"

"Old! Cracky!"

"He is half cracked, you know. Where is Elsie?"

"How is he cracked?"

"Aunt Ella said she was down at the shore."

"What do you mean by saying he is cracked?"

"I didn't,—I said he was *half* cracked; and so he is."

"How?"

"Oh, I don't know. The fellows say he is."

"Why should he not come to dinner when you asked him?"

"Because he never does; and we didn't want him, either."

Pauline pondered.

"He would just have been a bore," continued Tom, as they bent their steps inland; "and Aunt Ella would not have liked it, besides. Queer,—isn't it? They ought to suit each other, those two."

She had no idea what he meant. "How did you know him, Tom?"

"I have known him a long time. The question is, how did *you* know him? I shall tell Aunt Ella of your gallivanting about with one of the wild Blundells, and see how she'll look!"

"It was unavoidable," said his sister, steadily. "I was in the very middle of the bay, and had come to a place where I could neither go back nor forward. You may imagine what a start it gave me to find a man close at hand, when I thought——"

"Oh, well," cried Tom, impatiently, "where is Elsie all this time?"

"Perhaps she has gone indoors again."

"She was out when I left. I came down here on purpose to find her."

"Here she is, then!" A laughing voice from behind a rock. "I heard you all the time, and saw you too. What have you been about? Really, you two scandalous people——"

"Speak to Polly, if you like," exclaimed Tom, seizing her hands. "If you don't look better after my sister another time, Miss Elsie, I shall think twice before I allow her to come and stay with you again. But I am innocent."

"Were you not with her?"

"Not I. She managed this nice little escapade all by herself. I have been here for ever so long, as you might have known, if you had been anywhere but in this crazy, out-of-the-way place down here."

"How did you come?"

"I came by the Ross, got ferried across, and walked over the hill. Mind, I have been to church first, which apparently none of you have. And such a house as I find! Only Aunt Ella in it; you gone, no one can say where; and Pauline sitting check-by-jowl with a fellow whose name she does not even know, but with whom she seems vastly taken."

A brother's impertinence, ignored by the stately victim.

"Paulie, I wonder you let him treat an elder sister so!"

"Why, what did you say to her yourself, only a minute ago?"

"Never mind, tell me all about it," said Elsie, impatiently. "Did you find the church, Pauline?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"I had to come away, Elsie: it was all in Gaelic."

"Oh! oh! oh!" with a scream of delight. "Oh, that is charming! Oh, you poor Pauline, you dear Pauline! and so you had your walk for nothing, and your parasol is broken, and your gown is ruined, and, last of all, you got carried off by a pirate, and were only rescued by Tom and me."

"Come, I like that," said Tom. "What had you to do with it, may I ask? Sneaking behind that rock until you saw whether the pirate was going to demolish us or not."

"You would make a valiant ally in time of need, Miss

Elsie; like old Blucher, you would come galloping up with a great dust, when all the fighting was over, and do the shouting part.

*'Juheira-sa-sa-sa, und die Deutschen sind da,
Die Deutschen sind lustig, sie rufen, Hurra!'*

How long have you been hiding here?"

"It was some one else's shouting that made me look out. 'Hollo! hollo! hey!' and the echo cried after it, 'Ollo! ollo! ey!' What makes an echo drop its h's? They always do, you know."

"And you had seen none of us before?"

"No; the first I saw of anybody was when you were all down at the boat. I had heard the dip of the oars before, but it had not come in sight round the point. I concluded that you had come with Pauline."

"And I concluded that you had; or rather, that it was you sitting beside Blundell."

"Is that the pirate's name? What is he doing here?"

"Ask Polly. She knows all about him."

"I suppose that is his yacht, Elsie. He found me in difficulties among the recks. I was trying to cross the bay as the tide was out; and just when I had got to a place where I could get neither back nor forward——"

"I have heard this so often that I am perfectly sick of it," interrupted Tom, rudely. "There was nothing so very wonderful in this great deliverance; you women always make mountains out of mole-hills. Blundell was fishing in his boat, Elsie, and picked her off; that was all!"

"He was doing nothing of the kind," said his sister, warmly. "He was not fishing at all."

"Wasn't he? Well, then, he ought to have been. I mean to draw him about his Sunday amusements, and you shall see how he rises to it. It was Chaworth who gave me the hint. Elsie, are the gooseberries over yet?"

"No, indeed, they are but just begun! You forget how much later we are here than you in the south."

"Then let us have a turn at them before dinner."

To humour him she complied, but Pauline, pleading fatigue, escaped into the house.

"We are best by ourselves," said Tom, confidentially. "Pauline always nags me to go indoors before I have had half enough! What have you got there? Green ones? Are they good? I like these yellow boys."

"You don't know what is good, then! The green ones have far more flavour. Those are called the honey-globes, but no one cares for them after the others are ripe. These little ironmongers are the best of any."

"Are they?" said Tom, with all kinds in his mouth at once. "Oh, I say, look here! My best *visiting* trousers!"

He had been kneeling unconsciously on a juicy red ironmonger, and the result was a deeply-imbedded stain.

"Something always happens to this pair, whenever I wear them," said he, ruefully. "They came from Smallpage, and are the only ones I have that don't bag at the knee! I put them on to-day, because it was Sunday, to please my aunt."

"It was thoughtful of you, Tom."

"Well, what am I to do? My things won't be here till to-morrow, and—it's getting worse, I do believe—there is not a soul to lend me a pair! What are you laughing at?"

"Nothing. Why do you not ask Mr Blundell?"

"His? They would trail behind me like the spurs of a fighting-cock! I shall go on board his yacht, though. I say, Elsie, if he is here to-morrow, why shouldn't we have a run in it?"

"Delightful!"

"You would like it, I can tell you."

"But how could it be managed?"

"Oh, there is nothing easier. He is such a queer creature, you can make him do whatever you like, if you take him the right way. That's what Chaworth says. You have only to take him the right way, and you can twist him round your little finger."

"And how, if you take him the wrong way?"

Tom shrugged his shoulders.

"I should like to go," said his cousin, "very much."

"You wouldn't be sick?"

"No, indeed! At least I think not."

"What do you mean by you 'think not'? Have you ever been in a yacht?"

"No."

"You know nothing about it, then. They are the sickest things you can go in. There is nothing I like better than a little spanking 15-tonner, with a good sou'wester to strain the sheets."

"How large is this one?"

"This? Oh, it's far away too big," contemptuously. "It is as safe as anything. Aunt Ella would go in this one herself, I daresay! It was a little wee thing that Guy was lost out of."

"Who was Guy?"

"Guy? He was the other one. They were the wild Blundells, you know. Such a splendid-looking pair of fellows! Chaworth said——"

"You have had enough, Tom. Come to the green-houses."

"Chaworth said——"

"Look at this piece of heliotrope, peeping through the hinges. How can it have crept in there?"

"Chaworth said——"

"Shut the door after you."

"You are not listening to me a bit," said Tom, crossly. Neither she was.

Meantime Pauline sat by her open casement, looking on the sea.

It was an old-fashioned lattice-window, set in a frame of ivy, and both sides were caught back to let in as much of the outer air as possible. The chamber was round, being approached only by a narrow winding stair, which opened out of the gallery below; and the turret-room, as it was called, was appropriated to Miss La Sarte's use, whenever she stayed, as she usually did every autumn, at Gourloch.

Here she sat now, a tall, straight, dark-haired maid, with a thoughtful countenance, and calm, bright eyes.

Unlike Tom, unlike Elsie, unlike any one else in the world was Pauline.

It was this which made Tom rampant at the idea of his sister's adventure, and gave zest to Elsie's enjoyment of her defeat.

Pauline, the good, the grave, the handsome, the decorous, the everywhere admired and approved Pauline, to be caught tripping thus!

Elsie might have been wilful, and daring, and baffled, and made to look foolish as her cousin had been, and no one would have thought twice about it, whilst the whole house was now gaping at Pauline! Elsie would have been petted and pitied like a lost child; she would have come in bemoaning her fate; showing her hands and her face, her gown and her parasol; and all of a sudden she would have burst out a-laughing in the face of her comforters!

Pauline sits by her window, and her hands lie idly in her lap.

Through the balmy air come ever and anon the calls of sea-birds on the shore; the wild quivering cry of the curlew, or the lapwing diverting wayfarers from her young.

A slight breeze has sprung up with the return of the tide, wavelets lap the rocks, and ripple along the little bays and creeks of sand.

A long hour glides unbroken by, and the dreamer heeds it not.

A sudden attack upon the door; a double attack—one hand used for the rap, the other simultaneously turning the handle.

"Look here! why *don't* you come down. The gong is broken, Aunt Ella says, and you might have known. We have been waiting nearly half an hour."

"I am coming, dear."

"You might just as well read your good books after dinner as before," continued injured Tom.

"Pauline, as we know, had not been reading, and there were no traces of books to be seen, but she had forgotten

to smooth her hair, and her bonnet still lay upon the table.

Tom looked at her. "Are you tired?" he said, gruffly.

"I am rather, thank you."

"What a wild-goose chase it was! Blundell must have had a good laugh at you."

They were going down-stairs, and she slipped her hand within his arm.

"Isn't he rather a—strange man, Tom?"

"I told you he was half cracked."

"He never once smiled the whole time, except, yes, when he went away."

"I don't know about smiling, but you should just hear him laugh. He and Guy were the jolliest fellows in the world. Wherever the Blundells were, there was a row, and every night they kept it up. They had half the county by the ears, and there they used to be roaring and fighting——"

"Well?"

"Well, what?"

"What were you going to say?"

"I wasn't going to say anything. What do you mean?"

"What were they roaring and fighting about?"

"Oh, for fun. It was Guy who was the great hand; Ralph could be as quiet as a pussy-cat if he liked. Oh! the meekest, mildest creature, without a word to say for himself! So that all the old dowagers used to say, 'What a nice young man!' And he was, *very* nice!" said Tom, emphatically. "I say, you needn't tell Aunt Ella all this; we may just as well go in his yacht, and he is all right now. Do you hear? Mind you don't."

The last injunction gave Pauline food for thought. She waited her opportunity, and thus accosted her brother.

"Tom, if Mr Blundell is not—not a proper acquaintance for us, I cannot help telling Aunt Ella. He ought not to come here, and Elsie and I should not go in his yacht."

"What rubbish! Of course he is all right now; I told you that."

"I don't know what your 'all right' and your 'all wrong' means," cried she, losing patience. "You say he is wicked, and he is crazy, and seem to glory in it, and yet you wish us to be intimate——"

"Who said anything about being intimate? The intimacy is a fiction of your own. You picked him up for yourself, and were intimate enough with him in all conscience when I came upon you!"

"You know how it was——" began his sister.

"Oh, for pity's sake, don't come to the place where you could get neither back nor forward, again! I know the very spot by this time! Spare us the recital, just this once."

"You are very rude," said Pauline, frowning.

"No, no. I'll be ready for it again to-morrow, and promise to listen to every word. Come, Polly-poddy, don't be cross; you know you want to have the sail, and so does Elsie, and so we'll all go, and have a day of it."

"If you are sure," hesitated she.

"Sure? Yes, of course I am. There is really nothing the matter with him, only that he has been queer ever since he and Guy were out that night in the North Sea, and Guy was drowned. Instead of getting away from the water, as you would think he might have done, he is always on it, and goes mooning about by himself, first to one place, and then to another. But he is quite the pattern man, every one says. I believe," he added, lowering his voice, "he thinks he'll go to hell, or something of that sort, if he breaks out again."

"Is that what makes you call him crazy?"

"Yes. That is what the fellows say."

"So now," continued Tom, as if a load were off his mind, "you know the worst of him. And letting alone that, he is as good a fellow as ever lived. Just the kind of man *you* would take to; he is not Elsie's style at all. I say, what a pretty little creature she has turned out, and what airs the monkey gives herself!"

"I don't think any one ever accused Elsie of that before."

"They will now, then. She shuts you up at every turn, and then comes wheedling after you, to get you to go after her again."

"It is only her way, you silly Tom. She means nothing by it."

"Doesn't she, then?"

"Nothing whatever. She is a mere child."

"A monstrous preeocious child. Where on earth did she learn to flirt?"

"*Flirt!*" eried Pauline, angrily.

"Yes, flirt. I suppose it is born in a girl. Even a she-Paul will flirt, if she can do it on a Sunday, my dear sister," added he, silyly.

Pauline—blushed.

CHAPTER III.

"BITE HIM, PUNCH!"

"Now had I skill, I would right fain devise
To bring this high-born spinster to your eyes;
I could discourse of lip, and chin, and cheek—
But you would see no picture as I speak.
Such colours cannot—mix them as I may—
Paint you this nymph,—we'll try a different way."

—CRABBE.

The next morning, alas! alas!

Rain—soft, patient, persistent rain, not loud nor passionate, yet holding out no false hopes of giving way, set in with the daylight.

Low over the hillsides hung the misty veil; leaden looked the sea; piteous were the faces that surveyed it at Gourloch.

"Elsie, do you ever have anything but rain here?"

"Never! It poured the whole of yesterday."

"Yes, of course, if it is fine, it is sure to be on a Sunday, when one can't do anything."

"I had a presentiment that it would rain to-day."

“ Clever of you, that. I have a presentiment that it will rain to-morrow, and the next day, and the next after that.” Tom was out of humour, and the mischief found for his idle hands to do was teasing his cousin.

“ It is no worse here than elsewhere,” affirmed Elsie, smarting like a true Scot under their national disgrace. “ We have had very *good* weather, particularly *fine* weather, until quite lately. I am sure I don’t know why it should have broken just at this time,” continued she, with a troubled look at the sky.

“ And what is one to do the livelong day ? ”

“ You might go and see Mr Blundell,” said a quiet voice close by. Pauline was standing with her back to them, looking out of the window.

“ Eh ? What should I do that for ? ” demanded her brother.

“ You might find out how long he means to stay, and see what is our prospect of a sail.”

“ Well, I might do that. Perhaps he would take me with him to-day. I don’t care for the rain, and it would be better than staying at home.” (With a glance at Elsie.) “ Men can’t be expected to fad about a work-table all day like girls.”

“ Bring him back with you to entertain us,” retorted his cousin.

Tom tossed up his head. “ Likcly, isn’t it ? He hates women.”

No remark.

“ He never goes anywhere when he can help it.”

“ Oh ! ”

“ And so, as he won’t come to me, I must go to him,” proceeded young La Sarte with a lordly air, intended to convey that it was impossible two such choice spirits could be long apart. “ He will expect me, I daresay.”

Even as he spoke, Blundell’s boat was touching the shore, and the young men met in the avenue a few minutes later.

“ Hollo ! ” cried Tom. “ I was on my way to look you up. What a beast of a day ! ”

"Well, what have you got for me to do?"

Was he seeking Tom, as Tom was seeking him, from the sheer lack of any other source of entertainment?

They regarded each other earnestly. Should they fish? The streams were too high. The shooting of Gourloch was let to a stranger. Boating would be miserable; walking, stupid. Must they actually be driven indoors? It appeared the only thing to be done.

"I hope," said Blundell, as they walked up to the house, "that Miss La Sarte is none the worse for her wetting yesterday."

"Not a bit. At least, I never asked her. Isn't it a jolly old place? Belongs to my aunt, as far as you can see on either side. She was a Macdougall; you would know what that means if you were a native; and since my uncle's death she lives here for the most part of every year. The pity is about the shooting. She might just as well keep some of it for me, even if she let the rest; it is rather hard on a fellow to come to Scotland in August, and get no grouse. I have given her several pretty broad hints on the subject. I should come down regularly if I could look upon it as a moor."

"I don't doubt it," said his companion, drily.

"And, of course, I should have it to offer fellows. I can't ask them down, as it is, when there is no shooting. Fellows who have asked me, you know. There was young Beauchamp; and Farey, Lord Farey's son;—they would both have come down fast enough, if there had been anything for them to do. I had to make up a sort of explanation about my aunt being a widow, and not caring to have a lot of people about. I could not tell them slap out there was no shooting, they would have thought it so uncommonly odd."

"Are you the heir?"

"No, another of us, my cousin, has the title and the B——shire estates. That is why my aunt lives here."

"And does he come in for this property too?"

"Oh no, there's Elsie—I mean her daughter. A nice girl," said Tom, carelessly. "Sir Edward was only my

mother's brother, but we do pretty much as we like here.”

“And that was your sister whom I met yesterday? Do you know, the whole time she was with me she reminded me of some one, and I could not puzzle out who it was. Not that she is the least like you, Tommy.”

“Is she not? She is thought like me too.” (I suppose he means that she is handsomer, and she's not. I am quite as good-looking.)

“We are rather wet for the drawing-room, eh?” said Blundell, with a glance at his sea-soiled boots. “What do you think?”

“My aunt is awfully good-natured, and——” sinking his voice, “the carpets are as old as the hills. Nobody minds about them. Aunt Ella,” continued Tom, opening the door, “here is Mr Blundell: what can we do to amuse him?”

“We will do our best,” replied his aunt, pleasantly. She was a slight, graceful little thing, to whose opinions her nephew's exceeding deference seemed almost comical. “I am afraid we have nothing here very entertaining, Mr Blundell,” affirmed the lady.

“Perhaps Mr Blundell will kindly entertain us,” said a new voice, the other courtesies having been exchanged.

Turning politely towards the speaker, he beheld a rosy, golden-haired Hebe, in the first flush of her womanhood; a chubby, dimpled, rounded creature, whose mocking eyes were fixed upon him.

“I am dreadfully stupid,” said he, with a drawl.

Pauline, on his other side, jerked her netting-needle impatiently. (“He did not speak in that way to me,” thought she. “What a disagreeable, affected, artificial voice! I knew I should not like him.”)

Lady Calverley.—“You were very kind yesterday in bringing my niece out of an unpleasant predicament. She was a foolish girl to try the crossing, and we may be thankful things were no worse.”

“*You* would have laughed at us,” said Blundell to Elsie.

"I am sure I should."

"It is never safe to try a crossing by the sea," continued Lady Calverley.

"I should not have tried it unless the tide had been going out," said Pauline.

"I could cross at any time," said Tom.

Then there was a pause. ("I wonder how I could put up with him!" thought Pauline. "I must have been blind and deaf, or else he is altogether changed since yesterday.")

"Are you not a walker?" inquired Blundell, again addressing Miss Calverley.

"I don't care for walking, unless it is to get things. I should not mind it if I might shoot, or fish, or follow the otter-hounds; but walking for walking's sake is like taking medicine,—you wonder how little of it you can get off with, to do you any good."

Elsie, thankful for any diversion, conscious of charms, graceless and idle, sparkled with animation.

"I declare," speculated Tom, "she is trying her hand on Blundell next."

It was not her place. He had told her his friend was bored with women, and if he had by any chance come up to see Pauline, he ought to be talking to *her*. His aunt, too, merely putting in a word now and then; she should be taking the lead—she ought to *make* their visitor converse with her on this their first meeting.

Elsie was too free, too friendly, with a man whom she had never seen before. If this were the winning manner of which he had heard so much, he failed to appreciate it.

"What in all the world are we to do?" he reiterated, dolefully.

No one heeded him.

"Pauline, why are you fidgeting with that stupid work?"

"I did not know I was fidgeting."

"You are; and you have hardly done a stitch besides. Why can't you try to make yourself agreeable? Why don't you talk like Elsie?" in a low voice. "It all

falls upon her. Neither you nor Aunt Ella will say a word.”

“I can’t talk to a man who turns his back upon me,” said Pauline to herself. She was exaggerating, he had not turned his back; but the lady was nettled.

His back was not turned, but his shoulder certainly was. He was lounging over the side of the easy-chair, snapping his fingers at the pug in Elsie’s lap.

Punch was growling, wincing, and quivering with indignation.

“Look at him, Punch! Bite him, Punch! Hist! Good dog, good dog! Don’t be frightened, you little coward!” cried his mistress, full of the sport. “Punch, I am ashamed of you, to let yourself be tormented by a naughty, horrid——”

“Go on,” said Blundell.

“Elsie, my dear, will you open the dining-room door, and see what luncheon is about? It is surely one o’clock.”

Elsie jumped up with an instantaneous obedience edifying to see.

“One o’clock! It surely cannot be as late as that!” exclaimed their guest.

“It has been one o’clock *by me* for ever so long,” said Tom, emphatically.

“A quarter to one,” said Pauline, consulting her watch. “I think your clocks are rather fast, Aunt Ella.”

“Yes, my dear, we keep them half an hour before the time, as our servants are always late.”

“And that pulls them up?” said Blundell, gravely.

“They are obliged to go by the clocks, you know.”

“Which they would not do, if you kept them to the correct time?”

“I don’t know, I am sure. I wish I knew of any way to make them punctual,” said Lady Calverley, herself the most unpunctual woman in existence. “I never can get them to do as I wish in that respect. Well, Elsie, are we to come?”

“No, indeed, mamma, there is no appearance of food; but there is a rush along the passage now that betokens

good. There is a sound of abundance of rain. Mr Blundell——” But Blundell had turned to her cousin.

“Ah,” said Tom, cheerfully, “it will be all the better when it comes, Elsie! Here Punch, good old dog! you like me now, don’t you, sir? Take my advice and stick to me in the dining-room, and it will advance your best interests. The day is clearing, Aunt Ella, after all.”

What had made the day brighten, the dog good, and the late luncheon excusable, all at once, in the young man’s eyes? Pauline sedately conversing with his friend, or Elsie sitting by astonished and neglected?

“Elsie, come here; I have something to show you.”

She came hastily.

“It is only an old halfpenny; but never mind, let us be looking at it. I say, when are we to bring in about the sail?”

“We can’t bring it in at all.”

“Oh yes, we can, *you* can. You were chattering away to him just now easily enough. Think of something to put it into his head.”

“I won’t. He was quite rude to me just now.”

“Rude to you! How?”

“I spoke to him, and he turned away, and never answered me.”

“He was not thinking of you, that was all.”

“Then he ought to have been thinking of me,” pouting, and looking angrily at the halfpenny. “He should not be so taken up with any one that he cannot attend for a moment to another.”

“Oh, you take no notice, that is the best way,” advised he, by no means displeased at the tables being thus turned. “He and Pauline will get on together first-rate, for, between ourselves, they are both as mad as March hares. He is not in your line, my dear, at all.”

“He has not a pleasant way of speaking. Sometimes I can’t tell whether he is in joke or in earnest.”

“What does it matter which he is? He is an old frump, and he is not half so good-looking as he was either.”

“ He is quite good-looking enough.”

“ Oh, I don’t know. I don’t call him so very handsome now. And black hair always turns grey soon.”

“ How old is he ? ”

“ He is a long way over thirty, I know that. He was thirty when I left those parts, or, if he wasn’t, he was precious near it.”

“ Look here ! ” continued he, turning her attention to himself,—“ this mark, it shows wonderfully little after all. You can hardly see it in this light, can you ? ”

“ No, no ; it is not worth thinking about for a moment,” impatiently. “ They seem to have gone to sleep in the house to-day. No luncheon, nor anything.”

“ We are not starving ; and when we have eaten it there will be nothing else to do. I am in no hurry,” alleged the lad, defying that internal clock which had anticipated the hour so pertinaciously hitherto.

“ For the first time in your life, then. I thought you were always hungry, and greedy, and everything else that a boy ought to be.”

“ I daresay I was. I was a capital boy in all respects,” assented Tom, quietly consigning his boyhood to the past. “ And you were not a bad little girl either, Miss Elsie. Do you remember the turkey’s nest day ? ”

No answer.

“ What are you listening to *them* for ? ” cried he, with a frown.

“ Nothing—nothing. It was only to mamma. She—— What was it you were saying ? ”

“ Nothing worth attending to. I am only boring you. Mr Blundell is a great deal more entertaining, no doubt.”

“ Tom, you silly boy, don’t be ridiculous. I heard every word you said, till just at the last. I was thinking of something——”

“ Oh, never mind. It does not in the least signify,” tossing up and down the tassel of the blind, with a sham yawn, and an air of superb carelessness.

Elsie had no more to say ; her excuses were suspected, and apologies would have made matters worse.

Now at last they were at one in their desires ; equally anxious for interruption, the annoucement of luncheon was welcomed by both.

The day did not clear, according to Tom's prognostications, and the greater part of it had to be passed, even by him and his friend, within doors.

Five o'clock tea, however, was barely over, when, all at once, the sun shone out.

That more rain would fall ere night, and also through the night, was but too probable ; but for the present there was a lull.

The pattering of heavy drops might be heard upon the laurel hedges from the trees overhead ; blackbirds and thrushes did a brisk business among such hapless worms as had crept forth upon the grassy paths ; and the roaring of hidden waterfalls seemed all at once to become distinctly audible.

"Let us go and see the Gour Burn in flood !" suddenly suggested Tom. "What do you say, Elsie ?"

A making-up, such as is in fashion among quarrelsome children, had been effected between them ; and now, as usual, he appealed to her.

"Shall we, Pauline ?" cried Elsie.

"Yes, yes, we will ! For," subjoined Pauline, with exceeding demureness, "a whole day in the house is tiresome. One needs fresh air."

"My dear Pauline, what are you proposing ?" Lady Calverley looked at her niece with astonishment. "Going out *now* ! And it will rain again directly !"

"Now, mamma, don't say anything, *please* ! It will be so delightful ! And do make dinner a little later, so as to give us plenty of time. Come, Pauline ! Quick ! Before mamma can say a word !"

"Why should you not come too ?" urged Tom. "Put on thick boots, and come. I'll carry you home if you fall by the way."

"My dear, I could not walk half-way there ! And I cannot say I think you ought to ask the girls to go. Why cannot you and Mr Blundell go by yourselves ?"

Four gloomy faces made answer first.

Then, "It would be such a grand sight," murmured Pauline.

"I really think they ought not to miss it," pleaded Blundell.

Tom.—"It will do them all the good in the world!"

Elsie.—"We *must* go."

Further remonstrance would have been idle, and it was understood that Blundell was to return with them to the castle.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GOUR BURN.

"Thy gentlest sweep and boldest leap,
Thy rough rock walls, and plunging falls,
Thy foam-bells ringing free:
Thy pools and thy shallows, thy sun-woven shadows,
Thy startles and sallies, thy fern-glades and valleys,
Were early known to me."

With revived spirits and glowing countenances, the little party found themselves out upon the moor, surrounded by dripping heath and fern, brawling streamlets, and glistening sheets of rock.

"Hi!" cried Tom, walking backwards in front of them, up a steep incline. "This is the kind of thing for me! What a pair of cheeks Elsie has got!"

"What a pair you have got yourself!" retorted his cousin, as though it were an accusation. "Do walk properly now: this is not a place to trip in."

"Just what I should say it was," tripping as he spoke, and pretending to lurch over the side. "Why did none of you catch me? That pool down there would drown a hay-stack!"

"Isn't it a splendid pool?" said Elsie. "And the rock opposite is called 'The Otters' Inn.' The otter, when he

travels up to the lake on the other side of the hill, spends the day here, and proceeds on his way the following night."

"I should say he meets with cold comfort," said Tom, lightly. "It wad be sma' plesure to me to bide in a hoose where there was neither parritch nor whusky—eh, Blundell? The Otters' Inn is not quite in the style of the old 'Goat and Compasses.'"

No answer.

"Do you and Chaworth go there still?"

"No."

"Where is Chaworth?"

"I don't know. Miss La Sarte," said Blundell, turning to his companion, "I suppose, by this noise, we are close to the fall now?"

"I knew I should draw him," whispered Tom, triumphantly. "Did you see how angry he was? He hates the very name of Chaworth."

"Then why did you mention him?"

He stared. "Why? Just for that, to be sure! Didn't you see how he turned to Pauline, and would talk no more to me? Oh, it was rich!"

"Elsie," said Pauline, turning round, "we are going down to the ledge: we shall not be away more than a few minutes."

"Is Miss Calverley not coming too?"

No; Miss Calverley declined the invitation decidedly: it made her so giddy, that never once, not even when she was a child, had she seen the fall. She would await their return where she was.

The other three crept down the bank, clinging alternately to branches of trees and points of rock. Pauline mutely declined assistance, for speech was unavailing. The hollow rumbling sound which had been loudly audible on the heights, was now a deafening continuous roar, as the volume of water, which had been considerably augmented by the recent rain, thundered over the cliff, and lashed the black pool below into a seething caldron of yellow foam

The three adventurers, from their ledge, beheld the spectacle in silence.

Tom, his restless eyes roving up and down, as if to gather in every point of the picture, was still influenced by a certain amount of awe, for this was a sight to which he was unaccustomed; his sister, to whom it was more familiar, gazed thoughtfully into the depths; Blundell surveyed the scene with some degree of emotion, but of a kind so inscrutable, that it was difficult to guess whether it afforded him pleasure or pain.

Suddenly he motioned to the others to remain where they were, and disappeared up the bank.

"Miss Calverley, you really must come down. It is magnificent; and your cousin says you have never seen it yet."

"I should like to come so much," said Elsie, piteously; "but oh, if Tom were to touch me——"

"He shan't touch you. No one shall. You shall touch me, and that is all you need do. Hold on by my arm, and you can come down as safely as if you were on a highroad."

A few more entreaties, and she was persuaded.

Yes, wonderful to relate, she was persuaded. Shivering, miserable, yet excited and triumphant, she stood upon the ledge.

Pauline nodded her congratulations, and Tom clapped his hands in her face; but Elsie heeded them not.

She was holding on, as Blundell had told her, by his arm; and as wilder and wilder grew the hurry of the torrent, and more and more horrible the yawning depth below, she cowered the closer to him.

Strange cries, and shrieks, and groans sounded for her in the terrible din of the waters. Her eyes began to swim, her brain to reel. Well for her that some one at that moment touched her elbow. It was only Pauline, unaware of the compact made beforehand, and kindly anxious to see if her cousin were uneasy; but it gave the last touch to the girl's nervous terror, and uttering a cry which was lost in the raging of the waters,

she shot up the bank like a hunted animal escaping for its life.

The other three followed, grievous to relate, in convulsions of merriment.

Pauline's rare laugh rang out with the hearty, thorough enjoyment of one not often in mirthful mood; Tom seasawed to and fro with the agonies of his delight; while even Blundell looked diverted, though politeness restrained him from giving way to the same extent as did the others.

Elsie, the first to ridicule herself upon ordinary occasions, reddened with vexation, and drew herself pettishly away from her cousin's protecting arm.

"Little Elsie," began Pauline.

"Oh Elsie, Elsie!" cried Tom. "Oh fie, Elsie!"

"It was my fault," said a kind voice, without a trace of amusement in it. "I ought not to have pressed it," continued Blundell, "but I could not bear to think that you were debarred from sharing our pleasure. Miss La Sarte, standing there, you reminded me of the 'Lorelei.' You know the old legend? If you had taken your hat off, and let your hair down, it needed no more."

"Except that it should have been golden hair," said Tom, who had studied at Bonn, and had often enough sung about the "goldnes haar" with the wild students there; "and that Pauline would never lure any one to destruction. Elsie would make a far better 'Lorelei,'" he added, thoughtlessly.

"You are——kind," said his cousin.

"You are unfair to us all," said Blundell. "I had forgotten the purport of the lady's wishes, and only thought of her picturesque attitude. I had forgotten the golden hair, too, Tom."

"Oh, don't apologise: we are not offended; are we, Elsie? Quite the reverse. And as for Pauline, she knows you *meant* to be complimentary, whatever you might *say*."

Blundell's look said she might, and Miss La Sarte caught it.

"It is growing late," said she, hurriedly "Let us come."

"And come you along with me, Elsie!" cried Tom. "You and I will make it up on our way home. And I won't tease you, nor bother you, nor anything," he added, in more manly tones than he had yet spoken.

They set off accordingly.

"A nice-looking pair," said Blundell, looking after them. "If it is a fair question, is she quite grown up?"

"She would say *quite*, if you asked her; but one ought not to be reckoned very deeply accountable at seventeen—ought one?"

"It is to be hoped not," he answered, with a sigh.

"Oh," said Pauline, astonished at his taking it so seriously, "I was only thinking of my little cousin's playful ways. She has such bright spirits that sometimes, now and then, she may be misunderstood. Not, of course, by those who know her."

"Oh, certainly not. The sins of seventeen don't count for much anyway."

("Flippant," thought she. "I dislike that way of speaking.")

"You don't agree with me?" said Blundell.

"I think," said Pauline, with an effort, "that you do not mean what you say. You did not mean *sins*?"

"Yes, I did. We may wipe out the sins of seventeen with a single stroke, I should say."

"Oh no."

"No?"

"We cannot wipe out one."

"Then may God have mercy upon us!"

The blood rushed to Pauline's cheek, and her heart seemed to stand still. What did he mean by forcing this strange conversation upon her? by this sudden fall from the smooth surface of ordinary topics to those deep themes which may not be touched but with awe and reverence? She did not know how to answer, how to speak at all. Tom's hints and confidences, was she to

distinguish them from his ordinary rattle? Had he, for once in his life, kept within the mark?

Her pulses beat fast, as she took the next few steps in silence.

"I suppose you think me dreadfully profane?" said Blundell at last, with a sort of smile.

"No, no;" that rendering not having even occurred to her.

"What then?"

What then, indeed! She could not well adopt Tom's phraseology, and state that she had been wondering whether he were indeed "half cracked" or not. But she was greatly at a loss; she could hardly bring herself to speak.

At last, "I know you are right," said she. "It is the very root of our religion. But—you took me rather by surprise."

"You take me by surprise now. I hardly understand what you mean." ("In fact, not at all.")

"Is not our only trust in the mercy of God?" said Pauline, reverently.

"Certainly."

"Well?"

"Well?"

They looked at each other.

"Apparently we are equally at sea," said he, at last. "I had better explain my views. I believe that we *can* wipe out the faults, follies, sins, if you will, of our youth, by a consistent determination to avoid them for the future. If we cannot do that, I say, God have mercy, for there is no hope for us."

He spoke sullenly in the tone of a man resolved to abide by his own judgment; and his gentle companion winced, even while she answered steadily, "That is not the Christian religion."

"How not?"

"If our only trust is in the *mercy* of God, how can we be expected to *justify* ourselves in His sight?"

"We must 'work out our own salvation.'"

“Work it out through faith.”

A gesture of impatience. “Is that what you mean? I have seen quite enough of that sort of thing. Faith is a very easy stepping-stone to heaven. If a man does not lead a consistent life, he is very glad to take hold of faith.”

“I should say he would be more glad to take hold of it if he *did*.”

“Should you? Ah!”

“You are trying to do what you never can,” said Pauline, roused by his slighting tone.

“What is that?”

“Make yourself fit to appear before your Maker.”

“I can at least keep myself from being unfit.”

She shook her head. Blundell set his lips as if determined to say no more, and an awkward silence ensued.

With vacant eyes fixed upon the ground they marched along in silence, equally anxious to renew the combat, yet each unwilling to take the initiative part. Finally they broke out together

“Mr Blundell——”

“Miss La Sarte——”

The voices ceased as simultancously and as suddenly as they began.

“This is absurd,” said he. “We need not quarrel because of a difference in opinions; and considering that our acquaintance only dates from yesterday, it is too much to expect that they should jump together all at once. That,” he continued in a softer tone, “we must wait for.”

“Oh no; we need not quarrel.”

“By the way, we were more in sympathy yesterday, were we not? We both tried the church, and were both driven away by the same cause to the same place. How curious to think of your being Tom’s sister!”

“Have you known him long?”

“I used to have the boys over from school, and let them run about the place. Tom was rather a favourite of mine. I have only met him once since he went to Oxford, however.”

"You wish to change the subject," thought Pauline. "Very well." But before she had time to say a word he recurred to it.

"Miss La Sarte, I'll tell you what it is. Religion does not come easy to a man. There is no use in saying it does. It does *not*. It goes against the grain. A fellow nas to set his teeth hard, and *make* himself keep to the right road, or he will go in the wrong. When a parson—a clergyman preaches about faith and conversion, and those sort of things to us, he makes a great mistake. We want to *do* something—to take hold of something—that is, if a man is in earnest at all."

"Then, Mr Blundell, what benefit do you suppose we derive from the death of our Saviour?"

"We are to be saved by it, if we lead a worthy life. Surely that is an easy question? Excuse my saying so."

"Can any one lead a worthy life?"

"Certainly. We can lead *unworthy* ones, at all events."

"We can *will* to lead a worthy or unworthy life, Mr Blundell, but the power is absent, unless a mightier Power be working in us."

"Possibly. I know nothing about that. A man knows which way he is going, and it is of his own free will that he takes one direction or the other. There are the others waiting for us," said he, in a tone of relief.

"Did you get any berries, Pauline?" Elsie confronted them with scarlet bunches of the mountain-ash in her hand. "You shall have some of mine. I knew you would never think of getting any for yourself."

"Where did you find them, Elsie?"

"Where? Right across the path, to be sure. Only fancy, Tom, they never saw the rowan-tree, and we were ten minutes twisting off the sprays!"

"We were deep in metaphysics," said Blundell, lightly. "You ran away from us, besides."

Pacing the deck under the low-hanging heavens, ere night set in, a restless form might have been dimly visible, whose restless spirit thus communed with itself.

“So! I have begun already. It is a curious thing now, this faculty of mine! Go where I will, meet whom I may, it is always the same. What had I to do with the fancies of this brown-haired nun? She is one of those pure, guileless beings, in whose nature goodness is inherent; it signifies nothing to her that her creed is made of gossamer.

“Pah! What a farce it is! Do what you like, take your fill of all that is going, and then—heaven is ready for you.

“I am a dolt to squander sense against nonsense, in other words to argue with a woman—even a pretty one. By Jove! how splendid she looked, with that upward cast of the eye, and that colour in her cheek! I must try the effect again; I love to see a brunette burn.

“She shall not move me, though. Fool as I am, and fool of fools as I have been, there is a chance given to me yet, and as I am a man the devil shall have none of me. That sight, that face—will it ever cease to haunt me? ‘The one shall be taken, and the other left.’ My God! it was Guy—who was—taken.”

“Ha! what have you got there? What book is that? eh? Did I not tell you I would have nothing of that sort where I am master? Eh? Speak out! What do you say?”

In confusion under so sharp and sudden a charge, the delinquent stammered and stuttered.

“What do you say? eh?”

“It ain’t a bad book, sir, in—indeed it ain’t. Look for yourself, sir. It was so precious slow lying out here, all day long, sir.”

The suspected volume was held up for inspection.

“‘The minister’s’—what, ‘woeing!’” read his master, with an expression of disgust. “Filling your mind with rubbish like that! Where is the book I gave you yesterday? Why do you not read it?”

“In—in my bunk, sir.”

“And there it may remain, I suppose. I might have

guessed as much. You will come to no good, I can tell you, Jerry, if you go on like this. There is more mischief done by blackguard books of this sort——”

“Please, sir, have you ever read it?”

“I? No, indeed!”

“It’s by a lady,” insinuated the culprit, eyeing the book lovingly, and then looking to see what effect the intimation produced.

“What has that to do with it, pray?”

“Might be more delicate, more properer,” murmured the lad, with crest-fallen countenance, as feeling that he had expended his last shot, and missed.

“You be hanged!”

The piteous expression and the pitiful apology were too much; Blundell burst out laughing, and passed below.

“There spoke the true blood! That was wild Ralph back again!” Blake, the captain, had heard the end of the discussion, and witnessed the retreat. “Blest if I don’t jump i’ my skin to hear them good old words pop up, like the cork out of a sody-water bottle, when it can’t be kept down no longer! Ay, it was different in Guy’s time. Bless us, it *was* different!”

“It ain’t the woin’ itself he objects to, d’yc sec?” said Jerry, slyly. “It’s only the readin’ of it.”

(Whistling).

“Duncan Gray cam here to woo!

Ha! ha! the woin’ o’t!”

which ancient ditty he had lately picked up in the Highlands, and relished extremely.

Blake paused. “So that’s it, is it?” said he, with slow perception. Then, lifting his thumb, he jerked it over his shoulder at the grey tower, which was by this time barely distinguishable in the shadow of the hill.

Jerry nodded.

“Whew! We are in for it then, Jerry, an’ no mistake!”

CHAPTER V.

“ WOULD COMPLIMENTS SUFFICE ? ”

“ The noble desire of pleasing may degenerate into coquetry, but coquetry is its caricature.”—FREDERIKA BREMER.

For the five following days, rainy mist, and misty rain, shrouded both sea and land.

The offer of a sail in the *Juanita* had been made and accepted; for Lady Calverley, pleased with Blundell's address, and satisfied with her nephew's assurance that his friend was one of the best fellows in the world, saw no objection. But the dawn, when it broke, invariably showed the same disconsolate prospect, and the expedition had to be postponed.

He must come up to the castle instead; and Tom's “ You'll look us up in the morning, at all events,” was the understood conclusion to every meeting.

“ Could anything be more tiresome ? ” moaned Elsie, when on the fifth day the heavens still gloomed as heavily as ever. “ He will go away soon. We shall never have our day—our delightful day: we shall look back to this time all our lives, and say, like the emperor of old, we have ‘ lost a day.’ ”

“ And it is so calm, too,” murmured, in gentler accents, Pauline.

“ Quite perfect,” added her brother; “ just the right kind of day for a sail. Not a breath stirring anywhere. We should be lying opposite the Point from morning till night, drinking champagne and talking metaphysics, eh, Polly ? ”

“ I suppose there is hardly enough wind—I had forgotten that.”

“ Enough? Do you imagine Blundell and I would stagnate on shore all this time, if there had been enough to puff out a nautilus-shell? He is regularly stuck here,

that is why he is so thankful to come up day after day. He'll be off with the first breeze that suits."

"It will be very mean of him if he is," said Elsie; "after saying so much about our going. We may never have such a chance again."

"You can't expect him to stay for that. He is on his way to the Lewes, and only put in here for the Sunday. He is as strict as a parson about that, you know—a precious deal stricter than many a parson would be, too. It is of no use Aunt Ella's asking him to dinner on Sunday, by the way; he would have to do penance half the night after it."

"Is he a Roman Catholic?" cried Elsie, opening her eyes.

"Something very like one," reflected Pauline: "I did not think of that before. Such a religion would naturally commend itself to his mind, if it is as Tom says. How stupid of me not to find that out! He has given me every opportunity."

Tom had not answered, being intent on a curve in the shepherd's crook he was whittling out of a hazel rod.

"Tom, why did you not tell us before?"

"Tell you what?" holding the stick at arm's-length before him.

"That he was a Roman Catholic."

"That who was? What are you talking about?"

"Mr Blundell."

"Blundell!" said Tom, putting down the crook, and looking at her; "what on earth do you mean?"

It had all been a mistake; Blundell was as sound a Protestant as any one among them—he had only used the word penance in jest.

"Though I daresay he would like to say masses for Guy's soul," continued Tom. "He has never been heard to mention his name since the day he died; and you see he has broken with Chaworth and the whole lot of them. He is quite a reformed character, Polly. Take my blessing."

Elsie glanced at her cousin; but it was impossible to discern whether she heard or not.

“ I wish he would take me off with him,” began Tom, after a pause, during which he had been whittling most industriously. “ How jolly it would be ! ”

Silence.

“ That is to say,” he relented, “ for a week or so. Of course I should come back here again. Why do you look so grave, Elsie ? ”

“ It would be such a disappointment.”

“ Would it ? Would it really, Elsie ? ”

“ So few yachts ever come here ; and the ones that do, never belong to people we know. Once Mr M'Phail offered to take us in his ; but mamma said he was a shopman, and would not let us go. I did not care what he was ; I would have gone, and so would Pauline. And now when mamma is quite pleased and willing—she is going herself if her cold is no worse—it is rather hard.”

“ I am sorry for you,” said Tom, seeking to hide his chagrin under the guise of pleasantry. “ Perhaps, however, it is as well that you are not particular as to your company—a shopman or a scamp—you will be all the more easily pleased.”

“ Tom ! What do you mean ? ”

“ Pauline knows. She does not mind, you see, so why should you ? She, like a wise woman, is content to ‘ take the gifts the gods provide ’ her, and ask no questions.”

Elsie looked from one to the other, scanning the two faces, between which there was so strong an outward likeness, so little real resemblance.

There was the same rich russet-brown hair, deep-set eyes, delicately-cut nose and chin, and warm colour in the cheek—but here it ended. It penetrated no deeper. It was lost in the expression of the eye and lip—lost in every word and thought.

They might have been taken as two distinct types of the race from which they sprang.

Pauline was a Huguenot of the past century, Tom a Frenchman of to-day.

Earnestness, sobriety, and elevation of purpose distin-

guished the sister ; instability and careless ease characterised the brother. It was impossible that there should be sympathy between them ; but there was a perfectly good understanding. Tom was fond of his sister, and proud of her, even while ridiculing her scruples, and disregarding such gentle admonitions as she occasionally sought to administer. He was fonder still of Elsie. An unkind word from *her* cut him to the heart. Her presence made him a man.

The three were assembled in the comfortable old-fashioned library, where, when alone, they usually spent their mornings.

The visitor who had daily joined them of late had not yet appeared ; and so agreeable had been his society, so thoroughly had he contrived in that short time to become one of themselves, that they were at a loss what to do without him.

Some time had passed without Pauline's taking part in the conversation.

She was musing with troubled eye and flushed cheek, until roused from her reverie by the sound of her own name.

Elsie was regarding her and Tom alternately, and Tom's "She is content to take the gifts the gods provide her," fell with meaning on her ear. Her eye flashed, and the colour started to her cheek.

"I took a brother's word," she said.

He had gone too far. One way or other he must eat his words ; but what to Pauline would have been mortification unspeakable, was a light thing to Tom.

"I thought I should draw her," he said, gaily. "He is right enough, Elsie—I only said it to tease Pauline."

"You said it to tease *me*."

"You? no. What did it matter to you? He is Pauline's friend, not yours. Think of a saint like Pauline taking up with a sinner like Blundell!"

"When will you give up that foolish habit of saying a thing and contradicting it the next moment?" cried his cousin. "Soon it will come to this, that no one will

believe a single word you say. You knew you were talking nonsense to Mr Blundell about Punch yesterday: there is nothing of the Willoughby pug about him; and he was given to me because his tail was too long, and his muzzle too pink.”

“Punch may thank me for giving him a pedigree, then,” replied he. “If it had been the other way, I could understand your indignation, but I was doing the very best I could for the old fellow.”

“That was it! You wanted to make him out to be something fine, knowing all the time he is not.”

“And pray, what greater proof of friendship would you ask for?”

He was incorrigible; Elsie betook herself to generals.

“I do hope you will be more careful before Unele Maeleay.”

“Who, pray, is Uncle Maeleay?”

“He is my unele—double-distilled essence of uncle; there, make what you can of that. Come, read me my riddle, I beg you to say, how is he my uncle, this Uncle Maeleay?”

“Poetry, Elsie! and you a Presbyterian! Eh, lass, d’ye no ken that pawetry and profawnity gang han’ in han’?”

“If you think you can talk Scotch, Tom, you can’t. It is the one thing you can not do. I advise you to leave off attempting it.”

“Unele Maeleay speaks it more correctly, no doubt.”

“I daresay he does. All very old people do——”

“Oh, that’s glorious! I shan’t give up hope then; in time I too may become a proficient.”

“You are so stupid. Uncle Maeleay is a dear, good, kind old man, whom everybody likes; mamma will be very much vexed if you are rude to him.”

“When did you ever know me rude to anybody? I have not the slightest intention of maltreating the aged relative; on the contrary, I have no doubt we shall become the best of friends. “But,” affecting alarm, “he won’t expect me to converse in Gaelic, will he? It

would be cruel—barbarous; I have not time to prepare—I have not even a dictionary. Help, Pauline! help! It is a trap, a snare, a device of the enemy; let us save ourselves by flight before the attack begins.”

Pauline raised her head, and beheld foolish Elsie wincing under this profound satire.

“You are mistaken, Tom,” said his sister, quietly. “You are preparing a surprise for yourself when you see Dr Macleay.”

“How?”

“He is one of the finest gentlemen I ever met in my life.”

Here was a statement! Here was an occasion for Tom's face to lengthen, widen, open, and spread itself out in every direction that could indicate extreme amazement.

Amazement, not incredulity—Pauline must ever inspire belief—but it was speechless, unwilling amazement.

Even Elsie looked appalled by the strength of her ally, and doubtful for a moment of the ultimate value of such assistance. She could not have said so much. Affectionately indignant as she had been on her great-uncle's behalf, in her heart she had been framing apologies for him; she had been conscious, under the brilliant scintillations of Tom's wit, of a secret desire that he had timed his visit otherwise.

Pauline's *coup* at once placed him on a higher level; and if Pauline would but stand to it, if Dr Macleay would but justify her eulogium, his niece's triumph would be complete.

Quick as thought she followed the lead. “I am only afraid of what *he* may think of *you*,” said she.

“Very true,” said Pauline.

But, unfortunately, she smiled. Tom laughed, then roared, and was himself again.

“We are very ill behaved,” all at once cried his sister, jumping up and kissing her cousin merrily. “We are dreadfully in need of some one to come and keep us all in order.”

“And here he comes!” said Tom, significantly. “Here he comes!”

“Oh, here he comes!” echoed Elsie. “Here he comes, Pauline!”

Pauline could not imagine what they meant. How should Mr Blundell keep them in order? What could make Tom so absurd? Mr Blundell was no very good example for any of them. Idling away his time, as if he had nothing in the world to do but amuse himself. Tom would never settle to anything till he went; and Tom had promised so faithfully to read, during this term.

Which of the schools was he going in for?

The conversation was quite edifying to listen to, when Mr Blundell came in, to take his part, and be appealed to, and have his opinion discussed.

Then came the walk, and Tom’s whisper to Elsie to let Blundell and his “Lorelei” go first.

“Aunt Ella said we were to be sure to let her know if he came, you know, Elsie, to be proper, and that; so, as we haven’t done that, we can send them on in front, and you and I can mount guard behind.”

“Oh, nonsense!”

“Not nonsense at all. I know that was what she meant. She told me to be *sure* to let her know. I said, ‘All right,’ and bolted. Now this is how I make it ‘all right,’ you see.”

“She won’t be pleased, Tom.”

“I can’t go back for her now.”

“Let us go on with them, then.”

“Go on with them! What should we do that for? They don’t want us, and we don’t want them. We have far better fun by ourselves. Now I’ll tell you all about what I am reading for. It’s all bosh what Pauline says, you know, about my not passing; I mean to go at it, when I go back, I can tell you. Now, are you attending?”

When they came back from the walk Dr Macleay had arrived, and was in the drawing-room.

He was a man of remarkable appearance. In person tall and spare, his features naturally striking, were rendered still more so from being shaded by a profusion of snow-white hair, which also softened the effect of a skin somewhat roughened and weather-beaten by constant exposure.

His smile was good-humoured; his whole aspect mild and benignant; but it was like the gentleness of the great ocean as it sighs itself to sleep after the tumult of many storms,—like the quiet of the forest when there are no leaves left in it to rustle.

He was a widower, and childless.

For many years past he had led a useful and unostentatious life in one of the Hebridean islands, holding an authority absolute among his own people, and undisputed, if not definite, over other parishes. He was now engaged to stay at Gourloch for three or four days, but longer than that they hardly hoped to detain him.

“You remember my niece Pauline?” said Lady Calverley; “and this tall boy? No? He is her brother. And—our friend, Mr Blundell.”

“And—our dog Mr Punch,” subjoined Elsie. “Mr Punch, shake hands. You needn’t bow, in case it should turn into bow-wow. See how good he is! He always knows exactly how to behave himself, and he always barks at the right people.”

“Witness my reception,” said Blundell. “He suspected me for two whole days,—did not give me the benefit of the doubt, which every man has a right to. One ought to be looked upon as an honest man till proved a rogue, Punch.”

“A dog’s code is the reverse. You have to produce credentials of honesty before he will believe you are not a rogue. And I am not sure,” continued Dr Macleay, with a humorous twinkle in his eye, “that he has not common-sense on his side.”

“Those collies at church on Sunday, every one of them suspected me,” said Pauline, “and they must have had their worst fears realised. Dr Macleay, do you think dogs ought to go to church?”

“Certainly not, Miss La Sarte. I command my old Tim to stay at home every Sunday, but——”

“Ho does not obey?”

He laughed and shook his head.

“Does he follow you into the pulpit?” asked Pauline.

“Not exactly; he waits at the bottom of the stairs. I pretend not to see him till we are at home again.”

“And what would he do, if some one were to rise and leave the church?”

“I cannot say; he has given me no precedent to judge by. Were any of you unwell on Sunday?”

Pauline, with spirit, related her adventure; but as she proceeded, her principal auditor became grave.

“I very much doubt that crossing,” he said. “The people about here may know when to take it, and probably have landmarks to guide them across; but, Miss La Sarte, it is not fit for you. What would you have done if Mr Blundell had not been there? The tide might have been back upon you before you had got half-way! Take my advice and don’t try unknown crossings again; you may not always find a deliverer so handy.”

She laughed and promised. She would not be tempted in future; but she could not wish to undo the past.

Did he, her so-called deliverer, share the feeling? Apparently he did. His eye boldly sought hers, as he interposed—“You do not grudge me my good fortune, sir?”

“Very much indeed,” replied the Doctor, with alacrity. “You are most unreasonable to suppose I could help grudging it. A man who goes about staring into pools of water ought not to expect to see any image reflected in them but his own. Especially——”

A significant movement of the head interpreted the meaning of the unfinished sentence.

“Nobody pays you and me any compliments, Punch,” said a low voice, talking softly to itself. “Never mind, Punch dear, we don’t want their nasty compliments!”

“Wise little woman!” said her uncle.

“Silly child!” said her mother.

Everybody said something—good, bad, or indifferent

and, in the hubbub, some one who had stooped down to pick up the dog's collar, whispered a few words which reached no ear but that for which it was intended, "How could you say that? Would *compliments* suffice?"

CHAPTER VI.

OFF TO OBAN.

"It is ill playing with edge-tools."

It would not be easy to describe the state of Blundell's mind at this time.

He was unhappy, aimless, and idle.

His nerves had received a severe shock from the terrible scene of which he had been a witness, and his consequent solitary wanderings had not tended to restore their tone.

Having broken away from all his former associates, he had no resources but in himself; and the life he had elected to lead for the remainder of his days had, in six short months, palled upon him.

The impression he had received was still too powerful not to keep its grasp upon his conscience; but he was restive under it, wretched and miserable.

At this point he meets Pauline.

Here is a woman, so good, so pure, so true, that she would seem to have been placed in his path, to lead him forward on the way to heaven.

Here is a beautiful, rational, lovable creature, all that fancy could suggest, all that reason could require.

Now then, why may he not go in and win?

She is free, that is certain.

An affected misapprehension, an elaborate apology, and three words from Tom, have set that point at rest.

What holds him back?

The prospect is bright, serene, perfect in all its details, and—it cannot allure him.

It is Elsie's doing.

Ah! that little chit! What business has she to interfere with his happiness? What business has that saucy smile to come between him and those grave starlike eyes?

She is but a plaything, a child. A good child enough, but still a child. Nothing in her—nothing.

He amuses himself now and then with the little puss? Of course he does. Why should he not? He likes children. They are great fun. He likes to tease and trick them, and cause them to cry and pout, and then kiss and be friends again.

Miss Elsie is rather too old for the kissing, but that only makes it the more piquant.

He laughs to think how she would have behaved supposing her to have been the fair adventuress on the rocks! He fancies how he could have terrified her by tales of quicksands and swiftly approaching tides! How he would have rallied her on her forlorn appearance! on her charming spirit of enterprise! What sly allusions he would have made to it afterwards, and how cross she would have been with him—for the moment!

With this he falls to considering what the real heroine of the act looked like; how she spoke, how she clung to his arm, how haughtily she held him at a distance one minute, and how helplessly she appealed to him the next!

He had never seen anything more charming than the reserve giving way to eagerness, girlish and natural, when he proffered a rescue.

What a fool he had been to think of her as married! He might have known—might have seen—might have guessed—could not imagine how he could ever have supposed such a thing! Pshaw! She was as unsophisticated a creature as possible, and he had called her a woman of the world!

The pendulum oscillates towards the Paulino point.

The more he thinks of her the more he sighs for her.

His soul loathes the memory of his wasted youth ; he shrinks from it—turns from it.

“ Pauline, Pauline, I want to love you. I want you to love me. You were sent to me. You ought to be mine. You would help me—would teach me—make me good as you are. And I *can't!* I *can't!* ”

His head falls down upon his hands, he breaks out into sobs and tears.

After the rain came wind.

What had before been a dull, slate-coloured, unbroken surface of water, was speedily changed into a raging sea, of varied hues and unceasing motion.

Friday night saw the change ; and the boat which brought Blundell ashore on Saturday morning rocked so violently, even in the sheltered part of the bay where he landed, that the utmost caution was needed to prevent its bumping on the rocks.

“ This is a new experience,” said he, cheerfully. “ We are going the round of bad weather in all its shapes. It is something not to fear being ice-bound— not that I should care, but the Juanita would. I am off to Oban to-night.”

The effect of this announcement was electrical.

Lady Calverley uttered a soft ejaculation of “ To-night ! ” and by an irresistible impulse glanced at her niece.

Pauline stirred not, raised not her eyes, but her countenance betrayed, by a curious, almost imperceptible *something*, that she had heard.

Tom's mouth, from force of schoolboy habit, puckered for the whistle which his maturer judgment refused to sanction. But Elsie alone, with dilated, sorrowful eyes, deprecated the cruelty of the sentence.

“ And we have never had our sail,” said she.

“ You would not come to-day ? ”

“ Why not ? There is enough wind, is there not ? ” with eager gaze fixed upon him.

“ Enough ? Oh, quite—a feast ! ”

"But you are going yourself?"

"Not I. We should be tacking from morning till night. I shall walk to the ferry."

"And the Juanita will meet you?" said Tom.

Blundell was looking at Elsie—Elsie who was hanging upon his words as if her very being depended on them.

Could he disappoint her in such a trifling matter? Would it not seem unkind, rude, a poor return for all the kindness he had met with? The whole party looked disconcerted by his leave-taking.

Thus in a few seconds of time all was changed.

"The Juanita will remain where she is. Miss Calverley, we may have better weather when I come back."

"You are coming back?" she cried, with sparkling eyes.

"Certainly. I hope to turn up again in a few days, like the penny of evil repute."

"Oh," rejoined Elsie, pacified, "then you will come in for our harvest-home."

"You are not going to have a harvest-home yet? The corn is not down."

"We are obliged to have ours beforehand, as we dance in the big barn, and it will be more than half full afterwards. Will you come?"

"Am I to come, Lady Calverley?"

"It will be very good-natured if you do. We are much in need of support. And you will allow your sailors to come likewise, I hope? They would be quite acquisitions."

He wished she had not asked them—wished, almost wished at least, that she had not asked him—wished from his heart there had been nothing to ask either him or them to. Whenever he desired to break away, he seemed to be hemmed in afresh. An excuse he might have made certainly: his brother had only been dead six months, and during these he had gone nowhere, he had joined in no festivities.

But such an apology never once occurred to him, so

strong in his mind was the feeling of aversion on other grounds.

Why had this nuisance turned up just now to add to his complications? What had a good woman like Lady Calverley to do with rioting and vulgar revelry? What would his men think, on whom he enforced abstinence with such an iron hand?

With a bland and grateful smile, "Thank you," he replied—"only too happy!"

"You will bring the old place down about your ears, Mary," commented her uncle, who had entered and silently greeted the visitor whilst the arrangement was being made.

"My dear uncle, we have our harvest-home every year, and have never had an accident yet."

"Half a hundred roaring, stamping, thumping ne'er-do-weels, every man-jack of them bent on digging his heels through the floor if he can——"

"And no one enjoying the fun more than Uncle Macleay," cried his saucy grand-niece. "And he has got to make a speech afterwards, which we have not. So *Viva!* How we will dance instead!"

"You dance?" said Blundell, with an air of surprise.

"To be sure we do, and you must dance too. Tom's dancing is the admiration of everybody."

This was enough—Blundell would not now have absented himself on any account.

"Well, I *hope* I shall be back in time," said he; "I will do my best. If I do not appear, you will know it is no fault of mine. Can I do anything for anybody in Oban?"

Nobody wanted anything done, and he rose to go; having announced his intentions, he could not now draw back.

"But Elsie has got your stick!" cried Tom. "Elsie, you must give it up. You try mine, and you will find it is just as light; or if you don't, I can cut you another to-day."

"Which won't be ready for a week. I will fetch it,"

to Blundell. "But you must let me have it when you come back. I can't walk about without one, now."

When she came down again, he was waiting for her in the hall.

"There, take it!" said she; "you will need it to help you across the 'Englishman's Sorrow.'"

"What may that mean, Miss Calverley?"

"Nothing," colouring under the gravity of his reply. "Only a name given to part of the Mohr Ben particularly difficult to climb. You will be glad of your stick then."

"I should be glad of a straightforward answer now."

She was struck mute.

"You meant that I should be glad of something to comfort me when I am away from you."

He had intended to put her in a passion, and had succeeded.

"How—how can you? What——" cried she, trembling all over. The door opened.

"Hush! never mind! It was all a joke; only a joke, mind. Don't be cross with me." (Louder.) "By the way, this Highland ball, am I to have the honour of opening it with you?"

She could not speak.

"Oh, you are not gone?" said Tom, in the doorway. "My aunt wants to know if you won't have luncheon, or wine, or something?"

"It could be on the table in five minutes," said the lady's voice behind.

"No, indeed, thanks. I shall get something at the ferry."

"Well?" to Elsie.

She turned away. "You can't dance a reel."

"I can't dance anything, but I think I can dig my heels into the floor as hard as even Dr Macleay could desire! Will you be my partner?"

So he wrung from her a sullen consent ere he went.

"He can't dance, indeed!" cried Tom, not over well pleased with what he had heard. "That's rather good, I think. When there was not a wake, nor a fair, nor a lark

of any kind going, within twenty miles of Blundellsaye, but he and Guy were in the thick of it!"

"He would not learn much dancing in that way."

"If he had not dancing he had drinking."

"Does he drink?" said his cousin, in a low voice.

"Drink? no. You can't watch him very closely, or you would see that for yourself. He won't even allow his poor fellows their glass of grog; and looks such daggers at the decanters here, that it is positively uncivil. I can't get my mouthful of port after dinner, for him. No, he doesn't drink, *now*."

"Was he very bad, Tom?"

There was an air of good faith about Tom, which compelled a certain amount of credence, even from the most sceptical of listeners.

"Bad as bad could be. The hardest drinker in the county," impressively. The slightest opposition, and he would have substituted "in England," but Elsie was subdued, and he had only to proceed. "They were both getting quite bloated and bottle-nosed. Then Guy dropped off, and Ralph pulled up. Just in time, I can tell you."

"He does not look as if——"

"Oh yes, he does. A man could tell it in a moment. Depend upon it," knowingly, "Uncle Macleay sees it as well as I do."

Apparently Dr Macleay did, for shortly afterwards he took the opportunity of questioning young La Sarte more closely about his friend than any of the rest of the party had thought of doing.

Tom was in his glory. "I knew him when I was at Stow. His place, Blundellsaye, is not far from there. He was in the Life Guards," feeling as if each statement clinched his man's respectability more satisfactorily than did the one before it.

"Indeed! you knew him very well?" rejoined the old gentleman, carelessly.

"Oh, by Jove, yes! All our fellows knew him. We were often over there. The most splendid place," pro-

ceeded Tom, launching out—"quite a palace, gardens, grounds, everything. And shooting—no end of shooting, best shooting in the county. Have you ever been in Berkshire?"

"Not lately. Not for several years."

"Perhaps you have seen his place?"

"Perhaps I have, but there are a great many fine places down there."

"Yes, of course," rather taken aback. "Of course, the first county in England for good houses."

"Do you think so? I am not sure that I agree with you. But it must have been a great thing for you to have had a good friend, near at hand, in your school-days."

"Well," said Tom, with a little laugh, "I don't know that he was a particularly *good* friend. They were a little bit wild, you know, he and his brother; but we don't say anything about that here."

"A married man?"

"Oh dear no—never was a less married man I should say."

"He seems to be very much at home with you all?"

"Quite a tame cat about the house. They all like him, you see; my aunt is quite taken with him."

"Your aunt!" thought the Doctor. "I wish your sister may not be taken with him too! He is doing his best to make her, and this rattlepate sees nothing!"

"Rather got the better of the old boy," reflected Tom. "Put him off the scent completely. Scored, and no mistake!"

Dull and spiritless was the party assembled in the drawing-room after dinner that evening.

Dr Macleay, indeed, did his best towards reanimating the little circle which had lately been so full of life and gaiety, but nobody seconded his efforts. Dry as dust sounded in their ears the topics of the day—bald and flat the chit-chat of cheerful garrulity. Tom was uneasily watching his cousin, who was restless, flighty, and out of humour; his aunt was oppressed by a nervous headache,

and the howling of the storm, which had increased towards night; and Pauline seemed chiefly anxious to be left to the indulgence of her own thoughts.

No one asked for music, no one cared for tea, no one seemed willing to do anything the others wanted. Of the three young ones, it may be said that each one of them was in a more unreasonable, contradictory, pick-a-quarrel mind than the other.

“Elsie, let us have a game at backgammon?”

“Oh no.”

“Chess, then?”

“I hate chess!”

“Béziqne?”

“Mamma does not like the sight of cards.”

“Cards? It is the most innocent game in the world! Who ever heard of gambling at béziqne? And I suppose that is what she objects to?”

“There is not a pack in the house, at any rate.”

Tom raised the question, “What shall we have?”

“Nothing.”

“You are in a nice mind to-night,” said he, eyeing her. “May I ask if I have done anything to offend you?”

Poor soul! no. That power was not in his hands. If he could but have offended her, there might have been hope for him.

“No, Tom,” said she, wearily, “how should you?”

“It is all very well for Pauline,—she never favours us with much conversation; the only difference is that to-night we are to be deprived of any—but you, this is not your way at all. Some people might even insinuate that a certain small personage in days gone by was called a chatterbox—eh, Elsie?”

“Oh, I can chatter, if you like! There is so much to chatter about, is there not? Plenty of fun and news, and everything is so lively and entertaining, ourselves in particular.”

“So that’s it, is it?” said he, slowly. “You are dull. I am sorry; I might have guessed that before. *It is*

stupid work for you to be left with only us and Dr Macleay to amuse you——”

“To be *left!*” said Elsie, rather pale. “What are you talking about?”

His bolt had struck. He could only answer gloomily, “You know best,” and silence fell between them.

“Tom, I beg your pardon; I was very disagreeable. Please, Tom, forgive me.”

He nodded, with a watery smile in his eyes that touched her heart.

“Tom, I will play any game with you that you like.”

“Elsie, I had rather you did not *play* with me at all.”

CHAPTER VII.

A TALK IN THE TURRET-CHAMBER.

“Wer? Ich? Ich, eines mannes Bild,
In meinem reinen Busen tragen?
Dies Herz, von Himmelsglanz erfüllt,
Darf einer ird'schen Liebe schlagen?

—*Jungfrau von Orleans*

Next morning found them all in better minds, as became the day. The elements likewise had exhausted their angry feelings. All was bright and peaceful.

Dr Macleay conducted divine service in a small church within a mile of the castle, the relieving a sick brother of his Sabbath duties being the primary object of his visit there. He had been unable to come the week before, and hence Pauline's walk and its consequences.

“Paulie, do you not think it was a little, a very little too long?”

“No, Elsie, I was surprised when it was over.”

“So was I, for I thought it would never be over. But I should not say so to any one but you.”

She was nestling her head down in her cousin's lap

over which the golden hair, unbound, fell like a veil. The two had retired to the turret-chamber, had settled themselves within the little recess, and, I grieve to add, had bolted the door against poor Tom, who was hovering somewhere in the vicinity.

"It was a beautiful sermon," said Pauline.

"Yes, I daresay. Mamma is always in such spirits when Uncle Macleay is going to preach. I had not a word against the sermon, Paulie; only I thought it might have been said in a little less time. You have not such long sermons in England?"

"Our service is longer, much longer. On the whole, they come to the same in the end."

"To tell you the truth, it was Tom I felt for. He kept changing his arm about, and fidgeting with his rose, and it put me out so, that I grew as bad as he. Then I did wish Uncle Macleay would have left out the words 'fourthly' and 'fifthly;' it would not have called one's attention to its being such a length if he had said all he had to say, without marking the intervals so emphatically."

Pauline laughed.

"Paulie, I always think you are so good about our church."

"Don't you know that I am a Calvinist by descent?"

"And I am a Lutheran by inclination. Your churches, or better still, your cathedrals, I do delight in them! I would never go to a Presbyterian church again if I could get to one of these. Does this one of ours not strike you as horrible when you first come? Does it not, Paulie?"

"The music is rude, certainly," replied her cousin; "and the building—well, the less said about it the better. But the people and the preacher—Elsie, do you ever think what a noble life your uncle leads? When he was talking last night, telling us those strange wild tales of what he has actually himself gone through, has known, and seen with his own eyes, he seems to me to turn into one of the heroes of the first Church, 'full of faith, and power, and the Holy Ghost,' going from place to

place teaching and preaching, in spite of every kind of danger and hardship. How lightly the things of this world seem to sit upon him! He is not ignorant; he knows and is interested in all that is going on, far more than any of us are—but he chooses not to mix in it. And such abilities, such energies, as he expends upon these simple people! I never heard the Word of God explained with greater *care*, greater *pains* than we had it to-day. The language was so well chosen——”

“Paulie, you are quite enthusiastic.”

“Yes, I am; I felt *stirred*. It did one good to be there.”

“I am glad he came when you were with us.”

“And the people, how attentive they were! And what long distances they had come!” continued Pauline—the romantic, as well as the devotional side of whose character had been touched. “Did you notice how they sat almost motionless from first to last, as if they would not lose a word if they could help it? I could not keep from thinking of the ‘two or three’ gathered together, for, after all, we were so few; but I do believe, Elsie, He was in the midst of us.”

“Then only Tom and I were naughty,” said Elsie, ruefully. “I saw how you were listening; and when he stopped, if your eyes had not been so firmly fixed upon him, I should have thought you had been asleep, you started up so.”

“Asleep, dear?”

“I know you were not, of course. You sat like a statue from beginning to end. You are a very good Pauline.”

“Elsie!” Pauline was actually blushing. “I am ashamed to tell you, but—but—I was not attending at that moment. I don’t know how it was, but just then my thoughts had wandered, and the end did take me by surprise. I was thinking—for I ought to tell you the truth—whether the sea-air would take the colour out of my lilac hat if I were to wear it when we go in the yacht!

“Then you are the best Pauline that ever was, to come and confess it! And I love you twenty hundred thousand times better for that, than if you could repeat the sermon word for word from beginning to end.”

“I don’t know how it was,” pleaded Pauline.

“Never mind how it was; you looked so good, so perfect, sitting there, in that pretty white lily bonnet; and then to think—— But, Paulie, I don’t mind telling you now,—I did not listen *at all!* I hardly heard a single word, I was so restless; and I could not help thinking of other things all the time. Indeed, I do usually attend to Uncle Macleay, and never found his sermons long before.”

“You were thinking?” said her cousin, slowly.

“Yes, about all sorts of things. Paulie, how strange this last week has been! We seem to have been living quite in a world of our own, don’t we? Isn’t it odd, when one comes to remember that it was only this day week you first met Mr Blundell?”

“Elsie, I want to say a word to you—about Mr Blundell.”

“What about him?” a quick movement, a sudden alertness of reply.

“You see we have only Tom’s word to depend upon for all we know of him. And you know what Tom’s word is. I daresay he may be quite correct on some points—indeed Mr Blundell has let us know that of his own accord; but Tom contradicts himself so, as to others, that it is impossible to trust him.”

“I should think it was.”

“Dr Macleay let drop a hint of this kind to-day. Not in the least as if it concerned any of us; he only suggested in a general way that young men were not the best judges of each other, and let me see whom he was thinking about. I could hardly tell how it was done, but somehow it startled me to find how completely we are in the dark as to what he *is*, though we may know what he *has*. So I thought I would just remind you, Elsie.”

“But why me?”

"I was afraid that perhaps you might have been—thinking—about him, dear."

"Who? *I? I* think!" exclaimed Elsie, in unfeigned astonishment. "What can you mean, Pauline? It is *you*, not *I*—"

"Elsie!"

"This is all very fine! You, who are so wise, and so busy with your nice little motherly admonition—take care of yourself, Madam Pauline! No, you need not turn your great eyes on me with that pathetic look—don't you think that I have eyes as well as other people? Yes, mamma, is it you?" in answer to a tap at the door.

"I am come indoors, dear."

"Yes, mamma, I'll follow in a moment. Where is my Bible?" said Elsie, looking about her. "So," kissing her cousin, "farewell for the present; and, Pauline," in her car, "there is an old song that runs—

'Look well to thyself, and take care of thyself,
For there's nobody cares for thee.'

For '*nobody*' read '*somebody*,' my dear."

Tuesday dawned, Tuesday broke into a gracious, glorious summer noon-tide, Tuesday drew towards night.

In the little room, with flushed cheeks and shining eyes, Pauline is braiding her brown hair; in the vast untidy wilderness below, Elsie stealthily crimps her golden locks. Tom, in the white attic above them all, resolves with infinite satisfaction on the absolute necessity of a second shave. He sings as he is dressing: his heart is light, for his cousin has been more than usually gentle with him all day. Not a word has passed among the three as to any expected arrival.

They have all assisted at the decorations, visited the barn, and inspected the supper-table.

Now they have retired to make their toilets, for the lanterns are being lit, and it is long since the first guests made their appearance.

"They're come!" Old Davie was nodding his head

in at the drawing-room door, his breath short with excitement. "They're come! The men are come!"

"Which men, Davie?"

"The men—the men from the yacht." (He pronounced the word exactly as it is written.) "Will I put them in the barn with the rest, or take them in my room?"

"Which shall he do? Pauline, say." Lady Calverley was apt to depend upon her niecc.

"Is it not time for all of us to go? That would make it right either way," suggested Pauline.

"Eh! which does her leddyship say?" cried the old man, who was deaf, and troubled with many cares. "They are waiting down by a' this time."

"Ask them to go in," replied his mistress, with dignity. "We are coming now ourselves, Davie."

"Ye mun wait till the folks are in. The carpet's no down yet. Eh, my leddy, ye *mun* wait," for she was advancing. "There's a carpet for the hail length o' the road, an' whac's it for but yoursel, an' the Doctor?"

"We did not need a carpet, surely. It is quite dry to-night."

"Ye mun hae your carpet," resolutely rejoined Davie. "It's no consistent that ye should be walkin' wi'oot a carpet this time o' the night."

"So much trouble," murmured she, giving way, however.

"Let them tak the trouble. Oo, ye may lauch," muttered the old man, offended at the merriment he saw on every side; "but when there's naebody but me, and a' the folks to sec to, an' this an' that, it's veel there's some—ay, ay——" mumbling all the way he went, as he trotted down the passage.

"*Noblesse oblige*, Aunt Ella," said Tom, gaily.

"And he has not been long, at any rate," added the Doctor, as Davie, returning, flung open the door with an air of ignoring the previous contention, and announced magnificently, "The people are waitin' your pleasure, my leddy."

Forth they sallied : Lady Calverley in her comfortable black velvet, with an eye to the draughts, and the airy nature of the ball-room ; Pauline and Elsie in their white frocks and woollen wrappers ; Dr Macleay and young La Sarte in their chilly, cold-giving, evening suits, which they had not been allowed to evade even for once.

“Be as you always are ; it is best,” Tom’s aunt had replied, in answer to his piteous appeal ; and the Doctor, with his usual good-humoured “Well, well,” had given in at once. Tom must perforce give in likewise.

“Now, Elsie !” He claimed the right to stand up with his cousin.

“You know I promised to dance the first with Mr Blundell.”

“Blundell !” as if it were quite a new idea. “He is not coming, depend upon it. He never meant to come ; it was all smoke about his being back in time ! Twenty to one he sends for the Juanita to Oban ! Come !”

She hesitated.

“You need not wait for *him* !” cried Tom, contemptuously ; “you must begin, the people are all looking at us. If he comes, there is Pauline.”

She suffered herself to be persuaded—she could not help it.

Then began the scene forecast by Dr Macleay.

The shouting, the stamping, the digging of heels into the rafters ; the full flow of a Highland reel was at its height, though the dancing had not yet assumed the daring, joyous, out-and-out character which would follow later in the evening, when there was a movement of curiosity at the lower end of the ball-room, and a tall stranger walked quietly up one side to the corner where the hostess and her party were assembled.

“You did not wait for me,” said a voice in Elsie’s ear.

She was standing still, on the outskirts of the Reel a Thulichen, whilst Tom and a swarthy young shepherd strangled each other in the middle ; and had seen him come.

“You should have been here in time,” retorted Miss

Coquette, throwing back the golden head with all its wavy *rouleaux*; "I could not keep the people waiting."

"Not five minutes? And I have walked twenty miles to be here to-night."

"You cannot be fit for dancing, then. Go and sit by mamma. Pauline is not dancing, either," she added, significantly.

Then her turn came again.

All the lookers-on had collected round this set, and Tom was the hero of the moment.

"Yaish, yaish—a pretty lad—a weel-faured lad. An' goot at the danshin. Ay, ay—very goot at the danshin. An' he'll be for Miss Ailshie, wull he no? I'm shoor! An' he'll be for the shootin', and the feeshun, an' whatever else. An' thonders the English laidie, sister to him—that'll be her shentleman, is it no? An' a pritty man, too. 'Deed ay. What for no? Tougal, my man, is there nae word o' the Talisker?"

The "Talisker," indeed, was singularly long in making its appearance, and eventually it leaked out that none was to be forthcoming till supper. This was a new thing at Gourloch, where the lady's hospitality had hitherto been exercised entirely through her factotum Dougald, and there had been whisky in abundance.

On this night my lady, with decision, gave her orders that it should circulate more sparingly.

"They seem very merry," observed Blundell, who stood by Pauline's side, looking on the scene with an aspect inappropriately stern; "wonderfully merry, considering what a world we live in! Some people would go dancing to their graves, I believe!"

"This is surely an innocent enough amusement," replied she, in some surprise. "These good people enjoy themselves thoroughly after a very harmless fashion. And I must say I prefer it as a spectacle to what one meets with in our modern ball-rooms."

"I never go to balls."

"Hark to Blundell!" whispered Tom to his cousin, as the last words reached their ear in the sudden lull caused

by the cessation of the music. "He is coming it strong, is he not? He thinks that will take with Pauline, you know. I daresay he never goes to balls; and why? Because they used to be too soft for him, and now he is too soft for them."

"You never go to balls!" said Miss La Sarte in answer to the last remark.

Then she paused for two reasons.

She was no ball-goer herself, but a sudden repugnance seized her to naming what might appear to be a coincidence of opinion; also she did not know what now to say.

"I am here to-night against my will," continued he. "Life is too great a matter to be spent in jiggling about like idiots or mad people."

"This is hardly a question of spending lives, is it?"

"I see you are bent on defending it at all hazards. I am sorry to disagree with you, but I thought in a matter of this sort *you* would have been on my side."

"Is it the dancing itself you dislike, or the gathering together for any amusement?"

"Either—both. Every one here would be better at home."

She almost laughed in his face. "Pray don't say so to my kind aunt—she would be quite distressed. I am very sorry you are not enjoying yourself; but, since you are here, you must try to bear with us for a little."

He recovered himself.

"What a bear I am! Miss La Sarte, you must let me alone when I am in a temper like this. Could you not see I was only trying to make myself disagreeable? Yes, you could, you must have seen it; and you would not allow yourself to be provoked; you are too gentle, too merciful. But one thing you have done, you have made me ashamed of myself. Pray forget, if you can, the nonsense I have been talking."

She was about to reply, but some one else claimed her attention.

It was an ancient dame, inquiring, with profound respect, "Wull ye no be danshin yersel, young laidie?"

"I am a bad hand at it, Nelly."

"Oich, fie! It is yersel that says it. It is not that, neither."

"No one would care to have me for a partner."

"'Deed ay wad they then! 'Deed wad they too! It is Tougal wad be the prood man——"

"Come with me," said Blundell, hastily; "that is, if you will. You shall forgive me thus."

"And you and I will stand opposite to them, Elsie," cried Tom.

"Oh no, indeed! I must not dance with you again. It is Dougald's turn now; he is already rather out of countenance because I did not begin with him——"

"Oh, never mind him, the next will do——" began Tom.

"Your cousin is right," interposed an angry interfering voice. "Why should you wish to keep her from amusing herself? Miss La Sarte and I need no *vis-à-vis*; we are quite willing to sit down again. In fact you would rather, would you not?" turning to her with an "*I would rather*" written in his face.

She meekly acquiesced, and they retreated as spasmodically as they had advanced.

"So you've hung fire, have you?" said Tom, coming back with a rosy-cheeked, straight-backed matron whom he had selected. "And Elsie's off too! Never mind, Mrs M'Corquodale, we will take our places here, and some one else will be sure to come. Here you, Hector, there's no one here. That's right. Now we're ready."

"Tom is in great force," said his friend, observing him narrowly.

And indeed the gaiety and good-humour of the young leader of the revels won the hearts of all around him. Easy without being familiar, genial yet not jocose, his genuine and hearty abandonment to the pleasures of the evening placed him in a light so favourable that Lady Calverley was proud of her nephew, Pauline of her brother.

Elsie, infected with a like spirit, fitted hither and thither, all smiles, sparkles, and animation.

She and Tom by their united exertions left no one unattended to, and the good-humour and admiration of the company rose to a climax when the pair of blithe young creatures hand in hand came gaily bounding down the middle, amidst two long lines of faces awaiting their turn in the old-fashioned country-dance.

“Now then, up there, look alive! Begin a set, you people in the middle! That’s right, Alister! Come along! Now, Elsie! Polly, what are you about? Why don’t you and Blundell have a turn? It’s the best fun in the world!”

Thus prompted, there was no escape for the recusant.

Hitherto, although Miss La Sarte had danced, he had not been her partner; he had been leaning with folded arms against the wall, silently looking on. He had now to ask her inclinations, and as they were not antagonistic, places were found for them.

“Mr Blundell does not help half so much as I thought he would,” whispered Elsie to her cousin. “Is there anything the matter with him?”

“Not in the least. We were having rather a sober conversation just now, perhaps that is it.”

“Oh, is that it? But you might keep your sober conversations for another time; we want every one now to help in making it pass off well.”

“You and Tom are doing that.”

“Tom is a host in himself,” said Elsie. “Tom, I am praising you. You are behaving admirably. I don’t know really what we should have done without you. I only wish other people would do their parts equally well,” she added, distinctly.

“Miss Calverley thinks we are shirking our duties,” said Blundell to his partner.

“Not Pauline.” Elsie looked up at him with fearless eyes. “But I do think you might exert yourself to be a little more generally agreeable.”

“Ought I? What must I do? You sent me away yourself, and told me I was not fit for dancing.”

"You might go about among the people, and talk to them."

"But I am not to dance?"

"No one would expect you to be very much inclined to jump about after a twenty-mile walk."

"Have you walked so far to-day?" said Pauline. He had not told her.

Blundell laughed. "I am not quite such a poor creature as that comes to. My walk was only a good preparation. It is you who have stopped my evolutions," to Elsie. "It was you who laid the embargo on me, which prevented my showing off this evening. I might have been twirling and pirouetting in the midst of as admiring a circle as gathered round Hector just now, if you had not commanded me to forbear."

"You are wonderfully plausible. Pray, when may we expect to see you begin? I shall be one of the admiring circle of spectators."

"You still will not trust me?"

"How trust you?"

"You will not dance with me?"

"*Elsie!*" It was Tom, with a stamp of the foot in his voice, and hands stretched out for hers. Before she could answer she was whirled away.

After all, it had been rather pleasant nonsense, and of course he had had to make some excuse; it was absurd that he and Pauline should sit flirting together the whole evening; she hoped there would be an end to that for the present, at least.

The country-dance was over, and the indefatigable performers were grouping for the last reel before supper.

"Elsie, you had better dance with Blake. He is Blundell's skipper, rather a swell, and he is standing there with no one to speak to. Now, Mr Blake, Miss Calverley is going to take you for her partner this time."

"Me, sir? I'm, I'm—it's pertickler kind of you, sir, and of the young lady——" with a bow to each. "But I ain't quite right on my legs—borned that way. Very much obliged indeed, sir." And the flattered skipper

retreated, thinking vastly higher of the entertainment than he had done previously.

"You had better take one of them," counselled Tom. "They are all hanging together like a pack of sheep! Here you," said he, catching hold of our friend Jerry, and thrusting him forward—"you stand up here: and mind you do your best, for you have got Miss Calverley for a partner."

Jerry, fiery-red to the roots of his hair, and retreating inwardly from all his garments through very limpness, obeyed; and Tom, bidding his cousin keep the set open for him, turned away to match together and hustle to their places as many more of the company as had not already paired, and could give no good reason why they should not be joined together.

"Am I to have the pleasure, at last?"

Blundell had heard Tom gallantly soliciting the hand of the blooming village schoolmistress, and had found his way down to the lower end of the room forthwith.

"No, indeed! I am dancing with one of your men."

"With *whom*?"

"One of your sailors. There!" indicating the unfortunate Jerry, who stood confronting her with a face so drawn and withered, that the strongest solution of alum poured down his throat could alone have produced a like result.

"Jerry," said his master, quietly, "go and find some one else. And know your place better another time," added he, in a voice that threw yet more alum into the already stiff potation.

"As if it warn't bad enough already," muttered the poor lad, as he turned away. "An' I could ha' sworn it was the t'other one too."

"How dared the fellow presume!" exclaimed Blundell, passionately. "How could your cousin allow it! Pray forgive me this unintentional annoyance," taking her hand; "such audacity——"

"It was not his fault. He was told to do it."

"Told! Who told him?"

"Tom did, from me."

“From you? It was a great mistake. Tom should have known better—he should not have done it.”

“He should, if I told him.”

Her heart was swelling proudly, but she would not hear the absent condemned. At the moment, in her confusion of spirit she fully believed that the idea itself, not merely the acquiescence in it, had been hers.

“It was a great mistake,” repeated Blundell, dictatorially. “You ought not to dance with men like these.”

The hand he held was snatched from his. “Excuse me,” said Miss Calverley of Calverley, with the frown of an empress; “it is for me to judge what I ought and what I ought not to do in matters like this!”

And without another word, she left him.

CHAPTER VIII.

BY-PLAY AT THE BALL.

“But court na anither—though jokin’ ye be,
For fear that she wile your fancy frae me.”

—BURNS.

Here was Elsie in a new light!

He had seen her grave, merry, bold, timid, and on the verge of tears, but whatever might be *her* mood, she had never moved *him* in the slightest degree before.

Now, the child had suddenly asserted her womanhood, and discomfited him. He looked so foolish, so crestfallen, standing there where she had left him, that he felt an explanation was due to himself. Due, but to whom? Pauline, of course. It did not occur to him to care whether any one else had observed the incident or not.

Apparently Miss La Sarte was too deeply engaged in conversation to have observed anything. Her face was turned upwards, her slim, willowy figure was slightly thrown back from the waist, and she was smiling. He

thought he had never seen her look so well, but he thought it with a pang, for some one else had looked equally well a moment before.

The smile was still upon Pauline's cheek when he approached—a preoccupied, interrupted smile, with which he had nothing to do. He was compelled to wait ere he could gain her attention.

“I had to put a stop to your cousin's dancing with one of my men,” he began. “A rough fellow. Lady Calverley would not have liked it. It was Tom's fault——” here he remembered he was speaking to Tom's sister, and stopped.

“Tom is thoughtless,” said she, indifferently. “It did not occur to him, I daresay.”

“Nor to your cousin either; she is much displeased with me.”

“Is she? I daresay you deserve her displeasure.”

(“*You* are coming out in a new light too!” cried Blundell, inwardly. “What is the meaning of it?”) Aloud, “Why should you suppose I deserve it?”

“Why should she be displeased with you?”

“She thought I was scolding her.”

“Then probably you were. I have no doubt my cousin behaved admirably, and” — with a charming smile—“you must excuse me now, I am going to dance with Mr Carr.” Which, being interpreted, meant that Pauline was very angry.

Mr Carr was a clumsy young man, whose figure appeared to have made up in quantity what it lacked in quality.

As (having taken Lady Calverley's shooting) he lived in a rude hut on the moor, with no accommodation in it for any one but himself and his servant, it might be supposed he was sometimes rather at a loss, and she had bethought her of summoning him to assist at the harvest-home.

His assistance proved pretty much what might have been expected.

He had no interest in the proceedings beyond as they

amused himself; and as he had not appeared for an hour after the time specified, and had then found his hostess alone, save for the company of one white-headed old gentleman, he had meditated a speedy retreat.

The discovery of two pretty girls belonging to the house party had changed his mind; and he was considering which of the two to begin with, when his heart suddenly sank like lead. He had caught sight of Blundell and Tom, both in evening dress.

There was no reason why the spectacle should have affected him. It may be a matter of opinion whether or no he was not the more correctly attired of the two; certainly had he been in full dress, and the rest in morning clothes, it would have been infinitely more unpleasant.

But on this point numbers always have carried, always will carry, the day.

The consciousness of being comfortably and suitably clad fails to make happy the man who is habited unlike other men, especially if his is the convenient, theirs the becoming attire.

From this moment Mr Carr became a nonentity

There was no hope now of his flourishing about, chattering on the dance, being the principal figure in the room. This could have been borne by every one but himself. But neither was there any hope of his being a useful, efficient ally, and all were disgusted with him. He had been allowed to nurse his spleen in obscurity until Miss La Sarte, for purposes of her own, had drawn him forth, smiled upon him, and partially restored his self-complacency.

"You are not going to dance with that lout?" said Blundell, in a low aside.

"Why not? Are you going to scold me next?"

"Should you prove as refractory. Let me rescue you," offering his arm as he spoke.

"No, indeed; how can I? You would not have me behave so ill to this poor man. We have all neglected him quite enough to-night."

"Say you would, if you could, then."

"Our dawnce, I think," said Mr Carr, approaching, and looking at the interloper as if he feared even yet the morsel were to be snatched from his lips.

Fortune smiled upon him, however. Miss La Sarte showed no inclination to linger, and that other fellow who had been making all the running with her up to this time was now left in the lurch. So he commented, and the reflection was balm to his wounded spirit.

Blundell, however, was not so deceived—he had got his answer, though not in words.

"Pauline"—Lady Calverley seized upon her niece—"let this be the last. Elsie is growing quite wild. I don't know what odd-come-short she has got hold of now, but she ought not to dance with any but our own people."

"This is going to be the last, Aunt Ella."

"And do say a word to her, my dear; she heeds you more than she does me."

"What about? I think she is behaving as well as possible," said Pauline, perversely.

"My dear!"

"I do. I can't see any harm in her dancing: she has been doing it to please others the whole evening; she has never had a thought for herself. I think she deserves praise rather than blame."

Pauline was incomprehensible, and the perturbed lady fell back upon her uncle.

"Don't you think we have had enough of this?"

"I have had enough, Mary, and I daresay you have; but I doubt we are in the minority. Look at that scape-grace!" regarding with perfect benignity Tom's wind-mill figure and radiant countenance. "Do you hear him?—do you hear the young jackanapes? Making a din fit to bring the place down."

"He is but a boy," apologised Tom's aunt. "He forgets himself sometimes."

"Then let him forget himself as often as he can. A man who forgets himself has good stuff in him. What is his sister about, that she leaves all the work to little Elsie? Ah! I am glad to see her standing up at last."

On the whole, Lady Calverley was ill used by her confidants.

"Well done! well done, sir!" This from the Doctor, clapping his hands loudly and with hearty approbation as Tom, panting, gasping, and using his handkerchief in a very different manner from that which had amused Punch the evening before, drew to his side.

"That *was* a reel!" cried he. "Did you see my partner's performances? She has nearly killed me! I never saw such a woman to dance in my life! And she is the mother of a dozen children, all here to-night, and all dancing like good uns!"

"Ay, ay," said the Doctor. "I hope you will foot it as nimbly when you come to be a grandmother, Elsie."

"I hope she won't ask me to foot it with her," said Tom. "I know what would happen. I should never survive it."

"The supper is ready; will your leddyship take your place the noo, or wull ye hae them a' in first?"

"Take them in first, Davie, and we will follow when you come for us."

Accordingly, before many minutes had passed there was an obvious diminution of the crowd.

It took nearly half an hour ere the emigration was finally accomplished; but, soon after the echoes of the last footsteps had died away, the lady of the manor and her friends were summoned.

Blundell was standing by Pauline when the messenger came; Tom was kissing his aunt over her shoulder, as he enveloped her in her furs; and the Doctor was kindly trying to engage Mr Carr in conversation, and make him feel less of an intruder into the circle. Elsie was resting on a bench at a little distance.

The wraps were now brought forward. Blundell took up his companion's, a soft, white, cloudy shawl, and drew it round her; then he looked at the little pale-blue bundle left on the seat, and hesitated.

Already their hostess was advancing on Tom's arm, and he fancied he caught a rueful glance directed to the

blue shawl. He took it up, and smiled to Pauline. "I must make my peace with the little one," he said.

How she received this he could never tell; Mr Carr had almost jumped forward, had pressed in front of him, and had led her off with an air of triumph.

The Doctor, after a momentary hesitation, had followed; there was no one left to interfere.

"I hardly know if I may venture to offer my poor services," began Elsie's cavalier, in a voice that could be, when he chose, exquisitely modulated. "Will you take this from my hand?"

A slight formal inclination, and "Thank you," was all his politeness obtained.

"You have heated yourself with all this dancing; is it safe to go out into the night air all at once? Had we not better wait a few minutes?"

"I'm not in the least afraid. The others have gone, you see."

Steadily her eye met his. He was on the wrong tack; he must try another.

"Come, then," carelessly. "But don't go and say I gave you cold. By the way, have you forgiven me yet?"

"No." Short, sharp, emphatic.

"No? Are you such an implacable person? I should never have guessed it."

"You forgot yourself altogether just now, and it is not the first time."

This was the little speech which had been carefully prepared, whilst with bland and gracious mien Miss Calverley dispensed her closing favours. If their recent disagreement were not adverted to by him, neither would she say a word; if he recalled it, this was what he should get.

Evidently it was unexpected; he looked surprised, puzzled; and they walked the whole length of the ball-room in silence.

At the door-step stood Davie, lantern in hand. "Be quick, Miss Elsie! be quick! They're waitin' on me, and I canna be wanted longer——"

"Go on before," said Blundell, authoritatively; "we will follow. Now," said he, firmly, turning round to his companion, and putting his hand upon her arm, "you will tell me what you mean."

"It is easily told. You do not treat me with the courtesy which is my right, and which I expect from you in the future."

Likewise carefully prepared. It was plain he stood at disadvantage, having had no rehearsal.

His "That is a grave charge, Miss Calverley," was rather a lame conclusion to some moments' thought.

"It is a true one."

"May I ask how long I have lain under your displeasure?"

"Always." Terse, if not grammatical.

"Since the first day?"

"Yes; since the first day."

"And you will not state particulars?"

"No."

She moved forward, and he mechanically offered his hand to conduct her down the steps.

Still nothing more was said. It was apparent he was pondering the matter over, and her heart sank a little as she saw she had not done with him.

"Just tell me," said he, at last, as they entered the dark, old-fashioned portico. "Just give me some idea what I do that so vexes you; and I give you my word for it, that you shall never have cause to complain again."

"It is not—not anything in particular, rejoined she, skirmishing, like a wise general, from the heights. "It is the way you always speak to me, always look at me, as if you were saying things to see how I would take them, to—to play with me. You never behaved so to Pauline."

A faint smile stole over his face; he had caught the clue.

"Miss La Sarte is some years older than you are; you must not expect to be treated exactly the same."

It was a risk, but the event justified his temerity.

"I did not expect it," said Elsie, quite humbly; "I did not expect to be treated *quite* the same. But still, if you would not make such a great difference, if you would not show it so plainly, it would—the others would—you know——" she broke off suddenly—"I am not a child now."

"Certainly not," said Blundell, gravely.

"And mamma is so vexed if people think I am younger than I am. She is quite put out with *me* when they do so; she thinks it is my fault."

"Are you sure it is not?"

"Perhaps it is," said Elsie, sorrowfully. Then she stood still in the blaze of light into which they had entered, and raised her clear eyes to his. "I must have been wrong, or you would never have said that."

He looked down on her, "Suppose we say we were both wrong?"

"Yes," eagerly; "and—and, Mr Blundell, please don't tell anybody; please" (with great anxiety) "don't tell mamma or Pauline." . . .

The next moment Tom was in front of them.

"We thought you had been locked out. I was on my way to look you up. Come inside, it is such fun. I tell Aunt Ella she ought to make a speech, and Uncle Macleay backs me up, Elsie." Then to her aside, "You should see that fool, Carr! He thinks it is his innings with Pauline now, and he is grinning and wriggling from ear to ear. What was Blundell about to let him cut in? I could not believe my eyes!"

All that followed after this must of necessity be done or said in public. Healths were drunk, songs were sung, speeches were made; and at length the last guest had departed, and the last lamp was put out.

"I must say it, dear. I am sorry to have to reprove you, but I cannot let it pass. Your behaviour to-night did not please me at all. Here, there, everywhere; you and Tom never seemed in one place for two minutes

together. It is all very well for Tom; but for you, a young lady—I was quite shocked. So different from Pauline!”

Lady Calverley, who was one of the flighty kind herself, held her niece to be perfect, and would fain have cut her daughter to the same pattern.

“Go to bed now, and let us say no more about it; but it really will not do. We shall have to give up our harvest-dances altogether, if there is to be this romping. Just like the Miss Gregorys!”

“Oh, mamma!”

“Well, it is; I never approved of it from the first—never. But your poor, dear father—however, let us say no more about it. Your uncle was very kind; but I am sure Mr Blundell was surprised, and I don’t wonder at it.”

A little droop of the lips, but no protest.

“Pauline behaved so well—but, indeed, she always does. So gentle, so dignified, never putting herself forward, and—how well she looked!” cried Lady Calverley, with sudden eagerness. “I am sure Mr Blundell is struck with her.”

“Good night, mamma.”

“Good night, my love. You look pale,” observed her mother, with some compunction. “I don’t say that you meant any harm, Elsie, but you must learn that you are growing into a woman, dear, and show more womanly feeling. You know I can only desire your good. Oh, don’t cry!” said the poor lady, cut to the heart to see the large eyes filling. “It was no fault, I told you that; I did not mean you to take it so. Now you make me feel as if I should not have spoken. Only wrong things are worth tears, Elsie.”

Lady Calverley did not stop to reflect how seldom it is the things which are wrong which cost the bitterest tears; a foolish speech of our own, a slighting word of another’s, and our pillow is wet; but where are the drops that should fall over the unkind thought, the envious pang, the jest at folly? Our hearts will ache for a prick

to our vanity, our cheeks burn at the mocking of a simpleton; but does their *sin* cause us a sigh or a cry? Nay, for this we have no choking sobs, no quivering lips. To weep we need to suffer.

And thus with our little Elsie.

She sleeps, but even her dreams are haunted. She wakes, and recollection wakes with her.

They had all conspired in disapproval. Blundell had told her of one indiscretion; her mother had accused her of many. She had herself asserted that she was no longer a child, and almost immediately afterwards had been charged with want of womanly feeling.

And then, cruellest of all was that comparison to Pauline. Happy Pauline! Admired as well as beloved, beautiful as well as good, what needed she more?

“And he to dare to tell me that! To hold her up as an example to me” (which he had not done), “and to say that I must not expect to be treated the same! I wish he would go away, and take her with him! I wish never to see either of their faces again! And here I must go down to them all, as if nothing had happened, and submit to be scolded and lectured by everybody! I shan’t, though—not by him. When he comes up next I shall be sitting quite cool and quiet, and be very much taken up with letters, or something. If he speaks I need not hear at first, I will make him repeat it twice; then he may go and talk to his Pauline! Tom shall keep his distance too; he thinks he can twist me round his little finger. Mamma won’t like it, I daresay. I shall just tell her I can’t help that; I am doing my best to be like Pauline!”

A pause.

“Oh, I couldn’t say it! I could never, never say it! O Pauline! dear, dear, *kind* Pauline!” broke out a loud sobbing whisper as pride and passion fled, “I am a very wicked girl, and you are—an angel! God bless you, God bless you, dear Pauline!”

CHAPTER IX.

“THE JUANITA IS GETTING UP HER SAILS!”

“Merrily, merrily goes the bark
On a breeze from the northward free;
So shoots through the morning sky the lark—
Or the swan through the summer sea.”

A pale-grey rippling sea, a warm and gentle breeze, cloudlets fleeting over the sky and forming a dimly-mottled horizon—these were the signs that the long-expected day had come at last.

About such a day there could not be the shadow of a doubt, and for a few moments the joyful anticipation it inspired, put everything else out of Elsie's head.

At length they were to realise the pleasure so long and hopelessly deferred; and afterwards, decided the ungrateful girl, the author of it might go his way, and be seen of them no more.

Pauline surely could not be deeply concerned if such were to be the ease: her warning in the turret-chamber indicated that then, at all events, she was herself unaware of any feeling regarding him; and if she were now conscious of such, she would guard her own heart, as she had offered to guard Elsie's.

As for him, it did not signify whether he were concerned or not. She only felt aggrieved that her means of ascertaining his feelings were so limited, as to put it out of her power to be absolutely certain of wounding them.

Nevertheless she hastily retracted the *rôle* prepared in the night. It would scarcely do to pretend not to hear if he were to be offering her his hospitality; and to accept, and be rude in the act, would be impossible.

In less than two minutes she had resolved to lose sight of all disagreeable reminiscences, and enjoy herself to the utmost.

“Pauline, Pauline, the Juanita is getting up her sails!”

"I was a fool about that child last night," was the conviction brought home to Blundell's mind the instant he saw Elsie. "Here have I been fretting over my cursed vanity, and her little sad face—and come up to find her as pert as a humming-bird!"

"Miss La Sarte," began he, "is this to be the day?"

"My aunt will be here in a few minutes. She has only gone into the next room." Miss La Sarte politely waived the question. He sat down beside her.

"None of you are the worse for your exertions?"

"No, thank you."

"Nor any colds?"

"No."

"And the weather is perfect. Dr Macleay, I am hoping to induce you all to come for a sail."

"I shall have to sail, but I am afraid not with you, Mr Blundell. I must sail away to my own people."

"Let me—let us all convoy you."

"No, no, my good sir, I know what that means. It is very tempting, but I must not take another lazy day."

"What do I hear?" Lady Calverley had caught the last words as she entered. "Talking of running away, already! And I understood you were to be with us on Sunday?"

"If Mr Sinclair cannot get any one else, I shall have to come over again, or send my missionary——"

"Oh, come yourself. Come yourself, please."

"Come yourself," echoed Elsie.

"Well, well, it must be that, must it? And to speak the truth, there is a presbytery meeting at the Point on Monday, which I should have to attend at any rate. So I must be off early to-day, if I am to be back again so soon."

"And when are we to start?" said Blundell, addressing his hostess.

"Do you really mean us to go?"

"I hope you really mean to go."

It was plain she was to go, whether she meant it or not.

"Don't wait for me," cried the Doctor, perceiving he might be in the way. "The sooner I am off the better. And," giving her a hint, "I daresay Mr Blundell's boat is waiting."

"*That* does not signify a bit. I only wish we might have you with us," replied Blundell, courteously.

"You are very good; I wish it too, with all my heart. But work must be done, and I have a funeral at twelve. Yes, my dear, the dog-eart if you please. Mr Blundell, suppose you walk off with me while the ladies are putting on their things, and they can join you at the boat? The dog-eart will overtake us."

Every one looked grateful for a proposal so well timed, and he took his leave amid general goodwill.

"What a trump he is!" cried Tom, enthusiastically. "And what a jolly day we are going to have!"

"Now for the lilac hat, Pauline," whispered Elsie.

"The white one will do after all, Elsie, and be more shade from the sun."

"It is not nearly so becoming."

"Is it not? Oh, that is no matter." And Pauline turned softly away.

"She thinks he will see her often enough in it afterwards," considered Elsie; "and certainly it does not signify what she puts on—he will admire her all the same."

"Come along! Come along! Come along!" Tom beat a tattoo at all the doors in turn. "Come along, Aunt Ella; you won't like to be hurried on the way, you know. Come along, Pauline; Blundell will be tired of waiting. Come along, Elsie; are you putting twenty hats on your head at once?" adapting the spur to each ease with artful nicety.

Pauline in her white hat and froek, with a shawl hung over her arm, came out at his summons, but Elsie refused any recognition of it.

Her door was barred, and she was changing for the third time from one dress to the other.

Originally she had intended wearing a delicate pea-

green French cambric, which of course suited her charmingly.

It was a simple thing enough, but so pretty in its glossy freshness, that she hesitated to doom it to the wash-tub—an inevitable result of the expedition.

On the other hand, the *piqué*, which was her only alternative, ought to have been in the wash-tub already.

Oh for a white serge like Pauline’s!

As she peeped out of her window, and nodded to her cousin on the lawn, protesting that she would be down in something under half a second—whilst she had, in fact, not even begun operations in earnest—this desire took possession of her mind.

A white serge! It seemed to have been manufactured for the occasion.

After that vision, the *piqué* became intolerable. Off with it! On with the other! A bunch of dark sweet-peas in her bosom, and she is ready.

Nor had the elder lady been without her perplexities.

An old good gown, or a new middling gown? A warm gown, or a cool gown? A long gown that would be dreadfully in the way, or a short one that would perhaps be—well, hardly in the way enough?

She too had a glimpse of her niece standing in the sunshine outside.

At the moment, Tom was inserting a red rose in his sister’s white straw hat, to match the crimson shawl on her arm; and her simple robe, without a frill or flounce, without a ruffle to break its surface, fell in soft folds over the grass. Pauline was stooping forward, as Tom, with excellent taste, arranged the rose.

“A perfect picture!” exclaimed the aunt; “and how exactly alike they are!”

Lady Calverley was not quick in discernment. She saw the same brown hair (which curled for Tom) and the long brown lashes (which did the like for his sister), the same curve of the chin, and the same short upper lip, and said, “How like they are!”

A slight action of the hand when speaking, and a trick

of lifting the head, and throwing it backwards when under the influence of any emotion, was also shared by both, and in allusion to this Lady Calverley added, "And in all their ways, too!"

Then she too decided on the gown which she had *not* meant to wear; for, good woman as she was, she did not like to be thrust altogether into the shade.

"What are those two about?" muttered Tom. "What in the world had they to do, but put on their boots? Can't you manage to rout them out, Pauline? You have been ready for nearly half an hour."

"Am I properly dressed, Tom?"

"Yes, you are all right; but the rose was the finishing touch. I have got this white one for Elsie. What a roaster of a day it is going to be! Aunt Ella! I say, Aunt Ella! you won't need to put on your fur boa!!! Oh, here comes Miss Elsie at last, and as demure as possible! Here, mademoiselle, I have got this white rose for you."

"Thank you, Tom, but give it to Pauline. She is in white, you see, as it is."

"And you *don't* see how beautifully I have carried out the idea?" pointing to the rose and shawl. "White against white would be poor, it is the red that touches it up. She would never have thought of that for herself. I saw it in a moment."

"Then what do you think of this mixture?" said Pauline, divining her cousin's feelings. "These rich dark hues against the pale green? They are lovely, Elsie dear. You look very sweet," said she, with a strange little thrill in her voice.

"Not bad," said Tom, twirling his rose silently in his fingers, and waiting to see if it would be asked for.

Another minute, and he felt sure it would; but, "My dear Tom, is that for me?" from his aunt, naturally put an end to the matter.

Blundell was waiting for them at the boat.

The tide was tolerably high, and they embarked without any occurrence worthy of note.

The usual exclamations of novices on their first admittance on board a yaeht,—the usual wonder at the snowy whiteness of the boards, and at the comforts and luxuries of the cabins—together with the usual unexpressed commentaries on their smallness and narrowness,—were duly gone through.

They were taken to see everything above and below, the compass, the kitchen, the chickens roasting for luncheon ; and finally, seats were arranged in a comfortable place, and they sat, in a group, all together, maintaining that easy dropping chit-chat which people readily fall into, whose tastes and feelings are in common, when they have been inmates of one dwelling for any length of time.

If Blundell had not been an inmate of the Castle, they had seen scarcely less of him during the past ten days than if he had been.

When topics failed, exclamations on the beauty of the scene, the excellence of the day, and the delights of sailing, filled up the intervening spaces.

Presently, however, there was a move.

Pauline wished to pencil the outlines of the broken mountain-range which they were passing on the northern side, and Blundell was confident that he could find her a more convenient seat for the purpose.

Over a long low bench (it might have been a spare mast, and probably was) he spread a rug, and the tiny skylight of the cabin gave a support to her back.

Could she be comfortable there ?

Perfectly, and she confessed he was in the right—she could now sketch at her leisure.

But to do so she was obliged to furl her parasol, and the glare of the sun was such, that he could do no other than offer to hold it over her.

This she could not allow ; she had no need of it—her hat was sufficient protection—it was only a trouble.

“ You will break this, as you broke the other,” said he, “ unless I am allowed to keep it out of the way.”

She would not break it—she would permit him to

put it anywhere he liked, but he must not sacrifice himself.

So persistent was she that he grew irritated. "Pray let me have my own way for once." ("I am not *going* to make love to you, so you need not be so dead set against it," flashed through his mind.)

After this Miss La Sarte gave in.

"I am afraid," said Blundell presently, after a pause, in which he had had time to grow ashamed of himself, "that you must think me a very quarrelsome fellow. I never was sweet-tempered, but I have been worse than ever lately. Miss La Sarte, do you know what it is to be so out of conceit of yourself as to take amiss everything said to you?"

"Is that your feeling?"

"Yes, sometimes."

"Irritation of the nervous system, probably."

"How prosaic! But I daresay you are right."

Then there was another pause, and a burst of merriment came across the deck from the other party.

"They are more talkative than we are," said Blundell.

"I never talk when I am drawing."

"You are making a very pretty little sketch, but is that peak high enough?"

"It is quite high enough—I measured it with my pencil; but until it is shaded you cannot judge of it correctly. It looks too near at hand in this outline."

This was all. These short spasmodic sentences, with absolutely nothing in them.

Supposing him to have been a lover, this was his opportunity.

The others were close at hand, it was true, but they were out of sight and out of hearing.

Here was abundance of leisure, close proximity, and everything favourable.

Yet his reserve was matched by hers, and if he was absent, so was she.

Towards mid-day the breeze increased.

"Isn't it jolly?" said Tom, coming round. "Could

anything be more splendid? This baking sun and that swish of the waves against her sides! But, I say,” wagging his head, with a sly look, “somebody over there is beginning to feel the motion.”

CHAPTER X.

“GOOD NIGHT, *DEAR!*”

‘ Each puny wave in diamonds rolled,
O’er the calm deep, where hues of gold
 With azure strove, and green ;
The wind breathed soft as lover’s sigh,
And oft renewed, seemed oft to die,
 With breathless pause between.

“If they would only have had luncheon, when it began to be rough! I know I could have stood it as well as any one! It was only being so hungry and so empty, and the sight of those chickens as they passed! Oh, Pauline! how can you look so fresh? Don’t you feel it, in the least?”

Poor Elsie lay on a sofa in the inner cabin, and hours had passed since she left the deck.

“I think if you had not gone below so soon,” suggested her cousin; “if you would have waited, and had some brandy-and-water, and a little hard biscuit, as Mr Blundell suggested, you would have been better.”

“How could I? It was too late then. He never came near me till just at the end, when I could wait up no longer.”

“He did not think of it till Tom came round and told us. We heard you laughing only a few minutes before.”

“I thought I could manage to hold out, but Tom would make me look at things. It was that, and having to speak to him, and to say I was enjoying myself, just at the very worst moment—just when we got round the corner into

the open sea—that made me know how wretched I was. If he had let me alone——”

“Never mind now, dear; I am going to sit with you a little.”

“Oh no, you are not.”

Pauline sat down.

“You are going to do nothing of the kind,” cried Elsie, raising herself on her elbow. “I told mamma I would not have her either. Because I can’t enjoy it, do you think I am going to let you lose it all? Go away, and be as happy as ever you can; but don’t let anybody come near me. Now mind you don’t,” beseechingly.

“Mr Blundell,” said Pauline, in a low voice, “was very anxious to come down and carry you up to the deck.”

“The idea of such a thing! How could he think of it?”

Pauline smiled a grave smile, and put her cool hand on the girl’s brow.

“Ah! how nice!” exclaimed Elsie. “My head does burn so! But, Paulie dear, I really don’t want you here. I can’t talk to you if you stay, and it would make me worse to have you. So just go away, but—give me a kiss, first.”

“It is delightful, Mr Blundell! I enjoy it thoroughly; but my poor little daughter——”

“I wish we could get in a little sooner, for her sake. But the wind has chopped round to another quarter, and you see it is dying down besides. I am afraid it must be another hour, at the shortest, before we shall be there, Lady Calverley.”

Even so it proved. The breeze sank away to a whisper. The waves subsided, and the Juanita made almost imperceptible progress.

“Surely your cousin will venture up now?” said Blundell to Tom.

“I’ll go and see.”

“No, Tom, let me go.” Pauline had risen. “I will bring her up, if it is possible.”

It proved to be impossible. She was unwillingly supported into the saloon; but there she begged to be left, and only sent for, when they were going to land. The pretty green dress was crumpled beyond recovery, and her sweet-peas strewed the floor.

Her eousin would again have stayed, but Elsie was peremptory. She would neither condemn Pauline to the little close cabin, nor afford a pretext for any of the others to offer their company.

Pauline was to say that it was her special wish to be alone; and this message Pauline delivered so completely in the spirit in which it was given, that it was impossible even for Tom to do more than shout down the cabin-stairs from time to time, "Any better, Elsie? We are close at home now."

How close they were she could not judge; but the cheerful tidings were announced more than once before a stir overhead, a rattling of ropes, and a general movement, proclaimed that something new was going on.

A few seconds after, steps were heard on the cabin-stair; then a stoppage, and an order was given, by which she knew who the intruder was.

"He is coming to fetch me now," thought Elsie. "I wish it had been any one else. And this is the day I have been looking forward to so much; this the end of my beautiful sunny morning! I never, never will set my heart upon anything again!"

"You have had a sad time of it, I am afraid." Blundell's voice came in at the door. "We are opposite Gourloch now, and the ladies are waiting to disembark. May I come in?"

Elsie raised herself languidly, and tried to smile.

She felt weak, and wearied, but no longer giddy, and was able to stand without assistance. "I suppose it is quite calm now?" she said.

"Like a mill-pond. Scarcely a breath to keep us going," picking up her hat from the floor as he spoke. "Your eousin is a rare good sailor; she has been quite enjoying it."

“And so has mamma.”

“Yes, I don’t think Lady Calverley has been the least uneasy. What a pity the sea does not suit you! Head-ache?” said he, kindly, seeing she put her hand to her forehead.

“It is nothing, thank you; it will go off in the fresh air. What a fright I look!” cried Elsie, involuntarily, as, hat in hand, she turned to the mirror.

He laughed, “That was so like you.”

Burning as they were already, her cheeks blushed a deeper crimson. “Ought I not to have said it?”

“No.”

“I am ready,” said she, quietly.

“You won’t ask me why you ought not? It was because it was not true.”

“Oh!” A little smile. “But I am sure it *is* true,” said she, after a minute. “My hair is all coming down, and my face is so hot——never mind; let us come up-stairs.”

“Let me cloak you up first. Coming out of the cabin, though it is such a warm night, you might catch cold.”

She allowed him to put on her shawl, and waited patiently while he bungled with the pin. He was awkward, or preoccupied. Which was it? At all events, the operation took up several minutes’ time.

“Now I am ready,” said Elsie, once more; on which he silently took her hand, and she suffered herself to be led up-stairs.

No one was near the spot when the two emerged.

Blundell looked round, and stood still irresolutely, took a few paces forward, again stopped, and bent down towards her. “I am so sorry you are going,” he said. “Good night, good night, *dear!*”

Little word to undo it all! Elsie neither spoke nor moved, but stood still, and let him see it all in her face.

“Wait here one moment,” said he, hurriedly. “The boat is lowered, and the men——”

“Oh,” said Tom, coming to meet him half-way across the deck; “you were so long in coming that your fellows

grew impatient. They said every moment was precious when the tide was at this point for the landing, and my aunt was growing fidgety, so I took it upon me to let them go. She can't get over the rocks, you know. It won't matter for Elsie."

"All right," replied his friend, with indifference. (So that was what kept you quiet, was it?)

"Tom has sent off the boat," he announced, aloud. "He was quite right. It will be difficult, as it is, for Lady Calverley to land comfortably; but Tom declares he can easily help *you* over the rocks."

"I can help myself," muttered the girl. "I don't need him."

"Yes, you will, and me too, I suspect. Suppose I come too?" he added, bending forward to look into her face.

"I could not think of troubling you," said Elsie, gently.

"Is it a trouble? What do you think? Come, sit down here where your cousin has had her seat all day. Why, you are shivering, child, and the night is quite hot! Are you chilly?" said he, touching her hand.

A faint "No."

"I know what it is; you have eaten nothing to-day. Suleiman, a cup of coffee here, as soon as you can, and make it strong. Bring some bread or cake too."

"Oh no, I—I really could not touch it," said Elsie, as the man departed. "I wish you had not sent him. I am not in the least hungry. And besides, there is no time."

"Quite enough time. Do you see what Tom is doing? He is a cunning fellow; he has got round old Blake, and taken the wheel."

"But what is he doing?"

"Giving us a turn out. We shan't be quite so near the land when the boat comes back."

"But what is he doing that for?"

"I suppose he thinks," said her companion, sitting down by her side as he spoke, and watching the effect of his words, "that he would not object to having a few more of those rocks uncovered!"

"It is very presuming of him!" cried she, flushing up, as his meaning became apparent to her. "What right has he to interfere?"

"Don't be angry with Tom," said Blundell. "*I am not.*"

"He may do all sorts of mischief."

"He may—if you are bad to him."

("He treats me like a child," sobbed the poor little girl in her heart. "He thinks Tom and I are fond of each other, and it amuses him. Oh, how cruel it all is!")

"Why are you crying?" said a low voice in her ear.

"I am *not!*" With a sharp ring in her "*not,*" and two brimming wide-open eyes, Elsie turned, and defied him.

"Did you want so very much to get ashore?"

"Yes, very much. I am tired, and—oh, I beg your pardon, I did not mean to be rude," the bold beginning suddenly faded into a whisper. "Please do not mind. Please go away."

"Must I go away? You will have no one to talk to, if I do, and I am very happy here," said Blundell, dallying with his happiness, as a man will do who feels that he holds his fate in his own hands. "Why should I go away?"

She saw her mistake.

"Why should I go away?" reiterated he.

Still no reply.

"Let me give you your coffee first. You don't take sugar, I know. You will thank me, or rather Suleiman, when you have tasted it; he is one of the few gifted individuals who really can make coffee. Now, is that not good? I thought so, and you will be the better for it too. Good coffee is one of the best restoratives in the world. Any more? Quite sure? And now, tell me, for I want to know, *why should I go away?*"

She had thought to get off.

The easy transition to the tones of a polite host, the allusion to her tastes, the little word of praise to his servant, had completely deceived her.

How strange that he should persist in teasing! Why should he seek to amuse himself with her, just because he could not get Pauline? It was neither right nor kind of him; it was wrong, very wrong. And yet he had called her “*dear.*”

She was stupefied, dumb, unfit to contest in so close a combat.

“I say, I’m awfully sorry!” Tom’s voice was startling in its suddenness. “But I’m afraid I have taken you out rather further than I meant to do. Blake and I fell to talking, and he was spinning some long yarn or other: I don’t know how it came about, but we have put her out instead of in.”

“You must take us back again, old fellow, that’s all.”

Tom looked about him for a seat.

“You can’t leave the skipper, now that you have got him into the scrape,” continued Blundell. “You must stay and chat with the old boy, or you will have him quite savage. He is looking after you now with the tail of his eye.”

Tom hesitated, and looked down upon the pair.

His cousin, sitting forward, her cheek resting on her hand, took no heed of him. Her eyes were fixed on the golden sea-line, on the purple bank of clouds above, and on the little fleet of herring-boats, whose brown sails showed darkly against the sky. She was absent, absorbed; musing doubtless on the beauty of the scene, drinking in the sweet warm air of the summer night. Blundell, lying by her side, was no nearer to her in such contemplations than he at the other end of the deck; and what a walk home he and Elsie would have!

No one pressed his departure, but the look of indolent expectation in Blundell’s eyes was more difficult to withstand than words. He went, and left the two still silent.

“Well?” said the man, at last.

“Well, what?” murmured the girl.

“I have not had an answer to my question yet.”

“You are only joking. What does it matter? Look, do you see those little vessels on the horizon? They

are on their way north, for the herring have gone from here. I heard some fishermen say so yesterday. It is curious, is it not, that they should come and go, in that way, no one knowing why, or able even to guess?"

"Very. Yes. Elsie, I am going to tell you something."

So then, it had come at last!

He was going to tell her now, to confide in her, doubtless because he could not keep it to himself any longer. She had felt how it would be, how it must be from the very first; yet to tell it to *her*—that *she* should be the recipient of his love-talk, when the love was for another, struck her poor sick heart, a new jealous blow. Could she let him go on? could she encourage the recital?

Ah, she must—she must.

But a few words would be sufficient—one word, a monosyllable; and in the end a little quavering "Yes" struggled across her lips.

"You send me away from you," began the narrator, in a deep undertone, "and yet you will give me no reason why I should go. Now I am going to show you the best of reasons why I should not. Elsie, do you know that I have seen to-day some one whom I can never forget? some one who steals my thoughts by day, and breaks in upon my dreams at night? Do you know that I am a dull fellow, always looking on the black side of things, and that I am haunted by that little merry laugh, those saucy eyes? What do you say? Do you think you know—you do, you must have guessed, at least, who it is that I mean? Tell me, then, have you not?"

A sinking head, a heaving bosom confessed its "Yes," a guilty whisper tried to reach him "No."

"Haven't you? And I am just going to ask her——"

"Ala, Ralph! old boy! Run you to earth at last!"

CHAPTER XI.

"AHA, RALPH! RUN YOU TO EARTH AT LAST!"

"Bad men are seldom cheerful, but we see,
That when successful they can merry be."

—CRABBE.

The person from whom this salutation proceeded was a tall young man, with fair hair, a clean-shaven cheek, and a lint-white moustache falling straight down from the upper lip, in the narrowest possible arch.

Simultaneously with his "Aha, Ralph!" another voice said, playfully, and with a slightly foreign accent, "How do you do, Blondell?"

This speaker was a short man, with an ugly, clever, meditative face; a face from which you might gather that he to whom it belonged could, in the common phrase, do anything he chose, and also that what he chose to do would not always bear investigation.

The countenances of both gentlemen wore a cheerful expression, denoting that they had come, not because they expected their arrival would be welcome, but because they were morally sure it would not,—a conviction which, when it is to the taste of the individuals concerned, imparts a delightfully piquant flavour to the otherwise commonplace event.

The look of amazement deepening into disgust upon Blondell's face, the broken ejaculation which escaped his lips, were compensation for all they had undergone to find him,—and apparently it was not a little.

"We hear of you at Oban," said the little man. "We hear you are in this diztrick. To-day we are at Staffa, at Iona, and we see you with our own eyes. We see your yacht, your beautiful sails, your charming company on board—we see all this so nise, and so—what you call it?—tantalising? is that it, the word? We see——"

"How on earth did you see all this?" broke out Blondell, staring from one to the other.

“Do I not tell you? We are in that steamboat which did pass you, two—three hours ago. Oh, we have glasses, and we see it all! But we come not at you. The captain, he is a brute, he will not put us off. So then, we must go back with him, and get out when we touch—what is the name?” turning to his companion.

“Oh, shut up!” replied the other. “Ralph, old chap,” looking towards Elsie, who had risen and drawn back on their approach, “we did not expect to find the company still here; you will hardly have room to lodge us if you have a party.”

“Miss Calverley is going ashore in the boat that brought you here;—at least I presume you came in my boat?”

“Oh yes, certain,” resumed the little man. “We see the boat from the shore; we think they fish, and they come when we call. We cry ‘Halloo! halloo!’—”

“I say, aren’t you glad to see us?” interrupted the other, with an expressive smile. “Try to say so, if you can, just for civility’s sake, you know.”

“Shot if I am!” retorted Blundell, the first gleam of good-humour appearing in his face. “We are not victualled for cannibals. But”—lower—“wait till I see them off. Here, Tom! you remember Chaworth? Now, look sharp, or you won’t get over the rocks to-night! Now, Miss Calverley.”

“Thank him for the sail, quick!” exhorted Tom, as Elsie in silence took her seat in the boat.

Then looking up, as they let go, he called out, cheerily, “You’ll all come up to-morrow,—won’t you?”

“Who are they, Tom?” asked his cousin, as soon as they were out of hearing.

“That tall one with the moustache was Chaworth. You have heard me talk of him before. I don’t know who the other was. How queer of Blundell not to tell us he was expecting them to-night!”

“Perhaps they came before they were due,” said Elsie, who had good reason for the supposition. “How much pleasanter it is to-night than it has been all day! Listen to the cornercrakes!”

Going home she took his arm; she even asked for it. “Tom, I am still giddy—I can’t walk properly; let me take hold of you.”

Poor Tom! As she said it, there came wafted towards them the bitter scent of the bog-myrtle bruised beneath their feet; and all his life afterwards he remembered that perfume.

For some minutes after the boat left, there was silence on the Juanita’s deck. It was broken by the German, saying softly to himself, with a series of running nods towards the retreating figures—

“Yes, yes; that is ve-rie nise.”

“Rather a mistake—wasn’t it?” said Chaworth, in his hearty way. “Awfully sorry, you know. We shouldn’t have done it upon any account, if we had had the slightest idea; should we, Heinsicht? Don’t bear malice, old fellow.”

A face of wood could not have remained more immovable than did that of the man under scrutiny.

Adroit evasion, as much as sharp repartee, would have been useless. The face said, “You know so much, which I can’t help; but just find out some more, will you?”

“And what am I to do with you, since you are here?” said Blundell, at last, beginning to recover. “Where are your traps?”

“At Oban; at the big place there. We have only come down upon you for the night. We shan’t trouble you further.”

Chaworth stroked his moustache ceremoniously as he spoke, and slightly drew himself up. It was enough. The arrow found its mark.

“*Trouble me?*” said his friend, quite kindly. “Don’t be a fool, Jack.”

Thus conquered, Blundell became at once the docile and attentive host.

In person he bustled over the arrangement of their quarters, and the preparations for their entertainment; as much, it seemed, in atonement for his previous want of hospitality, as in excuse for it.

It was but a bit of a place, he hoped they would be comfortable, but it was their own doing, &c. &c. But it ended with this : whatever he had they were welcome to share.

The other two, for their part, spared no pains to maintain the goodwill at length excited.

They ate vigorously, drank with moderation, and on Blundell's excusing himself from joining them on deck afterwards, on the plea that he had given up smoking, and had letters to write, appeared to be not only sensible of the evil effects of cigars, but to be on the point of giving them up themselves.

The letters to be written resolved themselves into one short note ; and in two minutes he had dashed off the first page.

“MY DEAR LADY CALVERLEY,—The friends for whom I have been waiting so long, having at length made their appearance——”

Here he stopped to blot, before turning the leaf ; and on reading over what he had written, in order to catch up the thread on the other side, suddenly tore the sheet in pieces. “No ; hang it ! I won't go, throwing a lie behind me !”

Second note—

“MY DEAR LADY CALVERLEY,—My friends who arrived unexpectedly last night are anxious to be off early to-morrow morning, so——”

“Why, this is as bad as the other ! What *am* I to say ? A fellow must make some excuse.”

The few bald lines which finally found their way to the breakfast-table at Gourloch ran as follows :—

“MY DEAR LADY CALVERLEY,—Tom will have told you of the arrival of my friends last night. We are taking advantage of the fair breeze to be off early to-morrow, so

I am afraid I shall not be able to call and thank you for all your kind hospitality. Should we pass here on our way south, I hope to find you still at Gourloch.— With kind remembrances to all your circle, believe me yours truly,
R. BLUNDELL."

"When did this come?" inquired the lady to whom it was addressed, as she lifted it from her plate.

"It was handed into the ludge a while ago, my leddy," replied Davie, hovering about to hear if anything particular were contained in the epistle. Lady Calverley looked at the envelope with curious indecision, and after several minutes' delay, inquired, absently—

"This morning?"

"This mornin' or last night—nacbody said."

"What does he say?" cried Tom, impatiently.

Elsie, in startled silence, thought she knew. Pauline *did* know.

From her latticed window she had seen the white sails hoisted as the dawn was breaking—had seen the vessel glide swiftly past over a grey sea, whose waves were washing the rocks—had seen it become a mere speck upon the water, then turn a point and vanish; and an hour after, there still knelt in the same place a motionless figure, whose face was turned upwards.

"What does he say, Aunt Ella?" demanded Tom, for the second time.

"Oh, read it for yourself, my dear," replied she, finding it easier to give this answer than any other, and beginning to play nervously with her cups and saucers as she spoke. "There is very little in it."

Tom seized the note.

"It cannot be *that*, then," thought Elsie; and Pauline troubled herself very little as to what it was. She could guess.

"Cool, that!" said Tom, and read it a second time with the provoking slowness common to his sex.

Then he endorsed the idea. "I call that **uncommonly cool!**"

No message to him! No notice of his invitation! No pretext for departure so sudden! Such conduct merited but one epithet—it was “cool.”

Just as if they were not good enough for his friends! No doubt the other fellow was some swell; but Chaworth—Chaworth had always been as jolly to him as possible; and, in fact, he had been forecasting to Elsie on their walk home the fun they would all have together.

It was a sad home-thrust to the self-complacency of early manhood, and Tom, in his vexation, thought not of the feelings of others. This was well.

The colour which flooded and then fled from Elsie's cheek, the dilation of her eye, and the broken murmur which fell from her lips, were unmarked by any but Pauline.

Lady Calverley gave her whole attention to the tea-tray, making a hasty assault on the cups. Her niece was dear to her as a daughter, and with all the nobility of love, she would not look upon her in what might prove a moment to be forgotten.

The cream and sugar were put in all wrong; but with an easy air she dispensed her cups, nor took heed whether the slim fingers on her right hand trembled when stretched out, or no. Nor will we.

But Pauline, apart from her own feelings, was sorely troubled about her little cousin.

After the first shock, which had nearly discovered the state of her heart to all present, Elsie's pride rallied, and bore her up.

She went through her duties punctiliously, omitted nothing, neglected nothing, and was so gentle and considerate towards Tom, that he instinctively felt there was something wrong.

“What is the matter with Elsie, Pauline? Is she not well?”

“She has a headache to-day, I know,” replied his sister.

“So have I. There is ‘fire in the air,’ as Alister says. I wish it would come here and clear away those yellow clouds. Elsie,” as she entered, “I'll tell you what you'll

do for your headache. Come out and sit under the sycamore, and”—great effort of the mind—“I’ll read to you.”

“May I come too?” said Pauline, afraid that the scheme would end in disappointment—Elsie being inattentive, Tom ehagrined.

The disappointment, however, was of another kind. Elsie, too anxious to please, missed the mark. She liked it very much *indeed*—would like to have more, and then—made some excuse to slip away.

“There *is* something wrong about her,” said Tom. “I say, look here——” turning his head aside, and looking at the sea. “Is she—thinking—about *him*?”

Now for it, Pauline!

How can she shelter Elsie, comfort Tom, speak the truth, and reveal nothing? She hesitated, casting about in her mind for some way out of the slough of perplexity.

“She is, then?” said Tom.

His husky voice spoke volumes.

“Tom,” said she, with her arm round his neck, and her cheek laid on his curls, “never mind her now. She is so young, and she has never seen anybody. Don’t think any more about it. But be to her just as you used to be, and don’t—try to—to please her *too* much.”

“Have I done that?” said he, lifting his head, amazed.

“I think so, sometimes. Let her alone now. She will care for you some day.”

“Are you a prophet, Pauline?”

“Yes, I am going to be a prophet for you.”

“What a shame it was!” broke out Tom, after a long silence. “He was always making up to *you*——” He stopped short.

The arm round his neck pressed it a little tighter, but nothing was said.

“I say, he isn’t worth earing twopence about.”

“Never mind him, dear.”

“You have been awfully good,” continued Tom, brokenly. “I didn’t know—I never thought—somehow I forgot you. But you are not bothering after him, are you?”

She had borne much, but this from Tom—from her rough-and-ready jocund brother—was the soft sun-touch upon ice, and her lip began to quiver like an infant's ere it cries.

Tom looked hastily round, and rose with a sense of awe.

He had never kissed his sister spontaneously in his life; but now, as he passed, he rubbed something into her face, and though it was only his ear and a portion of his cheek, she understood.

Then he went off by himself, whilst she remained behind, for each was best alone.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PROCESS.

“I watch him well—his wayward course
Shows oft a tincture of remorse.”

—SCOTT.

A silent sea, a becalmed vessel, and two men lying on its deck smoking.

“I have not yet made up my mind,” said Heinsicht.

Blundell.—“You mean to make it up before you die, I suppose?”

“I suppose, yes.”

“Otherwise you will have to make it up pretty sharp afterwards.”

“Bah! there is no creed in heaven.”

“Don't trouble yourself as to what there is in heaven, my friend,—*you* won't be there.”

“*Teufel!* What you mean?” exclaimed the German, angrily.

“That's about it. Ask him. He'll tell you. Do you imagine he means to let you off after you have had all your share of the bargain? Nothing of the sort. All

you have to do is to go on the way you're going, and you will walk to the devil as straight as any fellow ever did in this world."

"You English!" broke out the German, passionately. "That is so like you, with your cold-hearted, steeff, supercilioss speech! You have no minds, no—no perception; you are as hard and dry as these boards. *This* is right, and *that* is wrong; and this you must do, or you must not do. You always want to dominate. It is a crime, a—a wickedness to think for one's self. In Germany we say, I go my way, you go yours; both are good; we will meet at the end. Here it is, if you go not my way you go to the devil. I hate this narrow, this *thin* talk. It is only for a woman, who will do what her priest tells her. I would not make my life like yours for great worlds. I would sooner be dead."

"I did not mean to offend you, Heinsicht; we are both saying what we think, you know."

"You do *not* think, that is it. You are saying what is told you; what you think you *most* say. And why? Because you have been ill; you have had the—what is it?—the nightmare. You will get better; you will shake it off. Who would be frightened into believing what his reason refuses? That is childish."

"I believe you are right. My reason has certainly not had much voice in the matter."

"Why," continued Heinsicht, pursuing his advantage, "listen to this. Look upon me. In Germany I am a very good Lutheran; in Italy I am a Catholic; here I am anything. I meet with very good people, very *nise* people, evcrywhere. I enjoy my life. I take all that is good, and trouble myself not more. But you, you are sombre, *misanthrope*, miserable. You take no wine, no beer; you go to no little parrties; you have no books, no pictures, and you make yourself as unheppy as you can. You tell me I am to go to the devil. I say, you have gone to the devil already."

"Humph!" said Biundell, thoughtfully. After a pause, he added, "Heinsicht, did you ever see a man die?"

"If I had not," replied his companion, "that would be a strange thing. Seen it? Yes. Once, twice, hundreds of times."

"In the war, I suppose; but I mean in cold blood."

"Yes, I tell you, ycs. What then?"

"When your own turn might be the next?"

"And this," said Heinsicht, with immeasurable contempt—"this is what a man comes to when he is aff—raid! This is what has taken the life—the—the ghost out of a man thirty years of age! He has had one little sight of danger, and he runs away from all his friends——"

"Confound you!"

"Ah! take care. You most not say the naughty words. They are bad, ve-rie bad. You most take care, such care, for you have your salvation to accomplish. Are you sure now, quite sure, Blondell, that the little smoke, the cigar, does not make all wrong? You had given it up a month ago, you know."

"What has that fool been jabbering about now?" inquired Chaworth, with a glance at his friend's face, as he met him turning away. "He grows to be a nuisance."

"I am the fool to let him jabber."

"Are you going below?"

"Yes."

"You have been at it again," said Chaworth, seating himself in the vacant place, with a look of displeasure; "you know the sort of temper he has, and you haven't the sense to let him alone. What is the use of going about making yourself disagreeable?"

The German smiled.

"It's so confoundedly unpleasant to be always having you two fighting," continued Chaworth. "If there's one thing I hate, it is to be with fellows who are always putting each other's backs up."

"I say nothing. It is not my fault."

"You have the most infernal way of saying nothing that ever man had. What is it about now?"

"Oh, we talk," said Heinsicht, complacently; "we

talk, and compare. I give him a little of what you call chaff, and he does not like it. He is difficult to please. But listen"—here he puffed out a long slow stream of vapour before proceeding—"listen, Chaworth; it is all to the good. To-day he is angry, to-morrow he is sorry; again he is angry, and again sorry. Through it all the words remain. He is coming to himself."

As usual, the quarrel was patched up, and the three continued together, cruising among the northern islands of the west coast, until the latter end of October, when a long spell of bad weather made them begin to weary of the monotony of their life.

"Jaek," said Blundell, one day, when he and his old friend were by themselves; "what do you suppose those people at Gourloch think of me?"

"It is difficult to divine people's thoughts," replied Jaek; "I never can be sure of my own."

"It was very bad, you know."

"I can quite believe it."

"It was the oddest thing your turning up just when you did. Five minutes later and I stood committed. Poor little thing! She was an uncommonly pretty girl, I can tell you."

"You are not quite come to matrimony yet, old fellow. But, however, if you had cared in the least about it, you could hardly have done better. A Scotch moor for the autumn months would not be a bad thing—not by any means," cocking his head sagaciously upon one side. "If you think of it, we could call on our way back. You left that open, you remember."

"What should you say," replied Blundell, with rather a foolish smile, "if it proved to be the other one I went back to see?"

"I should say," replied Jack, coolly, "that it was very like you."

"Like me! How?"

"Knocking down your own schemes is an amusement you have been addicted to all your life."

"There was no scheme in the matter. It was simply

this—they came in my way, and I had nothing else to do. Going about by one's self without a soul to speak to——”

“Your own fault, all the same,” observed his friend.

“Well,” assented Blundell, “you know how it was.”

“I say,” he broke out, after a pause, “you have not been talking about it to Heinsicht, have you?”

“Who—I? I talk to a beastly German! I say, let us get rid of him. He had too much again last night.”

“What did you bring him down upon us for? I never could endure the brute.”

“Neither could I.” Chaworth knocked the ashes off his cigar. “Let's kick him overboard.”

“I'll tell you what, Jack. We'll leave the yacht to find her own way back to Southampton, and you and I will be off to Paris.”

“Done with you. And what about *der Deutsche*?”

“You ship him; I can't. Make up some excuse, and you and I will have our things packed, and be off to-morrow.”

Accordingly, Blundell was arranging his papers in the saloon with an open portmanteau by his side, when “Yaha! yahoo! I thought it was a toad!”—came from the inner cabin; and Jack, dancing out upon bare toes, dangled into his face a soft shapeless mass, which he held suspended, apparently by the legs.

“What on earth have you got there?”

“Here, take it!” cried the apparition.

“Get out!” responded the other, drawing back, hastily. “What is it?”

It was a dead rose—a rose which, from pressure and want of air, had not shrivelled up, but was a sodden, discoloured pulp.

“What is it, then?” said Heinsicht, inquisitively, the noise having drawn him from his retreat. As he spoke he stretched forward a nose, which was ugly with the obtrusive, aggressive ugliness which Germany alone is capable of producing. A nose which had swept outward with a rush, and hesitated, before deciding upon the upward movement which it had finally adopted. “What is then the toad?” said he.

Blundell had turned away, as if annoyed by the interruption.

“What a confounded row to make about nothing!”

“Where did you find it?” continued Heinsicht, looking from one to the other.

“It found me, I can tell you,” said Jack. “I was going to bed, having nothing else to do, and in the dark I trod upon the beggar. Here, Ralph, it’s for you.”

“Ah!” said Heinsicht, drawing in his breath, as a closer inspection revealed to him the nature of the supposed toad. “I see now. It is a little re-lie, a treasure. It has fallen into the wrong hands, Blondell. You must take it, and keep it, and wear it here—here,” touching his breast as he spoke. “That is where a lady’s tokens should be laid.”

“Who mentioned a lady?” said Blundell, keeping his temper with an evident effort. “Have you never seen me with a rose in my button-hole? I say, I have got a lot of work to do to-night; just go off, and leave me alone, like good fellows.”

It was past midnight ere the work was finished, and he went on deck for a breath of fresh air before turning in for the night.

A scene of wild and solemn beauty awaited him there.

They had anchored in a narrow basin whose waters were seldom ruffled, and whose depths of shade were at this time rendered still more intense, by the single broad streak of silver which shot across the opening.

All around, giant mountains, sunk in their endless lethargy, rose into an empty moonlit heaven. Parts of them, ghostly in their brightness, stood out to view, but the greater portion was a vast indistinguishable mass, without form and void.

No living thing stirred on land or sea. Not a sound vibrated on the ear.

The solitary beholder of this sublime spectacle, Blundell, was not of a nature to view it with indifference.

It was at this midnight hour, when free from the observation of his companions, that he had of late sought, at

times, to recall the feelings which had influenced him so powerfully a few months before.

The suspieion that he was no longer impressed as he had formerly been by the remembrance of the appalling scene, with which he had been wont to feed his imagination, had changed into a certainty. He had used it as the most potent means of exciting his fading energies into a fresh maintenance of the new life he desired to lead. It had palled at length, and every time he would have tried the effect anew, it had proved to be weaker.

So great had been the first shock, that by one mighty upheaval it had torn up the old life by the roots.

Then the empty heart, swept and garnished, remained vacant, with the door open. And now, alas! the banished spirit was on the watch, eager to regain his lost possession.

“It has been no fault of mine,” and then followed the bitter cry, the amazing accusation of the man yielding up the mastery, “*It was God's fault who sent those men here!*”

The struggle was at an end; he was vanquished. Before he went to sleep, he softly undid the little window, picked up the rose, and let it float away upon the water.

PART II.
BLUNDELLSAYE.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FIRST PLUNGE.

“Fog, and mist, and rain,
Dark, and sad, and grey,
Floating over the quiet land—
Oh, dull November day!

Fear, and doubt, and care,
Dark, and sad, and grey,
My misty thoughts are ta'en from you,
Oh, dull November day!”

THERE are certain mornings in the year, on which it seems appropriate and natural to hear of a misfortune.

On such a day the leaves are dropping from the trees, the wind moans dismally, over the plains there hangs a dense white veil, the heavens above are dark, and the air is chill. Almost *any* event would be welcomed—almost anything of any kind, to stir up, were it even to wrath, the stagnant pool of commonplace, which engulfs life for the time being. The postman has been.

Has he indeed? You turn your eyes from side to side—your anxious, longing, letter-loving eyes, and they see nothing. Stay, you are wrong: there is one poor, ill-favoured, thin, blue, marrowless epistle; a wretched unit. It lies on your own plate.

Is that *all*?

Yea, verily. Toss it aside, throw it from you—it is a delusion, an impostor, a bill.

Nay, but in that letter lies your fate, dear reader : lower your scornful, discontented eyelids ; give, I pray you, one glance, and think it not too small a matter for your notice.

Therein,—you start ! Your lips open ! Your eyes dilate !

Now, what is the meaning of this ? What has caused that sudden flush, followed by so deadly a pallor ? Why that trembling hand, that sinking into the chair by your side, that blank, unresponsive gaze ? Are you stricken deaf and dumb ? Is there a ringing in your ears, a rushing at your heart—a lightning-flash of perception that, one minute before, you had been happy ?

And the letter is so short. It only contains the negative you had taught yourself to believe would never come ; the failure that, with your talents and influence, had seemed to be out of the question ; the death-blow to expectations, long as your life ; or the curt statement, that a little toy you had amused yourself with had not turned out as well as had been expected.

Some such trifle. And at length you find a mask wherewith to smile and repel intrusion—or, it may be, only breath to wonder and weep ; and through Novembers to come, when the sky is grim, and the earth is dank, and the wind howls, you will sigh and whisper, “It happened on just such a day as this !”

So perchance will sigh Pauline, when the ills of poverty have come home to her, and she has learned to know something of its stern pressure. When that uninteresting envelope had been opened, and the few lines perused which conveyed the intelligence that she and Tom were penniless, the brave girl had made light of the matter. If Tom, she said, could be brought not to mind—if he would lay his shoulder to the wheel, and work as a man should—it would signify little to either of them that they must from henceforth forego the luxuries, and confine their wishes to the necessities, of life. Neither of them

cared for luxuries—they had no expensive habits—they would manage excellently. She was only sorry that so much had been said about a trouble which was really not worth the sympathy expended upon it.

Poor, simple, grandiloquent Pauline!

What she would have done without the shelter offered by her father's sister, Mrs Wyndham, it would be impossible to say; and yet she could hardly be prevailed upon to accept it.

Why should she not be allowed to stay and make a home for Tom in London, where his guardians had, with some difficulty, secured for him a place in a counting-house? Tom's poor lodging would be lonely and dull. It was only when she had been made to understand that her brother might be absolutely hampered instead of benefited by such an arrangement, that she could be brought to abandon it.

So she is to live with Mrs Wyndham.

Nothing of this relation has hitherto been mentioned. To her niece she is almost a stranger, their paths in life having lain in different directions; and Pauline's remembrance of her, if not altogether flattering, is indistinct. At present, the lady is staying with the Jermyns at Harmony Court, in B——shire. The river is sweeping along in flood under the windows; the meadows beyond are one vast swamp; and the clouds, yet heavy with rain to come, move solemnly over the sky, and close in the prospect.

Mrs Wyndham looks out of the low, folding windows, and shudders; but the Grange, of which she has lately concluded a purchase, is not yet ready for her reception, and she has been unable to resist the entreaties of her dear sister-in-law and good husband, and the sweet girls, to come to them in the meantime.

"They had so enjoyed her last visit in the summer," writes Mrs Jermyn, "that, although they have *nothing* to offer—no amusements, no company, no *sunshine* even—still they cannot but hope that dear Camilla will *take pity* upon *them*, and will allow them to look forward to the

great pleasure of seeing her. They must indeed confess that the country is sadly destitute of *charms* at this time of year. They cannot compete with Brighton; and if Brighton is their dear Camilla's choice, they certainly ought not to *complain*, although they should hardly be able to forbear feeling *disappointment*."

This excellently-rounded period, with a good deal more of the same sort, hints, cajoleries, and insinuations, was exactly suited to the person for whom it was intended.

Mrs Wyndham's good-nature, which was her strongest, and her vanity which was her weakest, point, were alike flattered. With all her inclinations, and the greater part of her worldly goods, in Brighton, she consented to quit the cheerful, noisy, tempting streets, with their daily variety of congenial bustle, and immure herself in a dull country-house, at the bidding of relations who themselves allowed that there was no excuse for the unreasonableness of their request.

Why such a request had been made we may be permitted to wonder.

To Mrs Wyndham it was naturally a simple one. Which of us foolish ones is amazed at any anxiety for our presence? We are not dull, or frivolous, or empty-headed to ourselves. We are not, in our own eyes, ordinary-looking men and women, whose appearance to a stranger is so uninteresting, that the infirmity or defect we feel so keenly and take such pains to conceal, is passed over by him, unnoticed.

Look at that little man smiling to himself in the corner. Having been told to look at him, you see that he is there, and that he has red whiskers and a brown greatcoat. But how fussy was that little man over the cut and colour of that greatcoat, before it was made to his satisfaction! How particular that his brown necktie—*you* would not even know that he had on a brown necktie—should match it in shade! There is the finger of a brown kid glove peeping from his pocket! And his stick has a silver band with his initials thereon engraved; and his hat is some wonderful hat, and his boots are some

wonderful boots, and everything about him is chosen with care and pains, for he is the centre of lifelong devotion and occupation to one human being—himself.

Your cousin Angeline is a nonentity, and a troublesome creature to boot. Nobody cares to have her for their guest, and it is with difficulty you extract from the head of the house the invitation, which duty alone prompts you to send her. But Angeline, unconscious and important, looks at it differently. She is doubtful about accepting, does not send a decided negative (for which you would be thankful), but will reply in a few days. She hopes she *may* be able to come, only she has so many engagements, and having postponed other invitations, she would not like anybody to be hurt. May she leave it an open question? Would it be inconvenient if she were to offer herself by-and-by? She will consult the others, and see what they say, &c. &c. &c., to the tune of three sheets of a letter, all about this momentous question.

Listen to the narrator of an anecdote. How often he has been called "My dear fellow," by the great man whom the anecdote is about! How earnestly has his opinion been sought, and how authoritatively has he laid down the law, in reply! One marvels at the deference paid to such a weakling—until one remembers that the weakling is the speaker. Even as you look upon him, he beholds your gaze, and metamorphoses it. He is his own centre of all things. The universe moves around him.

Mrs Wyndham, as we have said, saw nothing extraordinary in her sister-in-law's letter, nothing to wonder at, that a little fidgety twaddling woman, encumbered with fancies, whims, likings and dislikings, destitute of resources, and dependent on those around her for amusement, should be eagerly solicited to become a member of a quiet family party. A few plaintive regrets she gave to Brighton, and set forth to gratify the praiseworthy desire.

Harmony Court had been intended for a purely summer residence by its first proprietor, a man of refined

tastes and delicate health, who passed the autumn and winter months in a warm climate, returning to England towards the latter end of May. At that season of the year he found a perfect paradise of repose in the long low building, nestling amid its creepers, and was accustomed, when absent, to recall with delight its velvet lawn, swept by the weeping ash and willow, its cool colonnade of roses, its sparkling river, and bell-tongued nightingales.

But Mr Jermyn, the next possessor of the property, was unfortunately not able to preserve the charming picture, complete, in his mind. He had stretched a point to buy the place, and, having bought it, he meant to live at it. He had neither the means nor the inclination to move his family from one spot to another; and accordingly Harmony Court, exulted in from May to October, had to be endured from October to May.

Mrs Jermyn, indeed, had the usual ladylike excuses of her doctor, her dentist, or her dressmaker, always ready, when a run up to town was felt to be desirable; and invitations for Charlotte and Minnie were usually accepted; but still there was ample experience to be had by all, that the most beautiful and bewitching retreat in the "leafy month of June," is commonly the most unwholesome and unlovely in the leafless month of November.

It is at this most doleful season of the year, however, that Mrs Wyndham has been persuaded to transfer herself and her belongings to B——shire, in which, during her summer infatuation, she had purchased a comfortable residence, within easy distance of the Jermyns. Her stay at Harmony Court has been prolonged from one week to another, and still the Grange is not ready, and still Mrs Jermyn presses her not to leave them. Pauline shall be made welcome also—there is room, abundance of room; and accordingly Pauline is expected upon the afternoon on which we now take up our tale.

The ladies are sipping their tea in the drawing-room. Mrs Jermyn, stout and fair, with rather too much cap

on her head, and rather more than enough smile on her face, lounges in the easy-chair by the fire. By the table are the two daughters of the house—Charlotte, tall, talkative, clever; Minnie, ordinary.

Mrs Wyndham, in the arm-chair opposite, toys with the screen which her still delicate complexion renders necessary, if she is to enjoy dear Selina's charming fire. The lace at the back of her little head is costly, diamonds sparkle on her fingers, and everything about her is rich and valuable.

Perhaps we may now suspect why she is invariably "dear Camilla," and "your dear aunt," and "our dear guest," in Mrs Jermyn's lips; and why it is only when mamma's back is turned, and papa's too, that Charlotte Jermyn crouches down to half her height, and minces about the room, simpering and grimacing, talking nonsense in a finely accentuated voice, and cackling a little artificial laugh.

How angry mamma would be if she knew!

It is very wrong, very *undutiful*, to laugh at one's own relations. It is extremely *absurd* to lie at the catch for small defects. So kind, so indulgent an aunt! What would Charlotte and Minnie do without aunt Camilla, who treats them as if they were her *own* children, and takes them to town, and makes them all those *beautiful* presents? She hopes that none of *her* children will ever be found *ungrateful*. She cannot answer for others; Camilla of course knows best about her own relations, but——, and the head is shaken portentously.

They are discussing the new arrangement, you understand; and Charlotte has been incautious.

Mamma cannot conceive what she means, is really astonished that a daughter of hers should be found wanting in *respect*. She considers that Pauline is quite in luck, quite *in luck* to find such a charming home. After such a sad misfortune, such a miserable business altogether, to have fallen on her feet as she has! No hardships, no privations, only the kindest and most *generous* of relations waiting to receive her with open arms!

“And kill her in a week!” breaks out the rebellious daughter. “You need not look so indignant, mamma. She will do it with the best intentions. Oh yes: she will call her ‘my dear,’ and ‘my love,’ and beg her to take care of her health, and insist on her going out every day in the carriage, and not walking too far, and not reading too much, and not doing anything else in the world than sitting by her side, listening to her ceaseless clatter, clatter, clatter from morning till night.”

“Charlotte! I—— We were just having a little discussion about your domestic affairs, Camilla,” explains Mrs Jermyn, as her sister-in-law’s entrance rather alters the nature of that discussion, and annihilates the response she had begun. “Minnie, a footstool for your aunt. Cold, dear? A little shawl for your shoulders? Minnie will fetch one in a moment. What were we saying? Oh, it was about your future inmate at the Grange. I only hope, my dear, that it will not be too much for you; the charge, I mean, the complete *charge* of a great girl like that! And such a risk as living together always is! You must let us know—that we shall *insist* upon—if it does not answer, and some other plan must be adopted. We shall feel ourselves responsible for the comfort of the Grange, as it was *we* who introduced you to the neighbourhood.”

Mrs Wyndham has had this fact impressed upon her memory rather oftener than she cares for, already; but she is in the habit of considering Selina a good creature, and makes allowance for her anxiety on a point where anxiety cannot but be flattering.

Mrs Jermyn runs on. “It ought to be considered in the light of a *trial*, not to be *permanent*, unless all goes on smoothly. If it suits, well. If not, dear, you *promise* to take us into confidence?”

Selina is really *too* kind. Of course it is a *risk*, and Mrs Wyndham cannot but feel *nervous*; but still, what else *could* she do? She could not allow the poor dear child to *starve*, and her own *nearest* relation too, her dear *brother’s* child.

Camilla is not to be outdone on her own special ground; when these two get together, every second word is accentuated.

"I suppose," responds Mrs Jermyn, wincing a little under the last observation, "that she has not been much out into the world—that she is little more than a great girl?"

"As tall as Charlotte, my love, and looks older, if anything. Dark-haired people always do look old. That, you know, is proverbial. It is we blondes who keep our youth, I can tell you," proclaims the faded beauty. "We cannot look old if we would. As Colonel Grafton said to me the other day, 'My dear madam,' he said, 'you cannot look old if you would!'"

Mrs Jermyn protests that the Colonel is right. Her dear sister does not look within *years* of her age, though indeed what that age may be she cannot pretend to *guess*, for she vows she cannot believe, and does not believe, what the family date tells. "Charlotte, your aunt will take another cup of tea. Oh, pray. My dear Camilla, you need not be afraid of *embonpoint!*"

"*Embonpoint!* now really!" The screen is thrown playfully forward in the direction of the other arm-chair.

"But it must be half and half only, then," suffering her cup to be taken. "Just because your mamma presses me. Now, dear Selina, are you sure, quite, absolutely *sure* that it will not inconvenience you to have Pauline? Not in the *least?*"

"A pleasure, dear—a *pleasure.*"

"You are so hospitable. For one week, then; our workmen promise to be gone in one week."

"And if they are not, Camilla, so much the better." And so on, and so on.

Into the midst of all this steps Pauline, with a cold, quiet face. Effusive greetings, embraces, questions, and hubbub follow.

"Self-possessed," comments a certain pair of searching eyes; "decidedly self-possessed. That sort of manner seldom takes. But she is one of the handsomest girls

I have ever seen." Aloud, Mrs Jermyn is saying pleasantly—"Now I think our traveller would like to take off her warm things, and have a rest before dinner. Would you not, Pauline—am I to call you Pauline? We are very nearly relations, you know, and now we are going to be neighbours as well. You must feel this room hot after coming in from the open air. Charlotte will show you your room, my dear, and I hope it will be comfortable. I think I must stay by the fireside and nurse my cold, as we are engaged to dine out to-morrow evening."

The last announcement was made with a little air that would at once have conveyed to an initiated ear that the dining out referred to was not an ordinary event in the household; but it was lost on Pauline.

With a polite hope that the lady would soon be better, she followed Charlotte, and was ushered up-stairs.

"Good-looking! No, I don't call her so very good-looking! What do you say, Charlotte?" Mrs Wyndham is peevishly exclaiming, as Charlotte re-enters the drawing-room. "Anybody looks well coming in out of the fresh air, among such a set of pasty faces as we have got. What have we all been about, moping indoors the whole afternoon? Why don't you girls go out? I have a great mind to take a turn myself. But no, I should certainly catch cold in this dreadful fog. Ah! what a climate it is! And what a situation you have got here, my dear children! I trust I shall be fit for Sir John's dinner-party. I am beginning to cough already."

"Put a little coal on the fire, Charlotte," suggests her mother. "Why did you come down so soon, my love?"

"I did not know I was to stay, mamma."

"Could you not have given her some little help? She has no maid, you know, and with all her things to unpack——"

"I will go back again by-and-by. She did not want me just now, I am sure." "Let the poor thing alone, can't you?" mutters Charlotte, under her breath.

So Pauline is left with the letter in her hand, which

had waited for her on the drawing-room mantelpiece since the day before.

It is from Tom, who is staying with some friends in the north. He is going to London, to begin his work there, in a few days. Meantime they are having good sport, and there is a houseful of people, and it is very jolly.

All this his sister reads musingly ; but she comes to a part by-and-by on which her eyes fasten, and a keen, eager look darts into her face. This dies away, and, with dropping eyelids, there follows the sob, and cry, "If I had only been sent anywhere—anywhere else !"

There is a tap at the door, her hands unclasp, she tries to look composed, and turns away her head. "Come in." The accents are stiff and uninviting, and Charlotte is more convinced than ever that her errand will be unwelcome.

"I came to help you to unpack," replies the intruder, ungraciously. "Can I——?" But here she catches sight of the beautiful young face, which had lately seemed to them all so cold and proud, now flushed, and quivering in pain, and it is, "Oh, do let me stay, dear! I like to be with you, and I am so glad you came," followed by a warm, honestly affectionate kiss, that finds its way to the heart at once.

CHAPTER XIV.

DOT'S REVELATIONS.

"Children and fools speak the truth."

Charlotte Jermyn was in every respect the antipodes of her mother. She was a bluff, downright girl, whose sterling qualities could not fail to meet with a certain amount of appreciation ; but as these were unhappily accompanied by a deficiency in the charms of grace and

refinement, they were robbed of the outward garb of attractiveness; and, although possessed of more than one friend, she had never had a lover.

This gave her no uneasiness. She was willing to please, and be pleased; but she could exist without admiration—she only exacted amusement.

The follies of her aunt were tolerated with cheerful equanimity, as long as they appealed to her sense of humour, and as long as she could put an end to the entertainment at any moment she chose, by leaving the room. But to be tied down to Mrs Wyndham's presence for the greater portion of every day of her life, would have been to her too irksome an existence to have been borne.

Hence the sympathy for Pauline, the unguarded expression of which drew forth her mother's rebuke in the last chapter.

Mrs Jermyn was as sincere in the administration of that rebuke as a perfectly insincere woman can be, when speaking without reserve or restraint.

As she expatiated upon Miss La Sarte's good fortune in finding such a home, at a time when a home of any sort was sorely needed, she felt strong in the power of truth. She did, in reality, covet the position she extolled. Not, however, on account of the advantages it openly offered, not because of the domestic happiness and the affectionate welcome, on which her eloquence expended itself with fullest unction; these, we may safely aver, did not excite her envy.

But the secret office of Mrs Wyndham's flatterer and sycophant was one she would gladly have filled, either in person or by proxy.

On this she had counted in the first delightful triumph consequent on the purchase of the Grange. To have Camilla at their very door; to have brought her there themselves; to behold her admired and caressed, a woman of consequence in the neighbourhood, and yet admitting none to her confidence but her *own relations*, one or other of whom would be invariably by her side;—this was

what her prophetic vision had unfolded to Mrs Jermyn's eyes, and she had been intoxicated by the prospect.

The futuro acquaintances, parties, furniture, and equipages of her sister-in-law formed endless matter for conjecture or affirmation, and more than one half-hour had been spent in calculating on the probability of Camilla's preferring gold to silver lace on her coachman's hat.

Sir John Finch had gold, Major Soames had silver. Camilla would certainly be oftener driven over to Finch Hall than to the Major's cottage. Consequently, as variety is pleasant, Mrs Jermyn would have preferred silver, but she had a conviction that Camilla would select gold.

This was, however, only a pleasurable meditation—there was no one real drawback to her flutter of excitement and happy anticipation.

Time drew on, and the unfortunate lady stood on the very brink of the exquisite mirage, when it suddenly became dim and blurred.

This was Pauline's doing.

Good heavens! a niece, and a La Sarte, coming to divert the reflected glory of the Grange from falling on Harmony Court! An interloper, a mischief-maker, one of Camilla's blood and race, with claims upon her superior to those of the Jermyns, stepping in between the two!

Naturally Camilla would incline towards one of her own family, if only for pride's sake (tacitly admitting the La Sarte's right to precedence), and the new-comer, an artful Frenchified girl, would spare no pains to improve her opportunity.

Pauline was to be regularly domesticated at the Grange, would take the bottom of the table,—act, in a manner, as hostess when the Jermyns came over—the Jermyns, who had looked upon the Grange as little less than their own,—and would, in a word, completely unseat Charlotte and Minnie from the niche to which their fond mother had in her dreams elected them.

With difficulty she had commanded her countenance and her voice when informed of the downfall of her hopes.

She had entreated her sister-in-law to reconsider the

matter, had pointed out with considerable fertility of imagination the evils likely to ensue from the proposed amalgamation ; but she could do no more : even she had not dared to suggest to Mrs Wyndham that a daughter of the house of La Sarte should take steps towards providing for her own maintenance.

At such a proposal, Camilla's eye would have flashed.

For a vain woman, she was curiously proud ; and Mrs Jermyn knew that on any point relating to family dignity, she must touch with extreme delicacy and caution.

She had therefore been compelled to confine herself to affectionate condolences and ingenious prognostications of mischief.

On the other hand, a few lines from Mrs Wyndham's brother had settled the question. " I have done my best for Tom, and of course you will take his sister."

Mrs Jermyn felt that " of course " as her death-warrant, and gave up the contest.

" So then, my love, it really is *to be*, and we must all hope it will turn out for the best," she had cried, trying hard to wring a smile out of her blank face.

" When a thing is once *decided* upon, Camilla, you are too good a creature to think of *drawing back*."

Camilla was—too good or too dense. She did not follow the idea thus slipped in edgeways. And that effort had been Mrs Jermyn's final one.

Her *bête noire* has now actually arrived, and the inaugural ceremony has taken place under her own roof.

The next morning, Pauline having driven out with her aunt, a little episode takes place in the breakfast-room. All the other ladies are gathered there, when the door opens, and Dot, an inquisitive eight-year-old piece of precocity, spoilt by her mother, and snubbed by her sisters, strolls idly in.

Instantly there is a lull in the conversation, for experience has warned all present that Dot is not a safe listener. Mamma returns to the account-book on the table before her, Charlotte takes up her work, and Minnie goes away. This is hard on Dot, who is instantly pos-

essed of a raging desire to know the extent of her deprivation. "What is it all about?" peevishly demands the innocent. "What are you all talking about? I know you were talking, for I heard you outside, and you stopped when I came in. You never tell me anything."

Charlotte.—"Get away, child. You shouldn't listen, and then you would not know whether you were told or not."

Dot.—"I did not listen, I only *heard*. I'll listen next time though, and *you* won't know whether I'm there or not."

"You will only get punished, you stupid little thing. Why are you not at your lessons?"

"Mademoiselle is not coming to-day. She has a headache."

"Well, go to the school-room, then. We can't have you here."

"You are always sending me away," whimpers the child. "Mayn't I stay, mamma? Mayn't I stay?"

An uplifted pen, enjoining silence, is her only answer; whilst mamma's lips move, in silent addition of figures that will not balance correctly.

Accordingly there breaks forth Imperious whine No. 2. "Mayn't I stay, mamma?"

"Stay? Yes, poor child! why not?" The sum is finished, and noted down. "Stay if you like," replies Mrs Jermyn, cheerfully.

"Oh, of course she may stay, and of course she may do whatever she likes, and pry into everything, and carry tales, and make mischief, as she always does!" exclaims the sister, disrespectfully. "But I, for one, decline to be pryed into. I shan't stay if she does."

"Charlotte is so cross to me, mamma," from the plaintiff.

"Charlotte, how can you be so cross to the poor child? What harm is she doing you? And don't you see she is not well?"

Exit Charlotte without reply. Dot, briskly, "What is it about, mamma?"

"About, my dear?"

"It's about Pauline, I know, for I heard them say her name. What is it about her and Aunt Camilla? Do tell me, mamma. You might tell me."

"Oh, never mind, my dear. Little girls can't be told everything."

"But I want to know, mamma, and I won't tell anybody else. Do say, mamma. Mamma, do say."

"My dear, poor Pauline has lost all her money, and kind Aunt Camilla is going to take her to live at the Grange. That is all."

"But why are you *sorry* that she is come? Why did you say you wished to goodness that she had been sent anywhere else? I *heard* you say that, mamma." And with the words the small cunning eyes (apparently a pair of her own, made down for Dot) search her through and through.

"How did you know I was speaking of Pauline, child? You should not fasten down to any particular person half a sentence that your ears happen to catch when you are coming into a room. The greatest mistakes in the world are made in that way," cleverly observes mamma, with an impressive air.

"Oh, but I *heard* you say Pauline." Dot nods her head to enforce the emphasis. "So there wasn't *any* mistake. And I know I *don't* make mistakes; I *never* do. I heard you say it quite distinctly; and I want to know why? Because it's funny" (mysteriously) "that somebody else wishes the very same thing, and he wrote it too."

"Who wrote it? What do you mean? Wrote it to you?"

"Oh no; to her—to Pauline. He wrote, or she wrote—somebody wrote; but you tell me first, and then I will tell you."

"What am I to tell you, silly one? You know all I said, it seems, already. But, Dot, remember, that if you repeat it to any one—sisters or Aunt Camilla, or *any one*—I shall be very, very greatly ill-pleased indeed. It would be most unkind, most *unfeeling* to say it again.

Remember that. If I thought I could not trust you, I should never have told you now."

"You never did tell me, mamma. You didn't tell me a thing. I heard it all for myself, and the other one too, and I want to know *why?*"

A laboured explanation, and then, "What do you mean about the other one? It was odd of Pauline to read out her letter to a child like you."

"Oh, she didn't read it," Dot candidly allows. "I read it."

"You? How did you read it?"

"I read it, because I found it. I found it in her room, under the dressing-table, when you were all at dinner. And I gave it to her afterwards."

"Oh, Dot, for shame! To read people's letters, and then come and tell what was in them! Never do that again, my dear; it is a very naughty thing to do."

"It was only a little bit, mamma" (slightly abashed). "It was only because it was about Mr Blundell; and Roberts says he thinks Mr Blundell is to come back to-day, and that we shall not be allowed to go through the farm any more. We do like to go through the farm so much, and he has been away so long. I wonder why he should come back at all."

"You are making some mistake, child. It could not be the same Mr Blundell; or you have read the name wrong. Pauline is not likely to know anything about this Mr Blundell."

"Somebody knows, who wrote the letter. Who was it wrote the letter?"

"Her brother—her brother, dear," impatiently.

"He knows, then. He called him Blundell; and oh, I am sure it was our *very own* Mr Blundell, because the letter *said* he was coming back, and Roberts said so too!"

"And was this all? I really think, Dot, you ought to tell me all you read—though I don't approve of your reading it, mind, and you must never do such a thing again—but you had better tell me now what you can

remember, just that I may show you what a silly little head you have got to take up such fancies."

"I didn't take up fancies." Dot grows sullen. "I saw it, and I am sure I was right. It said he was on his way to Blundellsaye—oh, *there!* It said, *Blundellsaye*, so of course it was him——"

"'He,' dear, not 'him.'" Mrs Jermyn corrects, coolly; but in reality she is impressed. "And what besides, Dot?"

"Oh, just that. And then directly after—because I was reading that, and I *saw* just below—'I wish you had been sent anywhere else.' And I did not read any more—not a word. I wonder why he wished Pauline had been sent anywhere else? She has not been sent to Blundellsaye!"

"William," said Mrs Jermyn, carelessly addressing her husband, at the luncheon-table, and choosing a pause, when her words could not but be heard by every one at table. "Did you know that Mr Blundell returns home to-day? I daresay we shall meet him to-night at Finch Hall."

The moment for the remark was carefully chosen, and she was inclined to think she had done well in making it.

CHAPTER XV.

THAT'S WHAT I THINK OF HIM!

"Oh wad some power the giftie gie us,
To see oursels as ithers see us!"

It is half-past six o'clock in the evening, and the dressing-bell has rung at Finch Hall.

Can there be a greater bore among bores than the dressing-bell? Imagine the bore magnified to its greatest degree. Picture to yourself a blazing fire to be left

behind; a newspaper, still unread, to be abandoned; a bundle of aching limbs to be forced up-stairs, and the prospect of transferring the same to fresh garments in the cool atmosphere of a November evening,—and you may perhaps arouse in your bosom, if it is a pitiful one, some sense of compassion for young Dolly Finch, who, left by himself in the library at the close of a hard day's hunting, sunk in the depths of an arm-chair, and full of weary comfort, was just dropping off into a gentle doze when he was sharply aroused by the unwelcome summons.

Dolly was the sworn enemy of bells in general, and of this imperious courtyard bell—this harsh, noisy, inexorable clang-clang—in particular.

It never found him ready. It never found him ashamed.

According to his mood, he regarded it with indifference or disgust.

The present was an evening for indifference. There was nobody by to order him off; he sputtered a sleepy execration, blinked his eyelids, frowned, and looked straight in front of him.

All was peaceful again, and the flickering firelight wooed his outraged feelings to forgetfulness. His head drooped forward, and hung upon his breast.

Anon he heard the sweet music of the hounds, and the patter of hoofs. Now he is sailing over an empty field, the fox well in sight. He loses her! He clears a fence! Hi, he is down! Some one is pulling him from under the horse, shaking him, shouting in his ears with a voice like a trumpet. He starts to his feet, and manfully grasps—the arm-chair!

By his side stands his father, observing, with a gentle yawn, "Wake up, Dolly. Time to dress."

Heavily sighed poor Dolly now.

There would be no further respite. He was still in pink; his boots were splashed, and his cap and whip lay on the floor by his side.

He must go, of course. Of course. He *is* going. He is only waiting a moment. Where is his cap? Eh? The voice growing ever more and more inarticulate.

"Dolly, Dolly, Dolly! Time to dress, you know."

"All right, sir," with another sigh. "Lots of time."

"Not such lots, I can tell you. It is by me, let me see—it only wants a quarter now. And there are some people coming to dinner, you know."

"I'll be ready," creeping to the front of the chair, in preparation for the effort of rising. "I don't take any time."

"Well, you had better be as quick as you can. I went down to the farm just now," continued Sir John, "and——"

"Oh, I forgot," broke in Dolly, calling his wits together. "I meant to tell you, Benson says we shan't get those oats. Ralph Blundell's come back."

"I was going to tell you that. I passed him outside the gate just now."

"Did you speak to him?"

"Oh, I gave him a sort of nod. There were half-a-dozen of them in the drag—as disreputable-looking a set as usual. That one with the long moustache, he was there. What do you call him? Harcourt? Chaworth—that's it. He was facing me. Blundell was driving, and that young cousin of his, Wilmot Blundell's son, whom I suppose he has undertaken to lead to the dogs as fast as it can be done, was on the box beside him."

"I hope you were not rude to him, sir?"

"I was not *rude* to him. I don't know what you mean by being *rude* to him. I just gave him a nod like this," repeating the performance. "I did not take off my hat, and salaam down to the ground before him—if you mean that."

Whether he meant that or not, Dolly did not explain. He was silent, gazing thoughtfully into the fire, and after a few moments thus passed, the father continued, bringing his eyebrows together, and scanning his son's countenance as he spoke, "You are not intending to call there, I suppose?"

"I must, some time or other. You won't; and if neither of us went, it would look so abominably uncivil."

"What do we care if it does look uncivil? We have no particular need to show civility to a man who is the pest of the neighbourhood."

"I must just call," said Dolly, with decision. "Don't ask him here, unless you like. But everybody will call."

"You will do as you please, of course. You usually do. But I shall have nothing to say to him."

"I cannot imagine why you should make it a personal matter, sir. He has never done you any harm that you know of."

"He won't do *me* any harm, I'll take very good care of that. I'm not likely to be harmed; but there are those who are, and not very far off either. I won't have you making a friend of that man, Dolly; so you need not think of it."

"Making a friend of him, because I leave a card!"

"Ay, making a friend of him. That will be the next thing. You will meet him with the hounds, and you will be invited to Blundellsaye, and you will go wherever he asks you, and do whatever he tells you——"

"A precious fool you make me out!" broke forth Dolly, never more indignant than at a hint of this kind.

"Fool enough, if anybody asks you to play the fool," unhesitatingly rejoined his father.

"Do you think I have no mind of my own, sir?"

"Mind of your own? No. If you have any mind of your own, it is kept for your mother, and sisters, and me. For the rest, anybody may pull you about with a string."

This was too much—the young man flushed with passion.

"That's a nice sort of thing to say to a fellow! It's a beastly shame to say such a thing!"

He rose to go, and the father's heart smote him.

"Well, Dolly, it was. I ask your pardon, and let me see I was wrong as soon as you can. I don't wish to see a son of mine tied to his mother's apron-string any more than you do. Choose your friends, bring them here, and so long as they are respectable, and gentlemen, they shall always have a welcome. But take my advice—it is only

my *advice*, mind—and have nothing to do with Ralph Blundell.”

Blundell's reappearance was commented upon at the dinner-table that evening, with the alacrity a new topic must ever inspire.

There was a large party, but although Mrs Jermyn had opined that he would be present, none of the others had expected for a moment to meet him. It was years since he had been seen at Finch Hall, where sobriety and decorum had always prevailed, and where an irregular life was less likely to meet with toleration than at any other house in the neighbourhood.

Nevertheless the event was interesting, even to the hosts. They knew Ralph Blundell, and had done so since his boyhood. Lady Finch asked after him in a maternally sad voice. She could not help feeling grieved whenever she looked across to that deserted, lonely house. She remembered the two brothers, such fine manly boys, always together, and so fond of each other, that you never saw them apart.

Their poor mother was so proud of them! She used to say her sons were better to her than any daughter could have been. As long as she lived, everything had gone on smoothly at Blundellsaye. The poor young men! They had been left so entirely without restraint afterwards, that one ought to have the deepest pity for them,—one ought to make the greatest allowances.

The gentle creature being well out of her husband's hearing gave free vent to the feelings her compassionate nature prompted.

At the other end of the table, the tone adopted towards the same subject was different.

Had there not been something strange about Ralph Blundell lately? What was it? Had he been off his head? Had he never been at Blundellsaye since his brother's death? Where had he been? Was he all right now?

It was not without emotion that Pauline heard the name bandied from one to the other.

There was no need for her to speak. No one imagined that a stranger could have any remark to make on a subject that had so purely local an interest. They did not trouble her with it; but adapting himself to her presumed taste, a little man on her left hand, who had been appealed to as an authority more than once, thus addressed her—

“And I suppose croquet is quite discarded for lawn-tennis now?”

“I suppose so,” said she, absently.

“Are you a great player?”

“A—a what?”

“A great lawn-tennis player. The ladies about here are uncommonly good at it.”

“Are they? Which?”

He stared a little. “Oh, that one in pink down there is one of our best hands. She and her sister play splendidly. It is the greatest fun in the world having one of them for your partner; you have nothing to do but to stand still with your bat in your hand, and let her run about! You are sure to win.”

A sympathetic smile disguised her inattention, and he proceeded easily.

“I don't say I'm a good player, you know; I don't say that. I never can hit the balls when there are a lot of people about, and everybody seems in a fuss and bustle. I can play splendidly by myself. At least I could, if it weren't for that nuisance of a net. Don't you think the net is a nuisance? I don't see but that we should do just as well without it. No one wants a game to be such desperately hard work.”

“No, certainly,” replied she, catching the last sentence.

“I often go out and have a round when there is nobody by,” he continued, confidentially, “and I hit every time. 'Pon my word I do. I never miss. People say to me sometimes at parties, ‘Fennel, how on earth don't you play better? You are always at it.’ But they never see me when I am by myself, you know. It puts me out playing with other people.”

“Yes?”

“It was just the same at croquet. I could play it splendidly, if I was let alone; but people used to get in one’s way so awfully. And then I never could find my ball, for somebody always must needs send it somewhere just when it was wanted! I used to say to the people, ‘My good people, if you would only have the goodness to let me alone, I could get through my hoops well enough; but it is so confoundedly disagreeable to be interfered with at every moment.’ Just when all the world is standing looking on at one part of the ground, you know, to have to go running about all over the place in search of your ball! It really is too bad, sometimes! I used to get awfully sat upon at croquet, Miss La Sarte. ’Pon my word I did.”

“That is over now—isn’t it?” She tried to speak pleasantly, tried to smile, and do her part as became a well-mannered young woman; but it was hard work, for reasons not difficult to imagine.

He was satisfied, however, and recommenced. “It is one comfort that there are such a lot of balls at lawn-tennis.”

“Yes—there are—there ought to be a number always.”

“Only nobody seems to care how they send a ball at you. It is up about your ears all in a moment, before you know it’s off. And then they—they expect you to send it back again, you know,” to Charlotte Jermyn, on his other side.

“Do they? Actually?” said she.

“They ought to send it fair—oughtn’t they? They ought to give a fellow a chance of seeing it coming towards him, instead of whizzing it over the net, within an inch of the top. I always send my balls a good long way up. There is nothing more stupid than people trying to show off, and making themselves disagreeable. Especially in a game.”

“Who was it now, Mr Fennel? Somebody has been maltreating you, I know.”

But Mr Fennel was prudent, and would not reveal his persecutors.

He had no desire to converse with Charlotte, and had already begun to be fascinated by the fair lady on his right hand, wherefore he turned again to her. So far, he certainly could not be said to have gained much of her attention; but attributing this to maidenly bashfulness, he essayed to overcome it.

Pauline had been silent, thinking on what she had heard before this chatterer began.

She had half expected to meet Blundell himself this evening. She had almost looked forward to the meeting, so strong was her resolution to face him with the same smile wherewith she had bidden him "good-bye," to chat with him easily, answer his questions with indifference, and recall reminiscences with spirit.

It had been a relief to find the party complete without him; but, perhaps, it had been something of a disappointment also.

She was so anxious to test her courage; nay, more, to prove to him that if he had suspected, if he ever could have suspected—pshaw! suspected what? Was it likely that he would for a moment contemplate such an absurdity, as that there had been found, not *one*, but *two*—two, so inordinately simple as to mistake the meaning of a few common compliments?

For Elsie, poor impulsive child—for a girl of seventeen, who had seen nobody, and had been nowhere, it was a trifle; but for *her*, in all the dignity of her twenty-one years—she could but blush to think of it!

Well, she would stand before him now, and let her face dare him to imagine anything so wild and fabulous.

Oh, how nicely she would talk about their pleasant meeting, their charming sail, the fine weather which had preceded his stay, and which had returned to them immediately after his departure! She would not make the two years which had passed since they met, excuse for any lapse of memory. Rather, she would have it all fresh before her (as indeed it was). She would playfully

assure him, that whatever he might have done, they had good cause to remember his visit. He had inflicted on them too many stay-at-home afternoons. Never before or since had such rain been seen at Gourloch, and he had taken it away with him when he went. He was undoubtedly the "Flying Dutchman."

After this neat and happy opening, to all of which he would of course make suitable rejoinders—they could slide into an easy vein. Conventional topics would follow, and the worst would be over.

They might meet afterwards, as often as a small neighbourhood rendered probable; she would not care.

"Do you hunt at all?" said Mr Fennel. He had finished his *pâté*, and was unwilling to remain longer silent. The *pâté* had elaimed his attention at the moment when he was turning from Charlotte to Pauline, and he had found it good.

Pauline started. Why could he not let her alone, this little rabbit-faced man, with his head half under the table?

"No, I don't," she replied, snappishly.

"Do you"—slowly—"skate?"

"No."

"Oh?"

A pause, in which, "Oh, dear, Mr Jermyn, I had never heard that before!" "Did you know the Boorhams, Lady Finch?" "Miss Willoughby says the hounds were quite at fault." "Ha! ha! ha! Did you hear that, Major?" were audible in bass and treble notes up and down the table.

Pauline had a moment's respite. Then, "Why don't you hunt?" resumed the little man by her side.

"I don't think I care for it."

"But you could, if you tried. That's to say unless you are nervous. It won't do to be nervous, you know; but I am sure," with his little eyes bent tenderly upon her—"I am sure that *you* are not nervous, Miss La Sarte?"

Whether or not, he was never fated to learn. A loud,

passionate voice had risen above the others, and the broken utterances, audible to all at the lower end of the table, had deafened Pauline's ear to his tasteless prattle. The speaker was Sir John Finch. "He is a disgrace to the neighbourhood! That is what I think, and I don't care who hears me! What are you knocking me under the table for?" in an angry aside to his son (whom a disarrangement of the dinner-table had placed by his side). "I *will* say what I think in my own house."

"Do be quiet, sir, for your own sake." Dolly's still lower reply was just heard, and no more. He was red with vexation, and hung his head over the plate before him.

"For *my* sake? For *whose* sake?" cried the old man, nervously clasping and unclasping his hands, and glaring from side to side. "It is not for *my* sake, I can tell you. Tchick! let me alone, can't you? I say, I am sorry he has ever come back; and I hope, whatever other people may do, that no son of mine——"

"Major Soames," said Dolly, loudly, "were you—ah,—did you, ah,—how did you get out of that slough after all? It was rather a nasty place to get into, wasn't it?"

But of whom had they been talking? Who was it the father would keep from his son? For whose return was he sorry?

Do what she would, Pauline could not rid herself of the foolish idea, that if a name had been mentioned, it would have been that of Blundell.

Absurd, was it not? So absurd as to rouse her indignation. Supposing that it *had* been, what then was the meaning of it? He might indeed—she could not say—she supposed it was not unlikely that at one time or other of his life he had not been all he ought to be. He had lived as other men of the world live.

It was sad, of course—terribly sad. But the follies of youth, renounced and forsaken, were they to be held over him for the term of his life?

He was no longer very young, he had spoken of them with repugnance, with resolution to——. "But I

suppose you like dancing?" The voice was that of her tormentor. He had still hope; the persistent little countenance shone with a new inspiration. She did not hunt; she did not skate; she responded but coldly to suggestions of lawn-tennis, and once-honoured croquet: but dancing! he had about hit it now. Every girl, in her heart, liked dancing.

"Surely you like dancing, Miss La Sarte?"

"I *hate* it," said Pauline.

Charlotte Jermyn, on his other side, laughed aloud.

"Why do you not try to find out my tastes, Mr Fenel? I hunt, and I skate, and I dance; and you have never so much as taken the pains to ask me if I do or not?"

"Because — because I know you do, Miss Jermyn. And I couldn't ask you when I knew it already—could I, now? Besides, where would be the use? You are rather sharp upon me now, you are indeed."

"Oh, that was it, was it? But then, when you have once ascertained what Miss La Sarte's inclinations tend to, will you never speak to her afterwards, either? Because, if that is to be the way, I can tell you at once, to save all further trouble on your part. I will furnish you with a complete list of her likings and dislikings,—the dislikings will swell the list considerably, judging from to-night's experience. Now, will you accept my offer? It is very good-natured of me to make it; and I only behave so generously to you out of consideration for the valiant efforts you have been making all through dinner, and for the scanty success with which they have been rewarded. Now you shall have time and peace to enjoy your olives. You don't really care for talking, I know, though you are such a good talker."

The little man saw he was laughed at, and his eyes shot fire.

"When I do talk, Miss Jermyn, I like, if you please, to choose whom I will talk to."

Saying which, he turned his shoulder upon her.

Charlotte coloured with mortification. She knew the

man to be a fool, and had not been by any means delighted to find herself conducted by him to the dining-room; but she had not chosen to be neglected, even by Mr Fennel.

On her other hand sat a silent, heavily-consuming old gentleman, with whom a few remarks between the courses were all that was attainable.

She had not come to the party to sit without uttering a word. She had not argued with Minnie for the right of being the Miss Jermyn included in the invitation, for this. Nor had her pink dress been hurried home from the dressmaker, for this. Nor had the first camellia of the season been ruthlessly abstracted from the greenhouse to adorn her hair, for this.

It was rather an event for the Jermyns to dine at Finch Hall, and Charlotte had come prepared to enjoy her evening after a downright, thoroughgoing, robust fashion. The beauty and grace of brown-haired Pauline did not cost her honest heart a pang. She meant to talk, and laugh, and have great fun. So she had told Minnie, to whom the fun would be rehearsed in due time, and who was even now contemplating it, as, Cinderella-like, she spent her lonely evening by the schoolroom-fire.

Alas, for the subject of her visions! Poor Charlotte! When the little worm on whom she had been trampling turned upon her she was dumb. She was astounded, and in a manner shipwrecked. She knew of no navigation which would enable her to steer out of such waters.

That he should dare! *He!* Little Fennel, whom all his neighbours laughed at, and made game of!

And she had rather liked to be on good terms with Little Fennel, too; for Little Fennel went everywhere and knew everybody, and the Jermyns were not exactly at home in the society to which they were suffered occasionally to gain admittance.

Very few cards had been left at Harmony Court, when it first passed into the hands of the retired attorney; and it had required patience, tact, and time to place the family

on the desired level where they now stood, but stood, as it were, on the outside edge.

Little Fennel, contemptible Little Fennel, stood upon this level, firmly established upon both his feet.

He was in the very heart and core of that society, into which they could penetrate no deeper than the rind. He belonged to it by right, knew its customs, used its shibboleths. He was present, invariably present, at those cosy, informal reunions, reports of which chilled the Jermyns' ears; and on the more public occasions, at gatherings from which it would have been a slight to exclude them, Charlotte, standing awkwardly alone, or grasping at the passing salutations of such acquaintances as she possessed, had often been well-pleased to see one whom she could address with any degree of familiarity.

She had been wont to play upon his weakness, to amuse him with her chatter, and to amuse every one else by the audacity with which she bantered him, and the skill wherewith she ministered to his vanity and his credulity.

She had carried this too far. She had been more completely put down than she had ever been in her life before, and that by the last person in the world from whom such a rebuff might have been expected.

In silence, therefore, she drew on her gloves, and followed the other ladies to the drawing-room.

CHAPTER XVI.

TWO WAYS OF LOOKING AT A TERRIBLE MAN.

"He is a fiend, I tell thee! He is a fiend."

"Is he? Then I would fain behold him."

"Charlotte, my love, do come and look at these *beautiful* prints."

Mrs Jermyn, trying hard to keep her footing on the outer edge of the level before alluded to, was pain-

fully aware of what a narrow and uncomfortable edge it was.

She, too, had had her vexations in the dining-room. Her petty pride had been wounded. No precedence had been given to her.

This, to a nature which loved to dwell on trifles, which made much of small distinctions, meant a great deal.

Undoubtedly, she argued, Mrs Wyndham had been something above her husband in the social scale; but Mr Wyndham had been Mrs Jermyn's brother, and his widow need not have been placed so very much above his sister. There was Camilla escorted in by a general, and there was Mr Jermyn's wife left to his aide-de-camp.

Camilla smiling and jubilant; Camilla chattering like a magpie; Camilla joked about *liqueur*!

No one had encouraged Mrs Jermyn's chatter, and her aide-de-camp, unjust youth, had been sulky. There had been defaulters,—a note had been handed in just before dinner,—and in the consequent readjustment of the table, he felt that he had suffered. Lady Finch had not been happy in her selection.

Nor had the unfortunate lady on whom his spleen vented itself, the comfort of perceiving the rest of her family fare better.

She had noted the neglect of her daughter, whose clouded brow openly betrayed it. As to her husband, provocation in that quarter was chiefly confined to the fact, that, whilst of no importance to anybody, he appeared well satisfied to be ignored.

Impatiently she waited for the move, but her expectation that a change of scene would produce happier results seemed in danger of remaining unfulfilled.

Lady Finch escorted two young mothers up-stairs to see Juliet's baby—her own first grandchild. Juliet adhered to Miss La Sarte, the sweet stranger-looking girl. Mrs Wyndham and the general's wife comfortably filled the sofa in the chimney-corner; and the Jermyns were again left out in the cold.

“Are they not *exquisite*?”

Charlotte had obeyed the call, and the appeal to her taste was made as she stood by her mother's chair. Mrs Jermyn was sinking under the weight of an enormous folio, which with one hand she endeavoured to prevent sliding off her knee, the other being occupied with her coffee-cup.

"There was one a few pages back," continued she, "with such a *lovely* light upon it; I think it must have been a Turner. Not that one—no, that was not it; it was not so far back as that."

"Oh, bother the book!" exclaimed her unsympathising companion. "You will let it fall, mamma, or spill your coffee, or something. What made you take up such a great lumbering thing?"

"My dear! *Lumbering*? It is rather heavy; but it is a most *magnificent* volume; and you know how *devoted* I am to pictures of all kinds."

"Photographs will do, then. Here, take this instead," said Charlotte, handing her an album. "Give me that mountain of a book. It was never meant to be taken off the table."

"Perhaps one could *enjoy* it better there." Mrs Jermyn still persevered in her pleased and interested smile. "Perhaps a little thing like this is more easily held. Thank you, Charlotte; now we can look them over nicely together. Who is this, I wonder?"

"No one you are in the least likely to know, mamma. Pass on, or we shall be all night about it."

"How impatient you are, my dear! Oh, there is dear Lady Finch! How very *delightfully* good that is! Herself, exactly as she looked at dinner! And Sir John! Capital! Nothing could be more—— Dear me! is it Sir John? Look, Charlotte. Dress does alter one so! It——"

"Would never turn that old gentleman into Sir John Finch," said Charlotte, with an irrepressible laugh. "Mamma, how can you be so—— Don't you see his hat, and his stockings, if you look at nothing else? That is the old Dean, Lady Finch's father, who is over eighty. No more like Sir John than I am!"

"People do get so sadly abused in photographs!" murmured her mother, apologetically. "I thought it was not *very* like; but still—— Oh! who are you, my dear?" to a little girl who had entered meanwhile, and was shyly passing up the room. "Come and speak to me," continued Mrs Jermyn, in her most inviting accents, "and" (inevitable demand) "tell me your name."

The child came reluctantly.

"Well," said the lady, with a smile, "What is it?"

"Marianne."

"Oh! Marianne. And whose little girl are you? Which of these ladies is your mamma?"

"She is not here. I have come with Aunt Louisa. Please let me go to her."

"Aunt Louisa? Which is she?" Lady Finch with her party having reappeared, there was a little gathering on the hearth-rug.

"She is behind them," said the child, readily. "And she looked to me to come, just now." There was no detaining Marianne; and Mrs Jermyn had again to fall back upon her daughter.

"I thought she could hardly be a *grandchild*," she began. "I could not fancy Lady Finch with a granddaughter of that age—could you? Charlotte," with a quick change of voice, "Charlotte."

"Well, mamma?"

"Stoop down a little. You can be bending over the book. Don't you think that your and Minnie's white silks would make up into something like that?"

"Lady Finch is speaking to you, mamma."

Caught at the single moment when she was off her guard, Mrs Jermyn felt that hers was a cruel case. She had been practising smiles and pretty speeches for the best part of half an hour, and after all her semblance of being pleasantly and profitably occupied, she had been detected in the indecorum of whispering to her daughter, and Lady Finch, evidently with a feeling of apology for past neglect, was hoping that she was not cold, and begging her to come nearer the fire.

After this she could not well plead the absorbing interests of the photograph-book. People don't whisper, and nod, and stare in another direction, if the mind is centred on photographs before them.

She was obliged to rise without referring to her employment—and in rising, to show, not more alacrity than she *felt*, but more than she wished to appear to feel.

Anything, however, was preferable to being longer excluded from the charmed circle; and a little attention for the rest of the evening went far towards consoling her for the mortifications she had undergone at its commencement.

No such mortifications had fallen to the lot of Mrs Wyndham; and accordingly she was in high good-humour with the whole entertainment.

The company was charming, the decorations beautiful, and the dinner excellent. She did not know when she had had so pleasant an evening.

"Pauline, my love," cried she, on the following day, "you made a perfect sensation! You did indeed! What did *you* think, Selina? Am I not right in saying so? And I can tell you, my dears, that there were one or two *partis* present, who were quite unexceptionable, *quite*."

"Mr Fennel, for instance," said Charlotte, whom a night's rest had so completely restored to serenity that she was disposed to look upon her past discomfiture in the light of a jest. "Mr Fennel is a *parti* after your own heart, Aunt Camilla. His attentions were quite unequivocal, *quite*. A charming young man, I can assure you. And he had neither eyes nor ears—neither *eyes* nor *ears*—for anybody in the room, but the *one*, the very particular *one*, you know. He has the *savoir faire* to perfection, he has indeed. And *that*, so few young men have——"

"Charlotte, you make my head ache," frowned her mother, as the mimicry grew too obvious. "You permit no one to speak but yourself."

"Oh, don't say that, mamma, for I was just going to tell you all about it. You can have no idea of the efforts

I made to gain a little, a very little share of his attention, but it was of no use. 'Pon my word it wasn't!" sliding into the Fennel voice. "I don't say he is much of a companion, you know—I don't say that. But still, it is rather a nuisance to have nobody to talk to at all; don't you think so? I can talk splendidly by myself, if I am only let alone, but it puts one out so when there are a lot of people all talking at the same time. Especially if there's nobody talking to me. One can't exactly go on talking to one's self at a party, can one?"

Pauline could not but laugh.

"Confess that was good," cried Charlotte, in her own natural manner, "and it will recompense me for all I underwent. You know how much that was."

"What are you talking about, my dear?" interposed Mrs Wyndham, taking all in good part. "I don't quite understand. Mr Fennel was not rude to you, I hope? He appeared to me to be an agreeable young man, and he was really extremely kind and civil about the Grange. He tells me he will be almost our next neighbour. He is going to call. So are the Finches, and Major Soames. It seems to me *everybody* is going to call. I foresee we shall be quite *besieged*, Pauline,—I do indeed."

"You had better not let them in all at once," said Charlotte, mischievously, "or they may do, as the besiegers sometimes did of old, turn upon each other. Admit them one by one, Aunt Camilla, 'on approbation,' as the shopmen say."

"Are *all* to be admitted—all, without exception, dear?" Mrs Jermyn was looking significantly at her sister as she spoke, and the look evidently recalled something to Mrs Wyndham's remembrance.

"What do you say, Pauline? Shall it be a fair field, and no favour? Are we to extend our gracious permission to all, even to this terrible Mr Blundell?"

"Mr Blundell!" said Pauline, with a little start.

"Perhaps Pauline may not like to hear him called 'terrible,'" said Mrs Jermyn. "Did you not say he was a friend, my dear?"

She had not said it, but this escaped the girl. She was upset all in a moment, and her colour went and came, as she answered, stammering. "Of Tom's, yes. I have only met him once, some years ago."

"So you see he may not be 'terrible' at all!" cried Mrs Jermyn, gaily. "Do you know he is going to be your next neighbour?"

Pauline made no reply.

"For my part, I love a 'terrible' man," babbled Mrs Wyndham. "And to confess the truth, the man whom I am warned to barricade my doors against, is the very man whom I should like of all others to open them to."

"My dear Camilla!" But Mrs Jermyn laughed. By this time Pauline was ready to speak, and there was something she wished to say.

"Mr Blundell was very kind to Tom when he was a schoolboy, and afterwards I met him at my aunt's, Lady Calverley's. We all liked him very much then. Is there any reason why he—is there anything against him?" she asked, plainly, and then her heart beat with the consciousness of having put a great simple question.

"Oh *dear*, no!" exclaimed Mrs Jermyn, fervently. "At least I cannot imagine that there is. You did not hear anything, did you? If there had been anything detrimental to him to be said, it would certainly have been mentioned at Finch Hall. Mr Blundell is a little talked about in some quarters, but there cannot be anything *really* of any *consequence* against his character, or Sir John, who is *such* a good judge, and *such* a particular man in every respect, would have been sure to know."

Mrs Wyndham stared.

How odd! Had Selina really missed that scene at dinner, heard nothing of that little ebullition between Sir John and his son, all about this very Mr Blundell? So outspoken as Sir John had been! so loud and noisy about it! Mrs Wyndham thought that nobody present could by any chance have escaped hearing him.

Dear! Did Camilla really mean it? When, how, and where was it? Mrs Jermyn could hardly believe such a

thing. What? Sir John so determined against him? So resolved to have no intercourse? Was Camilla *sure* about it! How *extraordinary*! There must really be something more—more—there must, she was afraid, be *some* truth in the reports spread abroad, which, for her part, she had always hitherto so *strenuously* refused to believe.

Then she looked her desire for more.

Mrs Wyndham had only been waiting for a pause, and was ready to strike in immediately.

She could not understand how Selina had not *heard* him. Selina was certainly not too far off. Every one round had listened. Pauline had, surely, observed the scene?—had noticed how annoyed young Mr Finch had been, and how he had done his best to keep his father quiet?

Yes, Pauline allowed, she had. And Pauline had an intuition, amounting to a certainty, that so also had the lady opposite her.

Why Mrs Jermyn should care to conceal that such was the case she could not conjecture, but of the fact she was certain.

For ends of her own, she was making use of what had escaped from an incautious old man in a fit of ill-temper.

Was Pauline going to be so imposed upon? She dissolved the whole testimony in her scorn, and threw it over.

CHAPTER XVII.

LITTLE THINGS PUT TOGETHER.

“Les absens ont toujours tort.”

The day of departure came at length, and, with a throb of delight, Pauline hailed it as a day of release.

Much, of course, was said about intercourse for the future; rides and drives were planned, and invitations were properly given and accepted.

This would, however, tone down with time ; nothing definite was fixed upon ; and she had, at all events, the satisfaction of hoping that she might never again be compelled to pass so long a period under the same roof with people whose tastes and feelings were so out of harmony with her own.

For Charlotte alone could she entertain some regard. Charlotte was sincere, and Charlotte had been kind to her.

Minnie was too entirely the reflection of those around her at the moment, to be worth notice ; Dot was her mother's child ; and that mother was—Mrs Jermyn.

Of Mr Jermyn, she could only feel that he had been unfortunate in his choice of a wife, but that, for no reason, was he entitled to be fortunate.

He was inferior in person and in manners, whilst his attainments were purely professional. He wore a civil smile, made a deferential bow, and said the rudest things without being in the least aware he was doing so.

The near neighbourhood of such connections, Pauline decided, must ever be a drawback to the Grange.

Had they been mere acquaintances, the distance—four miles—would have been sufficient to prevent too frequent intrusion ; but it was evident that in the present instance it was to be accounted little of.

Mrs Wyndham's relations must be considered, in a manner, hers. She must be subject, as her aunt would be, to early calls, interruptions at odd hours, and the other penalties of unceremoniousness between two families. There would be incessant notes, arrangements for meeting, and for going into public in company. She foresaw, with a blush of mortification, that she might have again to follow Mrs Jermyn into a room, and wait for her carriage, on Mr Jermyn's arm.

Charlotte would kiss her, pull her aside, and whisper ; Mrs Jermyn would tap her with her fan, and beckon her up, to know with whom she had been talking.

Al' this she had smarted under already ; and the chance of its recurrence was the only alloy in the plea-

sure with which she seated herself by her aunt's side, and looked back upon the eluster of faces around the hall-door.

"Well, they have been very good and kind," commented Mrs Wyndham, as the carriage rolled away, amid the vociferous "Good-byes" of the party on the doorstep. "And whatever little faults we might find, Pauline, we will keep to ourselves. We have shared their hospitality, we have partaken of their 'salt,' you know; that will be sufficient for you; for me, they are relations of my dear husband, and in that light alone I will look upon them."

Pauline was astonished and rebuked.

"They are gone!" cried Charlotte, coming back to the drawing-room. "Gone! And good luck go with them! She is not a bad sort of girl, that Pauline. I have forgiven her defrauding me of Little Fennel, and Dolly, and all her other sins; she has expiated them by going to live with Aunt Camilla!"

Mrs Jermyn, who had been airily waving her hand, and sending kisses after the retreating earriage, smiled no more directly it was out of sight, and replied to her daughter's tirade in a natural and cross voice. "Expiated! Nonsense! I don't know what you mean. The girl has fallen on her feet, if ever any one did."

"Humph!" said Charlotte. "That is the sort of fall in which one breaks the legs. When I fall on my feet, may all my bones be whole!"

"Going to a charming place like the Grange," continued her mother. "And Aunt Camilla making so much of her already! Quite as if she were her own daughter!"

"That's what I said," observed her husband with complacency. "I told them they would be taken for mother and daughter wherever they went."

"Did you say it to Camilla? or to Pauline?"

"To both. I said it to them as they were going away."

"Just what she would dislike of all things," muttered Mrs Jermyn, under her breath.

"Dislike it? Why should she dislike it? You said yourself this minute, that she treated her like a daughter."

“And here is Charlotte thinks it would be a hardship to be so treated,” replied his wife, aware that it would be useless to enter into explanations, and returning to the main point. “With every luxury at her command, a poor homeless girl——”

“You would not like it yourself, mamma. At least, I daresay *you* would, but *I* should not. And as for Pauline, she hates it like poison.”

“So she *says*.”

“Says? No; she is not likely to say a thing like that. I could not even tempt her to much smaller confidences. But any one with half an eye can see it for themselves. You must, mamma, if you did not choose to be blind.”

“But, oh,” continued Charlotte, amusement lighting up her countenance, “what a pair they are! How could you, even *you*, mamma, say that they suited one another? There they sat last night on the sofa, side by side. Aunt Camilla was smirking and smiling, and trying to get Pauline to tell her she was young and pretty. *You* tell her so, mamma, every hour of the day; but Pauline—you have no idea how well she did it, or rather did *not* do it. She kept the little aunt in perfect good-humour, and yet she never told a single fib! Says Aunt Camilla, ‘My dear, what a pretty hat! What a becoming hat! You look like an old picture—exactly like an old picture! One of the La Sartes come to life again! *Our* ancestors, you know, Pauline. The resemblance is quite remarkable—*quite*.’ And so on. Says Pauline, in her slow, soft voice, ‘I am glad you like it, Aunt Camilla.’ Evidently she would have worn a pie-dish on her head with equal contentment. But this did not suit the aunt at all, for the upshot of it was, that she wanted to be told it would become *her*. You must know that although part of her great and sudden attachment to Pauline consists in the belief that she is about to introduce to the world another Gunning, she has by no means made up her mind to sink gracefully into the background herself. Indeed she means to shine all the more, ‘with the mild magic of reflected light.’”

"I daresay Pauline was very rude and unkind about it. Young people never seem to think that older ones can have any feelings on such subjects at all."

"They went off together arm in arm afterwards, so I don't think the feelings can have been lacerated to any great extent," said Charlotte. "My belief is, that they will shake together, in spite of everything, and Aunt Camilla will claim her half of every young man who finds his way over to the Grange."

"There is one young man who will find his way there, and that ere long, or I am mistaken," observed Mrs Jermyn.

"One *little* man would be more to the purpose, if you mean Little Fennel," replied Charlotte. "Minnie," as her sister entered, "mamma thinks Little Fennel was hit hard. And so I daresay he was, for though I was his first love, I have never pretended to be his only one. He is not constant; 'pon my word, now, he isn't. But then one can't be expected to be constant, when there's no return, can one?"

"Oh, don't begin in that stupid way," said Minnie; "there's no fun in it. What were you going to say?"

"To say? When?"

"When I came in. You were going to tell me something——"

"About Little Fennel. I was going to tell you that mamma said he——"

"I never mentioned Mr Fennel, Charlotte."

"Oh, did you not? Who was it, then? Dolly? I knew it was all up with Dolly directly I saw him come into the room; but he was not allowed to usurp her, I can tell you. As for the beauty herself, I don't think she wished to be troubled with either of them."

"Nor was I thinking of either of them," said her mother.

"No? Well, I have come to an end of my guesses; you must tell me."

"I think I know," said the quieter Minnie. "Mr Blundell?"

“Mr Blundell! What are you both dreaming of?” cried Charlotte, as her mother’s smile showed that the right name had been spoken. “What put him into your heads? Because she did not like to hear him spoken against behind his back? You don’t know that girl at all. She has not the wits to stand up for herself, but she would not let any one else be attacked, and keep quiet. It is a shame, too. I hate to hear the absent maligned, and given no chance of telling their version of the story; it seems so mean. You might have known it was just the very thing to make Pauline fire up.”

“It *seemed* to be, indeed.”

“I call that unfair,” exclaimed Charlotte, still further roused to generosity of feeling by her mother’s sneer. “Now you are turning upon her, mamma. She did not say a word that she might not have said for anybody—not a single word. And as for poor Ralph Blundell, I always feel inclined to take his part, for the very same reason. I believe the only cause of all the outcry against both the brothers, was, that they were better born and better looking than the rest of their neighbours, and that they looked down upon the whole of us.”

“They could not well look down on Sir John and Lady Finch,” said her mother, angrily.

“Oh, Sir John is an old-fashioned old stick, who wants everybody to be as fusty and musty as he is himself. He will have some trouble in cutting Dolly’s pretty curls to his strait-laced pattern. Dolly hankers after the fun at Blundellsaye.”

“His father will be very foolish if he gives in to him,” retorted her mother. “No son of mine should consort with Ralph Blundell, if I could help it.”

“My dear mother, for two reasons your determination will never be put to the test. Firstly, because you have no son; and secondly, because, if you had a hundred, Monseigneur Ralph would never deign to take notice of one of them.”

“Do be quiet for a single minute, Charlotte,” said Minnie. “You talk on, and on, and no one else can

get in a word. Mamma, what made you say that about Pauline?"

"What made you guess what I was going to say?"

"Oh," replied Minnie, astutely, "because I had heard you say it before."

"To whom?"

"To Aunt Camilla. I heard you hinting about him. I wanted to know how you took up the idea at first."

"Little things put together," replied her mother, rather hastily, as a little thing in the shape of Dot entered. "Nothing in particular, I assure you. Now we have been idling here long enough. Come, Dot, and hold this skein of worsted for me."

She was not to be entrapped into further communications; and with an uneasy sensation of something wrong, she was aware, for the first time, that she would prefer none being made by any one else.

Charlotte's burst of indignation she could not face.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SIR JOHN FINCH.

"He has put on the strong armour of sickness, he is wrapped in the callous hide of suffering; he keeps his sympathy, like some curious vintage, under trusty lock and key, for his own use only."

It may have been observed that Mrs Jermyn, whenever she had an opportunity of introducing the names of Sir John and Lady Finch into her conversation, did not fail to take advantage of it.

As usually happens in such cases, where the acquaintanceship is assumed, on one side, to be especially close, her real knowledge of them was slight.

She had no true perception into the character or habits of either; but she had their visiting-cards on her table, she could describe the interior of their mansion-house,

and she could command a bow when their carriage passed hers in the village.

On this foundation she romanced at large to her less fortunate acquaintance ; for the Jermyns, although occasionally admitted to the neighbouring country-houses, could not be said to be intimate at any, but lived chiefly in a small world of their own, composed of the occupants of villas and river-side cottages, of which a considerable number clustered round the hamlet at their gates.

By these they were admired, envied, and imitated.

To them would Mrs Jermyn lay down the law, fearless of correction ; and her favourite topic was seldom far from her lips.

Sir John's "little ways" were alluded to, and his "old-fashioned foibles" apologised for, in a way that, could he have heard it, would have brought some of them strongly to the front.

Lady Finch's "unfortunate shyness" was likewise tenderly dealt with. She was really more to be pitied than any one else. It wore off entirely, *entirely*, when alone with her friends. People called her proud, but such an appellation was, she need hardly assure them, *altogether undeserved*. She was a sweet woman.

Even in allowing such little shortcomings, Mrs Jermyn would appear to have a struggle with herself. She could not but be partial, be blind to anything amiss in such friends. Their interests, she owned, were hers. She called on all to participate in their anxieties, demanded elation for their successes, mournfully claimed sympathy for their bereavements.

Tit-bits of gossip concerning their "kind neighbours at the Hall" must always, she felt, have a superior interest to any other subject, for the little coterie of which she had constituted herself the queen.

"Niece quiet folks, like ourselves," she would thus describe them. "Such stay-at-homes ! Sir John never can be brought to go anywhere. Lady Finch assures me she exhausts herself in vain. 'Do, dear Mrs Jermyn, try *your* persuasive powers,' she said to me the other

night—we were dining there, you know; she began to me directly after dinner about it: ‘Sir John may listen to *you*,’ she was good enough to say. She, poor thing, is quite tired of the Hall, and would like to have a few weeks abroad. I sympathised with her entirely. It is hard on a wife, and such a *devoted* wife too, not to be *considered* more. Men, however, never *are* considerate. Sir John, dear good man, is a most excellent husband, to be sure, but he is like the rest in that respect. *My* persuasive powers indeed!” bridling. “What could I say to that? I could only reply, ‘Indeed, my dear Lady Finch, I am not vain enough to imagine that where *your* persuasive powers have failed, *mine* would succeed.’ She laughed at me, but we understand each other perfectly. Sir John is always most agreeable, most *attentive*; but I hope I know better than to *misinterpret* that politeness which is one of the distinguishing marks of people of rank. Poor dear Mrs Wyndham is perhaps a *little* apt to take such civilities as *personal* distinctions. My sister-in-law is a most *amiable* creature, but (to confidential ears) wanting, without doubt, in discretion, in *judgment*. She will, however, be the greatest possible addition to the neighbourhood, and *we* will take care that she is not suffered to make herself ridiculous.”

On this point the orator would become diffuse, not to say prosy; for although the glory of the Grange had become in a manner dimmed by the residence of Pauline therein, when not in her actual presence, Mrs Jermyn still enjoyed much satisfaction from recounting details of the *ménage*, and enumerating the servants, the horses, the carriages, and the visitors of Mrs Wyndham.

The Finches had called, of course. They had called among the very *first*. So thoughtful—so like themselves.

Mrs Jermyn, however, did not know to whom she was ascribing honour.

Dolly Finch had not only instigated his parents to the visit, but he had accompanied them.

He had been loud in his praises afterwards. What charming people they were! What a delightful house it

was to go to! Mrs Wyndham so friendly, so easy! Such a nice, well-mannered woman!

“Why are there not more like her?” cried the young man, enthusiastically. “Usually if there is one thing in the world I hate more than another, it is to make a call. You give up your afternoon, and you ride four or five miles, and you have to get down and open half-a-dozen gates if you go up by a side entrance—besides the nuisance of the door-bell at the end—and all you get for your pains is a pair of cold fingers, and a seat on the ottoman, in the worst part of the whole room to get away from.”

“Humph!” returned his father, drily. “It seems to me there was another part of the room, very far from the ottoman, which you found still worse to get away from to-day. I found no difficulty in getting away from the ottoman, but I thought you were never coming out of that *corner*. And as for the house, it is all one abominable draught. I have been shivering ever since I came out of it.”

“You were shivering before you went, sir; you complained of it this morning. You have caught cold, standing about in the farmyard yesterday.”

“It was not the farmyard; there was nothing in the farmyard to give me cold. It was those hot, unwholesome rooms——”

“Unwholesome? They were delicious. The scent of the flowers——”

“I tell you it was *that* made me ill; I know it was. Nasty sickly atmosphere—enough to poison any human being! And every time the door opened, a gale blew along the ground, and froze one’s feet till they were like stones. I would not live in that house if I were paid for it.”

Dolly differed from him entirely. He liked the place and everything about it.

His mother agreed with him. Yes, Mrs Wyndham was agreeable—certainly agreeable, kind, and friendly. Good-looking too.

Dolly thought her uncommonly good-looking. A little bit made up, you know, but what of that? Miss La Sarte is not made up, at all events. She is—ah—rather handsome, is she not?

Not rather—very. A lovely girl. So graceful, so retiring! Such a contrast to those awkward Miss Jermyns! Lady Finch protests that she cannot imagine how they come to belong to the same race.

Hereupon Dolly grows quite excited. There is no relationship, none of any sort. Mrs Wyndham had made a low sort of marriage, and had got a lot of money, and her husband was dead, and there was no more to be said about it. But with Miss La Sarte, the Jermyns have nothing to do; Miss La Sarte belongs to a good old family.

He is so intelligible, and so deeply in earnest, that Sir John's two grey eyebrows come to the front, and make a dead point.

Beauty, birth, and money? He thinks it might do.

He will not say more of the discomforts he has undergone; and if that invitation Mrs Wyndham talked about should come, it must certainly be accepted, even if he should slip out of the engagement afterwards.

There proved to be some cause for the latter provision.

The next day he sat in his great arm-chair by the fire, in all the dignity of sickness.

Slippers encased his feet, a dressing-gown buttoned to his chin, and a shawl overspread his shoulders. His grey locks of hair, instead of curling crisply round each temple as was their wont, were brushed straight. They had not been plunged into water that morning, nor had his beard been trimmed. He was really unwell, and unnaturally docile and meek.

By mid-day Lady Finch sent for the doctor.

He allowed that she had done right. Perhaps the doctor could do him some little good. He was ill—he was exceedingly ill. Headache, and a nasty depression. He didn't know where. Everywhere. Then he closed his hand and beat his breast sorrowfully, "Pain! pain! pain!"

"I told you you had got a cold, sir," said Dolly, smiling, but not undutifully. "You never would have made such a fuss about those rooms, if there had not been something the matter with you. You don't care what a room is like, as a rule."

"I daresay you are right," mildly rejoined the invalid. "This attack was coming upon me, and that must have been why I felt out of sorts altogether; I ought never to have been out of doors; I know I ought not. What the doctor will say to me——"

"Oh, you'll be all right again in a day or two. You have only to take some gruel, and that sort of thing. What's this?" as a servant entered with a tray.

"Your soup, Sir John," said the man, arranging it by his side.

"My soup? Eh? I didn't order any soup. What am I to do with it? Who sent it?" demanded his master, eyeing the basin, but without ill-will. "I don't know that I want that soup," he continued, irresolutely.

"The best thing in the world for a cold," said Dolly. "And uncommonly good it smells, too. Heigh-ho! I wish it was dinner-time."

"Do you? Perhaps I may take a little; a mouthful or two. What made you say it was good? I don't know that it's good. I don't like eating soup at this hour; it is just some of Custard's nonsense, sending it," breaking some bread into the bowl as he spoke.

"Don't have it, if you don't want it," said Dolly, whose appetite had been sharpened by a long ride in the cold air. "If you are going to send it down again, give it to me. I'll soon make short work of it."

His evident partiality was as stimulating as a good sauce; more so, indeed, to Sir John, who hated sauces, as he hated everything that was not solid, substantial, and John Bull to the core.

"Oh, I suppose I had better take it," replied he, lifting a spoonful with an air of resignation. "When one is weak and ill as I am, it sets one up a little. I wonder that Dr Tyndall has not come yet! He should not have

been so long in coming, when I sent for him. Did he know it was for *me*, Anne?" to his wife, who entered.

"Oh, how comfortable you look, my dear!" cried she, disregarding his question. "I am so glad to see you can enjoy your soup. Custard told me she had ordered it for you."

"Humph! I'm playing with it a little." Sir John hung his head, and almost blushed for the relish he had evinced.

"I knew it was that Custard," he continued. "As if I am to be cured by anything *she* can do! If I were on my deathbed she would concoct some trash of a jelly, and imagine nothing more could be needed! The only person who might do me some little good is Dr Tyndall, and he keeps away. Send for a doctor, and you have as good a chance of getting a policeman when he's wanted."

"He has sent a message just now, to say that he had been called away, but will look in here this evening," said Lady Finch.

"*This evening!* *That's* not when I want him. Am I to wait all that time to know what is the matter with me? Till this evening, indeed! Till he has been round the parish, and attended to every whipper-snapper in it. And how am I to tell what to do for myself, or what to send for, or—or anything? Dr Tyndall can have no idea how ill I am. That fool of a Thomas has given the wrong message——"

"Thomas was out with me," observed Dolly.

"William, then. One of them. He has been idling away his time in the alehouse——"

"Ho has not had time to idle, if he has been to Hexley and back."

"I tell you he has. He has made a mess of it somehow. Who saw him? Who received the answer?"

Lady Finch vouched for the authenticity of the answer. She had met the butler on his way to deliver it, and had cross-examined him. The groom who had ridden to Hexley, had met the doctor's gig leaving the

village, and had received the message from Dr Tyndall's own lips.

"And what does 'this evening' mean, I should like to know?" muttered the invalid, relapsing into testiness. "It may mean any time. Eight o'clock, nine o'clock, ten o'clock. It is too bad" (with rising sharpness) "of Dr Tyndall to put me off with 'this evening.'"

Eight o'clock Lady Finch pronounced to be the fated hour. Dr Tyndall was rarely out after eight o'clock. He probably intended to take Finch Hall on his way home.

Sir John humphed, grunted, and fretted as he listened to her.

Three hours still to wait! Three mortal hours, in which there was nothing to be done but sit, sit, sit, and listen to the clock ticking! He did not want any more of the newspaper. He never went to sleep at that hour. He spurned every overture made to him.

"Three hours! And I haven't eaten a thing to-day! You needn't laugh,"—to Dolly. "I tell you I have not. Nothing but that abominable soup; and why I took it, I can't think. Messes at all hours of the day are enough to give one a fever. I feel much worse than I did, I can assure you. I wish I had thrown that soup out of the window."

"You do not look well, indeed," sympathised his wife.

"*Well?* I tell you I'm *very ill*. I can't get any one of you to understand how ill I am. If a proper account had been sent of me by William, that doctor could never have had the face to put me off with 'this evening.'"

"Oh come, sir," said Dolly, "you are getting round, or you would not be so lively. You were altogether too mild and tearful just now; I was growing really alarmed. You must be a long way better——"

"I tell you I'm *not* better!"

Dolly spread his hands, and pulled a face.

"I'm *not* better," continued his father, angrily. "You are just making a fool of me. None of you have any feeling."

"Dolly, be quiet," said his mother. "Your father is very uncomfortable and feverish."

"Uncomfortable! Is that all you call it?"

"I said feverish, dear. And since you dislike so much waiting for Dr Tyndall, let us send over to R—— for Dr Bell. Thomas can ride over at once. Shall I ring?"

"No, no." He would not have Dr Bell; he disliked strangers; and, twenty to one, Dr Bell would be off on some wild-goose chase too! It was not worth while sending, for he should not see him if he came. Dr Tyndall understood his constitution. It was too bad of Dr Tyndall not to have obeyed his summons sooner; but still he would wait for Dr Tyndall, and none other would he have.

The suggestion had done its part, however. It had given him something to think and speak about. He was now willing to lie back in his chair again, and pat his hands softly together, and discuss the probable cause of the doctor's delay.

Was there any one ill in the neighbourhood? Had he been sent for, to any distance? Had he gone to London?

The groom attested that he had not gone to London. He had driven off in the opposite direction: he had no luggage, and—Sir John was in the act of listening, and the butler was in the act of delivering the message, when the door-bell rang, with a sharp, authoritative demand.

"Dr Tyndall's ring, Sir John," said the man, with a smile; and in a few moments afterwards, Dr Tyndall walked in.

Finding that he should have to be out again that night, he had come, on second thoughts, to Finch Hall first. He was sorry to hear that Sir John was unwell. What was the matter? Cold? Bilious attack?

The patient gave himself little airs.

Well, no. He did not think he was bilious. His liver might perhaps be a little affected. Dr Tyndall would remember how very ill he had been from his liver some years before. He thought he felt something of the same

sort this time, only worse. What were the exact symptoms of liver complaint?

The doctor restrained his countenance, and mentioned several.

"And I have no appetite," continued the invalid. "I thought I had a little just now, but it's gone. They gave me some nasty soup, that took it all away again."

"You took the soup?"

"I took it—yes, a little. I wish now I had let it alone. You don't approve of such rubbish, I am sure, Dr Tyndall? These women," contemptuously, "they have no sense; they are made up of fiddle-faddle crotchets."

At the end of a quarter of an hour he was more composed; he had been dietated to, sympathised with, and prescribed for.

All was going on satisfactorily, when, as ill luck would have it, the visitor rose.

"You are not going yet!" cried Sir John, from the depths of his arm-chair. "You have hardly come in. Do you mean to say you can't sit down for five minutes?" He was hurt, and a sense of desertion stole over him. "Can't you stay and have some dinner?" he continued, almost plaintively. "Let your carriage go, and we will send you home."

But Dr Tyndall arrested the order.

It must be owned that he had a certain pleasure in saying "No;" that he felt all the importance of being hurried from one great house to another, as he announced that "home" was not his destination; he had been summoned to Blundellsaye.

It was this visit which he had feared would detain him until the evening. He had been actually on his way there, when Sir John's messenger overtook him, and it was not until after it was too late to recall the man, that it had occurred to him to alter the arrangement.

Sir John inquired, still with something of the peevishness of an injured man, which of the madeaps had sent for him.

The doctor was unable to say. In fact— with a little irritability—no proper message had been despatched.

Ho had met the drag, with a party in it, near the station, and a footman had jumped down and run after him, with a request that he would go up to the house at once.

Not having the pleasure of Mr Ralph Blundell's acquaintance, he had not looked into the carriage. Some one had bawled out to the man that they would be late for the train, and they had rattled off before he could understand clearly what was required of him.

Nevertheless, he must go, and with a motion of his hand he put aside further entreaties. They had to yield; and a dull evening, unenlivened by his cheerful chat, was endured by all.

It was late ere the doctor left Blundellsaye that night, and he was there again betimes on the following morning. On his way he was overtaken by Mrs Jermyn and her daughter, who were driving over to spend a few days at the Grange. The ladies pulled up, and he was consulted about Dot's second teeth, and the illness of a servant.

Then the waggonette took the lead, for the day was raw, and the doctor had enclosed himself in his brougham, which could not keep pace with the lighter vehicle. Also, he had halts to make, at one house and another. He made his bow, and they drove on.

"You have *indeed* been well received, my dear Camilla," began Mrs Jermyn after luncheon, during which full accounts of the past fortnight's doings had been given and hearkened to. "You are now fairly established as one of *ourselves*. But I said how it would be. It is the *siege*, you know, the siege that was prognosticated."

"Come along with me," said Charlotte to Pauline. "Mamma and Aunt Camilla like to palaver to each other, with nobody by to listen or interfere with them. They will '*dear,*' and '*quite,*' and '*so,*' as happily as possible, for the next two hours. Now tell me all you have got to tell. What have you been about since you came? How do you get on together? And has she sent for the hat, yet?"

Pauline could not choose but smile.

"You have no idea how kind she is, Charlotte; nor how little silly she can be, when—when we are quite alone."

"When mamma is not with her? Eh? I daresay. And so you are not absolutely bored to death, yet? You poor soul! I do pity you. And what says the Little Fennell to it all? And did Dolly come with the Finches?"

"Dolly? Oh yes," said Pauline, dreamily. "I wonder who is ill, in this direction? Aunt Camilla allows Dr Tyndall to drive through the grounds, as he used to do before she came, if he has to go that way; and this is the second time he has passed up the Long Avenue to-day."

"I can tell you," said Charlotte, with an odd look in her face. "Mamma would say you would not thank me, but of course that's nonsense. Only I know," she added, looking, with an assumption of entire carelessness, the other way, "that it is not pleasant hearing of anything happening to—to one's brother's friends. Mr Blundell has got typhoid fever."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE DOCTOR'S CARRIAGE.

"For it is with feelings as with waters,
The shallow murmur, and the deep are dumb"

"Mamma, you were wrong altogether!" cried Charlotte, afterwards. "She did not care a straw. She said, 'Indeed! I am sorry,' and then walked to her wardrobe, and took out her shawl, as composedly as I should have done. I forestalled you with the intelligence, in case the effect might be too much for your tender heart; but I might have saved myself the trouble. Mr Blundell has

no chief mourner—at present, at all events. Are you going out?”

“No, indeed! not on such a day. It would bring my neuralgia back again directly. I shall stay with your aunt, and you can take a walk with Pauline.”

“We are going to drive,” said Charlotte. “Aunt Camilla wants some shopping done in Hexley, and we are going in the pony-carriage. There it is, coming out of the stables. What a smart little turn-out! Look, mamma! that is surely a new kind of carriage; I don’t think I have seen one like it before.”

“Who is going to drive?”

“Pauline, of course. This is *her* carriage. Aunt Camilla never goes out in it.”

“It is quite absurd the way your aunt spoils Pauline,” cried Mrs Jermyn. “I hear she is getting down an Erard grand piano on purpose for her. And she is to have masters in the spring. It is really quite—quite ridiculous. A poor dependent girl! an absolute pauper! Most unsuitable when she may have to earn her own bread——”

“Not she!”

“You can’t tell; it is quite possible. Accustoming her to all this luxury is no kindness. It—oh, come in, come in, my dear,” in answer to a tap at the door. “Come in, Pauline; so you and Charlotte are going to have a little drive together. If you want Charlotte to drive, she is not at all nervous, and perhaps rather more accustomed to ponies than you are——”

“Would Charlotte like to drive?” said Pauline.

“Of course she would,” said Charlotte, readily—“and so would Pauline; so you drive one way and I the other, and we shall both be happy. As for my being accustomed to ponies,” she confided on their way down-stairs, “that is one of mamma’s little flights. I have never driven anything in my life but our old Tommy, who can by no means be started, unless some one runs in front of him all the way down the drive. But as I dearly like to handle the reins, and as you have got such a sweet

little rat of a thing to take along, I can't find it in my heart to refuse the polite invitation. We look picturesque, don't we? you in your scarlet shawl, and I in my blue cloak? Something nice and bright to look at on this deplorable day. Don't you wear gloves?"

"Of course," said Pauline, absently.

"Where are they, then? Why, I declare you thought they were on your hands! Your wits are wool-gathering, I think, or you are dreaming of some one far away. 'Over the hills and far away.' Let me see! Who can it be?"

"You had better drive first, Charlotte. Roger is apt to pull, coming home."

"Then you must wake up if you are going to hold him in, my dear. Where is the button for this apron?" Lower, "We don't need a man, do we?"

"Not when there are two of us. I have one when I go alone. What are you waiting for?"

"He has gone for umbrellas. Not that there is the slightest chance of rain, but, however, they do no harm. Now, shall I set off?"

They had not started many minutes when Pauline uttered a low ejaculation.

"What is it?" inquired Charlotte.

"The doctor's carriage coming back. Don't you think—we might——"

"What?"

"Nothing. Don't drive quite so fast, Charlotte. Don't let us be in his way. Let him overtake us while the road is broad enough for his brougham to pass. It takes up some room."

"We need not be in his way," said Charlotte. "We could run away from his old rumble-tumble easily. I can hardly hold the pony in, as it is. Get on, Roger."

"Give me the reins. I forgot that he had been in the stables the whole of yesterday. Of course he is too fresh for you."

She attempted to take them, but Charlotte laughed, and held them fast.

"No, no—none of that. If he pulls when he is com-

ing home, and if he is too fresh for me when he is going out, I shan't get much driving between the two. Hie, Roger! That is the proper pace to take. There, you see, the carriage is not even in sight behind us."

Pauline said not a word.

A few minutes later they came in sight of the lodge.

"Oh, I wonder how the baby is to-day!" cried Miss La Sarte. "There is such a dear little baby here, Charlotte—only a week old; and I am to be godmother. I must look after my baby. It was not quite well when I was down on Tuesday. Stop, and let me ask how it is."

"We can ask when we come back," said Charlotte. "Would that not do as well, as the gate is open now?"

"Oh, you can pull up just outside," said Pauline, readily. "There is plenty of room beyond for the carriage to pass. Besides, now that I think of it, we might need to call in the doctor; it would be a pity to lose the opportunity, when he is actually passing the door. I will ask him to wait one moment till I see."

The idea, which, in all truth, had only that moment flashed upon her, made Pauline look almost bright.

"Just stop for a moment, Charlotte, and I will jump down."

"Why should you jump down? Call to some one to come out. There must be some woman or girl to look after the house. There! Oh! Will you come here for a moment?" calling herself to a girl who ran hastily out, perceiving she might be wanted.

"How is baby?" inquired the other lady.

"Oh, baby is as well as can be, miss, mother says. It was that bottle, as you sent down, that did her all the good. She has never had no return of nothink."

"And the pain is quite gone?"

"Oh yes, miss. She is asleep, now. I have got her in the kitchen, to let mother have a bit of sleep too. Would you please to come in?"

"No, no—not to-day; not if there is no need. But there is Dr Tyndall, you see, close behind us. You are *sure* your mother would not like him just to see the baby?"

“Oh, he couldn’t see nothink, miss. And mother said yesterday as no baby could be better than she is now, and——”

“Then we had better go on,” said Miss Jermyn, raising the reins, “or we shall be in the way again. How heavy the roads are this afternoon! If I had taken Tommy out, he would have crawled at a foot’s pace; but this plucky little creature minds nothing. Look, Pauline! Is not that a fine lurid light upon Blundellsaye? Ah, poor Ralph Blundell! Who would have thought this was to be the end of him!”

Trot, trot, trot, along the muddy highway, and the doctor’s brougham still rolls behind.

He had not turned, as Pauline had feared he would, in the opposite direction. He was going, as they were, to the village.

“Where shall we stop, first?” inquired Charlotte.

“At the chemist’s,” boldly rejoined her companion. “Drive straight there.”

“The chemist’s? That is at the other end. We shall have to clatter all down the street first. Never mind, I like it. On such an afternoon it is something even to go to a chemist’s; shopping in Hexley is absolute dissipation. What a splendid road this is! I like a great, broad road, with walls on each side, and not a hill anywhere to check our speed. I do like to go fast. My heart sinks at the sight of our long rising ground outside the hamlet. We are expected to get out and walk up, in hot weather. Oh, Pauline, look at the river! How like a sheet of glass it lies! And those unearthly phantoms rising out of the mist—are those the poplars? What a ghostly landscape! And to crown it all, that passing-bell.”

“That *passing-bell!*”

“It is not one, you know; it only sounds like it. It is for afternoon service.”

“Afternoon service!” repeated Pauline, turning two helpless eyes on her companion. “What afternoon service?”

"You are rather addle-pated to-day, my dear; excuse the polite remark. We always have afternoon services in Advent, and so I suppose have you. Yes, I know they have, at Hexley."

"Yes, certainly, I remember."

"And now for the chemist's. Caudle? Is not that the man? We send over to him now and then, as mamma thinks his medicines are fresher than our little man's at Pipton. Softly over the bridge, Roger. *Now*, Pauline, look at the poplars. Look over your shoulder. I say! there's that old pill-box close to our heels again! It may pass now, for aught I care. There he goes, and gone to our chemist too. What is to be done? We must go somewhere else. To the library?"

"No, no — never mind the carriage," said Pauline, sharply. "What does it matter? We can pull up behind it. We cannot expect to have the shops all to ourselves."

"But he will keep you such a long time," remonstrated Charlotte. "He will have all sorts of prescriptions to be made up, and potions to be mixed. Caudle cannot attend to you both."

"I shan't keep him a moment." Pauline put her hand upon the reins. "No need to draw in, I can get out here."

And, scarcely waiting till the wheels stopped, she jumped out, and disappeared into the shop, Dr Tyndall himself holding the door open for her.

She had caught him at last.

"How do you do?"

But the doctor drew back.

"I think, Miss La Sarte, I won't come very near you, if you please. I have just come from a fever patient; and although it is not an infectious kind—still—allow me to wait outside while you are being attended to."

"Pray don't," said the poor girl, desperately. But he had closed the door.

Her purchase was made in a moment—a box of lozenges—and she came out again.

"Is your patient very ill, Dr Tyndall?" putting the change given by the shopman into her purse, with great deliberation.

"Typhoid fever," said he, concisely.

"Mr Blundell, is it not?"

"Yes, Mr Ralph Blundell. He *is* very ill, Miss La Sarte."

She closed the purse, and looked him full in the face."

"I used to know Mr Blundell; he was a friend of my brother, who would be sorry—tell me," said she, suddenly, with a catch of her breath, "have you given up hope?"

"Given up hope? By no means. We shall make a fight of it, I can tell you; but—ah"—with an unavoidable inflection of enjoyment, "it is a bad case. You know Mr Ralph? He has not led the best kind of life to bring him through a fever. He has been fast, you know—fast. And he is not as young as he once was, and every year tells. Added to all this, the stupid fellow has been going about for the last fortnight with the fever upon him, and without permitting anything to be done for it. I was not sent for till last night. I ought to have been with him ten days ago. This is a growing, creeping mischief; and of course, at the first, it is not unusual for people to be wholly unaware of their state; but such neglect as this, I never met with before. It was shameful, monstrous; and so I told them. They ought to have sent in spite of him. A sick man's orders ought to be looked upon as so much waste breath. However, all that *can* be done, now—— Allow me to hand you in."

She was not going to get in, she would walk to the next shop. She detained him, however, for a few moments, under a pretext so plausible, that it was spoken fearlessly, eagerly.

"Dr Tyndall, you will have to go often to Blundell-saye, of course. Shall I tell our lodge-keeper to leave the gates open at night? My aunt would be vexed if you had to go round by the road; but unless I give

orders, you may find some difficulty in rousing anybody. They wait up, on the evenings that we go out."

"Thank you—thank you. Yes, I may have to go through at all hours, and it saves my horses a good mile and a half taking that short cut. I am detaining you; Miss Jermyn is making signs."

"Shall I say you will pass through to-night?" With her back turned on Charlotte, she could affect not to perceive the signs. For this once, Charlotte should not balk her.

"To-night? Well, no; I think not to-night," replied the doctor, thoughtfully. "I have been already there twice, and we have got a good nurse. The crisis will not be yet. The thing is to keep him quiet and keep up his strength. He will have need of it all by-and-by Mrs Wyndham quite well?"

"Quite, thank you. She is not out to-day."

"Ah! Not a day for her either. But you young ladies mind nothing—I see you out in all weathers. I tell my daughter I wish she would take a lesson. Good morning."

He turned from her rather hastily. Two horsemen, whose appearance seemed to indicate that they were returning from a fruitless run, were dejectedly traversing the village at a foot's pace.

To one of these the doctor signalled; and having made his bow to Miss La Sarte, he ran out into the street. The elder of the pair reined up, Major Soames, who vied with Dr Tyndall in his spring flower-beds; and they now held an animated discussion on the possibility of obtaining some Dutch tulip-roots which the doctor had an inkling were to be had cheap.

"They did excellently with the Thomsons last year," he said. "You never saw a finer show. How is your soil for tulips?"

"Good, moderately good. But I mean to improve it. I fancy it is, if anything, too light. Did Thomson have a good show? What were the varieties?"

"Chiefly Couleur Pouceau; magnificent blossoms. Oh, Mr Finch, will you kindly say to Sir John——"

But Dolly had passed on, and drawn up beside the pavement ; at the moment, he was bending from his horse in close conversation with a lady who stood upon it.

Dr Tyndall looked blankly round, and plunged anew into the congenial dialogue. His message to Sir John was not half so important to him as the culture of his tulips.

Meanwhile Dolly, with a happy face, was doing his best.

“ Good morning,” he said, cheerily ; “ do you patronise Caudle’s ? ”

“ For lozenges. Will you have some ? ” Miss La Sarte fumbled with the string of her pocket. “ Will you have one, Charlotte ? ”

Charlotte put out her hand, keeping her eye on Roger all the while.

Then the box was held up, and Dolly was a long time over his selection.

“ You are sure they won’t burn ? ” he said. “ My mother gets hold of some of those long red things that look awfully good in the box, and they are the greatest shams. You take a handful, and when you have had them in your mouth half a minute, the tears are running down your cheeks. By the way, my governor is ill. I think I’ll take him some.”

He made no motion of going in search of them, however. He dallied with his reins, patted his horse’s neck, and thought of something more to say.

“ Coming to the Hunt ball, Miss La Sarte ? ”

She was not sure ; her aunt had spoken of it.

She must come ; it was to be one of the best they had had for many years. He was beginning to expatiate, when she interrupted him in a motherly fashion.

“ Do you know that you are very hoarse ? Have you caught cold too ? ”

“ I have got what the doctor calls ‘ a throat,’ ” replied he.

“ And what are you doing for it ? ”

“ Oh, nothing. I shall dance it off to-morrow at R——

You are not going there, of course? With us it is a call of duty; we are always let in for it."

"You seem to me to have a very good excuse; but you are coming up to us to-night? Go and ask Dr Tyndall's leave, or we shan't receive you."

"Eh?" said Dolly, opening his eyes.

"There he is! go and speak to him," continued Pauline, excitedly. "When there are so many dangerous complaints going about you ought to take care. He will tell you himself how ill some of his patients are. A sore throat ought not to be trifled with."

"I'll do it to please you."

His face beamed. "Only whatever he says, you know, you'll see me to-night all the same."

Pauline turned to go.

"Nice little pony," observed Dolly, still keeping alongside.

"He will trot as fast as your horse will," said Charlotte, who had with difficulty kept the creature quiet for so long.

"Well, I daresay, replied the horseman. "Are you going home, now? Let us have a trotting match."

Major Soames has wheeled off as he speaks, and the little doctor is pattering back over the stones. Miss La Sarte turns round involuntarily, and sees the shop-door open and close after him. Then she replies to Dolly's suggestion imperiously.

"No, no; we have a thousand things to do first, and we have no more time to waste. Charlotte, please go on to Library, take this list, and get the books changed. They are under the scat. I will walk there, when I have handed this note in at that red house over there. Good-bye, Mr Finch. Pray" (with an effort at arehness), "pray don't forget your promise."

"Eh? my promise?" said Dolly, stupidly.

"He is in there," continued Pauline, wishing Charlotte were not by, that she might speak more plainly. "We are not going to have you" (Charlotte moved on) "following poor Mr Blundell's example. *Ask how he is.*"

The words had the ring of a command. They were spoken—she had determined that they should be spoken. Though terrified at her own audacity, she waited not for any answer, but walked with rapid steps across the street.

Once on the other side, however, she paused and glanced back. Dr Tyndall stood by Dolly, and she was so far content.

“What did he say to you?” she inquired in the evening.

“Eh? What about?” said he.

“Your cold, of course.”

“Oh, my cold is gone; that brown thing cured it. You must give me another after dinner, though, if they are all as good. The doctor was telling me about poor Ralph Blundell.”

So she had hoped, and for this she had manœuvred. Her woman’s wit had prompted her to hold him in parley until the other was at liberty, and then, with her Parthian shot, she had flown.

“I rode up at once to ask after him,” continued Dolly; “that was how I came to miss you, I suppose. I thought Miss Jermyn and I were to have had that match we spoke about.”

“Miss Jermyn would have been delighted,” said Charlotte, overhearing him. “And she would have backed Roger for anything you liked to name. You have no idea of the pace we took on the way home.”

He laughed. “Come, it would be rather a joke; we’ll have it. Will you put him into training? And when shall it come off?”

They were wandering from the point, and Pauline sighed for patience—that weary patience which may indeed help to bear, but which is itself almost intolerable to be borne.

She was appealed to by the disputants.

Would she not stand up for Roger, her own Roger, the best little Roger in the world? Charlotte was in her element, equal to any repartee, conversant with every

sporting term. She was vaunting in extravagant terms the pony's beauty, swiftness, and amiability of temper; and Dolly, who lived more in the stable than in the house, was entering, *con amore*, into the discussion.

He was surprised but not displeased at the lukewarmness of Pauline.

Hang it! I'm not clever, and that sort of thing," thought the poor boy. "I can get on very well with girls that chaff and talk humbug; but when that won't go down I don't know what to say. I don't like them any the better for it; this one is worth a hundred of all the rest put together: and I hope that *my* Lady Finch—if ever there is one—won't go in for horses, and that. And slang's odious."

The last observation was called forth by the use of some cant term which Charlotte had recently picked up. It was one which, in all probability, half the ladies in the county would have used, and which, up to the present time, would have been passed by, unnoticed by Dolly. But, at the moment it assailed his ears, two great, pure, penetrating eyes were turned upon his, and then and there his heart fell down dead before them.

CHAPTER XX.

“CRIES AS IF HER HEART WOULD BREAK.”

“ My daughter, sorrow comes to all,
Our life is checked with sorrows manifold;
But woman hath this more—she may not call
Her sorrow by its name—”

—JEAN INGELOW.

It seemed to Pauline that they fell to talking about Blundell quite naturally after this.

“ I rode over to Blundellsayc, as I told you,” said Dolly. “ Of course I did not go in—there would have been no

good in that; but I just paid him the attention," he added, with a little air of pomposity, becoming the future head of the house.

"Would he hear that you had been there?"

"Oh, of course. Well, I don't know."

"Is he so ill, then?"

"They think he is rather in for it."

"I am awfully sorry for poor Blundell," broke out Dolly, after a pause. There had been another controversy at the Hall—he was full of his own opinion, and burning to confide it to impartial ears.

"The people here are such a prejudiced lot," he continued; "you wouldn't believe the way they go on about him. They have got hold of the idea that because he plays rather high, and bets a little, and—and that sort of thing—that he is all that's bad. The one half of them cut him. My governor won't have him at the house. Now, *I* don't go in with it at all. He has lots of money, and why shouldn't he do what he likes with his own? Everybody says he is as straightforward and honourable as a fellow can be; and he's the best-hearted and kindest one you can find, if he's only let alone. They say he has a temper, and that; but who cares for a temper? *That's* not what people mind. It's just because he has got a bad name—and my governor's at the bottom of it."

"Is he?" said she, faintly.

"Oh, by Jove! yes. You ought to have heard how he went on just now, when he was told where I had been. Of course he wasn't going to say anything to *me*," said the young man, with immense dignity; "it was my mother who told me afterwards. Of course he would never attempt to interfere with what I choose to do," continued Dolly, secretly cherishing the remembrance of that *amende honorable* which had been made after the first battle; "of course he knows better than that. But he would as soon think of riding into the river as going over himself. My mother quite goes in with me."

"Does she?" cried Pauline.

"She thinks it's a shame—just as I do. My mother

hates to hear people run down for nothing ; and when I tell her what hard lines it is for Blundell, she quite understands.”

As indeed she did, for no one was more son-ridden than was Lady Finch. Her daughters had married almost immediately upon their emancipation from the school-room ; and Dolly was her youngest, her spoilt darling, her Benjamin. To him she fondly deferred on all occasions ; with him she took counsel on matters whereon most wives dutifully seek advice from their lords. He dictated to her, his principal subject, with perfect ease and engaging frankness ; she admired, applauded, and echoed the words.

Pauline, with a great burst of gratitude for the womanly tenderness, and more, for the womanly powers of discernment which she fancied had been revealed, turned to her companion—

“I honour your mother,” she said.

“Oh, well, she is awfully good,” replied he, rather astonished. “By the way, she wants to know when you are coming over to see her. You were to look at some flowers, or something, weren’t you?”

“Yes, certainly. We will arrange with my aunt before you go. But what I meant was, about—about what you were saying just now. It is such a cruel thing to take up false reports, especially when they are, as they nearly always are, ill-natured and——”

“Oh, you mean about Blundell,” said Dolly, shrewdly. “Yes, that’s what I say. It’s all for nothing. Well, I won’t exactly say for *nothing*. He was an awfully wild fellow, as a young fellow ; but fellows change, you know. People hark back to what he was years ago, and bring it all up against him now.”

“But he may have changed since then.”

“That’s what I say. Of course he may.”

“Do you think,” said Pauline, “he has?”

“Well, I don’t know. I daresay. I don’t know much about him. You see, when he left—that’s about two years ago—I was at Oxford ; and so, of course, I wasn’t

much down here, for we were always off somewhere in the summer, and at Christmas I had a lot of places to go to. My mother used to make a fuss to have me at home, so I always came down for some part of the time, and we used to meet them—there were two of them, then, you know—there was a brother who was drowned afterwards. They were always out with the hounds, and that was pretty much all we ever saw of them. They were always civil, and it's disagreeable not to be on good terms with your neighbours. By the way, how conveniently you are placed here for people dropping in! You mustn't be surprised," with a little nervous, exploring laugh, "to see me sometimes. I am often passing."

"We shall always be glad," replied Pauline, conventionally. "My aunt is rather fond of having people dropping in."

"She won't turn me away, then? Please ask her not, for I'm coming soon. I shall ride over to Blundellsaye every day this week."

No one could have been kinder than Pauline was to Dolly, after this.

She thought him the nicest, the brightest, the handsomest of boys. She smiled upon him, chatted with him, humoured him in a thousand unconsciously attractive ways.

She reminded him of his promise. Would he be sure to fulfil it? Would he come in to amuse them when he passed that way?

They were often very dull, very stupid. They wanted waking up. People ought to see more of each other, to hear more about each other, to—to avoid being wrapt up in their own interests.

The words were words of wisdom, but they were curiously at variance with the look of the girl who spoke them. The restless eye, the agitated air struck Dolly, and, alas! he misinterpreted their meaning.

Come? Of course he would come. Was he likely to forget? He would come the very next day.

Miss La Sarte met him in the porch. "And how is Mr Blundell?"

He had forgotten to inquire. He had meant to go up that very afternoon. By Jove, he had! and he had forgotten. “You see,” he explained apologetically, “when you asked me here it all went out of my head.”

Here was a blow. That visit on which she had been counting suddenly changed into a penance, her envoy into an ordinary mortal. Worse than all, it was *her* request, *her* renewed invitation, *that*, with which she had sought to strengthen her hold upon him, which had wrought the mischief.

Perforce she had to entertain her guest, had to listen to his prattle, force herself to find topics, and make the weary moments pass.

She had brought it upon herself; she would not complain—in fact, she could not.

Mrs Wyndham was greatly pleased with the young man, and surveyed her niece, on his departure, with new complacency.

“You look extremely well to-day, my love. Of late you have been pale—rather, if anything, too pale; but this afternoon your cheeks have quite a colour. It is well that there is no one by to suggest a *reason*—is it not, my dear? Charlotte, you know,—Charlotte, who is so *quick-sighted*, and makes such very—such *odd* remarks at times; and my sister-in-law—it is just as well they were not here. I pressed them to stay, I did *indeed*; but they expect some friends to-night. Who they were, I did not hear; did you? Some of their own little set, I fancy, or Selina would have been sure to say. But, as it turned out, nothing could have been more lucky.”

If one of Pauline’s emissaries turned out faithless, others unconsciously served her better.

She was a constant visitor at the lodge during this period; for the baby was again unwell, and was in need of care and nursing. The dear baby! What an obliging, accommodating disposition was evinced by that infant of days! The doctor was in attendance, of course; and, of course, inquiries were made after sick neighbours, amongst others—quite as a matter of course—after the

one he had just left. The answer was simple, and invariably the same, "No change." On the seventh day Miss La Sarte was late; she met the carriage in the avenue.

"A few grapes for Mrs Tyndall, and my aunt hopes she is better? They are very poor ones, but the best we have."

"Thank you—thank you; very kind, I'm sure. Mrs Tyndall is getting on well, and no fresh attack. I wish I could say as much for the patient I have just left."

"Mr Blundell? How is he?"

"It is life or death to-day, Miss La Sarte. I shall tell you to-morrow how he is, or there will be nothing more to tell. Good morning."

She crept slowly home.

"Pauline, my love, I really *cannot* allow you to walk back and forward in that damp avenue a whole afternoon. I was watching you from my room, and wondering if you would *ever* come in. I thought of sending to you. Wetherell could have taken the grapes, or you could have left them at the lodge. Did you meet the carriage?"

She had met the carriage.

"And he seemed pleased? And how is Mrs Tyndall?"

"He seemed very much pleased, and Mrs Tyndall is better."

"But you must not do it again, my love. In this weather there is *nothing* worse for one than moping up and down in a damp, woody place like that. You look quite white. You have got a chill already."

No, no — she had no chill; she was well — quite well.

"Then do keep more to the open ground in future," persisted her aunt. "And now there are one or two little things that I want you to do for me. Quite little matters; they won't take you many minutes. There is this head-dress—it is frightful, positively *frightful!* Just look at that feather! Imagine it sticking out above my ear like that! And Wetherell can't see it. She has un-

picked it twice already, and each time it is made up worse than before. A single touch would put it to rights. Any one with a grain of taste could do it. I could, myself, only I want to lie down and take a little rest this afternoon, that I may be fresh for the evening. You don't care for needlework, I know, but this only needs *taste*, and your taste, Pauline, is always good. That is why I have come to you. As to the work, it will be *nothing*, as you see. Just to unpick this ruffle—it is far too full—and lay it on flat; and a touch is wanted at the side. There is something wrong, something heavy-looking about it altogether. I can't wear a mountain on my head, can I? It would look ridiculous above my little face.

“Then, these notes. That one is an invitation: that's easy; we'll go. But this is rather tiresome, because it is about a servant who left me some time ago, and I don't know *what* character to give her. She did not suit *me*, but then she was excellent in her way. I should be sorry if she did not get the place; but I don't think she ought to have applied to me, so long afterwards.

“Just let them know that, dear Pauline, and make up the best sort of character you can. Quite *honest*, you know, and *sober*; and be sure you say she *had* a kitchen-maid.

“Then this wool: I want it matched at Helbronn's. Dear me! where is the wool? It was in my hand two minutes ago, and I have been nowhere but in the drawing-room and conservatory! Just find it, love, and say I will have two skeins more, or whatever you think is wanted to finish my cushion. You know the cushion? It is in the work-basket, if you would like to take a peep at it.

“And, Pauline, one thing more. I am so glad I remembered: the plants—the plants for the dining-room table; would you choose them yourself this time? Burrows sent in such a shabby set last dinner-party we had, that I was quite vexed. When one *has* the plants, you know—good plants—it is ridiculous. I am particularly

anxious about the dinner-table looking well. By the way, what do you wear to-night, my love?"

"To-night?" moaned the poor girl.

"Yes, to-night. Make yourself very bright and pretty, for there will be many eyes on the watch. Your amber crape? It would blend with my satin nicely; and you would have the head-dress ready in time. Shall it be the crape?"

Was it luxury such as this that Mrs Jermyn had pictured?

The head-dress is finished; the notes have been written; and the plants changed.

And, "You dear, good creature!" cries the aunt, "you shall do one more thing for me, and then you must run to dress, for it is getting near the time. It is only to find my keys, Pauline, for where they are gone I *cannot* imagine. They were in my hand a little while ago, and I *must* have them if I am to wear my pearls to-night. Have you any pearls, love? If you have, put them on. Let us be as like each other as a fair and a dark person *can* be. Ah! I am many years older than you, Pauline—I am indeed. But then, you know, we blondes never look our ages as you brunettes do. We cannot look old if we would. As Colonel Grafton said to me—oh, you clever child, you have found the keys already! Now you shall see my pearls. But what a long face you have got to-night, my dear! I know: you want to be off to your own toilet. Run away then, and try to be down before any one comes."

But the guests are already at the door.

Mrs Wyndham shrieks, "It is not time! It is not nearly half-past seven! It is a mistake!"

Some one must have arrived by accident. Wetherell must fly, and find out who it is. "Fly, good Wetherell, fly!"

It is Sir John and Lady Finch; and neither Sir John nor his watch knows what it is to go wrong in the matter of punctuality.

Nor, indeed, does Sir John's cook dare go wrong,

either. It is as much as her place is worth, to have the dinner two minutes behind the hour, by the great clock in the hall.

Her master arranges his walk up and down the long drawing-room, so as to bring him to the door the moment the gong has ceased to sound; then there is just time left for him to swoop off his lady, and reach it again, as it is opened for their exit.

Mrs Wyndham knows nothing of this; but she does know that the Finches are not people to be treated uncourteously. She must get down somehow, before Lady Finch's wraps are disentangled, and she has joined her gentlemen in the hall.

“And I must go down by myself,” cries the hostess, fretfully. “I did hope you would have been ready, Pauline, though it is not your fault, poor dear. But I am not half dressed, and I *do* so dislike to be hurried. One moment, child—do look: is this ribbon becoming? or shall I wear the pearls alone? Untie the ribbon, Wetherell, quick! Now, clasp the pearls! No, I don't like that; I think I will have the ribbon. Run off, dear, run off, and be down as soon as ever you can!”

The party is assembled ere Pauline is ready.

Accordingly, every eye is fixed upon her as she slowly enters, in her clouds of amber, the fairest, finest, saddest-hearted woman present.

Oh, what a mockery is this glistening raiment, and the flash of these lustrous gems!

How ghastly in her eyes is this brilliantly-lit-up saloon, with its rustle, and chatter, and mirth!

He may be dying as she speaks! He may be dying as she walks along the floor! He may be dying as she takes her place at the table!

Any one of these trivial moments of her life may be to him that supreme moment of existence when the soul passes into the visible presence of its Maker!

Do you think that she can eat, and drink, and smile, and laugh, with this before her eyes?

Miss La Sarte is tired, very tired; she is not hungry;

her head aches. Some one says suddenly, "Poor Blundell's gone by this time, I suppose!" and the room becomes unbearably hot.

She escapes, and rushing to her chamber, alone and in the dark, cries as if her heart would break.

CHAPTER XXI.

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR.

"Yet think not that he comes below
 The modern average ratio;
 The current coin of fashion's mint,
 The common ballroom-going stint.
 Of trifling cost his stock-in-trade is
 Whose business is to please the ladies,
 Or who to honours may aspire
 Of a town beau or dandy squire."

—JANE TAYLOR.

A young woman does not fly from the dinner-table, while yet the second course is circling round, without provoking comment; and many and varied were the interpretations put upon Pauline's behaviour.

What a pity that she should be so delicate! What an unfortunate thing nervousness was! The weather was trying. Lady Finch brought forward a headache on her own account; and Mrs Wyndham, not to be outdone, averred that she had felt unequal to being out of her room the whole afternoon.

To Mr Fennel, however, was due the happy suggestion of the evening.

It was wholly, entirely, and gloriously his own: and it was acknowledged at once, and by universal consent, to be the most rational explanation that had been given of the unfortunate *contretemps*. No wonder he was proud of it. No wonder he repeated it, with increased faith in his own genius, and glory in his success, when he rode

over to the Grange on the following morning, to make the proper inquiries.

Mrs Wyndham was alone in the drawing-room, and accordingly to her he addressed himself.

"It was the venison now, wasn't it?" said he. "I know lots of ladies can't stand a haunch. It is so—so, —not unpleasant, you know, because venison can't be unpleasant. And what a haunch it was! Splendid! But then there is something peculiar, you know, something unlike anything else, about a haunch, and it was carried past just the moment before. So, then, I made up my mind it was at the bottom of the mischief."

"It might have been, Mr Fennel. My dear niece is certainly *excessively* susceptible. So am I; and so are *all* our family. We are quite *foolishly* particular; it really becomes a *misfortune*. I am surprised, I own," apologetically, "that Miss La Sarte was the only sufferer last night. I am most *thankful*, I assure you, that I was too far off to be endangered. With good kind Sir John sitting by my side—the *donor*, you understand; the haunch came from him—it would really have been *awkward*. And over little accidents of this kind, over faintness, one has no manner of control. It is all nerves, you know, *nerves*. There can be nothing disagreeable, nothing in any way offensive, about venison, *park* venison, too," continued the lady, feeling as if she must emphasise the difference; "but unfortunately it is not a question of argument—it is an effect on the imagination too subtle to be analysed."

This was quite good enough sense for Mr Fennel, who was willing to be supported in any way agreeable to his companion.

"It is a pity, isn't it?" said he; "because, you see, we can't do without venison, although certainly we might——"

"Oh, fie!" exclaimed she, briskly; "you are not going to say you could do without us poor women? I should never have expected this from *you*, Mr Fennel! I should not *indeed!*"

He protested—she feigned to be exasperated afresh; he explained—she would misunderstand; he apologised, and she was content.

All this was amusing enough to Mrs Wyndham, who was never better pleased than when carrying on a nonsensical banter, and who was as confident of her charms as any belle in her first season; but it began shortly to pall on the young man.

He wondered why Miss La Sarte did not appear. He began to look out of the window, tap his boots with his cane, and exhibit other signs of restlessness.

“You are surprised that my niece should choose that walk, I daresay,” commented Mrs Wyndham, who, while following the direction of his eyes, had been indulging in a tirade against damp avenues, dead leaves, and closed-in grounds. “It is a foolish whim, and so I tell her. So many nicer places as there are to be had, it is really odd, and imprudent too. But we women never *are* prudent; that, you know, is proverbial. We leave prudence, like all the sterner virtues, to your sex. Pauline is not to be turned from her own way, when once her heart is set upon it. I told her, warned her; I should not be surprised” (with a bright idea) “if, after all, it was not more of a chill, caught out of doors on such a miserable afternoon as yesterday, than the venison! A chill! I have no doubt about it, now. Foolish girl! And there she is in it again, at this moment!”

“Where?” cried he, eagerly—“where?”

“That scarlet dot among the trees. That is her red shawl. Now that the branches are bare, one can see a long way down the walk.”

He gasped with dismay.

Did she know he was there? Did she not mean to come in? Worse than all, had she gone out to avoid him?

It certainly appeared so, and yet he could not yield the point without a struggle. He had not passed that way, and as he had not seen her, it was quite possible that neither had she seen him.

"Really, it is a *foolhardy* thing to do!"

As Mrs Wyndham spoke, she moved towards the bell, but, divining her purpose, her companion forestalled her, stammering with eagerness.

"Now, do send me," cried he. "It's—it's really awfully bad, you know; and I'll tell her you said so. 'Pon my word I will, and I'll bring her in, too. She can't help coming, if you send for her, can she?"

He was off ere she could stop him.

"Now, Miss La Sarte, this is *too* bad of you; 'pon my word it is, now! Your aunt is awfully put out about it—she really is; and she sent me to bring you in, you know; and I told her that I would."

"Why should I come in?"

"Because—oh, well, I don't know. I came to bring you—I did indeed. Mrs Wyndham sent me. But, after all, it's very jolly here," continued the faithless messenger; "and I don't see why we should go in—'pon my word I don't. Or we might go to the garden, mightn't we, and then she couldn't mind that, could she?"

"To the garden! What should we do there?"

"What should we do there?" echoed he, with a cheerful laugh. "Ha, ha, ha! What *should* we do there?"

She stared at him.

"That was so good," he continued, adapting his pace to hers, with a comfortable settling down to companionship. "There's no reason in the world why we should go; and as for your aunt, I daresay she has forgotten all about it by this time. It's ever so much pleasanter out, isn't it? And I think this is the nicest walk I ever saw, 'pon my—— What is the matter?"

"Nothing. I thought I heard some one."

"Did you? Oh no; Mrs Wyndham would never send again. I am sure she wouldn't; for I told her I would bring you—and so I should, only, you see, you wouldn't come."

Louder came the sound of wheels. Her heart seemed to be beating in her throat, and every limb trembled.

She knew—she had known since morning—that there was still something left to hope, to wait for; and wait she would. The carriage, which had passed at an early hour through the grounds, was now returning. Too soon, too soon, she feared, for any good news; but if the worst had to be learnt, she must hear it then and there. She had now another patient to inquire after; the doctor's wife was still unwell, and nothing pleased the good man more than to be asked concerning her. He was certain afterwards to volunteer information on other points.

Oh! what should she do to get rid of her tormentor?

“Can I ask you to take the trouble to go up to the house for me? It is only to tell my aunt that—that—that”—(what message could be framed on the spur of the moment?) “that, as she dislikes my being here, we will go to the garden or come in.”

“Oh! not ‘come in,’” pleaded he.

Furthermore, if the young lady was so docile, what need of a forerunner? Quick as thought, she saw, corrected, her mistake, and yielded the point.

“We will go to the garden, then.”

Oh, joy! He turned the corner ere the carriage came in sight, and she stood by the wayside, alone.

She was right, so far. It was Dr Tyndall's brougham; and with a gesture she bade the coachman draw up. But the inside was empty.

“Where is your master?”

“Stopped at Blundellsaye, miss.”

“Is he to be there long?” with a gleam of hope.

“To be called for at five, unless he sends word, which is to be left at the lodge.”

“How is Mr Blundell?”

“Not so bad as yesterday, miss.”

When Mr Fennel reappeared, the carriage was out of view, and Pauline met him with a smile.

He could not now provoke her. The few moments of unbroken quiet his absence had procured, had sufficed to compose and soothe; and with a grateful spirit she rose above every trifling annoyance.

Now, she felt, was the opportunity given to atone for previous neglect, and to wipe out, if possible, reminiscences which might have given rise to suspicion.

The reminiscences of her present companion were not, it is true, likely to be troublesome in themselves; but that was, unfortunately, no guarantee that they should not be indirectly mischievous—that they should not be imparted to other more appreciative ears. Daily is the electric spark of intelligence passed through non-conducting lips. They feel not, they discern not, what they touch; but in its naked truth the message is conveyed, and only when it gains its destined point the shock is felt, the work is done.

On this Pauline ruminated.

“Who has she got hold of now?” said Mrs Jermyn, as she and Charlotte came in sight of the pair, having driven over to luncheon. “It is Mr Fennel, I do believe!”

“It is!” cried Charlotte. “Poor Pauline! Little Fennel in cold blood is rather too much of a good thing. At a ball or dinner-party he is passable, but before two o’clock!”

“Ay, before two o’clock! What can have brought him here before two o’clock? I think Pauline must be a most artful girl. To make an appointment with a young man——”

“Oh, nonsense, mamma! Do you think any human being could be so insane as to make an appointment with Little Fennel? He has come to call, and she has met him, and is taking him up to the house—that is all. Poor little chick! He is as happy as possible. Look at the little head going, and the little shoulders bobbing, and the little arms turned in, and the little toes turned out. What a little piece of absurdity it is, from beginning to end! And how angry it will be with us for coming! Carrying off its Pauline, taking the cream off its little cup of bliss, or, who knows? dashing the cup altogether from its lips! Listen! how merry its little heart is now! Ah, my friend, that laugh died away when you turned and saw us! Well, we shan’t owe you a grudge,” cried

the good-natured chatterer ; “ for I’m sure I should have felt just the same if I had stood in your stead. Well, Pauline? How do you do, Mr Fennel ? ”

“ You are having a nice walk,” said Mrs Jermyn, eyeing them both. She had at least the right to say “ walk,” until the walk had been disclaimed.

“ We are going to the garden,” replied Pauline, innocently. “ Will you and Charlotte come? Do ; you wanted to see the pines, and there are some large ones just coming on.”

Wanted to see the pines? Yes ; but not to see Pauline showing the pines !—not to be handed out of her carriage in her *own sister-in-law’s* grounds, and taken to *her* garden, and treated as a *visitor*, where she had a *right* to be at home !—not to be welcomed and *patronised*, and pulled about hither and thither to suit the young lady’s convenience ! No indeed !

But for Mr Fennel’s presence, Mrs Jermyn could hardly have brought herself to accept the invitation.

As it was, she debated ; but Charlotte had leaped to the ground, disdaining assistance, and curiosity prompted the offended lady to put pride in her pocket, and follow. At least she would discover the object of the expedition.

Pines indeed ! A girl without a penny should not presume to talk about pines.

To her astonishment, the girl without a penny walked off with Charlotte, and Mr Fennel was left to be her escort.

A blind, of course ; but she was agreeably disappointed at finding that she could so soon satisfy herself on the points about which she was most inquisitive. No one could now interfere with her.

“ I had no idea that gardening was one of your accomplishments, Mr Fennel ? ” she began.

Neither had he, but the circumstances were explained. Miss La Sarte had deferred to the wishes of her aunt, who had disliked her frequenting the closed-in paths ; she, or he, or somebody, had suggested the garden, and so, and so—that was it. He thought it was pleasant enough anywhere, for his part.

“No doubt,” replied the lady, drily; “even without the pines.”

“Oh, well, you know, I should like to see them awfully, if you would. There’s nothing better than a pine, and the one last night was the best I ever tasted. ’Pon my word it was.”

“Last night?” murmured Mrs Jermyn, absently.

“I forgot you were not here. We had an awfully nice little party, only Miss La Sarte was ill. And so I rode over this morning to see how she was. And she was out, you know. It was rather good, wasn’t it? Like the dog, you know. Ha, ha, ha! Mother Hubbard’s dog, wasn’t it? What is the verse?”

“ ‘When she came back,
The dog was a-laughing,’ ”

said Mrs Jermyn, readily. “Yes, amusing. But it was exactly the sort of thing one might expect——,” she checked herself. “The young ladies of the present day are inclined to be a little whimsical, we must acknowledge, Mr Fennel. Miss La Sarte kept her room?”

He was delighted to explain. Miss La Sarte had not kept her room, but she had retired to it deplorably early. Everybody had agreed as to the cause of her illness.

“And you would not think there could be anything the matter with her this morning, would you?” cried he, eloquently. “She was just as well as she could be when I came. She was walking up and down here in the avenue.”

“It is hardly fair of us to rob you of so charming a companion.”

“Oh, well, you know, we’ll catch them up in the garden. They can’t get away from us in the garden. That’s the best thing about a garden,” continued he, confidentially; “you know where to find people, and that sort of thing. If you are told to look for them in the stables, or the kennels——”

“You would hardly expect to find Miss La Sarte in either place?”

“Oh, you know, Mrs Jermyn, I was not talking of her then. You are laughing at me.”

He was prepared to be offended, but she hastily apologised. “Only a joke, Mr Fennel. You, who are so fond of jokes, must not blame me for my little attempt; but,” anxious to please, “you must not speak of gardens so disrespectfully, for we have heard great accounts of your own. You do take some interest in it, I suppose?”

“Oh, well, I do, sometimes. But what’s the use if I did? My gardener is such a swell that he won’t let me touch anything, and if I want a flower for my button-hole he hides it! ’Pon my word he does! I say, ‘Oh! come now, Harrison, this is *too* bad! This is past a joke! Where’s that white concern gone?’ But he won’t tell me, you know. He makes believe it is over, or some stupid show of that kind. I say, ‘Oh, come now, I know your stingy ways! but just give me *one*—just *one*. Come now.’ But he won’t. He is too many for me. I have got to give in to Harrison, whatever he says; because, you know, anything for a quiet life.”

“You take prizes at the flower-show as a reward for your good-nature.”

“Did Harrison take a prize? ’Pon my word I didn’t know. He would not tell me, you know; he would never tell *me*. He keeps it dark, all about flower-shows and that sort of thing.”

So he twaddled on.

Meantime Charlotte had inquired, “What brought him over at this hour? I don’t ask *who* brought him; *that* is apparent. But what excuse had he for coming?”

“We had a party last night, and I was stupid—at least, I don’t know how it was, I had to get up and leave the dinner-table. Wasn’t it wonderful?” commented Pauline, brightly. “He was bound to come and ask after me.”

“You had a party! And why did you not invite us? You eruel creature! You know we like to come. Why did you not make Aunt Camilla ask us?”

“I am afraid I did not think of it, Charlotte.”

“Well, don’t forget next time, and I’ll forgive you.”

Now say, quick, who was there, and all about it. Was it a nice one? Did everybody come? And what did you wear?"

"Everybody came. And I suppose it was a nice one."

"And what did you wear?"

"What did I wear? Oh, my amber crape."

"Your amber crape? I don't know it. You were very grand, then? What is it like? And how have I never seen it?"

"I don't know. I wore it at the Tracy's, and Aunt Camilla asked me to put it on last night."

"*Asked* you! That is rather good. If you were any other girl in the world—but I don't believe you do care much what you look like. Amber crape! I daresay it looked very beautiful, and that you looked very beautiful in it. There! That is what I would not say to everybody! Come now, Pauline, confess that you had one little gleam of satisfaction in seeing yourself in the mirror. Confess to one, and prove yourself a very woman."

Now, could Pauline confess with truth? The horror of the past night was still upon her—still hung like a black shadow, out of which she had, indeed, stepped into the sunshine, but whose chill touch could never be forgotten.

With a tremulous effort at pleasantry she rejoined, "Never mind what I say, dear. Tell yourself I did. And next time you may be sure I will."

"Well, young people, we have caught you at last! You cannot shake us off any longer. Pauline, my love, what is this I hear? Mr Fennel has told me a sad story. You naughty, imprudent creature, what have you been doing? Some one will have to look better after you in future, if this is to be the way. I must really take you under my own wing."

"It was the venison, you know," murmured a voice by her side.

"It was the amber crape," cried Charlotte. "It was the beautiful dress she wore, Mr Fennel. You know you

noticed what a beautiful dress she had on? Well, it was pinched in a little—just a very little too tight, and it took away her breath. Aren't you sorry, now, that you had admired the dress so much?"

"Well, now, I really am, 'pon my word. I did think it looked stunning, you know. But was it really that? Are you sure, now, that it had nothing to do with the venison?"

"Or that it had anything to do with the dress?"

Mrs Jermyn was looking at Pauline.

"I am sure of nothing except that it is not worth thinking about. It is gone, and I am ashamed of it. P'lease say no more."

She opened the inner door of the hothouse as she spoke, and every one had to enter—to look, admire, and be suffocated.

CHAPTER XXII.

A WELCOME VISITOR.

"Love is sunshine, hate is shadow,
Life is checkered shade and sunshine."

—*Song of Hiawatha.*

A pleasure was in store for Pauline.

Her brother had been invited by his aunt to spend Christmas at the Grange, and having had the good luck to obtain a few extra holidays, had started off to take them all, as he loved to do, by surprise.

He was in the hall, when the party returned from their stroll, surrounded by portmanteaus, gun-cases, and walking-sticks; and so taken up by paying the fare for his fly, that they were by his side ere he had perceived their approach.

Never was a new interest more opportune.

Pauline, now beginning to suffer from the reaction consequent on the late strain to her nerves, had been

unable to play the part she had resolved upon. Bodily and mental powers were alike jaded; and her loss of spirits had affected the others.

Mrs Jermyrn was irritable and suspicious, Mr Fennel chagrined, and even Charlotte's good temper had not been proof against the prevailing gloom.

Tom's loud, fresh, hilarious "How d'ye do?" was music in the ears of all. With him came in a gust of the outer atmosphere, a reviving influence of ignorance and innocence. He was to talk, and be talked to; to ask, and be answered; to usurp the looks, tongues, and attention of the circle.

How had he come? By the Great Western. When? That minute. For how long? Till Monday.

With the frankness of a schoolboy, and the ready adaptation of a man of the world, he was at home in a moment, prepared to sip the honey of the passing hour, to past and future alike indifferent.

He had scarcely, it appeared, as yet begun his new life. He had been visiting at the country villas of the head partners; all had been kind to him, and it was evident that he had been made much of. He was as ready as ever to take the lead, secure of the approval his gaiety, good looks, and good humour never failed to inspire.

What had they all been about? What was in hand for Christmas? He hoped there were to be a lot of balls? He hoped they were a dancing set? Private theatricals were still better. What house had been chosen for private theatricals? He had passed some very good houses on his way from the station.

The humiliating truth had to be confessed with shame—nobody had thought of private theatricals, and the Hunt Ball was the only one of which there appeared to be the slightest prospect.

With one accord they turned to this, in the disgrace to which their eyes were now opened, and three voices put it forth at once; Mr Fennel for the sake of the county, Mrs Wyndham for her own, and Pauline for her brother's.

She could not have his joyous anticipations damped at the outset; and the interposition was in so far satisfactory, that, although it was evident that this was not all he had expected, it was sufficient to prevent utter consternation.

The Hunt Ball? Yes, it was just about the time for one. Was it well done? Was it good? Did the people go?

He was referred to Mr Fennel, and took the hint; he was sure he would enjoy it immensely.

"I think we may say the people go, certainly," observed Mrs Jermyn, in her softest tones. "Sir John and Lady Finch invariably attend, and bring a party—a really *charming* party,—nice pleasant people, of the kind one does not often meet anywhere else; and the Willoughbys come, although the Manor is such a *long* way off, that—that they are hardly, perhaps, *quite* the acquisitions they might be" (in fact she did not know them). "I believe they are excellent people, but they are too distant for one to keep up anything of acquaintanceship with," continued Mrs Jermyn, skimming the surface of truth, but not troubling the deep waters. "Lord Chorley goes, whenever he is at home; and Mrs Curzon, who is rather a notable person in her way, is never absent. Her party has already begun to assemble—quite a houseful, I believe—all the married daughters, and their husbands, and such a number of gentlemen!"

"With not a *gentleman* among them!" supplemented Charlotte, *sotto voce*. "Do you know Mrs Curzon, Pauline?"

"No."

"No loss, I can tell you. Mamma believes in her, because she puts herself forward, and dresses gorgeously, and surrounds herself by a great rabble of people; but, for my part, I think she is the kind of widow that ought to have been burned in a suttee! She would have presided over the whole ceremonial with the utmost enjoyment, and made eyes at the Brahmin who handed her up the pile! Your last sight of her would have been, enthroned aloft in the greatest comfort, waving her fan,

and kissing the tips of her fingers to her dear relations among the crowd. What a pity, what a very great pity that the world and Mrs Curzon have both been defrauded of such a treat !”

Mrs Jermyn had now turned to Tom. “Of course I have only named *a few*,” she said. “There will be plenty of others, as you will see, to say nothing of the present company. The Thomsons, of course, and Major Soames, and the Jacks——”

“Don’t know one of them,” he remarked. “I don’t know a soul about here, except——never mind, you will find me some partners, Pauline. It is the best fun in the world making your way about a room full of strangers, and being able to pick out whom you like, without being obliged to ask the bores.”

“If one *can* do so,” replied Mrs Jermyn, not over well pleased at her list having failed to awaken either respect or inquiry. “If one could choose for one’s self, it would be naturally pleasant; but such a plan is not always, excuse me, feasible. Sir John and Lady Finch, for instance, are *extremely* strict in the matter of introductions, and make quite a point of no one’s being brought up to any of their party who is not—not——” she paused, uncertain how to finish so plainly rude a speech.

With the grudge she owed Pauline, so good an opportunity of rebuking the presumptuous brother had been too tempting; but it was difficult, in the presence of so many, to administer the necessary chastisement.

Was he, then, to carry matters with a high hand too? Had Tom no more idea than Pauline to what a low estate they had fallen? She was vexed with herself for the notice she had involuntarily bestowed upon Tom, and longed to retract it; but both the previous condescension and its present withdrawal were lost upon the ungrateful recipient.

Her unfinished sentence, her “not—not——” he filled up after his own fashion.

“Not ‘all there’?” he said, merrily. “Is that it,

ma'am? What a peculiar couple! Are there any little Finches, or are they all hatched and flown?"

"Mr Finch is——"

"Coming up to the front door."

Mrs Jermyn began the reply, her daughter finished it.

"Is that Mr Finch?" said Tom. "He has got a nice little horse. Do you think he will offer me a mount while I am here?"

Unparalleled audacity! Sir John and Lady Finch, *the* people of the neighbourhood, to be called "a peculiar couple," their name joked about, and their property coveted!

The angry colour gathered on Mrs Jermyn's cheek, and she glanced around, seeking support.

Would Camilla not say a word? Would Pauline not look abashed? Was Charlotte actually *laughing*?

None of them had any sense of propriety. Mr Fennel had even turned to young La Sarte, and begun a hunting conversation, and Mrs Wyndham was regarding them both with the complacency of a hostess who sees her guests assimilating properly.

Nor did the entrance of Dolly Finch improve matters.

It was Dolly's way to love and be loved, to look kindly on the world in general, and to hail with rapture anything of a kindred spirit.

This alone would have been sufficient to have insured for Mrs Wyndham's nephew the warmest reception; but in Tom he saw Pauline's brother.

Words cannot paint the satisfaction of his heart.

Due inquiries had hardly been made, he barely allowed himself time to express his pleasure at witnessing the invalid recovered, ere he turned to Tom. So lucky an opportunity could not be made too much off; and, in headlong haste, to take every advantage of it, he be-thought him of the very mount on which young La Sarte had been speculating.

In less than five minutes it was placed at his disposal.

As frankly was it accepted.

"With just a 'Thank you,' and no more," said Mrs

Jermyn afterwards. "Without a scruple about making use of Sir John's *beautiful* horses. Absolute *forcing* himself on their acquaintance. Making the appointment. Seeing no *favour* in it,—no—no—no anything! The coolness of these young people is really beyond bearing."

This, however, had to be for Charlotte's ears alone, and Charlotte merely replied by a shrug of her shoulders. It was not worth her while to open the eyes of the wilfully blind, even had it been a possibility.

During the visit little could be said, and nothing could be done, to interfere with the arrangements, which were harmoniously completed under the indignant lady's very nose.

"You'll come up to breakfast?" said Dolly.

"Thanks. What hour?"

"Ten, sharp. The meet is in the enclosure in front of the house."

"I hope that frosty look in the sky will give way," said Tom. "I don't half like the look of it. How was the scent this morning?"

"I—I wasn't out with them," said Dolly.

He was looking at Pauline as he spoke, and all but Tom knew how to interpret the words.

Tom stared. Not out with them? Wilfully not out? Was it possible, credible? He could scarcely believe his ears.

"Got a cold," muttered Dolly, in explanation. "Nasty sort of day." Then, with a happy thought, "What will you do for me to-day, Miss La Sarte? You cured me splendidly last week, and I have come back for more of the same stuff."

Such spirit deserved to be rewarded, as it was. He had secured the right to talk to her, and having thus begun, continued boldly—

"Miss La Sarte, you never come to a meet. We are going to have a big party to-morrow. Won't you come to breakfast with your brother, and my mother will drive you to the cover afterwards? She is sure to go."

"An awfully good idea!" cried Tom. "My sister would enjoy nothing more. We'll both come."

"So very kind," murmured Mrs Jermyn, for him.

She was the only auditor. Mrs Wyndham was entertaining Mr Fennel, and Charlotte was occupied with a study of the pair.

"So *exceedingly* kind," continued she, as the party soon after went into luncheon. "I hope, Pauline, that your brother will really *appreciate* such an offer. I hope he will understand *why* it was made. It would not be amiss, I think, to give him a word of caution, a hint——"

"The very thing for the dear boy, is it not?" exulted her sister-in-law in the same breath. "Now there is no need to fear he will be dull. Now we shall feel his visit is really provided for. What could have happened more *à propos*? Mr Fennel being here, too. Quite a gathering of young men!"

She was in the best of humours; her aside was conveyed in a happy whisper, Mrs Jermyn's in a surly undertone; but to neither did Pauline pay heed.

She was planning how to get off the promised engagement. Her head ached, but dare she plead that? Her aunt had not been invited, but could she suggest that? Dolly, alone, had asked *her*. She caught at this.

She caught at it, but to no purpose; her aunt was simply surprised.

"I don't understand, my dear. Not go because Lady Finch had sent you no invitation? Lady Finch knew nothing of the matter. She has asked you there repeatedly, *repeatedly*. It was not in the least necessary that I should be invited; there was no slight to me, *none*. A young man asks his friend; quite informally—the thought of the moment; and it occurs to him to ask his friend's sister also. To be sure you can go. It would be quite proper and suitable, *quite*. A nice, merry meeting, and everybody present; I shall be pleased, *delighted* that you should be seen there—I shall, *indeed*. You will wear your black and crimson dress. And, Pauline, I think you had better have the landau."

Mrs Wyndham was still engrossed with her subject when Dolly sauntered up.

"We shall see you to-morrow?" he said, trying hard to conceal his anxiety.

"Thank you, ye-es."

"You will not disappoint—*me?*" he continued in a low voice, and with a sudden meaning and emphasis. Mrs Wyndham had discreetly withdrawn, and the moment was his own. "I am sure you wouldn't, if you only knew. I ought to have said 'us,' I suppose, but I was thinking too much of myself. Miss La Sarte——"

She knew not what she said, but she stopped him.

She began to talk, smile, laugh insanely, and got him quieted somehow.

This was absurd. This could not be allowed. A boy, a mere boy, with whom she had permitted herself to be intimate, with whom she had felt it safe to be familiar, was suddenly developing into a lover. He ought not to make himself ridiculous: creatures of that age should be thinking of other things than love; football, cricket, and suchlike, should "fill the measure of his thoughts."

The girl was absolutely cruel in her contempt.

Poor Dolly's pretty, fair curls, his blue eyes, with their wistful pertinacious gaze, raised no feeling of pity or kindness in her bosom—rather, they excited in it a spring of bitterness and disgust.

Over her memory there rushed the recollection of a look, an eye, the turn of a dark head,—was she to blame? she seemed to see before her the man she could have loved; and the man whom she could not love, she hated.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"A LAWN MEET."

"Delightful scene!

Where all around is gay—men, horses, dogs;
And in each smiling countenance appears,
Fresh, blooming health, and universal joy."

Dolly, however, went off, highly contented with himself, and with all about him.

He had employed his time to the best advantage—had said his say; and now that the opening was thus happily made, there was nothing, he judged, for him to do, but to go hard at it, as was his way with the hounds. He whistled, like a ploughman, as he rode along the lanes; and if Lady Finch did not absolutely whistle also, when she was informed of all that had taken place, she did, at all events, fall silently in with her son's views, and sympathise in his hope and joy, after the most approved maternal fashion.

She did more. She despatched a groom forthwith, bearing a pretty little note of invitation to *both* ladies, with the promise of taking out a close carriage to the meet, should the morning be unfavourable.

"And if Miss La Sarte prefers the drag, there will be plenty of others to make a party," said she, meaningly. "Mrs Wyndham is sure to wish to come."

Of course Mrs Wyndham did wish to come, very much indeed; and of course nothing could have pleased her more, than being invited in such a decorous and respectable manner.

She sat with the note between her fingers half the evening, passing eulogiums alternately upon the politeness of the writer, the elegance of her composition, and the long tails of her *y*'s.

"I had no intention of going, none *whatever*," she said; "I did not in the least *expect* to be thought of. But since Lady Finch is so kind—has taken the trouble to

send over on purpose—I think I shall really enjoy it. Pauline, my love, what will you have with your early cup of tea? *Something* you really will need; it will be quite a little journey. Tom must take care of himself. It is *your* expedition, Tom—we go on *your* account. You will see that we are in time? Order the landau when you please, and we will do our best to be ready, although the hour is certainly a drawback. I shall go to bed a little sooner to-night: this has been a fatiguing afternoon; at least——”

She had not wished to confess so much. Her nephew had fallen on a lucky day, and might be allowed to presume that the Grange was ordinarily thus beset.

“You have the right sort of neighbours, I see,” said Tom. “That’s everything, in the country. I suppose you keep open house, Aunt Camilla.”

No supposition could have gratified his aunt more; and she regarded the speaker with new complacency, as she called to mind the manifestly good impression he had made upon her guests in general, and upon those guests whose opinion she most cared about, in particular.

It was something, not only to have a man in the house, but to have a man who drew thither other men. It was a great thing to have a nephew who could make a friend of Dolly Finch. She began to wonder how she had done without Tom. As she walked up-stairs she found in him fresh merits at every landing.

Left together, the brother and sister began to talk.

“Isn’t it capital?” cried the sanguine Tom, referring to his next day’s amusement; “I daresay I shall be out, every time. This is a three-days-a-week pack, Finch says. It’s a roughish country, and lames the hounds, rather. What a jolly fellow he is! And didn’t I come in the very nick of time? The other one would have mounted me too, only he is short of two horses; he was awfully civil, but he has a duffer of a seat. I don’t believe he is ever in the field with the others.”

All of this she had heard before, but, full of his subject, he had for a time no thoughts to bestow on anything else.

At last, "Those Jermyns were the only people here to-day whom I did not fancy," said he. "They were not quite the thing. Why do you have them over in this sort of way?"

Why? Because—well—of course—in fact—because she believed they could not help it.

"Oh, nonsense!" said he, easily. "Where is the difficulty? Tell 'em not to come."

Pauline smiled.

"You really ought," proceeded the authority. "I mean it. Get Aunt Camilla to let them know——"

"They are her relations."

"Relations, or not,—by the way, being relations makes it *worse*—she ought to have her own way in her own house. She ought not to be forced to have those sort of people about her. With their bonnets off, too."

"Bonnets off!"

"Making themselves at home. Those two ladies, sisters, who came in last—one of them was Lady Georgina Something—they took them for some of *us*. No wonder. Mrs Jermyn never had 'sister-in-law' out of her mouth, unless it was to substitute 'your aunt,' when she turned to the girl. I was horribly ashamed. I should have liked to have said something, only I didn't know how. Aunt Camilla should tell them not to do it."

A sudden vision of Mrs Jermyn's face, could she have heard herself thus easily disposed of, overcame Pauline's gravity, and he could not but laugh himself, although he did not choose to yield the point.

Pauline defended Charlotte, but in vain. She had been seen to no advantage, and she had not been heard at all. He would not believe a word in her favour.

No; Mrs Wyndham must be spoken to.

"*You* are the one to speak to her," he said; "she will listen to you. She gave me a flaming account of your illness last night, evidently thinking it had been just the thing to make her party go off well. And that was what brought those fellows here to-day? I'm very much

obliged to you—I wouldn’t have missed the chance on any account.”

He was too busy and too happy to be curious ; it had turned out well for him, and he was content.

“But I would suppress the Jermyns,” he concluded, after a pause, during which his sister had thrice essayed to introduce the subject nearest her heart, and twice had her courage failed.

For this she had lingered, believing that so good an opportunity would not, in all likelihood, recur.

Whilst he had pursued aloud his train of thought, his glib comments, his unhesitating praise or blame, her eyes had been searching vacantly among the embers of the fire, and she had, with difficulty, disguised the absence of her attention.

At every pause, she had inwardly cried, “Now!”—had drawn her breath, and all but begun.

But then he had struck in again, had gone off to his own cares, and hopes, and fears.

He hoped his boots were right. He thought he had some togs that would just do. It would not signify that he was not in hunting dress, would it ?

Often as she had already reassured him on these points, she had again and again to reply to this last and most important question ; had to repeat what had proved to be the best consolation, that he was a chance visitor, did not expect to hunt, and naturally had brought nothing with him for that purpose.

“Because, you know, I have a coat, and Finch wanted me to send for it,” he had explained. “But I think it is just as well it is not here. He knows I have got it, and he does not know I can’t get into it ! Besides, I shall do very well, shan’t I ? I showed you what I am to wear, don’t you remember ? Finch seemed to think it didn’t matter.”

He might have known Dolly all his life, so completely had they fraternised.

At last the moment came for which she had wellnigh despaired.

“I say,” said Tom, with something like an effort,

"whereabouts is Blundellsaye? It is not very far from here, is it?"

"About three miles. You can see the woods from our windows."

"Three miles! That's close by. Well, I shall keep out of *his* way, at all events."

"You have no need," her voice was quite steady and soft. "He is dangerously ill."

"Ill, is he?"

The eager tone was followed by compunction; and he added, more gently, "What is the matter?"

"Typhoid fever. But the worst is past."

She hoped, prayed, at least, that the worst was passed, and remembering her own misery, sought to allay his.

"I'm glad of that," said Tom. "I don't wish him any harm, but what a lucky thing this illness is——"

"*Tom!*"

"You know what I mean. If he *was* to have a fever, he might just as well have it now as any time. He is not the sort of man to——; he'll most likely come round," concluded he, vaguely; "and it would have been so uncommonly awkward meeting him. He behaved shabbily to us all."

Any one who did not know Tom would here have supposed that the subject was exhausted.

Not at all.

A great deal was said about Blundell at the Hunt breakfast, and by the time it was over, he found himself quite anxious to claim his acquaintanceship.

He came to Pauline for a card.

Had she any of his with her? They were to draw the covers of Blundellsaye, and some of them were going to ride up to the house first, as, in case of anything having gone wrong there (his way of putting it), they would, of course, have to go elsewhere.

His sister had no cards—how should she? He had not paused to consider, had merely spoken to be heard.

But Pauline drew him aside. "Do you think there is any need for you to go at all, at least to leave your name?"

“Leave my name? Oh, of course,” he made answer, aloud. Dolly Finch was standing by, and he was hearkening to himself, with Dolly’s ears. “I’m an old friend, and I shouldn’t like him to hear I had been in the neighbourhood without looking him up. We shall only ask how he is.”

“Write your name over mine,” suggested Dolly, fumbling for his card-case.

Tom was delighted; but what became of the card we shall presently hear. He need not have been so careful to write a manly, illegible hand.

“You were a friend of Blundell’s?” said Dolly.

Poor Tom! The temptation was too great; he ruffled his plumage, drew up his head, and began.

Blundell and he had been in Scotland together. Blundell was a rattling good shot. He was awfully sorry to hear of his illness—also to miss seeing him; the only fellow he knew in the county.

Had what he thought been now at variance with what he spoke, this would have been outrageous; but for the moment he was almost sincere; previous impressions were effaced from his slipshod memory, and saying what was agreeable to the humour of the moment, he felt it also, for the nonce.

A place had been found for him beside his host, and he had made a conquest of Sir John, for he had not only eaten a breakfast fit for a sportsman, but he had left on his plate not so much as an inch of crust of bread.

Cutlets, kidneys, fish-balls, omelet, disappeared like magic; and marmalade, butter, and roll were brought to an end at the same moment.

The achievement of this latter feat nearly moved Sir John to a “Well done!” for he knew its difficulty; and albeit the marmalade was somewhat out of proportion to the other ingredients of the mouthful, he respected the man who would not make two bites of a cherry.

A few of his choicest anecdotes were related for Tom’s benefit alone, more than one friendly intimation was confided, and a hope was emphatically expressed that he

would honour them with his company on the next day but one.

Till then they did not go out.

Meantime Dolly had slipped into a chair by Miss La Sarte, with a smile, and a "This seems to be unappropriated," on his lips.

It had not been easy, but he had contrived to march everybody past that chair. He had even routed from it a valiant fox-hunter, to whom one seat was as good as another, but who had strayed into this by accident.

"You are wanted up beside my mother," said Dolly, tapping his shoulder. "She is looking to you to help her with her teapots."

Whereupon Mr Fox-hunter had gone up higher with a very good grace, and had certainly helped to empty the teapot nearest to him, into his own cup.

"They all seem pretty comfortable," said Dolly, looking up and down. "I hope Mrs Wyndham does not mind the fire. This room is too narrow by half, and a great deal too long; it should have been cut in two, and pieced together."

He was unfolding his napkin, but a party of riders shot past the window.

"Keep this place for me." And he was gone to receive them, leaving her determined, if possible, to disobey.

But it was not possible. Anywhere else it might have been, but Dolly was in his father's house, and never was barn-door cock more completely master of his own dunghill, than he was master of those halls, one day to be his own.

Elsewhere shy, awkward, and easily circumvented, here, he was cool and clever.

The new-comers were adroitly marshalled up the room, and deposited in the places he selected for them, without volition on any one's part but his own. They were folks with eyes, ears, and tongues; therefore he put them where they could neither see, hear, nor repeat.

Then he returned to Pauline.

But, alas! every few minutes brought fresh guests, and with each arrival the diplomatic process had to be repeated. At length the punctual ones began to move, to make way for others, but even before that time Dolly's chance was over.

With all his efforts, and in spite of each individual success, he could hardly be said to have attained his end. He had been compelled to finish a hurried meal, drink off a cold cup of tea, and disappear to the stables, in obedience to a whisper from behind, ere he had, as a matter of fact, exchanged a dozen sentences with his companion.

He had shown how willingly he would have done more, had fortune favoured him, and that was all.

This over, Pauline could draw breath; and the muster, the start, and the brisk drive through the morning air, tended unconsciously to brace her spirits; especially as she was happy enough to learn by chance, among the earliest, that the master of Blundellsaye was supposed to be doing well.

The carriages had followed the hunt as far as the cover.

“ Lucky, isn't it?” said Dolly, who rode up with the intelligence. “ Although my governor would not go up to the house, he was stiff as a poker about drawing the cover, till he knew. We are going in directly, now.”

They were assembled in a wood of stately oaks, and, even as he spoke, the more resolute sportsmen were moving to the front.

Many, however, hung back.

“ I must go,” said Dolly, reluctantly turning his horse. “ You will come no further, I suppose.”

“ Get on, man!” shouted his father, who was experiencing a master's difficulty in coaxing the field into a wood, where the rides were deep, and the clay holding— “ get on. The ladies will wait and see the sport. There's a fox at home in there, or——” The unfinished sentence was carried down the wind; he was off, and Dolly after him!

Now followed a hush; eyes and ears on the stretch.

Then a rustle, a pause, another gentle movement, some-

thing silently stealing along from tree to tree—ere a perception of the greatness of the moment has entered into the minds of the passive rear-guard, there enters on the scene, with unquiet eye, and stealthy tread, the fox!

The fox! A great, red, white-throated fox!

“Oh! Oh! Oh!” Every fair one leaps to her feet, and the attendants frantically holloa.

They are heard, they are attended to, the word is passed, and up comes the pack.

“Gone away!” from the end of the cover.

A rare scent. One good hound after another opens, as each in turn inhales a soul-reviving whiff, and off they go,

“Over hill, over dale,
Through bush, through brier,”

horses and horsemen pressing hard behind them.

“I suppose we have now seen all we shall see,” says Lady Finch, addressing her little band generally.

“Do you think there is any use in following further?”

Of course they did not. Mrs Wyndham was shivering with cold, but very well pleased with her entertainment; she would not weaken the recollection of it, she would not run the risk of a less successful end to such a beginning.

In fact she wanted to get home, and as her feelings were shared by the rest of the party, the order was given.

“Only twelve o’clock!” exclaimed Mrs Wyndham, as she entered her own drawing-room; “the day seems nearly over. Is it possible that we have only come to twelve o’clock? that we have not had luncheon? that we have still the whole afternoon before us? Well, I should certainly be sorry to spend such a morning every day, but, just for once, it was extremely amusing. I wonder when Tom will appear?”

They were longing to talk it over with him, to hear the event of the run, and to relate their own experiences.

Pauline, as well as her aunt, had been carried away by the animation of the moment, and both were disappointed, when, at four o’clock, a groom rode over for Mr La Sartc’s

portmanteau. He was to dine at Finch Hall; and, in point of fact, he dined there at least every other night, during his stay at the Grange.

They were delighted with him. He had acquitted himself so well on his first day with the hounds, that he was to hunt regularly. They were only sorry it was for so short a time; he must come back ere long—must give them another fortnight before the season was over.

He was of the Finch party, at the ball.

Of the envy and indignation this caused in Mrs Jermyn's bosom he had no conception; he was merely in his natural element: the Jermyns and he had nothing in common, therefore he ignored them, and he would fain have had Pauline ignore them also.

Her “ I should be ashamed of myself if I did,” he could not understand.

Why ashamed?

Even Mrs Wyndham kept away from their part of the room—from that corner where he averred Mrs Jermyn sat like Giant Pope of old, grinning and biting her nails at the pilgrims as they passed by; his aunt knew what was what, and his sister would do well to follow her example. As connections, she might have to recognise them elsewhere, but not on an occasion of this kind, not before other people. To sit down beside Charlotte Jermyn was, at least, unnecessary.

But for this drawback, the ball was the best, as it was the last of Tom's pleasures. The floor was excellent, and he had partners for every dance. Furthermore, in the course of the evening, he learnt to believe that many more such might be in store for him, for Dolly Finch scarcely spoke to anybody but his sister, and Mrs Wyndham judged it only *kind*, only *right*, to let drop a hint to her dear nephew that he might make use of his own observation on the matter.

On the next morning he returned to London.

CHAPTER XXIV.

“LOAVES AND FISHES? NO.”

“For if it be unlawful to follow Christ for loaves, how much more abominable is it to make of Him and religion a stalking-horse, to get and enjoy the world!”—*Pilgrim's Progress.*

Blundell, with everything against him, fought for his life, and won it.

He was restored from the gaping edge of the grave; and many and sincere good wishes were now expressed for his welfare, by the very people who had formerly drawn back from his acquaintance.

Dr Tyndall could not say enough in his praise; he was the pleasantest, cheerfulest, best of patients; this illness would be the making of him. Hoot-toot! let bygones be bygones; Ralph Blundell would turn into a fine old English gentleman yet.

The rector confessed that he found Blundell interesting; and even Sir John Finch went so far as to leave his card.

After this, Mrs Wyndham told her niece that she thought she must wipe out the word “terrible.”

Where Sir John led, she might follow; and as soon as she met Mr Blundell among the neighbours, she should invite him to the Grange.

“My dear Camilla, and what *you* do, *we* do,” cried her sister-in-law.

“You shall be the authority; you shall lead the van. William,”—William was Mr Jermyn's Christian name,—“Camilla says you are to call on Mr Blundell, and that we must have him to come and see us. I am sure you will be glad to go, for, by all I hear, he must be immensely improved.”

“What did you hear, mamma?” inquired Charlotte.

“Oh, my love, everybody says so; and Sir John Finch has been to call, and your aunt wishes your father to go.”

“But what did you hear?”

“Nonsense, my dear! I have told you already. How can you be so foolish, Charlotte?”

“I have heard nothing,” said Charlotte, aside to Pauline, “except that Sir John’s heart smote him because the poor man had been so ill; and Dolly worked upon his feelings, because Dolly adores Ralph Blundell, as all the other Dollys in the neighbourhood do. They hang upon him wherever he goes, like puppies round an old pointer, and Dolly yearns to be among the puppies. Now Pauline, upon my solemn word of honour, that is at the bottom of the whole of this great reformation.”

But Pauline was sceptical.

“Dr Tyndall thinks very highly of him, Charlotte.”

“Of course he does. Mr Blundell has paid him the highest compliment one man can to another. And a very substantial compliment it is likely to prove, too. Dr Tyndall will point him out as long as they both live, as the trophy of his bow and spear. He will say” (puffing out her cheeks, and mouthing prodigiously), “Look at Blundell! Ah! if you had seen him once as I did. Never was any one so nearly done for in this world. Look at him now! Big, strong man; thirty years’ good life in him yet.’ Of course the inference is, ‘Wonderful skill! Wonderful doctor! A second Daniel.’ Naturally he adores such a patient.”

“You will of course be a *little* careful.” Dear Selina is whispering at the other end of the room. “You must not forget, dear, that *some* people don’t carry their eyes ticketed on their foreheads. Two single women, you know. It is different for *us*. William calls, William invites him to the house; the girls and I have nothing to do with it. But any time you have him here, dear, send for *us*. It would be better. You understand?”

“You dear foolish thing, to put such things into one’s head! We ask everybody, you know, *everybody*. All the other young men about here come.”

“But Mr Blundell is not quite a young man, dear. He is very nearly forty, you know; and you are not much more——”

“Oh dear, I am—at least——”

“Well, dear Camilla, I must speak the *truth*,” quite peevishly. “You don’t *look* it, dear, not by many years. If you are vexed with me for saying so, I cannot help it. It is only *right*, my *duty*, to let you know. People do talk, and will talk; and a little hint given in time, and taken in good part, may prevent mischief afterwards. Pauline, you know, ah—is—a—very, quite, in fact unsophisticated—knows nothing of the world. And she is French, you know—*French*. She runs up intimacies without any idea of the consequences.”

“If Pauline is French, so am I.” The La Sarte blood is slightly roused by the insinuation, but Selina hastens to pour oil upon the waters.

“Yes, dear, you are. And you *are* imprudent, and that is why I need to speak. Looking as young as you do, and with everything of youth about you, even to *insouciance*—but I am wrong, I make you angry——”

Angry? Mrs Wyndham is radiant. Selina is her dear sister—her dear, absurd, ridiculous, prudishly particular creature. For herself? Yes, she would plead guilty to *insouciance*, to foolish disregard of appearances, and perhaps it is well to be reminded.

But really she had thought that now—a widow—at her age!

However, if Selina thinks it wisest not to invite Mr Blundell——?

Selina really *docs*.

They will ask him; *they* will show him every attention, as Camilla seems to wish it. But at the Grange, they cannot, in her opinion, be too exclusive.

Blundell gives none of them the chance of excluding or including him; he is insensible alike to their regard or aversion. What is it to him? He is away from the neighbourhood the very moment he has the leave to travel, for which he has for long impatiently petitioned.

On the day preceding his departure, a suggestion having been made by the butler, he turns his head languidly, and with a yawn, replies—

“ Compliments and thanks ? Yes, of course. Send round. Here, take these away. What are you putting them down there for ? ”

It is the cards that have been left at the house.

“ Not like to look at them, sir ? ”

“ Eh ? No. Clear the table, and let Mr Chaworth know I am down. And a glass of sherry, Maddoek.”

So he comes and goes ; and the reaction which had set in in his favour speedily dies out.

Blundellsaye is once more deserted, and distinctly now, amid its leafless woods, may be seen from every side the ample many-windowed building, over which the sun, as he sets in the west, nightly throws his parting beams.

Snow falls, and then come the east winds of early spring.

Mrs Wyndham has cold after cold, and fancies that the air at the Grange does not agree with her. The neighbours are departing one by one, and she does not clearly understand why Dolly Finch left immediately after Christmas, and why the invitations to Finch Hall have not been so numerous since then. Pauline holds her peace. “ Perhaps,” considers the good-natured creature, “ my niece has had a disappointment. Perhaps we were, all things considered, somewhat premature. Silence, my dear Selina, *silence* is the best, if not the only cure for such a misfortune. We will not say a word, we will be discretion itself. All may come right if let alone—it may indeed.” She endeavours thus to buoy herself up, but it is evident that the disappointment, if there be one, is not confined to Pauline. Mrs Wyndham wants a change. Wales ? Yes. The mountain breezes would brace her up nicely for the London season, to the idea of which she elings.

Would she like Charlotte to go, or Minnie ?

Mrs Jermyn would be only too happy to spare either of the dear girls, and the dear girls were by no means averse to going.

“ I rather like that poor Pauline,” observed Charlotte,

one morning when she and her sister were alone together. "There is something pathetic about her, if you know what I mean. I never can be sure if she is what the people call 'simple,' or not. She is one thing at one time, and another at another. There is something fine in seeing her come into a room so cool and composed that you would think nothing could put her out; and then some trifle will throw her off her balance all in a moment! I believe she thinks she is a remarkably strong-minded, determined character; and if she believed it to be her duty to walk to the end of the world, she would gravely set out to do it; and she would fall on her nose at the twelfth step, and sit there looking at you with a pair of sad, imploring eyes! Pauline's eyes always remind me of a sheep-dog's who has lost his master. Minnie, do you think Pauline has lost her master?"

"I don't think she has found him—hereabouts, at any rate," replied Minnie. A brilliant reply for her.

"No; that I am sure of. Unless—but that must have been nonsense. They gave a dinner-party the night he was said to be dying. The dinner-party that Pauline was taken ill at—*Good heavens!*"

"You don't suppose that escaped mamma?" said Minnie. "But she thought Pauline's influence would have prevented any party being given, under the circumstances, if Pauline had cared."

"Mamma can no more understand that girl than she can a book of poetry!" exclaimed Charlotte. "*She* use her influence! *She* prevent a party! She would drive round and deliver the invitations herself, and not have the least idea when she came home what houses she had been to! If Aunt Camilla chose to give a ball the night Pauline was dying, she would say, 'Oh yes,' and put on her best dress for the occasion!"

"What nonsense you talk!" said Minnie, sensibly. "How could she?"

"I am the only one who knows anything about her," continued her sister, without heeding. "Poor girl! So that was it, was it? I can fancy it all now. I think I see her

in her amber crape that she had ‘been asked’ to wear! And she would not own to a single thrill of vanity. No wonder! Minnie, how did you keep this to yourself for so long?”

“I never thought of it till this moment,” confessed Minnie.

“Then let neither of us say a word. Mamma shan’t have a chance of worrying it out of the poor thing; but, if I go to Wales, I shall just try to find out a little more; that would be but a fair reward for keeping her secret.”

Charlotte, however, was not invited to go to Wales.

Another great girl, Aunt Camilla confided to Pauline, would make them an awkward number.

It was tiresome to have the back seat of the carriage always stuffed up; and three women trailing one after another into the rooms at hotels would be absurd.

Wetherell could look after her and Pauline, but she certainly could not attend to three; even in their walks, they would find it inconvenient to block up the footpaths, by walking three abreast. Three, in fact, was one too many.

Dear Selina’s hints, therefore, were not responded to. Pauline was a charming companion, her sister-in-law avowed. She really was.

A little absent, sometimes; rather dreamy and fanciful; rather too much wrapped up in her own thoughts. Fond of lonely walks, visiting the cottages, and everything romantic and young-lady-like.

All very well in its way; very nice and proper, but still——

However, on the whole, they got on together excellently.

“I don’t interfere with her, and she does not interfere with me,” protested the aunt. “And I must say I always find her ready and willing to join in any little scheme I have on foot. Quite pleased with the prospect of this little run; quite bright and busy about it. We shall visit all the prettiest neighbourhoods, and stay at the best

hotels. It is rather early for Wales, of course, still May is *one* month of their season; and now that this delicious warm weather has begun, we shall find it lively enough, I don't doubt."

"So I am not to come?" said Charlotte to Pauline.
"That is rather hard."

"I wish you were, Charlotte. I quite expected that you would be asked."

"And why am I not?"

"Because," said Pauline, with a smile, "we should be *three*."

"That," cried Charlotte, happily, "may be obviated. If Minnie came too, we should be *four*."

Pauline laughed.

"Well?" said Charlotte.

"Who could propose it?"

"Could not you?"

"Do you think I could?" said Pauline, gently. "I am sure you don't. For myself I should be very glad indeed to have you. I wish you were coming, with all my heart."

"Do you, *really*? Now I feel quite flattered by that. I don't mind about not being asked now. I never thought you would have cared."

"Indeed I do," said Pauline, touched by the unwonted tone. "You and I would have had nice walks together, and we would have gone out in the early mornings before breakfast——"

"Oh, don't make me jealous again, you cruel creature! I will try not to think about it, and be glad you are going to have the fun, even if I don't. That is a step for me, I can tell you, Pauline. I don't know how it is," she added, with an odd break in her voice, "you always seem to do me good, and yet you never preached to me in your life. You are not selfish, and mean, and untruthful, as many people are. You seem to get along without all the little shuffles and contrivances that they find necessary. You walk straight on, neither looking to right nor left, and it all seems to go smoothly for you. Now,

doesn't it? You are not particularly clever, not so clever as mamma, and yet you baffle her, I can tell you. And you twist Aunt Camilla round your finger. And you have all the young men in the neighbourhood at your feet. I wish I knew how you did it," said poor Charlotte, discontentedly.

Pauline did not answer. She was looking out of the window with the strange absent gaze in her eyes which made Charlotte think she was "simple;" and when she did reply to the next question, "What are you thinking about?" it was evident that her mind had strayed from the subject before the conclusion of the monologue.

"I was thinking of your saying that all things went smoothly for me," she replied. "I am afraid you will say I have taken an opportunity of preaching to you at last, Charlotte; but somehow your saying that, recalled to my mind the text, 'All things work together for good to them that fear Him.' You don't mind my saying it, dear? I do fear Him, you know, and you noticed the rest for yourself."

"Do you really believe it is that?" said Charlotte, with an awed look on her face. "If any one else had made such a remark, I should have called it profane. According to your ideas, then, the best thing one can do for one's self is to become religious. I mean, of course, in the way of getting things."

"Loaves and fishes? No; you know better than that. It is only those who are ready to give up, who can hope to receive."

"You would give up, I do believe," said Charlotte. "I don't think you would mind what you gave up. You never seem to me to have *taken hold* properly, in this wicked world of ours. Sometimes I wonder whether you ever had a naughty thought in your life. Of course you will *say* you have—I see it on your lips; but, I don't know. You are not like other people. I can't fancy you looking after your own ends, and being in a rage because some one else had got what you wanted. I think if any thing very bad happened to you, you would just—die."

The next time the Jermyns came over, it was to say good-bye.

Charlotte was in wild spirits.

"Tell me," she cried, "what does the Little Fennel say to this? Is he heart-broken?"

"What—does—he—say?"

"Good gracious! has it come to that, Pauline? Do tell me, quick! The audacious monkey! Keeping it so quiet, too! When did it take place, and where, and how?"

"What do you mean?"

"And she dares say that, blushing like a red, red rose!" cried Charlotte, seizing upon her. "And she would have gone away, without ever having told me, when she knows how I have aided and abetted——"

"What?" said Minnie, coming in.

"Shut the door, Minnie. Here is fun. Now, Pauline," cried her tormentor, "tell the truth, and shame somebody, with whom *you* never had any dealings, my dear! Little Fennel has made you an offer of his little heart, and his little hand, his big house, and the biggest pine in his garden! Now I'll tell you what he said, and all about it. He said, 'Come now, you had better take me—you really had, now. Don't you think so? Because, you see, I'm so awfully in love with you. 'Pon my word I am. And you shall hunt, and shoot, and skate; and I'll teach you how to play lawn-tennis without a net at all! 'Pon my word I will. There isn't anybody else, is there? Because I'm sure nobody else would like you half as much as I do, for I like you awfully—I do indeed. Come, now. What do you say?'"

Pauline laughed so violently that Charlotte grew frightened.

"Are you hysterical, Pauline? For pity's sake don't go on like that; you frighten me out of all the few wits I really do possess. You were grave enough two minutes ago—I shan't dare to tell you any more. There, now, do be quiet."

"It was like, was it?" said Minnie.

“ I won't tell you ; I won't hear you. Charlotte, be a good girl and don't ask me ; it is not fair. You surprised me into laughing, and then I could not leave off.”

“ Of course not ; I know you are nearly worn out. You have been packing all day for Aunt Camilla. ‘ Because Wetherell is so tiresome, she never *does* know where the things are ; and there is something, quite a *little* thing at the very bottom of the trunk, which ought to have been at the top ! And dear Pauline is the *only* person who *can* get it out ! And it won't take her *two* minutes ! ’ et cetera, et cetera : and she won't keep dear Pauline any longer, for she ought to be looking after her own things ; and the moment dear Pauline is at the door, she is called back to rummage for a mother-o'-pearl button.”

“ Never mind the button,” said Minnie ; “ but do just tell us about Little Fennel—only Charlotte and me ; and we promise not to repeat it even to mamma. Tell us when it was, and what he said.”

“ I can't tell you, Minnie. What would you think of me if I did ? Be content with what you have found out for yourselves.”

“ You refused him, of course,” said Charlotte. “ But did he not want to know if there was any one else ? ”

“ No, certainly not.”

“ And did he——”

“ Now don't say a word more, and don't tell Aunt Camilla, or any one,” said Pauline, turning resolutely away from the question. “ You ought to be doubly upon honour, having found it out for yourselves. Promise, Charlotte.”

“ And Dolly will be up to-morrow,” said Charlotte, significantly.

“ Dolly ? ” said Pauline, with evident discomfiture : “ Dolly ? No, I don't think so. He is away from home.”

“ Away. Then that was what sent him away, was it ? He was the first in the field. Well done, Master Dolly ! He knows the value of a good start and a clear coast.”

“ Nonsense, Charlotte.”

“ Not nonsense at all. Don't think to annihilate me

with your 'Nonsense!' I am too well accustomed to the dear, delightful word, and have too much sympathy with the author of

'Sense may be all true and right,
But Nonsense—thou art exquisite.'

To return to Dolly. Be good, sweet Pauline ('and let who will be clever'); tell us about Dolly."

'She is not likely to tell, while you talk, talk, talk the whole time yourself,' said Minnie, indignantly. "I wonder if you ever think anybody else can like to say a word! It's always the same wherever you go——"

"I wonder who is talking now?"

Pauline hoped that in the altercation other subjects might be forgotten: but no; the sisters were speedily reconciled, and returned in company to the attack.

"If you don't tell us, we shall imagine it worse than it was," cried they.

She would not tell them, and accordingly they proceeded to imagine.

"So that is your winter's work, is it?" concluded Miss Jermyn, at length. "And a very pretty winter's work, too! 'Pon my word it is, as your little man would say. So now you are off to Wales; and there you will break a few more 'country hearts, for pastime,' ere you 'go to town.' Well, I won't envy you more than I can help; and, considering that you go with Aunt Camilla, I am not absolutely sure that I envy you at all."

PART III.
W A L E S.

CHAPTER XXV

AGREE TO DIFFER.

“ It is the soul that sees ; the outward eyes
Present the object, but the Mind deseries ;
And thence delight, disgust, or cool indifference rise.
When minds are joyful, then we look around,
And what is seen, is all on fairy ground ;
Again they sicken, and on every view
Cast their own dull and melancholy hue.

Our feelings still upon our views attend,
And their own natures to the objects lend.”

—CRABBE.

THERE is a certain old-fashioned inn, set down in a warm and sheltered spot among the valleys of northern Wales.

It is a quaint, still, sunny spot, dear to lovers of the romantic and the picturesque.

Two broad and beautiful streams unite beneath its windows, spanned here and there by arches of dark grey stone ; cottages nestle along the banks ; and the village, which straggles in a desultory fashion to the left, is enclosed on every side by thickly wooded heights.

These had never showed more rich in foliage, more lovely in the varied tints of early spring, than they did on one Saturday evening at the close of the second week in May, when we now take up our tale.

The sun was sinking in a bright and peaceful glow, betokening a continuance of the fine weather, which had already lasted for some weeks, to the dismay of anxiously foreboding husbandmen, but to the great enjoyment of all who had no agricultural interests at stake.

So dry a season had rarely been known; and the only visitors to the inn who could bring forward a grievance, were such fishers as had been foolish, or heedless, or ignorant enough to dream of indulging in the sport which, on former occasions, had lured them thither.

The water had not risen to fishing trim for weeks; and now trickled lazily over the rocks, and made only a faint bubbling in the hollows, where, during the winter months, it had raved and thundered.

Artists were more fortunate—their riches were only too abundant.

A background of pale mountains, set in silvery haze, was to be had, turn where they might; and what was wanted further for a wondrous foreground, than glancing network of sunshine cast over cliffs half smothered in foliage? Every shade of colour from the deep blue-green of the pine, to the emerald prickles of the larch and the pink buds of the oak, was flickering there; whilst beneath the intruder's feet, and spreading themselves everywhere over the newly sprung grass, hyacinths, violets, and primroses blossomed into masses of blue and yellow mist.

Daylight was beginning to wane on the evening in question, as an open travelling carriage, somewhat shabbily appointed and drawn by hacks, was leisurely traversing the highroad leading towards the village.

It contained two ladies, one of whom, reclining far back upon the cushions, exhibited frequent signs of weariness and impatience, as point after point of the landscape was passed, without any indications that their journey was near its end.

“These roads are really very tiresome!” she exclaimed repeatedly to her companion. “I don't think I ever saw such roads in my life! One can never see beyond the next turning; it is up and down, up and down, the whole

way. I had indulged in a hope that the top of this terribly long hill would bring us in sight of a farmhouse or inn, or *something*—even a church,” with a sigh, “would be—well, it would not be much for us, certainly, for I am exhausted, quite; and so must you be, poor child—but still, it would be better than these dreary wilds, without a human habitation. How far off do you imagine we are still? A mile? Oh dear, I wish that were all! I am certain, *positive*, that we have many, *many* miles still before us. A mile? My dear, what could you have been thinking of? Do you take what that man says? I doubt much if he even knows the way. Now that I think of it, it would not in the least surprise me to find that we had taken the wrong turning. Suppose we have! What *are* we to do? Speak, child; it makes me quite nervous. We cannot go back among those frightful moorlands; we really *cannot*—it is growing late——”

“Don’t be afraid,” replied the other, cheerfully. “Do you see that this valley is just going to meet another, and pass into one? and that the road is keeping close to the river? and——”

“And what of that?” said her companion. “What does it signify if we are in one valley, or two, or a hundred? I am tired of valleys. These trees are a pleasant shade, but depend upon it, we shall not have them long; we shall emerge——”

“At our destination,” cried the younger lady, pointing triumphantly in front. “I knew it was in a wood, and I knew it was where two rivers meet; and that was what I meant by showing you the signs you could not interpret, dear auntie. See, here is the village close at hand.”

“Indeed! I could not have believed it,” responded the complainant, upright in a moment and restored to curiosity and good humour. “This is a charming surprise. Actually at our feet! Who could have dreamt of a little enchanted nook being so completely hidden, that one is in the midst of it before—— Why, it was not even that mile away we disputed about, was it? Cer-

tainly," with a laugh of pleasure, "we have no need to speak to our good driver about taking the wrong way. He has done very well—very well indeed; we are in excellent time for dinner, and I shall take care he has something more than his charge, for driving us so comfortably. It was better, much better, than if he had hurried the poor, good horses; for then, after all, we should only have arrived too soon! Now, all is right, and we will think no more of the perils of the way."

Her spirits and volubility increased every moment.

"It is actually further off than it looks, however," she commented. "How odd! It seemed far away, when it was in reality near; and now it recedes from us, when we are almost touching it. Surely," in alarm, "we are not about to plunge into this never-ending wood again!"

It was but a momentary apprehension; they turned a corner and the village lay before them.

"I am glad for your sake we are here," said the other traveller, as their pace quickened to a brisk trot; "but, for my own, I wish we might go on for a long, long time like this. I wish we need not go indoors to-night. What I should like would be to encamp by the side of one of those dark pools down there, with the waterfall to lull me to sleep, and the sun upon my face to wake me in the morning. How sweet the scent of the larches is! And how beautiful that cloudless sky!"

"Yes, my dear, yes," replied her companion, opening her reticule, and searching among its contents. "As you say, beautiful—quite. I hope I am not very dusty and dirty, am I? One would not wish to drive up to such a nice-looking place an absolute fright! Not but what a veil *is* a protection. You are burnt, my love, a great deal more than I, for want of one—a little sunburn is not unbecoming, however, to brunettes, as you know, no doubt; for blondes it is different altogether—a fair skin tanned is *horrible*. However, this veil, which is, as you see, double gossamer, has prevented that, I hope. Is my shawl tolerably straight? What a *very* nice little town! Quite a *town*. Railway station, church, every-

thing comfortable. We shall do very well here, for the Sunday; very well *indeed*. What do you say? Oh, charming! yes, a delightful drive, and the scenery is enchanting—no other word for it. But still, one docs get a little tired, you know, and hungry. Which is the inn, I wonder? That large grey house, shaded by creepers? Yes, we are going to stop, I am sure. I hope it may be, for it looks most substantial.”

She was not responded to. The other traveller was leaning forward intent on something different.

“That cannot be a nightingale,” said she, musing. “I don’t suppose they come so far north as this. It can only be a fine, deep-toned blackbird.”

“Wctherell tells me there is a *table d’hôte*, and everything done most correctly. Only women-servants, too. Odd, is it not?”

“Listen to the cuckoos! One has started another, and they are answering each other across the river. What a bright, hopeful, spring-like sound it is!”

Mrs Wyndham.—“Ah, here we are! And that is the landlady, I suppose!”

Pauline.—“Good-bye, cuckoos!”

The inn fulfilled all that had been said in its praise, and that was a great deal. It was clean, comfortable, quiet; good rooms were secured to our travellers, and the cookery was excellent.

Mrs Wyndham was in the best of humours.

She commended everything. She did not know when she had been in so nice a place, certainly not for a very long time. The furniture was unexceptionable; the pictures on the walls, gems; the servants the most attentive, respectful, and considerate she had ever met with.

“We shall do very well here, my dear—very well *indeed*, I think. We will breakfast at the public table to-morrow, as it is Sunday, to avoid giving trouble; and we will go to that nice little church afterwards. Go to bed early: don’t sit up, *Pauline*; don’t lose your ‘beauty sleep,’ my dear. Neither you nor I can do without that, you know. Your room is next mine, is it not? And

they both look to the front, as this one does. We were quite in luck to get such rooms, for the inn is full, Wetherell says. There are more people expected to-night, besides. A man rode in just now, to say so. From the Chester Races, Wetherell says. Where they are to be put, I cannot imagine; for quiet as the place seems now, it was all alive with people an hour ago. Gone to their rooms, probably. They appeared to be coming in from all quarters about ten o'clock. This is really a perfect little paradise of a place! So glad we found it out, and for Sunday too! Well, good night, love—I'm off!"

A few minutes afterwards she popped in, again.

"Sure you don't want anything, Pauline? Wetherell will attend to you, remember, precisely as she does to me. She has unpacked for you, comfortably? And you have really everything? Then don't sit up longer, my dear, and be sure to lock the outer door. *This* door is mine, remember. So convenient having rooms opening into each other! I would leave the door ajar, but you prefer having your window open, and one must beware of draughts."

She retired at last, and in half an hour all was quiet in the adjoining chamber.

Pauline leaned out over her broad window-sill.

There was scarcely a sound to interfere with the low monotonous gurgle of the waters beneath; scarcely a movement throughout the dim and hushed atmosphere.

Birds had ceased to sing, and were asleep on their roosts; cattle and sheep had nestled down among the high grass of the meadow; and only here and there a wayfarer trudged along the footpath.

At length even the sound of casual footsteps died away, and silence prevailed over all.

The scene was one to attune a pious mind to devotion, and the solitary watcher from her window owned its tranquillising influence.

Her heart was at rest with God, at peace with all the world.

No sighs nor regrets intruded, no anxious cares were suffered to assail.

A strange happiness filled her soul, and suffused every subject on which her fancy rested.

With comfort, hope, and simple trustfulness she thought of her brother, her aunt, all whom she knew.

She could not fear nor forebode. Her own life seemed almost too fair and pleasant, so wonderfully had its roughness been smoothed, its sharp edges been softened.

Where were the wild and foolish dreams that once had threatened to disturb its even tenor? Dead, buried, and forgotten, thank God!

To Him her spirit rose in pure and holy communion, the while grand old psalms of praise floated across her memory, and found an echo in her swelling bosom.

And there took possession of her heart a great Love, casting out all other loves, and a great Peace that trouble and sorrow move not.

Yea, soft and tender was the touch of the Everlasting Arms; and yet, methinks, in that quiet hour, they were girding sword and buckler, making ready with shield and breastplate.

She, knowing it not, was arming for the fight, and the time was at hand.

CHAPTER XXVI.

TRAVELLERS MEETING.

Athwart the swinging branches cast,
 Soft rays of sunshine pour,
 Then comes the fearful wintry blast—
 Our hopes, like withered leaves, fall fast—
 Pallid lips say, 'It is past,
 We can return no more!'"

—LONOFELLOW.

It was dark ere Pauline rose to withdraw, and as she paused for a moment to let down the blind of her window for the night, the sound of carriage-wheels and horses,

feet approaching at a great pace over the hard highroad, fell upon her ear.

With this was presently intermingled voices, snatches of song, and noisy laughter, grating harshly upon the peaceful solemnity of the scene.

The carriage whirled to the door.

It was immediately beneath her bedroom ; and as the travellers proceeded to alight with the confidence of expected guests, she concluded they could be none other than those whose messenger her aunt's maid had overheard engaging rooms for the night.

Such an arrival was too late to be agreeable, even had the party been composed of sober-minded and considerate people ; but in the present instance, the bustle of greeting inseparable from an inn was magnified into more of a tumult than was in keeping with the time and place.

Orders issued every instant at the full pitch of rollicking voices, interlarded with asseverations, jests, and nicknames not always polite, indicated that there were no ladies present ; and the free joviality of all pointed further to a party of pleasure, of which some, at least, were under the influence of liquor. Their spirits were at excitement pitch.

Luggage was missing, servants were backward, blunders were, it appeared, rife ; but whatever might be the cause of the disturbance, it produced, and was settled by, a laugh.

Once there was the sound of a fall, and the merriment increased prodigiously.

“Asleep?” There was a shout.

“Asleep?” “Who is asleep?” “Nonsense!” “Did you throw him out?” “He's not awake yet!” from each in turn.

“Ha, ha, ha!” from all.

Then followed a feminine remonstrance. “Come now, gentlemen!” and tittering from the doorstep.

At last the vehicle was slowly dragged round to the stables, and the rioters were prevailed upon to go indoors.

There was a lull. Supper was being served, and in the quiet interval the weary girl overhead fell asleep.

She dreamt she was dancing again at Elsie's Highland Harvest-home.

Again she heard the shuffling, scuffling, stamping of many feet, the shouting, and, above all, the twanging of dance music.

Again she saw by her side a motionless figure, and felt the first chill touch of a fear that, ere the night was over, had deepened into a certainty.

That cruel night!

She moaned and muttered in her sleep.

Louder came the notes of mirth, and still more distinctly, as her eyes unclosed.

She was awake, and still she heard them.

Some one was speaking to her. It was Mrs Wyndham, who stood in the doorway between the two rooms, uncertain whether to retreat or advance.

"My dear child, I would not wake you for the *world*! Are you awake? If you *are*,—eh? *can* you sleep through all this? *I* can't. What a dreadful noise! How shameful to *allow* such a noise! It is as bad in my room as it is here, I assure you. They must be dancing in a large hall underneath, or it could not be heard so distinctly in both rooms. Do, my dear Pauline, tell me what to do! How shall we put a stop to it?"

"I don't suppose we can, auntie." Pauline sat up, with long, brown, plaited hair falling over her shoulders, and drowsily regarded her visitor. "I don't think we can do anything, now that it is so late. They will stop soon, I daresay. It must be those people who arrived so late, and who have not gone to bed yet."

"My dear, it is *dreadful*! They *ought* to go to bed! They ought to be *made* to go to bed! Past two o'clock in the morning—Sunday morning, too—it is abominable, perfectly abominable! It ought not to be permitted! My dear Pauline, are you really asleep again?"

"Ah, yes; I'm afraid I am, auntie. I cannot keep awake. If I—could—do—anything——"

“We can speak about it, my love. We can, and we really *should*, for the sake of *others*, say something. People have no *right* to think only of their own convenience; and that every one in this large house should be deprived of rest—should be at the mercy of a set of ill-mannered, disreputable creatures—is not to be borne! I don’t approve of this inn at all, now. I shall get no sleep to-night, and not be fit to be seen to-morrow. Pauline!”

No answer.

“She is actually over again! That is rather hard; she might have felt for me a little. Young girls are selfish, somehow; not that Pauline is so *very* young,—I thought I should have had some sympathy, if nothing else.”

She then concluded to take a glass of water.

The bottle clinked against the tumbler, and the tumbler rattled against the basin; a chair fell over; worse than all, she hit her head a pretty smart rap against the open door, for the flickering moonshine afforded only a partial and uncertain light.

Pauline turned in her sleep.

(“She will surely wake *now*,” considered the unfortunate lady.) “Pauline, my dear.”

“Whoo—oop!” from below.

“Wretches!” ejaculated Mrs Wyndham, with the comfort of thorough exasperation, “they have awakened you again, my poor child, and now you will get no more sleep to-night, and neither shall I!”

Saying which, she sat down to exclaim, lament, and conjecture, until at length the music, after breaking off fitfully, and being renewed with vigour several times in succession, finally ceased; and only the hum of voices was distinguishable at intervals, when these were raised above ordinary pitch.

This was endurable, and better than this could not be expected.

Mrs Wyndham retired, and slumber again visited the eyes of Pauline, who, truth to tell, had been more weary of her aunt’s presence and complaints than of all the other torments of the night.

Others, however, as well as our travellers, had smarted under these.

"This won't do, you know," said a stout elderly gentleman, during breakfast on the following morning. "We must have this looked into. I could hardly get to sleep the whole night."

"Nor I." "Nor I."

Several others said the same.

Such a disturbance was intolerable, and a repetition of it must be prevented at all costs.

Who were the offenders? And what was the meaning of such a disgraceful revel?

The maids were humble, and explanatory; and it was plain they had not regarded the affair with the disfavour which was its due. (In fact, they had participated in the sport, and enjoyed themselves immensely.)

The gentlemen, they said, had been at the races, and they were full of spirits, and they would not be quiet. They had only run down for the day, just for a frolic. There was nothing wrong "whatever" (in the pretty Welsh accent).

"I don't know what you call wrong," replied the head and front of the complainants, aware that he carried an overwhelming majority with him; "but all I can say is, that if such a detestable riot is to occur again, rather than stay here to endure it—Sunday though it be—you must furnish me and my party with carriages, and we will take our leave at once."

He had all the best rooms; and, like Mrs Wyndham, was only attending the public meal out of consideration. Accordingly, great was the alarm caused by so dire a threat.

The carriages? Oh, he would not need the carriages whatever! The gentlemen—they had their own carriage; and it was ordered that evening, and they would be off immediately—that was, before night.

Oh, they were very well known gentlemen—very well known indeed. They were the ——s, and they were on their way to the Castle.

“Well, well,” with impatient disregard of the name held in such high estimation, “whatever they are, it matters not to us. Order and decency are expected in a place of this kind; and if you receive visitors who will not conform to the ordinary usages of society, such of us as are accustomed to see these maintained will withdraw our countenance. You may rest assured of that.”

“A vulgar man, my dear,” whispered Mrs Wyndham to her niece. “I wish he had not taken it up. All that was required was a quiet word to the landlady; it would have been amply sufficient without this bluster.”

The bluster, however, was not without its effect. Assurances were given over and over again, that no further annoyance need be anticipated. The gentlemen, they were quite quiet this morning; they were going down to bathe in the river, and they would not disturb anybody.

Breakfast over, the little church-bell tinkled its summons to morning service.

The door next our travellers' sitting-room burst open as Pauline passed, and was then banged, amid a scuffle and laughter, but she escaped down the staircase without seeing anything of those within.

Her aunt was waiting, and they set out together.

Mrs Wyndham surveyed her niece proudly.

“My dear, you look very nice—*very* nice. That bonnet just suits you. So simple, too; so suitable for the little church! Who are those people in front of us, I wonder? No one very particular; their dress makes one sure of *that*. I hope they will not sit near us; if I were to have that head before my eyes it would put me into a perfect fidget. Preposterous! Is it not? And for a place like this—a little country spot—for which one ought not to dress up *at all!* Not to *appear* to have dressed, at all events. One ought to have the effect of having slipped into a little bonnet and scarf; all that one had room for. That woman is *en grande tenue!* Nothing could be in worse taste.”

“Yes,” said Pauline.

She had fallen into the habit of not hearing one word in ten that fell from her aunt's lips.

"I thought, my love," continued the amiable monitor, "of giving you a little hint on this subject. It might not have occurred to you, although I see that it *has*, and I am rejoiced to see it—but really a nice perception on points such as these is given to few. It is in trifles that a woman ought to shine, Pauline. *That*," gloomily regarding the luckless robe on which her text was founded, "is, as any one might perceive, a *fête* dress! Had it been mine, nothing would have induced me to make such an unsuitable display! To be sure," with deepening dissatisfaction, "Wetherell might have found something for me a *little* better than this! Wetherell's judgment is not altogether to be depended upon. Although, indeed, I had no idea it was so faded when she laid it out."

"Faded? Oh, it has not faded much."

"Has it not? But it is certainly shabby. However, one would always prefer being underdressed to being overdressed. It is nothing to be underdressed—nothing. It merely argues a desire to pass unnoticed; in fact, it acts as a sort of *incognito*. Dear me! are all those people going to church?"

They had met another stream of villagers, and a wagonette containing several gaily-dressed ladies drove past.

"I certainly did not expect such a congregation," observed Mrs Wyndham, only half pleased. "This is an extraordinary place. At first sight it would appear to be buried in the wilds, and now we are in the midst of a perfect concourse of people! Well, I am quite satisfied that I was in the right to come thus to *church*; but for *dinner*, if you think Wetherell has carried out my ideas rather too strictly, we might make a little change. Although it is only an early dinner—a sort of luncheon—still that might pass. It is quite *en règle* to change for luncheon when one has been out before. And," with reviving spirits, "if noticed, it would serve to mark only the more distinctly my disapprobation of dressing up for church. What do you think?"

"I think you look very nice."

"Wetherell could get me out another in a minute."

"Could she?"

"You might at least give an opinion, my dear."

Mrs Wyndham was vexed. Nothing hurt her more than a suspicion that she had been thought frivolous.

"I am sure," she continued, with the same shade of annoyance on her brow, "no one cares less than I do about such matters, if I had only myself to think about; but for the sake of *others* I really consider it is one's *duty* to be a *little* particular."

Pauline confessed her fault. She had been giving her attention to—to—the folly of sweeping a dusty road with yards of fresh muslin—among other things.

Her aunt was delighted.

So that was it! Certainly such a sight was sufficient to distract any one's attention. She hoped her own train was out of the way; but it did not signify (carelessly), as she believed she should change it when she went in. She would be more comfortable in something cooler.

"We are in good time," said Pauline, as they approached the door. "Where shall we sit? There appears to be plenty of room."

"Choose a back seat then, my love. Let us be quite away from all those people we have been looking at. I think I always say my prayers better in a back seat, Pauline," whispered the poor woman, plaintively. "You are different, dear. Your head is full of better things, and you are not diverted from them, as I am. You must try to help me, child, for I need it."

"Dear aunt," said Pauline, greatly touched, and scarcely knowing how to reply, "so gladly—most gladly, I mean—— Here is a seat close at hand." And she opened the pew-door, relieved that no further response was needed.

The sun was at its height as the worshippers issued once more into the open air; and so sultry was the heat, that many lingered to enjoy the shade cast by a row of overhanging boughs, on their way back to the inn.

At the door lounged the young men, who had returned

from the river, breakfasted, and were now inhaling cigars.

"There they are!" exclaimed Mrs Wyndham, deserying them with a woman's quickness. "There are those — Dear me! what nice-looking — I cannot understand their behaviour last night! I thought we should have seen *clowns!*"

"Set of seamps!" muttered a voice behind. "Dissipated, disreputable——"

So much reached the ladies' ears.

Pauline, not inclined to confront the subjects of such unfavourable eritieism, averted her eyes from the doorway, and fixed them on outward objects.

Following her aunt's lead, however, she was about to enter, when a sudden movement among the group, and a loud exelamation of her name, made her stop short.

She turned, and found herself face to face with Blundell.

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN THE VALLEY OF THE LLUGWY.

"Dost thou not know I am a wayward man,
Sullen by fits?"—ETHWALD.

She knew him in a moment.

He was altered. He was stouter, redder, than he had been. There was a dash of grey on each temple. There was a something;—but, in spite of all—perhaps rather because of all—he was even more remarkable-looking than he had been before.

She would have known him in a crowd—have known him anywhere.

As it was, in this quiet place, their eyes met with a flash of instantaneous reecognition. A few dizzy moments—a voice in her ears—and then—she passed on.

Met at last! And such a meeting!

The bold look, the swaggering attitude, the con-

temptuous negligence of dress and demeanour—oh, how her heart throbbed!

She speak to him? *She* respond to his leap forward, and exclamation of her name?

She permit him to take her hand? Detain her?

No, indeed!

Not a smile—not a moment's hesitation, after that first involuntary halt. She will not vouchsafe him a word.

Up and down her room she paces, with clasped hands and quivering breath. The door is locked. She has secured a moment's quiet, and the wretched comfort of being free from prying observation.

Blundell? Could it be Blundell?

Were those Blundell's eyes? Was that Blundell's voice? In the same spot, under the same roof, they had stood and confronted each other, and he had spoken!

Oh! not he, but some vile impostor, miserable changing! When had he that insolent air, that flushed brow, that inflamed glance?

It cannot, it *shall* not be Blundell!

He, for whom she had wept and prayed, and shamed herself in her own eyes!

For whose sake she had stormed in secret indignation at the calumny, the slander, the injustice which had fastened on his name!

Had not that very name been dear to her?

Had she not hungered even to hear it reproached, albeit every syllable stabbed her heart, rather than not hear it at all?

How quick she had been to detect covert allusions, when he was their object! How ready in guessing, where his form would have supplied a blank!

Now, then, she knew why, that morning, there had vibrated through the thin partition of their rooms, through a locked door, a sound which had strangely awakened her memory, yet troubled her to discover why.

She had divined no reason for it.

The husky voice of a late sleeper, demanding brandy ere he could rise—was that like any one she knew?

Most *unlike* Blundell.

It had been a trick of speech—a something in the accent.

She had smiled—had sighed to think how easily his image could be conjured up.

That sigh was now a groan. That image had been slain by force.

Blundell—*her* Blundell—was no more.

Pauline did not leave her room till evening.

A headache, she said, detained her. She would lie down, needed no attention.

“Those noisy people are to leave about nine o’clock,” said her aunt, coming in. “None of them appeared at the *table d’hôte*, and I understand they have ordered dinner for themselves at seven. So, you see, we might just as well have had our little private dinner, as not; and you, poor child, might have been tempted to eat something. If one ever tries not to give trouble at these places, some one else is sure to reap the benefit. I made a point of going down to that early breakfast, tired though I was; and then, when we came back from church, at nearly one o’clock, there was the *débris* of a great meal not begun to be cleared away! In a sitting-room to the right. The door was open as we passed. Did you not notice? Hot dishes too, for I saw the covers! This dress looks more respectable, does it not, Pauline? It was absolutely necessary to change, I assure you, for some one trampled upon me as we came in—oh, I told you, I think! So very rude! He never offered the slightest apology: he was staring at some one else; I should have imagined it was you, if I had not seen you took no notice. But, really, I was quite annoyed. I am afraid they *are* a dissipated set of young men. It was one of *them*, you know, who did it, and there they are sitting at the window now, playing cards! I saw them as I passed by. Well, I have ordered up a cup of tea for you, love; and now I am going to take a little rest myself. How hot this room is! What do you say to a little

stroll after your tea? It would do you good. It is so sad that you should miss the whole of this lovely day!"

Pauline pondered.

She longed to go. The balmy air outside would soothe and calm her, but her aunt's tittle-tattle——

"I don't feel equal to a walk myself," said that lady, innocently. "I think my best plan will be to lie down and try to get a little nap, now that the house is quiet. By-and-by I may perhaps put on a shawl and peep out. But don't think about me, Pauline. Don't wait for me. Let us be independent of each other. I shall watch that party depart. They amuse me. And I feel quite good-tempered towards them, now that I know we are to be rid of their company before night."

"I shall not come back before they go, then," said Pauline. "After which, shall I come in and fetch you?"

Yes, that would do perfectly. Her aunt would be found in the sitting-room.

At seven o'clock Pauline reconnoitred.

The private dinner was being carried up, there was a slight bustle among the attendants, and then the door was shut.

She stole down-stairs, intending to turn to the left and explore a mountain-track which had come under her notice on their way home from church.

By taking this turn she would not run the risk of being seen.

Here too, she would be safe from any chance encounter, whatever direction the departing travellers took.

It was well planned.

In crossing the hall, however, an opening door startled her, and in the confusion of escaping, she darted across the very window she most wished to avoid!

It was wide open, and the clatter of dishes, and voices within, could be heard.

But he was scarcely likely to have noticed her, and she could not imagine why she should care, if he had.

Still she preferred not to retrace her steps, not to cross the window again; another footpath could be found.

Or stay, she would go down to the river. She would go over the picturesque old ivied bridge, and wander up the other side.

Groups of quiet-looking people, tempted by the warmth of the evening, were strolling up and down the village. Fathers and mothers with their little ones; sweethearts linked arm in arm; Sunday-school children in clusters.

Several of her fellow-occupants of the inn were likewise indulging in a ramble; and following some of these, she crossed the bridge, and passing a pretty watermill, at which they stopped to look, pursued her way up the river-side.

The party followed; a clergyman and two ladies.

She could hear their voices behind, as she walked quietly on, subdued and refreshed by the sweet influences around her; and after traversing rather more than a mile, she considered that here it would be well to stay awhile.

The footpath turned again, into the wood, and probably rejoined the highroad a little higher up the banks.

As she halted, those behind did the same.

They had reached the spot most tempting to lovers of scenery. They had gone down, as she had, to the brink of the water, and were remarking to each other on the beauties around.

Presently she observed them, with satisfaction, settling down upon the rocks.

Books were being pulled out, and they were choosing comfortable seats, evidently with a view to remaining where they were, for some little time.

“That will do very well,” reflected Pauline. “I shall keep those people in sight. I shall dog their footsteps going back. This is a lonely place, and good company at just that distance is desirable. I will sit down too, as soon as I have had one look round this point.”

Accordingly she stepped forward, her scarlet shawl rendering her a bright spot of colour among the flickering greens,—and stood motionless for several minutes.

Her brow bared to the evening air, her shawl thrown off, and hanging on her arm—all in white she stood, and

Blundell was looking at her. He had been looking at her for some time.

The first emotion which rushed with almost sickening force over Pauline's mind when she turned and saw him, was the sense of the same thing having happened before.

Then, true, it was *she* who had startled *him*; now, it was *she* who was startled.

But was this all the difference?

What she might have done, had time been given her to think, she could not tell; as it was, she simply stepped forward and held out her hand.

He took it, bowing low as he did so; but neither spoke.

She had leisure to observe that a change of some sort had taken place in him since the morning—a change which shook her; for it was once again the Blundell she had known in the wild Hebridean island who stood by her side.

Afraid of the silence, and of the strange trembling in her veins, Pauline was the first to stammer hastily a few incoherent words, but her voice was so low as to be almost inaudible.

Blundell made no attempt at reply.

"I startled you," he said, still keeping his eye upon her. "It was hardly fair to come upon you thus, but you forced me to it. Miss La Sarte, you would not speak to me this morning."

She was silent.

"I came to ask you, why?"

"*Why?*" with a sudden outburst. "*Why?*"

"Yes; why? We parted friends, we have not seen each other for two years and a half, and you meet me thus. I think I have a right to ask, why?"

"Oh," said Pauline, sadly, "*you know.*"

"I—know——?"

"You must—you do. Was that the way you would have met me in the days you speak of? Is that how you would have been seen on God's holy day of rest? In such company—and such—such——"

She paused, much agitated.

He remained quietly regarding her, and after a minute said, "When you saw me last, Miss La Sarte, I had just endured a great loss, and I was in bad health. You would not have me remain always the moping fellow I was then? You were all very kind to me, I know, but you must have seen what a low state of spirits I was in, equally unpleasant to myself, and to all my friends? Congratulate me upon having got the better of it."

"You have had another illness since then," said Pauline, gently putting aside the question; "I will congratulate you on your recovery from that."

"How did you hear of it? Yes, I was nearly done for, they tell me. But how did you know?"

"I heard about you every day. I was within four miles of Blundellsaye."

"*You* were within four miles of Blundellsaye! Where were you? Who were you with? How did I not know?"

He poured out the questions with a rapidity and eagerness that could not but be flattering.

"I was at the Grange, with my aunt, Mrs Wyndham."

"Mrs Wyndham? I don't know the name. Has she bought the Grange? Shall you be there again?"

"Yes, she has bought it."

"And when do you go back? How soon? How the devil—ah!—" he bit his lip. "I can't imagine how I did not come to hear of your being there."

No response.

"You did not think much of our society, I presume," continued Blundell. "Stupidest lot of people I ever came across. Will your aunt allow me to call?"

He pressed closer to her as he spoke. She drew back.

"I cannot tell."

"I don't know why you should treat me thus, Miss La Sarte," said he, offended. "Your other aunt was kindness itself to me all the time I was at Gourloch, and you and your cousin likewise. What have I done to injure myself in your opinion? Will you have the kindness to explain to me what really is the cause of your displeasure?"

"*My* displeasure! It is not *my* displeasure. I have no displeasure. I have nothing to do with it. I don't know—I don't know what to say," cried the poor girl. "But this morning when you spoke to me you seemed—you looked so unlike what I had ever seen you—I am afraid you were not even quite yourself——"

The effect of her words frightened her.

His brow crimsoned, and he leant against the rock as if to steady himself, without speaking, for several minutes' time. At last he turned towards her. "You thought I was drunk, did you?"

To his amazement the sound of a sob came for answer.

"And you cared as much as that?" he cried.

"How could I but care," replied she, "to see *any one* so? and on this day of all days! It"—firmly and quietly—"grieved me very much."

His look hardened again.

"That was a pity, for, as it happened, you were mistaken; I was not so abandoned."

Pauline turned to go.

"I see you do not believe me," he said.

"I cannot make you understand. I will try to believe you. You always speak the truth——"

"You are too good."

"But if it *is* the truth, it—— Why do you ask me to speak at all?" she broke off suddenly. "Why do you persecute me so? I would not say a word to pain you—no, I would not——"

"Oh dear, no! You only hint in the most gentle manner at unpleasant details."

Her anger rose.

"You must go now, or I shall. I will not speak to you, nor hear you speak again; I will *not*. It is no good. For the sake of the past, good-bye," putting out her hand, "but don't try to keep me."

"Good-bye," he said, carelessly. "I say, don't laugh at me behind my back, please. I am a fool, I know, but I would rather that *you* did not say it."

"How can you? How can you?" She struggled

with her feelings, resolute on keeping a mastery over them. "You never spoke to me so before, and what have I done to make you do it now? Let me go."

"Certainly."

He made way for her to pass. "And so departs all my chance in this world, and the next."

Could she go with those words in her ears? He thought not; and he was right.

She remained riveted to the spot, as if detained by the grasp of an invisible hand.

"Don't let *me* keep you," continued Blundell, in the same light tone. "I am hardly worth a curse—certainly nothing else. Confess now, you would not put out your little finger to save me, if you saw me going down into that pool—would you? You would sooner play the 'Lorelei's' part—I think it is a favourite one of yours—to such a poor devil as I am! This is the second occasion on which you have appeared in it to me. Don't do so a third time, please. That means the final scene, you understand? And I don't wish to be unnecessarily hurried in my exit; I should like to make my bow with decency, when the correct time comes——"

She turned from him, and burst into an agony of tears.

"Good God!" exclaimed he.

He had been beside himself.

The shock of meeting her in the morning, with the mortification consequent on her refusal to recognise him, had left him so ill at ease, as to make an explanation necessary. He had followed her steps, directed by villagers who had seen her pass, and had found her more beautiful and more impassible than ever.

More than that, he had found her at a peculiarly unfortunate time for his own spirits and temper.

He was suffering the reaction consequent on the previous day's outbreak, and he was fasting, having left the dinner-table without tasting either food or wine.

He had been betrayed into an unpardonable degree of irritation, until the sight of her distress recalled him in some measure to himself.

Her distress? But he wanted to be assured of more than her distress. He sought some personal claim to her tears. It seemed to him as though, all along, he had only cared for Pauline.

The trio on the rocks below went quietly home; but Pauline did not see them—her face was buried in her hands.

Blundell did, however, and waited.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

“PAULINE, ACCEPT THE PLEDGE.”

“Give a woman the consciousness of having right on her side, and it is odds but she will prove insensible to argument, inaccessible to tenderness, and invulnerable to scorn.”

“I cannot—no, I cannot,” said Pauline.

“And is this to be final? May I not speak again? May I not hope that you will relent? that time——”

She shook her head.

“Why should I say time, indeed?” cried he. “Why not now, this moment? You have said so much, you have been so good, I can scarcely believe my own happiness—it cannot be that you refuse farther to confirm it? You would not have me now despair? Only tell me that; only throw out the smallest crumbs of comfort, and I will feed upon them like a dog!”

“Mr Blundell, I do not dare. You know, you know why.”

“Yes,” he said, “I do know. A viler wretch than I am you cannot make me out, think what you may of me. That you should care——” He stopped in evident emotion.

“Care! Oh yes, I care——”

“Then you can save me. Can you refuse, and yet acknowledge what you have acknowledged? **Confess**

that I,—that my love, my devotion, has met—unworthy as I am to say it—with return?”

“ Are you asking *me* to save you?” cried Pauline. “ A sinner like yourself, save you!”

“ God forbid! I ask a pure and noble saint to save me, and to her shrine I am come,” he added, folding his arms, and stooping his head before her, with a gesture of proud humility. “ Will she disdain so poor a suppliant? Having alone the power, has she not the will?”

“ This is dreadful,” said Pauline. “ What warnings you have had already! Your brother’s fearful end! your own danger!—these you have disregarded, and you think that I, a poor, weak woman, can do more! What if I gave myself to you? You would soon cease to heed me. You would speak to me as you did just now——”

“ No, no.”

“ You would. What right should I have to expect anything else? Now, at this moment, you are seeking to persuade me to disobey the plain command of God——”

“ What command? To save a soul?” cried Blundell, eagerly. “ Is *that* the command I would have you disobey? See here: I have read the Scriptures—have studied them, perhaps, as much as you have—and although I pretend no longer to shape my life by what I found there, so much I can aver,—you could not be committing a sin in making so great a sacrifice.”

“ Sacrifice!”

“ Perhaps it would hardly be a sacrifice; but still it would be——” he paused, casting about in his mind for some word, some idea, that would weigh down the balance in his favour. “ Is it nothing to reclaim a man like me? Could you have done this—would I have asked it, would I have spoken another word on the subject—if that moment’s weakness had not disclosed to me more than I could ever have presumed to hope? Now you weep again, and give me courage,” attempting to take her hand. “ You do love me, you do care for me. God bless you for it! Pauline, let us both be happy.”

“ Stop,” said she—“ stop, and listen to what I say.”

She paused, drew a long breath, and grew calmer.

“Mr Blundell, when I first knew you, and I thought—we all thought, we believed—that you were, so far as you then knew, seeking with a single heart to walk in the right way, I—I would not have spoken to you as I have done to-night. I thought that for a man to be in earnest, and to be sincere, it was enough; that he was sure to find the truth at last. But I have learnt otherwise. You *were* in earnest—yes, you were; but you were determined to walk in your own strength—and you fell. And you *will* fall, whether you lean on yourself or me, or on any other than the Holy Spirit of God. That you may be led to cast away all other aid, and to seek His, before it is too late, shall be my daily prayer for you.”

“Don’t pray for me—lead me,” pleaded Blundell, not unnaturally. “You shall teach me what you mean, and show me by your own sweet example, the way to heaven. Who can do that better than a wife? You are leaving me to myself, when you might be my hope—my light—my life——”

“Should *I* be that?” said she, trembling. “Are those words fit for *me*? You would put me in the first place—me!”

“I would. I do already.”

“In His place, who will not tolerate such wickedness?”

“Wickedness?”

“Oh yes, you will see it some day. And *I* should be the cause!”

“I don’t understand. You are surely mistaken. You are under some delusion.”

“No,” said Pauline, starting forward with sudden vehemence, “I am not. And I must not listen to you any longer. Do not——” seeing he was about to interpose, “have pity, do not stop me. You would not be so cruel, if you knew—if you guessed—— And now,” resolutely, “I am going.”

“Going! Without one word of hope?”

“Yes, I have no hope.”

She turned dejectedly away, and he mechanically held

out his hand to guide her footsteps over the uneven path-way.

“At least I shall see you sometimes? You return south?” he said, at last.

“Yes.”

“To our neighbourhood?”

“I must; I am dependent on my aunt, and must go where she goes.”

“Indeed? Forgive me for being glad. It leaves me something yet to look forward to, something to live for. Must I take you home, now?”

He was still moving beside her step by step, holding her hand.

Neither spoke until they reached the footpath, when she would have withdrawn it, but he suddenly caught it to his lips.

“I cannot let this go,” he said—“I *cannot*.”

“Would you break my heart?” said she, weeping afresh. “Will you force me never to look upon your face again? Oh, do not make me fear you! Leave me—leave us friends.”

“And thus I seal our friendship!” said Blundell, suddenly clasping her in his arms, and kissing her trembling lips. “And thus I pledge myself to woo and win you yet! Pauline, accept the pledge.”

She could not speak.

“I am a brute!” said he, lifting the shawl which had dropped from her nerveless arm, and folding her in it. “You shall not have more to bear from me—to-night, at least. Stay—one kiss more; and now, lean upon me, and we will come. You shall not again have to say you fear me, Pauline. You may trust me. Come! By Jove! it is nine o’clock!”

She hurried along, aware of what this meant. His companions must be already waiting, nine having been the hour fixed upon for their start. So much her aunt had overheard, and even at such a moment she could feel an additional torment in the apprehension that he might be searched for, and discovered—with her.

Her hand lay within his arm, but as he had promised, he forbore to urge her further.

At length the bridge was reached.

"You will stay here, I presume," said Blundell, bending towards her. "Stay but ten minutes, and we shall be gone. But we shall meet, Pauline, meet at Blundell-saye. Only one question, now. When do you go there?"

"Not for some time. Not till the autumn."

"You are going to Scotland first?"

"Yes."

"I wish I were! But I have promised to join a party in Norway. And—yes—I'll go. I shall come back in October, however, and *then*—— No, not a word! Not a single word! I shall forget all you have said to me to-day, all but one confession, and that I shall *never* forget, *never*. It shall go with me, stay with me, until I draw another from your lips. Now I suppose I ought to go."

She remained motionless.

"Say good-bye, won't you?" said he, putting out his hand.

"Good-bye."

Other wayfarers were crossing the bridge, and a group of villagers stood curiously regarding the pair.

"Good-bye, good-bye," he whispered, coming close to her. "Say good-bye once again, Pauline. I hate to hear you say it, and so I punish myself for all I have done and said to-night. And yet—I don't wish a word unsaid. Do you? Have you forgiven me? Forgive me with some more tears, dear. Think of me to-night—no matter how,—I know it cannot be unkindly. Think of me to-morrow, and the next day, and every day. Now, one look, one smile! By Heaven! I hardly know how to part with you. Say but a single word—a touch of your little hand will keep me! What? You won't? And you turn from me again? *Pauline!*"

His look of reproach she could hardly withstand.

"Go, go," she stammered, faintly. "You promised me to go."

"I am going. Now, don't speak, but listen. I take with me to-night a talisman; and when next we meet, you yourself shall acknowledge all that it has done for me. The thought of you"—he stopped—he almost broke down—she could just catch the entreaty——

"Don't forbid me that, and I shall need no more."

He was not forbidden, she had no voice—perhaps no wish—to forbid him.

Some minutes he waited, as though to test the full value of her silence, then with a lingering look, with a grateful pressure of the hand he held, but without another word, he went.

Scarcely had the sound of his steps died away ere Pauline sank down upon the broken wall by the roadside, unable longer to stand.

Her strength had departed; but so long as it was needed, it had not failed her.

In mute wonder, with a sense of bare deliverance, she hung over the side, concealing her face from observation, whilst feebly wiping from her eyes the ever-gathering moisture—all power of thought and memory for the moment gone.

Blundell with her! Holding her hand! His passionate words vibrating on her ear!

It seemed a dream—a mad improbability.

Here—in this quiet place—away from all the world—she had spent one most terrible, most blissful hour.

Oh! had he known how nearly she had yielded!

This man, till a few hours ago her hero—then her scorn—had almost prevailed to be her husband!

And the past?

It had been explained in a moment, had scarcely seemed to need explanation.

Her coldness, her reserve, his sense of unworthiness, his resolution to forget, all by turns had been recounted.

Then he had hurried on to the present, and then had been the test. Did she love him?

Her heart had been his from the very first day. A word, a glance had made it leap; a touch had made it

tremble. This was for herself alone, but something of the truth had been revealed also to him. He had caught at it, and forced from her the whole. She *did* love him.

She could not deny it.

And he loved her. Why then the difficulty?

Over and over, she had been forced to combat the appeals of a resolute, self-willed man, bent on the fulfilment of his wish.

Had she done right? She hardly knew.

Had she done wrong? *No*.

In the dire confusion of misery and happiness one thing was certain, her conscience was at peace. No reproachful voice within had need to be stifled.

He loved her; that could not but make her happy. She loved him; that could not but make her miserable.

But there was One above who would not chide her.

Those only who love the dear ones of earth *more* than Him, are unworthy of Him.

Yea, and the greater the love that is not *more*—the stronger the love whose bonds are broken for His sake—the more infinite will be His compassion.

And this woman hath done what she could. She hath brought a costly offering.

She hath ta'en her sacrifice and laid it at His feet, and—joy unspeakable!—He will not despise it!

It was some time ere Pauline was sufficiently composed to note the flight of time, and the gathering darkness, which warned her to stay out no longer.

She had risen from her seat, and was about to turn her steps homewards, when her aunt flitted across the bridge.

Mrs Wyndham had been infinitely amused watching the party drive off, and was anxious to describe all that she had descried from her post of observation.

They were boys, mere boys, she said,—all, excepting the tall dark man—the wretch who had trodden on her dress in the morning, but whose misdemeanours she had almost found it in her heart to forgive, as he had been

so unmercifully set upon by all the rest. He had been out, and lost his way, and they had pelted him with the most pitiless epithets.

Indeed they had had some cause for vexation: their carriage, a charming drag, with a team of roans, had had to stand, or rather to move backwards and forwards, in front of the inn, for three-quarters of an hour at least.

Hearing his excuse—that he had lost his way—made Mrs Wyndham, she averred, think of her niece, and it had immediately occurred to her that Pauline had in all probability lost her way also.

But for a lady to make her way unprotected through all that uproar, was not to be thought of; and she had been obliged to wait till they were off, ere she could escape from her prison. She had waited till they had turned the corner, and had then set off immediately.

Inquiries followed, to which, in the present tumult of her spirits, it was difficult for Pauline to reply.

Was she rested? Had she enjoyed her walk? Was her head better?

Yes, her head was better—she had really forgotten all about it. The other questions could be passed over.

“Did you see anything of the missing gentleman?” inquired her aunt, presently.

Ah—yes, Pauline had.

“By far the best-looking of the whole set, my dear; and quite seven or eight and thirty, I should say. Men, you know, do improve up to that age. None of the others were in the least handsome,—at any rate, not to *my* taste. Perhaps I am singular, but I must own that I never can look at a fair man when a dark one is by. Fair *women*, you know, are—are—are *de rigueur*. But I ought not to say that to you, ought I, you nut-brown maid? ‘Nut-brown maid,’ you see; every style has its admirers; and there are some whom I could name, who, I fancy, would declare that a blue eye cannot compete with a hazel one—eh, my love? But as a rule, Pauline—as a *rule*, it is fair women, and dark men. Byron, you know, ‘The lamps shone o’er fair

women, and dark'—isn't it 'dark' men? Well, if it is not, it ought to have been; and I do really believe,"—with a little laugh—"that it was his being a dark man, and such a very good-looking one, that inclined my heart to pity that delinquent more than all the ill-treatment he met with, for indeed he seemed to heed that very slightly."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing; not a word, so far as I remember, after the first. He jumped into the drag without entering the house, although the others did have the grace to ask him to have something to eat before they went; for, it seems, he had not been in at their dinner."

"And he had lost his way?"

"So he said."

"I wish," reflected Pauline, "he had not said it."

After this the Welsh tour fell somewhat flat.

The best places were duly visited, and the best scenery surveyed, but the tour failed in restoring the animation which it had at first inspired.

Pauline was so very quiet, could it be that she was ill? Mrs Wyndham scarcely liked to confess even to herself that she would have done well to add another to her party; but certainly neither aunt nor niece was unduly depressed when the time came for turning their backs upon moor and fell, and they found themselves safely off in the London train from Hereford.

PART IV
L O N D O N.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY.

' His voice was soft, his temper mild and sweet,
His mind was easy, and his person neat.

When no maternal wish her heart beguiled,
The lady called her son 'the darling child ;'
When with some nearer view her speech began,
She changed her phrase, and said 'the good young man !
And lost, when hinting of some future bride,
The woman's prudence, in the mother's pride."

—CRABBE.

AT five years old, Sir Hugh Calverley was a gentle, amiable, and interesting child ; at fifteen he was much the same ; and at five-and-twenty he was little more.

Many excellent qualities he was, without doubt, endowed with ; but, as years went on, it became apparent that these were rather of the heart than of the head ; and although a public school had been gone through with average credit, and his degree duly taken at Oxford afterwards, his friends confessed, aside, that it was more than they had ever expected from him.

His mother, doting on her only son, and divided betwixt her anxiety for his health, which had never been robust, and her ambition for his honour, which she was fully as desirous of maintaining, scarce knew on which

side to base her maternal counsels. Her pride would have urged him to the arduous pursuit of knowledge, had not her secret fears constrained her to forbear.

She dared not run the risk !

At length she was fain to leave the issue to Providence, Luck, or Chance, whichever of the three would undertake the job, and direct her own and her son's fortunes as agreeably as had been done hitherto !

She did not say so, of course ; but no less was this the interpretation of her undeveloped thoughts.

She had still her moments of grateful astonishment, when she bethought her of the time—now twenty years gone by—when “poor dear Sir Edward,” then a hale handsome young soldier, but eighteen months married, had, after a brief illness, been taken from his wife and infant daughter ; thus raising to the headship of the family his youthful nephew,—a transition which, until it actually took place, rashness itself would not have presumed to consider as more than within the limits of possibility.

The troop of lusty boys, whom the prophetic vision of his sister-in-law had ever kept in sight, were now scattered to the winds, and the title devolved upon a sickly little fellow, whose infancy had been one prolonged martyrdom, and who, it was confidently predicted, would never be reared to maturity.

Nevertheless Sir Hugh lived, and even, after a fashion, thrrove.

His nurses grew to be indignant if he were looked upon as delicate, and his mother only mentioned his health to assure her friends how stout and strong he had grown.

It would perhaps have been a wiser course to have given such observations the chance of emanating from the lips of others ; but the ridicule which Mrs Calverley might have drawn down upon herself was moderated by the allowances universally made for the mother of an only and feebly-constituted child.

It was a pardonable self-deception, and heads were still shaken on the subject.

Accordingly, when, in the teeth of all presages, and in spite of continual drawbacks, manhood was actually attained, and twenty-one years of the youthful baronet's life were concluded, amidst banqueting, bonfires, and general rejoicing, the sympathy and congratulations bestowed upon the exulting parent were more sincere and heartfelt than they usually are upon these occasions.

She was not a woman to be popular, but neither was she one to give offence.

So long as her own projects were not interfered with, so long as all went smoothly for her and the single object of her tenderness—we might almost say of her regard—she could be an agreeable neighbour and acquaintance; and accordingly, passed excellently well in a hasty and superficial world.

We have no time nowadays for definitions of character!

It is enough that such a one has been friendly, good-natured, or amusing, to draw forth a gush of our worthless approbation!

Here and there, indeed, a commentator may just go so far in discretion as to add "So far as I see," or, "I have not had much opportunity of discerning;" but it would be exacting an unwarrantable degree of sacrifice to suggest that the opportunity is within reach, and that the discernment may be exercised at any time!

So long as Mrs Calverley annoyed nobody, intruded on nobody, kept her foot from her neighbour's house, and was understood punctually to fulfil the ordinary obligations of life, her trumpet of praise was steadily sounded, and she was scarcely recognised, even by her nearest relations, for the cold-hearted, scheming, selfish woman that she really was.

Her son, of a nature too distinctly different for him not to perceive occasionally more than was permitted to public view, was purblindly alike by affection and by the clever adroitness of a mind superior in ability to his own.

The petty motives which lay beneath the front of plain, straightforward actions, and the furtherance of selfish ends by specious and plausible reasoning, were accord-

ingly only half suspected by him, and much was passed over entirely that would have been bared beyond concealment to a keener observation.

A passing vexation he experienced, a gentle impatience, and even that was stifled.

He was, as his mother loved to describe him, the "best of sons!"

The public estimation of Mrs Calverley being thus high, it will not be wondered at if her gentle and charming sister-in-law gave in her adhesion, as in duty bound.

Indeed, so little did she dream of disputing its justice, that she had from time immemorial been in the habit of looking up to "your Aunt Marion" as the embodiment of judgment, discretion, and good sense; nay, she went so far—although this was accompanied by the faintest touch of misgiving—as to make use occasionally of that lady's conscience instead of her own!

Lady Calverley was not, as we know, a woman of strict penetration. A great deal she took for granted; and what "everybody said," she was too diffident not to believe, in all honesty, to be a truer estimate than any which she, single-handed, was likely to form.

Diffidence being the good lady's secret tyrant, she was thereby so held in check as to be little able to withstand, although she did occasionally smart under, the abruptness of Marion's decisions, her authoritative finger, and her unhesitating Yea and Nay.

When in her daily presence, she would, in spite of herself, at times heave an involuntary sigh for the more chastened rule of Pauline La Sarte, who alone possessed a counter-amount of influence, and who had even on one or two occasions gone so far as to reason away certain arbitrary and distasteful dictates which had been issued from Calverley.

Marion had suspected to whom this interference was due: she had never cared for her niece; and she seized the opportunity, when a home and position were needed for Pauline, to declare against her becoming an inmate of Gourloch.

She did so with admirable moderation and judgment.

“My dear,” she said—and the finger which longed to rise and assert its rights was kept down and folded out of sight among the others—“let us talk it over quietly. You wish to do the very best you can for Pauline, and so do I. You *think* the kindest thing is to invite her to live with you ; but if you will put aside your writing-desk for a moment”—(she had already begun, “My poor dear, *dearest* Pauline”)—“and consider the question,” pursued the mentor, “in all its bearings, you will, I am sure, come to see that what you mean to do in simple kindness might prove to both niece and nephew a real injury.”

“An injury! My dear Marion!”

“Yes, an injury. You cannot provide for them eventually,—Tom has to be thought of too,—and you would cut them off from Mrs. Wyndham’s goodwill, without rendering them any material benefit.”

“Mrs Wyndham? I never thought of her.”

“You are so hasty, dear Ella. I thought of her immediately. She arrived in England from Italy just a week before Hugh and I came up here. We called, and found her an agreeable woman, living in excellent style. She will doubtless adopt both the young La Sartes ; she has no one to whom her husband’s large fortune could, with greater propriety, be left, and it will be a good arrangement on all sides. Permit Mrs Wyndham the opportunity : do not be *too* ready with your offer. If hers is not forthcoming, there is time for it yet.”

“But Pauline knows nothing of this aunt—has scarcely ever seen her!”

“Exactly. And if you take her away, she is not likely ever to see her ! Let her now begin the acquaintance, let her have the chance of making herself agreeable. She is endowed with sense and prudence, I believe, and will understand, no doubt, how much depends upon it.”

The sneer was lost, but the wisdom was not.

Even Lady Calverley was struck by it, and forbore to urge anything further in defence of her own suggestion.

Apparently disinterested, and with no reason for being

interested, as Mrs Calverley seemed, she had a stronger motive for the use of her dissuasive powers than is even suspected by the reader. She had, in fact, "no idea of that boy Tom finding his way down to Gourloch as he used to do in past times!"

She had other plans for Elsie.

Her son's admiration for his cousin could not escape the mother's eye; and although, when it first became manifest to her, the revelation was not altogether palatable, she was, upon mature consideration, not only reconciled to, but eager for the match. Elsie, beautiful, blooming, wealthy, well-born, and, above all, her own indubitable subject, was weighted against the solitary drawback of her being Hugh's cousin.

She herself had paid tribute—grudgingly enough, it is true, until the new idea had found its way—to the radiant young creature, who, when she and her mother joined them in their travels, had brought such life and vigour and brightness into their daily routine of dull perfunctory formulas. How could she wonder at her boy?

She had no right to be astonished; she was not unwilling; gradually it crept into her ardent, unflinching, determined desires, and became of these the chief.

On what might be her niece's feelings, she was, with all motherly partiality for Hugh, unable at first to reflect without anxiety; and confessing, in her inmost heart, that it was not amidst crowded halls and among gayer rivals that he was likely to shine, she blessed anew in her heathenish soul that fresh dispensation of Luck which was to throw them, for the space of several months to come, into close and continual contact.

Thus, during the winter passed by Pauline in B——shire, and by Tom in London, the two Calverley families were abroad in company,—meeting each other during the Christmas week at Rome, and afterwards passing on to Florence.

It was at this latter city, during a long illness of the young baronet's, that the happy assurance came to his fond parent of his affection being returned.

Elsie was so assiduous in her ministrations, so content in the necessary abandonment of pleasures, so eager for the invalid's recovery, that only one interpretation could be rendered. He had but to speak to be listened to.

She was, however, willing to delay, since it appeared that all would eventually fall in with her wishes.

Excitement in Hugh's present weak state of health was peremptorily to be avoided; and as it was certain that the marriage could not take place before the autumn, she was in no hurry about the engagement.

Elsie was already looked upon in the light of a daughter; and in being alive only to her virtues as such, Mrs Calverley went the surest way towards winning some return for herself.

Grave approbation from the severe aunt was flattery too delicate not to please.

Elsie was attentive, docile, and obedient; Hugh more than ever affectionate; Lady Calverley cheerfully content.

What could overcast this pleasant picture? Nothing, so far as mortal eye could see—nothing; and the exulting mother was radiant. She had not, you see, taken to heart a certain wholesome little proverb about not counting one's chickens.

She counted hers over constantly, including her niece as one of the brood.

A nicer pair of chicks, she thought, she had never seen! When she cried "Cluck, cluck, cluck," they came running; when she waved them away, they tripped merrily forth! Visions of a prolonged reign at Calverley, with these two dear little head subjects always at command, floated before her eyes. They should be so happy, so comfortable together; no business cares should worry her darling son, no domestic troubles oppress her sweet daughter!

Everything tiresome and disagreeable would of course be referred to *her*; *she* would undertake to smooth the path, ordain the laws, adjust the household.

A town house must be had, certainly.

They must go into society, in whose ways Elsie, fitted

to adorn but not to lead, would infallibly need advice. Her mother, too simple, would have none to give. Both would look to *her*. To leave them, then, in the lurch, would be still more cruel than at Calverley.

She would, in fact, be indispensable wherever they went.

Accordingly no pains were spared to insure this satisfactory result.

She was ready for every proposal, and charmed with all she saw; she lauded the dear niece behind her back, patronised the mamma, fondled her boy, and brought the whole party to London soon after Easter in the best of humours with each other and all the world!

Masters were now engaged for Elsie—the future Lady Calverley must be duly accomplished; and as it would be well to brush off at the same time the rusticity of girlhood, a little decorous going into the world was also entered upon.

The party was divided, to avoid remark, but the hotel where Hugh and his mother were lodged was within a few doors of that in which Lady Calverley had rooms.

Cards were left and invitations duly appeared.

It cannot be said that they poured in—the London world is too busy and preoccupied to trouble itself much about outsiders of fashion, unless they be very great people indeed; but a note or two came on most days, and there were “afternoons” to be remembered, the Park to be driven in, and shopping to be accomplished,—so that Lady Calverley, who had scarcely been anywhere since her early widowhood, felt almost bewildered by the whirl she lived in!

“The days seem so short,” she said, “and the distances are so great! Whatever is arranged to be done, we never are able to complete it! It is really more than I *like*; and if it were not for your Aunt Marion—but she thinks we ought, for your sake, Elsie; and I suppose,” with a sigh, “she knows best.”

Mrs Calverley pressed it the more, as she witnessed, with secret delight, the indifference of her niece.

A few balls, a dozen receptions, and as many state dinners, constituted the round of Elsie's so-called pleasures. She was guarded to and from these by her watchful *chaperones*, and Hugh was in close attendance. The crowds were usually great; Hugh's dancing was indifferent, and on this account they had always to come away early.

It cannot be said she was enamoured of gaiety thus taken.

She took to her music and drawing with renewed zest.

With these pursuits her cousin could sympathise, and in them he appeared to advantage.

He drew correctly, and played with taste. They studied art together, and hunted up picture-galleries in every part of London, to which the long-suffering mothers by turn accompanied them.

(Neither matron, after a time, could endure the name of a picture-gallery.)

Sir Hugh Calverley was in his way, however, a person of sufficient importance to receive more attention than fell to the lot of the ladies, whose day was past, and from whom no return could be expected.

He was called upon by several men of note, and invitations from their wives followed.

These, as a rule, he managed to evade, unless it was decided by his mother to be expedient for his dignity that he should be seen at the entertainment. When this was the case, in all probability, he at the house of some leader of the party to which the Calverley family belonged.

Mrs Calverley would then dictate a solemn acceptance; Hugh would go—and be miserable.

His only consolation was in Elsie's "I wish I had been there!" afterwards.

Once the heedless girl added, "Instead of you," and could not understand what ailed her cousin during the rest of the morning.

She *would* have enjoyed that lovely summer *fête*, with its beautiful flowers, gay dresses, lamp-lit trees, and

merry music. Why not? Why should she not say so: It must have been delightful!

"And the dancing?" said Hugh. "You are fond of dancing."

"I should not have danced." (His heart leaped.) "On the turf," added the saucy maid, "it is too hard!"

"Hugh is quite a different creature, is he not?" would cry his fond parent; "quite a gay young man, I declare! His invitations—there were two fresh ones this morning—are really becoming so numerous that he will have to set up a book! I, for one, am unwilling that he should go out so much" (he had been out four times in a fortnight); "but it is difficult to draw the line, and my son must do as other young men do. A young man does not like to be dictated to. Hugh will judge for himself; he will not brook any interference in these matters. That Reception at the Foreign Office to-night, he talks of giving up. It is really of no consequence, as his name will appear whether he is there or not! I say nothing, I leave it entirely to himself. On points like this, Hugh must always have his own way."

Even Lady Calverley smiled at the palpable attempt to give the poor lad consequence.

"Hugh is unwell to-day, and Marion is afraid for him," she said to herself.

"Why don't you go, you silly Hugh?" inquired his cousin. "Go, and tell us all about it afterwards. Will it be different from other receptions? Will all the very great people be there? I shall want a long, true, and very particular account. Nobody asks me to Foreign Offices!"

Hugh cared not a straw for the very great people; and for him, the evening would certainly be as blank as all other evenings were—when she was not by his side.

"If you were coming," he said, piteously, "I should go in a moment! It would make all the difference! And I am not to be with you this afternoon, either!"

"Can't you go anywhere by yourself?" cried the beauty, with sudden sharpness. "You don't suppose

that we want to have you tacked to our apron-strings all day long, sir?"

But after this she had been so penitent, and so careful, and so kind, that the sting was drawn from the wound ere it had had time to fester.

She would not deliberately give Hugh pain—she was only frisky and volatile, like a young kid; and it gave her just a shade of annoyance that he should not be more independent, more manly.

Had she been the man, she laughed to think if she would have been content with the demure round prescribed by her aunt,—the calls, the drives, the tea-parties, and the concerts.

As it was, they wearied her—she panted for a freer air: but for him!

Well, he was a dear, good Hugh.

And had he not been as a young prince among them during those past months?

Had they not praised, and petted, and made much of him, contesting with each other in the extent of their homage—surrounding him, as it were, with a halo that was almost sacred?

He had been their first consideration, his wellbeing their first thought.

Even here in London he was still *the* one, the person of importance, the man of the party. Everything was arranged with reference to his convenience, and the project that he could not join in was dismissed.

In plain terms, he was "cock of the walk" for the *time* being.

CHAPTER XXX.

DOVER STREET.

“ Ah !—world unknown ! How charming is thy view,
 Thy pleasures many, and each pleasure new !
 Ah !—world experienced ! What of thee is told ?
 How few thy pleasures, and each pleasure old ! ”

—CRABBE.

It is rather a curious fact that all these near relations of Tom La Sarte's had been in town for almost three weeks ere he received any intimation of their arrival.

They could scarcely, it will be opined, plead the ardent pursuit of pleasure and the multiplicity of their engagements in extenuation of a neglect which, when it is remembered on what terms he had been formerly with at least two of the party, will be seen to have been rather particular.

They were, it is true, carried easily on from one week to another, — each day brought its own occupations ; but still, time was indubitably found for the rounds of state calls imposed by Mrs Calverley ; for shopping, driving, and pastimes ; for looking up any and every acquaintance who held out the slightest chance of being an acquisition, — and five minutes is not a very large proportion even of a London day to bestow on a nephew !

“ Dear Tom, — We are here. When can you come and see us ? ” would not have taken Lady Calverley above two minutes to indite, and it would have brought him to her feet, rejoicing.

But she was too busy, — she could not name an hour, — it was so difficult to fix for people beforehand.

He must come on a Saturday, — on a Sunday, — on some day, at least, for which they had nothing else in view ; and as that day was long in coming, the contingent was put off also.

At length the idea became invested with the disagreeableness of a duty neglected.

She protested she knew not what to say, was ashamed to write ; Hugh must go down and call upon his cousin.

Hugh stammered an excuse.

He had already proposed this, and—and—and his mother did not wish it.

Elsie volunteered her services.

“Mamma, we really must. I will send Tom a note. He can't be angry with me, for he knows I never do remember anything or anybody. What shall I invite him to?”

“*Luncheon!*” cried her Aunt Marion, with a happy stroke. “My dear Ella, excuse my answering Elsie's question. We are still so entirely one party, that I really forgot I was not in my own room! You will agree with me, however, I know. Luncheon is such a *nice* time for a young man to drop in! He can *walk*, for one thing—and that, to Tom, must be a consideration; and then he would not, you know, be inclined to hang on afterwards,—you understand what I mean? The carriage will come round as usual, and Tom will take the hint. Poor fellow! This first meeting will be awkward enough for him, under his changed circumstances, and the kindest thing we can do will be to shorten it as much as possible. Shall we say to-morrow, to luncheon, dear?”

Certainly, since the fiat had gone forth; and with Elsie's excellently bald and simple statement that mamma hoped he would come at two o'clock, if he had no better engagement, fault could not be found.

She and Hugh had a German lesson on the next morning, and it was scarcely over before the appointed time.

“Tom cannot intend to come,” said Elsie; “he has sent no answer.”

“Ah! has he not?” replied Hugh, dreamily. “Look here, Elsie! this word is given with two distinct meanings in one page! That is rather hard upon us, eh? No wonder that we could not make head or tail of Elma's speech; the whole drift of it lies in that word. If *you* come here for a moment I can show you——”

He was lying on the sofa, and she came behind to look over his shoulder.

"See there," said Hugh, pointing with his pencil-case—"there, it means—it means—let me see—I had it just now. Oho! stop! I believe I have got hold of the wrong word after all!"

"Don't go on, Hugh; you look tired. I wish mamma would come in, and let us have something to eat."

The wish was to be gratified on the instant: ere Elsie's sentence was concluded, the door opened, there was a rustle of silks, a woman's voice thrown backwards to some one behind, and in fluttered Lady Calverley, followed by her nephew.

She had picked him up at the door.

Elsie stepped forward, and Hugh rose from the sofa, whence immediately issued a cascade of books, papers, and pencils. He regarded them wearily, and Elsie stooped to pick them up; stooping was bad for Hugh.

He was not looking his best that morning; his hair was spread unbecomingly, and his neck-tie was too bright in tint to harmonise with his colourless cheek.

His languid air was in no less curious contrast to Tom's quick movements, than were his soft white fingers to the brawny hand which closed over them.

"Hugh, I'm awfully glad to see you!" cried his cousin; "I"—seizing the books from Elsie, and bestowing them again on the slippery sofa (whence they immediately slid down again)—"I had no idea you were here," he continued, with a hearty ring of welcome. "When did you come? And how is Aunt Marion?"

"Very well, thanks; she is next door."

"She will be with us directly," added Lady Calverley. "She only ran up-stairs to give some directions, and was to follow me in a few minutes. I asked her to meet you, Tom. We do not always lunch together, although we usually dine. It is so convenient being so near."

"Yes, I suppose so. I had no idea *you* had come," continued Tom, still kindly regarding his cousin, and thinking in his heart, ("Well, I never saw such a poor,

abject-looking scarecrow in my life!") "Are you all right again? You had rather a bad time of it this winter, hadn't you?"

"Oh yes, I'm all right again, thanks."

"He had need be 'all right again,' to go through all he does!" interposed his aunt, gaily. "We cannot keep pace with him."

"Good gracious!" muttered Tom.

Seeing, however, that his inquiries were not reciprocated with any particular warmth, he turned from Hugh. He did not turn to Elsie. He scarcely appeared to notice her.

"Well, Aunt Ella, so here you are, safe home again. When did you come?"

There was no possibility of evading the question further.

A woman of the world would have been ready with her, "My dear boy, how can I say? You don't expect me to remember, when I have been bored, and worried, and pulled to pieces in every direction since I came! The wonder is, that I have survived it all!" Then she would have slid off to other topics, and he would have learnt nothing, and might have concluded anything.

But this was high art to our simple country mouse.

She knew exactly to a day how long it was since their arrival; and accordingly, albeit with reluctance and some feeling that he had no right to have driven her to such straits, she stated the time, "Three weeks."

On that day three weeks they had come.

Tom did not feel the blow as much as might have been expected.

He had been away, as it happened, at that time; he had been away for Easter, and, not calculating closely, imagined that he had stayed longer in the country than he really had.

He had been given three days, and it seemed to him now quite an age.

Still, making all allowances, he felt the slight; and the longer he sat in the room, the more keenly it hurt him.

His aunt was running on, about trifles, and when he caught her up, was at the point of inquiring as to how he liked their present situation. Was it not convenient, accessible, central?

"Is it?" said Tom, rather bewildered. "I—yes, I suppose it is."

Had he been called upon at the moment to state what street he was in, he would have had to look out of the window! On his way thither he had scarce known where his feet carried him.

"Are you going to be long here, Aunt Ella? I am so glad you are come! I was afraid you had given it up, as Pauline did not tell me anything. What an immense time it is since I have seen you!"

"Yes," replied the lady, relieved by his manner; "it really is. Three years nearly—or quite—which? I must not insult you by saying you are *grown*, Tom, but you certainly are changed. Elsie is altered, too," she continued, imprudently. "Don't you think so?"

"No," said Tom.

Yet she could have vowed he had never looked at her. Hugh and Elsie were still engaged in putting away their things, and did not attempt to help in the entertainment of the guest.

"Really not?" replied Elsie's mother. "Well, we have seen and done a great deal since you were with us last. We have scarcely been at Gourloch since then, do you know? It has been under repair all this past year, while Elsie and I have been wandering about. You have been a traveller too. We shall expect some traveller's tales, remember. Ours are all written down: Hugh keeps the journal; we run to him whenever we have anything to say. Have you kept a journal, Tom?"

"Journal? No," said Tom, staring a little. "You know what a duffer at writing I am, Aunt Ella. I never write a word, except to Pauline, and she makes a list of all the bad spelling, and sends it back to me."

"My dear Tom," his aunt laughed, "that is the old

joke, is it not? That was in days gone by. I have no doubt you spell as other people do now."

"Perhaps," he allowed, with some grimness. "Other people don't often give me a chance of seeing how they spell."

Then he did turn his head, and look straight into Elsie's face. Her three lines stood out distinctly before them both, and she knew that he was learning now the interpretation thereof.

"Well, we are none of us literary folks," smiled Lady Calverley, wheeling smoothly away from the subject. "We can't throw stones at each other, can we? However, you will like to see our photograph-book, I am sure? We have quite a collection from the different places, exactly in order as we visited them; Hugh has arranged them, and put them in so nicely. Hugh, my dear, where is the book? Tom would like to see it."

The entrance of Tom's other aunt, however, saved him the infliction.

Her reception was more frank, more cordial, than any he had yet met with.

She engrossed him completely, but nevertheless did not set him more at his ease. He did not feel, when luncheon was over, that he had made any way; worse, he was staggering backwards. The precious moments were slipping past, and there was no word of future meetings, no taking him into partnership, no "You must go with us to-day, and then we shall see about our plans for to-morrow."

He did not guess how fully he had expected this, until the prospect had vanished out of sight.

He could not help hoping to the end. He could scarcely believe but that *something* must be said. Gradually he became chilled, stupefied, dumb.

He could not make it out.

At first he had inwardly forged excuses. He had come on an unfortunate day; they were preoccupied with other matters; their heads were slightly turned by the first dizzy draught of London life, so intoxicating to novices.

Then it slowly streamed in upon his reluctant perceptions that it was he himself, not the interruption of his presence, that was unwelcome!

He had come trembling with expectancy; he went away trembling with wrath.

Why had he been asked at all? Why did they not leave him alone altogether?

Almost immediately luncheon was over, Mrs Calverley rose, saying, "What time exactly must I be ready, dear? You gave the order, I think, to-day? Don't let me disturb anybody, don't let me break up this pleasant meeting of cousins—but I really must run, if I am to be ready at half-past three. That was the hour, was it not? I will be punctual."

She had made it clear; Tom had another benevolent smile, and pressure of the hand, and she took herself off.

"Do have some more strawberries," cried Lady Calverley. "Hugh—Tom—somebody. Tom, you were always the last to leave the strawberry-beds—come!"

She held them up invitingly, but he turned sick at the sight.

He had with difficulty swallowed those on his plate, and the allusion to the strawberry-beds at Gourloch was too much. He thought he could never go near them again.

How hot the room felt! How dully sounded the wheels on the pavement below!

None of them talked much, and yet the minutes flew. Lady Calverley looked at her watch, and Tom understood. He went, and did not soon come back again.

"What is the matter? Are you not ready? Are you not coming with us?"

Elsie was discovered by her mother bonnetless and unprepared when the carriage came round: she did not rouse herself. She answered with perfect readiness, "I don't care to go. I shall stay at home to-day and—practise."

"Are you behindhand? That is a pity. I suppose Tom's visit put you out? Well, don't tire yourself, dear child; we shall not be long away."

“ Good-bye, mamma,” dutifully.

She saw the carriage drive off, then she stamped up and down the room like a little fury!

“ What a shame—what a shame it was! To treat him so! Tom, who used to be one of ourselves! He looked so glad to see us, and so nice, and so—and so—and—so. And to put him down in a big chair, and give him his luncheon, and send him away! He might have been a stranger whom none of us had ever seen before! Suppose he had been, Captain Maurice was far more intimate. I might speak to him, ugly wretch! but I could not say one word to Tom, with mamma and Aunt Marion sitting by! I suppose they had some *stupid* idea—*stupid*——” with a clench of her little fist. “ As if *that* was not over long ago; and as if—as if—it mattered a bit whether it were or not! Oh! how ashamed they ought to be! Not a single kind look, and he looking so kindly at us! Mamma might have had *some* feeling, she who used to make so much of Tom! Poor Tom! Hugh is everything now! If Hugh had taken the trouble he might have changed everything to-day, but he was as bad as anybody; he sat without saying a word, and looked such a—goose! I never thought Hugh would have been so cruel to any one, especially to Tom; it seemed as if we were all against him—all.” One by one, great angry tears rolled down, like drops in a thunderstorm. “ I hate cruelty,” burst forth the girl, “ and I hate meanness—and I hate Hugh!”

But the carriage party came home radiant.

They had had a charming drive, and had found everybody out, excepting *the* one whom they desired to find at home! Lady Frederick Whitton had received them, and had done still more,—she had lent them her own ticket for the Horticultural Gardens—for the great rhododendron show, which was just being opened. Lady Frederick had found that at the last moment she would be unable to attend, and most fortunately they had been the first people who had made their appearance after her decision had been arrived at.

Charming, was it not? So opportun—*the very thing* that Elsie had most cared about; and although they had been actually in Queen's Gate at the time, they had driven back for her as fast as they could.

She must put on her bonnet immediately.

Ere she could say "Yes" or "No," ere she could fully understand what she was about, she was sitting in the carriage on her way to the Gardens.

Royal carriages were at the door, and a long line streamed behind.

Elsie was of that sympathetic temperament which loves to go where others go, see what others see, and enjoy what they enjoy. Her spirits unconsciously revived; she began to smile, to laugh, to look about her. The scene was gay and beautiful, disagreeable reminiscences were effaced, and Tom was forgotten.

Was it possible that Hugh had divined something amiss? He snatched a moment to whisper, "I am so stupid to-day, Elsie. My head aches. I'm sure Tom must have thought me sulky, or something—I was quite a bear to him."

Of course he was pitied and forgiven, and gradually, it may be hoped, the headache gave way.

At any rate he was no longer "stupid," he was more than ordinarily animated and attentive. He and Elsie flew from flower to flower, vying with each other in the discovery of the finest bloom. They strolled over the grass behind their guardians, they extolled the music and eulogised the company.

They were young—their nerve of admiration had not yet been extracted.

Presently, however, came a breath of discord.

They passed a beauty, an imperial-looking girl, of whom Hugh, simple fellow, cunning fellow—which?—was loud in his praises.

Elsie could "not see it," walked coldly past.

By-and-by, "There she is again!" cries Hugh.

"Who? What? Oh, *that* girl! Nonsense! There are hundreds here to-day who are far prettier!"

“I don’t think there are.”

“Don’t you?”

She “does not understand what he means.” Wonders what he is “dreaming of.” He is “too absurd.”

She is actually pouting.

In truth, this young woman could never bear to be second. She was a queen by natural intuition, and felt out of place on aught but a throne. She had subjugated Hugh, Tom, and such as those by the score; she had nearly stolen a march upon Ralph Blundell. He had escaped by flight, and she had put out of sight, as speedily as possible, the mortifying recollection.

Wherever she had since been seen, she had slain her thousands—in modern phraseology, she had met with considerable admiration; and possibly some portion of her indifference to London society may have lain in the secret, that there she was not—but it is unkind to attribute motives!

Whatever be at the root of it, it is one of the blessings of little Elsie’s life that she has not been drawn into that great whirlpool—that she has not thrown her youth, and her beauty, and her innocence into its devouring jaws. She will grow up into a good, true, loving woman like her mother, and she will not be overburdened with—common-sense.

CHAPTER XXXI.

“LET US HAVE A CHANGE OF SUBJECT.”

“What though you have beauty,
Must you therefore be proud and pitiless?”

—*As You Like It.*

A few days after this, our little tyrant boldly suggested to her slave that he should take some steps towards undoing the past, for which he expressed contrition.

“Why don’t you ask Tom to walk with you,” said she,

“instead of Captain Maurice? You don't care for Captain Maurice; and as walking is good for you, you must have some one.”

“Tom has no time,” said he.

“Have you asked him?”

“No.”

Tom, however, could not be altogether ignored; and little satisfaction as was to be obtained out of the brief and hasty visits which were all that were permitted him, he could not bring himself to decline them.

He longed to do so; he hated himself for accepting. Pride dictated the coldest and shortest of refusals, the plea of pre-engagements, absence, inability to leave his work, anything. That he did not, upon the slightest of foundations, fabricate one or other of these excuses, was in itself a token for good.

He actually hesitated on the score of truth; as he *could* go, he would.

Once he found Elsie alone in the room. They did not make much of the opportunity, supposing it to have been one. They confronted each other with lowering brows, and spoke in cautious and guarded phrases.

He hoped she was enjoying her season? Was she out every night? He had seen her name down at the Drawing-room.

She thanked him, and she was enjoying herself immensely. Mamma had taken her to the Drawing-room, and Hugh had gone with them. Hugh looked so well in his deputy-lieutenant's uniform. Mamma had been in lavender, and she herself in white. Aunt Marion had not gone. She supposed Tom did not care for such dissipations.

Tom stood still and looked at her.

Then the others came in, Hugh with a bouquet for his cousin; and the two young men did not regard each other with the pleasure such near relations are supposed to feel when they meet.

Elsie tossed her head, and turned her shoulder on them both.

“You hardly thanked poor Hugh at all for his pretty offering,” remonstrated her mother, afterwards. “You are getting spoilt, child; every attention seems your right, and to be accepted without the slightest gratitude! That is not pretty behaviour, Elsie. Was it because Tom was there? Why should Tom mind? Tom has not money to throw away on costly flowers; and surely he would not be so ungenerous as to feel vexed because another has! Every one is not born to the same lot in life,” observed Lady Calverley, profoundly.

“Indeed, no——”

“And you need not have made a fuss about them; a few kind acknowledgments were all that was required. Dear, thoughtful fellow! He is always trying to please some one or other—always. Yet you turned from him with such a cold look! I don’t suppose you have the least idea of the pains he took——”

“Let him give them to you, if he likes. I don’t want his flowers!” cried the ingrate. “What have I to do with Hugh, and what does it matter to him if I do look cold? It is no business of his how I look! Mamma, you and Aunt Marion think of no one, and talk of no one, but Hugh from morning till night! I am tired of Hugh! Let us, if you please, have a change of subject.”

When Elsie talked like this, her mother forbore reply. She would not vex the girl, and she made allowances for her; more, she was fain to attribute temper such as this to every cause but the right one.

Her daughter was unwell, was overdone, was unused to the rush and tumult of London life.

Fondly she would lay her hand on the pretty head, and ask if it ached? No, it didn’t ache. (It only twitched under the caress.) Was she tired? Would she lie down on the little sofa? go to her room and take a rest? have some eau-de-Cologne?

The child almost stamped.

What did mamma mean? What should she rest for? Why should she lie down? What *should* she do with eau-de-Cologne? Nothing annoyed her more than these

petits soins: she wished mamma would not begin with them; they were not like her; she—she—she had learnt them from Hugh!

And if she had, cried the poor lady, roused to her defence, what then? She had learnt many things from Hugh. Patience, for example, and that not before it was needed!

Then she tried another position.

She spoke in grave maternal tones: she called herself “Elsie’s mother;” in that capacity it was her bounden duty to take the rebellious daughter to task. This daughter was growing every day more unreasonable and contradictory, unlike what she had ever been, and still less like what those who loved her would wish her to be. She was so unwilling to be pleased, to join in any little scheme. What was the meaning of it all?

As soon as the last words had passed her lips, Lady Calverley would have recalled them if she could.

She desired nothing less than to know the meaning. She shrank, of all things, from probing the depths of that troubled surface, being solicitous only to smooth it down by persuasion, or to lay it flat by authority.

But the question was beyond recall.

Elsie jumped up, bristling in battle array. The meaning of it? The meaning of what? Of her not going to the cricket-match? Was that the “little scheme” she had not joined in? She hated cricket. Why should she go to what she hated?

To sit on a bench for four or five hours under a burning sun, seeing a few men run about and pick up balls, and hearing now and then a great clapping of hands, without in the least knowing what it was for, was a very poor entertainment, she thought! She could not imagine how it could be her duty to attend it!

“It might be your duty to think of others more than of yourself,” replied the mother, severely. “To try to please some, who only try too much to please you.”

“Hugh—Hugh—Hugh, I suppose! He is the ‘some’ who only tries too much to please me! And so he does.

a vast deal too much! I wish he would let me alone! And to reward him, I am to sit and fizzle a whole afternoon, seeing what I don't care for, and hearing what I don't understand, besides having to smile, and say, whenever I am asked, It is delightful! Surely, mamma, you and Aunt Marion can go and pretend to enjoy yourselves, for Hugh's sake, without my being dragged along behind his chariot-wheels too!”

Lady Calverley thought of the picture-galleries, and how often she had been dragged, half fainting with fatigue, round and round them, bound to those very wheels, whilst Elsie sat in the chariot.

She sighed, and that sigh brought the child to her arms.

“The best, the kindest mamma in all the world!” she sobbed. “Oh, don't you be angry with me, don't you be against me! I don't mind Aunt Marion, or—any of them, if you will be on my side!”

But when pressed more closely, she had nothing to say; and the astonished mother let the moment pass, neither understanding nor improving it.

She said not a word to Marion; she only felt more and more tremulous as to what future lay before them all.

Mrs Calverley, however, was still complacent and serene. She was only a little more eager than she had been to bring matters to a close now that Hugh's health was re-established, and that Elsie's music lessons were near their completion.

One day she threw out a feeler. Tom had been there, had stayed his wonted half-hour, and, as no one pressed his remaining, had taken his departure. Mrs Calverley turned to her sister-in-law as the door closed, Elsie alone being in the room with them—

“How odd it seems, dear,” cried she, “to think what a complete difference it makes in the relationship whether it is on the father's or on the mother's side! That young man, when he talks of his aunt, Mrs Wyndham, seems quite to belong to her—to be, in fact, more like her son than her nephew! His father's sister is infinitely more

to him than his mother's brother—than my poor dear husband and Sir Edward ever were."

The statement might have been true of her husband; it had not been so of Sir Edward, to whom the orphan children had been much attached.

With a clear recollection of this, Lady Calverley, being unable to acquiesce, was wisely silent, and the judicious speaker pursued her advantage.

"Cousins," she said, addressing Elsie, "are never considered equally near when they are related through the maternal branch. Tom does not seem by any means so fully your cousin as Hugh—does he, my dear?"

"Oh dear, no!"

Her aunt smiled.

"Hugh," continued the elf, "seems so much more like a *brother*, you know."

It will seem that Elsie was very naughty. She liked these little encounters. She enjoyed the discomfiture of her elders. They revenged the injuries of some one absent, and were a salve to her own uneasy mood.

Hugh's unvarying gentleness afforded no outlet to her distempered spirits; and to do her justice, with him she restrained, as far as she was able, all expression of them. She was not, he fancied, exactly what she had been, but he had no idea of what she could be behind his back! He never beheld her in her worst flights—never knew how petulant, how scornful, and how difficult to manage this beautiful young creature had become. Nothing pleased her, everything seemed to chafe her. She would sit for hours without employment, then pettishly declare she had no time to waste! She would gibe at the very follies which had enchanted her a while ago!

Poor Hugh was often at his wits' end, and even his mother grew puzzled and suspicious.

A solemn council was held by the two parents, resulting in a change of plans.

They would not wait until Gourloch was ready—they would not remain in town—they would go to Calverley.

The timid proposition emanated from the lips of Lady

Calverley: it had occurred to her that if once away in some quiet place, freed from intrusion, and out of reach of all disturbing influences, the old Florence days might be revived.

Where could this better be accomplished than at the old ancestral home, of which poor Hugh, whom Elsie had lately taken to hold in such slight estimation, was master and lord? There she would behold him reinstated in his rightful position, there she would understand and learn to value the true worth of his fine—yces, certainly fine character.

She did not say, even to herself, "There, he will be without rivals;" or, "There, she will see to what a lot he can raise her."

I suppose, guileless as this good creature was, such shafts of Apollyon did lurk somewhere down in the hidden cells of her heart, but she knew not they were there.

"Hugh," she reflected, "is so good, so conscientious a youth. It is difficult to meet with high principles in these days" (perhaps it always has been, but Lady Calverley was in the habit of ascribing misdemeanours to "these days"); "and although Hugh is not perhaps exactly the sort of person I should have imagined beforehand she would take too, still, as she evidently *has*"—she paused—"as she evidently *did* at one time—and we have no right to suppose there is a change—it would be a sad pity that any uncomfortable obstacles should stand in the way. She is admirably fitted for the position,—country life suits her tastes; and she is not moving one way or other out of the sphere in which she was born, which I consider is the happiest lot that can fall to any girl."

The idea, thus matured, was submitted to the master-mind; and, for a wonder, Marion was not only acquiescent, but grateful! To approve any project that had not originated with herself was a new thing with Mrs Calverley, but even at the first unfolding she did not frown or demur. She confined herself to simple astonishment that she should have overlooked—have left (inference) to a poor creature like Ella—so obviously excellent a scheme!

At a glance she took in the whole bearings of the case, and pronounced her autocratic decision.

In a week? Yes. She sat down then and there, and wrote off directions to her housekeeper, butler, and coachman, pressed dear Ella's hand in token of a fresh understanding, and announced the resolution to the young ones with an air of confidence in their approval.

She and Hugh would leave that day week, the aunt and cousin would follow before another week was over.

Hugh received the tidings with equanimity; Elsie likewise — unless the heightened colour in her cheek meant anything.

She did not make a remark aloud, but inwardly she exclaimed, "That is because Pauline is coming." And herein, we have occasion to observe, she was mistaken.

Pauline's letter, which Lady Calverley had received that morning, had not, it is true, done anything to shake the resolution which had been formed ere its perusal, but that was all.

The letter had cost the young traveller some trouble. She had known it must be written, and had resolutely set herself down to the task; but it was hard work this forcing of her pen to dwell on what would probably be expected — on descriptions of mountain scenery, ruins, rivers, effects of sky and sun — when all her thoughts were centred in one leafy vale, and on one evening scene, of which no mention must ever cross her lips!

She, however, did her best, little imagining how entirely the effort might have been spared. The closely-written sheet, which was to indicate the disengaged and observing mind, was, we may safely aver, never thoroughly gone through. It found the reader as preoccupied as it left the writer.

How often is it thus! How strangely different is the scene into which the letter drops from that pictured by the writer!

We have been staying with friends; and after our departure, the broken threads are gathered up for us. Accounts are given of pleasures whereto we also had been

bidden, and which we had been compelled to forego; odd bits of gossip about the people we had met are copiously related, in the delusive faith of an eager perusal; and already our thoughts are far away—other interests have pushed these into the background; the detail—ashamed as we may be to own it—is wearisome.

Or, comes the intelligence of a great event—a marriage—a triumph, everything promising and everybody perfect. We are to be amazed, charmed, jealous to distraction. And behold! our own love is so deep and hopeless, and our own secret is so madly absorbing, that the pæan falls on our ears as the beating of a hollow drum; we gather no meaning in the sound, we only sigh for it to cease and trouble us no more!

Or, we have notice of an undreamed-of return from foreign climes. We are to be taken at unawares, we are to have the joyful shock of an overwhelming surprise. The letter has been delayed, comes late, it has scarcely been delivered ere the visitor is at the door. Ah! the door is shut, the blinds are drawn, and we sit within the darkened rooms weeping for our loss!

Lady Calverley knit her brows over her niece's intimation of their approach, the only portion of the epistle which really awakened notice; but even that did not discompose her materially. It was unfortunate, it was extremely provoking, that she could not, because of the brother's misdemeanours, greet the sister with that warmth which her arrival would, at any other time, have inspired.

If Tom—silly fellow—would but see the folly of continuing to attach himself when there was no hope of a return; if he would only have sufficient generosity to withdraw from the field, and not annoy, when that was all he could do,—how joyfully would she have embraced Pauline!

Nay, she would have resumed that kiss on his own cheek, which had of late been somewhat intermittent, and had, indeed, threatened to fall into disuse altogether! Tom was, in fact, too much of a favourite with this aunt for her to be content with anything short of extremes in

her manner towards him. She was unable to recede gracefully into the new position which she desired to take up; she must needs spring at it, and all at once—as if afraid of resolution failing—mark the “So far shalt thou come, and no farther,” which was henceforth to be his boundary-line.

Had she cared for him less, she could have drawn it with a more delicate touch.

She could not, indeed, dissemble; had never learned, would never learn, to do so.

But she might, under careful tuition, have practised in the gradation scale.

She might have been delighted to see him one day,—and have forgotten he had been asked the next. She might have discussed his future visit,—and fixed its exact duration. She might have rejoiced to see the cousins chatting over old times,—and have presided over the conversation.

In short, she might have precluded the wolf from advancing one step into the fold without his being aware of the barrier placed in his way!

But none of this velvet-pawed management was possible to Lady Calverley. When she was annoyed, she showed it; when she was not taken agreeably by surprise, she did not pretend to be so.

It was not even, as we have seen, to her own experience that the profoundly sensible suggestion was due which made luncheon the supposed acme of our poor outcast's aspirations.

She took the hint, however; he was never bidden to anything but that cold-blooded meal. Dinners at a hotel were so “uncomfortable,” and they were “so often out,” that it was “of no use asking him.”

Even that starveling of an apology emanated from Mrs Calverley. Her sister-in-law merely smiled, looked nervous, and scarcely concealed her impatience for his exit.

She overdid her part altogether. But for a timely reminder now and then, and but for one other cause—

which we are about to name—she might have stumbled into the very explanation she most wished to avoid !

That cause lay in the slender thread of hope, to which poor Tom—with all his faults, faithful to his early and only love, still clung.

It might have been the very presumption of ignorance ; but it is so, that, desperate and trembling, he still refused to believe in the certainty of Elsie's indifference. He could not feel, with her mother, that his power was only to annoy. Every word, every action, was weighed by him in after-communications with himself. Bitter hours, but salutary. He grew into manhood during those dreary summer days ; and with manhood came the dawns of self-command, calmness, truth. It was not Elsie alone who whispered to herself, “ How Tom is changed ! How he is improved ! ” It was the observation of all who had known him in days of yore.

CHAPTER XXXII.

“ I ONLY COME IN FOR HER FROWNS ! ”

“ Adversity is like the period of the former and of the latter rains,—cold, comfortless, unfriendly to man and to animal ; yet from thence come the flower and the fruit, the date, the rose, and the pomegranate.”—*The Talisman*.

Mrs Wyndham invited her nephew to be her guest during the whole of her stay in town.

She was too truly polite and kind-hearted a woman not to insist that the advantages of such an arrangement were entirely on her side. She would have a host to sit at the foot of her table, an escort to call her carriage when she went out, and a cheerful companion for home evenings.

It was so good of dear Tom to give them his company ! He should breakfast whenever he liked—she would not promise to be down ; but whatever was necessary to his

convenience should be strictly attended to. They must not expect him to be punctual to meals—busy men were often detained; but they would do their best to make him comfortable.

Mr Wyndham having been a City man at the time of her marriage, she was quite *au fait* regarding many things that were problems to Pauline.

“He will not be with us in the daytime, my love,” she said. “That, we cannot expect. He will return about six—a very good time; we can occasionally pick him up, and drive him home through the Park. He will have his Saturday afternoons; we must always make them pleasant. If there is a ‘Mail-day’ in his house, he will be kept till late. My dear Joseph was always late on ‘Mail-day.’ It was inconvenient, sometimes. I had to calculate, you know, when arranging our engagements. People dine later now. We shall consult Tom when the invitations come; he will be a help and comfort to us in every way.”

Pauline’s kiss of gratitude brought the tears to the good lady’s eyes.

Tom was waiting on the platform as the train drew up, and ere it stopped his hand was on their carriage-window.

His anticipations were not damped this time; his aunt was delighted with the attention—which she had repeatedly warned Pauline not to expect, busy men being especially tied down at that hour, she believed; and Pauline herself was only too ready to reciprocate his affectionate embrace. He had never kissed her in a railway station before; now, it seemed, he had forgotten everything but the pleasure of meeting; and she was charmed that he should so forget.

Her bag was taken from her hand, and he followed her to her room as soon as the bustle of arrival had subsided.

“You look washed out, Polly; what have you been about? Is she not good to you? How do you get on? I thought you had been having rather a high time of it lately; I would have given anything to have been with you. It’s—it’s rather slow here.”

She wished indeed that he had been with them, it had been so pleasant ; the scenery was really beautiful, and her aunt had been all that was kind.

Nevertheless there did not appear to be much more to be said about it.

Had he got her letter ? She was afraid it was a stupid one, but he deserved that ; what had he to say for himself ? He had never written a line ! She did not think she had had one word for three weeks ! What had he been doing ? Whom had he been seeing ?

Nobody. At least Elsie and his aunt were in town ; he had been seeing them—a little.

Not very much. They were going out a good deal, he thought. *He* hardly went anywhere. He knew very few people. He was awfully glad she had come.

Pauline began to comprehend. She would not put the questions she most longed to ask, confident that he would soon unconsciously answer them. Not yet, though.

" And I am to be with you the whole time ? " by-and-by began he, more cheerfully. " That's jolly ! It really is awfully good of Aunt Camilla ; I'll be as nice to her as possible. You don't know what it is to be all alone in a place, without a soul who knows anything about you—nobody caring a hang where you go or what you do——" He broke off suddenly.

" Is there *nobody* ? " said his sister, struck by his tone. " I thought you spoke of some Mr Chadleigh ; was not that his name ? Don't you care for him ? "

" Oh, well enough. We go about together, and all that. But he has got lots of other friends, and of course he goes off with them ; and I have nobody. They are such a set in our house ! Worse than in any of the others, I think. They talk about the ' West End,' and the ' swells of the West End,' as if," said Tom, with a sort of vexed laugh, " there were any other place ! You know what I mean. We never used to think about *them* at all ; it was like another world that we could not get at if we tried ! But *they* are always on the look-out to bring in anything they can about the places here. And they

go and hire horses—such brutes!—and ride in the Park on Saturdays. And they talk to me about my ‘grand relations,’ and that sort of thing. I know,” said poor Tom, with a bitter face, “I am a fool to care; but I can’t help it. One of them said to me to-day, ‘You will hardly speak to us when you come down in the mornings now, you will be such a fine gentleman!’”

“Poor Tom! But you are going abroad soon. You will be happier then.”

“Unele Julius says I can’t go for two years,” said he, examining with curious eye some ornaments on the mantel-piece. She thought his hand went up to his face as he spoke.

(“Two years! How will he bear it?”) Pauline sighed sorrowfully.

“I say,” continued Tom, “don’t say anything to Uncle Julius, mind. He has done all he can for me. And of course I must do as other fellows do. He asked me how I managed on my allowance last time I saw him, and I said, ‘All right;’ but it hardly keeps me in luncheons, and we have nothing but tea when we get home. That does not matter so much, for they never cook decently in lodgings. The worst of it is, that I generally run short a week before the quarter is out.”

“And what do you do?” inquired his sister, anxiously.

“Oh, they give me luncheon at the place. They know I’ll pay when it comes in. They are awfully nice people, and they know me quite well now. They always let me have anything I want, but of course I have to look out not to let it run up too much.”

“Tom, why did you not tell me?”

“Oh, what is the use? You have enough to do to take care of yourself. I can get along well enough.”

“I have not much money,” said Pauline; “but I have had no need as yet to spend *any*. And Aunt Camilla told me to-day that she meant to make me a much larger allowance for dress. I knew how vexed she would be if I went about with her in London looking shabby—and it does take a great deal to be really well dressed—so I

thought I had better accept it. Here, dear; I have really needed no winter clothes, and you must never run short again. Promise that you won't."

"Oh, rubbish!" said Tom. "I'm not going to take your money, so you need not think it! It's humbug your not needing clothes. You must do as other people do; and if you try anything else, it will be my duty to prevent it."

He was more like himself—like the old, jocular, merry-hearted Tom; but a better nature had been called forth, and was now being shown.

"You *must* take it," said Pauline. "I am to get all my new things to-morrow, and Aunt Camilla will insist upon the bills going in to her. I am not even to see them. Could I wear them, knowing that you—here, take it!"

"There is such a lot," said Tom, looking into the purse. "The half of that will pay my landlady. Poor soul! She is not a bad sort. But she does dun so."

"You really owe it, then?"

"Well, yes. But you see, coming to live here, I knew I could save enough. Because Uncle Julius said he wouldn't stop the supplies, and that it would set me up a little, when—when I go back again. So I took the money that I had, for the luncheon people, and told Miss Perrot I would send hers. She was quite satisfied."

"I say," continued Tom, after a pause, "you needn't say anything to the Calverleys about me. There is no need for them to know the sort of thing it is. They think I'm as jolly as possible."

"Do they never ask you?"

"Oh yes, sometimes. But Aunt Ella is not bright, you know. Elsie doesn't say much."

"And what is Elsie about? Very gay?"

"Oh, of course. I don't know that they are, though; only they always seem to be going off somewhere just when I come. Look here," eagerly—"don't say a word to any one, but I believe they are trying to make up a match between Elsie and Hugh! I am sure that is what

they are after—Aunt Ella and Aunt Marion between them. They each think it would do. Aunt Marion would like to get the Gourloch estates back again, and Aunt Ella would like Elsie to be another Lady Calverley. *That's* why, whenever I go, they are always going out! I don't believe in it, you know! It is generally to concerts, or things of that sort, where they could ask me to go with them if they liked; but they don't, and I never offer. It is just done to get rid of me! So, now, I have almost left off going."

"And does Elsie want to get rid of you too?"

"I thought she didn't, once or twice. She told me one day that it was a pity I never had a moment to stay when I came! Of course I hadn't, when they were going out! I had asked for an hour or two off, on purpose to be free for the rest of the day, and could have stayed the whole afternoon and evening, for that matter; but when Aunt Ella said they should be late, and the carriage was at the door, was I likely to stay? They took me as far as the Marble Arch, and put me down there, and I had nothing on earth to do but go and walk in the Park! Aunt Ella did not seem to like me even to speak to Elsie!"

"Aunt Ella shall answer to me for this," said Pauline, cheerfully. "But, Tom, don't be too much cast down. These precautions are so many danger-signals. Don't you see, you stupid Tom, that a double watch is set over a fortress when there is a traitor within? Be patient a little longer, dear. I know that you are brave."

"Do you think," said Tom, slowly, "that there is any hope?"

"I think there is some *fear*," replied his sister. "Great fear on the part of the two mothers. What has Hugh to say to the arrangement?"

"Oh, he is mad after her. He is awfully delicate, you know, and almost everything knocks him up. But he is always driving about with them; and if there is anything the least out of the way proposed, Aunt Ella is sure to say, 'It would be too much for Hugh.' Just as if he was one of themselves!"

" And how does Elsie treat him ? "

" She is as good to him as she can be. They are reading German together, translating some fool of a book. She writes at it, for dear life, whenever *I* am there ! She hardly gives me a look. There was only one day——" said he, hesitating.

" Well ? " said Pauline—" well ? "

" She came outside the door—I had left my gloves, or something, and she came out with them. She looked in a perfect rage ! Before I could say a word, she broke out that she wished I would leave off coming at all, for it was always the same thing over again. That nobody wished me to come if I didn't like it. They were quite happy without me. For her part, she would not care if she never saw my face again ! Sounds encouraging, doesn't it ? But, you see, I couldn't help thinking that she *did* care. What was it all about, unless she did ? I think she was almost crying ! If I had only had another minute I should have found out everything, but at first I could not say a word. I only stared at her. Then the door opened, and she rushed away. Next time I saw her, she would hardly look at me."

" We can go there to-morrow, Tom."

" I thought you would, but I can't get away till six. What time does Aunt Camilla dine ? Eight ? That's jolly. That will give me plenty of time, always. But I think I had better not go with you to-morrow. I don't want to force myself upon them, and I know the old ones hate my coming. It used to be all so different ; I expected that when they came it was to be just like old times ! I had been thinking about it——" his lip trembled.

" You are getting dangerous now, don't you see ? " said Pauline, pleasantly. " When Tom was only a boy, and Elsie laughed at him, Tom might do anything he chose ; but now Tom is a man, and Elsie perhaps does not laugh at him—don't you see ? "

How firmly wise and shrewd could the sister be, when she spoke for another ! What comfort there was in her simple word and smile !

"She does not *laugh* at him, certainly," said Tom, with a sigh, but a sensation of relief, "she keeps her laughter for other people; I only come in for her frowns!"

"Now, Tom, take my advice. You know that it is generally good—is it not?"

"I suppose so," said Tom.

"Will you take it?"

"I'll take it."

Pauline put on a serious face, and raised her finger. "Make Elsie tell you what she meant that day. Say to her how disappointed you have been, and how you have felt all this. And show her that it was not *you*, but *they* who cut your visits short, and——"

"And when am I to say all this? I am never given a chance."

"Listen. You shall have your chance, poor boy; I will give you your chance! Aunt Ella shall go off with me—you will see that I can manage that—and then you must speak for yourself. And, Tom, I think I should tell her about Hugh, too."

"Should you? But what am I to say?"

"Say—say—say that you are jealous! Say anything you please; his name will be enough, I imagine. Show her that you see plainly what he wants, and find out if he is to have it? Of course—stop—I don't know whether that would be strictly fair; you must think over that part for yourself, Tom."

"But have I a right to say all this?" said Tom, faltering. "It's easy to talk. You know what *I* want, and I haven't a penny!"

"I think you have a right," replied his sister, firmly. "You have cared for her ever since you were a mere boy, and you had plenty then. At present, it is true, you have nothing of your own, but you have very good prospects. Uncle Julius told me so; he said you had an excellent opening, if you would only persevere and not be discouraged by trifles. If Elsie cares for you, Tom, you are doing her a wrong in holding back. She has

enough for both—at present. And if we are mistaken,—at least, in speaking out, you do *her* no harm.”

“You know how I have cared for her,” said Tom.

“Yes, Tom. Dear Tom, dear boy, I do know! And I hope—oh, I do hope!—that you are going to be happy at last. I believe it too.”

“And what about yourself, Pauline?” turning round upon her with a smile. “I had forgotten all that, I declare. I thought, by this time, I should have been introduced to a Mr Pauline.”

“I!” She started, with something like a cry—“*I, Tom!*”

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE CONFERENCE.

“And much that Prudence will not dip
The pen to fix and send away,
Passed safely over from the lip
That summer day.”

—JEAN INGELow.

Perhaps Pauline was not sufficiently impressed by the greatness of her undertaking when she engaged to procure for the disconsolate lover the opportunity of which he had wellnigh despaired.

She set out for Dover Street with a high head and a quick pulse, confident in her power of putting in order the tangled skein, of shaking the silly people into their proper places.

Doubtless it was owing to miscomprehension alone that they had slipped out of these; and it seemed to the youthful arbitrator as if nothing could be simpler than to push, poke, or thrust them, each into his niche again.

She returned from her visit enlightened and crest-fallen; yet it was hard to discover what portion of it

had been unsatisfactory, and she could only feel that she had failed, without being sure wherein she ought to have succeeded.

She had nothing to complain of, certainly.

Lady Calverley flew at her with open arms. "My dear, dear——" kiss, kiss—"Pauline! So glad not to have missed you! So nearly went out this morning! Sit down, my child; I can hardly believe it is really *you*. Elsie will be charmed that you are come. She has only run in next door; I won't send, because it will be delightful to have you all to myself for a few minutes first. Come to my room; we shall be quieter there. See here, it opens out of this, behind these doors. And when did you come, dear? And how is your aunt? You are in Kensington, are you not? A long way from here?"

"Not very far. We only came last night, rather late."

"And you have a house for the season—at least your aunt has? She is fortunate in getting one so late. How pleasant it will be for you and Tom to be together! He misses you sadly, I am sure. *We* only stay ten days longer. You should have been here before, Pauline; then we could have seen so much of each other, and——how well you are looking, dear! Not quite red enough here, though," touching her cheek; "but you never had Elsie's roses."

"No," said Pauline, smiling; "I never had."

"But you are really well? And what a charming tour you must have had! We have heard all about you, and where you have been. Another time you must go to Florence. Mrs Wyndham would be enchanted with Florence; I never enjoyed a stay in any place more. Winter is the time, you know—late winter, at least: one should go to Rome first, then to Florence, then to Cannes. Try to get your aunt to take you, Pauline."

"Aunt Camilla has been so much abroad that I don't think she would care to go again just yet. She may, some other time; but the Grange is really a delightful place, and she will go back there for this winter at least, I hope."

The last word slipped out unconsciously.

Florence, indeed! What had Rome, Florence, and Cannes, put together, to offer in exchange for the dripping woods, overcast skies, and fine, broad, leaf-heaped, mud-girt highways of B——shire?

The thought of these brought the sparkle to her eye.

Acorns and beech-nuts fall in October; horse-chestnuts burst upon the footpaths. She is ready to vow and protest that not a fruit in sunny Italy can vie with these coarse products of the wood. The river, with its dull passionless flow—she would not change it for the bluest wave in Genoa Bay.

Get her aunt to take her! She smiled in contempt of the whole proposition.

The slip of the tongue, the smile, and the momentary vision were lost upon Lady Calverley, who was engrossed with her own part, and who was chiefly anxious to be as kind, as unchanged in manner, as she possibly could, without committing herself to any scheme that might prove awkward in the future, or betraying any arrangements that were more prudent concealed for the present.

“The next thing is,” she cried, “when are we to see you at Gourloch?”

To this there was an easy rejoinder: “When will you have us?”

Us! Her aunt winced, but was resolved not to show it.

“My dear Pauline! When your own room is always ready, and you have but to write and say you are coming! Mrs Wyndham does not care for Scotland, I believe; but if there were a chance of her being in the North, I hope I need not say how happy we should be to see her also.”

“Thank you, but I don’t think she has any idea of going. I believe she intends paying a round of visits in the Isle of Wight and Devonshire this summer; and if it would be convenient for you that I should come at that time——”

“It would be convenient for me to have *you*, Pauline, at *any* time—surely you know that?”

Pauline returned the embrace, but she felt the “*you*;”

there was no Tom in that "you:" the warmth and the welcome were for her alone.

"I will tell her, then, Aunt Ella; and you may look for me in July, if nothing comes in the way. How I shall delight in dear Gourloch again! I found out this plan, and suggested it to Aunt Camilla as soon as I heard you expected us."

Again that "us"! It could not be helped—it was the natural, inevitable result of years of intimacy. Never once had the sister stayed at Gourloch without the brother, and the invitation which had preceded the return of the Calverley party from abroad, had unconsciously been worded so as to include both. No other desire had then occurred to the writer.

"Ah, yes. I wrote from Paris, did I not? Then it is settled, and you will be down in July? You will see several changes, I fancy. In many places the old walls were really so tumble-down that they had to be put in complete repair. You remember those steps giving way that day we had been somewhere—some expedition——"

"We had been in Mr Blundell's yacht."

"Had we? Was that the day? How could you recollect? Hum—ah!—yes. You have never met him again, I suppose? We came home first that evening, you and I, and you insisted—you naughty, wilful creature—on waiting for the others at the bottom of the stairs, to warn them that it was dangerous to walk up. I remember it all now. That weary hour, before they appeared—and how knocked up poor Elsie was! She did not get over the effects for days. It was a mistake altogether our going; and certainly it was a pity that Tom ever introduced his friend."

"The introduction was involuntary, Aunt Ella; I think you forget."

"Was it, my dear? I thought he was Tom's friend. I am sure it was under that impression that I received him at Gourloch. My uncle Dr Macleay—you know him—he did give me a hint, but I thought that Tom——" with an aggrieved air.

It was evidently something to have this to take hold of against Tom, and Pauline's ire was doubly kindled.

She flushed to her brow.

"I think," she said, impetuously, "we had nothing to regret. You would not have wished to fail in hospitality even had Mr Blundell been a stranger; as it is, he is—a well-known—neighbour, of many of our friends—at the Grange——"

"Oh, really?" said Lady Calverley, demurely; "I did not know."

"Tom, you see, was guiltless," continued her niece, feeling that she had betrayed herself, and burning with shame. "I must stick up for the poor boy, must I not, Aunt Ella? He has no one but me."

"Certainly. Is Mr Blundell in town?"

"Mr Blundell? I don't know. Have you seen him? Why?"

"I thought you appeared to have renewed your acquaintance with him."

"Yes," said Pauline, calmly; "I have. I met him not long ago, but he said nothing about coming to town."

"Is he to be in Scotland this summer?"

"No, he was going to Norway."

Her aunt was baffled.

"Well," she said, "about those steps. What a real mercy it was we had that warning! We sent for a builder, you remember, and he wanted to patch it up, but my uncle would have us write to Glasgow, to Mr Barrie, an architect, and quite a great man: well, you know, he said the idea was absurd—that no amount of patching could do any good! Many parts were absolutely rotten, and he considered the turret—your turret, Pauline—unsafe. You need not be afraid to return to it, however; it has been thoroughly attended to. However, you must have heard all about it at the time; and we have been wandering about the world ever since, Elsie and I. You were attending to your poor Uncle Julius's wife, you remember. How little we thought, when we all parted that autumn, that three long years would pass

ere we should meet again! On the whole, it has been a pleasant time, and we have much, much to be thankful for. Everything has fitted in so wonderfully—like the pieces of a dissecting map!”

“Yes,” said Pauline, “one pulls through somehow.”

She could not make her tone as cheerful as her aunt’s, nor feel that the pieces in *her* dissecting map had all been fitted yet.

A great hollow had been reft in her life, whose edges were still quivering; and, apart from this, she felt that kindness, cordiality, and chat were yet bringing her no nearer to the attainment of her mission. She experienced an almost imperceptible restraint, which did not diminish as the time went on, and Elsie still did not appear.

“Aunt Marion and Hugh are here, are they not?” she said, at last.

“Elsie is with them now; it is they who have rooms next door. Not absolutely next door, for there is a shop between, down-stairs; but the windows of the two hotels meet, as you see, and the entrance is round the corner. We run in and out at all hours.”

“It must be very convenient.”

“Very—in every way. We have our carriage in common, you know—your Aunt Marion’s thought; it saves expense—horses do run away with one’s money terribly in London; and we just fill it comfortably. Hugh’s valet is such a treasure! He knows where every place we want to go to is, in a moment—quite in the courier style; he was invaluable when we were abroad.”

“Is Hugh as delicate as he was?”

“Oh, by no means. Quite well and strong now,” rather shortly.

“I heard he had been ill.”

“A long time ago, my dear. He had an illness—just such an illness as anybody might happen to have—when we were at Florence. He caught cold, and neglected it most imprudently. But, however, he got over it as well as could possibly have been expected. He says, you know,” with a smile, “that it was owing to *our* nursing;

Elsie's and mine, that he rallied as he did. Elsie looks upon him still as her very particular—patient."

Pauline would not see, would not question, as she was clearly intended to do. She looked innocently into her aunt's face.

"I had no idea you were going away so soon."

"Almost immediately, my love." The smile left Lady Calverley's lips. "Yes, we must begin to think about getting our goods together. We have been here for six weeks—to-morrow is the longest day, the 21st, is it not? How quickly the time passes!"

"I daresay, in such company!" cried a voice in the doorway. "And is it really my Pauline, whom mamma has kidnapped in this unlawful manner? Mamma, how could you be so cruel? You knew how I have been waiting and waiting for her, and you never let me know she had come."

"I would not disturb your reading, Elsie. I knew Pauline would stay a little, and——"

"My reading! I should have flung the book out of the window, and myself after it, for joy. Here have I been peering through that chink in the door for ever so long. I could not be certain who it was, and I was not going to come in to everybody. Another time, have the doors a little wider open, mamma, and then I can see comfortably. It was only when Pauline stooped forward as you were moralising about old Time in that affecting manner, that I caught sight of her. I might have been tantalised till now, if she had sat still."

"She looks well, does she not, Pauline?" said the mother, with a glance of pride.

"Very well."

Too well, Pauline thought, to augur good for her brother,—too beaming with health, happiness, and—Hugh?

"What an extravagant child you are," continued Lady Calverley, addressing her daughter, "to wear that pretty dress at this time in the morning! It begins to lose its freshness already."

“I put it on for Pauline,” said Elsie—both her auditors fancied, with something of defiance in her tone.

And so there was. She was resolved to emphasise her welcome; whosoever was tardy or lukewarm, about the warmth and readiness of hers there should be no manner of doubt. Whatsoever her heart forbade should be done for Tom, she would do for Pauline.

Towards him she durst not move, but she could scat herself at his sister’s feet. His hand was dropped as soon as it touched hers, but this one was clasped to her bosom.

She talked as they had never heard her talk all those late unlucky weeks.

She laughed and jested.

Even the arrival of the rest of the party, and the consequent interruption, put no check on her flow of spirits; she would show them all what she thought of their guest, whom it was that she, the princess, delighted to honour.

But Pauline’s heart sank lower and lower.

This gaiety and frolic, this mirth and sunshine, were misunderstood. She had expected a downcast eye and troubled brow, a constraint and depression. She was only saddened and discomfited by Elsie’s best endeavours. With inward misgiving she now brought forth a little proposition, of which in the morning she had been full.

It had been insinuated into Mrs Wyndham’s mind, partly by her and partly by Tom; they had put together their joint stock of guile, and got it done somehow. Her invitation to Elsie to return with Pauline, spend the day, and be sent home in the evening, was supposed to have originated with herself alone.

But in the delivery of the message the form of it was altered.

For “in the evening” Pauline found herself compelled, through sheer trepidation, to substitute “in time for dinner.” She really could not go through with the original suggestion in front of those unresponsive faces. Of Elsie’s face she could not judge—she had turned away

her head, attracted apparently by something passing ; but the other three confronted the speaker pitilessly.

It might have been taken for a harmless business enough, to go stopping with two ladies, and be brought by them back to her own door—not even to see, to speak to any one forbidden !

But she could tell in a moment that the possibility of such a project being started had been actually under discussion, and that it would not be permitted to take place.

She had not above half expected that it would. There was the probability of prior engagements for one thing ; but she had hoped that, by judicious pressure, judicious yielding, and—general judiciousness, in fact, something might be made of it. Another day, perhaps, fixed upon.

Doubtful as she had imagined a concession, she had not believed an absolute refusal possible. She had not calculated on the arrangement having to be made under Mrs Calverley's eye.

“What have we to-day, I wonder?” murmured Elsie's mother, with a look, Pauline felt, at her sister-in-law.

A programme was immediately produced—every hour was, it appeared, mapped out ; but—

“Would to-morrow do?” said Pauline.

“I was about to name to-morrow, my dear Pauline ! If you really are disengaged, we might hope to call on your aunt to-morrow ; and then *you* could join *us*, take a seat in our carriage, and we could all enjoy the pleasure you only designed for Elsie. Remember,” cried Mrs Calverley, “that we too have claims—that we have seen nothing of you for long, either. You must not” (archly) “treat us in this shabby manner—you must not stint us ; we shall look to having you for the whole afternoon to-morrow.”

So polite a suggestion cleared away Elsie's rising discontent, and she looked round, cheerily crying, “You will come, won't you, Paulie ? And another day I can go with you.”

“Certainly,” smiled her aunt. “You two will want to see all you can of each other ; you must make up for lost

time. And, dear me! what a crowd of things there are besides, to be squeezed into this one week! People to be seen, and bills to be paid! How shall we ever get through everything? I must really leave some matters for you to attend to, after we are gone, Ella, although we will do all we can. We must not add to our engagements, we must not fix anything more at present; but I daresay we shall see something of Pauline on most days."

Meantime Hugh was sitting by with a brow as black as thunder. He neither showed his cousin Pauline any of those attentions which he was prone to render women, nor did he pay her the compliment of taking part in the conversation. He sat silent, turning over the leaves of a book.

Elsie redoubled her caresses.

She haughtily ignored his ill-humour, and turning her back upon him, replied in monosyllables to one or two whispers which it might be presumed conveyed complaints or proposals.

She was not going to have her own dear Pauline trampled upon as poor Tom had been. That Hugh should dare to scowl because she made much of Pauline! It was insufferable.

She was very wroth with Hugh,—but she let the arch-malefactor go free. She could not, poor innocent, gauge the value of those bland overtures, which she so readily seconded, nor tell that the only comfort which Pauline carried away with her that day was the recollection of Hugh's frowns.

These were faithfully recorded for Tom's benefit, but Tom was not in a humour to approve of such crumbs of encouragement. He had built too much on his sister's influence: it had seemed to him, such was his faith in her, that the very fact of her presence had power to work a miracle; and as no miracle was wrought, he was proportionately disappointed.

Was *that* all she had to tell him? Had she done *nothing*? Had she never learnt a single *thing*, not even if they were to be at the Festival on Saturday?

Why did she not take the chance when Lady Frederick Whitton was there? What had they talked about? How long had she stayed?

She was ashamed to own how long she had stayed; she really did seem to have laboured in vain, to have failed completely in all that she had undertaken. His reproaches cut her to the heart, but she could not gainsay them.

She raked her memory, assured him of the kind reception she had met with, of the civility of everybody (Hugh excepted), of Aunt Ella's being evidently under command, of Aunt Marion's being uniformly smooth-tongued and insincere. But when she had done, she could think of nothing more.

Elsie, however, had been very loving.

"Was she?" said Tom, awaiting more.

When no more came, he added, with a pitiful attempt at a sneer, "She wasn't at the book, then?"

"The book is only for you. I saw no book."

"It has a green cover, and 'Extracts' in gold letters on the back."

"Perhaps Hugh will take it with him when he goes, and then the charm will be broken."

"When he goes?"

"Did you not know? He and Aunt Marion go this day week, three days before the others."

"Three days before the others!" repeated Tom, almost in a whisper. "I never knew that."

Then he suddenly leapt to his feet, and shouted "Hooray!" at the top of his voice.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

“SHE IS NOT COMING WITH ME!”

“Then she plots, then she ruminates, then she devises; and what they think in their hearts they may effect, they will break their hearts but they will effect.”
—*Merry Wives of Windsor*.

When Mrs Calverley took her departure on the following Tuesday, she left everything behind her in such excellent training, and the time seemed so short ere they should be standing within the great entrance-hall at Calverley to welcome their travellers from London, that she did not think anything could go wrong in her absence.

No further attempt had been made on the part of Pauline to secure her cousin's company alone, and they had walked and driven all together, without anything happening to ruffle the surface of composure.

Tom had not again called in Dover Street; nor, when the party there went to Kensington, had he made his appearance.

Elsie was once more moody and capricious, but she made no attempt to remain in town, nor did she express disinclination to visiting Calverley. “She only needs to be assured of Hugh's wishes,” augured his fond mother; “his backwardness is extraordinary.”

She could not, however, succeed in her representations, and was fain, while marvelling at the blindness and obstinacy of her son, to take such comfort as they could yield to herself, and leave him alone.

“On Friday, dear,” were her last words, as she disappeared from Dover Street; and with the thought of Friday she buoyed herself up all the way to Calverley.

“Now is our time,” said Pauline, and she went straight to the hotel.

But Lady and Miss Calverley had gone out, and were not expected home to luncheon.

She called again in the afternoon. Lady and Miss Calverley had returned, and had gone out again.

“ This must be Elsie’s own doing,” reflected Pauline ; nor was she unconvinced, even when it proved that the second expedition had been to Kensington, and that they had found Mrs Wyndham at home.

“ They dine out to-night, I know,” said she to Tom. “ It was partly on account of this dinner that these two were obliged to stay behind ; but we will see them, somehow. Tom, we will make them come here the night before they go.”

“ Can you ? ” said he, as Mrs Wyndham entered the room.

“ Aunt Camilla,” began Pauline, “ what do you think of asking Aunt Ella and Elsie to dine here on Thursday ? We have no engagement, and perhaps they would come to *us*, though they would not care to go anywhere else on their last evening.”

“ Well, my dear, I *had* intended to hear the Jubilee singers ; and you had said you would like it too. We have seen a good deal of your aunt. But, of course, I am only too glad. Suppose we do invite them. Sir Hugh as well ? He usually goes where they do. And his mother ? Make it pleasant if we do have them, love : I fancy those young people like to be together, don’t they ? I imagined something of the kind.” (Poor Tom !)

“ Oh, they are gone, you say,” continued Mrs Wyndham, all unconsciously. “ Oh ! ” She paused. “ If you think they would *care* to be asked—if they would really *like* to come—by all means let us ask them. But Thursday ! That is to-morrow. My blue dress was only to come home to-morrow, which, of course, means it won’t. Well, I suppose I can wear some other thing ; but really. Lady Calverley has never seen me in anything nice.”

“ Never mind, Aunt Camilla,” said Tom, from the corner of the sofa, to which he had retreated, whilst his sister fought the battle. “ Aunt Ella can’t contend with you in that respect. She goes about a perfect tramp when she is at Gourloch, and I have never seen her out of one gown since she came to London.”

“ I am sure she was elegance itself to-day.”

"That's it—that's the very one! She went straight to a shop and bought it when she first came up, and it has been on every day since."

"My dear Tom, a *shop!*" simpered his aunt.

"Well?"

"We don't get such things in *shops.*"

"Where do you get them, then?" asked simple Tom.

"At our dressmakers. They devise them for us. They arrange them to suit our styles—our complexions. For me, a blonde, they would suggest blue; for Pauline, rose-colour, or amber, or——"

"White," said Tom. "Pauline looks best of all in white. It suits her—her mind, I think. Eh?"

This was beyond his aunt, however.

"But, I say," continued he, resuming his careless tone, "did you think of having—ah—anybody on Thursday? I should like to know beforehand, in case I am asked anywhere else."

"Certainly, you must. Well, Thursday, then—that is to-morrow. It is rather short notice. How are we to get an answer, and how can we have any one to meet them?"

"That we cannot," cried Pauline, eagerly. "They could not expect it, Aunt Camilla. And I am quite sure they—we should all prefer being without strangers; don't you think so, Tom?"

"Yes," muttered Tom; "of course."

"If that is to be the way, it is quite easy, then," said Mrs Wyndham. "Shall I send, or shall we go there?"

"Let us go, and at once," replied Pauline. "They cannot be out at this early hour; and if they are, we will leave the note. Shall I write it from you, Aunt Camilla, and shall I ask them to come in their travelling apparel, so that anything you have will do? We will agree to keep them in countenance."

Mrs Wyndham was satisfied, and they set off.

All went well; the ladies were at home, and the invitation, given as it was face to face, was perforce accepted. A little hesitation, a lurking reluctance, Pauline felt sure,

clung behind the mother's smile ; but about Elsie's “ We will come ” there could be no two opinions. Her whole countenance glowed with animation.

“ It must be right for us,” communed Pauline with herself, “ or she would never look like this. Now,” continued she, “ my dear, charming little aunt, you are not going to get your own way this time ; you are not to be allowed to lay yourself under Aunt Marion's Juggernaut car and be crushed ! That is what you think you would like, I know. And that is what you have designed for Elsie ; but, or else I am mistaken, Elsie does not design this for herself. If she likes Hugh,” argued Pauline, “ she won't have Tom. If she likes Tom, she ought not to be made to take Hugh. Made to take ! Nonsense ! Aunt Ella would never say a word ; but Hugh will be asked there, and praised and petted,—and then he is really nice, and good, and kind ; and she pities him ; and, above all, he is always there. She is a tender-hearted little thing ; and if Tom says nothing—— Ah ! she could be cruel enough to him once.”

But for this was Pauline the one to blame her ? I think she had never felt more kindly towards Elsie than at that moment. I think, in her inmost soul, she marvelled not at that cruelty. She marvelled only that one who had once hearkened to the subtle sweetness of *his* voice, could ever listen to another !—that Blundell could be forgotten for Tom !

True, it had been but the fancy of the moment, the passing pang wherewith womanhood is born ; the child's awakening to her power and to her weakness, to her knowledge of happiness and sorrow.

It had not mattered much who had taught the lesson. Elsie had suffered and forgiven ; and of all that had passed there remained but this, the fixed resolution never again to betray by word or look the unsought secrets of her heart.

Something of this Pauline began to suspect, and it yielded a new hope for her brother.

She alone understood, and held the wayward girl blame-

less, when smiles and frowns, clouds and sunshine, kindness and coldness, alternated so swiftly that the most long-suffering of the other three was annoyed and perplexed.

Of one idea possessed, Elsie heeded nothing, so long as her stronghold was safe. Hugh should not know, Tom should not know, none of them should know, whom it was she loved, or whether she loved at all, until she was asked—until the very words were spoken. She had been bitten, but the extent of her wound had never been told, and only one guessed there was a scar.

That one was Pauline.

Thursday was one of the hottest days of the year; and Tom and his sister stood on the balcony of their aunt's house, to wait the arrival of their guests.

Lady Calverley was late, of course.

"She has not got the clocks here half an hour fast, you know," jested Tom. He was shaking with excitement and nervous tremor. "Do you remember that, Pauline? That great ticker in the hall that every one was supposed to go by, and that nobody did? She ought to ask the people at the hotel to be kind enough to cheat her! Or," with sudden dread, "do you think they can't be coming?"

Pauline reassured him. She had seen her aunt in the afternoon, had been with them in the Park, and certainly, at that time, there had been no idea of throwing up the engagement.

If by any chance they did not come—— Ah! there they were!

Those were Elsie's forget-me-not ribbons! She had not made a fashionable fright of herself for travelling, on this occasion; she had kept out one of her pretty evening dresses.

This to an experienced eye meant something, meant well for Tom. Poor Tom! he had bought a penny rose for his button-hole! He never spoke when the carriage stopped. He ran down hurriedly, and brought them in. Then he stood by his aunt's chair, talking to her, till dinner was announced.

That Lady Calverley was not at her ease was tolerably evident.

Tom had been an early darling ; and that she should ever be trying to treat him as a young man to be kept at a distance, or even as a mere nephew, would once have seemed a thing impossible.

How square, and broad, and strong he towered over her head !

How handsome the poor boy looked ! What a light shone in his fine brown eyes !

No one was more alive to the beauty of a fine eye than she ; even Mrs Wyndham was not more susceptible on the point of good looks than was Lady Calverley.

That the hair on the top of her other nephew’s head was growing thin, had been a positive grievance ever since it came beneath her notice ; and as her daughter’s future husband, she had long resented the slope of his shoulders.

In Dover Street, she had tormented herself by secret comparisons between him and Tom ; but she had never, until this night, perceived the extent of the latter’s superiority.

She fidgeted in her chair, wishing herself anywhere but where she was. Then she called to mind where she might hope to be at that hour on the morrow, and endeavoured to endure what she could not avoid.

If Elsie had only allowed her to send an excuse ! It would have been true, perfectly true ; she was so tired that she was nearly worn out, and so was Elsie. They were to make an early start, and Mrs Wyndham could not have taken offence. But Elsie had been so—foolish.

Elsie had, in fact, far from pressing her mother to go, willingly agreed to make her excuses—but in person. Certainly *she* should not stay away without a reason ; why should she ? And as to this there could be no reply, there remained nothing for it but that both should go. To have let Elsie go alone would have been sheer madness.

The more she looked at Tom, the more she shuddered

at the idea—the more she framed apologies for being there at all, to be presented to her sister-in-law when the misdemeanour should come to light.

“My dear Marion,” she imagined herself saying, “you must allow that the *convenances* of society almost compelled us to accept. You yourself would have seen the necessity had you been there. And really there was no result.” (How devoutly she hoped there would be none!) “They met as ordinary relations; Tom made no attempt to speak to her.” (Certainly not, at present.) “We had a nice cheerful evening” (things might brighten before it ended), “and I am really glad we went.” Into which extraordinary statement she contrived to interpret the joy she anticipated when all should be over.

Glad! Ay, she would be right glad when she found herself safely seated in the carriage again. She would be gladder still to be fairly on her way to Calverley.

Then, when Hugh had at last declared himself—when suspense, concealment, and mystery were happily at an end,—then, she would write the kindest, warmest letter to her dear Pauline, in which Tom should have his message—his hearty welcome. Stop! what is this? She is delivering it already!

They are on their way down-stairs; and with her hand upon his arm, she is whispering, “You have not said when we are to see you in the North, Tom? It is always coming ‘home,’ you know, when you come to us.”

Here was the first kind word she had addressed to him since the change began.

“I shall have a fortnight in July, thank you,” said he.

“A fortnight! You used to come to us for *months*! Are they so barbarous as to give you only one fortnight?”

He smiled.

“That cannot be, Tom; it is quite ridiculous. Your uncle must make a point of it.”

She was really astonished, horrified; she was genuinely sorry for him; she was only not sorry for herself. (“Even Marion,” she reflected, “could not expect me to refuse him that one fortnight; and perhaps, indeed certainly,

all must be quietly settled before that time. Knowing everything, it will then be his own choice whether or not he comes at all.”)

She did not know herself what to wish in the matter. She yearned over the boy, and felt as though she had no right to yearn. She was certainly to be felt for. It is so hard to steer between the Scylla of Love and the Charybdis of Fear, and this for a woman who was “not bright.”

“My dear Tom, it is too absurd!”

“It is as much as any of us have, Aunt Ella.”

“But you used to come to us for months!”

“When I was at Oxford.”

“At Oxford! And do you mean to say that you really have to work harder now than when you were at Oxford? I am sure you cannot mean that, Tom. I have heard of young men *killing* themselves with study over and over again, but I never thought it was to go on all their lives. Did you, Mrs Wyndham?”

“We don’t kill ourselves with study, certainly,” replied Tom, with a laugh. “You need not be alarmed for me, Aunt Camilla.” She had turned to him in real concern. “I don’t look like being killed, do I?”

Yet they might have seen, had they chosen, that his plate went away almost untouched.

This passage-at-arms over, “Tom,” cried his other aunt, “did you ask Mr Chadleigh about those tickets? Now, you sad, forgetful fellow, I am sure you forgot. Did you forget?”

He started.

“Tickets!—I—I—— What in the world are you talking about, ma’am? What tickets?”

“The tickets Mr Chadleigh spoke to you about, you know. He said he could get them for us.”

He regarded her earnestly.

The offer had been his own; he had vouched for the production of the said tickets, and had been full of the scheme, for Elsie had been included in it.

As soon as their departure had been fixed for so early a date as to preclude the possibility of her acceptance, the

project had collapsed, and had entirely vanished from his memory.

He owned his fault, and promised amendment, hastily. He was exceedingly attentive to both his aunts, but he was not punctilious in his duties as a host. He neglected the younger ladies, not addressing his cousin once during the meal.

When she spoke to others, when her head was averted, his look was upon her, but it was withdrawn ere there was a chance of their eyes meeting.

Elsie was not herself either. She was, she averred, too tired to speak; too tired to eat; too hot, and tired, and cross about going away, to care for anything. Tom's head just moved at the last declaration; it almost seemed as if he were going to speak to her, but he did not.

She and Pauline went off arm in arm when dinner was over, with many protestations of affection on the part of the little one. Dear Pauline! She was going to leave Pauline so soon! She did not like leaving her Pauline at all. She would make the evening as long as ever, ever, ever she could.

“Out of doors?” suggested Pauline.

“Oh, delightful! In the gardens. Mamma, we are going to the gardens in the Square. Pauline says we can get out this way, and it is so hot in the house. Oh, these beautiful gardens! Look at that pink horse-chestnut covered with blossoms! And look at those lilacs, and that may, and syringa! This little gate is locked, Pauline; how shall we open it?”

“Tom has the key,” said her cousin; “I will fetch it.”

She did—and him.

Mrs Wyndham, as we know, is not so fond of evening strolls as her niece is, but she will join them by-and-by. She will be found in the drawing-room if wanted. They will, she is sure, rejoice to be rid of her for a little while.

Says Pauline, “Now, Aunt Ella, I am going to show you *my* seat.”

Aunt Ella.—“Come, Elsie, and see Pauline's seat.”

Pauline, with boldness.—“Go away, Elsie. I don't want

you. Go away with Tom as you used to do, and leave us two together. Good-bye."

Aunt Ella.—"But, my dear, she does not want to go; she has had walking enough for to-day. She is tired. She will not be fit for her journey."

Pauline.—"Then she need not walk. She can go and find a seat. But she is not coming with *me!* I want to have a nice long talk with you alone; we have not had one since we met. Take her away, Tom."

"Will you come, Elsie?"

His faltering voice proclaimed how little he expected that she would. He turned away as he spoke, as if he would prevent an answer. He did not even look at her.

Nevertheless she went.

CHAPTER XXXV.

TOM'S OPPORTUNITY.

"Every dog has his day, and every man his hour."

Lady Calverley fretted in impotent vexation.

"My dear Pauline, I always like to have a chat with you; but these gardens are so public, overlooked by so many windows—don't you think we had better keep together a little?"

"We can't lose ourselves, auntie. The gardens are closed in on every side, and only the people in the Square have access to them. Now, are they not charming? Come, look down this vista; is not that a lovely blending of dark and pale green overhead, with those rows of bright things along the paths? That is what you came to see. Here is my seat, and looking on that leafy——"

"Oh, very; yes, charming. I suppose we shall meet them if we turn down this walk?"

"Then we won't turn down it. Let us sit down here. This piece of grass is like velvet, is it not? Look——"

"I see, my dear, and I do indeed admire it exceedingly. But, Pauline, I do *not* like," with gathering determination, "Elsie to be seen wandering about——"

"My dear auntie, who is to see her? And she is only gone with Tom."

"It is not—not——"

"Not an unheard-of thing, is it? They used to be always together; and you and I were companions too, in old days. I want to know, how do you go to-morrow?"

"By the Great Northern, from King's Cross."

"By the Great Northern! That is up the east coast. Where do you stop? Edinburgh?"

"We do not need to stop anywhere. We—we go straight to Calverley."

"To Calverley!" Pauline stopped short. This arrangement had never been mentioned to her or Tom. "I thought you were going straight to Gourloch!"

"It is not ready for us, my dear; it will not be ready for another week or more. Your aunt and cousin were kind enough to ask us to make a halt with them, as neither Elsie nor I," emphatically, "cared to remain longer in town."

"Did Elsie not? I thought she said she was cross because she was going."

"I never heard her say that till to-night; she was put out about other—little—things. She is quite willing to go to Calverley, I assure you."

("Now I understand," thought Pauline—"now I see why poor Tom was allowed this one evening. He was to have it under strict supervision, just for decency's sake, and then Elsie was to be whirled away to Hugh and Calverley. Oh, Tom! if you could only know all that hangs on this one half-hour!")

"It is rather early to banish the poor child to the Highlands, is it not?" proceeded her aunt, apologetically; "she will see nobody at Gourloch, you know. Calverley is a charming place, and it is a pity she should

so seldom be there; we have not paid them a visit for years."

"Nor have I," said Pauline.

"You like better coming to us, do you not? And we like having you. Aunt Marion is very kind, but I don't think she and you were ever very great friends, were you?"

"No, I don't think we were."

Pauline pursued the interesting topic, aware that a good, confidential, relational talk behind backs was what her aunt never could resist. "You see," she said, "Aunt Marion never seemed to make us at home, as you did. She made *too* much of us, so that we felt we were visitors every moment of the day; and there was always so much stiffness, and such planning and arranging before one could take so much as a walk in the grounds——"

"Yes, yes," cried Lady Calverley, delighted; "that is exactly your Aunt Marion! Before one can take a walk in the grounds, as you say, everybody must know what you are going to do, and every chance of interruption be provided against. It was the same here. Really, you know, however much one wishes to be considerate, when carried to such an extent it becomes irksome. I had to leave a message if I did but run as far as the post-office. The post-office was at the end of the street, and I liked the run; but if your Aunt Marion chanced to come in, it was, 'Where had I gone?' and 'When should I return?' so that really I have felt these last few days so free——" she recollected herself.

"I know I can trust you, Pauline; you are not one to make mischief. You understand what I mean. It is nothing really worth complaining of—it is a mere trifle; but you see, having been my own mistress," with a sigh, "for so many years, I am not accustomed even to the mildest restraint. It is a little *restraint*, my dear—that is exactly the word; and to tell you the truth, I never care very much for being at Calverley, for that very reason. Your aunt is not—not——"

"I think I can tell what it is."

“She is not quite delicate about little things. She seems to forget altogether that I was once in her place, or that Sir Edward was my own dear husband. She talks of him too freely—too freely by far. Most ignorantly and unjustly too, sometimes, I must say.” (The disobedient young ones were entirely lost sight of as she warmed with her subject.) “His mismanagement,” she continued—“that was what she harped upon during the whole of our last visit. I have not heard so much about it lately, but I daresay I shall, as soon as we go there. His mismanagement! In what it consisted it would be difficult, I imagine, to point out. I could see no mismanagement. Everything always seemed as nice as possible. No one ever hinted to me of mismanagement. And then, she calls on me to approve of numberless alterations. They *may* be improvements—I cannot tell. To me they certainly are anything but pleasant. I never do enjoy going to Calverley.”

“Oh, I daresay you will get on better this time.”

“I’m sure I hope so—for Elsie’s sake. Remember, my dear, that nothing I have said bears the least reference to Hugh. He, poor dear, has nothing to do with it; he is so gentle and affectionate that I never feel out of my place with him. Nor would I wish to be unjust to your Aunt Marion, only——”

“Yes?” said Pauline, with a sudden fear that she saw her other aunt threading her way towards them.

It proved to be a false alarm, and she could once more assume the post of confidential listener.

Lady Calverley was talking steadily on. She was “well at it” now, lost to every thought but that of her congenial theme.

Domineering? that was the word. *So* domineering! Every one must be happy in *her* way. They must have her tastes, her pursuits. Even in graver matters, it appeared, she would fain have led; but here Pauline would believe that the strong but worldly woman had been baffled—that on such points the true Christian could be steadfast, for conscience’ sake.

The hour slipped by, and a slight breeze began to fan the tops of the branches.

Lady Calverley gave a little shiver.

"It grows chilly," she said; "we must have been sitting still a long time. What have we been about? Mrs Wyndham will think we have neglected her shamefully."

"Perhaps," said Pauline, rising, with a smile, "we had better go in."

"And Tom? And Elsie?"

"There they are!"

"You see, Aunt Ella, I really couldn't help it."

This was all the apology Tom had to offer for two faces that told their own tale so unmistakably that even the most incredulous could read it at a glance.

Oh, how thankful the poor woman was at the moment that she was not at Calverley!

That was her first, her instantaneous thought.

How easily the blow fell, after all, when accompanied by such sobs and kisses, tears and laughter!

Nobody frowned on her, nobody scolded, nobody was made miserable. She was taken at unawares. She had been descanting on the very topic meet for such a conclusion, unconsciously preparing for it, by the slow fire of insubordination which had been kindling in her breast during the recital of her wrongs. This now burst into a flame.

Had not her own child, her pretty darling, a right to choose in such a matter? Was she to be overruled by any tyrannical will, and ordered what she was to do? not even by her own mother, either,—not even by the only one who had a right to speak, if right there was?

Great for Tom was the moment he had chosen.

She was conquered with scarcely a struggle, threw open the gates and admitted the enemy at once to her innermost citadel.

It was but, "Tom, Tom, you naughty boy!" And he was hanging round her neck, just as he used to do.

She was, in truth, bewildered, and knew not what she said, or if indeed she said anything at all. To this day she maintains that her consent was never asked.

But she says that one thing greatly struck her. That, amidst the tumult of petitions, praises, smiles, and whispers, she caught a glimpse of a sweet and beautiful face, so illumined by pure unselfish joy that it seemed as though it might belong to a loving soul in Paradise, rather than to an inhabitant of this stained and sinful world.

She says that look overcame her, and that Tom owes his winning Elsie to Pauline.

Tom, however, has no idea of giving in to this. If it was any one who got him that, he says, it was his Aunt Camilla.

“For you see,” he explained afterwards, “I forgot all about money and that; and if Aunt Camilla had not come forward in such a splendid way, and said she would make it all right, I don’t know what we should have done. She went straight off to her lawyer the very next morning, and I am to have half, and the other half is to be for Pauline. Wasn’t it jolly of her? Uncle Julius and she, between them, are going to settle an allowance on me besides, so that I need not have to live on Elsie’s money for the present. And—and—they are all a great deal too good to me, you know; it makes a fellow feel—ashamed.”

All that required to be done ere the eventful evening closed, was to telegraph to Calverley, and to take on the rooms in Dover Street; for as to carrying out that journey, the bare thought of it was more than either mother or daughter durst contemplate.

A letter explained the telegram, but we need not witness the reception of either. Mrs Calverley’s scorn and Hugh’s woes may thus be left out of our little story; and as both of these were out of sight of the happy party in London, so I imagine were they out of mind. As for the German book, I greatly fear its translation will never be accomplished.

Mrs Wyndham would willingly have received Lady Calverley and Elsie into her house for the remainder of their stay in town, but it was not large enough to accommodate them comfortably; so that Tom was obliged to be satisfied with finding them in the drawing-room every evening on his return home, or with going to Dover Street himself. It may be believed his case was not a hard one. He was never *asked*, nobody thought of *inviting* him; he had his revenge for all those miserable luncheons, in the way he now went and came at will, and in the tears that fell upon his shoulder the night before Elsie left for Gourloch.

That she should weep for this, when he was to follow in a few weeks.

He was awed by the extent of his happiness, by his great prosperity.

"I knew she could never care about a fellow who lay upon the sofa," he said, adverting to Hugh; "but then, that was no reason, you see, why she should care for one who didn't. And she was such a little vixen! Was she not, Pauline? She would not give me the ghost of an idea whether I had a chance or not. Who would have believed the little thing could have been so close? It was not the least like her; I thought that when you came, at all events, you would have found out everything in a minute."

"She took another character for the time," said Pauline, unconscious, however, that she too could do the like on occasion. "Love can work other changes besides making the bold timid, and the timid bold. It can make the meek perverse, and the gentle obstinate; and——"

"The good-tempered as sulky as bears," said Tom. "Fancy, I have seen Elsie sulk in a corner, so that I hardly knew whether I should have liked best to have boxed her ears, or—have boxed all the other ears in the room! I knew they were tormenting her."

"At least you know it now." She could not forbear a smile.

"I should think I did know, now. I have made her

tell me all about it, over and over again—and you won't see Aunt Marion at Gourloch in a hurry, I can tell you, Pauline; she was the one, you know—she was my worst enemy. As for Hugh, I'm only sorry for him; but I daresay he'll take a tonic, and get over it. Well, now, Pauline, there's only you to be provided for," continued Tom, superior in the fulness of his satisfaction. "Elsie and I will have to take you in hand. We shall have a house in town, you know. I mean to go on with what I'm doing. Uncle Julius thinks it would be a pity to throw up such an opening, just when I have begun to get through the drudgery; and then, with a home of one's own, it will be all so different! Besides, they're to buy me a partnership, instead of making me an allowance. That is the new idea. It was only not spoken of before, because they thought I mightn't care to go on with it. But I don't mind. I should not like to marry, and not do anything for my wife. I wouldn't live on her money for the world. Aunt Ella is to stay with us a good part of the year, and of course we shall always be at Gourloch in the autumn. We have been settling it all this morning. When I told Aunt Camilla, she was awfully pleased. And oh, Pauline! she has had such a letter from those Jermyns!"

Pauline had not seen it.

"It came when you were out," said Tom. "She must be an atrocious woman! But if I had been Aunt Camilla, I don't think I should have told them all she was doing for me. They are furious. And what do you think she," alluding to his aunt, "had the sense to say? She only observed, with a sly look, that she did not think they would come quite so often over to the Grange as they used to do."

Even Pauline could not say that this was unfair; Mrs Jermyn's attentions had been too conspicuously fulsome.

"So, you see, you will not be troubled with too much of their company, whatever house in the neighbourhood you are in," said Tom, thinking of Finch Hall.

She could not answer, thinking of Blundellsaye.

PART V.
G O U R L O C H.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CONCLUSION.

“What is this passing scene?
A peevish April day;
A little sun, a little rain—
And then night sweeps along the plain,
And all things fade away!”

—H. KIRKE WHITE.

Gourloch lying in the glorious sunshine! Waves sparkling and dancing along the bay! Lazy cloud-shadows floating over the uplands!

Who that gazes on that beauteous scene would dream that, all through the preceding night, a summer storm had tossed these peaceful waters, had raged down from the mountain-passes, and dashed the fishermen's boats, bottom upwards, on the shore?

It had been so unexpected, and of such unusual violence, that the destruction to nets and boats had been great; and the country people were fain to console themselves as best they might that at least the damage was confined to these. Their hay had not been cut; and although many vessels of one kind or other had been out, still, as the herring season had not begun, these were easily counted, and there was no reason to suppose evil had befallen any one of them.

It was only towards evening that rumours got abroad, which were sedulously kept back from the inmates of the Castle.

“The minister’s boat” had been out, and it had not returned!

It had been seen near the northern islands, and was carrying full sail.

It had been seen to tack repeatedly, and was apparently endeavouring to make for the sheltered portion of the loch, when it had suddenly disappeared. The conclusion had been that, finding the crossing difficult, the men had put back for the night, which they could spend comfortably on the island. They had just quitted Ewan M'Lachlan the crofter's cottage.

But it was now whispered that a boat had come in from the island seeking for tidings of this very party!

They had never returned to the cottage; and the minister, who was himself at the helm, was said to have expressed a great desire to be at his own home that evening.

He had foreseen the storm, but had refused to set off ere his mission was accomplished, having been sent for to visit a dying woman—Ewan’s aged mother, who had for many years been one of his parishioners.

He had stayed in the cottage above an hour, and had then yielded to the representations of the boatmen, who, incredulous at first as to the prognosticated stress of weather, became, on a sudden, alarmed and impatient.

They had set sail, and, as long as they could be seen from the cottage, had appeared to make way very fairly; but on a call from his mother, Ewan represented that he had been obliged to attend to her; and when he was again at liberty, he noticed that the boat had put back considerably, and appeared to be labouring a good deal. However, it got round the north headland, and he thought if it weathered that point, there was nothing further to fear.

Still, with the recollection of a great increase of wind soon afterwards, and knowing that the boat was con-

sidered by many over-rigged, he had not felt easy until he should learn that it had put into harbour safely.

Ho had been first to the manse, where he learnt, with great uneasiness, that nothing had been seen of either the boat or its occupants !

He had immediately crossed the Sound to Gourloch.

It could no longer be concealed from Lady Calverley that grave apprehensions must be entertained ; but although messengers were at once despatched in all directions, it was not until the second day had passed that it was known how terribly the worst of these had been realised.

The mainsail of the boat and two of the seats had been cast ashore on the rocks, immediately opposite to the spot where Ewan had last seen it ; but of its living freight nothing had been seen or heard.

All must have found a nameless grave !

So sad an event cast a gloom over the whole countryside, and especially over the happy meeting within the old grey towers, which had been so eagerly anticipated by all of those with whom we are now concerned.

Pauline and her brother arrived within a few days of its occurrence.

“We have lost,” said Lady Calverley, “the best, the noblest of men. Within sight, Pauline, almost within reach, if there had been any at hand to render aid. We know,” with a sigh, “that some good reason there must have been why his useful and honoured life should have been thus cut short ; but for us, we cannot yet think of anything but the great, the widespread loss that must be felt. If he had been a very old man—if one could have said that he had ‘finished his course ;’ but he was so well, so strong—— Well, my dear, I must not make you too sad. We have no right to think only of ourselves ; and I am so very, very glad to see you both. You will help Elsie and me to bear our grief, for we know how you feel for us.”

“And with you,” said Pauline.

Then Lady Calverley wiped her eyes, and glided away

She had talked for a full hour and a half, and was more cheerful: she could remember that she would like to gather a few sweet-scented flowers for her niece's room.

Pauline stood still and thought. "What a grand death to die!" she said; "no pain, no fear, no weary waiting for the end. He fell in his harness, fighting the good fight. He was found at his post when the call sounded. Then he went forward—forward!

While we have been absorbed in our little round of cares and hopes and wishes, he has lived out his noble self-devoted life, and accomplished the work that was given him to do. Thrown away? How could I ever think him thrown away here? What if he did toil, unknown and unthanked by men? *He* knew, whose eye is never off His faithful servants. He watched him, never shrinking, never yielding, never weary. Oh, what a good man has gone to his rest! How poor, how small, how mean we grow beside such giants! We fritter away the lives that might all, with God's help, be great and glorious as his was. We clog ourselves, we forget that

‘Pilgrims who travel in the narrow way,
Should go as little cumbered as they may.’

Life—life—what is life?" murmured Pauline, gazing into the fathomless heavens above with dreamy eye. "A few winters and summers, a few pains and pleasures, a single love— Ah me! what will be the end of my love? Am I preparing to 'go as little cumbered' as I may; or—am—I adding a weight to pull me down, down? Not yet can I know, not yet can I guess. I feel so strangely sad to-day. Time seems so short; eternity so long. But one aim seems worth pursuing, one end achieving. I would not wish—so help me God!—to raise one barrier—no, not even *that* one, if a barrier it were to prove—betwixt me and Him. I am His; to Him I render myself again, to do with His servant even according to His will!"

"You are writing," said Elsie, putting in her head

soon after. "I came to see what you had been about all this time; Tom and I have been down to the shore. This dear little turret-room looks like itself, now that you are come back to it, Pauline. I did not like it when we first came, and I was afraid you would not care for the paper we chose. But mamma says you are quite pleased with it."

"Yes, Elsie, I think it is pretty."

"I am so glad. If you did not, mamma would have had it done over again, and let you choose your own. Can I do anything for you?"

"Not just yet. I will come in search of you when I have finished my letters."

"I have a number to write too," said Elsie, ruefully—"that is why I have had to come in. Don't forget the post goes out early from here."

"I am only writing a few words to Aunt Camilla."

"Mind you say we don't mean to part with you for a long, long time."

"I have promised to be with her in October at latest, Elsie."

"October? Poor mamma will be left alone, then."

"Whose fault is that? You and Tom should have been more considerate."

"Tom, considerate! He is the greatest plague of a boy; I can't get away from him."

She turned to go, and Tom was there. "Let me go, let me go!" cried she, trying to pass him. "I won't hear a word you have to say. Those letters *must* be written, or the postman will come before they are ready——"

He caught her. "Listen, the postman has called and gone. He came early, for some reason best known to himself, and I did not keep him. On the contrary, I bowed him off with the greatest urbanity. He explained it all in his best English, and as I did not comprehend one word, I replied in my best Gaelic, confident that it would be used with like effect. However, we concluded our conversation with entire satisfaction, and I sent him

on his way rejoicing. What can a single day signify? You can write those wonderful epistles to-morrow, and I will help you——”

“Bad spelling and all? But I must see mamma, and tell her at any rate.”

“She knows. I took the post-bag to her.”

“Were there any letters for me?” said Pauline, as he sauntered back to her, obliged to be content with Elsie’s promise of a speedy return, as she flew off at last.

“No,—I don’t think so. I had one. I say! poor Blundell has broken his neck riding a steeplechase in Paris last Sunday!”

The ink was not dry on the sheet under his sister’s hand. “Over the words, “He died as he had lived,” her fingers hung frozen, rigid, numbed.

“Isn’t it strange,” said Tom, still standing in the doorway, “that we should have the news *here*? Do you remember——” He heard Elsie calling to him, and went away caressing a puppy he held in his arms.

The paper rustled in the draught of air, for he left the door open. A dog bayed on the hillside, and a raven croaked overhead.

The room felt cold; the sunshine crept away from it.

Colder still sat that motionless figure, bending over her desk.

A step outside,—she staggered to her feet, barred the door, and had her hour of agony unseen.

Yet athwart that hour there shot one streak of brighter shade. In the portion of that cup there mingled one drop that was not gall.

She had not thrust him from her. They had parted with clasped hands and kindest looks.

She had left him that hope for which he had petitioned, on which he had depended. And the end was *this*!

God give us grace to heed!

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