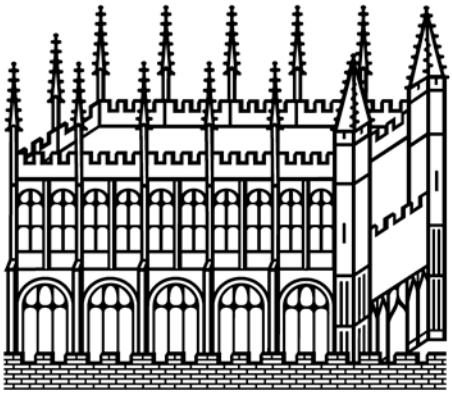

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MARCHCROFT MANOR

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MARCHCROFT MANOR.

A Novel.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY

C. A. ROBERTS.

"Amor può molto più che ne voi ne io possiamo."

Boccaccio.

VOL. I.

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251. k. 8.

MARCHCROFT MANOR.

CHAPTER I.

A friendship so complete
Portion'd in halves between us, that we grew
The fable of the city where we dwelt.

TENNYSON.

"You are so fond of the country Roger, you will be delighted to hear the startling news I have to tell you. You heard yesterday that George de Tressanay, my second cousin, had died suddenly. Now, I have just learnt that I am his heir. I, who have never thought of landed property, except to expatiate on the criminality of its tenure in general, and now I, of all people, I suddenly find myself the possessor of a large domain and old baronial mansion, every stone of which could probably bear testimony to some deed of violence and

oppression committed by its rapacious feudal owners."

"For which you will now feel yourself responsible, I suppose?" asked his listener, Roger Osborne, with a laugh, "but I heartily congratulate you, Julian," he continued, shutting up the ponderous volume in which he had been absorbed until his friend's sudden entrance into his chambers, and pushing a pile of documents and papers back on the table, "and I wish you health and long life to enjoy your good fortune; it is grand news," and he rose and shook the first speaker, Julian de Tressanay, warmly by the hand.

"It is indeed, I can hardly believe it."

"When did you hear it?"

"Hardly an hour ago. Of course I came to tell you at once. Imagine me, of all people, with an estate in the country."

"There is one inevitable result," returned Roger Osborne, "I can foretell that the wings of your high-flying imagination will be clipped

and I shall find my friend gradually deserting, his clique of ardent young patriots, with their eloquent rhapsodies over the destinies of peoples, and subsiding by degrees into a sober-minded country gentleman. Methinks I see you, a few silver threads are interspersed in your raven locks (of course closely cropped), you trot out every morning on a steady, stout cob, finding the state of your crops much more important than the mental enlightenment of the seething multitudes of our metropolis. That is the prevailing phrase, is it not?"

"It is a shame, Roger," answered Julian de Tressanay, "it is really a shame that a man of your culture and enlightenment should speak with such persistent ridicule of the great movement of our age, the one attempt at progress which will distinguish this nineteenth century from other epochs. I look upon this legacy as the means of devoting myself more entirely than before to my 'clique,' as you call it. I shall be free

to give my whole energies to the cause, for being thus relieved from the necessity of working for my livelihood, I can carry on the war to an unlimited extent.''

"So you think. I can tell you, however, that the first step towards toleration will be made when you have tasted the sweets of possession. You will then begin to feel a smouldering compassion for other victims, who like yourself, have been unfortunately doomed to become landed proprietors, and you will feel some compunction in the notion of ousting them out of their mouldering castles, when you find how pleasant it is to live in one yourself. But seriously, where is the place? Sit down and tell me all about it."

Julian had been pacing restlessly up and down the room, half amused and half irritated by his friend's sarcasms; he stretched his long limbs in an easy chair at last, and passing his hands rapidly through his dark hair, as his habit was when about to speak of anything which interested him.

"I believe it is a fine old house," he began, "not very large, but one of the few still remaining in England which has been left really unaltered, a genuine relic of olden days. You drive over what was once the drawbridge, I suppose that at least has been modified; there are narrow old windows and castellated turrets, all round is the moat (probably full of dirty, stagnant water). The rest you can picture to yourself; sloping grass lands, fine timber, numerous coppices and meandering brooks, cottages picturesque no doubt, but probably unfit for the habitation of human beings. Such is Marchcroft Manor in ——shire, one of the most beautiful counties in England. But all this is my lawyer's description. I have never been there as you know, or seen old George de Tressanay."

"You never expected to succeed to the place, did you?" asked Osborne.

"Never; it was to have gone to a nearer relation of my poor cousin's, quite a young

man, but he died suddenly a few weeks ago, whereupon I became the heir; but Roger you must come with me on a journey of discovery; give up your trip abroad for once, and come and see something of your own country. I believe you are perfectly ignorant of any part of it except London."

"As you know the horror I have of the country, Julian, of the damp and the long wet days, the dulness of the people you meet, with no ideas beyond their crops and their archery meetings, you will perhaps appreciate the sacrifice I shall make if I say yes—but yes, I will come; it would be mean after all to desert you when such a misfortune, according to your own persuasion, has overtaken you."

"Well then, come home with me now, and let us settle when we can go."

"It would be of no use trying to do any more work after this exciting news," answered Roger, "so I may as well. Mind you are responsible for this waste of time."

"And I wonder who bears the blame for all you have wasted this week. I do not believe you have been near your chambers for days."

"What could I do?" asked Roger, as they went downstairs. "There was that very important sale of pictures, and then that idle fellow Acton made me spend two days boating with him, how could I help myself. After all, life was not given one to be spent in daily drudgery."

"I see you take good care not to pervert the purpose of yours," answered Julian, with a laugh.

Looking at these two friends as they stroll leisurely down the street, it could easily be divined that they were as different in tastes and character as they were in appearance.

Roger Osborne, the elder of the two by some few years, was a barrister. His talents had already gained him a considerable reputation, although it was to be feared that his literary tastes gave him more pleasure

than did the strict exercise of his profession. He had a great taste for painting, and had acquired a rather valuable collection of pictures and choice books, and growing more and more absorbed in the pursuit of culture as years rolled on, he became less an actor than an observer in the world of men. He was tolerant to all views as he had himself no decided opinions.

"How can you," he used to say, "judge of anything, when your eyes are blinded by passion and prejudice? Let the stream of life hurry on, but stand calmly on the shore and mark the whirlpools and eddying currents; it is far more interesting to watch the waves dashing against the rocks than to be hurled against them oneself, and have one's head broken in the shock. If others," he would add, "like to take a plunge into the vortex, let them do so by all means; let them struggle and hurtle against the restless waves as much as they please; let them do that or anything else which they may find smoothes

their after-path in life. But why should they scorn me? whose only sin is that I stand aloof and claim a right to make my life as pleasant as I can in my own way."

Roger Osborne's "own way" was to live amongst a circle of chosen friends, giving up as much time as he could spare to his books and art.

Another way which he had of making his life pleasant was guessed at only by even his intimate friends; Julian de Tressanay himself scarcely knew how many dreary lives were brightened by Roger's unfailing kindness, or started afresh in life through his ever-ready help. If one of his friends chanced to discover, and comment upon some such act, he would laugh in his quiet way and reply that it was done merely from a selfish point of view, merely to ensure his own comfort from being disturbed by the knowledge of some deplorable misery.

Osborne was almost alone in the world. The few relatives he had left, resided in a

remote part of England, and as they happened to share none of his interests or tastes, it is probable that it was during his rare visits to these uncongenial relations that he had imbibed such a strong dislike to the country. As a rule he seldom left London except to take some holiday trips abroad.

It might hardly have been expected that this fastidious, unimpassioned man should be the devoted friend of a young enthusiast like Julian de Tressanay, yet they were bound to one another by the closest ties of intimate affection. Their very appearance, as before remarked, offered a strong contrast. Roger Osborne scarcely reached middle height, his features were finely cut, his eyes clear and grey, his whole appearance was that of a refined gentleman whose composure it would not be easy to ruffle.

Julian de Tressanay was unusually tall, his dark hair and olive complexion pointing to his foreign extraction. The expression of his face was singularly mobile, the dark eyes

and rather irregular features lighting up with fire and excitement when speaking with eager gesture on subjects on which he felt strongly. He held an appointment in the Foreign Office; his duties were irksome to him, but he persevered, however, in the profession as he required some addition to his income, and furthermore, it secured to him the advantage of living in London. This was a weighty consideration, for he had thrown his whole soul into the stirring questions of the day, the improvement of the lower classes, the progress of humanity, and in London he found friends who sympathised with his aims, and scope for expounding his ideas. His theories were rather wild, perhaps, but his convictions were sincere, his energy and enthusiasm unbounded. He drew Roger Osborne into his circle to a certain extent, although he could not persuade his friend into a belief that the schemes propounded by the reformers would ever bear much fruit. It was the genuine

sincerity of Julian's convictions, rather than the expectation of the result of these convictions, which attracted Roger; it was sometimes a matter of regret to him that he could no longer be possessed with strong emotions, and although he used to laugh at Julian and exercise his playful wit at his friend's expense, it was not without an occasional sigh at the absence from his own soul, of the boundless faith in the future, and enthusiasm for his work, which gave to Julian's life an importance and reality which Roger felt were wanting in his own. Now this old family domain had fallen to Julian de Tressanay, who, like Roger, had scarcely any near relatives left in the world. In company with his friend, a few weeks in the country seemed endurable to Roger; there was also the additional excitement of seeing the place, for the first time, of which Julian had so unexpectedly become the possessor; and before many days were passed they found themselves travelling down to Marchcroft.

English people, as a rule, are given to disparage their own country, to explore remote and unfrequented foreign parts, scarcely knowing anything of their own country the while. Yet, dispensing with features of grandeur or sublimity, where can fairer scenes be met with than when travelling through the rich inland counties of England in the early days of August? The foliage is dark and heavy from the summer sun, but it is relieved here and there by fresh autumnal shoots; the grass fields are smooth and green after the recent mowing, while richest and most beautiful of all are the fields of golden corn and waving barley. A breath of peace and content seems to pervade the whole atmosphere; and if below the surface there are wrongs and miseries awaiting redress, yet it must be confessed that the land is fair and that one might do worse than spend one's days on the soil which is free from oppression, and which has been so long untrod by the foot of foreign invaders.

Some such thoughts floated across Roger Osborne's mind as he and De Tressanay travelled down to Marchcroft. It was a long journey from London, but they arrived at length at Marlsham, the small station at which they were to get out. They looked eagerly out of the window as they entered the station; the platform was empty, except for one porter, who moved slowly to and fro. The arrival of the new owner of the manor seemed to cause no stir at any rate in this sleepy little place. Alighting from the train they saw a dog-cart standing outside the station.

"That must be my carriage," said Julian, laughing; "this is the beginning of my new experiences."

An old coachman, called Jacob by the porter, held the reins. His weather beaten countenance betrayed no signs of welcome or curiosity as his new master, emerging from the station, approached the vehicle, but both the young men felt that they were being mea-

sured from head to foot by his calm searching gaze.

"Will you take the reins, sir?" he asked, preparing to vacate his seat; he looked towards both the strangers at once, still uncertain as to which was his new master.

"Not on any account, thank you," returned De Tressanay, who had no particular fancy for riding or driving, and who now felt more inclined to give his attention to looking at the new neighbourhood than to the handling of the reins.

"Th' old master allus drove himself," muttered Jacob, in a tone which conveyed disapproval of the new system.

"Drive on," answered De Tressanay, who with Roger, had now seated himself. "How far is it to the house? and which way is it?"

"About three miles over there, sir," was the answer.

And they set off at a leisurely trot, taking the direction in which Jacob had pointed with his whip.

"Is this the fastest horse in your new stables, Julian?" asked Roger, as the stout old steed stopped before arriving at the foot of the first hill, and began to proceed at a quiet walk.

"It's the only horse we has to use now, sir," answered Jacob, "the others has been past their work this long while; this 'un was allus fast enough too for th' old master. He's gone this pace for the last ten years, and has never been blamed for't till now."

Julian and Roger could not repress a smile at the rebuke thus administered.

"It seems to me," said Roger, in a low voice, "that you will have to take a new line, and think of establishing your own rights, instead of putting it into other people's heads to stand up for theirs when they were perfectly happy without them. But what a view!"

They had reached the top of the hill and looked down on a rich valley widening out towards the blue hills in the distance; the fields were yellow with fast-ripening corn,

leafy orchards fringed rising grounds on which the smooth grass was shaded by spreading trees, and on the one side dark woods stretched far away in undulating line. On a hill not far distant they could catch a glimpse of a fine old house, but it was only a glimpse, for it was shaded by groups of fine trees.

"Is that the house?" asked Julian, eagerly.

"Why yes, sir, there's no other except the Rectory, anywhere near."

"Lord of the land, my dear Julian," said Roger, "you will have no one to harangue save the rooks, of which there is probably a large colony. You will have to build a set of houses for exiled democrats, in order to keep your indignation against the landed class of society at boiling pitch. I should think it would soon cool here," he added, as they passed through some massive iron gates and drove up a magnificent avenue of beeches towards the house.

"Th' old master never wanted no buildin' done here," growled Jacob; he was beginning to have a bad opinion, if not of his new master, at any rate of his new master's friend.

"Such a fine, faddy-looking young gentleman," he described poor Roger afterwards to the gardener, "allus a sayin' something which you don't know is laughin' or serious; and he don't look as if he knowed a good horse when he seed one. He'd better keep to his trains in London, may be they go fast enough for 'un."

For more than half a mile De Tressanay and Osborne drove on under the shade of the beech trees, the sunlight tinting the green canopy with a deeper colour, and falling here and there aslant on the smooth massive trunks. At last they emerge from under the trees, drive on past some shrubberies, catch a glimpse of some smooth lawns, shady nooks and bright flower beds, then the carriage stops and Julian stands at his own door.

Roger laid his hand on his friend's arm, and said in a tone of unwonted seriousness, "Welcome, my dear fellow, to your own home, and long and happy may your years be in it."

Julian thanked his friend by a warm pressure of the hand; so many new feelings were rising within him he could not find any words for a while. On his quick, excitable temperament, the whole aspect of the old place as it stood steeped in the bright sunshine, had a singularly impressive effect. His whole life and habit of thought had been so free from and opposed to any influences such as would affect him here; a whole vista of new occupations, new ideas, new duties, suddenly flashed across his mind. With his vivid imagination he pictured to himself, his whole being gradually modified if not changed by his new position; then, with a pang of regret for the old life which he had sketched out for himself, and which, in its earlier aspects, had now ceased to exist for him, and

with a natural flush of pleasure and surprise at the sight of the beautiful old place, now his own, he set foot in the abode of his forefathers.

The hot afternoon had passed, dinner was over, and Julian and Roger sat smoking their cigars on the lawn. Their eyes rested on the smooth green turf, or wandered on past the flower beds to the undulating stretches of grass and timber in the park.

"Really, Roger," said Julian, "you will have to become a devotee to the country if we have days like this. This delightful garden, summer weather, the quiet and freshness, so delicious after London, what more can any one desire? No houses near, old Jacob said, so we may trust there will be no benighted country neighbours to bore us."

"I am afraid it is too good to last," answered the ever-sceptical Roger, "otherwise I would vow myself to become a hermit on the spot. There seems to be an excellent library too, as far as I could see in a short

inspection. As you say, what more could one desire? But there must be some thorns in this paradise, if you do not discover them speedily, anticipate the evil, O friend. Sacrifice something to avert misfortune, wake not the envy of the gods."

"I believe you are a born heathen, Roger. You ought not to be existing now at all. You would have been an ornament to society in the great days of Greece. Then you could have drunk all the delights of life, satiated yourself with beauty, steeped yourself in philosophy and poetry, and been troubled with no pangs of conscience as you ought to be, and as I trust you are occasionally, in this life for drifting along and doing no harm I hope, but leaving no mark behind you, in this time of ours, when every nerve ought to be strained in the few years we can work in"—

"For goodness' sake, don't take to spending your eloquence on me, else I shall have to send for some of your tribe to be lectured

to every morning; that safety-valve being provided, there may be a chance of your society being bearable for the rest of the twenty-four hours. But look, is this the thorn in our paradise? and shooting out so soon too?"

The "thorn" in question was no less than the rector of the parish, who was coming up to be the first to welcome De Tressanay to his new home. Unconscious of the feelings excited by his well-intentioned visit, Mr. Selby briefly introduced himself; then, taking his seat on the bench by Julian's side and lighting a cigar, he fell into friendly conversation at once.

If either of our heroes had ever thought at all about the rector of Marchcroft, they would probably have pictured to themselves a very different individual from the personage they now beheld. De Tressanay would have concluded that an elderly man who had always lived in the country, would as a natural consequence have narrow views and

a narrow mind; while Roger would have shrugged his shoulders in his insouciant way and resigned himself to the anticipated infliction of a commonplace-looking gentleman with garments of an evidently country cut, and no conversation but of a local order, the type unendurable above all others to him. In Mr. Selby however they saw a complete refutation of both these expectations. They saw a man verging it is true on the term of life called elderly, but full of energy and vigour. His face bore the impress of benevolence and refinement, and a peculiar simplicity of manner—asfar removed from the rusticity of a mere dweller in the country as from the conventional polish of the man of the world—gave a singular charm to his address. Furthermore he was attired in finished evening dress, rendered slightly unclerical-looking perhaps by the addition of a light overcoat.

"We have heard of you sometimes Mr. De Tressanay," he said, after they had sat talk-

ing for some little time, "as a tremendous radical, and a zealous speaker and worker in the cause you have taken up. Perhaps I may not be inclined to go quite as far in every direction as you yourself, but I expect I should sympathise with many of your ideas; I hope we shall discuss them together some day. At the same time I may spare you some degree of disappointment if I can convince you that there is absolutely no scope for your reforming energies in this quiet parish of Marchcroft. Every cottage in the place is well built and almost all are inhabited by your own tenants who are staunchly attached to old fashions and customs; and nothing on earth I should say would bring them to countenance any change in the mode of life which prevailed during the old master's lifetime."

"I cannot even at the risk of disappointment," answered De Tressanay, "give up all hope of being able to introduce innovations should I find that they would be beneficial.

Surely the very breath of this age is movement and change. Can there be any surface so turbid and shallow as to remain stagnant when exposed to its vivifying influence?"

"Ah well," replied Mr. Selby as he leaned back in the easy garden seat and watched the smoke of his fragrant cigar curl upwards in the still evening air, "you will soon see what an exceptional surface is offered by the well-to-do countrymen of this district and how admirably adapted it is to resist the teaching of new doctrines. Indeed," he continued with an irrepressible laugh, "I fancy, if you will excuse my making the remark, that your first experiences will commence in your own establishment."

"Indeed I have already seen enough to make one aware that any departure from the customs of 'the old master,' as they call my poor cousin, will be visited on me by very serious consequences."

"I have already begun to suspect that they look upon me as a very offending in-

dividual," interposed Roger—"De Tressanay, Mr. Selby, has a certain simplicity of tastes which I do not share but which the worthy Jacob and Job the butler will probably consider a hopeful sign, and they will think that could they but get rid of me, they might train him in the way he should go. When I see their looks growing suspiciously dark towards me, I shall run away, Julian, and leave you to their schooling," and all three joined in a hearty laugh.

"It is getting late," said Mr. Selby recovering his composure, "and I must wend my way homewards. I hope we shall soon see you and your friend at the Rectory, Mr. De Tressanay, I shall be so glad to introduce you to my wife and to my nieces who are staying with us at present. They pay us long visits every year and they know every nook and corner of this lovely old place. Your cousin of course knew them from their childhood and he used to spoil them dreadfully; but they will be wondering what has

become of me, good-bye," and shaking hands warmly with the two young men, he walked away into the fast-approaching darkness.

"Even you, Roger," exclaimed Julian as soon as Mr. Selby was out of sight, "you, with your foolish susceptibility to boredom cannot look on this man as a 'thorn' in our paradise. I am quite charmed with him and it is most refreshing to find that such enlightened views as he appears to have, can exist in this remote country place. It seems to me that we both have a great deal to learn, and that we have not the faintest idea of anything connected with country life. We cannot imagine the development of other circles outside our own and are grossly ignorant of the way in which five-sixths of the world spend their lives and employ their mental powers. And here was I for one, like all the rest of us, rushing on with fixed ideas founded on theories which we never paused to question, and all the time we are entirely wanting in practical experience. Everything that I have

heard and seen to-day is in flat contradiction to all my preconceived ideas."

Julian had risen to his feet, it was too dark to see the earnestness of his expressive face but his voice vibrated through the still warm air and in its deep sympathetic tones could be traced the yearning for wider knowledge, and for the attainment of noble ends, the passion by which some few exalted souls have been inspired in all generations of mankind.

Roger returned no answer. He never admired his friend so much as when he was declaiming, with his own peculiar earnestness, on any subject he had at heart. Throwing away his cigar, he passed his arm through Julian's and they both sauntered slowly into the house.

Julian was right; they had both much to learn: he who was only as it were on the threshold of life and also the other; although Roger Osborne thought he had sounded the depths of existence and marked out a level

path on which to tread for the remainder of his days: avoiding the thorns and stony places of the road as far as he could, and not drinking too deeply of its refreshing springs or intoxicating joys.

CHAPTER II.

There is no event greater in life than the appearance of new persons about our hearth, except it be the progress of the character which draws them.

EMERSON.

IT would be difficult to find a prettier dwelling-place than Marchcroft Rectory. The house, picturesque in itself with its quaint old gables and chimneys, was rendered still more so by the profusion of creepers which climbed its walls and flung their tender, though tenacious tendrils, from point to point. A lawn, which looked as smooth as velvet, lay in the front, at the end of which a grand old cedar spread its massive and venerable branches; sun-flowers and hollyhocks were blooming in profusion, and the whole garden was alive with the flutter of birds who here enjoyed the most perfect immunity from disturbance. The garden and the shady walks amongst the shrubberies

were deserted for the moment, as the gong had just sounded for breakfast.

"Now, Uncle John, tell us all about your visit last evening; you were so late we could not wait for you."

This question was addressed to Mr. Selby by his wife's elder niece, Ella Malloney, and the way in which she sat by her uncle and signified that her queries were to be fully satisfied before he should be allowed to proceed in peace with his breakfast, showed that she fully deserved the epithet of "dreadfully spoilt," which he had applied to both these young ladies the evening before.

"What can I tell you?" he replied, "I strolled up to the house; there it was just as usual; the moat was not dried up, the turrets were standing as firmly as ever; the trees threw their long shadows as they are wont to do when the moon"—

"No, no, we do not want to hear about the house; how you do tease us, Uncle John. Tell us about this Mr. De Tressanay."

"You seem to think his arrival such an important event that I thought I would reassure you as to the effect it might have had on the Manor itself. To proceed, I rang at the front door, and Job was going to usher me in in state, and fetch his new master out of the garden, but I preferred seeking him there myself. Job's face, I remarked, bore an aggrieved expression. I suppose he was annoyed that young De Tressanay was not sitting over a fire in the study after dinner, as his poor cousin used to do even on these hot evenings. I crossed the lawn, and there by the mulberry tree, I found this important individual himself, and a friend with him."

"Now tell us exactly what they were both like," said Olive the younger, and presumably equally spoilt niece.

"Imagine two young men," continued Mr. Selby, leaning back in his chair with an expression of extreme gravity, "clothed in evening dress; they wore, moreover, thin overcoats and smoked cigarettes. As far as

I could observe, they also bore heads, and each head had 'a pair of eyes with lids to them,' and "—

"You are too bad," interrupted Olive, with an injured pout, "I am sure they must both have been disagreeable and ill-mannered, or else you would not be in such a teasing mood. I wish Mr. De Tressanay had never died, and then they would have stayed away."

"I heard a very different story from your uncle last night," interposed Mrs. Selby; "he described Mr. Julian De Tressanay and his friend in the most glowing colours."

"Julian is a nice name," said Olive, meditatively.

"Seriously, children," continued Mr. Selby, "I know not which of the two young men pleased me most, De Tressanay with his grave face, a man evidently of deep thought and earnestness, or Mr. Osborne, with his polished manner, a cultivated, refined scholar I imagine."

"I liked the beginning of Mr. Osborne

best," said Ella, "but you rather spoilt him with the end of your sentence. I am afraid they are much too learned for us, and I do not feel as if I wanted to see them at all now. Mr. Osborne—what is his Christian name?"

"De Tressanay called him Roger," answered Mr. Selby.

"Roger Osborne certainly sounds nice," mused Ella, resting her pretty head on her hand.

"I daresay this new Mr. De Tressanay will begin and alter everything in the house," said Olive, plaintively, after a while, "and never think of asking us what had better be done, and I am sure we have much more right in the house than he has. Remember the hours and days we have spent there, and we know every corner of it, and I do not suppose he knows or cares anything about it. I wish he had died as well as old Mr. De Tressanay, and then he would never have come."

"Olive, Olive," remonstrated her aunt.

Mr. Selby was just leaving the room.

"I advise you both," he said, pausing to pat Olive on the head as he passed, "to spend the morning in reading and improving your minds, then you will be better fitted to meet these clever gentlemen," he added, laughingly, as he closed the door.

"I am afraid you idle children will never follow that piece of good advice," said Aunt Lucy.

And Aunt Lucy was quite right, for this was the way in which these two girls spent their morning.

First they went out through the low dining-room window into the garden, and as if they were not already sufficiently charming to look upon, they lingered amongst the rose trees, gathering here a bud and here a blossom, and here a spray of fragrant jessamine, which, fastened into their fresh morning dresses, rendered them both more distractingly pretty than before.

Yet neither of these girls was vain; but it was as natural to them to array themselves with the loveliest and most fragrant adornments that they could find, as it is to the rose herself when she raises her head at dawn with the dew drops shining on the tender petals, to feel that she has attained unto the aim of her short life—perfected beauty. So in a dim and unconscious manner was it with Ella and Olive; it was as natural to them, as to the unconscious flower to be beautiful and to rejoice in beauty.

Having gathered their flowers, they next visited the chickens, and fed them all amidst much cackling and excitement; a flock too of white pigeons flew down, some alighting on the girls' shoulders and feeding from their hands; then Olive went round to all the setting hens and insisted on disturbing them to partake of this general breakfast. This occasioned much clamour and ruffling of feathers, but Olive was more accustomed to consult her own will than the feelings of

others, much less the wishes of mere hens, and paid no heed to their noisy remonstrances.

"How can you tease the poor things?" asked Ella, with the little pitiful expression which often crossed her face.

"Why should I not, if I like?" answered Olive.

"That is always what you say," replied Ella.

"And that is what I am going to do all my life, what I like, Ella," returned Olive, not in a defiant voice, but with a slow lazy accent, as if she were queen of her life and could shape it as she would.

Then the dogs came gambolling out to be caressed by Ella, and caressed and teased by Olive, and then the girls sauntered again round the garden, and finally sat down under the cedar and wasted the old gardener's time as well as their own by desultory questions about the autumn flowers. This was the way their mornings were usually spent. In

the afternoon they all went for a long drive; on returning they found two cards on the hall table, "Mr. De Tressanay" and "Mr. Roger Osborne."

"I am very sorry we have missed them," said Mrs. Selby; "let us ask them to dinner to-morrow evening, and so break the ice of our first introduction."

The invitation was accordingly sent, and accepted, and if in the course of the following day the minds of the three ladies at the Rectory were often found wandering towards the anticipated meeting with the two strangers, remember, before condemning them too harshly, that the country was very quiet, there were few neighbours and but little society; that one of these strangers was to be a permanent resident, and that a neighbour in the country, signifies a very different quantity from the mere dweller next door in a large town.

The following evening De Tressanay ordered the dog-cart to take them down to

the Rectory. They had been for a drive in the afternoon, and Jacob was indignant at the carriage being ordered out again.

"Th' old master could allus walk to the Rectory," he said to Job, "but these young gentlemen are mighty sparin' of their trouble, and Mr. Osborne is the worst on 'em."

Jacob had to obey orders, however, and, quite unconscious of the crying infraction of precedents that he was committing, De Tressanay, taking the reins into his own hand this time, drove himself and Osborne down to the Rectory, not without a few laughing criticisms on his style of driving from his friend.

They were ushered into a cool drawing-room hung with paintings of landscapes and portraits, and fragrant with a profusion of flowers. Mrs. Selby received her guests with the same warm cordiality as that with which they were greeted by her husband. With such hosts there could be no formality or stiffness, and De Tressanay and Osborne

soon felt as if they were amongst old friends.

"I suppose, Mr. De Tressanay," said Mrs. Selby in the course of dinner, "that you have been exploring the neighbourhood."

"I am afraid we have been very idle; we have scarcely been anywhere yet," he answered. "After being so long in London, it seems enjoyment enough to do nothing for a little while but revel in the coolness and quiet. I have spent most of my time, I must confess, lying on the grass satisfied to look at the trees and blue sky while Osborne was painting; he has been far more industrious, and made two or three sketches already."

"There are a great many places of interest in the neighbourhood," remarked Mrs. Selby, "when you feel inclined to explore them."

"You should make Uncle John go with you to see them," said Ella; "he knows everything—architecture, history, and all. I

do not like anything difficult, but he makes it nice and easy for us, though I am afraid I forget it all afterwards."

Roger could not help laughing at this naïve confession.

"Why do you laugh?" she asked, raising her arched eyebrows deprecatingly; "it is quite true."

"I can hardly accept your own opinion of your memory, Miss Malloney."

"You may believe every word," she answered. "My sister Olive and I are very ignorant; papa is always telling us so, and we do dislike learning things. Uncle John was quite right; he said you would be much too learned for us."

"I am sorry he should have given such a disagreeable description of us," answered Roger.

He was intensely amused at this conversation; he had never met a girl like this, she was apparently simplicity itself.

"He did not mean that you were disagree-

able," continued Ella, "only that you would not like us."

Here Olive, who was sitting opposite to Roger and Ella, and who had been leaning back in her chair listening to them, half raised her eyes, and said to Roger—

"We have both been thinking you rather disagreeable. We have always spent so much time at the Manor, and since you came we have had to stay down here, and there is no fishing, and I get rather tired of the garden."

Ella looked deprecatingly at her sister, but Olive was always accustomed to say just what she liked. Mrs. Selby had remonstrated with her gently sometimes, but her words had never had the slightest effect, and she found that whether owing to Olive's great beauty, or to the perfectly innocent, childlike way in which she expressed her sentiments, no one ever took offence.

"Indeed, Miss Malloney; I am very sorry we should have interfered with your

walks," answered De Tressanay in his most courteous tones. "I should be most sorry to do so. I hope you will come up to the Manor as often as you please," he continued, blushing deeply as he spoke; it was such a novel idea to him to think of two girls rambling about his grounds.

"You do not know what you are saying, De Tressanay," said Mr. Selby; "if you were wise, you would strictly forbid such intruders. I used often to wonder how your poor cousin could put up with them; they used to pick the flowers, and insist on decorating the rooms, and drive old Job to the verge of distraction with their fancies."

"Never mind," returned Olive with a defiant look at her uncle. "Mr. De Tressanay says we may come. We should have gone there to-day if you had not been so cross. We will come and fish after breakfast to-morrow, then I shall not be so sorry that you have come there instead of our Mr. De Tressanay," she added to Julian himself,

looking up at him, so that for the first time he had a glimpse of the most wonderfully deep, dark eyes; for Olive had a way of seldom raising her long, dark lashes.

You might wish to gaze into the lustrous depths that you knew must be hidden beneath the dreamy eyelids, but you might long in vain; the smile might dawn on the perfect lips, and a blush might spread over the clear pale cheeks and touch the low forehead shaded by the smooth dark hair, but the veil might still be drawn over those wonderful eyes.

De Tressanay had to be satisfied with a glimpse only, for Mrs. Selby rose at that moment, and the three ladies left the room.

"I suppose there is good fishing about here, Mr. Selby, and good shooting too?" asked De Tressanay, to whom every subject connected with the place and neighbourhood were of interest; and he found Mr. Selby replete with information concerning the history of the whole country, while he

seemed familiar with every acre, house, and family in Marchcroft itself.

"To what political opinions do the people mostly incline?" asked De Tressanay at last.

"If you mean the Marchcroft people," replied Mr. Selby, "you will find their prevailing inclination is to let things be."

"But those who have a vote? Surely they must have a preference as to its disposal. They cannot be blindly indifferent."

"They very often are, indeed. I have frequently known them ready to vote either way, or as the 'old master' wished."

"But these must be exceptionally ignorant specimens, Mr. Selby."

"Not at all. I have even known them look upon their vote as a sort of talisman and complain that it has never done them any good all the years they have had it."

"De Tressanay is always in such a hurry," put in Roger Osborne. "He expects progress to be too rapid. If you think of the

years that it takes for mankind to digest any new ideas (I am not speaking, of course, of the philosophers or the most highly cultivated portion of the race), you cannot, I should say, feel surprised that the comparatively recently enfranchised do not as yet fully appreciate their new dignity. Indeed I rather agree with them, I would much rather be legislated for, pay a certain sum called a tax, which promises to ensure me a quiet life, and not be troubled about anything else, letting members of Parliament elect themselves if they like to."

"Osborne will not confess that he thinks seriously of these things," said De Tressanay, feeling himself bound to excuse his friend to their host. "He is right in saying we cannot expect the newly enfranchised to understand the full responsibility of their position, especially remembering how long they were suffered to remain in a state of neglect and ignorance; but we should do all in our power to enlighten them, and to impress

them with the importance of the possession, now for ever their own. Would it not be well to begin here at once? What should you say;" and here Julian leant forward and spoke with the most candid fervour, "what should you say to a series of lectures, in a popular form, of course, on the franchise, and on the responsibility of each member of the commonwealth? Osborne and I could soon get them up."

Mr. Selby would have smiled had it not been for the earnestness of the speaker.

"All the people here, De Tressanay," he answered, "will soon be absorbed by the harvest; they will not give a thought to anything else, and that is but natural and right. It would be better, as you ask my opinion, to wait till the winter, then they have more leisure in the long evenings, and you will have had time to become acquainted with them."

"And then I shall be dragged out of my comfortable quarters in town," said Roger,

with a resigned expression of countenance, "and I shall be brought into the country in the midst of snow and wretched weather. This is just the sort of thing, Mr. Selby, I am being constantly made to go through in London, hoisted up on to platforms, and kept there for hours in a crowded room, fearfully hot, and the atmosphere generally unpleasant, and then I have to propose a vote of thanks to De Tressanay and his coadjutors for their delightful expositions."

Mr. Selby laughed.

"But you are rewarded by the appreciation of the audience and their enjoyment of, I have no doubt, most excellent speeches."

"Rewarded?" asked Roger, "indeed my reward comes in the shape of a fearful headache next day, and I completely muddle the cases which some unfortunate persons, who have heard of my usually brilliant abilities, have entrusted to me; indeed," he added, shrugging his shoulders in his nonchalant way, "my professional prospects are dan-

gerously blighted by these wretched entertainments."

"Indeed, Mr. De Tressanay," said Mr. Selby, when he recovered his gravity, "I think even at the risk of victimising Mr. Osborne, some lectures in the winter would be an excellent plan, but you must not expect progress to be too rapid. It takes a long, long time for any general enlightenment to permeate the masses. Can we wonder at it when we see what opportunities the upper classes have had for so many years, and how little they have comparatively profited by them. The history of the civilization of mankind may be compared to that which we find in nature. Mountains rise on the face of the earth, and valleys are furrowed on her surface, islands grow up in the midst of the seas, and the aspects of the continents shift and change; but all this is, we believe, wrought slowly and silently; ages pass away and time and the slow-working laws of nature carry out these changes unmarked by

convulsions and sweeping catastrophes. So with mankind. Revolution may break out and alter the face of things in the same way that volcanic outbursts or shocks of earthquakes render a fruitful neighbourhood almost unrecognisable, but both are alike limited in their extent and effects, and disturb neither the course of the universe nor the current of the life of man. We should all work, and no true-hearted efforts can be wasted, but we must not expect to see immediate results or to see our efforts bear fruit in lives so short as ours. But," he said rising, "I have inflicted quite a sermon on you, let us join Mrs. Selby in the garden."

Mrs. Selby, Ella, and Olive were sitting under the great cedar ; it was a very warm evening, the scent of corn was wafted now and then on the breeze, the humble-bees came droning past and the bats wheeled in their airy circles.

"Do you spend a great deal of time here,

Miss Malloney?" asked De Tressanay, rousing himself from the train of thought into which their conversation in the dining-room had led him.

He had perhaps an unconscious feeling that the garden would look rather deserted without the two bright girlish figures who seemed to reign over it. It was Olive whom he addressed.

"Oh, a great deal," she answered, slowly picking off the worn-out blossoms off a rose tree and throwing them towards the pond, which not one of them reached. "We like being here so much, the country is much nicer than Fennington where we live, and nobody wants us at home. Papa is always so busy, he has scarcely time to speak to us, and can hardly ever take us anywhere; and our sister Jane, she is quite old you know, has so much to do, we do not see much of her either. She is mad about the parish, and teaches and preaches every day. Oh! dear," here came a sigh and then a little laugh. "I

know it is quite wonderfully good, but I would not do it for anything."

A vexed expression came over De Tressanay's face; why should this girl, he thought, be determined to be useless and waste her life? And Mr. Selby shook his head and said—

"Jane leads a most unselfish, useful life, she could not be idle like you girls. You are both just like butterflies."

"I like that," said Ella, in her clear, sweet voice, "that is just what I should like to be, a butterfly, and flutter about in the sunshine."

"Why do you choose a butterfly of all ephemeral beings, Miss Malloney," interposed Roger, "its life is so soon over. Do you not like living?"

"Yes, to-day I do very much," she answered, looking up at him with her little pathetic expression, "to-day, when I have everything I like. If everything were miserable and one was obliged to feel sorry, I

should so dislike it; then I should think the butterfly very lucky to have got away from it all before the sun went down."

Roger could say nothing. His ready wit and deep reading failed him here alike. He could only watch Ella as she flitted in her soft white dress from rose to rose, and feel as if he ought to carry her away to some fairy region where people could never be miserable or be made to feel sorry, and where the sun need never go down.

Presently Mr. Selby asked for some music, and they strolled up to the house.

"Do you play or sing?" asked De Tressanay, of Olive.

"Oh, no," she said, "but I like to listen to Ella."

"Does this girl think the whole world made for her amusement?" thought Julian to himself. Meanwhile Ella had moved towards the piano, Roger opened it for her, he had such a gentle manner, especially towards women, that Ella had forgotten how learned

he must be, and had quite ceased to be afraid of him.

"What will you sing?" he asked, "and you will want some light."

"Oh no, Mr. Osborne, I generally sing without music," and she began a simple English song.

Roger felt disappointed at first; he was passionately fond of music, but he delighted in a grave, classical style, and always declared that he could find no pleasure in anything else.

But then he had never heard Ella Malloney sing.

We do not pretend to say that she would not have done better to have studied classical music (as well as other grave subjects), but we do not ask the simple wood bird to perform a sonata with a regular sequence of movements, or to give us a succession of tone pictures; no, we stand amongst the sunlit branches, and gather the primroses which nestle at our feet, and listen to the sweet

glad notes which are poured out over our heads and are content. So when Ella sang, the most fastidious were apt to relax the rigidity of their art canons, and to resign themselves to a pure enjoyment of the sweet voice with its simple pathos. Roger sat and listened in the dim twilight, so dim that he could only just discern the slight figure with the small fair head with its wavy locks bending over the notes. Another song, and then the lamp is brought in, and the spell is broken.

A little more pleasant talk and the evening is over, and De Tressanay and Osborne are driving home in the clear starlight.

"It is wonderfully fortunate, is it not?" said Julian, "to find such exceptionally pleasant neighbours in the country, and how nice Mrs. Selby is, she is so kind and cordial and seems well informed too, but I suppose that must be the natural consequence of living with such a cultivated man as her husband. He is, I should say, one in a thousand."

"I do not know that," returned Osborne, "do you think the most cultivated husband could cultivate Miss Olive Malloney's mind?"

"She has wonderful eyes," answered Julian, musingly.

"I daresay she has," replied Roger, lightly, "but she seems to have a way of seldom raising her eyelids fully, so I have never really seen them yet."

But Julian had seen them.

"I was surprised," continued De Tressanay, after a few moments' silence, "to see you so delighted with Miss Malloney's singing. I enjoyed it, but you are such a critical fellow, I always suppose what I like to be far too unscientific for you."

"The lark's song is not what you would call scientific," answered Roger, "but it is none the less sweet," then he added with a gay laugh, "I do not accuse Mrs. Selby of being more worldly than any other lady afflicted with the care of daughters or nieces, but I doubt if she would trouble to ask us to the

Rectory very often, if she knew what a hopeless pair she was welcoming to her house; I who am disillusioned for ever, and you who refuse to enter into illusion."

Did Roger still see a pathetic little face with deep blue eyes floating before him, and did he still hear a sweet, almost childlike voice vibrating through the still evening air? And did he therefore proclaim aloud his eternal farewell to love, to assure himself anew of the utter deadness of his heart? Or was it, as he thought, that his experience had been so bitter that no face, no voice, could reawaken a corresponding echo within him?

The answer lay waiting: hidden in the depths of the warm autumn days to come.

Different as were the characters of these two young men, their experiences of life had been as widely different. When Roger Osborne first settled in London, he went out a great deal into the world; his good looks and brilliant conversation soon rendering him distinguished in a wide circle of society. Before a year

had passed he had fallen violently in love. His feelings were apparently reciprocated, his attentions encouraged, and before long he was engaged to the object of his first serious attachment. For a few months fortune seemed to shower all her gifts on Roger Osborne; love, wealth, a brilliant career seemed to stretch before him, but this fair prospect was suddenly clouded. The beautiful Lady Theresa threw him over in the most deliberate manner for a richer though far less worthy admirer.

The blow was very severe. Roger's devotion to his first love was deep and ardent, and it was a hard struggle to cast out the idol on which his hopes had centered themselves. With this uprooting of his passion he believed that, young as he was, he had uprooted with it all possibilities of love for ever.

It was some time later than this that he made acquaintance with Julian De Tressanay, and the friendship, which soon grew up

between them, did a good deal to eradicate any seeds of bitterness which might have clung to even so generous a nature as his after crushing disappointment. He was inclined to laugh De Tressanay's ardent aspirations to scorn at first, but when he saw the sincerity of his new friend's intentions and the unsparing devotion with which he strove to carry out his ideas, this tendency to ridicule turned to sincere admiration. He saw that to help and to succour was better than to despise or upbraid, and while still disclaiming, for his own part, any symptom of enthusiasm on any subject, he fell into the habit of helping and supporting De Tressanay in many of his schemes.

Thus absorbed in his literary tastes and his growing friendship, his years passed smoothly away, but that one page of his life, in which his strongest feelings had been excited, was not reopened. He had been disappointed, he had suffered. He dreaded any renewal of the fierce experience he had

gone through, and he doubted that any spark of passion could ever be rekindled in his heart. He thought he had done with love.

As Roger Osborne might be said, according to his own imaginings, to have done with love, so, according to the same standard, Julian De Tressanay had never begun with that serious experiment. Filled from his boyhood with lofty aspirations, his ideal in connection with women took a still more exalted form. He saw the immense influence woman exercises in every sphere, the many failures and shortcomings which have their origin in her failures and shortcomings, the hindrance, which in her lower type of character, she imposes on a life to be devoted to high projects. His whole feeling was so permeated with this conviction that he believed that no woman, but one of the most ideal type, could ever have the slightest attraction for him. And such a one he had never met.

CHAPTER III.

Considerate la vostra semenza:
Fatti non foste a viver come bruti,
Ma per seguir virtude e conoscenza.

DANTE.

THE next morning, not directly after breakfast, but as soon as De Tressanay and Osborne had discussed their letters and newspapers, Roger began to collect his materials preparatory to going out sketching. Julian watched his preparations silently at first, then he said—

"I have been disgracefully idle ever since I have been here, I am not half-way through that book on the 'Theory of the Holding and Reasonable Limits of Property' yet. I must devote the whole morning to it."

At that moment Job looked in.

"Please, sir, Richards, the bailiff, has come to know if you could go over the Ruddock Farm with him this morning."

Julian sighed and looked at Roger, who smiled and said—

"Which will win the day theory or practice?"

De Tressanay turned his eyes once more to the sunny slope of lawn in front of the window.

"Say I am engaged this morning," he then said to Job. "You know," he added, to Roger, "I have heaps of time to get practically acquainted with it all, and this looks such a lovely morning to sit out and read."

"I am delighted, my dear fellow, at your decision, I had set my heart on having the benefit of your conversation or occasional remarks whilst I finished my sketch—come on," and off sauntered the two friends laden with books, an easel, a camp stool, paint boxes, and all the elaborate paraphernalia in which artists are wont to indulge.

Job shook his head gravely as he watched them disappear. He then went to tell Richards his master was not coming.

"He told me to say as he was engaged this morning. Shall I tell you what that means? Why, that he'll sit the blessed morning through under them trees, and read out of a big book, or he'll lie in the grass and talk to Mr. Osborne, and scarce a word can you understand, if you wasted your time a-listening to 'em, for all 'tis English they talk, but 'tis such a power of long words, such as th' old master never used. And that there Mr. Osborne a-dabblin' with paint and water, a-messin' it altogether with his fine hands; I never seed such ways."

"'Twill be different," replied Richards, who had listened with a very grave face; "'twill be different when the shooting begins."

"Don't you deceive yourself there," answered Job, more acridly than ever, "neither on 'em has so much as asked about the birds, and when I made bold to point out th' old master's favourite guns, and said as I'd have them all clean and ready by the

1st September, he just looked up and stared at me as if he was in the thick of a dream; and I do believe if I'd said 1st December, it wouldn't ha' made a bit of difference."

"Dear, dear," said Richards, "to think of such a change, dear, dear," and the sturdy bailiff walked off with his surly-looking terrier at his heels, with the uncomfortable feeling of a man, who for the first time in his life, is confronted with a condition of things which no strain of his mental faculties will enable him to understand.

Meanwhile De Tressanay and Osborne had reached the spot where they meant to enjoy the morning after their own fashion. It was some little way from the house; the chain of hills, grey in the morning light, barred the distant view immediately in front of them, the river lay so deep between its banks that they could not see its quiet waters, but they could follow its course for some distance by the bold red cliffs which rose precipitously above it; then far away to the horizon

stretched cornfields, orchards, meadows, and woods until they merged into indefiniteness in the far distance. Behind them stood a clump of elm trees, and in their shade Julian took his seat on the grass, gave himself up to his book and his pipe, reading a few extracts from the former occasionally, and adding a few criticisms of his own, for the benefit of Roger, who was soon busy "'a-messin'" with his paints. About an hour passed, when Julian was suddenly roused by a muttered "Hulloa" from his friend's lips.

"What on earth is it, Roger?" he asked.

"There are those girls," answered Roger, pointing with his paintbrush to two figures in light dresses at the edge of the lake.

"Then they have actually come," said Julian, half sorry to be interrupted in his reading, yet not altogether displeased at their arrival. "But—but what are we to do?" and the two looked at one another and burst into a laugh.

They felt very much as two shipwrecked

travellers would do, who, having taken possession of and made themselves tolerably at home on an apparently lonely island should find themselves suddenly disturbed by the appearance of some strange beings to whom they would have to apologise as intruders.

"We certainly ought to go and say good-morning to them," said De Tressanay, after a moment's hesitation as he closed his heavy book and slowly raised his long limbs from the ground.

"Go on, Julian, and receive them as master of the establishment; I must just finish this tree."

"No, no, you must come too."

"I cannot leave this sketch just now," answered Roger, "it would really be spoilt. I will follow you immediately," he added, as Julian still lingered, but finally walked slowly off to meet his visitors.

They evidently did not consider themselves visitors, for they seemed more at home than Julian yet felt in his new domain.

Ella had already perched herself amongst the tortuous roots of a tree, and was reclining comfortably against its trunk, whilst Olive, with the help of a little boy who had come with them and carried the rod and basket, was busy getting all her tackle into order.

"Where is your rod, Mr. De Tressanay?" she asked.

"I never fish," was the answer.

"Then you hunt and shoot?"

"I never hunt or shoot."

"Then what will you do in the country? You had better go back to London at once."

"I can hardly tell what I shall do, Miss Malloney. I have not lived in the country since I was quite a child."

"And always in a town since?"

"Yes, always; either in Germany or England."

"Then I do not think you will like the country at all."

"I think you will," interposed Ella. "How

can you help it? I always dislike Fennington more than ever every time we go back."

"Perhaps you would like Fennington," continued Olive. "There is always such a rush, no one seems to have time to live; I wish we lived in the country."

"But if your home is at Fennington you must have friends and find something there that you care about."

"No, Mr. De Tressanay, we do not indeed," replied Ella, "we had some friends, but they are gone away, and now there is really no one we care for the least. Papa and Jane have lots of friends; but they are very clever, and old you know; they always seem to look down upon us as if we were children, and I suppose we are grown up, for we really go to balls sometimes."

Olive was nearly ready to commence operations, but she stopped winding the reel, and said—

"Yes, they are very pleasant; the only thing is we meet nice people at them and

then never see them again, so we make no friends, Ella and I."

The boy had done his share of the work by putting the bait on the hook; he handed the rod to Olive, who threw the line dexterously into the water.

"It is a pity, Mr. De Tressanay," she said, "you do not fish. What will you do in the country? You will soon hate it. What can you do in the winter if you do not hunt?"

"Indeed, Miss Malloney, there are interests and aims in life besides fishing, shooting or hunting."

"I wonder what you call 'interests and aims?' They must be something very dull, if you talk about them, I do not think I shall listen any more than I do when Uncle John talks about agriculture and politics, and what else? Oh! free trade."

De Tressanay felt he should be false to his convictions if he did not make some sort of a stand here; this girl was so pretty, so charming, surely, he thought, it must be

from want of proper teaching that she was utterly callous to any great interests.

"Miss Malloney," he began in his deep voice, "I am sure you would care for serious interests if you were once to think about them, and"—

"What do you call a serious interest?" interrupted Olive.

"This is one of them," he said. "You know there are numbers of people in the world who are happy and well off; but there are millions of others who live in the midst of all sorts of miseries, do you not think," he continued, looking very earnestly down on the pretty wilful face, "that those who are educated and well off are bound to try and do something to make others a little better and happier?"

"I can understand when you talk like that, but I do not want to hear anything more," she answered with an impatient shrug of her shoulders. "You would soon make me feel dreadfully uncomfortable, and as if I

ought to give everything away; please not." And the defiant expression gave way to a look of almost piteous entreaty.

At that moment Roger came up.

"Good-morning," he said. "What sad remonstrance did I hear? I expect I am just in time to rescue you from some of his high-flown doctrines, I am so often a victim myself, I can sympathize."

"Then you think it is all nonsense?" asked Olive, her face brightening with a look of relief.

"What is nonsense, Miss Malloney?"

"Oh! all he was saying about—about people being miserable, and our being miserable too to do them good."

A slight cloud came over De Tressanay's face. He had, he fancied, made a little impression on the mind of this thoughtless girl, and here was Osborne going to scatter the first seeds to the winds with his airy ridicule. He sat down on the grass and idly pulled up some of the blades.

But Roger did not laugh this time; leaning his back against a tree he said—

"Once upon a time"—

"Oh! a story," cried both the girls at once, "this is nice."

"It is not a long one," said Roger, smiling.

"Make it a long one," said Olive.

"Once upon a time then, there was a man and his friend, and they lived—in the East, in a great city. The man, his name was Hassan, had nothing to do but to enjoy himself, and he tried very hard to do it; but wherever he went he always found something the matter. There were children who fell down and hurt themselves, or there were people who were so poor that they had not enough to eat. Then these people lived in such horrid dark holes that they could hardly see the sun, and the moon never, and they were very wicked, and took things that did not belong to them, and were very often put in prison and punished. Yet many of

these people would have been nice enough if they had known better, and had had a chance of seeing how different life was in the open sunshine from what it was in the wretched holes in which they had been born and brought up. So seeing this, Hassan left off trying to enjoy himself and set to work to do all he could to mend these people's houses and ways, and he never felt miserable again, for he had never time to think about himself at all."

"And his friend?" asked Ella.

"Oh! his friend thought it was all too much trouble, and went on trying to amuse himself always, but he rather envied his friend, who was so much better than he was."

"Hassan was the nicest," said Olive, "but did he want the people, who were well off, to be so dreadfully busy and do so much?"

"He was very glad when he could persuade them to, and when they once listened to him they could not help doing what he told them.

And when they had once begun they seldom wished to stop."

"If one liked it, it would be all very well," mused Olive.

"But I must finish my story. The Caliph was so pleased with Hassan that he made him Grand Vizier, and gave him a collar made entirely of pearls to wear on grand occasions; but he was very angry with Hassan's friend for being idle, and he sent one day and had his head cut off, so that he might not live and be useless any longer."

"Is that all?" asked Ella. "I am so sorry for the friend, so very sorry," and she looked up at Roger with deep pity in her blue eyes. "The Caliph ought to have thought of Hassan, because he must have been dreadfully sorry to lose his friend."

"Perhaps he was," answered Roger, as he settled himself most comfortably in a low bough of a tree which hung almost over the water, and shaking off the handful of blades of grass which De Tressanay had thrown at

him at the end of his story, "How is it you do not fish" he continued, "as well as your sister?"

"I do not like killing the poor things," she answered, and then with a little musical laugh, she added, "This is the way I fish. I bring some bread and throw little bits into the water, and watch them float away, and I often see a fish rise and take one. I like to think they have something nice without being caught."

"I should like to come to you to be fed," he answered, "if I were a fish and you the fisher."

Ella did not reply at once, she was looking dreamily into the lake.

"No," she said, after a few moment's silence, "you would not like it at all, for when the winter came, or even the rain, I should not come out, and then you would be starved. I should only give you these nice things when it was warm and bright, and then you could most likely find plenty of flies

and other things, and not want mine, so it is no real good. I am no real good to anything, only just to enjoy myself for a little while, I think that is all I can do."

Again Roger was at a loss for an answer. Mere compliments, such as he would have paid to most girls, were utterly out of place here, and he was silent; so was Julian.

He did not like to see Olive fishing; it did not agree with his ideas that a fair, delicate girl, should be so eager in a sport which ended in the destruction of harmless creatures, for she showed more animation over it than he had yet seen her evince, and he did not like the utter indifference she showed to the pain she was necessarily inflicting. And yet he could not be really angry, for he could see that she acted in a perfectly unconscious manner; it was not, after all, he thought, a wilful disregard of pain, but a total want of realization of it. She acted as if everything must administer to her pleasure, and accommodate itself to her wishes. Enjoyment was

necessary to her, as to the ancient Greek, and she accepted it as a due, and with like unquestioning indifference as to its source. She was like a wild product of nature, and her soul (though to attribute such a possession to her seemed to be attributing the like to the birds of the air or to the legendary mermaid), as utterly undeveloped. It had yet to awake to the loftier realities of existence, and to sympathy with lower beings.

While these reflections were succeeding one another in De Tressanay's brain, it was but natural that his face assumed a very grave aspect.

"My dear Julian," said Roger, who was watching his friend's expression with some amusement, guessing with tolerable correctness the current of his thoughts, "I fear your conscience is bitterly reproaching you for not being at this moment in the delightful company of Richards, toiling in this blazing sun along the dusty road to Ruddock Farm, wherever that may be."

"Why should you want to go there?" asked Olive. "There is nobody poor or miserable there."

"Fancy any one being poor or miserable at Ruddock Farm!" laughed Ella.

"Is it such a nice place, then?" inquired Osborne.

"Delightful," answered Ella. "There is a delightful old house, with such a garden of flowers, hollyhocks much taller than I am, and great white lilies, and such dear, kind old people live there. Olive and I go there sometimes and have tea; they always give us such nice things, eggs, and honey, and syllabub."

"I suppose you must want to go and have tea there," said Olive, with a merry laugh, dipping her line afresh into the water, "there can be no other reason, as every one is so well off and comfortable. We can tell you all about it; there are six sons, two of them are in New Zealand, and one is in America, and four daughters, Bessy makes the butter

and Jane does the house, and the other two are married. And there is a quantity of poultry, and now there are four ducks setting by the pond."

"I am glad to hear it is such a flourishing place," said De Tressanay, "but I consider it is my duty to become personally acquainted with each farm and each tenant—in fact, with everybody and everything."

What a strange place he had come to, he thought, and how strange to be suddenly living on an estate which he had never seen before, and to be thrown together with these two girls who knew every nook and cranny of it, and could even tell him how many eggs there were in the ducks' nests at one of the farms.

"It does sound so odd," continued Olive, dangling her rod in the water, and looking round at Julian, inattentive for the moment to the chances of a bite, "it does sound so odd to hear you say you 'consider it your duty' to go to Ruddock; why, we go two

or three times every year when we are at Marchcroft, but we never go because we consider it our duty, we go because we like it."

"But Miss Malloney, we may like a thing and it may be our duty to do it too."

"I should be sure not to like it if it were called a duty," answered Olive. "A duty is always a dull, annoying sort of thing, I know."

"Yes," sighed Ella, pensively, "Jane always has some duty when we want her to go out somewhere with us."

"You would like Jane much better than us," said Olive, with sudden decision, as if she had just made a discovery; "you would agree splendidly, and you use just the same sort of words, doesn't he, Ell?" she asked, appealing to her sister.

"Just the same," answered Ella, "what a pity it is she is not here instead of us; only I could not think of going away."

A conviction dawned on Roger's mind that no figure could have quite replaced Ella as

she sat nestled against the tree in an easy dreamy attitude, her bright fair hair and complexion contrasting with the dark setting around her, but he answered demurely—

"After your description we would give anything to have your sister here, Miss Malloney."

"Yes, I am sure you would," she replied, in a tone of earnest conviction.

"Is there no chance of her coming?"

"None; she has been away with papa lately, and nothing would induce her to take another holiday."

"Not even the prospect of seeing us?"

"Oh, no! not even that," answered Ella, laughing.

"Then," returned Roger, with deep gravity, "we must hope for the pleasure at some future time; meanwhile we must make the best of you two, you know."

It was against all previous tendencies of Julian De Tressanay's character that he should have felt seriously annoyed with his

friend for this speech. He was well accustomed to Roger's incurable habit of laughing at every one, and he could hardly have told himself why he should have been annoyed in this instance. It was a singularly sensible suggestion of Roger's to propose replacing two girls who cared for nothing in the wide world but to amuse themselves from morning to night, by a grave elder sister with whose ideas Julian would probably thoroughly sympathize, and who even used the same kind of words as he did himself.

"I am only too happy to have the pleasure of seeing you here," he returned, with his most lofty courtesy, "and I hope I may prevail on you to stay to luncheon."

Roger looked up with surprise; this distant manner was a sure sign that something had annoyed Julian; why the words he had uttered should have had that effect, he could not at first imagine.

"We should like to very much," answered

Ella, "but we had to promise to be back to luncheon before we left."

"Isn't it tiresome?" asked Olive, "we always used to stay to lunch."

"But you really must stay," said Julian reverting to his more natural way of speaking.

"We would in a minute," said Ella sadly, "if we could do what we liked, but I suppose it is our duty to keep our promise."

The latter part of her remark was addressed to Roger and was accompanied by a pathetic, questioning look.

"Did we not just say that a duty was always disagreeable and very dull?" complained Olive.

"I wonder," said De Tressanay, after a moment's reflection, "if we could induce Mrs. Selby to come up to luncheon, then of course you would stay."

"If you would like," suggested Osborne with sudden alacrity, "I would drive down to the Rectory and fetch her if she would come."

"Do you think she would?" asked De Tressanay anxiously.

"I really do not know," answered Ella, "you might try."

"What a fuss it all is," mused Olive indolently.

"Do go Roger, if you will," said Julian, "order the dog-cart and drive down."

Roger roused himself out of his easy position.

"I suppose I must go at once?"

"Yes, this minute," decreed Olive.

Julian rose also and walked a step or two with Roger, asking him to give some orders about luncheon, just as he was turning away Roger said—

"I would not go so far to fetch Jane."

A sunny smile broke over Julian's face.

"You are quite incorrigible," he replied, but Roger strolled heedlessly on towards the house.

After a little while they saw Osborne driving down towards the gate making occasional

efforts to stir the old horse out of his usual easy pace.

"How lazy he is not to walk," said Olive "if Aunt Lucy comes she could have walked or come up in the pony carriage, poor old Samson will be worn out if you go on driving him so much."

"He will have plenty of rest when I get a new horse," answered De Tressanay.

"A new horse?" inquired Olive; then as if she were speaking her thoughts aloud she went on, "I suppose it will all be new soon, I do not know that I like it"—but at that moment the soliloquy was interrupted by a bite; she drew up her line and in a few moments a fine fish was safe in her basket. This little excitement over, De Tressanay felt rather puzzled how to proceed. He had wished to have a good morning's reading but it was unexpectedly pleasant, idling with these pretty, original girls, but yet he did not know if they cared to have his society all the time and was afraid they might get tired

of his company. With his somewhat stately courtesy he said, after the attendant boy had rebaited Olive's line and she was again seated, rod in hand,

"Now I think you will like to be left undisturbed, I shall hope to see Mrs. Selby and yourselves to luncheon."

He had risen to his feet and was about to walk away when Olive looked up and really opening her dark eyes, she said—

"You need not go, you are not at all in our way. I expect I shall want you to help me put a fresh piece into my rod presently, it is not quite long enough. You can sit down there."

There was no help for it. De Tressanay saw his morning was to be wasted and he humbly took the seat pointed out to him by this lazily imperious girl.

Some desultory conversation ensued between the three, another fish was caught, then the rod had to be taken to pieces and put together again and so the time sped on

till at last the sound of wheels was heard, the dog-cart came in sight, and in it they observed Mrs. Selby sitting beside Roger.

"This is delightful," exclaimed Ella.

Olive left all her fishing apparatus to be taken home by the boy and they soon joined Mrs. Selby and Roger at the hall door.

A very cheerful luncheon ensued. The large oak-panelled dining-room had always seemed so quiet to De Tressanay and Osborne, now it was full of sounds of sweet voices and gusts of merry laughter; even Job's usually acrid countenance bore a softened expression when he saw the familiar figures flitting across the lofty room once more.

"It all looks just as it used to," said Olive as luncheon was finished, glancing round with dreamy satisfaction, "but no, where is that group in plaster of Paris which used to stand there?"

"I had it taken away," answered Julian, "it annoyed Osborne dreadfully, it was so ugly."

"And why should anything ugly hurt him? It had been there so long. Does he always send away everything ugly?"

"Whenever it is possible. You should see his rooms in London, you would fancy yourself in a little bit of some wonderful Eastern palace, he has such gorgeous rugs and hangings, and pictures. He is a regular sybarite."

"As for De Tressanay," said Roger interposing, "he would be perfectly happy in a whitewashed cell, provided it were clean and airy and that he had plenty of books in it. Ugliness actually depresses me, my eyes must find some pleasant objects to rest on, else my spirits sink to a dead level of gloom."

"Are his rooms very ugly then?" asked Olive.

"They would have been undoubtedly if he had been left to himself, but as you may have remarked, he has a weakness for my society, and knowing that I should be expected to spend a certain portion of my time

in his rooms, I took good care to have them arranged fit for a civilised man to live in. What a rage he was in too, when he had to pay the bill."

"You would be a dangerous person to trust, Mr. Osborne," said Mrs. Selby, "with your love of beautiful things. I do not wonder at Mr. De Tressanay being perhaps startled at the expenditure."

"I tell you he was very angry at first, but when I told him it was the price of my delightful company, he could say no more of course."

They left the dining-room and spent some little time standing about looking at the old portraits of some of De Tressanay's ancestors which hung round the hall, and listening to Roger's whimsical remarks on the likeness he declared he could trace in some of them to Julian. At length Mrs. Selby said they must be ready to start, the carriage would soon come up, and they were going for a long drive.

"But we must see Granny," exclaimed Ella.

"Yes," said Olive, "she must be dying to see us."

"Who on earth is Granny?" asked De Tressanay with a wondering look.

"Don't you know?" asked Ella, "why the housekeeper."

"Oh! Mrs. Mitten. I should never have ventured to connect that august lady with such a familiar term."

"She is the dearest old granny," answered Ella, "she has been so good to us ever since we were tiny children."

"She is a very alarming person to me," said Julian, "she is always so respectful and yet she makes me feel how immensely superior she is and how profoundly ignorant I am."

"She is the one person in the establishment whom I suspect of cherishing a slight feeling of mercy towards me," said Osborne, "and I flatter myself she secretly prefers me to De Tressanay, because I praised her pre-

serves and potted meats. As for him, you might give him the greatest delicacies and he would never notice them, and if he did he would be much too frightened at Mrs. Mitten to mention them."

"What fun," cried Olive, "fancy being afraid of old Granny! Come on Ell, let us go and tell her so."

And before De Tressanay could beg them to consider their proceedings, for he was greatly horrified at this proposal, the two girls had flown through the long corridor and were out of sight. What transpired in the housekeeper's room could not be ascertained, but it could easily be guessed from the peals of laughter and the merry voices heard echoing in the distance, that Granny failed to inspire Ella and Olive with any alarm.

Just as they returned the carriage from the Rectory drove up.

"Are you ready, children?" asked Mrs. Selby.

"Yes," said Ella. "Oh! I nearly forgot,

I was to ask for that book for Uncle John. I suppose we may go and get it, Mr. De Tressanay ?" she asked.

"Of course, Miss Malloney, anything that you or Mr. Selby would like; let me come into the library with you, and help you find it."

"It is not there," said Olive, "it is in a bookcase on the lobby above; you could not find it," and away up the staircase they raced, just as they used to when they were really children, and when a long day at the Manor was the greatest delight of their lives.

The book was soon found; they said good-bye, and Julian and Roger standing at the door, soon lost sight of the carriage as it disappeared under the shadow of the beech trees.

The house seemed dull and quiet as they came in again; there were no shawls and hats on the dark oak tables, no gloves and parasols on the broad window sills where the sun came streaming in with a flood of light, and, above all, no clear young voices and

fresh laughter broke the stillness. Julian took up a catalogue of the pictures, which he often studied when he had nothing else to do, and made a pretence of identifying some of the portraits. Roger opened the old organ, and played chords and fragments of airs; then he rose listlessly and stood looking out of the window. De Tressanay threw aside his book.

"What are we to do, Roger, all the afternoon?" he asked with a yawn.

Roger replied with a yawn too, then they both burst into a laugh at finding themselves in such a disorganized frame of mind.

"I do not feel the least inclined for any more reading," said Julian.

"Nor I for any more painting," said Roger, "I feel, what shall I say? *désœuvré*."

"Well then, let us walk to Ruddock Farm and look at the ducks setting on their nests by the pond."

And to Ruddock Farm they accordingly went.

CHAPTER IV.

He would give thee a soul and would still keep his own.
HANS ANDERSEN.

IT was a long time since there had been such a beautiful autumn as there was this year when Julian De Tressanay first came to Marchcroft. One fine day slowly rolled on after another; the deep golden sunlight hung over the corn fields, and shone on the ripples of the river as it took its placid course through the valley; the bright fruits and ripening berries made the whole land appear like one smiling garden. These were days when to those who were well and strong it seemed impossible to stay in the house; it was the time for lingering on the hill side amidst gorse and bracken, for seeking the shade of the woods, for a closer union with Nature, who, in such a season, veils her stormy and chilling aspects, and appearing to us like a gentle and beautiful being, woos us

to her side; and so intimately are we connected with this strange being, Nature, that we must not be surprised if we find that the lights and shades which we see varying and changing in the sunlight, enter into and work strange changes in the lives of some of us as well as play over the surface of the waters and hills.

De Tressanay and Osborne felt this fascination for outdoor life; they sat out reading and sketching, sometimes superintending Olive Malloney's fishing; or De Tressanay, endeavouring to become acquainted with his estate, roused Roger from his painting, or idle sauntering round the gardens and shrubberies, and carried him off to inspect some farm or cottage. They also found time for several visits to the Rectory, where De Tressanay would engage Mr. Selby in long conversations concerning the welfare of the people of the place, these talks being varied of course by Osborne's occasional criticisms touched as ever with light irony.

They were both arriving at a perfectly friendly intimacy with Ella and Olive Malloney; it was almost a new experience to Julian, for having no near relations, the usual familiar intercourse with mother, sisters, aunts, or cousins was closed to him. To Roger it came as a gradual revival of an earlier phase of his life, but the old pain was dead, and amidst the little circle at Marchcroft, life was so fresh, so gay, so untouched by the breath of artificial worldliness that his dread of its reawakening was lulled to sleep. To him it had also the charm of a long-untasted pleasure, for of late years he had gradually deserted general society and retreated more and more into the companionship of a select band of male friends, and his influence, combined with the absorbing interest with which De Tressanay had thrown himself into his projects of progress and reform, caused Julian also to desert fashionable circles to nearly the same extent, consequently, for some time past, they had

almost excluded themselves from any society save that of their own group of friends.

Roger had, he imagined, exhausted society and forsaken its eddying circles for ever. The Rectory at Marchcroft was, however, very attractive to them both. Mr. Selby sympathized with their tastes, understood their ideas; Mrs. Selby was kind and genial, while the two girls with their beauty, grace, and unusual simplicity cast a strange fascination over the place.

Both Ella and Olive were certainly very different from most girls. Their mother died when they were quite children, and their father, a distinguished physician, was so absorbed by his profession that he had but little leisure to devote to his family. Their only sister was much older than they were, and with her grave disposition could never understand their characters, cast in a lighter mould; therefore in their own home they might be said to have grown up singularly uninfluenced by those around them. Not

that they had been neglected; it was the general opinion at Fennington that they had had great advantages. No pains had been spared to make their education complete. Masters and mistresses had succeeded the governess as the time for "finishing their education" drew near; yet when they left the schoolroom, the instruction which had been expended on them with so much pains seemed to have either vanished to a great extent, or else, with the same outer effect, it had sunk too deeply into their systems to rise and shine on the surface. The whole machinery of teaching which had been set in motion for their benefit had failed to work the latent powers, by no means inconsiderable, of their intellects. They had carried on a monotonous attempt to assimilate the mental food measured out to them, but it was not the kind on which they were fitted to thrive. Their teachers spoke to them in words which failed to arouse their interest or kindle their imaginations. The instruction

passed, as it were, over their heads, and instead of being able to say, as Olive frankly said to Julian De Tressanay, "I can understand when you speak like that," they might have said they never understood; they listened duly, but the words soon faded from their minds and were forgotten. Dr. Malloney had a quick incisive way of judging and speaking; his own perceptions being extremely clear and acute, he could not tolerate vague inaccuracy or half-acquired knowledge, consequently a remark on any historical or literary subject, hazarded in a feeble, blundering way by either of the girls, invariably brought down such a sharp sarcasm, such a setting forth of their profound ignorance of the matter, that they gradually forbore these attempts, retreated from every show of caring for any deeper subject, pronouncing all such subjects far too clever for them. Had their father been more encouraging, it might have been different. He was fond of his children, and he had a

drives and walks, lingerings under shady groves and amongst the rose trees in the Rectory garden. It was on one of these days that Olive, standing at the open window, said to Mr. Selby.

"Uncle John, do you know we have only had two pic-nics since we have been here this time?"

"That means you want to have another immediately, I suppose."

"It is such lovely weather," remarked Ella.

"There is no chance of getting off, I see Lucy," returned Mr. Selby, sighing resignedly. "Well children, where do you want to go?"

"You are a nice kind uncle," said Ella clasping her hands round his arm.

"Oh! I know what all that means," he answered, "it means that we are to be taken further and made to waste a still longer day than usual, on these trying occasions."

"It is a great shame, Uncle John," said

Olive, "to call our pic-nics 'trying occasions,' you know you enjoy them as much as we do and you ought to be delighted to take us. Aunt Lucy could hardly get you away the last time, when you thought you could trace out that old camp. We will go there again, if you like, and then you will be quite happy."

"Thank you, you are most considerate."

"No; not there," pleaded Ella, "do take us to Witten Forest, I have wanted to go there for such a time."

"A twelve miles' drive," answered Mr. Selby, "the worst road in the neighbourhood, and a wretched inn."

"You should not think of all those things, Uncle John," replied Ella, "you should think of the great beautiful forest, and the sun shining through on the smooth trunks of the beech trees, and the soft green moss."

"It is very nice to be ordered what to think. I suppose I am to forget the damp, rheumatism in the future, and the insects

which come and creep over one out of the old trunks on which we shall have to sit."

"You are only to think of what we tell you you may."

"Well, then I suppose there is no help for it, I must take you."

Ella executed a little dance of delight round the drawing-room, and Olive said:

"There is a nice, proper uncle," with the air of a queen patronizing an obedient subject.

"Now," said Mrs. Selby, "as we are to go, the question is, who shall we ask to join us?"

There was a pause for a few moments, nobody spoke.

"The Dentons," said Ella, demurely at last.

"The Brackleys," continued Olive, equally demurely.

"By all means," rejoined Mr. Selby, "but" he continued, glancing at his nieces with a look of amusement breaking over his face,

" does no one wish for those two poor young men at the Manor to be invited ?"

" Oh ! yes they may come," said Ella and Olive at once, but without looking up.

" I hardly know though how they will come ; I am sure old Samson could not go so far, and last time we met De Tressanay, I forgot to ask if he had got a new horse yet. I had so much to do in endeavouring to confute some of Mr. Osborne's extravagant paradoxes."

" Did you not hear, John, of the new purchase ?" asked Mrs. Selby, " Mr. De Tressanay was telling us of it yesterday, I suppose before you came in."

" A horse, dog-cart, and a groom," interrupted Ella.

" How much did he give for the groom ?" asked Mr. Selby, " I know De Tressanay is a very remarkable person, but I should hardly have thought he could have bought "—

" You tiresome Uncle John, you know I did not mean that, but "—

"You had better let me finish my story," said Mrs. Selby. "Hearing that a new horse was wanted, Jacob suggested going to buy one at Durnstone Fair, but Mr. De Tressanay would not hear of that, he was so afraid the old man would choose one on the exact pattern of the ancient Samson."

"He does hate that poor Samson," exclaimed Olive, "and thinks him only fit to be turned out for the rest of his life, with the other worn-out old horses."

"Well," continued Mrs. Selby, "as that plan did not do, he wrote to a friend in London who was giving up his carriage and horse, and suggested becoming the immediate purchaser; his friend told him in answer, that although he had had another offer he would give him the preference, and despatch both dog-cart and horse, as soon as he could to Marchcroft."

"I suppose De Tressanay knows the horse?"

"He had often seen this friend driving it,

and it always went a great pace, that seems to be the one merit of a horse in his eyes; however, what I think the worst part of the story, has yet to come; this friend told Mr. De Tressanay that Viper, that is the animal's name, was often difficult to manage, and so vicious in the stable, that he advised him to take the groom as well, as he was accustomed to its tricks. Imagine old Jacob's face when the whole turn-out arrives," and Mrs. Selby could not forbear a hearty laugh.

The rector smiled too, but he became grave again immediately, and said :

"I am sorry to hear this; I should say, neither De Tressanay nor Roger Osborne had much idea of driving. I imagine the former would think it a waste of time to bestow much thought on it, and as for the latter, I fancy a little dangerous excitement would be just the thing to please him. I think on the whole," he added, after a moment's reflection, "it will be best to hire the break from Marlsham and save our horses,

they have had a good deal of work lately, and in that case we might as well ask De Tressanay and Osborne to drive to Witten Forest with us."

"Yes, Uncle John," said Olive, "we are quite pleased with all that."

"Well then," he said, "there is nothing to do but to send the invitations and order the carriage, and wish for a fine day. I suppose we shall be allowed to stay at home if it pours with rain."

"Oh! it will be splendidly fine," cried Ella, "why do you always think of disagreeable things? We never do, and they never happen."

"Ah! I am not a favoured little mortal like you," he answered, "the elements and other variable influences which affect our existence have no such tender regard for me. Perhaps I am better able to look after myself," he added, taking a complacent look at his six feet of stature in the mirror.

"I could not have any disagreeable things

coming at me," she answered, with her most pathetic look.

"Should you think it a very disagreeable thing to walk up to the Manor with me and ask De Tressanay and Osborne at once to join in this dreadful pic-nic; we shall be late for dinner, but that will not matter much."

"That will be quite a nice thing to do," answered Ella.

"I will come too," said Olive, "if I can spare the time;" she had actually taken up some needlework.

They had a pleasant stroll across the meadows; as they stood at the door waiting for the bell to be answered they heard the tones of the organ pealing through the hall. The door opened, and as they entered Roger rose from the old instrument and came forward to meet them.

"De Tressanay being a moderately punctual person," he said, "is dressing for dinner, he will be down directly. I was

amusing myself to the last moment of the respite especially allowed to me. It is one of the inevitable bores of life having to do anything at any stated time."

"Yet think of the wild confusion into which life would fall if there were no stated times for the different acts of the day," remonstrated Mr. Selby, "fancy an express train starting just whenever the engine driver felt inclined for a ride, a luggage train driver having thought the moment had come to start half an hour before."

"Trains should be dealt with in an especial province of legislation, Mr. Selby, because such centres of sheer brute force are apt to become dangerous if not carefully regulated, but in the case of harmless individuals like myself, why should they not saunter through the hours as they like? I am sure we bind additional burdens on ourselves in these matters. How much happier our ancestors must have been before the detestable invention of clocks and watches?"

"Why do you wear a watch if you think it such a dreadful thing?" asked Olive.

Roger drew out a plain, but remarkably handsome watch, and handled it affectionately.

"Habit, Miss Malloney, nothing else; it is to me a terrible symptom of the degeneracy of modern man to see how entirely he becomes the ape of the groove into which he happens to be born; now, how much more interesting you would find me if I wore skins instead of a coat."

"I should not speak to you for one," answered Olive contemptuously.

It was an especial amusement to Roger to say the most absurd things before her; she did not always attempt to argue with him, but the haughty look of contempt which used to curl her lip, incited him to still more startling utterances.

"Perhaps I would," said Ella, "but you look nicer as you are."

At that moment De Tressanay appeared,

and he and Osborne eagerly accepted Mr. Selby's invitation to the pic-nic, which was finally fixed to take place on the next day but one.

The rector and his nieces then prepared to start homewards, and De Tressanay and Osborne strolled down with them to the drive gates. Before they had gone far the gong sounded.

"Listen to old Job, that is all sounding for me," said Roger, "and he knows it is perfectly useless just now."

"This friend of mine," explained De Tressanay, "is hopelessly unamenable to orders. I never could get him down in time for dinner which," he continued laughing, "I considered inconsistent with the proper ordering of the establishment, so I told Job to sound the gong a second time about ten minutes before the solemn moment of the banquet, and that generally has the effect of rousing Osborne from his paints, or organ, or whatever he may be wasting his time over."

"And Job looks the most perfect martyr when he is doing it," rejoined Osborne, "were it not that De Tressanay has a certain way of asserting his authority, he would have flatly refused to do it."

"I am afraid we are both a trial to them all," said their master.

"Do you know what Granny said of you the other day?" asked Ella. "She said Job and Jacob and the gardener were always coming to her with some complaints about you both."

"Yes, you seemed inclined to alter everything, and did not care about shooting," chimed in Olive.

"And Mr. Osborne only liked music and *water* painting and such-like messes!" exclaimed Ella, her blue eyes sparkling with amusement.

"Not like a man at all," added Olive, with a little shriek of laughter.

"So she told them," resumed Ella, "that they must have patience, you were both.

young and had your faults like others, but they must be thankful it was no worse, for you were very harmless."

And the gay young voices rang out in peals of clear laughter in which the young men and Mr. Selby heartily joined.

They soon reached the gates, but still lingered on a few moments before saying good-bye.

"What a perfect evening it is," said the Rector, as his eyes rested with pleasure on the peaceful scene around him.

"Perfect," answered De Tressanay, but a sigh followed his words and his face saddened.

"Are you wishing yourself back in London?" asked Olive. "You do not look as if you liked this much."

"No, indeed I am not," he replied.

"Then why do you look as if you did?"

"Well, if you must know, I could not help thinking how few enjoyed it."

"There are a good many people who do at Marchcroft," she argued.

"They are very few compared to the many shut up in noisome streets."

"Build a little row of cottages down there," suggested Osborne, pointing to the lower slope of the path, "and have relays of them down from London."

"How horrid," said Olive.

"Horrid? why, Miss Malloney?" asked De Tressanay, reproachfully.

"Why they would be crowding here and everywhere and spoiling the look of everything, it would not be the least like it is now."

"But they would not want the whole place, they need not come in your way."

"There is not at all too much room for us," answered Olive, in her most imperial manner, whereupon the discussion ended, and after saying good-bye, De Tressanay and Osborne turned homewards.

Both were silent for a few minutes, then De Tressanay began—

"There must be something radically wrong

in women's education. Women, as a rule, are far better than we are; they are much less selfish and more ready to give up their own pleasures to others; yet they do not seem able to grasp a great idea. They cannot as much as realize the smaller measures which are necessary steps towards the great ideas being carried out. Surely it must be the result of their training. If noble and lofty aims were made the object of life instead of amusements or accomplishments, the result would be different. Their characters are more impulsive, more pliable than ours, and therefore we ought to be far more careful of the moulds into which their early education is cast, for it seems to me that for years they bear the impress of this stamp, if not for always."

"Not always, when they are once launched into the world, a fresh rush of influences often undoes this early education, or else brings out what good there may have been in it, and completes it."

"Perhaps sometimes."

"Of course I mean when the nature is fine enough to be improved."

"Yes," said Julian, thoughtfully, "there is that, what comes afterwards may quite replace an unsuccessful education; I am glad you think so," he continued, with a sudden animation.

"But you forget, my dear fellow," rejoined Roger, lapsing into his usually indifferent tone, "that it is only a small proportion of our own superior sex who have attained to such serious views as yourself, and who desire for women to be more than ornamental adjuncts."

De Tressanay sighed.

"That is only too true; but you know what an influence women have, or at least are supposed to have," he said, disclaiming any personal experience in the matter, "and if they were once raised to a steadfast and high tone of thought and feeling, they would elevate many of our sex who now sink

from habitually associating with inferior beings."

"I do not know," answered Osborne, "that women are meant to share the hard work and hard thinking which fall to our lot. I am inclined to take Schiller's view," he said lazily, as they slowly mounted the steps, "they are rather meant to adorn existence, and add to its charm, it is enough for them that—

> Heavenly roses they twine and they weave,
> In the life on the earth we live and we leave."

But De Tressanay shook his head, still unconvinced as he crossed the hall.

The morning of the day fixed for the picnic to Witten Forest dawned brightly as if to fulfil Ella Malloney's utmost expectations. The Rector was finally unearthed from the study where he loved to spend his studious morning, hours; De Tressanay and Osborne arrived at the appointed time, and soon the whole party started, animated at the prospect of the long expedition on this sunny autumn

morning and by the increasing pleasure which these new friends found in one another's society.

The first few miles of the road were already familiar to De Tressanay and Osborne, as they had driven several times in the direction they were now taking, but before they were half-way on their road, they entered an entirely new neighbourhood. Every acre of the country was however well known to Mr. Selby, and he was able to satisfy their numerous questions concerning the various localities as they drove along.

"Who does this place belong to?" asked De Tressanay, as they were driving past some beautiful grassy slopes shaded here and there by fine trees.

Mr. Selby told him that the whole neighbourhood was nearly equally divided between two proprietors, one of whom never lived on, and scarcely even visited his estate. This information roused De Tressanay to expatiate hotly on the responsibilities of proprietors,

and led him on to denounce with vehemence the evils of our landed system in general.

Mr. Selby was inclined to agree with some of his arguments at first, but he soon drew back.

"Surely," he said at last, "you would not advocate?"

"Forgive my interrupting you, Mr. Selby," said Roger, who had been deep in conversation with Ella, but whose attention had been attracted by the last fragment of the argument, "but De Tressanay pines to see a community established where every one should have a small, but charming property, or a certain charmingly small capital."

"I know you will not accept this statement of my views too literally," pleaded Julian.

"No, no," replied Mr. Selby, smiling, "but first reflect on the stagnation which would surely overspread such a country."

"And just think of the bareness of the life which would prevail in his ideal state," con-

tinued Roger, "the whole mind of man would necessarily be concentrated on the struggle to cultivate his plot of ground, with ruin staring him in the face if his crop of potatoes was inferior to his neighbour's, and his property would not considerately hand him back a liberal percentage for his outlay and labour in bad seasons."

"How can you fail to appreciate even the idea of a state in which each member should know that he was equally responsible for his own welfare and that of his state, where all should labour and rest alike," remonstrated Julian, and soaring above vexatious details, his dark eyes rested on the fleecy clouds floating on the sky above, as if he already saw a vision of this perfected state in some unattainable future.

"And where would be the leisure in which the arts might flourish?" asked Osborne, "or the wealth to foster them? Pray recollect that paintings and statues and symphonies have not the material value in

supporting life as for instance, a crop of wheat, and yet it is these things which make existence bearable."

"Roger, Roger, your first thoughts are always for the delights and pleasures of the eye, you will not heed the great principles. Those established, the other things need not be forgotten," answered Julian, with a slightly weary air as of one tired of arguing with a persistently unreasonable child.

"Poor fellow!" said Roger to the others, "he is so desperately in earnest."

"I think De Tressanay," returned Mr. Selby, convincingly, "that you will find our present common-wealth improved by reforms in every direction, and you will find plenty to do in trying to carry them out, better than your Utopia. You will find,—but," he said, interrupting himself suddenly, "I run the risk of preaching you a sermon as I fear I have done once or twice already; a truce to our arguments for to-day, though I believe Olive has been actually listening to our grave

conversation, for the first time in her life I should say."

"What do we want with theories just now?" said Roger, with his most *fainéant* air. "Have we not arrived in the fair land of Utopia? Look at this scenery, this sunshine, and with our own admirable selves to crown it all, is it not enough for the thing called to-day?"

"That is exactly what I have been thinking, Mr. Osborne, only I could not express what I meant," answered Ella, leaning back in the carriage with an air of intense satisfaction.

"Yes, and I," said Olive. "I cannot think why you should argue and want to alter anything. I am perfectly content," and her eyes wandered out to the far horizon as if to include all she saw in the like blessed condition.

"Content is the one inexcusable state for the human mind," returned De Tressanay, rather defiantly; he knew he had failed to

convince his hearers, but he could not forbear this last shaft.

"I was always taught it was a virtue," answered Olive, "I do not see the good of changing one's mind about everything as some people seem to do when they are grown up."

"But if they are convinced that the new ideas are better, Miss Malloney?"

"It is a great deal too much trouble to change," answered Olive, decisively, folding her hands in her lap and looking full at De Tressanay with her deep imperturbable eyes.

They were driving slowly under some trees and a beautiful dragon-fly suddenly came darting backwards and forwards close to them.

"I daresay that creature," remarked Roger, "did not want to change when he lay at the bottom of some pool, a little fat contented grub. He had however, no choice in the matter, and no doubt he is vain enough now, and thinks flying in the air with an

exquisitely decorated body, far better. It is a pity that a choice should be left to us."

This statement of Roger's was in flat contradiction to what he had said shortly before, but then he had such a provoking way of siding with his friend when the argument was over, and no one had agreed with Julian.

On they drove, the Rector pointing out the places of interest on the way, and beguiling the time with some of the strange stories which still haunted some of the old manors and woods. It was a bad hilly road, but the drive was over at last, and the inn, miserable-looking enough to justify Mr. Selby's description of it, was reached. Mr. and Mrs. Denton, the only guests who had been able to promise to join in the pic-nic had already arrived, and the whole party set out at once to seek the shade of the forest trees. After strolling for about half a mile a very lovely spot was reached, and every one agreed that a better place for luncheon could

not be found, and accordingly the halt was made.

"Now Uncle John," said Ella, in the middle of luncheon, "you must say you are glad you came; everything is delightful as I said it would be, and not one of the disagreeables you foretold has happened."

"A kindly fate sometimes tempers one's misfortunes," answered Uncle John with an air of mock resignation, "even De Tressanay allowed just now that a tolerably fair result may spring from an evil root when it has no business to."

Mr. Denton looked rather puzzled, "Life would be uncommonly pleasant," he said, "if it threatened no greater misfortune than a day like this in Witten Forest, or does Mr. De Tressanay regret London so much?"

De Tressanay was about to reply gravely that he considered the country preferable, but Roger answered for him as he was about to speak.

"Any one who is accustomed to town must

find a good deal to regret," he announced very gravely, "especially at this time of year."

"Indeed," said Mr. Denton, with surprise. "I never go there if I can possibly help it, and when I was young we always thought it a place to be avoided at this season, but I suppose you young men think differently."

"I think if the younger generation prefer a hot crowded street to this," added Mrs. Selby, trying to repress her inclination to laugh, "we may congratulate ourselves on our superior taste if we take a glance around us," and she looked first all round as far as she could see, and then at the picturesque group by her side.

"It is lovely," said Olive, "and there is everything you said there would be, Ell, such lovely dark green moss, and such nice trees, and the sun lighting up their trunks."

"I see you fully appreciate the beauties of the country, Miss Malloney," said Mr.

Denton, thinking she was more sympathetic than these puzzling strangers.

"Of course she does," returned Ella, eagerly, "she always sees the striking points of a view at once; she would draw beautifully, only she never works at it."

"Yes," said Mrs. Selby, "it is a pity that she is so idle, she has great taste for drawing."

"But does not the very fact of having talent urge you on to work?" asked De Tressanay. "This girl has latent powers after all," he thought to himself.

"Oh no," answered Olive, with a distractingly charming smile, and folding her pretty taper fingers together, as if their mission were perfect idleness, "it is quite enough to feel one could do a thing if one chose, but I am not going to choose."

"You should see what piles of sketches I have at home, Miss Malloney," interposed Roger, "you would call me industrious."

"Oh! any one can work at things," re-

turned Olive with the contemptuous air with which she often treated Roger.

"Oh yes! any one," he returned, "it is not every one who has the genius to be idle; it is far more distinguished, and one gets through life with less fatigue. You seem to possess a grand prerogative of idleness, by all means persevere in it."

"You are very kind to advise me," she said haughtily.

"Oh! Mr. Osborne," said Ella, looking up at him with her sweet, earnest eyes, "I wish you would not talk like that to Olive, I should so like her to draw beautifully, as well as you do, then every one would admire her sketches."

"I am sure we should admire Miss Malloney's paintings," said Mr. Denton, rather severely, ignoring all mention of Osborne's productions.

"This young man wants to be taken down," Mr. Denton thought to himself. "He seems very conceited, and evidently thinks himself

a wit." In fact he did not much like either of these young men, they were not like the country neighbours he was accustomed to.

Luncheon was finished and there was a general proposal to explore a little of the forest.

"I do not feel inclined to walk very far," said Mrs. Denton, "and I daresay Mrs. Selby does not either, but we can set out with you and sit down in some pretty nook when we are tired."

They all set out together, walking in a confused group at first, as the broad spaces beneath the spreading trees gave plenty of room for three or four people to walk abreast. It is a curious fact however that in a party of friends, especially in such a romantic place as a beautiful forest, the tendency of the human being to desert general society and to confine his or her attention to one member only of the circle, becomes especially observable. In the case of this party exploring Witten Forest, it was most remarkable, and

this is the order into which the different units arranged themselves before long, subject to the predisposing law just alluded to. Mrs. Denton and Mrs. Selby slowly fell behind the rest, Mrs. Denton detailing with great minuteness the engagement and approaching marriage of one of her grand-daughters; Mr. Selby soon found himself in deep consultation with Mr. Denton over a case which was to come on at the next magistrates' meeting. De Tressanay and Olive had chosen to follow a side-path which seemed to lead towards an inviting-looking glade and Olive decreed it would be just the place for some rare ferns which were reported to grow in the forest. Roger and Ella after following the rector and Mr. Denton for a little while, struck out a new line for themselves in an opposite direction.

Much pleasant conversation ensued between these several pairs.

Ella and Roger chatted away gaily on many topics; Roger thought his companion

had never looked so pretty and bright as she did tripping along under the solemn spreading trees. The forest seemed to have a special fascination for her.

"Is it not nice?" she asked, stopping and leaning against an immense beech tree as if she were caressing its stout trunk.

"I should like to make a sketch of that tree and of you standing just like that," answered Roger. "I should call the picture the 'Forest Fay.'"

"I should like to be that and live always amongst the trees."

"Then you must have a perpetual summer, the sun must always shine, and only the gentlest breezes must rustle through the sheltering branches."

"Yes, it must always be summer, the days must be all like this. I could not bear the storms and cold," she added with a sudden shiver.

"If you really belonged to the wood you would rejoice in all its moods; you would

laugh when the thunder crashed and the lightning split the great trees from crown to root and you would dance round and round with the snow flakes."

"Indeed I should not; I should hide myself in some hole and fall fast asleep and not wake till the summer came back. You do not know what a dreadful coward I am, I cannot bear anything that is not quite nice."

This was said so seriously that Roger felt a sudden pity at the idea of anything hurtful approaching her, he was silent for a moment, then he said—

"I am afraid there are many things which are not quite nice that every one is obliged to meet sometimes in the world."

"I know there are," returned Ella with another shiver, "there are so many things I could not bear, being ill or getting helpless and stiff with old age and not being able to dance about," and the most pitiful expression came over the winsome face.

"I hope it will be a long, long time before

any of these things fall across your path; perhaps," he continued soothingly, "you will not think them so dreadful when they do happen."

"Yes I shall, Mr. Osborne, and there are so many besides. I cannot bear anything to change, I should like my life and everything to go on just as it does now."

"But things might change for the better."

"Oh, no! they could not for me."

"You might wish for a change some day, most people do."

"I never shall. A change would be sure to give one all sorts of troubles and I could not bear responsibilities, people get so worn with them, I know they do."

"It is difficult to keep such things out of one's life," said Roger dreamily.

"Then perhaps it would be better to go anywhere out of their way."

"Out of the world even?"

"Perhaps."

Roger had never heard such strange words

from lips so rosy and fresh, but they were quivering now with a look of real distress. He was at a loss how to reason with her, but the next moment he caught sight of a beautiful wreath of leaves and bright berries, and hooked it down with his stick.

"These would look so nice in your hat," he said, holding them up as you would hold up a toy to a child who cannot quite forget that it has just fallen down and bruised itself.

"How lovely," said Ella, forgetting her dread of misfortunes, "let us fasten them on at once."

But this was not such an easy matter and it was finally found necessary to sit down on the grass, and for the hat to be taken off.

When the wreath was arranged at length with Roger's assistance, they found it so pleasant sitting there in the quiet and stillness, that they did not continue their walk for some time.

They talked about De Tressanay's coming to Marchcroft.

"It is quite a new life to me," said Roger. "I never cared about the country before, and now I seem to have settled down in it as if I had always liked it better than anything else."

"Yes, it seems as if you must have been here for ages, and as if we had always known you. But it is not at all what might have been expected, because you know you are both so learned and clever, you might never have cared to speak to us."

"I hope you think we do care to speak to you now."

"Oh, yes. At least I never think about it," answered Ella with a bright laugh. "Of course you would have liked Uncle John, every one does, and he is so clever too; but, then you would not have seen so much of him if you had not cared to speak to us, because we like him to be always with us when we are here. Is it not all lucky, would you

not have been dreadfully dull up at the Manor?"

"Well you see Miss Malloney I cannot say positively that we should have been dull, because we are so used to being together, Julian and I, but I will tell you what we should have been exactly like; we should have been just like a couple of the fish which swim about in some caves in Kentucky. They have been so long in the dark that they are quite blind, although you can see that they were meant to have eyes like other fishes, but as they would have been no good to them, they did not take the trouble of growing. Now these fish get on well enough I daresay in the dark holes, but think what a wretched existence it is compared to that of their relatives who swim and leap in the river."

"And you would have both moped away in the old house till you would have been blind too," said Ella laughing, "what a sad story: but let us walk on a little farther."

They rose from their mossy seats and

strolled on and on under the great trees. It seemed as if that sunny afternoon could never come to an end.

Julian and Olive were enjoying their walk also. They reached the glade and found some beautiful ferns, which Olive insisted on getting up by the roots, or rather making her companion get up for her. This operation took some little time and involved some effort.

"We must sit down and rest," she said as it was concluded, as if she had borne a great share in the exertion.

They sat down, their view was somewhat limited by a sloping bank, but it was a lovely spot.

"This is the prettiest part of the forest that I was ever in," said Olive.

"Now, if you would only work at your drawing you might make such a sketch."

"But I do not like work, Mr. De Tressanay; and when I do try to do any it is always a failure; I mean I might as well not have done it."

"What do you mean?"

"Why you said so much the other day about wasting one's time, and doing useless things, that I thought I would do something very useful."

Olive stopped here and looked up into the tree above her head; it seemed as if she had begun to study the way in which the branches were interwoven high, high up, so absorbed did she seem in looking at them.

"What did you do?" asked Julian, after a minute or two, as Olive was still silent.

His voice seemed to rouse her from the fit of contemplation or shyness which had come over her; she looked at him with a laugh breaking over her face, and hindering her words at first as she continued—

"I got some strong, coarse stuff, which I thought must be useful, it was so ugly, and I made my fingers quite sore, they are hardly well yet, working at it, and I made it into a pinafore for a poor child. Now is not that just what you think every one ought to do?

Women, I mean, who cannot run about and do all sorts of other things, I am sure I don't know what."

"Indeed, it was very good of you, a most excellent thing," and De Tressanay felt quite melted and penitent, remembering he had sometimes judged her harshly.

"Well, but I have not done. I finished this; nobody knew anything about it, except Ella, and we had a great consultation to know who to give it to, for you know the people at Marchcroft are so well off, they would be quite pleased to give me a pinafore if I wanted one, so at last we thought of some new people who had just come to a cottage at the far end of the parish. We did not know anything about them, and hoped they might be poor. So we went yesterday morning; we saw one or two children playing in the garden, and went in. I felt very uncomfortable, and Ella looked as if she were going to cry, and I thought I would get it over as quickly as possible, and said, 'I

thought you might like a pinafore for one of your children, so I have brought you one; I made it myself.'"

"She ought to have been most delighted," interrupted De Tressanay, more and more melted.

"Indeed, she was not at all," continued Olive; "she looked at it as if she were half inclined to bundle it and us too out of the house, and all she said was, 'Well, thank you, Miss, it'll do to save Jane's new ones for a bit,' and we came away that minute, and thought we would try no more pinafores."

"What a horrid woman," said Julian, with a storm of indignation, "but," he continued, "perhaps she was well off, and was not accustomed to have things given her."

"The gardener told us afterwards she was the wife of a retired tradesman."

"Of course, that was why she did not want it; but it was so good of you, but would it not have been better to have asked

Mr. Selby about some one who was really poor?"

"Oh, no, he would have laughed at me so. Of course I should not have minded that," she said, with a little toss of her proud head, "but I did not want him to. I wanted to tell you, because I thought you would be so pleased, as you are always wanting one to work."

"But you should not do anything of the kind, Miss Malloney, to please me or another."

"Then why should one do anything?" she asked, looking up at him with the full light of her unconscious eyes.

"You should do all you can to help every one, whether poor or rich, not because you like them, or because it may please others, but simply because it is the best act which lays in your power," and De Tressanay was so strangely perturbed that his deep voice trembled as he spoke.

"It is very hard to do things like that

without thinking of pleasing anybody," said Olive, rather hopelessly, picking the bits of moss by her side.

"Indeed, you will not find it so when you get into a habit of acting from one fixed and immovable principle."

"Ah, 'principle,' yes, I remember people used to talk to us about that when we were children, not that I ever understood what it meant. I can understand when you tell me things, and when you speak, it seems as if one ought to begin at once. Oh, dear!" she continued, with a little laugh, and scattering her heap of gathered moss out of her lap, "it was much more comfortable before you came and made us think about things."

De Tressanay's heart gave a sudden leap.

"Are you sorry I came?" he asked, looking eagerly down into her face.

Olive turned her head a little away from him.

"No," she said, "I am not sorry."

"Hulloo, here are some of the stragglers," rung at that moment on their ears.

Julian and Olive started to their feet.

"That was Mr. Denton's voice," she said, "and there is he and Uncle John."

They walked slowly to meet them, a strange silence seemed to have fallen on them, for neither spoke.

"I am glad we met you," said Mr. Selby, "for it is time to think of having some tea, and starting homewards."

"Already?"

"Yes, child, do you want to spend your whole life out here?"

"Yes, I think I do," she answered, and, clasping her arm in her uncle's, she walked with him all the way back to their former trysting place, leaving Julian to be entertained by Mr. Denton.

Roger and Ella were the last to join the rest of the party. When they arrived they found a fire blazing, and the preparations for tea nearly complete.

"We ought to allow you two no tea," said Mrs. Selby; "you were not here to help us get it ready."

"Really, Mrs. Selby, I am so sorry," said Roger, seating himself comfortably, and leaning back against the stump of a tree.

"You look quite distressed, I must acknowledge."

"Well, you see it is De Tressanay's mission to work and be useful; it was, I am sure, quite refreshing for him to have a chance of exerting himself. I hope he has done his work well," he asked, patronisingly, turning to Olive.

"Much better than you would have," she answered, disdainfully, "you would have been afraid of scratching your hands, and burning your fingers."

"I would much rather let some one else do that."

"I am sure he has no 'principle' at all," said Olive to De Tressanay, in rather a low voice.

"No what?" asked Roger, languidly.

"Miss Malloney says you are devoid of 'principle,'" explained Mr. Denton, "but we may hope—"

"I am sure she does not know the meaning of the word," interrupted her uncle.

"Indeed, I do, Uncle John; Mr. De Tressanay has been explaining it to me this afternoon."

"Have you been talking ethics?" asked Roger; "Miss Malloney and I talked philosophy the whole time and natural history."

Uncle John was about to utter some incredulous and withering sarcasm, when Mr. Denton, accepting Osborne's statement quite seriously, said gravely—

"Of course this high education makes such a difference; when I was young we should never have thought of such subjects at a pic-nic."

"It entirely alters the whole tone of society, Mr. Denton," answered Roger,

delicately fishing an egg out of the saucepan, which Ella had just taken off the fire.

"Indeed it does," was the grave rejoinder. "No wonder that we elder ones cannot keep pace with your ideas and conversation."

'Do not flatter their vanity, Denton," said Mr. Selby. "I hope they will do as much credit to their generation as we have to ours."

"And be as nice as you when we are old, Uncle John," added Olive, who was sitting close to him.

"Thank you, Olive, but I beg you not to consider me old."

"Oh! but you are very, very old," cried Ella.

"I protest against being called anything of the kind," returned Mr. Selby, indignantly, whereupon a general disturbance ensued, which was not appeased till Mrs. Selby decreed it was high time to start on their long drive.

The Rectory was reached without any ad-

ventures, the conversation on the way home was not so eager and continuous as it had been on the way to this memorable pic-nic, but rose and fell fitfully, as if with the quiet and repose fast sinking on the earth, a hush fell also on the spirits of the little party as they made their way home.

Julian and Roger were still very silent as they walked back to the Manor. So absorbed indeed was each in his own thoughts as to be violently startled when a belated blackbird flew out of the hedge, disappearing again with a series of little shrieks of horror at finding himself so close to them, or as a rabbit ran across the drive just before their feet.

It was a curious fact that these two friends, who were accustomed to discuss everything together with the frankness of constant companionship, should never have discussed the character or even the appearance of the Rector's nieces. Julian, it is true, had occasionally made some remarks about Ella, with

which Roger had entirely disagreed, or Roger had hazarded some remark about Olive only to find himself flatly contradicted by Julian.

This evening the subject seemed to be avoided by mutual consent, and the two friends chatted on less interesting topics till bedtime.

CHAPTER V.

Vain is the effort to forget.
Some day I shall be cold, I know,
As is the eternal moon-lit snow
Of the high Alps, to which I go—
But ah, not yet, not yet!

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

A LONG day spent in the open air is generally supposed to be conducive to slumber, but this did not prove to be the case with Roger Osborne or Julian De Tressanay the night after the pic-nic to Witten Forest.

Julian lost himself in a series of visions, wherein a graceful form and a face with the most beautiful dark eyes was the principal figure. It was in vain that he passed his hand impatiently over his eyes, as if to shut it out; it recurred perpetually. He grew half irritated as he wondered why he should think so much about this girl; she was very pretty, but when the time came for him to love, the object of his devotion was to be

very different from Olive. She was to be wise, and animated with the same interests and ideas as himself. Beauty and sweetness of disposition belonged to this ideal as a matter of course. Now Olive was hardly educated at all in the higher sense of the word; and all she wished for was to be amused and petted all her life. Yet, had not her words that day showed that new thoughts and a more serious feeling had been awakened in her mind; had she not tried to do something for others? Was it her fault if no one had taught her before that there were higher duties in life than to think only of her own ease? And De Tressanay was again overwhelmed by a sense of melting tenderness, when he thought of her working and hurting her soft fingers for the sake of some unknown child. If the attempt had been a failure, it did not detract from the goodness of the motive. Most efforts were at first unavailing and disappointing. Yet she said sometimes she would not change nor

take any trouble; but then she could not be expected to alter her whole habit of thought and life at once, and she always said these things before Roger, who seemed to delight in provoking her to these statements; she did not say these things nearly so often when he was not in hearing. But what was it all to him? Julian thought again. Why could he not leave off thinking about her altogether, and why did his books and political theories occupy his mind less than they had done three weeks ago? And why did they seem to grow cold and shadowy when he watched the warm colour mount to Olive's face, or when she raised her dreamy eyes to his? It could not be that he was in love; and here De Tressanay again passed his hands over his forehead, and took some rapid turns up and down the room. It was impossible, he hoped it was impossible. Their dispositions were so utterly different; he must be suffering from a fit of sheer folly to imagine such a feeling possible. It could only be the

natural admiration which her unusual beauty and simplicity evoked. That would pass, and he would fall back to his usual state of thought and feeling.

Whereupon for the hundredth time, Julian passed in review all the course of that day and several others, trying to recall every look and smile of this fascinating girl, with whom he was so far from being in love, he thought.

Meanwhile Roger's mind was agitated by a somewhat similar train of thought. He was more ready than Julian to recognise the symptoms of a feeling stronger than admiration, but like De Tressanay, he wished that he could be mistaken.

"I am afraid," he thought to himself, as he stood at the window and looked out into the clear starlight night, "I am afraid that sweet face of Ella Malloney's will disturb my peace of mind. Who could resist that pathetic expression? who could help watching her tender ways to her uncle and aunt and Olive? She seems always to know what

everybody wants before they are aware of it themselves. But it is utter madness of me to sentimentalize like this. I who thought that my very soul was seared by disappointment, I who have turned away from every chance of that chapter of my life being reopened. What should two such butterfly creatures as Ella and I have to do with one another? She dreads cares, and has a morbid horror of responsibilities. I trouble about nothing, and the plan succeeds admirably for us both as free agents. It would be a ruinous system for a married pair, one of whom, at least, must accept cares and responsibilities. It would be folly, I suppose with my income; I have plenty for myself, but not enough to make life what it should be for a being like Ella; it would be enough perhaps for a hard-working, practical wife, a type hardly suited to me. Ella could only think, as I do, of the ornamental side of things, and would have, of course, no more notion of economy than I have. And one

fine morning we should be found dead of want, like two improvident butterflies. Besides, she likes talking to me well enough and gives herself up to be taken care of as it were, but no deeper feeling I am sure has stirred the calmness of her childlike eyes. How sweet they are, too. I had better go away, and try and forget them. A fortnight in the Tyrol might help me to regain my usually equable state of mind. It is a horrid bore; I hate going. How I shall hate saying good-bye. I will start to-morrow without saying it. How pretty she looked with those berries in her hat. I was nearer the mark than I was aware when I compared Julian and myself to those Kentucky fish. Here, however the comparison ends, for we do not hear of their acquiring their eyesight; perhaps that is after all a doubtful advantage. Julian, too. I hope to goodness he is sound. He seems to like Olive. It would be a misfortune, for they are utterly unsuited to one another. He is so earnest and takes things

so desperately *au grand sérieux*. Dear old fellow, he would break his heart if he were disappointed in what he expected to be happiness. He had better come with me to the Tyrol—if I go."

With this reflection Roger at last fell asleep, but only to wander through a long dream or rather nightmare, which ended by his thinking that he and Ella were wintering on the top of one of the snowy peaks of the Tyrol without any hut or protection. Ella was wearing a white evening dress, and he was trying to reach a string of leaves and berries to wrap round her.

Presently came the dawn, flushing across the pale silvery sky ; then came the full fresh light of the sunlit morning dispelling feverish imaginings and wearisome dreams alike.

For a while, however, one hovers uncertain, scarcely remembering what was the dream to be forgotten or the resolution to be held fast and acted on by and bye.

Perhaps the clear daylight illuminates that

which has to be held on to and remembered, too clearly. Perhaps Roger Osborne thought so as he looked out on the smooth lawns bathed in dew, and away to the grassy slopes in the park glittering in the early sunlight. He sighed very regretfully, thinking that by the following morning he should be far away from the pleasant scene which he had grown to like so well.

His resolution to leave that very day, however, was unshaken, but although it was present to his mind the whole time, he made no allusion to it during breakfast. He tried to make an attempt once, but he had never found so much difficulty in introducing a subject before.

After breakfast he took a turn up and down the garden, and discovered that Marchcroft had never looked quite so pretty and delightful as at that moment when he was about to leave it. Re-entering the library and finding De Tressanay busy over some letters, Roger sauntered up to the window

and watched a couple of squirrels running up and down in an old cedar for some minutes, but they did not seem to help him at all in breaking his intelligence to his friend. At last he said, still looking out of the window, so that De Tressanay could not see his face as he spoke—

"What do you think, Julian, of taking a trip abroad?"

"Abroad, Roger? Who do you mean?"

"You and me; both of us."

"Not me, Roger. I could not go. I must be at Marchcroft for some time to come. I could not go, even if I wanted to."

"I do not suppose you want to particularly, but it would be better for you."

"I cannot possibly."

A short silence ensued, during which Roger carefully tracked the flight of a body of wood pigeons across the park. He lost sight of them in a few moments and resumed—

"I do not like deserting you, Julian, but

I think you are getting tolerably settled down here, so I have almost made up my mind to join Malcolm Brown in the Tyrol. If I start this afternoon I should have a fortnight or so there with him."

"Oh! really," said De Tressanay.

He had stopped writing, and sat balancing a paper knife in his hand and the noise it made as it struck now and again on the table was the only sound to be heard through the room. Julian had a sudden apprehension of Roger's reason for taking this unexpected step. He thought in his heart that it was the best thing his friend could do. He could not, therefore, urge him to stay, yet he could not urge him to go; he did not like parting with him, and he felt himself that the idea of going would be abhorrent, so all he could say was "Really!" and he said it again.

Roger still stood looking out of the window, he was growing so absorbed in his own thoughts that he hardly saw the sloping meadows and spreading trees before him. It

was such a difficult question to decide upon. He imagined that he would have given anything for some unforeseen event to render his departure immediate and inevitable; it was so hard to deprive himself deliberately of the sight of the face and the clear eyes which had come to make such a difference in his life.

"Brown says the weather there is splendid," he continued, after a long pause.

He was trying hard to conceive any place but Marchcroft being endurable.

"Really," said Julian again.

"What is the matter, Julian?" Roger asked, with some warmth, "can you not advise a fellow what to do?"

Roger would have given anything for De Tressanay to have made up his mind for him, it was really most annoying for him to sit there and say next to nothing.

"My dear fellow," began De Tressanay soothingly, "of course I shall miss you horribly, but"—

"Why, there's the Rector coming up," interrupted Roger.

"Now?"

"Yes."

Roger turned away from the window at last and took up a railway guide. He turned over the leaves, but he was either very absent or wanting in his usual skill in unravelling its complicated instructions, for he was still searching through its contents when Mr. Selby was announced.

After a cordial greeting had passed between them, the Rector explained the object of his early visit.

"I wanted to tell you, De Tressanay," he said, "that the annual cottage garden flower show was to have been held at Mannington, but last evening the secretary, who manages the affair, came over in some perplexity to tell me that for some urgent reason Colonel Philips had been obliged to retract his invitation, and it struck me that you might like to have it held here."

"It is the very thing of all others I should like," answered De Tressanay, "it will be such an opportunity to see something of the people."

"I thought you would not be displeased at the suggestion," returned Mr. Selby, his face beaming with satisfaction.

"Displeased? I am so much obliged to you, of course I could know nothing about it."

Mr. Selby launched forth into an account of the flower shows and dilated on the success which had usually attended them, and on the numbers of people who looked forward to the occasion from year to year.

"A great number of farmers, too, generally attend these shows," he continued, "in fact it is quite a fête for the whole neighbourhood."

"We will make it a fête, indeed," said Julian, and he plunged at once into all sorts of schemes for making the entertainment as attractive as possible.

Mr. Selby's experience and suggestions were invaluable, and Roger evinced as eager an interest in the affair as if he had never thought of starting for the Continent that very afternoon.

"Mr. Osborne's taste will be of great assistance in the arrangement of the tents," remarked Mr. Selby, rising to depart.

"But he is going away," said De Tressanay, with a forlorn look on his face as he suddenly remembered his friend's announcement, "he is going to start to-day for the Tyrol."

Mr. Selby looked up in amazement.

"I am not going to do anything of the kind," returned Roger, with sudden energy. "A friend out there wants me to join him, but now if I can be of any use to Julian in this matter, I shall not think of going."

"I am so awfully glad," answered Julian, with a sigh of relief.

So was Roger "awfully glad." Instead of an event happening to force him away,

here was an excuse to stay and help De Tressanay, and he caught at it with childish delight.

"It would be a pity to go away just now," said Mr. Selby, "when the country is so pleasant, though, of course, the Tyrol is very attractive."

"I think it's an atrocious hole," returned Roger emphatically to Mr. Selby's astonishment.

Osborne did not offer any explanation, however, of this sweeping statement. The Rector took his leave, and De Tressanay and Roger spent the rest of the morning in talking over what should be done on the occasion of the flower show.

It may be remembered that De Tressanay had no near neighbours at Marchcroft with the exception of his friends at the Rectory; but the more distant residents had begun by this time to consider the fact that he had now fully entered into possession of the Manor, and carriage after carriage had found

its way through the long avenue of beech trees to the house.

De Tressanay turned over the cards which had accumulated in the old china bowl on the hall table.

"We will drive and return some of these visits," he said, "and leave invitations to some of the people for luncheon on the day of the flower show."

This proposal was carried out. They had a long drive; Osborne handled the reins, and Viper, by her constant indulgence in shying, kicking and other similar freaks, fully justified the character she had brought with her to Marchcroft.

They chatted on many topics, and now having paid their last visit and turned their faces towards home, they fell into rather a serious conversation.

"It is wonderful," Julian was saying, "how soon one may feel quite settled down in a new place."

"Yes," returned Roger, "you seem to be

taking root rather rapidly here. In time you will exactly realize the little picture I drew of your future self when you came to me with the great news."

"It was great news to me, effecting, as it did, an entire change in my habit of life."

"And by degrees habit of thought."

"No, no, Roger, never that."

"It will be impossible to prevent it, Julian. Your theories are inapplicable to the people of Marchcroft, and as you will have no others to deal with, if you go on living there, your former ideas will eventually grow rusty from gradual disuse."

"I object altogether to that statement. I hope you do not think that this one parish is to be the boundary of my thoughts. My former ideas, as you call them, must be kept alive by something wider than that, though I hope in time even my very prejudiced neighbours may listen to some new notions. It must be a very exceptional place after all. The whole condition of the people is so

different from what I expected to find in the country."

"Yes, it is really a pity fate did not make you master of Henwood; was not that the name of the place we saw from the top of that hill? It seemed a delightful locality; some thousands of miners with a wretched-looking set of houses would naturally have been far pleasanter than Marchcroft, with its pretty cottages and model farms, and where the people are all ready to lecture you and keep you in order."

"There might be a chance of doing something at Henwood," said De Tressanay meditatively.

"Shall we turn round now and see?" asked Osborne. "Viper seems very uneasy about going home, perhaps she feels a call too. My opinion is that the best place for her would be at the bottom of one of the deepest pits there," he added as the beast put back her ears and pulled violently as something came rattling up behind them.

"Really though, Roger, I am so glad you spoke. It may be possible to find out what can be done there in time."

"I am so sorry the unlucky words passed my lips. You have a delightful place as free from misery as any spot on earth can be. Why not enjoy it in peace?"

"But I do not want peace and rest," answered Julian, with such emphasis as to make Viper bound from one side of the road to the other, "that will be all very well," he continued, far too absorbed in the subject under discussion to notice the animal's vagaries, "if I live to be old, then I may look forward to a period of rest like a short Indian summer before sinking into the grave. Now my energies are strong, and the blood stirs in my veins. I could not rest or take life as languidly as you do, or, as I think sometimes, you pretend to."

Osborne shrugged his shoulders.

"I am the outcome," he said, "of culture, and live, as far as possible, in harmony with

the beauty and refinement of life. You, on the contrary, are like a simple and strong product of nature which must sweep along in a straight course, and," he added, with a laugh, "tear down the flimsy fabric of dreams which we have reared if it happen to lie on your path."

"Yet you often tell me that I feed on theories and do not realize the practical working of things, though it seems to me it is those, who think as I do, who are really practical. We face the facts and ills of life and try to find some remedy for them, while on your own admission you take refuge from them in the 'baseless fabric of a dream.' Your dream is shattered, and what then?"

"We find another and wrap ourselves round in that," said Roger, with provoking coolness.

"Wilfully blinding yourselves to the fact that it must some day be torn to shreds, like those which have comforted your souls previously."

"That tearing to pieces is an unpleasant process," remarked Roger.

They were approaching the Rectory, and he could not help thinking to himself that he had better have gone to the Tyrol. A dream was pleasant enough while it lasted; but would not this dream fade into the autumn air like another which had dissolved in such bitter pain, one spring many years ago.

"Shall we stop here?" asked De Tressanay. "I rather want to consult Mr. Selby about two or three things."

Roger did not answer; but he tightened the reins and forced Viper into a slower pace. He had much better have gone to the Tyrol he thought to himself again; but how glad he was that he was not just starting.

At that moment two bright faces looked over the little gate at the end of the shrubbery. There were the two girls with their hands full of flowers.

"We thought it was you," said Olive.

"Won't you come in and have some tea?" asked Ella.

This offer was accepted with pleasure; every trace of previous indecision having vanished.

They had tea under the great cedar tree. De Tressanay seemed to have forgotten the important points he had wanted to discuss with the Rector. There were so many pleasant reminiscences of the previous day's pic-nic to be talked over. At last he bethought himself of inviting Mr. and Mrs. Selby and their nieces to luncheon on the day of the flower show, saying that he hoped to see a good many of his new neighbours on the same occasion.

"I am also thinking of asking the farmers to luncheon at an earlier hour," he said, "and I want to have a tea and plenty of amusements for the poor people."

Olive assumed a haughty pout.

"And will they fill up the park, and shall we have to go and help amuse them?" she

inquired. "It will be like one of those dreadful school treats Jane has at home."

"Indeed, it will not be like a school treat, Miss Malloney, and you shall not be troubled with entertaining any of the people if you do not like it," answered Julian as a slight cloud of vexation passed over his face.

"I cannot bear playing games," she said looking up with a deplorable, yet penitent expression, which melted Julian at once. "I suppose we may come up and help arrange the flowers? We always used to for Mr. De Tressanay when there was anything going on."

"I shall be delighted," interposed Roger, "if you will come and assist in that. I answer at once, because De Tressanay would never know if the tables were decorated or not."

Julian had launched into a train of thought far removed from such trivial details.

"It will be so interesting to see if a care-

fully organized day of pleasure for the poor people cannot be made a success in the country. Do you not think, Mr. Selby, that that class of people in England lead such dull, if not sad, lives? Even when tolerably well off they have no recreation. Their lives seem bounded by a tedious monotony which it is impossible for them to break through."

"What you say is very true, De Tressanay, and too often their attempts at breaking this monotony have direful consequences."

"That is just it. Human nature has an inborn desire and capacity for enjoyment, and the sense must find its vent. The grand plan would be to provide harmless, perhaps improving, enjoyments."

"It would be nice for them to enjoy themselves," said Olive, who had been listening quite seriously. "I should not mind, if one might look on and not be expected to do all sorts of things."

"I was sure you would be anxious for

their enjoyment when you really thought of it," said De Tressanay very eagerly, as if the approval or disapproval of Miss Olive Malloney were of great consequence in the matter.

"I do not say I feel anxious," she returned slowly, raising her eyes as she spoke. "I only said I should not mind."

"You had better be careful, Miss Malloney; De Tressanay is slowly making a convert of you," remarked Roger. "You will wake some morning and find yourself as great an enthusiast as he is."

Olive coloured slightly.

"I do not believe you care for anything," she said with a haughty toss of her head.

"Oh, yes I do. I care for amusing myself."

"I wonder you find enough to amuse you here."

"Mr. Osborne was thinking of going to the Tyrol, I believe," interposed Mr. Selby.

"Were you really?" asked Ella earnestly.

"Oh, no," answered Roger—he thought

he must have been mad to think it possible to go—" a friend wanted me to join him, but Julian could not spare me before the flower show."

"Shall you go then?"

"Oh, no, I have quite given it up."

And Roger thought that Ella looked pleased when she heard this, and the bare idea of going away grew intolerable.

"I am afraid we ought to be starting," said De Tressanay at length, "if you are ready, Roger."

"I feel a little revived," he answered. "You do not know what an exertion it is to drive De Tressanay's new horse," he said to Olive.

"I thought men were not so easily tired."

"But it is not only the bodily fatigue that is very great, it is such a wear and tear to one's nerves."

"I should be ashamed to say I was frightened at a horse if I were a man."

"I am dreadfully frightened at Viper."

"I thought men did not care for a very quiet horse."

"But I am a dreadful coward, Miss Malloney."

Olive glanced at him disdainfully, but Ella turned an imploring look on Julian, and asked—

"Is he really, Mr. De Tressanay?"

"Oh! he is a deplorable coward," was the answer.

"About everything?"

"Yes, everything."

"Mr. Osborne," called Mrs. Selby at that moment from the other side of the lawn, "I want you to give me your opinion about this flower bed."

Roger rose immediately, and walked across to where she was standing. He had become a great favourite of Mrs. Selby's, and she had a firm belief in his taste. As soon as he had gone, Julian said—

"He told you a story the other day, it is my turn now."

"Do tell us a story," said Olive, but Ella's face looked disturbed, and she said nothing.

"I will begin as he did," answered Julian. "'Once upon a time,' Roger and I were at a meeting; it would be no use, Miss Malloney, to attempt to describe what it was like, or what sort of people were there that night; you could not imagine it, and I hope you will never see anything like it. Many of the people, however, were not so bad as they looked; I had known some of them for a good while. I had just been speaking, and they had been very attentive."

"What had you told them?" asked Olive.

"Nothing very deep. I had been begging them to save their money instead of wasting it at the public-house, and trying to show them that they might be better employed than in getting drunk and beating their wives; then I looked at my watch, and finding it was late, I said the meeting was over,

and they might go home. I got down from the platform to speak to some of the people, but in a few minutes I found that my watch and chain were gone. I jumped upon the platform again, and made a stirring harangue on the wickedness of robbing in general, and of robbing me in particular. It stirred them up with a vengeance, for a good many of them were rather friendly towards me, and the rest got excited, but the frenzy reached its height as they caught sight of a man trying to slip out of the room unobserved. They set up a fearful yell, and tried to catch him, but he slipped through their hands and managed in some extraordinary way to get up on the platform. One man below seized a piece of a broken bench—there were plenty broken by that time—and hurled it after him, but Roger, who had been vainly trying to quiet the mad crowd, saw it coming, and raised his arm to save the man. The people scrambled up the platform to get hold of the unfortunate wretch; so mad were they, it

was a chance what they might do to any one who tried to protect him, and they did not know Roger, but Roger kept them all at bay, simply by his determined face and coolness. There he stood with a light cane in one hand and his other arm hanging down helplessly, and the thief cowering behind him. I was jammed in a corner, and mad as I was to get out, I could not move for some moments. Some policemen soon arrived, and the crowd gradually dispersed; my watch and chain were in the man's pocket. Many people would risk their lives for a friend, but there are not so many who would face a mad mob to save a thief."

Roger and Mrs. Selby had returned to the group by the cedar tree just before De Tressanay finished his story; he had grown excited with his subject, and a glow was on his face. Roger leant back on the bench; then in his most languid manner, as if he were tired of the long story, he said—

"A mangled man is such an unpleasant

spectacle; it is always worth a little trouble to avoid it."

"A broken arm was a trifling inconvenience, I suppose," said Mr. Selby.

"That was rather a bore," answered Roger, "but it got well again after a time, and I had a little reprieve from De Tressanay's lectures."

"What became of the thief?" asked Ella, who had been listening with rapt attention.

"He spent a certain period of time in prison," answered De Tressanay, "and Osborne, who you know never exerts himself, used to go and visit him. He came out in due course, and has lived ever since in Roger's service. Now he has become his confidential servant, and Osborne leaves everything in his care. I believe he has never betrayed his trust."

"Why should he?" asked Roger; "he has everything he wants. The reason why people steal is often because they have not anything they want. When he came out of prison I

gave him a watch and chain, and said, 'Now you need never take one that doesn't belong to you again.' Why do you laugh, Mrs. Selby? I assure you it was a splendid cure."

"I think I may well laugh," she said, "if he had taken a fancy to anything of yours, Mr. Osborne, should you have presented him with a duplicate?"

"Yes," said Ella; "what should you have done? I was just thinking of your diamond studs."

"There was no risk of that sort," he replied, "Ned Trotter has a delicate sense of the general fitness of things. He feels that in his position in life, diamond studs are not suitable to his personal decoration, but a watch is essential. A man must know the time."

"But why do you go to such places; I mean to places where such dreadful things happen?" asked Ella, reproachfully.

"It is very silly, is it not? I have got into a foolish habit of always running after

De Tressanay. You see he is such a little puny fellow, he wants somebody to look after him."

"This Ned Trotter must be a remarkable character," said Mr. Selby, reflectively.

"He is, indeed," replied Osborne, "if you saw him you would say his appearance was equally remarkable. He has become such a good servant that I think sometimes he ought to get a better place. Do you not think he had better keep himself in readiness to replace old Job when he gets past his work?"

"Yes," answered Mr. Selby, "I should advise De Tressanay to have him down that Job may train him in his own ways. I should like to see his face when he hears the history of Ned's antecedents."

And this idea amused the whole party so much that peals of laughter rang through the quiet garden.

At last De Tressanay and Osborne rose to take their leave.

"Good-bye, Miss Malloney," said Julian, as he shook hands with Olive, "I hope you liked my story as well as you did that one of Osborne's."

"No," she said, rather defiantly, "I liked his best."

"But I like yours," said Ella.

"De Tressanay is such a fellow to invent," interposed Roger, "I found my story in a book in the British Museum, so it must be true."

CHAPTER VI.

* * * * * *

And wandered far and farther still,
They trod the vale and crossed the hill
And into fairy land.

SEVERAL days were still to elapse before the flower show. Having given up his intended trip to the Tyrol, Roger Osborne put aside all thoughts of prudential arguments on the subject of his feelings towards Ella Malloney. He had tried to go away, he thought to himself, but it seemed as if fate had willed that he should stay. Consequently he ceased to struggle, and gave himself up to this strange current, which was sweeping over his life and carrying away its old landmarks.

It is strange how easy it is to acquire at sudden blind confidence in fate, when some slight circumstance causes us to tread in the path which we are longing to follow. We

stand at the turn and gaze down the pleasant, devious road, but hesitate to follow it at once. Some obstacle appears on the other track, the track which it would be perhaps wiser to follow; fate does not, we think, urge us to overcome this impediment, on the contrary, she means it as a sign that we should follow it no more. We turn from it, and follow the flitting butterflies, and seek the scented blossoms on the enchanted road where we think she is tenderly leading us. If the path becomes rough and stony, and beset with thorns, we do not say it was our fault for choosing to thread its ways, but that we could not help it; fate led us onward.

Roger Osborne yielded to his apparent destiny with a good grace.

De Tressanay threw himself heart and soul into the arrangements for the fête. He was determined that it should be a great success, that it should inaugurate auspiciously an acquaintance with the dwellers on his estate, and with many of his neighbours. He had

also various matters of business to attend to in connection with his new property; and while he was holding some long interviews with his lawyers, and trying to master the contents of some formidable-looking documents, Osborne took the opportunity of paying several visits to the Rectory for the purpose of sketching. He had expressed a wish to make a sketch of the place some time before, and the two girls had begged him to do one for them, "then," they said, "we shall have something nice to look at when we go home." Roger promised willingly, and the work was to be begun.

As he walked down in the fresh morning sunshine, his thoughts travelled back over the pleasant weeks which had rolled away so quickly since De Tressanay and himself had first trod the road down to the Rectory, now grown so familiar to them, and then he pondered over the changes which had struck his own feelings within that short lapse of time.

"And Julian, too," he reflected, "I cannot but think that he admires Olive more every day. I suppose it is hopeless to attempt to stem the tide, but I confess it is rather a woeful disappointment to me. I wanted a very different wife for him. Will this girl ever be able to appreciate and admire him sufficiently? The only hope will be that if she cares for him, she may improve; I fancy sometimes she has latent talents which might be brought out. They say she could draw, it would be something if she could be induced to cultivate that one taste. Happy idea! I will try and make her, though she delights in contradicting me in every way."

With this new scheme occupying his mind, he entered the shrubbery gate; as he approached he heard Ella singing, and slackened his pace in order to catch every note as it came floating through the open windows. He could not hear the whole of what she sang, only the words, "and into fairy land," reached him once and again like a

dreamy refrain. Into fairy land, yes ; the hand is loosed from the rudder, the sails are filled with the light breeze, and he is drifting fast thither, but he has shut his eyes to the future, and the waves must bear him where they will.

"Good-morning, Mr. Osborne, I am glad it is fine for you to begin your sketch at last," said Mrs. Selby, welcoming him at the low window. "Which view of the house are you going to choose?"

"That requires some serious consideration," he answered, looking round the garden; "I wish you would all come out and give me your advice."

Mrs. Selby, Ella and Olive came out through the window.

"We have a right to give advice," said Olive, "because the picture is to be ours, is it not, Mr. Osborne?"

"Certainly, if you care for it when it is done."

"Of course we shall care for it," said Ella, with a half-reproachful look.

"Oh, yes, we shall like it," said Olive, "because if it is not very good it will remind us of the Rectory, and I like all this," she added, glancing round as far as she could see.

"Really Olive," interposed Mrs. Selby, "you are very rude to Mr. Osborne; the picture could not be otherwise than good, I am sure."

"Miss Malloney is very severe to me always," said Roger, laughing, "I wish you would come out and show me how to do it," he added to Olive.

"What do you mean?" she asked defiantly.

"Come and make a sketch too, I know you could if you tried."

"But I have hardly ever tried a real sketch."

"Would you not like to try now?"

"Do, Olive," urged Ella.

Olive hesitated for a moment.

"I should do it so badly," she said.

"Everything must have a beginning, and I promise not to laugh."

Olive looked at him indignantly, but she was almost persuaded to try.

"I have no paints or paper."

"I have plenty of everything here; now let us choose the best place."

They walked across and up and down the old garden, bright with the clear autumn sunlight. One particular view commended itself to them all. Roger put up his easel, brought out a chair.

"Now Miss Malloney," he said, "everything is ready for you to begin; you are to distinguish yourself you know."

"But I cannot take your easel, what shall you do?"

"Oh! never mind me, I can paint anyhow."

Olive flushed, she did not like him to assert his superiority in this easy way of his. She would draw, she thought, she would show him that he was not the only one who could sketch, and she sat down with a strange new determination rising in her mind.

Roger had intended to pique her pride, and rouse her ambition, and he had succeeded. He watched the changing expressions of the beautiful face with amused interest, and felt convinced that under the indolent, dreamy surface, lay a force of character and powers hitherto almost unsuspected.

He took a seat meanwhile beside her on an old stump of a tree, partly overgrown with ferns.

"Now I can see what you are doing, and tell you what is wrong," he said making a few strokes on his paper with a light, firm touch.

Olive coloured again; she felt a strong inclination to push away the easel and give it all up. Osborne had no right, she thought, to speak to her in that off-hand way; why should she do it wrong? but as she saw the outline growing beneath his rapid strokes, the question again rose burningly within her, Why should she not excel also, why should she not do things which should be admired

and praised like his? But she found she was only at the very beginning as she laid a few wavering, uncertain touches on her paper. As long as he was so superior in the art to her, he had a right to teach; he was her master and her pride was subdued.

Roger meant to maintain his supremacy.

"She requires a firm hand," he thought to himself, hardly able to repress a smile at the thought of the indignation which Julian would have shown at his behaviour; and thoroughly assuming the office of instructor, he reproved and encouraged his pupil alternately, till in the course of a couple of hours a very fair beginning had been made.

Olive really posse ssed great talent, and she was spurred on now by a new ambition as well as by her pride, which revolted from Roger's easily assumed superiority.

At last the luncheon bell rang and she rose reluctantly.

"You must go on," said Roger, "you will soon improve."

Olive had been looking at her own attempt with some complacency, without paying any attention to Roger's sketch. He held it up for her to see. Her heart sank when she looked at it; should she ever be able to paint like that? Her own work seemed suddenly a miserable failure, and tears almost came into her eyes.

"You must not expect to do much at first," said Roger pitilessly as he shut up his paint box.

"I am going to do it quite as well as that —and better too some day," she retorted with a desperate attempt at her old disdainful manner, as she turned towards the house.

"Do stay to luncheon, Mr. Osborne," begged Mrs. Selby.

"Thank you very much. I must go back; I left poor De Tressanay in the hands of two lawyers. I must go and see if they have quite finished him off by this time. He looks so unutterably wretched during these interviews."

Osborne nevertheless felt almost tempted to stay; had he not devoted himself to Olive's improvement for Julian's ultimate benefit the whole morning, and thus sacrificed Ella's society to a great extent?

"You were singing when I came, Miss Malloney," he said still lingering, "and I missed it all."

"I was only trying a new song. I will sing it to you when I know it."

It was new to her this song, and it was new to Roger, but the words were soon to grow familiar enough.

They were both silent for a moment. Roger suddenly roused himself.

"I must go," he said, "good-bye, Mrs. Selby. May I come to-morrow and go on with this sketch?"

"By all means, I want to see it finished."

"Thank you. Good-bye," he said again, then turning as he lifted his hat he added, "You can go on working at yours, Miss Malloney, and I will give you another lesson to-morrow."

"He is very conceited," said Olive stooping her proud little head at the window as she entered the house.

The next day Roger again came down to the Rectory.

"I thought I had better come rather earlier," he said apologetically to Mrs. Selby, "as this fine weather may not last and I am not satisfied with my work of yesterday and want to begin a fresh sketch. Are you ready, Miss Malloney?" he asked, as Olive did not seem to be making any preparations.

Olive resented his taking it for granted that she was to come out and draw.

"I will come when I am ready," she said.

"That will never do," returned Roger, "it never does to disturb one's work, so we must begin together, and it will be a good lesson for you again to-day to see how I do the outline."

"If I am to draw well I suppose I had better," thought Olive after a moment's struggle, and she began to get ready.

"I think, Miss Malloney," said Roger to Ella who was helping him to make his preparations in the garden, "it would be such an improvement if you would let me introduce you into this painting; just stand close to the trunk of this tree, yes, just like that."

"I shall be delighted to," she said, it was such a nice, novel idea to have her picture taken, "only you must put in Olive too."

"Oh no! she is going to work."

"Never mind that, I could not be done without her, we have never been separated."

"Well, I can only give her a few minutes' holiday."

"I shall not draw a second longer than I like," interposed Olive who had just come out and overheard this last speech.

Roger could not help smiling at this girl who was so defiant and whom he could yet lead so easily.

"I shall like to be in the picture," she added.

"Very well, I will just sketch the outline

very quickly and then I can finish it afterwards, so that I need not disturb you when you are once settled to work."

They tried two or three positions, at last he was satisfied and began his new sketch.

An artist could hardly have wished a fairer subject than the quaint old house, the spreading trees with their massive trunks, and the two girls in the foreground in the fresh grace of their youth and beauty. Roger would have been content to have spent many hours of that bright autumn day over his easel, if he could have kept that one slight figure with fair rippling hair before him, and heard a few words from her musical voice now and again.

In a little while however he declared himself satisfied and Olive began her drawing. She felt far more interested in it than on the previous day and progressed still more rapidly, while Ella looked first at one sketch and then at another and flitted to and fro like a butterfly which has nothing to do but

to enjoy its bright life in the sunshine. Shortly before luncheon time De Tressanay came down, and Olive flushed with pleasure as he expressed his admiration of her work.

"I think it is wonderful," he said, "as you hardly ever tried to sketch from nature before."

"It is owing to her having such a good instructor," said Roger.

"Not at all," returned De Tressanay, quite gravely, "it must be real talent."

"I beg," interposed Osborne, "that you will not turn my pupil's head with your extravagant praise. This is very fair," he said, pointing to a corner of her picture, "but this drawing is faulty. Look at the difference between yours and mine."

It was hard to be scolded before De Tressanay, but her master was right, she saw her shortcomings and began to correct them without a word.

De Tressanay stood dumb with astonishment, both at Roger's audacity in speaking

so peremptorily to this beautiful girl and also at the humble way in which she received his rebukes. He had always thought that Olive possessed a soul for higher things, and now behold, was he not watching its gradual awakening?

He did not speak for a minute or two, then he said—

"I like your picture, Roger, I should think you would have it framed to remind you of Marchcroft when you are in London in the winter."

"He is going to give it to us, is it not good of him? We will hang it up in our own room at home, and we shall wish ourselves back again when we look at it," said Ella, with a sigh.

"We are not going yet, so we need not talk about it," answered Olive, with an evident resolve not to think of anything disagreeable.

"There is the dog-cart, Roger," said Julian, as the sound of wheels came near,

" we have to go to Marlsham, Mrs. Selby, to see about some things for the flower show."

"You can go on working at this a good deal by yourself, I want to see a good deal more done to it," was Osborne's parting injunction to Olive.

The paint boxes were shut up, the easel folded together, and De Tressanay and Osborne were soon driving on their way to the town.

Again for another morning and yet another, the old Rectory garden was stirred by the sound of eager voices, and the work of the busy artists. Roger's sketch was finished, and Olive was growing quite absorbed in her work. There must be a pause, however, in their studies, for the next day was the day before the flower show so anxiously looked forward to.

Roger took his sketch back with him to the Manor. It was really finished, but he declared that it required a few more touches. The truth was he could not bear to part with

it. Besides the figure of Ella, which it contained, the scene it represented brought back vividly so many words and looks which Roger loved to dwell upon and recall.

"I thought you were going to give away your picture," said Julian, late that evening, as he looked over his friend's shoulder and saw he was adding some light touches to it here and there.

"So I am," answered Roger, "but I wanted to work a little more at it."

He held the painting at a distance before him, handling it tenderly as if he were loath to let it go.

"Ella's figure is very good," observed De Tressanay, "it is wonderfully like."

"The figure is something like," answered Roger, holding it now in one light and now in another. "Of course the face is on too small a scale to do her justice; but what picture," he muttered, half to himself, "could do justice to the face, and to those 'dove's eyes which can make gods foresworn.'"

"He must be very much in love," was De Tressanay's startled, though unuttered comment.

De Tressanay was quite right. Roger Osborne was deeply in love, and moreover he was at last quite aware of it.

Marchcroft Manor presented a very busy scene on the following day. Tents were pitched in the park, flags were fastened up; the whole aspect of the place denoted that some unusual entertainment was about to take place. De Tressanay had begged that Ella and Olive might come up and arrange the flowers, as they had said they often used to do. Mrs. Selby had given her consent to their coming, saying she would walk up with them after luncheon.

Both the girls were eagerly looking forward to taking this part in the preparations.

"It is so long since we have been at the Manor," said Ella, "this sketching has taken so much time."

They walked up to the house and found De

Tressanay and Osborne sauntering up and down on the broad gravel drive, smoking their cigars.

"We thought we should find you hard at work," said Ella.

"We were taking a little rest," replied De Tressanay, "we really have done a great deal."

"That's what he says," interposed Roger; "he sits on a table and smokes and propounds all sorts of irrelevant ideas, leaving me to do all the real work."

"Of course Mr. de Tressanay does all the important part," returned Olive, with a curl of her lip.

"And you think the drudgery good enough for me?" asked Roger.

"Of course, if you like it," she answered.

These two, it seemed, could never keep the peace. Olive had learnt to be submissive to Roger during the drawing lessons, but when pencil and paint brush were once laid aside she delighted in reasserting her independence.

They took a few turns up and down the lawn, when these new friends met, there never seemed a lack of ready topics to discuss.

At last Mrs. Selby said—

"If you are going to arrange flowers you really should begin, the carriage will come for us before you have half done."

They turned towards the house.

"I hope you will think the rooms are improved," said De Tressanay, as they mounted the steps, "and not be horrified at a few innovations. Roger is responsible for all of them."

"It is a mercy," said Roger, "that he has some one to look after him; he would never notice it if the sofas and chairs were turned upside down."

"He thinks about more important matters," returned Olive.

"I do not see that composing a treatise on the 'Abstract Right of Equality of Mankind,'"

"Now, Roger," began Julian, but Roger went on unheedingly.

"As he was trying to do this morning, of course you know he could not manage anything so difficult, is half so important as making one's dwelling place decently habitable. Of course if his theories were all carried out, a long row of wooden benches and deal chairs would be the only befitting furniture."

Olive a few weeks before would have scorned such a suggestion, now she only looked a little puzzled; perhaps as if she were hoping she might get to like them if necessary, while Ella exclaimed—

"How bare and ugly! I do hope, Mr. De Tressanay, that you will change your plans, or that they will never come true."

"Oh! we like this," they both exclaimed the next moment, forgetting all fanciful theories as they entered the house.

Not much had been done, but the few alterations and additions designed by Os-

borne seemed to have wrought a wonderful change. The house had looked before so strangely dull, even gloomy. Julian's predecessor had lived there throughout his long life without giving a thought to decorative improvements. He had spent the last forty years there as a widower, the signs of a mistres' presence had long faded away, and a stern and severe aspect had invaded the old hall and the large, lofty rooms. Very different did it look now, especially as baskets of flowers and ferns covered the tables, glowing with colour and diffusing a fragrant scent.

"You do not object to some changes?" asked Roger, rather quizzically.

"This is better than bare, ugly tables and chairs; indeed it is, Mr. De Tressanay," said Olive, persuasively.

Julian smiled.

"It amuses Roger to see pretty things around him," he said, pretending to regret his deal furniture.

"I thought I should never like to see any alterations here," said Ella. "But it is perfect now; it all looks so much lighter and more cheerful."

"It would never have done to have left Julian here to grope about in the dark," replied Roger. "There he would have moped over his books till I should have found him quite bleached, like a vegetable grown in a cellar."

Julian and Olive laughed till their voices echoed again; but Ella had suddenly become quite grave. She was taking some stephanotis out of one of the baskets, and handling it delicately—

"Are you going back to London?" she asked.

She did not look up, but a pathetic expression quivered across her lips.

"Some day," answered Roger indifferently; but his heart beat faster, for did not the very idea of his future departure sadden her? She could not be quite indifferent to him if

she looked grave at the bare mention of his going away.

Mrs. Selby begged that some easy work might be found for her as she did not pretend to any great proficiency in arranging flowers. She succeeded, however, in filling some vases to her nieces' satisfaction, and thinking she had done a fair share of the work, she went out to see the old gardener's wife who had been ill for some days.

After her departure the preparations went on with unabated vigour. Perhaps Roger and Ella did the most; but Olive gained great praise for her arrangements of flowers and ferns. She looked quite in her element, touching now this blossom and now that with her delicate taper fingers, and she seemed half absorbed in the beauty and heavy perfume of the flowers.

Julian stood about, humbly carrying pots hither and thither as he was told by his more talented friends.

At last the great red lilies glowed against

the old panels in the hall, and the other rooms were bright with rich clusters of blossoms and trailing festoons of creepers, and the artists walked about and surveyed their work with intense satisfaction.

"I had no idea it was so late," exclaimed Ella at last. "Do let us fetch Granny to see the flowers before the carriage comes."

De Tressanay, of course, consented willingly; but he and Roger felt rather taken aback, for the housekeeper still maintained an air of severity towards her new master and his friend. She soon appeared, however; Ella and Olive clinging to her on either side, just as they used to do when they were children. They promenaded her all round, and tried to make her admire the novelties and improvements.

"You see, Miss Ella," Mrs. Mitten allowed, "it is very natural for you to like new things; but I like the old ways best."

"But do say you like these flowers," cried Ella, as they entered the dining-room. "Do

look at the mantelpiece, Mr. Osborne did all that himself."

"I daresay it's very fine, Miss, but the old master never troubled about such things; messing the leaves all over the house too," she added reprovingly as she stooped to pick up some scattered sprays.

"They will be all brushed up in a minute; don't be such a disagreeable old Granny; do say it is lovely."

"I daresay you think so, my dear," she replied as they re-emerged into the hall, "and there's no denying that Mr. Osborne is a very handy young gentleman; but I should say it was more manly-like to be out shooting than a-playing about with flowers, and such-like; that, he should have left to the gardener in my opinion."

They suddenly perceived Roger, who was sitting on one of the window sills, close to them. Ella and Olive laughed merrily.

"Do you hear what Granny says about you?" they asked.

But Granny, thoroughly discomfited, had disappeared through a side door as fast as her aged limbs would carry her.

They sat amongst the bright flowers in the drawing-room and had tea. Still Mrs. Selby did not come.

"I cannot think why Aunt Lucy is so long," said Olive; but she did not look in a hurry to go, as she leaned back in an easy-chair and sipped her tea.

"Nor I," returned Ella, "but she had not seen old Nancy for some days, and when Nancy once begins to talk there is no hope of getting away."

"Julian," said Roger, "do let us persuade Miss Malloney to sing before Nancy stops talking, and Mrs. Selby really comes."

He rose and opened the piano.

"I want to hear what you were singing the other morning, if you will be good enough? You said it was a new song."

"It is; but I know it now," she answered.

She struck a few chords on the old in-

strument, its notes were somewhat quavering; but the tones were still sweet and harmonised with the pure young voice which rose above them. She sang through the verses of the song; she sang the last line, "and into fairy land," and again and yet again the words were repeated; they floated through the room, and they rang in the ears of the listeners.

Truly they all seemed bound for fairy land, or were, perhaps, hovering on its outskirts. Could they but stay in that delicious dim region where the long glad day was tinged with golden light, the dream of one hour only surpassed by the still sweeter dream of the next!

Roger sat lost in restful delight.

"Do not stop," he begged when the song was finished, and Ella sang on, one song after another. The time sped away, the glow of the setting sun began to be reflected on the sky.

"Come and look at the sunset," said

Julian to Olive, "we can see it so well from the hall."

The light streamed in a glorious flood through the west window. Olive sat on the old faded cushion, Julian stood, and both gazed out into the western sky. Masses of red and golden clouds floated above the edge of the horizon; some tall poplars in the foreground stood out against the bright light, their straight trunks and close-set branches showing clearly on the glowing setting, while pale roseate streaks strewed the upper portion of the heavens.

"Is it not beautiful?" asked Julian. "Look at those airy, wisp-like clouds floating on the pale blue sky. It is always a fresh marvel to me to see the great bounty of Nature. She lavishes a wealth of colouring and form, past the imaginings of the greatest earthly artists, there it is, whether we care to employ it or no, whether generation after generation passes without learning the lesson she would teach."

"What lesson?"

"Every scene of perfect beauty ought to teach us a lesson," he answered; "it is a revelation of some supreme beauty the fulness of which would be too great for our mortal eyes; it is a lesson which should raise us above the meannesses and trifles of the world. What are our petty jealousies or troubles when we are lifted above them, and can steep our souls in the glories and deep calm of nature? Yet we regard not this deeper aspect, we pass, scarcely raising our eyes to sights such as this, or we look, admire, and forget."

Olive sat and listened with clasped hands. She had often watched the changing scenes of a beautiful sunset before, but this was a revelation to her. It seemed as if it would be profane to look at another sunset carelessly as she used to do; each recurring one would recall the solemn words she had just heard and remind her of the grave cultus which beauty ought to receive.

"Forgive my lecturing," said De Tressanay, suddenly, "I know I have a dreadful way of never stopping when I once begin to talk."

"Do not stop," said Olive, still gazing out at the resplendent clouds, "I want to hear more, you have taught me more than any one else ever has."

Julian was silent for a moment.

"Now the brightness is beginning to fade," he said, "soon the sun will sink, 'Phöbus der Liebende ruht,' you know that poem of Schiller's?"

"I did learn some German once, and I have nearly forgotten it all, but I will learn it again," answered Olive, turning her head and looking at Julian with a humble look in her eyes, "what does that quotation mean?"

"It means that the long race through the heavens is over for the day, and Phœbus the Lover may rest."

The words fell dreamily from Julian's lips,

his whole face was bathed in the glory of the golden light. Olive sat motionless; they both seemed struck with a sudden consciousness that one same and supreme feeling ruled both their souls.

The sound of wheels on the gravel broke the spell. They both started as if suddenly recalled to the common facts of life.

"Do you not want one of these yellow roses?" De Tressanay asked, as the door bell rang. He opened the window and leaning out, gathered a freshly opened blossom. "I fear it will fade like the sunset," he said, for the sky was already paler and the clouds broken and dispersed, floated on, fading into greyness.

"Thank you," said Olive, and she fastened the rose in her dress.

Mrs. Selby had come at the same moment as the carriage; she could not wait, they all said good-bye rather hurriedly, but scarcely a word passed Olive's lips as she drove back to the Rectory.

CHAPTER VII.

For I love you so,
That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot,
If thinking on me then should make you woe.
SHAKESPEARE.

IT was natural that the visitors to Marchcroft on the occasion of the flower show, should spare a few reflections, in some cases not untinged with envy, to Julian De Tressanay's position. Young, full of health and vigour, a beautiful property at his command, it seemed as if fortune had showered upon him every desirable gift. Fortune seemed even to rule the weather on his behalf. For several years past rain had fallen persistently on the occasion, but this time the sky was nearly cloudless, the landscape was steeped in bright sunshine, and the slight sharpness in the air, which was well nigh the only sign of approaching autumn, seemed to invigorate and stimulate, rather than to chill the spirits of the gathering throngs.

Preparations began at a very early hour in the park. Carts and trucks streamed in laden with flowers and vegetables, which were speedily arranged in the spacious tents under the old gardener's superintendence. De Tressanay and Osborne strolled all round for a final inspection, returning to the house just in time to receive some of the first arrivals, the farmers, whom De Tressanay had invited to luncheon at a rather early hour. They and their wives were soon assembled in the long library which had been decorated with so much care on the preceding day.

Julian took his place at the head of the table, while Mr. Selby did the honours at the other end.

The Rector had been rather surprised at Olive requesting that she and Ella might be present at this luncheon, instead of at the one to which they had been formally invited.

"It will not be at all the sort of thing you like," he said, "the room will probably be

hot and crowded, which you always say you cannot bear."

"Never mind about that, let us come," Olive had answered, while Ella, looking up with perfect ingenuousness, said—

"She wants to hear Mr. De Tressanay speak, and so do I."

Therefore as Ella and Olive generally did exactly what they fancied, places were found for them; Olive happened to be seated next to Roger, rather near the end of the table.

Julian's visitors were rather silent at first, but their host's genial manner, and Mr. Selby's familiar and popular countenance soon set them at their ease, and before luncheon was half over, the hum of conversation became loud and general.

Neither Ella nor Olive had ever been at any kind of public meeting, neither had they heard any one in whom they felt an interest make a speech, therefore it was not surprising that their hearts beat considerably faster than usual, when luncheon being over, their

uncle stood up and in a few simple but cordial words, proposed Julian De Tressanay's health.

The toast was heartily responded to, and Julian rose to return thanks.

Just as he was about to speak, Roger observed a head peering through the door which had been left ajar. He rose noiselessly, opened it, and beckoned to a knot of men, the gardener, Richards the bailiff, and others who were anxious to hear the speeches, to come in. They did so, and stood close to the door where they could see all that was going on and hear every word. Roger returned to his seat.

"The more who can hear him the better," he whispered to Olive, and for once Olive bestowed on him a glance of kindly approval.

Julian began to speak. He was strongly excited. It was such a stirring occasion to him, seeing for the first time in his own house, the many neighbours whose interests

he must share, with whose fortunes he must grow more and more identified as years rolled on. He was accustomed to speaking, and to address large audiences, but this was such a different class of people that he could not conquer a certain nervousness. Roger watched his friend anxiously, for Julian's voice sounded faltering and constrained at first. It was only at first however. Julian had a natural gift of eloquence, a natural gift of uttering words which went straight to the minds and hearts of his hearers. All hesitation ceased and a charm seemed to fall on the listeners, as he stood at the head of the table, a tall, commanding-looking figure, his expressive face in its deep earnestness, giving emphasis to the heartfelt words which flowed from his lips. Roger felt greatly relieved as Julian went on gathering more confidence every moment. His satisfaction soon reached its height for he had never heard his friend speak so well.

Olive sat and listened with breathless in-

terest. Whatever became of the rest of her life, it could never flow on in its old easy current again ; its course had been too deeply stirred by the deep vibrating voice and burning words which sank into her memory with an indelible impression. It was such a contrast, the intense hush of the room after the din of voices which had prevailed a few minutes before, and now but the one voice alone was to be heard breaking the silence, with its searching, sympathetic tones ; holding the listener as if by some irresistible power.

"I must tell you," said the speaker in conclusion, "that I have never lived in the country, so that I have much to learn. A great many things are different from what I had imagined, so that I have something also to unlearn. You must bear with my ignorance and mistakes, I know that my life here entails responsibilities, and is not one to be lived lightly, but to be spent in the earnest hope that neighbours and friends may be the

better for my existence. I want you to look on me not as a man who has happened to become master of an estate, but as a friend who wants to learn your trials and troubles, that he may help you bear them, and thus the sum of them will be lightened, feeling that we all belong to one great brotherhood, in which none has a right to be idle, none has a right to be indifferent to the fortunes of another;" a few more words and he was silent.

A burst of applause broke the hush, the audience had been deeply interested and deeply touched, and it seemed as if they could not give sufficient token of their approval. At last, an elderly man who held one of the largest farms at Marchcroft, got up. He was very wealthy and very shrewd, though of a rough, uneducated type. A man of usually few words, those he used, generally conveyed a strong meaning. Silence reigned again in the anxious expectancy of what Daniel Diggle could be going to say.

"I'm of opinion sir," he began, addressing De Tressanay, "as we ought to thank you for what you have said. The words was rather fine may be, but we can tell what's genuine from a sham, and there was no sham in what you were pleased to say. You spoke right kindly, and I hope we shall get on comfortably together as you say you mean to. What I partickler wanted to say was somethin' as we've heerd about you. Of course we've had a deal of talk about you as was nat'ral, coming here so unexpected and after the old master had been here for so many a year, and as I was a-saying, we heerd as you was one of these radicals, and we don't want no uprootin' here; but as we hears you speak so sensible, we hope you don't neither, and we give you a downright hearty welcome." Here Mr. Diggle was interrupted by shouts of applause, he seemed to take a good share of these signs of approval to himself, for with his face beaming with satisfaction he went on, "I sees that I've said the right

thing, but what I partickler got up to say, for I'm no hand at a speech, I am not making a speech I beg, you sir, to understand, at all, was that as we've drunk the Rector's health, and long life to 'un to be sure, and your health Mr. De Tressanay, that it seems nat'ral we should drink your young friend's there too, as he has been here all along, and stood by you through all your first coming here. That's what I wanted partickler to say, so now down I sit."

This speech, not meant for a speech at all, in worthy Mr. Diggle's mind, was received with shouts of laughter and agreement, and the proposal was carried out with a hearty goodwill.

Perhaps only one person present felt inclined to negative the suggestion, and that was Olive. Why should they trouble about Roger Osborne at all, she asked herself angrily, they ought only to think of one person in the world. "Now," she thought, "he will speak, and he is sure to make every one

laugh and then they will forget Mr. De Tressanay's beautiful speech; they ought not to listen to anyone else," and a quick pang of jealousy shot through her as she saw Roger rise in his easy way, and begin to speak. He first thanked them for their kindness in giving him, a stranger and a visitor, such a kind welcome.

"I feel very proud of it," he said, "not only on my account, but because you give it me as Mr. De Tressanay's friend. And on this subject as I know more than anyone else, I have a right to speak. You take him on trust, judging from the interest he has shown in everything concerning you from the first day he came, and from the words you have just heard him speak, but I know from an experience of several years, that in small things as in great, in days of trouble and disappointment as in days of good fortune and happiness, that he is the truest and most honourable friend that a man can claim for his own. Every day will prove to you the truth of my

words. As to your fear, Mr. Diggle, of his being a radical, and 'uprooting' everything, let me set your mind at ease on that point. If to be a radical, means to try to get to the bottom of every abuse and every misery that underlies the surface of life, Mr. De Tressanay may claim the honour to be so called, for that is what he is always trying to do, to remedy evils, to cure the ills which spring up all round us. That is the only kind of 'uprooting' on which he has ever tried his hand. Instead of 'uprooting' here, he will give his thoughts to sowing and planting. I speak to you as interested in the tilling of the land, is not that better than letting your fields lie fallow, or letting the weeds overrun your furrows? You surely would not refuse the use of a plough, because you have a spade, or the use of a threshing-machine, because you have a supply of flails; and so surely you will recognise Mr. De Tressanay's wisdom and good intentions, when he speaks to you of new ideas, and new improvements.

Again, before sitting down, I must thank you for the kindness you have shown me as Mr. De Tressanay's friend, and before long you will know for yourselves that that is a title to covet, to gain and to prize."

Roger's face had lighted up with enthusiasm as he spoke; his voice was not deep and sonorous like Julian's, but he was strongly excited, more than he cared to show, and the words vibrated from his lips with a ringing penetrativeness which went straight to the hearts and minds of his hearers. They gave vent to their feelings by round after round of applause, it seemed as if their satisfaction would never be appeased, while Julian, flushed at the fresh ovation excited by Roger's words, thanked his friend with a grateful and proud glance.

The cheers subsided at last, the company rose, and De Tressanay, leading the way, begged his visitors to explore the gardens and grounds to their heart's content.

Roger and Olive came out together. Ella

had met her old friends from Ruddock Farm, and, hearing that they had never been through the gardens, she led them away towards the conservatories.

"Do let us get out into the fresh air," said Roger, as they approached the door.

"I did not think about the heat," answered Olive, "but I want to go and look at the tents."

"It is a mercy to get out of that hot room," continued Roger, standing without his hat at the bottom of the steps, the unusual excitement which he had shown had subsided, he had assumed an air of greater nonchalance than ever. "Of all sacrifices I have ever had to make for Julian's sake, I have never been condemned to sit through two luncheons on one day before. He insists upon my coming in to the other state affair, which I suppose will be in less than an hour."

"Will there be more speeches?"

"Oh, no! thank goodness, we shall be spared that."

"I do not see why you should wish to be spared hearing Mr. De Tressanay speak."

"I have heard him often enough."

Olive looked up at him indignantly. Roger laughed quietly when he said—

"He is worth listening to, I allow. Did he not speak splendidly? The people here ought to be proud of him indeed."

The words, uttered with a slight return of energy, brought a glow to Olive's face.

"Then you do really care for Mr. De Tressanay?" she said.

"Care for De Tressanay?" Roger asked.

If he had been asked if he cared for the fresh air which he breathed, for the bright sunshine overhead, for all the things which form the precious treasure of life, he could hardly have looked more astonished.

"Sometimes I think you do not care for anything."

"I do care for De Tressanay—a little," he said, slowly.

It is curious to observe the special moments

which seem to invite the breaking through of the reserve which hangs over the relations of one human being to another, when such beings have only recently formed acquaintance, and are unconnected by any tie or old association. The most natural time for them to reveal something of their inner thoughts to one another, is in the silence of the woods, or in looking out into the calm of a star-set sky; without either of the occasions, a large gathering often sets an intimate conversation astir. The excitement, which has called the assembly into being, reacts on the spirits of those in the throng, and in the midst of a crowd, engrossed in general preoccupations, the shyest of mortals may forget the *gêne* which oppresses them, when they know that every word they utter can be heard by the other members of the small circle gathered round them. Olive had never felt so inclined to talk unreservedly to Roger.

"Do men have as many friends, and do

they care about them as much as we do?" she asked, as they walked across the lawn.

"I should doubt our having so many friends; we may have more acquaintances with whom we stand on a pleasant, easy footing, which, to outsiders, might pass for friendship. I fancy a real friendship between two men is a deeper and closer thing than an ordinary woman's friendship."

"I do not see why," objected Olive.

"I do not say it always is. Perhaps the reason of its being so sometimes, is that men have generally more to do than women, and, consequently, the time they can spend together is a recreation too short and pleasant to be spent in jealousies and quarrellings."

"Do you and Mr. De Tressanay never quarrel?"

Roger laughed a light, amused laugh.

"The idea of Julian and me quarrelling!" he said, "we are too much to—well we could not quarrel."

"But must women always be jealous and quarrel?"

"I do not know," answered Roger, laughing again, "they are supposed to very often, but you ought to be a better judge than I am."

"I am sure I do not know either; we never have any squabbles at home, and, as for friends, I do not think we know any girls well enough to quarrel with. We are so much away, and nobody could be cross or spiteful at the Rectory."

"I am quite sure that you and your sister need never fear such a danger in your friendships. Your natures are too fine, you are far above the reach of such mean feelings."

"Do you really think so?"

Roger stopped and looked at her, he had been switching the blades of grass as he walked along, and his head was quite turned away, as, with a more vigorous switch of his stick than before, he made the last remark.

He was surprised at her anxiously grave expression.

"Of course I do. I am sure I am not in the habit of paying you empty compliments. Am I, over the drawing lesson for instance?"

"Never mind the drawing; but I am so glad, Mr. Osborne, for that is something to begin with."

"To begin and end with, I should say," he returned, puzzled as to what she could mean.

"Oh, no, no! the end is so far away."

This was another enigma to Roger, but just then some newly arrived neighbours accosted Olive, so it had to remain unsolved.

The real solution was that Olive was growing so dissatisfied with herself that these words of Roger's were a balm to her disturbed feelings, inspiring her with a gleam of distant hope of rising in her now stricter estimation.

The stream of visitors poured in more and more rapidly. Roger busied himself by

showing groups of people, intent upon enjoying themselves, the way to the tents, and there did the honours of the prize potatoes and kidney beans with as much interest as if he had been a gardener himself. From this occupation, however, he was disturbed before long by a pressing message from Julian to come up to the house; it was time for the dreaded luncheon. Mr. Selby had excused himself from this second banquet, so Roger was deputed to take his place. He soon made his way to the bottom of the table, escorting a portly elderly lady, the horizon of whose mind seemed bounded by the events of the neighbourhood.

The principal attention of the guests was naturally concentrated on De Tressanay. Great was the curiosity of the younger members to see the new master of Marchcroft; many were the warnings, serious the good advice which some of the elders would fain have bestowed on him, some were ready to strike up a true and honest friendship

with him; others were ready with fulsome flattery, for was not the object of general observation that day, young, of a striking appearance, and last, though not least, in general consideration, extremely rich?

Julian was happily unconscious of the views which were being formed about his character and prospects. He had already taken a liking to some of his new acquaintances, and some were well worthy of his friendship, while upon all his simple, cordial manners made a most favourable impression.

Conversation flowed freely, and the luncheon passed off with the greatest cheerfulness. When it was over, Julian escorted some of his guests through the gardens into the park, where the entertainment was now at its height.

In one part a brass band was playing inspiriting tunes. Dancing was suggested. The people were rather shy of performing at first, but some of the under-gardeners set the example, and soon long lines of dancers

were executing the mazes of old-fashioned country dances on the smooth green turf, the effect of the best holiday costumes of the women being heightened by the uniforms of a few soldiers home on leave.

The tents were crowded. Ladies in silks and satins, attendant gentlemen, threaded their way amongst the smock frocks and fustian coats of the working men and their wives in their best; all alike showed an interest in the contents of the tents, and discussed the merits of various articles to which prizes were awarded. Later on the excitement would culminate in the award of these prizes to the different winners by the hands of one of the most popular lady patronesses.

Amidst general gaiety and enjoyment the hours of that bright afternoon passed rapidly, and De Tressanay, as he walked to and fro, felt still more sanguine as to the success of wholesome recreation. Schemes for procuring further enjoyments for the inhabitants of Marchcroft and their neighbours

passed rapidly through his mind. He was filled, too, with a sudden elation, feeling that the means for carrying out so many long-dreamed-of ideas were now actually at his disposal.

A smooth portion of turf had been set aside for bowls. A knot of people stood round, but no one seemed to know how to play.

Julian stopped, and began to explain the rudiments of the game. He had not gone far in his explanations when Roger, whom he had lost sight of for some time, came up to him and said—

"A good many fresh people have just arrived, Julian, some of your most aristocratic acquaintances, and they are all asking for you. I did my best to receive and entertain them, for I did not know where you were, but they were by no means satisfied with me."

"I suppose I must go," answered Julian, rather unwillingly, as he slowly relinquished the bowl he was holding in his hands.

"I expect I can play better than you. I will have a game and show them all about it," rejoined Roger, as Julian turned to go up to the house.

"Now," he continued, "have all you fellows lived to grow up without knowing how to play bowls?"

A general laugh went round the circle, but none of them knew.

"May be that new-comer may," said one of the group, pointing to a big, burly man who had just joined them.

"I can beeat most folks at it," he said.

"Come and see if you can beat me, Mr. Newcomer," said Roger.

"My name bean't Newcomer," grumbled the boastful player with a scowl.

"That's only his joke," said a bystander.

"I don't see no joke," returned the man in a surly tone.

Roger took off his coat, and set to work in good earnest. In the excitement of playing the new-comer recovered his temper, but,

notwithstanding his good opinion of himself, it did not seem as if he were going to beat Roger.

The lookers-on soon began to understand the game and to applaud the players, especially Roger.

Very handsome he looked as he swung the bowls, a slight, lithe figure, his bright chestnut-coloured hair touched by the sunlight.

So thought Lady Hartridge as she stood and watched the game for a few minutes. She regretted she had not brought her second daughter. Her elder daughter had already been introduced to De Tressanay, and earlier in the afternoon he had escorted her and her father Sir Thomas, through one of the tents, a proceeding which her mother had observed with satisfaction. Now there was this other distinguished-looking young man that her sister might have been introduced to. Lady Hartridge had been struck by Osborne's appearance at luncheon and inquired who he

was. She had not learnt if he was a man of fortune, that would have to be ascertained, she reflected, but as he was a barrister and probably clever, she was told he had just made a capital speech, he was pretty sure to make as much money as he liked. It was strange his playing with the common people, but it was probably for the sake of popularity. Perhaps he meant to go into Parliament like so many barristers. She would wait till the game was over and then get some one to introduce her to him, Sir Thomas could do so for they had been talking together at lunch. She might invite him to Hartridge Hall. Whilst these reflections occupied her mind, various friends strolled up and began to talk to her, but Sir Thomas still delayed.

The game was over and Roger having defeated his antagonist but mollified his ill-temper by setting him to teach the others, put on his coat, and advanced towards Lady Hartridge. He had no intention however of

cultivating her acquaintance but he was longing to join Ella. She had been trying to do the honours to Lady Hartridge, now that lady had found other friends and Ella was left alone.

"Can you introduce me to Mr. Osborne?" said Lady Hartridge anxiously to an old gentleman who had just come up and spoken to her.

"Certainly," answered the old gentleman who was no other than Mr. Denton.

But Roger who had hardly had a moment's talk with Ella all day, was already by her side.

"Do come and let us have a turn together," he said to her, "let us go on quickly before those people catch us," and away they walked together.

Lady Hartridge was disappointed.

"It is no use now, Mr. Denton, he is going to devote himself, it appears, to that insignificant-looking girl."

"Miss Malloney is a charming young

lady," returned Mr. Denton who did not like to hear his old friend's niece spoken of in such a disparaging tone.

Lady Hartridge tossed her head haughtily but made no reply.

"I wish that insignificant-looking girl were gone," she thought to herself, "and I wish I had brought Annabella."

Unconscious of Lady Hartridge's perturbed feelings, Roger and Ella walked together. They turned their steps towards the less frequented side of the park.

"How well you play at bowls," said Ella in a few moments when they had emerged from the crowded groups of people, "that big, broad-shouldered man seemed so clumsy over the game. How is it that you and Mr. De Tressanay do everything so well?"

"I am glad you think I can do that one thing well," returned Roger, "my own impression is that I pretend to do a good many things and do them all more or less badly. Julian is very different."

"I am sure you do nothing badly," she replied looking up at her companion with her bright, trustful eyes.

Roger's pulses beat quicker as he met her glance, and he gradually guided their steps towards the remoter part of the park.

"I have hardly had a minute's talk with you to-day," he said after a short interval of silence.

"No, you have been too busy and so have I. There were so many people I knew, and I had to take them about and show them everything they wanted to see. I suppose you were introduced to a good many at luncheon. Did you speak to Lady Hartridge?"

"No."

"That was Lady Hartridge watching your game. She lives at Hartridge Hall, a lovely place about ten miles from here. She brought her eldest daughter, but the younger one did not come to-day. Her name is Annabella, and Olive and I have always such a

laugh about her. She is about Olive's age, and we have been introduced to her over and over again, but she never remembers us, and each time she always asks us the same question, 'Do you not find Marchcroft very dull?'"

Roger was strangely absent, or else he did not care to hear about Annabella Hartridge, for he made no reply.

They had reached a clump of large trees, and instead of walking any farther they turned aside and stood under the shade of the spreading branches. A few birds twittered and flitted in the swaying boughs, their notes and the flutter of their wings, were almost the only sounds to be heard for the band had stopped playing, and only an echo of the festivities penetrated to this sequestered spot.

"Do not let us talk about other people," said Roger suddenly, "let us talk about ourselves."

He did not look at Ella as he spoke, but

cut off the blossoms of some dandelion plants with his stick.

"There is everything that is delightful to be said about ourselves," she answered gaily, "this has been such a day, perfect from the beginning, and Marchcroft is the most beautiful place in the world I think."

"I hope you do not think it is the only beautiful place in the world?"

Roger ceased to cut off the dandelion heads and his eyes rested on Ella's face.

"Oh no!" she said, "I know there are plenty of others, perhaps I should think any place beautiful where I had been very happy."

"Then you have been happy here?" asked Roger with a strange tremor in his voice.

"Perfectly happy," she answered, "so perfectly happy, that I should like everything to go on exactly as it is now to the very end of all our lives."

"Do you not want anything to change?"

"No, I told you I cannot bear changes, they frighten me so."

"You cannot always think so."

"Oh yes! I shall," she said; she felt his unusual earnestness was almost oppressive, she tried to laugh it off as well as a gathering fear of something grave, she did not know what, which was rising in her own mind, "I am sure you do too; do say so. And look, you can just see the flags on the farther tent fluttering away, how far off it looks."

But Roger did not look at the flag.

"Yes Ella, yes I do," he said. He dropped his stick, and suddenly took both her hands in his. He looked down into her face and said with quivering lips—

"Yes, I want one great change. I want you and me to be more to one another than friends as we have been till now. I want you to be my wife."

Ella was utterly astonished; the vague fear she had felt had not warned her of so serious a question as this, almost imperious in its sudden insistency. So astonished was she

that she stood for a second without withdrawing her hands from Roger's grasp. She was recalled to herself by the burning anxiety of his expression.

"Mr. Osborne," she said, looking startled and distressed, "what do you mean?"

"I mean that I love you more than any one else in the whole world, Ella," he answered, still holding her hands.

But she withdrew them gently.

"No, Mr. Osborne, please say it is all a dream, that you do not mean it," she said piteously.

"Do you not wish me to mean it?"

"No, indeed," the words came confusedly, "I never thought of marrying anybody, and nobody ever wanted to. Indeed I could not, I am so frightened at things; and it is so serious, marrying."

"It would not frighten you if you loved me, Ella; can you not love me as I love you? I did think you cared for me."

"I do like you, Mr. Osborne very much,

please not think I do not like you," she paused here with a sob, "but will you never say anything like this again, we were so happy before," and the clear eyes were dim with tears.

"Can it never be different?" asked Roger. He still struggled to speak calmly but his voice sounded strangely unfamiliar.

"Oh no! never," gasped Ella hurriedly.

Roger was absolutely stunned. He had felt so sure that his love was returned and that a great joy would follow his spoken words; and *now*? He was causing intense pain to the being who was the dearest to him in all the world and in the great tenderness of his love for her, pity and vexation at having caused her a moment's sorrow, rose uppermost in his mind. He could hardly yet realize how bitter was his own disappointment. He had turned away, striving to regain his mastery over himself during this brief conflict within him.

There were a few seconds of perfect silence.

A bird fluttered out of the branches, alighted for an instant on the ground close by and flew away again, a dead twig fell off one of the boughs at his feet; he noticed and remembered both these things. A strange numb feeling came over him as if he had been standing there a long, long time. Ella's pleading voice aroused him.

"Mr. Osborne, you are not angry? I hope you are not angry?"

"How could I be angry? except with myself for vexing you."

"Do not think about that; but will you please not mind about all this, and will you let everything be as it was before?"

"Certainly."

Ella gave a sigh of relief.

"I am so glad," she said, "and you will not mind really? It would be dreadful to think you were not happy," and again a sob threatened to drown her voice.

The sob wrung Roger's heart afresh, she should not plead to him in vain.

"You must never think I am the least unhappy."

"And then you will never talk about it again?"

"Never."

The fateful word sounded strange and harsh, as it died away amidst the soft flutter of the beech leaves, stirred by a passing breeze. The terrified look passed from Ella's face.

"You are very good to do all I ask," she said. "You must not forget your promise about being quite happy. I am not worth troubling about for one minute."

She did not look at Roger, who made no reply. She had picked up his stick and was passing it gently from hand to hand. She was greatly relieved at his ceasing to press the subject. She had no idea of the struggle raging in his heart. His instant acquiescence in her request completed her illusion, that it was no great disappointment to him. He was still silent.

"And you will be always—just as you used to be?" she continued after a while.

"Oh, yes!" answered Roger, as if suddenly awoke from a dream, "you shall never see me any thing else, but just as I used to be."

"Then it is all right again," she said softly, as a smile began to dawn once more on her lips, "do let us come out from under these trees, they are so dark and dismal."

Roger followed her slowly past their drooping branches. The light which had shed such a new glamour over his life had been cruelly quenched under their shadow. They walked silently side by side across the park towards the tents. Everything was to be just the same between Ella and Roger, they were to be friends just as they were before, yet Ella was surprised to find that she could not talk in the same unconstrained manner to her companion, she had never been at a loss for words when in his company before. Only a few stragglers were to be seen as they approached the tents.

"Where can everybody be?" said Ella at last, "they must be having tea already."

"If you see any friends you could go in with," returned Roger, "I will stay out in the cool a little longer."

Ella looked up at him for the first time since they had stood under the beech trees. His face was quite white. Roger saw her startled look of distress.

"It is nothing," he said with a forced smile, "I was so long in the hot luncheon-room, it has given me a headache; it will go off directly."

"I am so sorry; could not I —"

"There is Mrs. Denton," interrupted Roger, "she would take care of you," and quickening his pace he handed Ella over to her old friend, without giving her time for further remonstrance.

The day's festivities were rapidly drawing to a close. The prizes were going to be given away, and the proceedings would be over. An immense crowd had thronged round to

see the distribution. De Tressanay looked in vain for Roger, who had made most of the arrangements for the ceremony. He was nowhere to be seen. At last he caught sight of Ella.

"Have you seen Osborne?" he asked.

She blushed scarlet.

"Yes, just before tea," she answered.

"Did you see him come in?"

"No, he would not come in; he—he complained of a headache."

"What shall I do without him? I do not know where all the things are. There he is at last," De Tressanay exclaimed, his face brightening, "he looks all right; what could have given him a headache of all things, Miss Malloney?"

"He said it was the hot room at luncheon," she answered, blushing again.

Julian was too pleased to see Roger coming to notice her embarrassment. Osborne soon had everything in order. Lady Hewetson stood at the table and handed the prizes; the

excitement of the interested spectators was at its height. The ceremony lasted some time, but at length the last prize was given away and the crowd of people, after some deafening cheers for their host, began to stream slowly towards the park gates. De Tressanay and Osborne escorted the rest of their visitors up to the house, and stood at the door, as carriage after carriage came up and rolled away.

The party from the Rectory were the last to start. Mr. and Mrs. Selby warmly congratulated both Julian and Roger on the success of the day as they bade them good-bye. They drove away, and the two friends were left alone.

Mr. and Mrs. Selby had much to talk over that evening. So animated, indeed, was their conversation, that they did not notice that neither of their nieces took as lively a share in it as usual.

Ella was glad when the evening was over and they retired for the night. Her mind

was entirely taken up with thinking over the scene which had passed between Roger Osborne and herself that afternoon, and she wanted to go on thinking about it undisturbed. Her feelings were going through a rapid series of changes. She had been so utterly astonished at Roger's words; no one had ever proposed to her before, and to be suddenly asked by this new friend to become his wife had actually terrified her. Life had been so pleasant, especially of late, she dreaded any change, and besides, she could never leave Olive, she thought. The only dread was, did Roger really mind very much? She could not bear to think of his being unhappy, but he had promised he would not be, and she had seen him talking quite cheerfully afterwards when the prizes were being given away; he had smiled and laughed like others. She could not imagine any one caring so very much for her; if it were Olive it would be quite different. Every one must love Olive. Then, again, a curious sense of pleasure

came over her to feel that Roger had, at any rate, cared a good deal for her. She had never seen any one like him; he was so clever, so good-looking, and always so gentle and kind to her. But everything was to be the same; she wondered why she should feel any doubt as to its being so. It had all been so sudden, and she had been so confused that she could hardly remember what she had said. Surely she could not have said that she did not care for him, and Ella clasped her hands tightly over her eyes as if to shut out from her inmost vision how much she did care for him, and then she mused on, trying to convince herself that she was satisfied with the way it had all ended, and trying to persuade herself that if Roger were to say the same words to her again, she should give him the same answer.

It was a strange new consciousness, the fact of this proposal. Ella hardly knew what she ought to do. Was it a thing she ought to speak of, or might she keep it all to

herself? She wondered what other girls did. She had never seemed to realize that such an event might happen to her some day. How should she make up her mind to tell her aunt of it? She felt much too shy for that, and why should she? Everything was to go on exactly the same. The bare fact of Roger Osborne wishing her to become his wife sent a deep flush over her very brow; she could not mention such a thing; she would not know how to begin. Olive? Yes, she might tell Olive. Perhaps she would guess that something unusual had happened, and ask some questions which might pave the way.

When one is possessed with some overwhelming consciousness, it is difficult to believe that such consciousness is not betrayed in every look, word, and gesture, but even intimate friends, whose minds are unbiassed by any suspicion, are curiously slow in noticing signs of perturbation painfully self-evident in the vivid imagination of the actor

in the late exciting scene. So with Olive. She noticed nothing unusual in Ella's demeanour; indeed, she seemed absorbed in ideas of her own, and when Ella feebly attempted to lead the way to a disclosure she paid no attention to what her sister said, or interrupted her with remarks of her own.

"Ella," she said, "I am sure there is a German grammar on one of the shelves in Uncle John's study; do you remember? I think I do. I used to notice it because the binding was so ugly."

"I do not remember," answered Ella. "What do you want it for?"

"I do want to learn some German again, and I want to begin directly. I daresay you have not forgotten it as much as I have. We might work at it together. I will go and look for it now."

Olive took a candle and went in search of the book. In a few minutes she came back, holding it up triumphantly in her hand.

"Here it is," she said. "I wonder what

one ought to learn first. I wish Mr. Osborne would give me some German lessons as well as drawing lessons. I suppose these verbs must be learnt; they look dreadfully long," she added with a sigh.

It was curious that a young lady should conclude a day devoted entirely to amusement, by sitting up till late into the night studying the conjugation of a German verb.

CHAPTER VIII.

So it is that a great silent-moving misery puts a new stamp on us in an hour or a moment, as sharp an impression as if it had taken half a life-time to engrave it.

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES.

DEEP twilight fell rapidly on Marchcroft Manor after the last of the guests had departed, and with it returned something of the tranquillity which usually pervaded its time-honoured precincts. Within its walls, however, no great serenity was to prevail that evening. Twilight passed into darkness but neither Julian De Tressanay nor his friend seemed inclined to seek their rest. Julian was walking up and down the room, according to his habit, when strongly excited. He was thoroughly pleased with the way in which the day had gone off, and his vivid imagination was already picturing future days which should bring as much enjoyment to the folks of Marchcroft as this occasion had seemed to procure them. So absorbed

was he in these thoughts, and in talking over the events of the day, that he failed to observe any lack of spirits on the part of his friend, or rather that the interest and animation manifested by Roger were somewhat forced.

The old clock in the hall at last sounded its midnight chimes. De Tressanay stopped in his restless pacing close to Roger, who was sitting listlessly in an easy-chair. Even his choice cigarettes had no charm for him that evening.

"I had no idea it was so late," Julian exclaimed, "why Roger, you look quite tired after the day's dissipation."

Roger roused himself as if with a determined effort.

"I am not tired, but I want to speak to you, Julian; I want to tell you something."

An eager expectancy rose in Julian's mind, he guessed what the subject of Roger's words was to be. He sat down on a low chair facing his friend.

There was a dead pause for a moment or two.

Then with an attempt at a smile and his old bantering manner, Roger began—

"I made a fool of myself, this afternoon. The whole scene, you know, made one fancy it was Arcadia—and so on—and Ella and I strayed away under the trees—and—and—I proposed to her."

"Well?" asked De Tressanay, with breathless interest.

But Roger had turned away his face and was silent. At last he continued in a strange hard voice.

"And she refused me!"

"Refused you? Impossible!"

"It is not only not impossible, but exactly the case."

"But why? What reason could she give? I was sure she liked you, no, more than liked you; heartless little"—

"Not a word, Julian," broke in Roger, firing up, "no human being shall breathe a

word of blame against her in my hearing. She is much too sweet and perfect for me, that is all. If you could have seen her face and the look of pain which came over it at the idea of vexing me. I felt such a brute to awaken a shade of trouble in her mind, which was as clear and cloudless as a child's. She had, I am sure, never known a pang before."

"Your pangs are nothing, I suppose?"

"Of course not. A strong man must bear things of course; trouble would kill her just as a delicate rose leaf is crumpled up by a frost."

"But I cannot understand her not caring for you. Did she actually say she could not? Never could?"

"No, she did not say that in so many words; but don't you see, she has a curious morbid horror of any new state of things and of responsibility or cares. Good heavens! I wished I had never been born, when I saw the great tears," but here Roger stopped and could proceed no further.

"My dear Roger, I never felt so dreadfully sorry; I cannot understand it or imagine any girl refusing you. She cannot mean it, or was too surprised to know what she was saying. Do ask her again," added Julian, imploringly.

Roger had recovered his composure.

"Do you think," he asked, and a touch of wounded pride rang through the bitterness with which he spoke, "do you think that I would beg a woman to marry me time after time till she was tired of saying 'no,' and might perhaps say 'yes' at last, out of pity?"

"No, no, Roger, but with Ella—"

"To her," and the bitterness died out of Roger's voice again, "I would never allude to anything which would give her a moment's pain. I promised I would never allude to it again. I promised I would be just as I have always been; but Julian, I think I must go away for a little time at any rate. I mean to keep my promise, but it would be rather

too difficult just now. And Julian," he added, laying his hand on his friend's broad shoulder, "I think the same fever has overtaken us both, may you be more fortunate."

The deep colour sprang to De Tressanay's face as he grasped Roger's hand in his own. He did not answer, but such a light shone in his dark eyes that Roger, familiar with every expression of his changeful countenance, knew that he had found the love which would be the ruling passion of his life.

Men of Julian De Tressanay's stamp do not fall in love one day and forget their fancy the next. To such as he, love is a solemn thing in which their souls can only be steeped once and for ever, whether a kindly fate leads them to the haven where they would be, or whether the happiness of their lives suffers shipwreck.

"It is strange," said Roger, after a moment's silence, "to moralize on events after they have taken place. I should never have expected to fall in love with Ella

Malloney, and her sister is certainly not the ideal you used to sketch out for your wife."

De Tressanay winced slightly.

"She is a reality, more beautiful than my wildest dreams could have pictured; and more than that, I see more and more clearly every day that she has every grand quality a woman can possess. Her powers are not yet developed, circumstances have not called them out, but they only need to be awakened. She seems stirred by new interests already, and—if she cares for me, love will do the rest; 'love,' whom you know, 'can do more than you or me.' But I dare not dream that she will ever care for me, I am mad perhaps to hope it."

"She must," said Roger, "how could a girl help it? You are so different from the common-place people she must have seen all her life."

"It is much more strange, Roger, that any girl could help loving you, it is absurd," continued Julian, with an increasing

vehemence of conviction, "I should like to talk to Ella, and ask her if she is mad to throw over a fellow like you, or at any rate I should like to talk to the Selbys, they might bring her to reason"—

Roger sprang to his feet.

"Julian, you must make a solemn promise to me never to allude to this wretched business when you see her, or to throw out a single hint that you know anything about it. It is my one consolation to think that she will be perfectly undisturbed as to my state of mind and feeling, and when I see her I shall take good care that she shall never guess it. Promise me, Julian, and promise never to mention it to any one creature."

Julian hesitated.

"Promise me, Julian, I have never asked you to promise me anything before."

"But Roger, I am convinced that there is some ridiculous mistake, and if I could help to clear it up—"

"I thought you would do as much for me

as this," interrupted Roger, in a wounded tone.

"But do listen to reason for one moment."

"I will not listen to anything. Give me your solemn promise."

And Julian gave his promise dismally enough.

"I cannot understand it," he said, again. "I should have said you were perfectly irresistible."

"Pray continue to think so," answered Roger, with an attempt at a laugh, as he went to the table and piled a few of his books up together, "it is something for a forlorn wight like me to have a partial friend."

"What you are doing means that you are going away," remarked Julian, with a sigh.

"I ought to have gone long ago—to the Tyrol. I might have known it was not my fate to be successful in love. I thought I had done with love, and I might have known better. After being once deceived, I might

have been prepared for disappointment. I shall take good care not to be such an idiot as to run the risk of either conclusion again. I ought to have gone away."

"But if you had gone, your feelings would have been the same, and the uncertainty would have been prolonged."

"Some uncertainties are pleasanter than realities," answered Roger drearily, as he lighted his candle and left the room. Julian remained walking up and down the library in a thoroughly perturbed state of mind. He had been so happy all day long. The sun had shone in the unclouded heavens, such gay throngs of visitors had filled the gardens and grounds, such thorough enjoyment had prevailed from morning to night, while no strange owner could have had a more hearty welcome to his new home. Not a single untoward incident had marred the brilliancy of the day's proceedings. Olive had looked more beautiful than ever, and had taken the liveliest interest in everything; and full of the vague

sweet hopes of dawning love, the only drawback to Julian was that the day had been too short, that life itself was not half long enough for the glory which seemed to hover over it.

And now? Now it was as if some unseen hand had dashed this overflowing cup to the ground, just as his lips were about to touch the gilded brim, as if a sudden gust of wind had blown out the bright light which was well nigh dazzling in its brilliancy. It was no common friendship which bound these two friends; attached to one another as they were, they were touched by the same joys and griefs, as far as human beings have the power of sympathizing, soul with soul. It is true that that power, perhaps happily, finds its limitation, "the heart knoweth its own bitterness," a bitterness the great deeps of which another cannot fathom. But as deeply as one heart can realize the disappointment of another, so deeply did Julian feel for Roger that night.

The event, moreover, brought a sudden

chilling of his own hopes. If a girl, he thought, could turn a deaf ear to any one so charming as Roger, how could he expect another girl to look more favourably on himself; probably he had bored her to death by his prosy theories. Besides girls thought so much of looks, and he was not half so good-looking as Roger. The future seemed full of mists and doubts which he had never perceived so clearly before. Now by the light of the past, they assumed a sudden distinctness. At the same time he felt perfectly convinced that there must be some egregious mistake about this very past. He was sure Ella did care for Roger, probably she had been startled and did not know what she was talking about, and Roger seemed to have no clear idea either of what had really been said. Of course, between pity for her confusion and wounded pride on his own side, Roger had rushed to this ridiculous conclusion. Then there was this most annoying promise not to try to set matters straight.

"That was just like Roger," he muttered to himself, "he laughs at me for having what he calls high-flown notions, while all the time his own ideas are ridiculously over-strained. Why, I imagine I am ready on principle to help vagabonds, but it would never enter my head to take a thief into my service and place boundless confidence in him as he has done. A sensible man would go and ask a girl again, of course, but no, Roger would rather die first! he is confoundedly proud and can be detestably obstinate. Give her pain forsooth! as if his disappointment were not of far more account."

So Julian fretted and raged far into the night, and all in vain as he knew; for were not his hands tied so that he could do absolutely nothing in the matter?

Roger exhibited his usual composure of manner at breakfast next morning. He kept up indeed a show of high spirits, some of his whimsical remarks calling up a ghost of a smile on Job's withered countenance. Julian

would have been better pleased with a graver, if sadder demeanour on the part of his friend, for he knew that his mirth was feigned, and the ring of his laugh hollow.

"I think Julian," Roger said after breakfast, "if you do not mind Viper going a longer distance, I would rather go by Durnstone than Marlsham. The journey from there up to town is shorter and less tedious. I should have to start at the same time from here. I have been studying the trains," and he turned over the leaves of a time-table as he spoke.

"Certainly; whichever way you like," answered De Tressanay, absently. He was thinking how dull he should be when he found himself all alone.

"Will you drive in with me?" asked Osborne, "we might as well see the last of one another."

"Of course I am coming with you, but for goodness' sake, don't talk of seeing the last of one another. If you do not come back

here soon, I shall cut Marchcroft and come up to you."

"I do not know when I shall come back here," answered Osborne, looking all round him, "I shall be very busy, I shall find lots to do. I suppose we must start between eleven and twelve."

De Tressanay and Osborne were, however, not to drive together that day.

As the time was approaching for them to start, De Tressanay's lawyer, Mr. Cooper, arrived unexpectedly, bringing some papers with him to which he wished De Tressanay to give his immediate attention. De Tressanay tried to postpone the business, but it was of serious importance, Mr. Cooper had come from a long distance on purpose for its despatch, and he had no time to spare, so much to his annoyance, Julian was obliged to give up his drive to Durnstone with Roger.

"Tom must go with you and bring back the dog-cart," he said, "I am disgusted not to go with you."

Roger carried a parcel in his hand as he came downstairs ready to start.

"Julian," he said, "this is the sketch I promised to give them. Will you take it down to the Rectory some day? I hope it will have pleasant associations for them," he added, rather bitterly, as he laid it on the hall table. "How the weather has changed, I am glad it was not like this yesterday," he continued, a minute or two afterwards, as he stood on the steps.

It did not actually rain, but the wind swept across the lawns, a grey mist hung heavily over the hills. In a few moments Viper came to the door, showing evident signs of temper.

"Do be careful, Julian," Roger said, "how you drive this brute, she requires more attention than you condescend to give to your driving. I should be sorry you know, to hear you had broken your neck. It would be a pity just as you are getting to a sensible age."

This last remark was in rather a louder voice on purpose for Job's benefit.

"Really, Roger, I hope you will be careful yourself. Do be patient, especially at first."

"Thank you for your good advice. I expect a very amusing drive, a contest between brute force and the mental ingenuity of man," he returned, as he lighted his cigar.

"Good-bye, Julian," he said, and stepped lightly into the dog-cart. A sudden impulse seemed to check him, for he bent down and shook his friend's hand once again. Then with one more look at the old Manor, with one more glance at the gardens beyond, he tightens the reins, gives Viper an impatient touch of the whip, and away they go at full speed, and are soon flying down under the beech trees.

Julian stood watching the start rather anxiously.

"I wish," he thought to himself, "that I had insisted on his taking Samson; Viper I can see, is in no mood to be trifled with,

and poor old Roger in no mood to humour her. How I hate the beast, and wish she had never come into my stables."

"Mr. Cooper wished me to say he was quite ready, sir," said Job, interrupting his master's reverie.

De Tressanay made no reply, he was straining his eyes to catch the last glimpse of Roger. He might well wish to see the last glance of the slight, erect figure. Would the old gay Roger with his light wit, with his charming *insouciance* ever return again? Would he ever again be able to stand aloof and calmly watch the stream of life flow by, rippling only with his bright gusts of laughter; or has he taken too deep a draught of its waters and found in them nothing but bitterness?

But now the last glimpse of the dog-cart was lost, even the sound of wheels had died in the distance, and De Tressanay turned away with a sigh.

The business which Mr. Cooper was so

eager to transact, concerned matters of considerable importance. The lawyer pointed out the different facts with great clearness and keen interest, but he found Julian strangely absent.

The day seemed long and dull to others besides Julian De Tressanay.

About one o'clock the mist turned to heavy rain, which beat against the Rectory windows with a dreary autumnal sound. Mr. Selby was busily engaged in some parish business, Mrs. Selby found plentiful occupation in trying to make up some arrears in her correspondence, but with Ella and Olive the time hung heavily.

Ella felt restless and dissatisfied. She could not ward off a certain anxiety about Roger, and a certain anxiety to make quite sure that he was not troubling about her. Yet a longing, half mingled with nervous apprehension, yet an intense longing to see him again was her dominant feeling. She could not explain to herself why it was that

she suddenly seemed to care much more for him than she knew she had ever done before.

Olive sat down resolutely to some drawing, but after a time her eyes wandered absently to the window, and the paint brush hung idly in her fingers, she looked in vain for any cheering impressions from without. The rain beat against the panes and long trails of creepers drifted wearily to and fro in the wind.

It was already dusk when Mr. Selby came in.

"What is the matter with you all?" he asked, in his cheery voice, as he came into the drawing-room, "you look rather dull in here."

"We could not get out all day," answered Olive, with a little injured pout.

"It is not very nice out," said her uncle, surveying his wet garments.

"No, but it is not nice to have to stay in," rejoined Ella, taking one of his cold hands and holding it to the fire to warm it.

"Well, have you had no visitors?"

"Not one," answered Ella; a quick blush spreading over her face as she spoke.

"Not seen anything of De Tressanay or Osborne?"

"Nothing," replied Olive.

"I wonder they have not been here to-day. I suppose it is too late now. I must go and get off these wet things, children."

With the Rector's entrance a more cheerful spirit seemed to have returned to the household. A day in which there was absolutely no excitement, following one in which every hour is stirringly occupied, is apt to produce a certain amount of ennui, but now it seemed dispelled as the fire burnt up brightly, the curtains shut out the sight of the dreary wet evening, and the Rector's kindly countenance beamed in the midst of the little circle.

Dinner was over, and they were laughing over the account Mr. Selby was giving of a visit he had paid that afternoon, when the servant entered and announced that Job had

come down from the Manor and wanted to speak to the Rector.

"I suppose some message from De Tressanay. I wonder at old Job coming down this wet night," said Mr. Selby, as he left the room.

Job was shown into the study.

"What is it?" asked Mr. Selby, "this is an unusual hour to see you out."

"Mr. De Tressanay told me to come down myself, sir, and it's bad news as I've brought. Mr. Roger had an accident going to Durnstone, and is badly hurt from what Tom says, and master is gone off as hard as he can, to see what he can do."

Job did not say "Mr. Osborne," he called him now by the name he had so often heard from Julian's lips.

"An accident?" exclaimed Mr. Selby. "How did it happen? Where was Mr. Osborne going?"

"Up to London, sir. It seemed all sudden-like, for we heard nothing about it till this

morning, when the order came for the packing, first thing. As to me, I fancied as there was something wrong the night before, for they both sat up very late and seemed restless like, and as for Mr. Roger, I could not well make him out, he did not seem to hear one half what master was saying to him. I knows about the sittin' up, sir," continued Job, with a shake of his head, "for, however late they were, I always took a look round a bit later still, unbeknown to them, of course, you see, sir, they are both young and careless, maybe, with the lights and bolts, and such-like."

"But the accident?" asked Mr. Selby impatiently, he longed to stem the old man's garrulity.

"Well, sir, we know but little about it, and that's the truth. Tom seems to have troubled a lot more about Viper than about Mr. Osborne."

"Was he driving Viper?"

"Yes, sir, that was the mischief. If

master would but have kept to Samson or one like him, it would have been all right."

"But what did he say about Mr. Roger?"

"Viper ran away, and when Tom, who jumped out, got up to the place where the trap was lying all smashed up, a gentleman who was passin' by, stopped to see what could be done, and took Mr. Osborne, on to Durnstone to the Star Hotel in his carriage, but he was knocked about till there, he seemed as if there was no life left in him."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Selby.

"Oh, sir! it was a sight to see master's face when he heard of it. Mercy on us," continued the old man, with something like a sob in his voice, "it was a sight to see them two together, they was so mighty taken up with one another, and now as we all say, they were right kindly young gentlemen, though a bit funny-like in their notions."

Job spoke as if not only Roger, but Julian too, were already in their graves.

"I do not understand now," said Mr.

Selby, "did not Tom go on and see after Mr. Osborne?"

"No, sir. He just left him to be took on by this strange gentleman and went after Viper, who had broken away and a fine chase he had. He brought her back without a scratch about three hours ago. I wish every bone in her body had been broken."

"Then Tom knew nothing more about Mr. Osborne?"

"That was the worst of it, sir. I thought as Mr. De Tressanay would have sheer gone mad when the booby would talk of nothing but this here brute Viper; Viper this, Viper that. It was awful, sir."

"It is awful indeed, Job. What can be done?"

"Nothing can be done, sir, till we hear from master."

"Be sure and let me hear as soon as possible. If it is in the middle of the night never mind, send down to me at once."

"Yes, sir."

"I shall go over to Durnstone myself the first thing to-morrow morning."

"That would be very kind of you, sir, they can hardly fare by themselves them two, they would be the better for your advice, sir."

"Pray Heaven Mr. Osborne may be alive to heed it," said the Rector, in an agitated voice.

"I say amen, sir, to that," returned Job, and the old man set out to return to the Manor, the gloomy night seeming to increase his dismal forebodings as he went.

Mr. Selby was deeply distressed. He had taken a special liking to these two young men who seemed to have given a new zest to his tranquil existence at Marchcroft. He grieved to think that Roger Osborne, whom he had seen so full of life and vigour but the day before, was injured; to what extent he recoiled from thinking.

He dreaded imparting the news to his wife and nieces; judging them by himself, he

would fain have spared them the pain this knowledge would bring.

"How distressed those children, too, will be," he said to himself, then suddenly shrinking from facing them, he rang the bell and sent for Mrs. Selby. She should tell them, he thought.

"What can it be, Ella?" asked Olive, as Mrs. Selby was summoned from the room. An instinctive dread had seized Ella. "I know there is something dreadful the matter," she said.

"Oh, nonsense! Ella; how can there be? Where?"

"It must be at the Manor as Job came down."

"But we saw Mr. De Tressanay and Mr. Osborne late last evening, nothing could have happened since then."

Apparently the whole of the Manor was now summed up in these two names to Ella and Olive.

The minutes passed slowly away; at last

Mrs. Selby returned. Her face looked anxious and distressed.

"I know you are going to tell us something dreadful," said Ella.

She was quite pale and her lips trembled.

"I hope it may not be so very dreadful," answered Mrs. Selby, "but I have some bad news to tell you," and she related to them what she had just heard from her husband.

Mrs. Selby had expected that the girls would be distressed to hear of this apparently serious accident to one, whom they had grown to look upon as a friend. They had neither of them yet suffered sorrow or serious disappointment, and she knew that hearing of any misfortune to a friend or even to a pet animal, made a deep impression on them, but she was scarcely prepared for the poignant distress which her announcement evidently caused Ella. Mrs. Selby pointed out that after all Roger Osborne might not be very seriously injured, that people often recovered from severe hurts, but her words

were vain and could not charm away the frightened look of distress which seemed to have settled on her face.

They soon retired to rest, but the slumbers of the inmates of Marchcroft Rectory were disturbed that night by anxious thoughts, and one pillow at least was wet with tears.

No further news reached the Rectory that night. Next morning Mr. Selby ordered his dog-cart early to drive to Durnstone. Had the occasion been less anxious and pressing, he would have been amused to note the alacrity of the whole party around him to aid in the preparations for his drive, and to hasten his departure.

The rain still fell heavily, but it did not occur even to Mrs. Selby that a drive of ten miles through the steady downpour could be postponed, or that there could be the slightest hesitation on his part to setting out in it. And, in truth, the Rector was himself much too eager to reach Durnstone to dream of hesitating for a moment.

"I shall get back as soon as I can," he said, to the little group assembled at the door.

He took the reins, and his stout cob set off at a good steady pace, as if his one object were to get to his journey's end as quickly as he could without much inconvenience to himself.

CHAPTER IX.

> The dearest friend to me, the kindest man,
> The best conditioned and unwearied spirit
> In doing courtesies.
>
> SHAKESPEARE.

JOB's account of his master's agitation on receiving the intelligence of his friend's accident was not exaggerated. De Tressanay hastily gathered the little information he could from Tom the groom, and drove off to reach Durnstone as soon as possible.

He is older now than he was then, many stirring emergencies have made his life eventful; in common with other men he has passed through hours of anxiety and days of painful expectancy. But never can the memory of that drive be effaced from Julian De Tressanay's memory. In after-years the whole scene would rise before him with painful distinctness, Jacob's saturnine face, the old horse refusing to be urged out of his

usual pace, the landscape wrapped in grey mist, the pouring rain beating down without intermission.

It was bad enough to know that Roger was hurt, but to think of him lying in a strange inn, waited on by stranger hands, dying perchance for want of medical assistance; these reflections caused every moment which passed before Julian could reach his friend, to weigh on his mind with an almost unendurable burden. After driving for about two miles, his burning impatience could endure the restraint no longer. He turned off to Marlsham, and sending Jacob back to the Manor, he procured a light carriage and a pair of good horses, and driving on at last at a pace more in accordance with his urgent anxiety, soon made up for the slight delay.

Notwithstanding the utmost speed of the two fresh horses, it was nearly dark when the carriage dashed up to the hotel door. De Tressanay sprang out. In answer to his instant inquiries, he was told that a gentle-

man in an unconscious state had been brought there by another gentleman in a carriage; that the latter had told them they would soon hear about the injured man from Mr. De Tressanay of Marchcroft Manor. He had then driven away saying he would ask the first doctor in Durnstone to call as soon as possible.

"What did the doctor say?" asked Julian, as the hotel keeper showed him upstairs.

"He said he'd call again this evening. He seemed to think badly of him, sir," returned the master of the house, opening the door of the room into which Roger Osborne had been carried.

Mrs. Collins, the hotel keeper's wife had constituted herself nurse, but although everything had been done to carry out the doctor's directions, no efforts had yet availed in recalling Roger Osborne to consciousness.

Julian stood by the bedside struck with despair. The good woman was touched to the heart by his distress.

"Don't take on so, sir," she said, "the doctor said it was concussion of the brain, but I've known many a man get over that, even if a doctor looked ever so black about it. His leg is broken to be sure, sir, in two places, badly broken, but a man don't die of a broken leg or even two of 'em. Bless you, sir, I've seen a sight of accidents in my time. He seems bruised all over, poor young gentleman, but I never heard tell as bruises was a mortal complaint."

Fortunately for Julian, the good woman's garrulous attempts at consolation were here interrupted by the doctor's arrival.

At the close of his visit he told Julian that he considered Osborne's injuries very serious, but he was not without reasonable hope of his ultimate recovery.

"He must have a good nurse," he said, as he was leaving, "for it will be a long, tedious business."

Julian immediately telegraphed for Ned Trotter.

The next morning brought a dawning return to consciousness, but otherwise Osborne's condition seemed but little changed. The doctor came again, there were no worse symptoms, he assured Julian, and it was early yet to expect improvement, but he looked grave, graver, Julian thought than on the previous evening.

Ned Trotter arrived before the morning was far spent, to Julian's great relief, for the kind-hearted mistress of the establishment worried him almost beyond endurance by her perpetual attempts at consoling conversation.

Mr. Selby arrived before mid-day. He was deeply grieved when he found what the state of the case was.

"My dear De Tressanay," he said, when they had both adjourned to the dreary little sitting-room after standing for a few moments by Roger's bedside, "I do feel for you in this trial. I have seldom met with a sadder contrast, even in the course of my long life,

than to see the poor fellow lying helpless there, knowing he is the same Roger Osborne full of life and spirits of yesterday. A moment's carelessness or impatience with the mare brought it all about, I suppose. I never liked to see either of you driving her, and that is the truth."

"No one will ever drive her again," answered De Tressanay, quietly.

"But I understood she was not the least hurt."

"I shall have her shot at once," returned De Tressanay, in such a determined tone, that the Rector felt any attempt at dissuasion, if advisable, would be useless.

"We were much surprised to hear of Osborne starting off on this unlucky journey," continued Mr. Selby, "it was very sudden was it not?"

"Rather."

"He told us only a day or two before that he was going to stay with you for another month at least."

The consciousness of his promise already weighed on Julian.

"He had some cases he wanted to go into," he answered.

"Oh, of course, as a rising barrister his profession must have claims on him, and sudden claims sometimes," answered Mr. Selby, quite unsuspectingly and without noticing Julian's slight hesitation.

"I only wish I could take a better account home with me," said the Rector, when the time came for him to start, "but there is really ground for hope, De Tressanay, the doctor does say so, and Osborne has youth and a good constitution in his favour."

"Yes, that is something," said De Tressanay, but his face was very troubled.

"I cannot tell you how distressed the ladies were to hear of this, last evening, though I confess I was just as bad as they were. There is no need to praise your poor friend to you, but a brighter, more genial

fellow I never met. He has quite won all our hearts I assure you."

"I wish he had not lost his own," muttered De Tressanay to himself, savagely, but he made no audible reply to the Rector, as he placed up and down the room with restless steps.

With a promise from De Tressanay that he should constantly hear about Roger, Mr. Selby took his leave. He reached home after an uneventful drive, and found that his return was anxiously expected by his wife and nieces. The serious account he brought of Osborne was a great disappointment to them all.

"And Mr. De Tressanay?" asked his wife, when Mr. Selby had told them all he could concerning his friend.

"Poor De Tressanay," he answered, "he takes it terribly to heart, and is evidently consumed by anxiety. He is of too excitable a temperament to stand a state of suspense quietly, and he really seems bound up in his

friend. I remarked in the course of our conversation, that the event cast a sad and sudden gloom over these yet early days of his residence at Marchcroft, especially just after the brilliant day of the flower show, and he said in his impulsive way that if Roger did not recover he could not bear to return there, and should not think of returning there at all at present. Roger Osborne has certainly the power of exciting feelings of strong attachment. De Tressanay had already got his servant down as nurse, Ned Trotter, you remember the story about him?" the girls nodded assent, their hearts were too full to speak, "and he does everything for the poor fellow with the greatest devotion."

Ella steadied her voice with a great effort.

"He is not really worse than they thought at first?" she asked.

"There are no worse symptoms, but in a case like this it is a serious thing to show no improvement."

Ella could maintain her composure no longer. She opened the low window through which she and Roger had stepped out so often together, and went into the garden. But the sun was shining no longer as in those glad days which seemed to be divided from the present by a dark abyss. The sky was dull and grey, and a chilling breeze stirred the fast-falling leaves. Ella shivered in every limb as the wind blew on her bare head. This was the first sorrow she had ever known. She felt bewildered and agonised, but it did not act upon her as she had always believed that trouble, in her morbid imagining of it, would do. She had always believed that she would like to flee away from it, that directly a dark cloud cast a shadow over the sunny little world in which she had always lived, she would long for any refuge, even for "th' abhorred shears to slit the thin spun thread of life," if thus she might seek shelter from pain or regret. How different was the reality. Instead of longing to escape from pain, she felt

a thirst to bear this present and any future pain, so long as she might stay where she could hear tidings of Roger, or catch the sound of his name as it passed the lips of his friends. The hardest part was to feel that had her words been different from those she uttered that afternoon, when the solemn beech trees stood witnesses to her refusal of his love, he might not have gone away so suddenly, and this accident might never have happened. He had promised that he would be gay and cheerful just the same as he used to be, but as she recalled the scene a fresh light seemed to fall on his words, a new meaning revealed itself in the accent with which he uttered them; and at last Ella realized what that interview had cost him, and realized that Roger Osborne had awakened a love within her heart which was now as strong as that which had mastered his own spirit.

"What could I do?" she asked herself, piteously, "if I had but known, if I had but known!" and the tears rolled fast down her

cheeks and the chill wind dried them as they fell.

"Why should Ella stand out in the cold with no hat on?" said Mr. Selby, catching a distant glimpse of her, "how miserable both these girls look," he added with a sigh, "I am afraid, Lucy, we ought not to have let them see so much of those two young men."

"I do not see how we could help it, John. I always wonder why poor Mr. Osborne went away in such a hurry."

"He had cases to look after in London," answered Mr. Selby, undoubtingly, "De Tressanay told me so."

But Mrs. Selby was far from convinced that professional cares had called Roger Osborne away.

Meanwhile Olive had retreated to a little morning-room where she had her drawing. She sat down and listlessly took up two or three sketches, but her eyes were blinded with tears, and she could hardly see them.

"Mr. Osborne may never get better, and Mr. De Tressanay may never come to Marchcroft any more, and then I shall never see him again. We shall go home, and come and stay here just as we have always done, but I shall never feel as I used to again. I shall hate the old life and all belonging to it. If he were only to come back I would never contradict him as I did at first, and say things which I knew he did not like. He used to look so reproachfully at me. I would try and do everything he told me now, everything he says must be right. But he won't come, and I shall have no one to tell me how to be better any more. I know I have been a selfish, useless creature, and I was just beginning to find it out, but it is all over now," and Olive hid her face in her hands and wept.

Very different was the gloomy atmosphere which seemed to have taken possession of the Rectory from the cheerful spirit which usually pervaded that peaceful abode. The

Rector sometimes read out loud of an evening when the weather grew too chilly to be out of doors after dinner, "You are such idle children," he used to say to his nieces, "I must try and improve your minds in spite of yourselves," and partly to forget the present trouble by calling Shakespeare's creations before their eyes, partly to dispense with the need of conversation, or to break the silence which had suddenly fallen amongst them, he continued his reading; but not one of the listeners followed the course of Viola's chequered fortunes very attentively, and the Rector himself started several times to find that he was reading mechanically, and with the most heartless indifference to the final fate of the heroine.

The evening drew to a close at last. When Ella and Olive were alone in their room, Ella could restrain her feelings no longer; she burst into a flood of tears, and throwing her arms round her sister's neck, she gasped between her sobs—

"It is all my fault, Olive; if he dies it will be all my fault."

"What do you mean, Ell? What do you mean?"

"It was my fault that he went away so suddenly. I know it was. He said that he would not mind, but I know now that he did. I did not think so then, not a bit. If he had not gone this would never have happened."

"That's nonsense, Ell; Uncle John says he always expected something must happen; he thought so every time he saw Mr. Osborne, or Mr. De Tressanay, driving that horse."

"It would be sure not to have happened. It was all my fault only I did not know."

"You must tell me what you mean, Ell."

"It was that afternoon at the flower show, and we walked about in the park."

"You and Mr. Osborne?"

"Yes—we—and we stood under some trees, and—oh, Olive, I cannot tell you."

"I know. He said he would like to marry you," returned Olive confidently. We might expect a newly hatched swallow to mention the pyramids in the same tone of intimate acquaintance—

"Yes. How could you guess?"

"Why, is it not always happening to people except to Jane and us?"

"And now it has to one of us, and I wish—oh! I wish it never had."

"But why? You could never find anybody nicer to marry, hardly anybody at least," said Olive, correcting herself, as a taller figure and darker face rose before her own inner vision.

"But I did not know, Olive, not then."

"Did not know what?"

"That I—I cared about him."

"You did not tell him you did not?"

"Yes."

"Oh, Ella!"

"I don't think I said I did not care at all, but that I did not want to marry; and he

promised he would not mind, and would never look sorry about it, and now perhaps he will die, and never know I did care."

"But he will get well, Ell, and then he will ask you again; they do, really, you know, two or three times; I have often read it in books."

"He never will. He promised faithfully not to."

"But why? What could have made him promise?"

"I asked him to. I was so frightened. It is dreadful to be asked all of a sudden like that. You feel as if you were being taken by a wind, and swept right away, and it was all over so quickly, before I quite knew how it all happened."

"You were very, very silly, Ell; but do not cry so dreadfully. Somebody could tell Mr. Osborne that you did not mean it, and that you would give anything if he would only ask you again, and then he will. I will tell Aunt Lucy," cried Olive, as her

face lighted up with the conviction that she had hit upon the remedy for all this misery.

"No, no, Olive," said Ella, her tears stopped and she spoke firmly and proudly, "you must never think of such a thing; nobody in the world shall know anything about it. I could not bear it, and I should die of confusion to think that he might find out that I wanted anybody to ask him to ask me again. Oh, Olive!" she continued, hiding her face in her hands in an agony of horror at the bare idea, "promise not to tell anybody; you must promise."

"Very well; but I do not see why. Now perhaps Mr. Osborne and you may die of broken hearts, and it might all be prevented. It's more romantic to be unhappy, I suppose; I would rather be happy," Olive added with a sigh. "It was very silly of Mr. Osborne to go away. If he had stayed he might have seen for himself that you wanted to change your mind."

"Perhaps I shall never see him again," sobbed Ella, breaking down afresh.

"Perhaps we shall never see either of them," said Olive dismally; and with this unconsoling reflection, their conversation ended for the night.

The next two days brought but meagre intelligence, and that of no very cheering kind to the Rectory.

On the following morning Mrs. Selby had a letter from her brother, Dr. Malloney, proposing to pay a clear day's visit at the Rectory.

"When is he coming?" asked Mr. Selby absently.

"To-day by the twelve o'clock train," answered his wife; "it is rather an unfortunate time for his visit. He so seldom has a holiday that he expects to be amused and to enjoy himself when he does come out. I am afraid he will find this dull just now."

"And there is no letter from De Tressanay," mused the Rector gravely.

"Nothing," returned Mrs. Selby, and a painful silence reigned through the room.

"I must go and meet William," said Mr. Selby after a pause. "One of you girls must come and meet your father; I shall not have room for you both."

It was settled that Olive should go to the station, and at the appointed time she and her uncle drove off to Marlsham.

Dr. Malloney did not arrive by the train, which came in a few minutes after they reached Marlsham, but they found a telegram from him saying that he had been unexpectedly detained, and could not arrive till late in the afternoon.

Mr. Selby folded up the telegram, and put it in his pocket. When he was well past the station, he said—

"Olive, I have a great mind to drive on to Durnstone; we shall be back in time to meet your father."

"Do drive on, Uncle John," was the eager rejoinder; "it seems dreadful to have no news all day."

Olive's heart beat quickly as they drove into the town; she dreaded hearing bad news, but the dread was almost lost in the throb of joy at the thought of seeing Julian De Tressanay once more.

They arrived at the Star, and were shown up into the sitting-room. After a while Ned Trotter came and asked Mr. Selby to go into Roger's room; Olive began to fear she might not see Mr. De Tressanay at all.

The time seemed very long as she waited in the gloomy little sitting-room. She tried to find some amusement in looking out of the window, but she could only see a row of ugly houses opposite; one was almost exactly like the other. It would be very dull to live in one of them Olive thought, as she watched some figures flitting past the windows inside. She did not know how long she stood looking out, but presently she roused herself almost with a start to find that she had lost herself in conjecture as to whether she should prefer a brass, or an iron knocker at the door,

if she had to live in the house exactly opposite. Having dispelled that idea she wandered once again round the room, and studied the pictures ; but an engraving of an old nobleman, the grandfather of the present Duke of Brackley, whose country seat was close to Marlsham, and an elaborate, coloured representation of the fortifications of Sebastopol, were hardly calculated to arouse her interest. Everything was so still in the house. It was not market day, so there was but little coming and going, and those who went to and fro in the house moved with hushed steps in consideration for the sick man who lay upstairs. Mrs. Collin's description of the accident and of Roger Osborne's appearance, together with her constant reports of his condition, had not failed to awaken a lively interest in the minds of her visitors.

At last Mr. Selby entered the room, and with him came De Tressanay.

" He is certainly a little better," was the latter's reply to Olive's eager inquiry, " but

he varies very much, and his progress is very slow."

Some luncheon was brought up; De Tressanay's spirits improved after they had talked together for a while, and he was interested in what the Rector was able to tell him of the effect of the flower show and the pleasure it seemed to have afforded.

"It all seems so long ago," he said, passing his hand over his eyes and forehead, "I feel as if I had been here for years."

"And it is such a dull place and such a dull town," said Olive, looking up at him compassionately; she thought he looked very worn and tired.

"It would make no difference if the place were ever so lively and nice," he answered with a smile.

It was so good of her, he thought, to look so sorry.

Mr. Selby took out his watch. "It is time we should start," he said; "we must not keep your father waiting, Olive. I

should like to see Osborne again before I go, if I may, De Tressanay."

Julian rose, and showed him into Osborne's room. In a few minutes he returned, leaving the Rector with Roger.

Olive had gone to the window again, and was standing looking out into the street. She turned with a look of bright welcome on her face as Julian entered the room and stood by her side.

"Mr. De Tressanay," she said, colouring, "I was so glad when Uncle John said he should drive round this way. I wanted to see you to tell you something."

She hesitated for a moment; Julian looked down earnestly at her, he could not think what she was going to tell him.

"I could not bear," she continued at last, in an uncertain voice, "to hear that Mr. Osborne was so very ill without asking you to tell him that I am very sorry I used to be so rude to him; and will he forgive me?"

"How can you distress yourself with such

an idea? I am sure you could never say anything rude."

"Indeed, I did," replied Olive earnestly, "especially at first over the drawing. I did not like his laughing at me, and telling me I did things wrong."

"He was always laughing at every one," said Julian. "I wish I could hear him laugh again," he added with a groan.

"But you will; he must get better."

De Tressanay's only answer was a despairing gesture.

"Don't look so unhappy," pleaded Olive; "you know he is better to-day, but I shall have to go directly, so will you tell him that he was always right when he did laugh at me; and do you think he will forgive me?"

The dark eyes were raised full to De Tressanay's now.

"I know Roger has forgiven you long ago," he answered; then stooping he took her hand, and bent over it, and kissed it.

Olive started slightly, but before she could

withdraw her hand she heard Mr. Selby's step at the door, and De Tressanay released it in an instant.

"We must start directly, Olive," her uncle said as he came in.

There was a slight flush on her face, but she did not look offended with him, De Tressanay thought, as she bade him good-bye.

Olive was not offended. She held her hand very tenderly as they drove away; a flood of strange new feelings had rushed through her whole being as De Tressanay pressed it to his lips. It was something to be sure of, something to treasure in her memory in this troubled time. If Julian never returned to Marchcroft, yet if he cared a little for her, he might take the trouble to try and see her again somewhere. Surely that silent kiss must mean that he did care. She wished she could ask some one how much such a thing meant. She looked up at her uncle John as they drove along, and

wondered if he had ever kissed Mrs. Selby's hand, a long, long time ago, before they were engaged, and if she thought it meant anything really serious. But Olive could not ask him, and had to content herself with her own vague speculations. She was more cheerful, however, than for several preceding days.

Dr. Malloney arrived in due course, and received his usual warm welcome at the Rectory. He also looked forward to these flying visits to Marchcroft as a pleasant refreshment. Mr. Selby's conversation was intelligent and interesting; Mrs. Selby was his favourite sister; the rest and quiet were pleasantly soothing after the busy life he usually led; and yet the atmosphere of the place was not dull and stagnant. But on this occasion Dr. Malloney began to fear his visit would be less enjoyable than usual.

When the first flutter of welcome had subsided, and the most recent family events had been discussed, the Doctor noticed that

the conversation flagged, that Mr. Selby was not eager for discussion as usual, while his sister seemed to have no thought except for the report which her husband had brought from Durnstone. Ella looked ill and miserable, and Olive was strangely absent. Altogether, when Dr. Malloney retired for the night, it was with a feeling of regret that he had not joined a friend in a talked-of trip to the lakes.

Ella and Olive shared the same room.

"Ella," said her sister after she had been in bed for some time.

"Yes," came in answer from the opposite corner of the room.

"Are you asleep?"

"No."

Ella was always a long time now before she could go to sleep.

"What is it?" she inquired as Olive had suddenly lapsed into silence.

"Did Mr. Osborne kiss your hand before he asked you to marry him?"

"Oh, no!"

"Did he ever do it?"

"No, never. What could make you think of such a thing?"

"I was only wondering," answered Olive.

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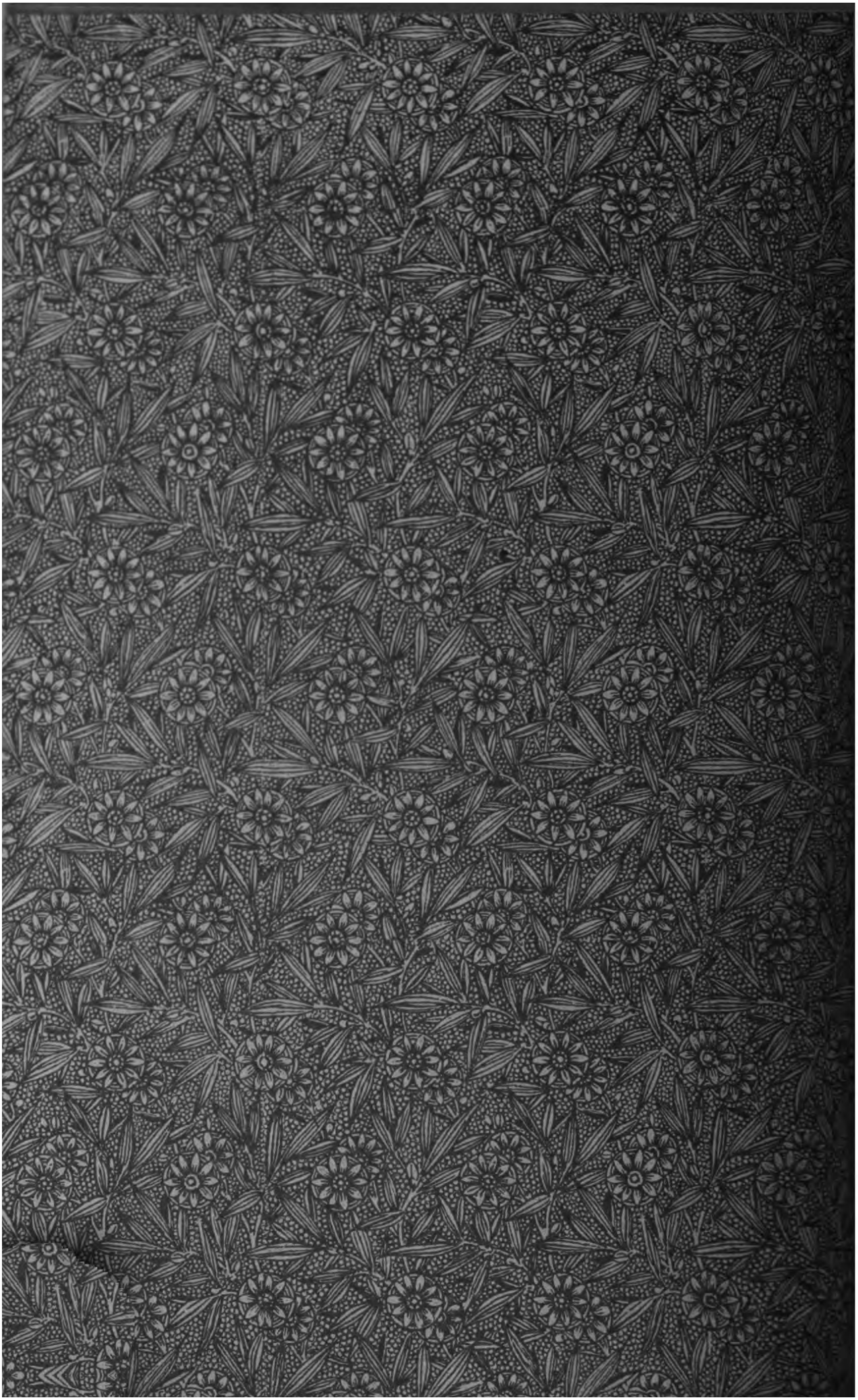
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