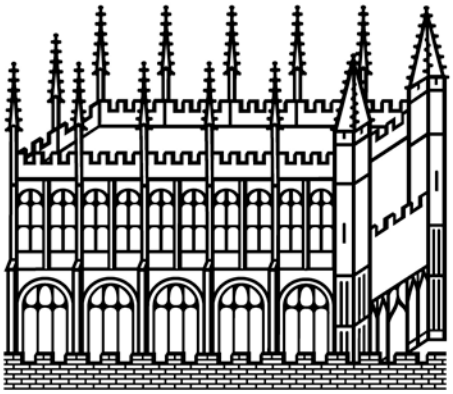

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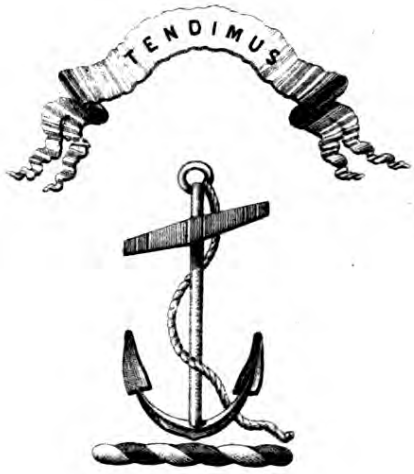

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SCENES OF CLERICAL LIFE

BY

GEORGE ELIOT

IN TWO VOLUMES

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CONTENTS.

VOL. I.

PAGE

THE SAD FORTUNES OF THE REVEREND AMOS BARTON, 1

MR GILFIL'S LOVE-STORY, ... 153

VOL. II.

MR GILFIL'S LOVE-STORY—*(continued)*, ... 1

JANET'S REPENTANCE, ... 45

682

THE SAD FORTUNES

OF THE

REVEREND AMOS BARTON

SCENES OF CLERICAL LIFE.

THE SAD FORTUNES OF THE REV. AMOS BARTON.

CHAPTER I.

SHEPPERTON Church was a very different-looking building five-and-twenty years ago. To be sure, its substantial stone tower looks at you through its intelligent eye, the clock, with the friendly expression of former days; but in everything else what changes! Now there is a wide span of slated roof flanking the old steeple; the windows are tall and symmetrical; the outer doors are resplendent with oak-graining, the inner doors reverentially noiseless with a garment of red baize; and the walls, you are convinced, no lichen will ever again effect a settlement on—they are smooth and innutrient as the summit of the Rev. Amos

Barton's head, after ten years of baldness and supererogatory soap. Pass through the baize doors and you will see the nave filled with well-shaped benches, understood to be free seats; while in certain eligible corners, less directly under the fire of the clergyman's eye, there are pews reserved for the Shepperton gentility. Ample galleries are supported on iron pillars, and in one of them stands the crowning glory, the very clasp or aigrette of Shepperton church-adornment—namely, an organ, not very much out of repair, on which a collector of small rents, differentiated by the force of circumstances into an organist, will accompany the alacrity of your departure after the blessing, by a sacred minuet or an easy "Gloria."

Immense improvement! says the well-regulated mind, which unintermittingly rejoices in the New Police, the Tithe Commutation Act, the penny-post, and all guarantees of human advancement, and has no moments when conservative-reforming intellect takes a nap, while imagination does a little Toryism by the sly, revelling in regret that dear, old, brown, crumbling, picturesque inefficiency is everywhere giving place to spick-and-span new-painted, new-varnished efficiency, which

will yield endless diagrams, plans, elevations, and sections, but alas! no picture. Mine, I fear, is not a well-regulated mind: it has an occasional tenderness for old abuses; it lingers with a certain fondness over the days of nasal clerks and top-booted parsons, and has a sigh for the departed shades of vulgar errors. So it is not surprising that I recall with a fond sadness Shepperton Church as it was in the old days, with its outer coat of rough stucco, its red-tiled roof, its heterogeneous windows patched with desultory bits of painted glass, and its little flight of steps with their wooden rail running up the outer wall, and leading to the school-children's gallery.

Then inside, what dear old quaintnesses! which I began to look at with delight, even when I was so crude a member of the congregation, that my nurse found it necessary to provide for the reinforcement of my devotional patience by smuggling bread-and-butter into the sacred edifice. There was the chancel, guarded by two little cherubims looking uncomfortably squeezed between arch and wall, and adorned with the escutcheons of the Oldinport family, which showed me inexhaustible possibilities of meaning in their blood-red hands,

their death's-heads and cross-bones, their leopards' paws, and Maltese crosses. There were inscriptions on the panels of the singing-gallery, telling of benefactions to the poor of Shepperton, with an involuted elegance of capitals and final flourishes, which my alphabetic erudition traced with ever-new delight. No benches in those days; but huge roomy pews, round which devout church-goers sat during "lessons," trying to look anywhere else than into each other's eyes. No low partitions allowing you, with a dreary absence of contrast and mystery, to see everything at all moments; but tall dark panels, under whose shadow I sank with a sense of retirement through the Litany, only to feel with more intensity my burst into the conspicuousness of public life when I was made to stand up on the seat during the psalms or the singing.

And the singing was no mechanical affair of official routine; it had a drama. As the moment of psalmody approached, by some process to me as mysterious and untraceable as the opening of the flowers or the breaking-out of the stars, a slate appeared in front of the gallery, advertising in bold characters the psalm about to be sung, lest the sonorous announcement of the clerk should

still leave the bucolic mind in doubt on that head. Then followed the migration of the clerk to the gallery, where, in company with a bassoon, two key-bugles, a carpenter understood to have an amazing power of singing "counter," and two lesser musical stars, he formed the complement of a choir regarded in Shepperton as one of distinguished attraction, occasionally known to draw hearers from the next parish. The innovation of hymn-books was as yet undreamed of; even the New Version was regarded with a sort of melancholy tolerance, as part of the common degeneracy in a time when prices had dwindled, and a cotton gown was no longer stout enough to last a lifetime; for the lyrical taste of the best heads in Shepperton had been formed on Sternhold and Hopkins. But the greatest triumphs of the Shepperton choir were reserved for the Sundays when the slate announced an ANTHEM, with a dignified abstinence from particularisation, both words and music lying far beyond the reach of the most ambitious amateur in the congregation:—an anthem in which the key-bugles always ran away at a great pace, while the bassoon every now and then boomed a flying shot after them.

As for the clergyman, Mr Gilfil, an excellent old gentleman, who smoked very long pipes and preached very short sermons, I must not speak of him, or I might be tempted to tell the story of his life, which had its little romance, as most lives have between the ages of teetotum and tobacco. And at present I am concerned with quite another sort of clergyman—the Rev. Amos Barton, who did not come to Shepperton until long after Mr Gilfil had departed this life—until after an interval in which Evangelicalism and the Catholic Question had begun to agitate the rustic mind with controversial debates. A Popish blacksmith had produced a strong Protestant reaction by declaring that, as soon as the Emancipation Bill was passed, he should do a great stroke of business in gridirons; and the disinclination of the Shepperton parishioners generally to dim the unique glory of St Lawrence, rendered the Church and Constitution an affair of their business and bosoms. A zealous evangelical preacher had made the old sounding-board vibrate with quite a different sort of elocution from Mr Gilfil's; the hymn-book had almost superseded the Old and New Versions; and the great square pews were crowded with new

faces from distant corners of the parish—perhaps from dissenting chapels.

You are not imagining, I hope, that Amos Barton was the incumbent of Shepperton. He was no such thing. Those were days when a man could hold three small livings, starve a curate a-piece on two of them, and live badly himself on the third. It was so with the Vicar of Shepperton; a vicar given to bricks and mortar, and thereby running into debt far away in a northern county—who executed his vicarial functions towards Shepperton by pocketing the sum of thirty-five pounds ten per annum, the net surplus remaining to him from the proceeds of that living, after the disbursement of eighty pounds as the annual stipend of his curate. And now, pray, can you solve me the following problem? Given a man with a wife and six children: let him be obliged always to exhibit himself when outside his own door in a suit of black broadcloth, such as will not undermine the foundations of the Establishment by a paltry plebeian glossiness or an unseemly whiteness at the edges; in a snowy cravat, which is a serious investment of labour in the hemming, starching, and ironing departments;

and in a hat which shows no symptom of taking to the hideous doctrine of expediency, and shaping itself according to circumstances; let him have a parish large enough to create an external necessity for abundant shoe-leather, and an internal necessity for abundant beef and mutton, as well as poor enough to require frequent priestly consolation in the shape of shillings and sixpences; and, lastly, let him be compelled, by his own pride and other people's, to dress his wife and children with gentility from bonnet-strings to shoe-strings. By what process of division can the sum of eighty pounds per annum be made to yield a quotient which will cover that man's weekly expenses? This was the problem presented by the position of the Rev. Amos Barton, as curate of Shepperton, rather more than twenty years ago.

What was thought of this problem, and of the man who had to work it out, by some of the well-to-do inhabitants of Shepperton, two years or more after Mr Barton's arrival among them, you shall hear, if you will accompany me to Cross Farm, and to the fireside of Mrs Patten, a childless old lady, who had got rich chiefly by the

negative process of spending nothing. Mrs Patten's passive accumulation of wealth, through all sorts of "bad times," on the farm of which she had been sole tenant since her husband's death, her epigrammatic neighbour, Mrs Hackit, sarcastically accounted for by supposing that "sixpences grew on the bents of Cross Farm;" while Mr Hackit, expressing his views more literally, reminded his wife that "money breeds money." Mr and Mrs Hackit, from the neighbouring farm, are Mrs Patten's guests this evening; so is Mr Pilgrim, the doctor from the nearest market-town, who, though occasionally affecting aristocratic airs, and giving late dinners with enigmatic side-dishes and poisonous port, is never so comfortable as when he is relaxing his professional legs in one of those excellent farmhouses where the mice are sleek and the mistress sickly. And he is at this moment in clover.

For the flickering of Mrs Patten's bright fire is reflected in her bright copper tea-kettle, the home-made muffins glisten with an inviting succulence, and Mrs Patten's niece, a single lady of fifty, who has refused the most ineligible offers out of devotion to her aged aunt, is pouring the

rich cream into the fragrant tea with a discreet liberality.

Reader! *did* you ever taste such a cup of tea as Miss Gibbs is this moment handing to Mr Pilgrim? Do you know the dulcet strength, the animating blandness of tea sufficiently blended with real farmhouse cream? No—most likely you are a miserable town-bred reader, who think of cream as a thinnish white fluid, delivered in infinitesimal pennyworths down area steps; or perhaps, from a presentiment of calves' brains, you refrain from any lacteal addition, and rasp your tongue with unmitigated bohea. You have a vague idea of a milch cow as probably a white-plaster animal standing in a butterman's window, and you know nothing of the sweet history of genuine cream, such as Miss Gibbs's: how it was this morning in the udders of the large sleek beasts, as they stood lowing a patient entreaty under the milking-shed; how it fell with a pleasant rhythm into Betty's pail, sending a delicious incense into the cool air; how it was carried into that temple of moist cleanliness, the dairy, where it quietly separated itself from the meaner elements of milk, and lay in mellowed whiteness, ready for the skimming-dish

which transferred it to Miss Gibbs's glass cream-jug. If I am right in my conjecture, you are unacquainted with the highest possibilities of tea; and Mr Pilgrim, who is holding that cup in his hand, has an idea beyond you.

Mrs Hackit declines cream; she has so long abstained from it with an eye to the weekly butter-money, that abstinence, wedded to habit, has begotten aversion. She is a thin woman with a chronic liver-complaint, which would have secured her Mr Pilgrim's entire regard and unreserved good word, even if he had not been in awe of her tongue, which was as sharp as his own lancet. She has brought her knitting—no frivolous fancy knitting, but a substantial woollen stocking; the click-click of her knitting-needles is the running accompaniment to all her conversation, and in her utmost enjoyment of spoiling a friend's self-satisfaction, she was never known to spoil a stocking.

Mrs Patten does not admire this excessive click-clicking activity. Quiescence in an easy-chair, under the sense of compound interest perpetually accumulating, has long seemed an ample function to her, and she does her malevolence gently. She is a pretty little old woman of eighty, with a close

cap and tiny flat white curls round her face, as natty and unsoiled and invariable as the waxen image of a little old lady under a glass-case; once a lady's-maid, and married for her beauty. She used to adore her husband, and now she adores her money, cherishing a quiet blood-relation's hatred for her niece, Janet Gibbs, who, she knows, expects a large legacy, and whom she is determined to disappoint. Her money shall all go in a lump to a distant relation of her husband's, and Janet shall be saved the trouble of pretending to cry, by finding that she is left with a miserable pittance.

Mrs Patten has more respect for her neighbour Mr Hackit than for most people. Mr Hackit is a shrewd substantial man, whose advice about crops is always worth listening to, and who is too well off to want to borrow money.

And now that we are snug and warm with this little tea-party, while it is freezing with February bitterness outside, we will listen to what they are talking about.

"So," said Mr Pilgrim, with his mouth only half empty of muffin, "you had a row in Shepperton church last Sunday. I was at Jem Hood's, the bassoon-man's, this morning, attending his

wife, and he swears he'll be revenged on the parson — a confounded, methodistical, meddlesome chap, who must be putting his finger in every pie. What was it all about?"

"O, a passill o' nonsense," said Mr Hackit, sticking one thumb between the buttons of his capacious waistcoat, and retaining a pinch of snuff with the other—for he was but moderately given to "the cups that cheer but not inebriate," and had already finished his tea; "they began to sing the wedding psalm for a new-married couple, as pretty a psalm an' as pretty a tune as any's in the prayer-book. It's been sung for every new-married couple since I was a boy. And what can be better?" Here Mr Hackit stretched out his left arm, threw back his head, and broke into melody—

"'O what a happy thing it is,
And joyful for to see,
Brethren to dwell together in
Friendship and unity.'

But Mr Barton is all for th' hymns, and a sort o' music as I can't join in at all."

"And so," said Mr Pilgrim, recalling Mr Hackit from lyrical reminiscences to narrative, "he called out Silence! did he? when he got into the pulpit;

and gave a hymn out himself to some meeting-house tune?"

"Yes," said Mrs Hackit, stooping towards the candle to pick up a stitch, "and turned as red as a turkey-cock. I often say, when he preaches about meekness, he gives himself a slap in the face. He's like me—he's got a temper of his own."

"Rather a low-bred fellow, I think, Barton," said Mr Pilgrim, who hated the Reverend Amos for two reasons—because he had called in a new doctor, recently settled in Shepperton; and because, being himself a dabbler in drugs, he had the credit of having cured a patient of Mr Pilgrim's. "They say his father was a dissenting shoemaker; and he's half a dissenter himself. Why, doesn't he preach extempore in that cottage up here, of a Sunday evening?"

"Tchaw!"—this was Mr Hackit's favourite interjection—"that preaching without book's no good, only when a man has a gift, and has the Bible at his fingers' ends. It was all very well for Parry—he'd a gift; and in my youth I've heard the Ranters out o' doors in Yorkshire go on for an hour or two on end, without ever sticking fast a minute. There was one clever chap, I

remember, as used to say, 'You're like the wood-pigeon; it says do, do, do all day, and never sets about any work itself.' That's bringing it home to people. But our parson's no gift at all that way; he can preach as good a sermon as need be heard when he writes it down. But when he tries to preach wi'out book, he rambles about, and doesn't stick to 's text; and every now and then he flounders about like a sheep as has cast itself, and can't get on'ts legs again. You wouldn't like that, Mrs Patten, if you was to go to church now?"

"Eh, dear," said Mrs Patten, falling back in her chair, and lifting up her little withered hands, "what 'ud Mr Gilfil say, if he was worthy to know the changes as have come about i' the church these last ten years? I don't understand these new sort o' doctrines. When Mr Barton comes to see me, he talks about nothing but my sins and my need o' marcy. Now, Mr Hackit, I've never been a sinner. From the fust beginning, when I went into service, I al'ys did my duty by my emplyers. I was a good wife as any's in the county—never aggravated my husband. The cheese-factor used to say my cheese was al'ys to be depended on.

I've known women, as their cheeses swelled a shame to be seen, when their husbands had counted on the cheese-money to make up their rent; and yet they'd three gowns to my one. If I'm not to be saved, I know a many as are in a bad way. But it's well for me as I can't go to church any longer, for if th' old singers are to be done away with, there'll be nothing left as it was in Mr Patten's time; and what's more, I hear you've settled to pull the church down and build it up new?"

Now the fact was that the Rev. Amos Barton, on his last visit to Mrs Patten, had urged her to enlarge her promised subscription of twenty pounds, representing to her that she was only a steward of her riches, and that she could not spend them more for the glory of God than by giving a heavy subscription towards the rebuilding of Shepperton church—a practical precept which was not likely to smooth the way to her acceptance of his theological doctrine. Mr Hackit, who had more doctrinal enlightenment than Mrs Patten, had been a little shocked by the heathenism of her speech, and was glad of the new turn given to the subject by this question, addressed to him as churchwarden and an authority in all parochial matters.

"Ah," he answered, "the parson's boddered us into it at last, and we're to begin pulling down this spring. But we haven't got money enough yet. I was for waiting till we'd made up the sum, and, for my part, I think the congregation's fell off o' late; though Mr Barton says that's because there's been no room for the people when they've come. You see, the congregation got so large in Parry's time, the people stood in th' aisles; but there's never any crowd now, as I can see."

"Well," said Mrs Hackit, whose good-nature began to act now that it was a little in contradiction with the dominant tone of the conversation, "*I* like Mr Barton. I think he's a good sort o' man, for all he's not overburthen'd i' th' upper story; and his wife's as nice a lady-like woman as I'd wish to see. How nice she keeps her children! and little enough money to do't with; and a delicate creatur'—six children, and another a-coming. I don't know how they make both ends meet, I'm sure, now her aunt has left 'em. But I sent 'em a cheese and a sack o' potatoes last week; that's something towards filling the little mouths."

"Ah!" said Mr Hackit, "and my wife makes Mr Barton a good stiff glass o' brandy-and-water,

when he comes in to supper after his cottage preaching. The parson likes it; it puts a bit o' colour into 's face, and makes him look a deal handsomer."

This allusion to brandy-and-water suggested to Miss Gibbs the introduction of the liquor decanters, now that the tea was cleared away; for in bucolic society five-and-twenty years ago, the human animal of the male sex was understood to be perpetually athirst, and "something to drink" was as necessary a "condition of thought" as Time and Space.

"Now, that cottage preaching," said Mr Pilgrim, mixing himself a strong glass of 'cold without,' "I was talking about it to our Parson Ely the other day, and he doesn't approve of it at all. He said it did as much harm as good to give a too familiar aspect to religious teaching. That was what Ely said—it does as much harm as good to give a too familiar aspect to religious teaching."

Mr Pilgrim generally spoke with an intermittent kind of splutter; indeed, one of his patients had observed that it was a pity such a clever man had a "'pediment" in his speech. But when he came to what he conceived the pith of his argument or

the point of his joke, he mouthed out his words with slow emphasis; as a hen, when advertising her accouchement, passes at irregular intervals from pianissimo semiquavers to fortissimo crotchets. He thought this speech of Mr Ely's particularly metaphysical and profound, and the more decisive of the question because it was a generality which represented no particulars to his mind.

"Well, I don't know about that," said Mrs Hackit, who had always the courage of her opinion, "but I know, some of our labourers and stockingers as used never to come to church, come to the cottage, and that's better than never hearing anything good from week's end to week's end. And there's that Track Society as Mr Barton has begun —I've seen more o' the poor people with going tracking, than all the time I've lived in the parish before. And there'd need be something done among 'em; for the drinking at them Benefit Clubs is shameful. There's hardly a steady man or steady woman either, but what's a dissenter."

During this speech of Mrs Hackit's, Mr Pilgrim had emitted a succession of little snorts, something like the treble grunts of a guinea-pig, which were always with him the sign of suppressed disap-

proval. But he never contradicted Mrs Hackit —a woman whose "pot luck" was always to be relied on, and who on her side had unlimited reliance on bleeding, blistering, and draughts.

Mrs Patten, however, felt equal disapprobation, and had no reasons for suppressing it.

"Well," she remarked, "I've heared of no good from interfering with one's neighbours, poor or rich. And I hate the sight o' women going about trapesing from house to house in all weathers, wet or dry, and coming in with their petticoats dagged and their shoes all over mud. Janet wanted to join in the tracking, but I told her I'd have nobody tracking out o' my house; when I'm gone, she may do as she likes. I never dagged my petticoats in *my* life, and I've no opinion o' that sort o' religion."

"No," said Mr Hackit, who was fond of soothing the acerbities of the feminine mind with a jocose compliment, "you held your petticoats so high, to show your tight ankles: it isn't everybody as likes to show her ankles."

This joke met with general acceptance, even from the snubbed Janet, whose ankles were only tight in the sense of looking extremely squeezed

by her boots. But Janet seemed always to identify herself with her aunt's personality, holding her own under protest.

Under cover of the general laughter, the gentlemen replenished their glasses, Mr Pilgrim attempting to give his the character of a stirrup-cup by observing that he "must be going." Miss Gibbs seized this opportunity of telling Mrs Hackit that she suspected Betty, the dairymaid, of frying the best bacon for the shepherd, when he sat up with her to "help brew;" whereupon Mrs Hackit replied, that she had always thought Betty false; and Mrs Patten said, there was no bacon stolen when *she* was able to manage. Mr Hackit, who often complained that he "never saw the like to women with their maids—he never had any trouble with his men," avoided listening to this discussion, by raising the question of vetches with Mr Pilgrim. The stream of conversation had thus diverged; and no more was said about the Rev. Amos Barton, who is the main object of interest to us just now. So we may leave Cross Farm without waiting till Mrs Hackit, resolutely donning her clogs and wrappings, renders it incumbent on Mr Pilgrim also to fulfil his frequent threat of going.

CHAPTER II.

It was happy for the Rev. Amos Barton that he did not, like us, overhear the conversation recorded in the last chapter. Indeed, what mortal is there of us, who would find his satisfaction enhanced by an opportunity of comparing the picture he presents to himself of his own doings, with the picture they make on the mental retina of his neighbours? We are poor plants buoyed up by the air-vessels of our own conceit: alas for us, if we get a few pinches that empty us of that windy self-subsistence! The very capacity for good would go out of us. For, tell the most impassioned orator, suddenly, that his wig is awry, or his shirt-lap hanging out, and that he is tickling people by the oddity of his person, instead of thrilling them by the energy of his periods, and you would infallibly dry up the spring of his eloquence. That is a deep and wide saying, that no miracle can be wrought without faith—without the worker's faith

in himself, as well as the recipient's faith in him. And the greater part of the worker's faith in himself is made up of the faith that others believe in him.

Let me be persuaded that my neighbour Jenkins considers me a blockhead, and I shall never shine in conversation with him any more. Let me discover that the lovely Phœbe thinks my squint intolerable, and I shall never be able to fix her blandly with my disengaged eye again.

Thank heaven, then, that a little illusion is left to us, to enable us to be useful and agreeable—that we don't know exactly what our friends think of us—that the world is not made of looking-glass, to show us just the figure we are making, and just what is going on behind our backs! By the help of dear friendly illusion, we are able to dream that we are charming—and our faces wear a becoming air of self-possession; we are able to dream that other men admire our talents—and our benignity is undisturbed; we are able to dream that we are doing much good—and we do a little.

Thus it was with Amos Barton on that very Thursday evening, when he was the subject of the conversation at Cross Farm. He had been dining

at Mr Farquhar's, the secondary squire of the parish, and, stimulated by unwonted gravies and port wine, had been delivering his opinion on affairs parochial and otherwise with considerable animation. And he was now returning home in the moonlight—a little chill, it is true, for he had just now no greatcoat compatible with clerical dignity, and a fur boa round one's neck, with a waterproof cape over one's shoulders, doesn't frighten away the cold from one's legs; but entirely unsuspicious, not only of Mr Hackit's estimate of his oratorical powers, but also of the critical remarks passed on him by the Misses Farquhar as soon as the drawing-room door had closed behind him. Miss Julia had observed that she *never* heard any one sniff so frightfully as Mr Barton did—she had a great mind to offer him her pocket-handkerchief; and Miss Arabella wondered why he always said he was going *for* to do a thing. He, excellent man! was meditating fresh pastoral exertions on the morrow; he would set on foot his lending library, in which he had introduced some books that would be a pretty sharp blow to the dissenters—one especially, purporting to be written by a working man who, out of pure zeal for the welfare of his class,

took the trouble to warn them in this way against those hypocritical thieves, the dissenting preachers. The Rev. Amos Barton profoundly believed in the existence of that working man, and had thoughts of writing to him. Dissent, he considered, would have its head bruised in Shepperton, for did he not attack it in two ways? He preached Low-Church doctrine—as evangelical as anything to be heard in the Independent Chapel; and he made a High-Church assertion of ecclesiastical powers and functions. Clearly, the Dissenters would feel that "the parson" was too many for them. Nothing like a man who combines shrewdness with energy. The wisdom of the serpent, Mr Barton considered, was one of his strong points.

Look at him as he winds through the little churchyard! The silver light that falls aslant on church and tomb, enables you to see his slim black figure, made all the slimmer by tight pantaloons, as it flits past the pale gravestones. He walks with a quick step, and is now rapping with sharp decision at the vicarage door. It is opened without delay by the nurse, cook, and housemaid, all at once—that is to say, by the robust maid-of-all-work, Nanny; and as Mr Barton hangs up his hat

in the passage, you see that a narrow face of no particular complexion—even the small-pox that has attacked it seems to have been of a mongrel, indefinite kind—with features of no particular shape, and an eye of no particular expression, is surmounted by a slope of baldness gently rising from brow to crown. You judge him, rightly, to be about forty. The house is quiet, for it is half-past ten, and the children have long been gone to bed. He opens the sitting-room door, but instead of seeing his wife, as he expected, stitching with the nimblest of fingers by the light of one candle, he finds her dispensing with the light of a candle altogether. She is softly pacing up and down by the red firelight, holding in her arms little Walter, the year-old baby, who looks over her shoulder with large wide-open eyes, while the patient mother pats his back with her soft hand, and glances with a sigh at the heap of large and small stockings lying unmended on the table.

She was a lovely woman—Mrs Amos Barton; a large, fair, gentle Madonna, with thick, close chestnut curls beside her well-rounded cheeks, and with large, tender, short-sighted eyes. The flowing lines of her tall figure made the limpest dress

look graceful, and her old frayed black silk seemed to repose on her bust and limbs with a placid elegance and sense of distinction, in strong contrast with the uneasy sense of being no fit, that seemed to express itself in the rustling of Mrs Farquhar's *gros de Naples*. The caps she wore would have been pronounced, when off her head, utterly heavy and hideous—for in those days even fashionable caps were large and floppy; but surmounting her long arched neck, and mingling their borders of cheap lace and ribbon with her chestnut curls, they seemed miracles of successful millinery. Among strangers she was shy and tremulous as a girl of fifteen; she blushed crimson if any one appealed to her opinion; yet that tall, graceful, substantial presence was so imposing in its mildness, that men spoke to her with an agreeable sensation of timidity.

Soothing, unspeakable charm of gentle womanhood! which supersedes all acquisitions, all accomplishments. You would never have asked, at any period of Mrs Amos Barton's life, if she sketched or played the piano. You would even perhaps have been rather scandalised if she had descended from the serene dignity of *being* to the assiduous

unrest of *doing*. Happy the man, you would have thought, whose eye will rest on her in the pauses of his fireside reading—whose hot aching forehead will be soothed by the contact of her cool soft hand—who will recover himself from dejection at his mistakes and failures in the loving light of her unreproaching eyes! You would not, perhaps, have anticipated that this bliss would fall to the share of precisely such a man as Amos Barton, whom you have already surmised not to have the refined sensibilities for which you might have imagined Mrs Barton's qualities to be destined by pre-established harmony. But I, for one, do not grudge Amos Barton this sweet wife. I have all my life had a sympathy for mongrel ungainly dogs, who are nobody's pets; and I would rather surprise one of them by a pat and a pleasant morsel, than meet the condescending advances of the loveliest Skye-terrier who has his cushion by my lady's chair. That, to be sure, is not the way of the world: if it happens to see a fellow of fine proportions and aristocratic mien, who makes no *faux pas*, and wins golden opinions from all sorts of men, it straightway picks out for him the loveliest of unmarried women, and says, *There* would

be a proper match! Not at all, say I: let that successful, well-shapen, discreet and able gentleman put up with something less than the best in the matrimonial department; and let the sweet woman go to make sunshine and a soft pillow for the poor devil whose legs are not models, whose efforts are often blunders, and who in general gets more kicks than halfpence. She—the sweet woman—will like it as well; for her sublime capacity of loving will have all the more scope; and I venture to say, Mrs Barton's nature would never have grown half so angelic if she had married the man you would perhaps have had in your eye for her—a man with sufficient income and abundant personal éclat. Besides, Amos was an affectionate husband, and, in his way, valued his wife as his best treasure.

But now he has shut the door behind him, and said, "Well, Milly!"

"Well, dear!" was the corresponding greeting, made eloquent by a smile.

"So that young rascal won't go to sleep! Can't you give him to Nanny?"

"Why, Nanny has been busy ironing this evening; but I think I'll take him to her now." And

Mrs Barton glided towards the kitchen, while her husband ran up-stairs to put on his maize-coloured dressing-gown, in which costume he was quietly filling his long pipe when his wife returned to the sitting-room. Maize is a colour that decidedly did *not* suit his complexion, and it is one that soon soils; why, then, did Mr Barton select it for domestic wear? Perhaps because he had a knack of hitting on the wrong thing in garb as well as in grammar.

Mrs Barton now lighted her candle, and seated herself before her heap of stockings. She had something disagreeable to tell her husband, but she would not enter on it at once.

"Have you had a nice evening, dear?"

"Yes, pretty well. Ely was there to dinner, but went away rather early. Miss Arabella is setting her cap at him with a vengeance. But I don't think he's much smitten. I've a notion Ely's engaged to some one at a distance, and will astonish all the ladies who are languishing for him here, by bringing home his bride one of these days. Ely's a sly dog; he'll like that."

"Did the Farquhars say anything about the singing last Sunday?"

"Yes; Farquhar said he thought it was time there was some improvement in the choir. But he was rather scandalised at my setting the tune of 'Lydia.' He says he's always hearing it as he passes the Independent meeting." Here Mr Barton laughed—he had a way of laughing at criticisms that other people thought damaging—and thereby showed the remainder of a set of teeth which, like the remnants of the Old Guard, were few in number, and very much the worse for wear. "But," he continued, "Mrs Farquhar talked the most about Mr Bridmain and the Countess. She has taken up all the gossip about them, and wanted to convert me to her opinion, but I told her pretty strongly what I thought."

"Dear me! why will people take so much pains to find out evil about others? I have had a note from the Countess since you went, asking us to dine with them on Friday."

Here Mrs Barton reached the note from the mantelpiece, and gave it to her husband. We will look over his shoulder while he reads it:—

"SWEETEST MILLY,—Bring your lovely face with your husband to dine with us on Friday at

seven—do. If not, I will be sulky with you till Sunday, when I shall be obliged to see you, and shall long to kiss you that very moment.—Yours, according to your answer,

"CAROLINE CZERLASKI."

"Just like her, isn't it?" said Mrs Barton. "I suppose we can go?"

"Yes; I have no engagement. The Clerical Meeting is to-morrow, you know."

"And, dear, Woods the butcher called, to say he must have some money next week. He has a payment to make up."

This announcement made Mr Barton thoughtful. He puffed more rapidly, and looked at the fire.

"I think I must ask Hackit to lend me twenty pounds, for it is nearly two months till Lady-day, and we can't give Woods our last shilling."

"I hardly like you to ask Mr Hackit, dear—he and Mrs Hackit have been so very kind to us; they have sent us so many things lately."

"Then I must ask Oldinport. I'm going to write to him to-morrow morning, for to tell him the arrangement I've been thinking of about hav-

ing service in the workhouse while the church is being enlarged. If he agrees to attend service there once or twice, the other people will come. Net the large fish, and you're sure to have the small fry."

"I wish we could do without borrowing money, and yet I don't see how we can. Poor Fred must have some new shoes; I couldn't let him go to Mrs Bond's yesterday because his toes were peeping out, dear child! and I can't let him walk anywhere except in the garden. He must have a pair before Sunday. Really, boots and shoes are the greatest trouble of my life. Everything else one can turn and turn about, and make old look like new; but there's no coaxing boots and shoes to look better than they are."

Mrs Barton was playfully undervaluing her skill in metamorphosing boots and shoes. She had at that moment on her feet a pair of slippers which had long ago lived through the prunella phase of their existence, and were now running a respectable career as black silk slippers, having been neatly covered with that material by Mrs Barton's own neat fingers. Wonderful fingers those! they were never empty; for if she went

to spend a few hours with a friendly parishioner, out came her thimble and a piece of calico or muslin, which, before she left, had become a mysterious little garment with all sorts of hemmed ins and outs. She was even trying to persuade her husband to leave off tight pantaloons, because if he would wear the ordinary gun-cases, she knew she could make them so well that no one would suspect the sex of the tailor.

But by this time Mr Barton has finished his pipe, the candle begins to burn low, and Mrs Barton goes to see if Nanny has succeeded in lulling Walter to sleep. Nanny is that moment putting him in the little cot by his mother's bedside; the head, with its thin wavelets of brown hair, indents the little pillow; and a tiny, waxen, dimpled fist hides the rosy lips, for baby is given to the infantine peccadillo of thumb-sucking.

So Nanny could now join in the short evening prayer, and all could go to bed.

Mrs Barton carried up-stairs the remainder of her heap of stockings, and laid them on a table close to her bedside, where also she placed a warm shawl, removing her candle, before she put it out, to a tin socket fixed at the head of her bed. Her

body was very weary, but her heart was not heavy, in spite of Mr Woods the butcher, and the transitory nature of shoe-leather; for her heart so overflowed with love, she felt sure she was near a fountain of love that would care for husband and babes better than she could foresee; so she was soon asleep. But about half-past five o'clock in the morning, if there were any angels watching round her bed—and angels might be glad of such an office—they saw Mrs Barton rise up quietly, careful not to disturb the slumbering Amos, who was snoring the snore of the just, light her candle, prop herself upright with the pillows, throw the warm shawl round her shoulders, and renew her attack on the heap of undarned stockings. She darned away until she heard Nanny stirring, and then drowsiness came with the dawn; the candle was put out, and she sank into a doze. But at nine o'clock she was at the breakfast-table, busy cutting bread-and-butter for five hungry mouths, while Nanny, baby on one arm, in rosy cheeks, fat neck, and night-gown, brought in a jug of hot milk-and-water. Nearest her mother sits the nine-year-old Patty, the eldest child, whose sweet fair face is already rather grave sometimes, and who always wants to

run up-stairs to save mamma's legs, which get so tired of an evening. Then there are four other blond heads—two boys and two girls, gradually decreasing in size down to Chubby, who is making a round O of her mouth to receive a bit of papa's "baton." Papa's attention was divided between petting Chubby, rebuking the noisy Fred, which he did with a somewhat excessive sharpness, and eating his own breakfast. He had not yet looked at Mamma, and did not know that her cheek was paler than usual. But Patty whispered, "Mamma, have you the headache?"

Happily, coal was cheap in the neighbourhood of Shepperton, and Mr Hackit would any time let his horses draw a load for "the parson" without charge; so there was a blazing fire in the sitting-room, and not without need, for the vicarage garden, as they looked out on it from the bow-window, was hard with black frost, and the sky had the white woolly look that portends snow.

Breakfast over, Mr Barton mounted to his study, and occupied himself in the first place with his letter to Mr Oldinport. It was very much the same sort of letter as most clergymen would have written under the same circumstances, except that

instead of *per*ambulate, the Rev. Amos wrote *pre*-ambulate, and instead of "if haply," "if happily," the contingency indicated being the reverse of happy. Mr Barton had not the gift of perfect accuracy in English orthography and syntax; which was unfortunate, as he was known not to be a Hebrew scholar, and not in the least suspected of being an accomplished Grecian. These lapses, in a man who had gone through the Eleusinian mysteries of a university education, surprised the young ladies of his parish extremely; especially the Misses Farquhar, whom he had once addressed in a letter as Dear Mads., apparently an abbreviation for Madams. The persons least surprised at the Rev. Amos's deficiencies were his clerical brethren, who had gone through the mysteries themselves.

At eleven o'clock, Mr Barton walked forth in cape and boa, with the sleet driving in his face, to read prayers at the workhouse, euphuistically called the "College." The College was a huge square stone building, standing on the best apology for an elevation of ground that could be seen for about ten miles round Shepperton. A flat ugly district this; depressing enough to look at, even on the brightest days. The roads are black with

coal-dust, the brick houses dingy with smoke ; and at that time—the time of handloom weavers—every other cottage had a loom at its window, where you might see a pale, sickly-looking man or woman pressing a narrow chest against a board, and doing a sort of tread-mill work with legs and arms. A troublesome district for a clergyman ; at least to one who, like Amos Barton, understood the "cure of souls" in something more than an official sense ; for over and above the rustic stupidity furnished by the farm-labourers, the miners brought obstreperous animalism, and the weavers an acrid Radicalism and Dissent. Indeed, Mrs Hackit often observed that the colliers, who many of them earned better wages than Mr Barton, "passed their time in doing nothing but swilling ale and smoking, like the beasts that perish" (speaking, we may presume, in a remotely analogical sense) ; and in some of the alehouse corners the drink was flavoured by a dingy kind of infidelity, something like rinsings of Tom Paine in ditch-water. A certain amount of religious excitement, created by the popular preaching of Mr Parry, Amos's predecessor, had nearly died out, and the religious life of Shepperton was falling back to-

wards low-water mark. Here, you perceive, was a terrible stronghold of Satan; and you may well pity the Rev. Amos Barton, who had to stand single-handed and summon it to surrender. We read, indeed, that the walls of Jericho fell down before the sound of trumpets; but we nowhere hear that those trumpets were hoarse and feeble. Doubtless they were trumpets that gave forth clear ringing tones, and sent a mighty vibration through brick and mortar. But the oratory of the Rev. Amos resembled rather a Belgian railway-horn, which shows praiseworthy intentions inadequately fulfilled. He often missed the right note both in public and private exhortation, and got a little angry in consequence. For though Amos thought himself strong, he did not *feel* himself strong. Nature had given him the opinion, but not the sensation. Without that opinion he would probably never have worn cambric bands, but would have been an excellent cabinetmaker and deacon of an Independent church, as his father was before him (he was not a shoemaker, as Mr Pilgrim had reported). He might then have sniffed long and loud in the corner of his pew in Gun Street chapel; he might have indulged in halting rheto-

ric at prayer-meetings, and have spoken faulty English in private life; and these little infirmities would not have prevented him, honest faithful man that he was, from being a shining light in the dissenting circle of Bridgeport. A tallow dip, of the long-eight description, is an excellent thing in the kitchen candlestick, and Betty's nose and eye are not sensitive to the difference between it and the finest wax; it is only when you stick it in the silver candlestick, and introduce it into the drawing-room, that it seems plebeian, dim, and ineffectual. Alas for the worthy man who, like that candle, gets himself into the wrong place! It is only the very largest souls who will be able to appreciate and pity him — who will discern and love sincerity of purpose amid all the bungling feebleness of achievement.

But now Amos Barton has made his way through the sleet as far as the College, has thrown off his hat, cape, and boa, and is reading, in the dreary stone-floored dining-room, a portion of the morning service to the inmates seated on the benches before him. Remember, the New Poor-law had not yet come into operation, and Mr Barton was not acting as paid chaplain of the Union, but as

the pastor who had the cure of all souls in his parish, pauper as well as other. After the prayers he always addressed to them a short discourse on some subject suggested by the lesson for the day, striving if by this means some edifying matter might find its way into the pauper mind and conscience—perhaps a task as trying as you could well imagine to the faith and patience of any honest clergyman. For, on the very first bench, these were the faces on which his eye had to rest, watching whether there was any stirring under the stagnant surface.

Right in front of him—probably because he was stone-deaf, and it was deemed more edifying to hear nothing at a short distance than at a long one —sat "Old Maxum," as he was familiarly called, his real patronymic remaining a mystery to most persons. A fine philological sense discerns in this cognomen an indication that the pauper patriarch had once been considered pithy and sententious in his speech; but now the weight of ninety-five years lay heavy on his tongue as well as in his ears, and he sat before the clergyman with protruded chin, and munching mouth, and eyes that seemed to look at emptiness.

Next to him sat Poll Fodge—known to the magistracy of her country as Mary Higgins—a one-eyed woman, with a scarred and seamy face, the most notorious rebel in the workhouse, said to have once thrown her broth over the master's coat-tails, and who, in spite of nature's apparent safe-guards against that contingency, had contributed to the perpetuation of the Fodge characteristics in the person of a small boy, who was behaving naughtily on one of the back benches. Miss Fodge fixed her one sore eye on Mr Barton with a sort of hardy defiance.

Beyond this member of the softer sex, at the end of the bench, sat "Silly Jim," a young man afflicted with hydrocephalus, who rolled his head from side to side, and gazed at the point of his nose. These were the supporters of Old Maxum on his right.

On his left sat Mr Fitchett, a tall fellow, who had once been a footman in the Oldinport family, and in that giddy elevation had enunciated a contemptuous opinion of boiled beef, which had been traditionally handed down in Shepperton as the direct cause of his ultimate reduction to pauper commons. His calves were now shrunken, and his

hair was grey without the aid of powder; but he still carried his chin as if he were conscious of a stiff cravat; he set his dilapidated hat on with a knowing inclination towards the left ear; and when he was on field-work, he carted and uncarted the manure with a sort of flunkey grace, the ghost of that jaunty demeanour with which he used to usher in my lady's morning visitors. The flunkey nature was nowhere completely subdued but in his stomach, and he still divided society into gentry, gentry's flunkeys, and the people who provided for them. A clergyman without a flunkey was an anomaly, belonging to neither of these classes. Mr Fitchett had an irrepressible tendency to drowsiness under spiritual instruction, and in the recurrent regularity with which he dozed off until he nodded and awaked himself, he looked not unlike a piece of mechanism, ingeniously contrived for measuring the length of Mr Barton's discourse.

Perfectly wide-awake, on the contrary, was his left-hand neighbour, Mrs Brick, one of those hard undying old women, to whom age seems to have given a network of wrinkles, as a coat of magic armour against the attacks of winters, warm or

cold. The point on which Mrs Brick was still sensitive—the theme on which you might possibly excite her hope and fear—was snuff. It seemed to be an enbalming powder, helping her soul to do the office of salt.

And now, eke out an audience of which this front benchful was a sample, with a certain number of refractory children, over whom Mr Spratt, the master of the workhouse, exercised an irate surveillance, and I think you will admit that the university-taught clergyman, whose office it is to bring home the gospel to a handful of such souls, has a sufficiently hard task. For, to have any chance of success, short of miraculous intervention, he must bring his geographical, chronological, exegetical mind pretty nearly to the pauper point of view, or of no view; he must have some approximate conception of the mode in which the doctrines that have so much vitality in the plenum of his own brain will comport themselves *in vacuo* —that is to say, in a brain that is neither geographical, chronological, nor exegetical. It is a flexible imagination that can take such a leap as that, and an adroit tongue that can adapt its speech to so unfamiliar a position. The Rev. Amos Barton

had neither that flexible imagination, nor that adroit tongue. He talked of Israel and its sins, of chosen vessels, of the Paschal lamb, of blood as a medium of reconciliation; and he strove in this way to convey religious truth within reach of the Fodge and Fitchett mind. This very morning, the first lesson was the twelfth chapter of Exodus, and Mr Barton's exposition turned on unleavened bread. Nothing in the world more suited to the simple understanding than instruction through familiar types and symbols! But there is always this danger attending it, that the interest or comprehension of your hearers may stop short precisely at the point where your spiritual interpretation begins. And Mr Barton this morning succeeded in carrying the pauper imagination to the dough-tub, but unfortunately was not able to carry it upwards from that well-known object to the unknown truths which it was intended to shadow forth.

Alas! a natural incapacity for teaching, finished by keeping "terms" at Cambridge, where there are able mathematicians, and butter is sold by the yard, is not apparently the medium through which Christian doctrine will distil as welcome dew on withered souls.

And so, while the sleet outside was turning to unquestionable snow, and the stony dining-room looked darker and drearier, and Mr Fitchett was nodding his lowest, and Mr Spratt was boxing the boys' ears with a constant *rinforzando*, as he felt more keenly the approach of dinner-time, Mr Barton wound up his exhortation with something of the February chill at his heart as well as his feet. Mr Fitchett, thoroughly roused now the instruction was at an end, obsequiously and gracefully advanced to help Mr Barton in putting on his cape, while Mrs Brick rubbed her withered forefinger round and round her little shoe-shaped snuff-box, vainly seeking for the fraction of a pinch. I can't help thinking that if Mr Barton had shaken into that little box a small portion of Scotch high-dried, he might have produced something more like an amiable emotion in Mrs Brick's mind than anything she had felt under his morning's exposition of the unleavened bread. But our good Amos laboured under a deficiency of small tact as well as of small cash; and when he observed the action of the old woman's forefinger, he said, in his brusque way, "So your snuff is all gone, eh?"

Mrs Brick's eyes twinkled with the visionary hope that the parson might be intending to replenish her box, at least mediately, through the present of a small copper.

"Ah, well! you'll soon be going where there is no more snuff. You'll be in need of mercy then. You must remember that you may have to seek for mercy and not find it, just as you're seeking for snuff."

At the first sentence of this admonition, the twinkle subsided from Mrs Brick's eyes. The lid of her box went "click!" and her heart was shut up at the same moment.

But now Mr Barton's attention was called for by Mr Spratt, who was dragging a small and unwilling boy from the rear. Mr Spratt was a small-featured, small-statured man, with a remarkable power of language, mitigated by hesitation, who piqued himself on expressing unexceptionable sentiments in unexceptionable language on all occasions.

"Mr Barton, sir—aw—aw—excuse my trespassing on your time—aw—to beg that you will administer a rebuke to this boy; he is—aw—aw—most inveterate in ill-behaviour during service-time."

The inveterate culprit was a boy of seven, vainly contending against "candles" at his nose by feeble sniffing. But no sooner had Mr Spratt uttered his impeachment, than Miss Fodge rushed forward and placed herself between Mr Barton and the accused.

"That's *my* child, Muster Barton," she exclaimed, further manifesting her maternal instincts by applying her apron to her offspring's nose. "He's al'ys a-findin' faut wi' him, an' a-poundin' him for nothin'. Let him goo an' eat his roost goose as is a-smellin' up in our noses while we're a-swallering them greasy broth, an' let my boy allooan."

Mr Spratt's small eyes flashed, and he was in danger of uttering sentiments not unexceptionable before the clergyman; but Mr Barton, foreseeing that a prolongation of this episode would not be to edification, said "Silence!" in his severest tones.

"Let me hear no abuse. Your boy is not likely to behave well, if you set him the example of being saucy." Then stooping down to Master Fodge, and taking him by the shoulder, "Do you like being beaten?"

"No-a."

"Then what a silly boy you are to be naughty. If you were not naughty, you wouldn't be beaten. But if you are naughty, God will be angry, as well as Mr Spratt; and God can burn you for ever. That will be worse than being beaten."

Master Fodge's countenance was neither affirmative nor negative of this proposition.

"But," continued Mr Barton, "if you will be a good boy, God will love you, and you will grow up to be a good man. Now, let me hear next Thursday that you have been a good boy."

Master Fodge had no distinct vision of the benefit that would accrue to him from this change of courses. But Mr Barton, being aware that Miss Fodge had touched on a delicate subject in alluding to the roast goose, was determined to witness no more polemics between her and Mr Spratt, so, saying good morning to the latter, he hastily left the College.

The snow was falling in thicker and thicker flakes, and already the vicarage-garden was cloaked in white as he passed through the gate. Mrs Barton heard him open the door, and ran out of the sitting-room to meet him.

"I'm afraid your feet are very wet, dear. What

a terrible morning! Let me take your hat. Your slippers are at the fire."

Mr Barton was feeling a little cold and cross. It is difficult, when you have been doing disagreeable duties, without praise, on a snowy day, to attend to the very minor morals. So he showed no recognition of Milly's attentions, but sniffed and said, "Fetch me my dressing-gown, will you?"

"It *is* down, dear. I thought you wouldn't go into the study, because you said you would letter and number the books for the Lending Library. Patty and I have been covering them, and they are all ready in the sitting-room."

"O, I can't do those this morning," said Mr Barton, as he took off his boots and put his feet into the slippers Milly had brought him; "you must put them away into the parlour."

The sitting-room was also the day-nursery and schoolroom; and while Mamma's back was turned, Dickey, the second boy, had insisted on superseding Chubby in the guidance of a headless horse, of the red-wafered species, which she was drawing round the room, so that when Papa opened the door Chubby was giving tongue energetically.

"Milly, some of these children must go away. I want to be quiet."

"Yes, dear. Hush, Chubby; go with Patty, and see what Nanny is getting for our dinner. Now, Fred and Sophy and Dickey, help me to carry these books into the parlour. There are three for Dickey. Carry them steadily."

Papa meanwhile settled himself in his easy-chair, and took up a work on Episcopacy, which he had from the Clerical Book Society; thinking he would finish it and return it this afternoon, as he was going to the Clerical Meeting at Milby Vicarage, where the Book Society had its head-quarters.

The Clerical Meetings and Book Society, which had been founded some eight or ten months, had had a noticeable effect on the Rev. Amos Barton. When he first came to Shepperton, he was simply an evangelical clergyman, whose Christian experiences had commenced under the teaching of the Rev. Mr Johns, of Gun Street Chapel, and had been consolidated at Cambridge under the influence of Mr Simeon. John Newton and Thomas Scott were his doctrinal ideals; he would have taken in the *Christian Observer* and the *Record*,

if he could have afforded it; his anecdotes were chiefly of the pious-jocose kind, current in dissenting circles; and he thought an Episcopalian Establishment unobjectionable.

But by this time the effect of the Tractarian agitation was beginning to be felt in backward provincial regions, and the Tractarian satire on the Low-Church party was beginning to tell even on those who disavowed or resisted Tractarian doctrines. The vibration of an intellectual movement was felt from the golden head to the miry toes of the Establishment; and so it came to pass that, in the district round Milby, the market-town close to Shepperton, the clergy had agreed to have a clerical meeting every month, wherein they would exercise their intellects by discussing theological and ecclesiastical questions, and cement their brotherly love by discussing a good dinner. A Book Society naturally suggested itself as an adjunct of this agreeable plan; and thus, you perceive, there was provision made for ample friction of the clerical mind.

Now, the Rev. Amos Barton was one of those men who have a decided will and opinion of their own; he held himself bolt upright, and had no

self-distrust. He would march very determinedly along the road he thought best; but then it was wonderfully easy to convince him which *was* the best road. And so a very little unwonted reading and unwonted discussion made him see that an Episcopalian Establishment was much more than unobjectionable, and on many other points he began to feel that he held opinions a little too far-sighted and profound to be crudely and suddenly communicated to ordinary minds. He was like an onion that has been rubbed with spices; the strong original odour was blended with something new and foreign. The Low-Church onion still offended refined High-Church nostrils, and the new spice was unwelcome to the palate of the genuine onion-eater.

We will not accompany him to the Clerical Meeting to-day, because we shall probably want to go thither some day when he will be absent. And just now I am bent on introducing you to Mr Bridmain and the Countess Czerlaski, with whom Mr and Mrs Barton are invited to dine to-morrow.

CHAPTER III.

OUTSIDE, the moon is shedding its cold light on the cold snow, and the white-bearded fir-trees round Camp Villa are casting a blue shadow across the white ground, while the Rev. Amos Barton and his wife are audibly crushing the crisp snow beneath their feet, as, about seven o'clock on Friday evening, they approach the door of the above-named desirable country residence, containing dining, breakfast, and drawing rooms, &c., situated only half a mile from the market-town of Milby.

Inside, there is a bright fire in the drawing-room, casting a pleasant but uncertain light on the delicate silk dress of a lady who is reclining behind a screen in the corner of the sofa, and allowing you to discern that the hair of the gentleman who is seated in the arm-chair opposite, with a newspaper over his knees, is becoming decidedly grey. A little "King Charles," with a crimson

ribbon round his neck, who has been lying curled up in the very middle of the hearth-rug, has just discovered that that zone is too hot for him, and is jumping on the sofa, evidently with the intention of accommodating his person on the silk gown. On the table there are two wax-candles, which will be lighted as soon as the expected knock is heard at the door.

The knock is heard, the candles are lighted, and presently Mr and Mrs Barton are ushered in—Mr Barton erect and clerical, in a faultless tie and shining cranium; Mrs Barton graceful in a newly-turned black silk.

"Now this is charming of you," said the Countess Czerlaski, advancing to meet them, and embracing Milly with careful elegance. "I am really ashamed of my selfishness in asking my friends to come and see me in this frightful weather." Then, giving her hand to Amos, "And you, Mr Barton, whose time is so precious! But I am doing a good deed in drawing you away from your labours. I have a plot to prevent you from martyrising yourself."

While this greeting was going forward, Mr Bridmain, and Jet the spaniel, looked on with

the air of actors who had no idea of by-play. Mr Bridmain, a stiff and rather thick-set man, gave his welcome with a laboured cordiality. It was astonishing how very little he resembled his beautiful sister.

For the Countess Czerlaski was undeniably beautiful. As she seated herself by Mrs Barton on the sofa, Milly's eyes, indeed, rested—must it be confessed?—chiefly on the details of the tasteful dress, the rich silk of a pinkish lilac hue (the Countess always wore delicate colours in an evening), the black lace pelerine, and the black lace veil falling at the back of the small closely-braided head. For Milly had one weakness—don't love her any the less for it, it was a pretty woman's weakness—she was fond of dress; and often when she was making up her own economical millinery, she had romantic visions how nice it would be to put on really handsome stylish things — to have very stiff balloon sleeves, for example, without which a woman's dress was nought in those days. You and I, too, reader, have our weakness, have we not? which makes us think foolish things now and then. Perhaps it may lie in an excessive admiration for small hands and feet, a

tall lithe figure, large dark eyes, and dark silken braided hair. All these the Countess possessed, and she had, moreover, a delicately-formed nose, the least bit curved, and a clear brunette complexion. Her mouth, it must be admitted, receded too much from her nose and chin, and to a prophetic eye threatened "nut-crackers" in advanced age. But by the light of fire and wax-candles that age seemed very far off indeed, and you would have said that the Countess was not more than thirty.

Look at the two women on the sofa together! The large, fair, mild-eyed Milly is timid even in friendship: it is not easy to her to speak of the affection of which her heart is full. The lithe, dark, thin-lipped Countess is racking her small brain for caressing words and charming exaggerations.

"And how are all the cherubs at home?" said the Countess, stooping to pick up Jet, and without waiting for an answer. "I have been kept in-doors by a cold ever since Sunday, or I should not have rested without seeing you. What have you done with those wretched singers, Mr Barton?"

"O, we have got a new choir together, which

will go on very well with a little practice. I was quite determined that the old set of singers should be dismissed. I had given orders that they should not sing the wedding psalm, as they call it, again, to make a new-married couple look ridiculous, and they sang it in defiance of me. I could put them into the Ecclesiastical Court, if I chose for to do so, for lifting up their voices in church in opposition to the clergyman."

"And a most wholesome discipline that would be," said the Countess; "indeed, you are too patient and forbearing, Mr Barton. For my part, *I* lose *my* temper when I see how far you are from being appreciated in that miserable Shepperton."

If, as is probable, Mr Barton felt at a loss what to say in reply to the insinuated compliment, it was a relief to him that dinner was announced just then, and that he had to offer his arm to the Countess.

As Mr Bridmain was leading Mrs Barton to the dining-room, he observed, "The weather is very severe."

"Very, indeed," said Milly.

Mr Bridmain studied conversation as an art.

To ladies he spoke of the weather, and was accustomed to consider it under three points of view: as a question of climate in general, comparing England with other countries in this respect; as a personal question, inquiring how it affected his lady interlocutor in particular; and as a question of probabilities, discussing whether there would be a change or a continuance of the present atmospheric conditions. To gentlemen he talked politics, and he read two daily papers expressly to qualify himself for this function. Mr Barton thought him a man of considerable political information, but not of lively parts.

"And so you are always to hold your Clerical Meetings at Mr Ely's?" said the Countess between her spoonfuls of soup. (The soup was a little over-spiced. Mrs Short, of Camp Villa, who was in the habit of letting her best apartments, gave only moderate wages to her cook.)

"Yes," said Mr Barton, "Milby is a central place, and there are many conveniences in having only one point of meeting."

"Well," continued the Countess, "every one seems to agree in giving the precedence to Mr Ely. For my part I *cannot* admire him. His

preaching is too cold for me. It has no fervour —no heart. I often say to my brother, it is a great comfort to me that Shepperton church is not too far off for us to go to; don't I, Edmund?"

"Yes," answered Mr Bridmain, "they show us into such a bad pew at Milby—just where there is a draught from that door. I caught a stiff neck the first time I went there."

"O, it is the cold in the pulpit that affects me, not the cold in the pew. I was writing to my friend Lady Porter this morning, and telling her all about my feelings. She and I think alike on such matters. She is most anxious that when Sir William has an opportunity of giving away the living at their place, Dippley, they should have a thoroughly zealous clever man there. I have been describing a certain friend of mine to her, who, I think, would be just to her mind. And there is such a pretty rectory, Milly; shouldn't I like to see you the mistress of it?"

Milly smiled and blushed slightly. The Rev. Amos blushed very red, and gave a little embarrassed laugh—he could rarely keep his muscles within the limits of a smile.

At this moment John, the man-servant, ap-

proached Mrs Barton with a gravy-tureen, and also with a slight odour of the stable, which usually adhered to him throughout his in-door functions. John was rather nervous; and the Countess happening to speak to him at this inopportune moment, the tureen slipped and emptied itself on Mrs Barton's newly-turned black silk.

"O, horror! Tell Alice to come directly and rub Mrs Barton's dress," said the Countess to the trembling John, carefully abstaining from approaching the gravy-sprinkled spot on the floor with her own lilac silk. But Mr Bridmain, who had a strictly private interest in silks, good-naturedly jumped up and applied his napkin at once to Mrs Barton's gown.

Milly felt a little inward anguish, but no ill-temper, and tried to make light of the matter for the sake of John as well as others. The Countess felt inwardly thankful that her own delicate silk had escaped, but threw out lavish interjections of distress and indignation.

"Dear saint that you are," she said, when Milly laughed, and suggested that, as her silk was not very glossy to begin with, the dim patch would

not be much seen; "you don't mind about these things, I know. Just the same sort of thing happened to me at the Princess Wengstein's one day, on a pink satin. I was in an agony. But you are so indifferent to dress; and well you may be. It is you who make dress pretty, and not dress that makes you pretty."

Alice, the buxom lady's-maid, wearing a much better dress than Mrs Barton's, now appeared to take Mr Bridmain's place in retrieving the mischief, and after a great amount of supplementary rubbing, composure was restored, and the business of dining was continued.

When John was recounting his accident to the cook in the kitchen, he observed, "Mrs Barton's a hamable woman; I'd a deal sooner ha' throwed the gravy o'er the Countess's fine gownd. But laws! what tantrums she'd ha' been in arter the visitors was gone."

"You'd a deal sooner not ha' throwed it down at all, *I* should think," responded the unsympathetic cook, to whom John did *not* make love. "Who d'you think's to mek gravy anuff, if you're to baste people's gownds wi' it?"

"Well," suggested John, humbly, "you should

wet the bottom of the *duree* a bit, to hold it from slippin.'"

"Wet your granny!" returned the cook; a retort which she probably regarded in the light of a *reductio ad absurdum*, and which in fact reduced John to silence.

Later on in the evening, while John was removing the tea-things from the drawing-room, and brushing the crumbs from the table-cloth with an accompanying hiss, such as he was wont to encourage himself with in rubbing down Mr Bridmain's horse, the Rev. Amos Barton drew from his pocket a thin green-covered pamphlet, and, presenting it to the Countess, said,—

"You were pleased, I think, with my sermon on Christmas Day. It has been printed in *The Pulpit*, and I thought you might like a copy."

"That indeed I shall. I shall quite value the opportunity of reading that sermon. There was such depth in it!—such argument! It was not a sermon to be heard only once. I am delighted that it should become generally known, as it will be, now it is printed in *The Pulpit*."

"Yes," said Milly innocently, "I was so pleased with the editor's letter." And she drew out her

little pocket-book, where she carefully treasured the editorial autograph, while Mr Barton laughed and blushed, and said, "Nonsense, Milly!"

"You see," she said, giving the letter to the Countess, "I am very proud of the praise my husband gets."

The sermon in question, by the by, was an extremely argumentative one on the Incarnation; which, as it was preached to a congregation not one of whom had any doubt of that doctrine, and to whom the Socinians therein confuted were as unknown as the Arimaspians, was exceedingly well adapted to trouble and confuse the Sheppertonian mind.

"Ah," said the Countess, returning the editor's letter, "he may well say he will be glad of other sermons from the same source. But I would rather you should publish your sermons in an independent volume, Mr Barton; it would be so desirable to have them in that shape. For instance, I could send a copy to the Dean of Radborough. And there is Lord Blarney, whom I knew before he was chancellor. I was a special favourite of his, and you can't think what sweet things he used to say to me. I shall not resist the

temptation to write to him one of these days *sans façon*, and tell him how he ought to dispose of the next vacant living in his gift."

Whether Jet the spaniel, being a much more knowing dog than was suspected, wished to express his disapproval of the Countess's last speech, as not accordant with his ideas of wisdom and veracity, I cannot say; but at this moment he jumped off her lap, and turning his back upon her, placed one paw on the fender, and held the other up to warm, as if affecting to abstract himself from the current of conversation.

But now Mr Bridmain brought out the chess-board, and Mr Barton accepted his challenge to play a game, with immense satisfaction. The Rev. Amos was very fond of chess, as most people are who can continue through many years to create interesting vicissitudes in the game, by taking long-meditated moves with their knights, and subsequently discovering that they have thereby exposed their queen.

Chess is a silent game; and the Countess's chat with Milly is in quite an under-tone — probably relating to women's matters that it would be impertinent for us to listen to; so we will leave

Camp Villa, and proceed to Milby Vicarage, where Mr Farquhar has sat out two other guests with whom he has been dining at Mr Ely's, and is now rather wearying that reverend gentleman by his protracted small-talk.

Mr Ely was a tall, dark-haired, distinguished-looking man of three-and-thirty. By the laity of Milby and its neighbourhood he was regarded as a man of quite remarkable powers and learning, who must make a considerable sensation in London pulpits and drawing-rooms on his occasional visits to the metropolis; and by his brother clergy he was regarded as a discreet and agreeable fellow. Mr Ely never got into a warm discussion; he suggested what might be thought, but rarely said what he thought himself; he never let either men or women see that he was laughing at them, and he never gave any one an opportunity of laughing at *him*. In one thing only he was injudicious. He parted his dark wavy hair down the middle; and as his head was rather flat than otherwise, that style of coiffure was not advantageous to him.

Mr Farquhar, though not a parishioner of Mr Ely's, was one of his warmest admirers, and thought he would make an unexceptionable son-

in-law, in spite of his being of no particular "family." Mr Farquhar was susceptible on the point of "blood,"—his own circulating fluid, which animated a short and somewhat flabby person, being, he considered, of very superior quality.

"By the by," he said, with a certain pomposity counteracted by a lisp, "what an ath Barton makth of himthelf, about that Bridmain and the Counteth, ath she callth herthelf. After you were gone the other evening, Mithith Farquhar wath telling him the general opinion about them in the neighbourhood, and he got quite red and angry. Bleth your thoul, he believth the whole thtory about her Polish huthband and hith wonderful ethcapeth; and ath for her—why, he thinkth her perfection, a woman of motht refined feelingth, and no end of thtuff."

Mr Ely smiled. "Some people would say our friend Barton was not the best judge of refinement. Perhaps the lady flatters him a little, and we men are susceptible. She goes to Shepperton church every Sunday—drawn there, let us suppose, by Mr Barton's eloquence."

"Pshaw," said Mr Farquhar: "Now, to my mind, you have only to look at that woman to thee

what she ith — throwing her eyth about when she comth into church, and drething in a way to attract attention. I should thay, she'th tired of her brother Bridmain, and looking out for another brother with a thtronger family likeneth. Mithith Farquhar ith very fond of Mithith Barton, and ith quite dithtrethed that she should athothiate with thuch a woman, tho she attacked him on the thubject purpothly. But I tell her it'th of no uthe, with a pig-headed fellow like him. Barton'th well-meaning enough, but *tho* contheited. I've left off giving him my advithe."

Mr Ely smiled inwardly and said to himself, "What a punishment!" But to Mr Farquhar he said, "Barton might be more judicious, it must be confessed." He was getting tired, and did not want to develop the subject.

"Why, nobody vithit-th them but the Bartonth," continued Mr Farquhar, "and why should thuch people come here, unleth they had particular reathonth for preferring a neighbourhood where they are not known? Pooh! it lookth bad on the very fathe of it. *You* called on them, now; how did you find them?"

"O!—Mr Bridmain strikes me as a common

sort of man, who is making an effort to seem wise and well-bred. He comes down on one tremendously with political information, and seems knowing about the king of the French. The Countess is certainly a handsome woman, but she puts on the grand air a little too powerfully. Woodcock was immensely taken with her, and insisted on his wife's calling on her, and asking her to dinner; but I think Mrs Woodcock turned restive after the first visit, and wouldn't invite her again."

"Ha, ha! Woodcock hath alwayth a thoft place in hith heart for a pretty fathe. It-'th odd how he came to marry that plain woman, and no fortune either."

"Mysteries of the tender passion," said Mr Ely. "I am not initiated yet, you know."

Here Mr Farquhar's carriage was announced, and as we have not found his conversation particularly brilliant under the stimulus of Mr Ely's exceptionable presence, we will not accompany him home to the less exciting atmosphere of domestic life.

Mr Ely threw himself with a sense of relief into his easiest chair, set his feet on the hobs, and in this attitude of bachelor enjoyment began to read Bishop Jebb's Memoirs.

CHAPTER IV.

I AM by no means sure that if the good people of Milby had known the truth about the Countess Czerlaski, they would not have been considerably disappointed to find that it was very far from being as bad as they imagined. Nice distinctions are troublesome. It is so much easier to say that a thing is black, than to discriminate the particular shade of brown, blue, or green, to which it really belongs. It is so much easier to make up your mind that your neighbour is good for nothing, than to enter into all the circumstances that would oblige you to modify that opinion.

Besides, think of all the virtuous declamation, all the penetrating observation, which had been built up entirely on the fundamental position that the Countess was a very objectionable person indeed, and which would be utterly overturned and nullified by the destruction of that premiss. Mrs Phipps, the banker's wife, and Mrs Landor,

the attorney's wife, had invested part of their reputation for acuteness in the supposition that Mr Bridmain was not the Countess's brother. Moreover, Miss Phipps was conscious that if the Countess was not a disreputable person, she, Miss Phipps, had no compensating superiority in virtue to set against the other lady's manifest superiority in personal charms. Miss Phipps's stumpy figure and unsuccessful attire, instead of looking down from a mount of virtue with an auréole round its head, would then be seen on the same level and in the same light as the Countess Czerlaski's Diana-like form and well-chosen drapery. Miss Phipps, for her part, didn't like dressing for effect—she had always avoided that style of appearance which was calculated to create a sensation.

Then what amusing inuendoes of the Milby gentlemen over their wine would be entirely frustrated and reduced to nought, if you had told them that the Countess had really been guilty of no misdemeanours which need exclude her from strictly respectable society; that her husband had been the veritable Count Czerlaski, who had had wonderful escapes, as she said, and who, as she did *not* say, but as was said in certain circulars

once folded by her fair hands, had subsequently given dancing lessons in the metropolis; that Mr Bridmain was neither more nor less than her half-brother, who, by unimpeached integrity and industry, had won a partnership in a silk manufactory, and thereby a moderate fortune, that enabled him to retire, as you see, to study politics, the weather, and the art of conversation, at his leisure. Mr Bridmain, in fact, quadragenarian bachelor as he was, felt extremely well pleased to receive his sister in her widowhood, and to shine in the reflected light of her beauty and title. Every man who is not a monster, a mathematician, or a mad philosopher, is the slave of some woman or other. Mr Bridmain had put his neck under the yoke of his handsome sister, and though his soul was a very little one—of the smallest description indeed—he would not have ventured to call it his own. He might be slightly recalcitrant now and then, as is the habit of long-eared pachyderms, under the thong of the fair Countess's tongue; but there seemed little probability that he would ever get his neck loose. Still, a bachelor's heart is an outlying fortress that some fair enemy may any day take either by storm or stratagem;

and there was always the possibility that Mr Bridmain's first nuptials might occur before the Countess was quite sure of her second. As it was, however, he submitted to all his sister's caprices, never grumbled because her dress and her maid formed a considerable item beyond her own little income of sixty pounds per annum, and consented to lead with her a migratory life, as personages on the debatable ground between aristocracy and commonalty, instead of settling in some spot where his five hundred a-year might have won him the definite dignity of a parochial magnate.

The Countess had her views in choosing a quiet provincial place like Milby. After three years of widowhood, she had brought her feelings to contemplate giving a successor to her lamented Czerlaski, whose fine whiskers, fine air, and romantic fortunes had won her heart ten years ago, when, as pretty Caroline Bridmain, in the full bloom of five-and-twenty, she was governess to Lady Porter's daughters, whom he initiated into the mysteries of the *pas de bas*, and the lancer's quadrilles. She had had seven years of sufficiently happy matrimony with Czerlaski, who had taken her to Paris and Germany, and introduced her there to

many of his old friends with large titles and small fortunes. So that the fair Caroline had had considerable experience of life, and had gathered therefrom, not, indeed, any very ripe and comprehensive wisdom, but much external polish, and certain practical conclusions of a very decided kind. One of these conclusions was, that there were things more solid in life than fine whiskers and a title, and that, in accepting a second husband, she would regard these items as quite subordinate to a carriage and a settlement. Now she had ascertained, by tentative residences, that the kind of bite she was angling for was difficult to be met with at watering-places, which were already preoccupied with abundance of angling beauties, and were chiefly stocked with men whose whiskers might be dyed, and whose incomes were still more problematic; so she had determined on trying a neighbourhood where people were extremely well acquainted with each other's affairs, and where the women were mostly ill-dressed and ugly. Mr Bridmain's slow brain had adopted his sister's views, and it seemed to him that a woman so handsome and distinguished as the Countess must certainly make a match that might lift himself

into the region of county celebrities, and give him at least a sort of cousinship to the quarter-sessions.

All this, which was the simple truth, would have seemed extremely flat to the gossips of Milby, who had made up their minds to something much more exciting. There was nothing here so very detestable. It is true, the Countess was a little vain, a little ambitious, a little selfish, a little shallow and frivolous, a little given to white lies. But who considers such slight blemishes, such moral pimples as these, disqualifications for entering into the most respectable society! Indeed, the severest ladies in Milby would have been perfectly aware that these characteristics would have created no wide distinction between the Countess Czerlaski and themselves; and since it was clear there *was* a wide distinction—why, it must lie in the possession of some vices from which they were undeniably free.

Hence it came to pass, that Milby respectability refused to recognise the Countess Czerlaski, in spite of her assiduous church-going, and the deep disgust she was known to have expressed at the extreme paucity of the congregations on Ash-Wednesdays. So she began to feel that she had

miscalculated the advantages of a neighbourhood where people are well acquainted with each other's private affairs. Under these circumstances, you will imagine how welcome was the perfect credence and admiration she met with from Mr and Mrs Barton. She had been especially irritated by Mr Ely's behaviour to her; she felt sure that he was not in the least struck with her beauty, that he quizzed her conversation, and that he spoke of her with a sneer. A woman always knows where she is utterly powerless, and shuns a coldly satirical eye as she would shun a gorgon. And she was especially eager for clerical notice and friendship, not merely because that is quite the most respectable countenance to be obtained in society, but because she really cared about religious matters, and had an uneasy sense that she was not altogether safe in that quarter. She had serious intentions of becoming *quite* pious—without any reserves—when she had once got her carriage and settlement. Let us do this one sly trick, says Ulysses to Neoptolemus, and we will be perfectly honest ever after—

> ἀλλ' ἡδὺ γάρ τοι κτῆμα τῆς νίκης λαβεῖν
> τόλμα· δίκαιοι δ'αὖθις ἐκφανούμεθα.

The Countess did not quote Sophocles, but she said to herself, "Only this little bit of pretence and vanity, and then I will be *quite* good, and make myself quite safe for another world."

And as she had by no means such fine taste and insight in theological teaching as in costume, the Rev. Amos Barton seemed to her a man not only of learning—*that* is always understood with a clergyman—but of much power as a spiritual director. As for Milly, the Countess really loved her as well as the preoccupied state of her affections would allow. For you have already perceived that there was one being to whom the Countess was absorbingly devoted, and to whose desires she made everything else subservient—namely, Caroline Czerlaski, *née* Bridmain.

Thus there was really not much affectation in her sweet speeches and attentions to Mr and Mrs Barton. Still, their friendship by no means adequately represented the object she had in view when she came to Milby, and it had been for some time clear to her that she must suggest a new change of residence to her brother.

The thing we look forward to often comes to

pass, but never precisely in the way we have imagined to ourselves. The Countess did actually leave Camp Villa before many months were past, but under circumstances which had not at all entered into her contemplation.

CHAPTER V.

THE Rev. Amos Barton, whose sad fortunes I have undertaken to relate, was, you perceive, in no respect an ideal or exceptional character, and perhaps I am doing a bold thing to bespeak your sympathy on behalf of a man who was so very far from remarkable,—a man whose virtues were not heroic, and who had no undetected crime within his breast; who had not the slightest mystery hanging about him, but was palpably and unmistakably commonplace; who was not even in love, but had had that complaint favourably many years ago. "An utterly uninteresting character!" I think I hear a lady reader exclaim—Mrs Farthingale, for example, who prefers the ideal in fiction; to whom tragedy means ermine tippets, adultery, and murder; and comedy, the adventures of some personage who is quite a "character."

But, my dear madam, it is so very large a majority of your fellow-countrymen that are of this

insignificant stamp. At least eighty out of a hundred of your adult male fellow-Britons returned in the last census, are neither extraordinarily silly, nor extraordinarily wicked, nor extraordinarily wise; their eyes are neither deep and liquid with sentiment, nor sparkling with suppressed witticisms; they have probably had no hairbreadth escapes or thrilling adventures; their brains are certainly not pregnant with genius, and their passions have not manifested themselves at all after the fashion of a volcano. They are simply men of complexions more or less muddy, whose conversation is more or less bald and disjointed. Yet these commonplace people—many of them—bear a conscience, and have felt the sublime prompting to do the painful right; they have their unspoken sorrows, and their sacred joys; their hearts have perhaps gone out towards their first-born, and they have mourned over the irreclaimable dead. Nay, is there not a pathos in their very insignificance,—in our comparison of their dim and narrow existence with the glorious possibilities of that human nature which they share?

Depend upon it, you would gain unspeakably if you would learn with me to see some of the

poetry and the pathos, the tragedy and the comedy, lying in the experience of a human soul that looks out through dull grey eyes, and that speaks in a voice of quite ordinary tones. In that case, I should have no fear of your not caring to know what farther befell the Rev. Amos Barton, or of your thinking the homely details I have to tell at all beneath your attention. As it is, you can, if you please, decline to pursue my story farther; and you will easily find reading more to your taste, since I learn from the newspapers that many remarkable novels, full of striking situations, thrilling incidents, and eloquent writing, have appeared only within the last season.

Meanwhile, readers who have begun to feel an interest in the Rev. Amos Barton and his wife, will be glad to learn that Mr Oldinport lent the twenty pounds. But twenty pounds are soon exhausted when twelve are due as back payment to the butcher, and when the possession of eight extra sovereigns in February weather is an irresistible temptation to order a new greatcoat. And though Mr Bridmain so far departed from the necessary economy entailed on him by the Countess's elegant toilette and expensive maid, as to

choose a handsome black silk, stiff, as his experienced eye discerned, with the genuine strength of its own texture, and not with the factitious strength of gum, and present it to Mrs Barton, in retrieval of the accident that had occurred at his table, yet, dear me—as every husband has heard—what is the present of a gown, when you are deficiently furnished with the et-ceteras of apparel, and when, moreover, there are six children whose wear and tear of clothes is something incredible to the non-maternal mind?

Indeed, the equation of income and expenditure was offering new and constantly accumulating difficulties to Mr and Mrs Barton; for shortly after the birth of little Walter, Milly's aunt, who had lived with her ever since her marriage, had withdrawn herself, her furniture, and her yearly income, to the household of another niece; prompted to that step, very probably, by a slight "tiff" with the Rev. Amos, which occurred while Milly was up-stairs, and proved one too many for the elderly lady's patience and magnanimity. Mr Barton's temper was a little warm, but, on the other hand, elderly maiden ladies are known to be susceptible; so we will not suppose that all the blame lay on

his side—the less so, as he had every motive for humouring an inmate whose presence kept the wolf from the door. It was now nearly a year since Miss Jackson's departure, and, to a fine ear, the howl of the wolf was audibly approaching.

It was a sad thing, too, that when the last snow had melted, when the purple and yellow crocuses were coming up in the garden, and the old church was already half pulled down, Milly had an illness which made her lips look pale, and rendered it absolutely necessary that she should not exert herself for some time. Mr Brand, the Shepperton doctor so obnoxious to Mr Pilgrim, ordered her to drink port-wine, and it was quite necessary to have a char-woman very often, to assist Nanny in all the extra work that fell upon her.

Mrs Hackit, who hardly ever paid a visit to any one but her oldest and nearest neighbour, Mrs Patten, now took the unusual step of calling at the vicarage one morning; and the tears came into her unsentimental eyes as she saw Milly seated pale and feeble in the parlour, unable to persevere in sewing the pinafore that lay on the table beside her. Little Dickey, a boisterous boy of five, with large pink cheeks and sturdy legs, was having his

turn to sit with Mamma, and was squatting quiet as a mouse at her knee, holding her soft white hand between his little red, black-nailed fists. He was a boy whom Mrs Hackit, in a severe mood, had pronounced "stocky" (a word that etymologically, in all probability, conveys some allusion to an instrument of punishment for the refractory); but seeing him thus subdued into goodness, she smiled at him with her kindest smile, and, stooping down, suggested a kiss—a favour which Dickey resolutely declined.

"Now *do* you take nourishing things anuff?" was one of Mrs Hackit's first questions, and Milly endeavoured to make it appear that no woman was ever so much in danger of being over-fed and led into self-indulgent habits as herself. But Mrs Hackit gathered one fact from her replies, namely, that Mr Brand had ordered port-wine.

While this conversation was going forward, Dickey had been furtively stroking and kissing the soft white hand; so that at last, when a pause came, his mother said, smilingly, "Why are you kissing my hand, Dickey?"

"It id to yovely," answered Dickey, who, you observe, was decidedly backward in his pronunciation.

Mrs Hackit remembered this little scene in after days, and thought with peculiar tenderness and pity of the "stocky boy."

The next day there came a hamper with Mrs Hackit's respects; and on being opened, it was found to contain half-a-dozen of port-wine and two couples of fowls. Mrs Farquhar, too, was very kind; insisted on Mrs Barton's rejecting all arrow-root but hers, which was genuine Indian, and carried away Sophy and Fred to stay with her a fortnight. These and other good-natured attentions made the trouble of Milly's illness more bearable; but they could not prevent it from swelling expenses, and Mr Barton began to have serious thoughts of representing his case to a certain charity for the relief of needy curates.

Altogether, as matters stood in Shepperton, the parishioners were more likely to have a strong sense that the clergyman needed their material aid, than that they needed his spiritual aid,—not the best state of things in this age and country, where faith in men solely on the ground of their spiritual gifts has considerably diminished, and especially unfavourable to the influence of the Rev. Amos, whose spiritual gifts would not have

had a very commanding power even in an age of faith.

But, you ask, did not the Countess Czerlaski pay any attention to her friends all this time? To be sure she did. She was indefatigable in visiting her "sweet Milly," and sitting with her for hours together; and it may seem remarkable to you that she neither thought of taking away any of the children, nor of providing for any of Milly's probable wants; but ladies of rank and of luxurious habits, you know, cannot be expected to surmise the details of poverty. She put a great deal of eau-de-Cologne on Mrs Barton's pocket-handkerchief, rearranged her pillow and footstool, kissed her cheeks, wrapped her in a soft warm shawl from her own shoulders, and amused her with stories of the life she had seen abroad. When Mr Barton joined them, she talked of Tractarianism, of her determination not to re-enter the vortex of fashionable life, and of her anxiety to see him in a sphere large enough for his talents. Milly thought her sprightliness and affectionate warmth quite charming, and was very fond of her; while the Rev. Amos had a vague consciousness that he had risen into aristocratic

life, and only associated with his middle-class parishioners in a pastoral and parenthetic manner.

However, as the days brightened, Milly's cheeks and lips brightened too; and in a few weeks she was almost as active as ever, though watchful eyes might have seen that activity was not easy to her. Mrs Hackit's eyes were of that kind, and one day when Mr and Mrs Barton had been dining with her for the first time since Milly's illness, she observed to her husband—"That poor thing's dreadful weak an' dilicate; she won't stan' havin' many more children."

Mr Barton, meanwhile, had been indefatigable in his vocation. He had preached two extemporary sermons every Sunday at the workhouse, where a room had been fitted up for divine service, pending the alterations in the church; and had walked the same evening to a cottage at one or other extremity of his parish to deliver another sermon, still more extemporary, in an atmosphere impregnated with spring-flowers and perspiration. After all these labours you will easily conceive that he was considerably exhausted by half-past nine o'clock in the evening, and that a supper at a friendly parishioner's, with a glass, or even two

glasses, of brandy-and-water after it, was a welcome reinforcement. Mr Barton was not at all an ascetic: he thought the benefits of fasting were entirely confined to the Old Testament dispensation; he was fond of relaxing himself with a little gossip; indeed, Miss Bond, and other ladies of enthusiastic views, sometimes regretted that Mr Barton did not more uninterruptedly exhibit a superiority to the things of the flesh. Thin ladies, who take little exercise, and whose livers are not strong enough to bear stimulants, are so extremely critical about one's personal habits! And, after all, the Rev. Amos never came near the borders of a vice. His very faults were middling—he was not *very* ungrammatical. It was not in his nature to be superlative in anything; unless, indeed, he was superlatively middling, the quintessential extract of mediocrity. If there was any one point on which he showed an inclination to be excessive, it was confidence in his own shrewdness and ability in practical matters, so that he was very full of plans which were something like his moves in chess—admirably well calculated, supposing the state of the case were otherwise. For example, that notable plan of introducing anti-dissenting

books into his Lending Library did not in the least appear to have bruised the head of Dissent, though it had certainly made Dissent strongly inclined to bite the Rev. Amos's heel. Again, he vexed the souls of his church-wardens and influential parishioners by his fertile suggestiveness as to what it would be well for them to do in the matter of the church repairs, and other ecclesiastical secularities.

"I never see the like to parsons," Mr Hackit said one day in conversation with his brother churchwarden, Mr Bond; "they're al'ys for meddlin' wi' business, an' they know no moor about it than my black filly."

"Ah," said Mr Bond, "they're too high learnt to have much common-sense."

"Well," remarked Mr Hackit, in a modest and dubious tone, as if throwing out a hypothesis which might be considered bold, "I should say that's a bad sort o' eddication as makes folks onreasonable."

So that, you perceive, Mr Barton's popularity was in that precarious condition, in that toppling and contingent state, in which a very slight push from a malignant destiny would utterly upset it.

That push was not long in being given, as you shall hear.

One fine May morning, when Amos was out on his parochial visits, and the sunlight was streaming through the bow-window of the sitting-room, where Milly was seated at her sewing, occasionally looking up to glance at the children playing in the garden, there came a loud rap at the door, which she at once recognised as the Countess's, and that well-dressed lady presently entered the sitting-room, with her veil drawn over her face. Milly was not at all surprised or sorry to see her; but when the Countess threw up her veil, and showed that her eyes were red and swollen, she was both surprised and sorry.

"What can be the matter, dear Caroline?"

Caroline threw down Jet, who gave a little yelp; then she threw her arms round Milly's neck, and began to sob; then she threw herself on the sofa, and begged for a glass of water; then she threw off her bonnet and shawl; and, by the time Milly's imagination had exhausted itself in conjuring up calamities, she said,—

"Dear, how shall I tell you? I am the most wretched woman. To be deceived by a brother to

whom I have been so devoted—to see him degrading himself—giving himself utterly to the dogs!"

"What can it be?" said Milly, who began to picture to herself the sober Mr Bridmain taking to brandy and betting.

"He is going to be married—to marry my own maid, that deceitful Alice, to whom I have been the most indulgent mistress. Did you ever hear of anything so disgraceful? so mortifying? so disreputable?"

"And has he only just told you of it?" said Milly, who, having really heard of worse conduct, even in her innocent life, avoided a direct answer.

"Told me of it! he had not even the grace to do that. I went into the dining-room suddenly and found him kissing her—disgusting at his time of life, is it not?—and when I reproved her for allowing such liberties, she turned round saucily, and said she was engaged to be married to my brother, and she saw no shame in allowing him to kiss her. Edmund is a miserable coward, you know, and looked frightened; but when she asked him to say whether it was not so, he tried to summon up courage and say yes. I left the

room in disgust, and this morning I have been questioning Edmund, and find that he is bent on marrying this woman, and that he has been putting off telling me—because he was ashamed of himself, I suppose. I couldn't possibly stay in the house after this, with my own maid turned mistress. And now, Milly, I am come to throw myself on your charity for a week or two. *Will* you take me in?"

"That we will," said Milly, "if you will only put up with our poor rooms and way of living. It will be delightful to have you!"

"It will soothe me to be with you and Mr Barton a little while. I feel quite unable to go among my other friends just at present. What those two wretched people will do I don't know —leave the neighbourhood at once, I hope. I entreated my brother to do so, before he disgraced himself."

When Amos came home, he joined his cordial welcome and sympathy to Milly's. By-and-by the Countess's formidable boxes, which she had carefully packed before her indignation drove her away from Camp Villa, arrived at the vicarage, and were deposited in the spare bedroom, and in

two closets, not spare, which Milly emptied for their reception. A week afterwards, the excellent apartments at Camp Villa, comprising dining and drawing rooms, three bedrooms and a dressing-room, were again to let, and Mr Bridmain's sudden departure, together with the Countess Czerlaski's installation as a visitor at Shepperton Vicarage, became a topic of general conversation in the neighbourhood. The keen-sighted virtue of Milby and Shepperton saw in all this a confirmation of its worst suspicions, and pitied the Rev. Amos Barton's gullibility.

But when week after week, and month after month, slipped by without witnessing the Countess's departure—when summer and harvest had fled, and still left her behind them occupying the spare bedroom and the closets, and also a large proportion of Mrs Barton's time and attention, new surmises of a very evil kind were added to the old rumours, and began to take the form of settled convictions in the minds even of Mr Barton's most friendly parishioners.

And now, here is an opportunity for an accomplished writer to apostrophise calumny, to quote Virgil, and to show that he is acquainted with the

most ingenious things which have been said on that subject in polite literature.

But what is opportunity to the man who can't use it? An unfecundated egg, which the waves of time wash away into nonentity. So, as my memory is ill-furnished, and my note-book still worse, I am unable to show myself either erudite or eloquent apropos of the calumny whereof the Rev. Amos Barton was the victim. I can only ask my reader, did you ever upset your ink-bottle, and watch, in helpless agony, the rapid spread of Stygian blackness over your fair manuscript or fairer table-cover? With a like inky swiftness did gossip now blacken the reputation of the Rev. Amos Barton, causing the unfriendly to scorn and even the friendly to stand aloof, at a time when difficulties of another kind were fast thickening around him.

CHAPTER VI.

One November morning, at least six months after the Countess Czerlaski had taken up her residence at the vicarage, Mrs Hackit heard that her neighbour Mrs Patten had an attack of her old complaint, vaguely called "the spasms." Accordingly, about eleven o'clock, she put on her velvet bonnet and cloth cloak, with a long boa and a muff large enough to stow a prize baby in; for Mrs Hackit regulated her costume by the calendar, and brought out her furs on the first of November, whatever might be the temperature. She was not a woman weakly to accommodate herself to shilly-shally proceedings. If the season didn't know what it ought to do, Mrs Hackit did. In her best days, it was always sharp weather at "Gunpowder Plot," and she didn't like new fashions.

And this morning the weather was very rationally in accordance with her costume, for as she made her way through the fields to Cross Farm,

the yellow leaves on the hedge-girt elms, which showed bright and golden against the low-hanging purple clouds, were being scattered across the grassy path by the coldest of November winds. "Ah," Mrs Hackit thought to herself, "I dare say we shall have a sharp pinch this winter, and if we do, I shouldn't wonder if it takes the old lady off. They say a green Yule makes a fat churchyard; but so does a white Yule too, for that matter. When the stool's rotten enough, no matter who sits on't."

However, on her arrival at Cross Farm, the prospect of Mrs Patten's decease was again thrown into the dim distance in her imagination, for Miss Janet Gibbs met her with the news that Mrs Patten was much better, and led her, without any preliminary announcement, to the old lady's bedroom. Janet had scarcely reached the end of her circumstantial narrative how the attack came on and what were her aunt's sensations—a narrative to which Mrs Patten, in her neatly-plaited nightcap, seemed to listen with a contemptuous resignation to her niece's historical inaccuracy, contenting herself with occasionally confounding Janet by a shake of the head—when the clatter of a horse's hoofs on the yard pavement announced the arrival

of Mr Pilgrim, whose large, top-booted person presently made its appearance up-stairs. He found Mrs Patten going on so well that there was no need to look solemn. He might glide from condolence into gossip without offence, and the temptation of having Mrs Hackit's ear was irresistible.

"What a disgraceful business this is turning out of your parson's," was the remark with which he made this agreeable transition, throwing himself back in the chair from which he had been leaning towards the patient.

"Eh, dear me!" said Mrs Hackit, "disgraceful enough. I stuck to Mr Barton as long as I could, for his wife's sake; but I can't countenance such goings on. It's hateful to see that woman coming with 'em to service of a Sunday, and if Mr Hackit wasn't churchwarden and I didn't think it wrong to forsake one's own parish, I should go to Knebley church. There's a many parish'ners as do."

"I used to think Barton was only a fool," observed Mr Pilgrim, in a tone which implied that he was conscious of having been weakly charitable. "I thought he was imposed upon and led away by those people when they first came. But that's impossible now."

"O, it's as plain as the nose in your face," said Mrs Hackit, unreflectingly, not perceiving the equivoque in her comparison,—"comin' to Milby, like a sparrow perchin' on a bough, as I may say, with her brother, as she called him; and then, all on a sudden, the brother goes off wi' himself, and she throws herself on the Bartons. Though what could make her take up wi' a poor notomise of a parson, as hasn't got enough to keep wife and children, there's one above knows—*I* don't."

"Mr Barton may have attractions we don't know of," said Mr Pilgrim, who piqued himself on a talent for sarcasm. "The Countess has no maid now, and they say Mr Barton is handy in assisting at her toilette—laces her boots, and so forth."

"Tilette, be fiddled!" said Mrs Hackit, with indignant boldness of metaphor; "an' there's that poor thing a-sewing her fingers to the bone for them children—an' another comin' on. What she must have to go through! It goes to my heart to turn my back on her. But she's i' the wrong to let herself be put upon a' that manner."

"Ah! I was talking to Mrs Farquhar about that the other day. She said, 'I think Mrs Barton a v-e-r-y w-e-a-k w-o-m-a-n.'" (Mr Pilgrim gave

this quotation with slow emphasis, as if he thought Mrs Farquhar had uttered a remarkable sentiment.) "They find it impossible to invite her to their house while she has that equivocal person staying with her."

"Well!" remarked Miss Gibbs, "if I was a wife, nothing should induce me to bear what Mrs Barton does."

"Yes, it's fine talking," said Mrs Patten, from her pillow; "old maids' husbands are al'ys well-managed. If you was a wife you'd be as foolish as your betters, belike."

"All my wonder is," observed Mrs Hackit, "how the Bartons make both ends meet. You may depend on't *she's* got nothing to give 'em; for I understand as he's been havin' money from some clergy charity. They said at fust as she stuffed Mr Barton wi' notions about her writing to the Chancellor an' her fine friends, to give him a living. Howiver, I don't know what's true an' what's false. Mr Barton keeps away from our house now, for I gev him a bit o' my mind one day. Maybe he's ashamed of himself. He seems to me to look dreadful thin an' harassed of a Sunday."

"O, he must be aware he's getting into bad

odour everywhere. The clergy are quite disgusted with his folly. They say Carpe would be glad to get Barton out of the curacy if he could; but he can't do that without coming to Shepperton himself, as Barton's a licensed curate; and he wouldn't like that, I suppose."

At this moment Mrs Patten showed signs of uneasiness, which recalled Mr Pilgrim to professional attentions; and Mrs Hackit, observing that it was Thursday, and she must see after the butter, said good-by, promising to look in again soon, and bring her knitting.

This Thursday, by the by, is the first in the month—the day on which the Clerical Meeting is held at Milby Vicarage; and as the Rev. Amos Barton has reasons for not attending, he will very likely be a subject of conversation amongst his clerical brethren. Suppose we go there, and hear whether Mr Pilgrim has reported their opinion correctly.

There is not a numerous party to-day, for it is a season of sore throats and catarrhs; so that the exegetical and theological discussions, which are the preliminary of dining, have not been quite so spirited as usual; and although a question relative to the Epistle of Jude has not been quite cleared

up, the striking of six by the church clock, and the simultaneous announcement of dinner, are sounds that no one feels to be importunate.

Pleasant (when one is not in the least bilious) to enter a comfortable dining-room, where the closely-drawn red curtains glow with the double light of fire and candle, where glass and silver are glittering on the pure damask, and a soup-tureen gives a hint of the fragrance that will presently rush out to inundate your hungry senses, and prepare them, by the delicate visitation of atoms, for the keen gusto of ampler contact! Especially if you have confidence in the dinner-giving capacity of your host—if you know that he is not a man who entertains grovelling views of eating and drinking as a mere satisfaction of hunger and thirst, and, dead to all the finer influences of the palate, expects his guest to be brilliant on ill-flavoured gravies and the cheapest Marsala. Mr Ely was particularly worthy of such confidence, and his virtues as an Amphitryon had probably contributed quite as much as the central situation of Milby to the selection of his house as a clerical rendezvous. He looks particularly graceful at the head of his table, and, indeed, on all occasions

where he acts as president or moderator—a man who seems to listen well, and is an excellent amalgam of dissimilar ingredients.

At the other end of the table, as "Vice," sits Mr Fellowes, rector and magistrate, a man of imposing appearance, with a mellifluous voice and the readiest of tongues. Mr Fellowes once obtained a living by the persuasive charms of his conversation, and the fluency with which he interpreted the opinions of an obese and stammering baronet, so as to give that elderly gentleman a very pleasing perception of his own wisdom. Mr Fellowes is a very successful man, and has the highest character everywhere except in his own parish, where, doubtless because his parishioners happen to be quarrelsome people, he is always at fierce feud with a farmer or two, a colliery proprietor, a grocer who was once churchwarden, and a tailor who formerly officiated as clerk.

At Mr Ely's right hand you see a very small man with a sallow and somewhat puffy face, whose hair is brushed straight up, evidently with the intention of giving him a height somewhat less disproportionate to his sense of his own importance than the measure of five feet three accorded

him by an oversight of nature. This is the Rev. Archibald Duke, a very dyspeptic and evangelical man, who takes the gloomiest view of mankind and their prospects, and thinks the immense sale of the "Pickwick Papers," recently completed, one of the strongest proofs of original sin. Unfortunately, though Mr Duke was not burdened with a family, his yearly expenditure was apt considerably to exceed his income; and the unpleasant circumstances resulting from this, together with heavy meat breakfasts, may probably have contributed to his desponding views of the world generally.

Next to him is seated Mr Furness, a tall young man, with blond hair and whiskers, who was plucked at Cambridge entirely owing to his genius; at least, I know that he soon afterwards published a volume of poems, which were considered remarkably beautiful by many young ladies of his acquaintance. Mr Furness preached his own sermons, as any one of tolerable critical acumen might have certified by comparing them with his poems: in both, there was an exuberance of metaphor and simile entirely original, and not in the least borrowed from any resemblance in the things compared.

On Mr Furness's left you see Mr Pugh, another young curate, of much less marked characteristics. He had not published any poems; he had not even been plucked; he had neat black whiskers and a pale complexion; read prayers and a sermon twice every Sunday, and might be seen any day sallying forth on his parochial duties in a white tie, a well-brushed hat, a perfect suit of black, and well-polished boots—an equipment which he probably supposed hieroglyphically to represent the spirit of Christianity to the parishioners of Whittlecombe.

Mr Pugh's *vis-à-vis* is the Rev. Martin Cleves, a man about forty—middle-sized, broad-shouldered, with a negligently-tied cravat, large irregular features, and a large head, thickly covered with lanky brown hair. To a superficial glance, Mr Cleves is the plainest and least clerical-looking of the party; yet, strange to say, *there* is the true parish priest, the pastor beloved, consulted, relied on by his flock; a clergyman who is not associated with the undertaker, but thought of as the surest helper under a difficulty, as a monitor who is encouraging rather than severe. Mr Cleves has the wonderful art of preaching sermons which the

wheelwright and the blacksmith can understand; not because he talks condescending twaddle, but because he can call a spade a spade, and knows how to disencumber ideas of their wordy frippery. Look at him more attentively, and you will see that his face is a very interesting one—that there is a great deal of humour and feeling playing in his grey eyes, and about the corners of his roughly cut mouth:—a man, you observe, who has most likely sprung from the harder-working section of the middle class, and has hereditary sympathies with the checkered life of the people. He gets together the working men in his parish on a Monday evening, and gives them a sort of conversational lecture on useful practical matters, telling them stories, or reading some select passages from an agreeable book, and commenting on them; and if you were to ask the first labourer or artisan in Tripplegate what sort of man the parson was, he would say,—"a uncommon knowin', sensable, free-spoken gentleman; very kind an' good-natur'd too." Yet for all this, he is perhaps the best Grecian of the party, if we except Mr Baird, the young man on his left.

Mr Baird has since gained considerable celebrity

as an original writer and metropolitan lecturer, but at that time he used to preach in a little church something like a barn, to a congregation consisting of three rich farmers and their servants, about fifteen labourers, and the due proportion of women and children. The rich farmers understood him to be "very high learnt;" but if you had interrogated them for a more precise description, they would have said that he was "a thinnish-faced man, with a sort o' cast in his eye, like."

Seven, altogether: a delightful number for a dinner-party, supposing the units to be delightful, but everything depends on that. During dinner Mr Fellowes took the lead in the conversation, which set strongly in the direction of mangold-wurzel and the rotation of crops; for Mr Fellowes and Mr Cleves cultivated their own glebes. Mr Ely, too, had some agricultural notions, and even the Rev. Archibald Duke was made alive to that class of mundane subjects by the possession of some potato-ground. The two young curates talked a little aside during these discussions, which had imperfect interest for their unbeneficed minds; and the transcendental and near-sighted

Mr Baird seemed to listen somewhat abstractedly, knowing little more of potatoes and mangold-wurzel than that they were some form of the "Conditioned."

"What a hobby farming is with Lord Watling!" said Mr Fellowes, when the cloth was being drawn. "I went over his farm at Tetterley with him last summer. It is really a model farm; first-rate dairy, grazing and wheat land, and such splendid farm-buildings! An expensive hobby, though. He sinks a good deal of money there, I fancy. He has a great whim for black cattle, and he sends that drunken old Scotch bailiff of his to Scotland every year, with hundreds in his pocket, to buy these beasts."

"By the by," said Mr Ely, "do you know who is the man to whom Lord Watling has given the Bramhill living?"

"A man named Sargent. I knew him at Oxford. His brother is a lawyer, and was very useful to Lord Watling in that ugly Brounsell affair. That's why Sargent got the living."

"Sargent," said Mr Ely. "I know him. Isn't he a showy talkative fellow; has written travels in Mesopotamia, or something of that sort?"

"That's the man."

"He was at Witherington once, as Bagshawe's curate. He got into rather bad odour there, through some scandal about a flirtation, I think."

"Talking of scandal," returned Mr Fellowes, "have you heard the last story about Barton? Nisbett was telling me the other day that he dines alone with the Countess at six, while Mrs Barton is in the kitchen acting as cook."

"Rather an apocryphal authority, Nisbett," said Mr Ely.

"Ah," said Mr Cleves, with good-natured humour twinkling in his eyes, "depend upon it, that is a corrupt version. The original text is, that they all dined together *with* six—meaning six children—and that Mrs Barton is an excellent cook."

"I wish dining alone together may be the worst of that sad business," said the Rev. Archibald Duke, in a tone implying that his wish was a strong figure of speech.

"Well," said Mr Fellowes, filling his glass and looking jocose, "Barton is certainly either the greatest gull in existence, or he has some cunning secret,—some philtre or other to make himself

charming in the eyes of a fair lady. It isn't all of us that can make conquests when our ugliness is past its bloom."

"The lady seemed to have made a conquest of him at the very outset," said Mr Ely. "I was immensely amused one night at Granby's, when he was telling us her story about her husband's adventures. He said, 'When she told me the tale, I felt I don't know how,—I felt it from the crown of my head to the sole of my feet.'"

Mr Ely gave these words dramatically, imitating the Rev. Amos's fervour and symbolic action, and every one laughed except Mr Duke, whose after-dinner view of things was not apt to be jovial. He said,—

"I think some of us ought to remonstrate with Mr Barton on the scandal he is causing. He is not only imperilling his own soul, but the souls of his flock."

"Depend upon it," said Mr Cleves, "there is some simple explanation of the whole affair, if we only happened to know it. Barton has always impressed me as a right-minded man, who has the knack of doing himself injustice by his manner."

"Now *I* never liked Barton," said Mr Fellowes.

"He's not a gentleman. Why, he used to be on terms of intimacy with that canting Prior, who died a little while ago;—a fellow who soaked himself with spirits, and talked of the Gospel through an inflamed nose."

"The Countess has given him more refined tastes, I dare say," said Mr Ely.

"Well," observed Mr Cleves, "the poor fellow must have a hard pull to get along, with his small income and large family. Let us hope the Countess does something towards making the pot boil."

"Not she," said Mr Duke; "there are greater signs of poverty about them than ever."

"Well, come," returned Mr Cleves, who could be caustic sometimes, and who was not at all fond of his reverend brother, Mr Duke, "that's something in Barton's favour at all events. He might be poor *without* showing signs of poverty."

Mr Duke turned rather yellow, which was his way of blushing, and Mr Ely came to his relief by observing,—

"They're making a very good piece of work of Shepperton Church. Dolby, the architect, who has it in hand, is a very clever fellow."

"It's he who has been doing Coppleton Church,"

said Mr Furness. "They've got it in excellent order for the visitation."

This mention of the visitation suggested the Bishop, and thus opened a wide duct, which entirely diverted the stream of animadversion from that small pipe—that capillary vessel, the Rev. Amos Barton.

The talk of the clergy about their Bishop belongs to the esoteric part of their profession; so we will at once quit the dining-room at Milby Vicarage, lest we should happen to overhear remarks unsuited to the lay understanding, and perhaps dangerous to our repose of mind.

CHAPTER VII.

I DARE say the long residence of the Countess Czerlaski at Shepperton Vicarage is very puzzling to you also, dear reader, as well as to Mr Barton's clerical brethren; the more so, as I hope you are not in the least inclined to put that very evil interpretation on it which evidently found acceptance with the sallow and dyspeptic Mr Duke, and with the florid and highly peptic Mr Fellowes. You have seen enough, I trust, of the Rev. Amos Barton, to be convinced that he was more apt to fall into a blunder than into a sin—more apt to be deceived than to incur a necessity for being deceitful: and if you have a keen eye for physiognomy, you will have detected that the Countess Czerlaski loved herself far too well to get entangled in an unprofitable vice.

How, then, you will say, could this fine lady choose to quarter herself on the establishment of a poor curate, where the carpets were probably fall-

ing into holes, where the attendance was limited to a maid of all work, and where six children were running loose from eight o'clock in the morning till eight o'clock in the evening? Surely you must be misrepresenting the facts.

Heaven forbid! For not having a fertile imagination, as you perceive, and being unable to invent thrilling incidents for your amusement, my only merit must lie in the faithfulness with which I represent to you the humble experience of an ordinary fellow-mortal. I wish to stir your sympathy with commonplace troubles—to win your tears for real sorrow: sorrow such as may live next door to you—such as walks neither in rags nor in velvet, but in very ordinary decent apparel.

Therefore, that you may dismiss your suspicions of my veracity, I will beg you to consider, that at the time the Countess Czerlaski left Camp Villa in dudgeon, she had only twenty pounds in her pocket, being about one-third of the income she possessed independently of her brother. You will then perceive that she was in the extremely inconvenient predicament of having quarrelled, not indeed with her bread and cheese, but certainly with her chicken and tart—a predicament all the

more inconvenient to her, because the habit of idleness had quite unfitted her for earning those necessary superfluities, and because, with all her fascinations, she had not secured any enthusiastic friends whose houses were open to her, and who were dying to see her. Thus she had completely checkmated herself, unless she could resolve on one unpleasant move—namely, to humble herself to her brother, and recognise his wife. This seemed quite impossible to her as long she entertained the hope that he would make the first advances; and in this flattering hope she remained month after month at Shepperton Vicarage, gracefully overlooking the deficiencies of accommodation, and feeling that she was really behaving charmingly. "Who, indeed," she thought to herself, "could do otherwise, with a lovely, gentle creature like Milly? I shall really be sorry to leave the poor thing."

So, though she lay in bed till ten, and came down to a separate breakfast at eleven, she kindly consented to dine as early as five, when a hot joint was prepared, which coldly furnished forth the children's table the next day; she considerately prevented Milly from devoting herself too closely

to the children, by insisting on reading, talking, and walking with her; and she even began to embroider a cap for the next baby, which must certainly be a girl, and be named Caroline.

After the first month or two of her residence at the Vicarage, the Rev. Amos Barton became aware —as, indeed, it was unavoidable that he should— of the strong disapprobation it drew upon him, and the change of feeling towards him which it was producing in his kindest parishioners. But, in the first place, he still believed in the Countess as a charming and influential woman, disposed to befriend him, and, in any case, he could hardly hint departure to a lady guest who had been kind to him and his, and who might any day spontaneously announce the termination of her visit; in the second place, he was conscious of his own innocence, and felt some contemptuous indignation towards people who were ready to imagine evil of him; and, lastly, he had, as I have already intimated, a strong will of his own, so that a certain obstinacy and defiance mingled itself with his other feelings on the subject.

The one unpleasant consequence which was not to be evaded or counteracted by any mere mental

state, was the increasing drain on his slender purse for household expenses, to meet which the remittance he had received from the clerical charity threatened to be quite inadequate. Slander may be defeated by equanimity; but courageous thoughts will not pay your baker's bill, and fortitude is nowhere considered legal tender for beef. Month after month the financial aspect of the Rev. Amos's affairs became more and more serious to him, and month after month, too, wore away more and more of that armour of indignation and defiance with which he had at first defended himself from the harsh looks of faces that were once the friendliest.

But quite the heaviest pressure of the trouble fell on Milly—on gentle, uncomplaining Milly—whose delicate body was becoming daily less fit for all the many things that had to be done between rising up and lying down. At first, she thought the Countess's visit would not last long, and she was quite glad to incur extra exertion for the sake of making her friend comfortable. I can hardly bear to think of all the rough work she did with those lovely hands—all by the sly, without letting her husband know anything about it, and husbands

are not clairvoyant: how she salted bacon, ironed shirts and cravats, put patches on patches, and re-darned darns. Then there was the task of mending and eking out baby linen in prospect, and the problem perpetually suggesting itself how she and Nanny *should* manage when there was another baby, as there would be before very many months were past.

When time glided on, and the Countess's visit did not end, Milly was not blind to any phase of their position. She knew of the slander; she was aware of the keeping aloof of old friends; but these she felt almost entirely on her husband's account. A loving woman's world lies within the four walls of her own home; and it is only through her husband that she is in any electric communication with the world beyond. Mrs Simpkins may have looked scornfully at her, but baby crows and holds out his little arms none the less blithely; Mrs Tomkins may have left off calling on her, but her husband comes home none the less to receive her care and caresses; it has been wet and gloomy out of doors to-day, but she has looked well after the shirt buttons, has cut out baby's pinafores, and half finished Willy's blouse.

So it was with Milly. She was only vexed that her husband should be vexed—only wounded because he was misconceived. But the difficulty about ways and means she felt in quite a different manner. Her rectitude was alarmed lest they should have to make tradesmen wait for their money; her motherly love dreaded the diminution of comforts for the children; and the sense of her own failing health gave exaggerated force to these fears.

Milly could no longer shut her eyes to the fact, that the Countess was inconsiderate, if she did not allow herself to entertain severer thoughts; and she began to feel that it would soon be a duty to tell her frankly that they really could not afford to have her visit farther prolonged. But a process was going forward in two other minds, which ultimately saved Milly from having to perform this painful task.

In the first place, the Countess was getting weary of Shepperton—weary of waiting for her brother's overtures which never came; so, one fine morning, she reflected that forgiveness was a Christian duty, that a sister should be placable, that Mr Bridmain must feel the need of her advice, to which he had

been accustomed for three years, and that very likely "that woman" didn't make the poor man happy. In this amiable frame of mind she wrote a very affectionate appeal, and addressed it to Mr Bridmain, through his banker.

Another mind that was being wrought up to a climax was Nanny's, the maid-of-all-work, who had a warm heart and a still warmer temper. Nanny adored her mistress: she had been heard to say, that she was "ready to kiss the ground as the missis trod on;" and Walter, she considered, was *her* baby, of whom she was as jealous as a lover. But she had from the first very slight admiration for the Countess Czerlaski. That lady, from Nanny's point of view, was a personage always "drawed out i' fine clothes," the chief result of whose existence was to cause additional bed-making, carrying of hot water, laying of table-cloths and cooking of dinners. It was a perpetually heightening "aggravation" to Nanny that she and her mistress had to "slave" more than ever, because there was this fine lady in the house.

"An' she pays nothin' for't neither," observed Nanny to Mr Jacob Tomms, a young gentleman in the tailoring line, who occasionally—simply out of

a taste for dialogue — looked into the vicarage kitchen of an evening. "I know the master's shorter o' money than iver, an' it meks no end o' difference i' th' housekeepin'—her bein' here, besides bein' obliged to have a charwoman constant."

"There's fine stories i' the village about her," said Mr Tomms. "They say as Muster Barton's great wi' her, or else she'd niver stop here."

"Then they say a passill o' lies, an' you ought to be ashamed to goo an' tell 'em o'er again. Do *you* think as the master, as has got a wife like the missis, 'ud goo runnin' arter a stuck-up piece o' goods like that Countess, as isn't fit to black the missis's shoes? I'm none so fond o' the master, but I know better on him nor that."

"Well, I didn't b'lieve it," said Mr Tomms, humbly.

"B'lieve it? you'd ha' been a ninny if yer did. An' she's a nasty, stingy thing, that Countess. She's niver giv me a sixpence or an old rag neither, sin' here she's been. A-lyin' a bed an' a-comin' down to breakfast when other folks wants their dinner!"

If such was the state of Nanny's mind as early as the end of August, when this dialogue with Mr

Tomms occurred, you may imagine what it must have been by the beginning of November, and that at that time a very slight spark might any day cause the long smouldering anger to flame forth in open indignation.

That spark happened to fall the very morning that Mrs Hackit paid the visit to Mrs Patten, recorded in the last chapter. Nanny's dislike of the Countess extended to the innocent dog Jet, whom she "couldn't a-bear to see made a fuss wi' like a Christian. An' the little ouzle must be washed, too, ivery Saturday, as if there wasn't children enoo to wash, wi'out washin' dogs."

Now this particular morning it happened that Milly was quite too poorly to get up, and Mr Barton observed to Nanny, on going out, that he would call and tell Mr Brand to come. These circumstances were already enough to make Nanny anxious and susceptible. But the Countess, comfortably ignorant of them, came down as usual about eleven o'clock to her separate breakfast, which stood ready for her at that hour in the parlour ; the kettle singing on the hob that she might make her own tea. There was a little jug of cream, taken according to custom from last night's

milk, and specially saved for the Countess's breakfast. Jet always awaited his mistress at her bedroom door, and it was her habit to carry him down stairs.

"Now, my little Jet," she said, putting him down gently on the hearth-rug, "you shall have a nice, nice breakfast."

Jet indicated that he thought that observation extremely pertinent and well-timed, by immediately raising himself on his hind-legs, and the Countess emptied the cream-jug into the saucer. Now there was usually a small jug of milk standing on the tray by the side of the cream, and destined for Jet's breakfast, but this morning Nanny, being "moithered," had forgotten that part of the arrangements, so that when the Countess had made her tea, she perceived there was no second jug, and rang the bell. Nanny appeared, looking very red and heated—the fact was, she had been "doing up" the kitchen fire, and that is a sort of work which by no means conduces to blandness of temper.

"Nanny, you have forgotten Jet's milk; will you bring me some more cream, please?"

This was just a little too much for Nanny's forbearance.

"Yes, I dare say. Here am I wi' my hands full o' the children an' the dinner, and missis ill a-bed, and Mr Brand a-comin'; and I must run o'er the village to get more cream, 'cause you've giv it to that nasty little blackamoor."

"Is Mrs Barton ill?"

"Ill—yes—I should think she *is* ill, an' much you care. She's likely to be ill, moithered as *she* is from mornin' to night, wi' folks as had better be elsewhere."

"What do you mean by behaving in this way?"

"Mean? Why, I mean as the missis is a slavin' her life out an' a-sittin' up o' nights, for folks as are better able to wait of *her*, i'stid o' lyin' a-bed an' doin' nothin' all the blessed day, but mek work."

"Leave the room, and don't be insolent."

"Insolent! I'd better be insolent than like what some folks is,—a-livin' on other folks, an' bringin' a bad name on 'em into the bargain."

Here Nanny flung out of the room, leaving the lady to digest this unexpected breakfast at her leisure.

The Countess was stunned for a few minutes,

but when she began to recall Nanny's words, there was no possibility of avoiding very unpleasant conclusions from them, or of failing to see her position at the Vicarage in an entirely new light. The interpretation too of Nanny's allusion to a "bad name" did not lie out of the reach of the Countess's imagination, and she saw the necessity of quitting Shepperton without delay. Still, she would like to wait for her brother's letter—no—she would ask Milly to forward it to her—still better, she would go at once to London, inquire her brother's address at his banker's, and go to see him without preliminary.

She went up to Milly's room, and, after kisses and inquiries, said—"I find, on consideration, dear Milly, from the letter I had yesterday, that I must bid you good-by and go up to London at once. But you must not let me leave you ill, you naughty thing."

"Oh no," said Milly, who felt as if a load had been taken off her back, "I shall be very well in an hour or two. Indeed, I'm much better now. You will want me to help you to pack. But you won't go for two or three days?"

"Yes, I must go to-morrow. But I shall not

let you help me pack, so don't entertain any unreasonable projects, but lie still. Mr Brand is coming, Nanny says."

The news was not an unpleasant surprise to Mr Barton when he came home, though he was able to express more regret at the idea of parting than Milly could summon to her lips. He retained more of his original feeling for the Countess than Milly did, for women never betray themselves to men as they do to each other; and the Rev. Amos had not a keen instinct for character. But he felt that he was being relieved from a difficulty, and in the way that was easiest for him. Neither he nor Milly suspected that it was Nanny who had cut the knot for them, for the Countess took care to give no sign on that subject. As for Nanny, she was perfectly aware of the relation between cause and effect in the affair, and secretly chuckled over her outburst of "sauce," as the best morning's work she had ever done.

So, on Friday morning, a fly was seen standing at the Vicarage gate, with the Countess's boxes packed upon it; and presently that lady herself was seen getting into the vehicle. After a last shake of the hand to Mr Barton, and last kisses

to Milly and the children, the door was closed; and as the fly rolled off, the little party at the Vicarage gate caught a last glimpse of the handsome Countess leaning and waving kisses from the carriage window. Jet's little black phiz was also seen, and doubtless he had his thoughts and feelings on the occasion, but he kept them strictly within his own bosom.

The schoolmistress opposite witnessed this departure, and lost no time in telling it to the schoolmaster, who again communicated the news to the landlord of "The Jolly Colliers," at the close of the morning school-hours. Nanny poured the joyful tidings into the ear of Mr Farquhar's footman, who happened to call with a letter, and Mr Brand carried them to all the patients he visited that morning, after calling on Mrs Barton. So that before Sunday, it was very generally known in Shepperton parish, that the Countess Czerlaski had left the Vicarage.

The Countess had left, but alas! the bills she had contributed to swell still remained; so did the exiguity of the children's clothing, which also was partly an indirect consequence of her presence; and so, too, did the coolness and aliena-

tion in the parishioners, which could not at once vanish before the fact of her departure. The Rev. Amos was not exculpated—the past was not expunged. But, what was worse than all, Milly's health gave frequent cause for alarm, and the prospect of baby's birth was overshadowed by more than the usual fears. The birth came prematurely, about six weeks after the Countess's departure, but Mr Brand gave favourable reports to all inquirers on the following day, which was Saturday. On Sunday, after morning service, Mrs Hackit called at the Vicarage to inquire how Mrs Barton was, and was invited up-stairs to see her. Milly lay placid and lovely in her feebleness, and held out her hand to Mrs Hackit with a beaming smile. It was very pleasant to her to see her old friend unreserved and cordial once more. The seven months' baby was very tiny and very red, but "handsome is that handsome does,"—he was pronounced to be "doing well," and Mrs Hackit went home gladdened at heart to think that the perilous hour was over.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE following Wednesday, when Mr and Mrs Hackit were seated comfortably by their bright hearth, enjoying the long afternoon afforded by an early dinner, Rachel, the housemaid, came in and said,—

"If you please 'm, the shepherd says, have you heard as Mrs Barton's wuss, and not expected to live?"

Mrs Hackit turned pale, and hurried out to question the shepherd, who, she found, had heard the sad news at an alehouse in the village. Mr Hackit followed her out and said, "Thee'dst better have the pony-chaise, and go directly."

"Yes," said Mrs Hackit, too much overcome to utter any exclamations. "Rachel, come an' help me on wi' my things."

When her husband was wrapping her cloak round her feet in the pony-chaise, she said,—

"If I don't come home to-night, I shall send

back the pony-chaise, and you'll know I'm wanted there."

"Yes, yes."

It was a bright frosty day, and by the time Mrs Hackit arrived at the Vicarage, the sun was near its setting. There was a carriage and pair standing at the gate, which she recognised as Dr Madeley's, the physician from Rotherby. She entered at the kitchen door, that she might avoid knocking, and quietly question Nanny. No one was in the kitchen, but, passing on, she saw the sitting-room door open, and Nanny, with Walter in her arms, removing the knives and forks, which had been laid for dinner three hours ago.

"Master says he can't eat no dinner," was Nanny's first word. "He's never tasted nothin' sin' yesterday mornin', but a cup o' tea."

"When was your missis took worse?"

"O' Monday night. They sent for Dr Madeley i' the middle o' the day yisterday, an' he's here again now."

"Is the baby alive?"

"No, it died last night." The children's all at Mrs Bond's. She come and took 'em away last night, but the master says they must be fetched

soon. He's up-stairs now, wi' Dr Madeley and Mr Brand."

At this moment Mrs Hackit heard the sound of a heavy, slow foot, in the passage; and presently Amos Barton entered, with dry despairing eyes, haggard and unshaven. He expected to find the sitting-room as he left it, with nothing to meet his eyes but Milly's work-basket in the corner of the sofa, and the children's toys overturned in the bow-window. But when he saw Mrs Hackit come towards him with answering sorrow in her face, the pent-up fountain of tears was opened; he threw himself on the sofa, hid his face, and sobbed aloud.

"Bear up, Mr Barton," Mrs Hackit ventured to say at last, "bear up, for the sake o' them dear children."

"The children," said Amos, starting up. "They must be sent for. Some one must fetch them. Milly will want to . . . . ."

He couldn't finish the sentence, but Mrs Hackit understood him, and said, "I'll send the man with the pony-carriage for 'em."

She went out to give the order, and encountered Dr Madeley and Mr Brand, who were just going.

Mr Brand said: "I am very glad to see you are here, Mrs Hackit. No time must be lost in sending for the children. Mrs Barton wants to see them."

"Do you quite give her up, then?"

"She can hardly live through the night. She begged us to tell her how long she had to live; and then asked for the children."

The pony-carriage was sent; and Mrs Hackit, returning to Mr Barton, said she should like to go up-stairs now. He went up-stairs with her and opened the door. The chamber fronted the west; the sun was just setting, and the red light fell full upon the bed, where Milly lay with the hand of death visibly upon her. The feather-bed had been removed, and she lay low on a mattress with her head slightly raised by pillows. Her long fair neck seemed to be struggling with a painful effort; her features were pallid and pinched, and her eyes were closed. There was no one in the room but the nurse, and the mistress of the free school, who had come to give her help from the beginning of the change.

Amos and Mrs Hackit stood beside the bed, and Milly opened her eyes.

"My darling, Mrs Hackit is come to see you."

Milly smiled and looked at her with that strange, far-off look which belongs to ebbing life.

"Are the children coming?" she said, painfully.

"Yes, they will be here directly."

She closed her eyes again.

Presently the pony-carriage was heard; and Amos, motioning to Mrs Hackit to follow him, left the room. On their way down stairs, she suggested that the carriage should remain to take them away again afterwards, and Amos assented.

There they stood in the melancholy sitting-room —the five sweet children, from Patty to Chubby— all, with their mother's eyes—all, except Patty, looking up with a vague fear at their father as he entered. Patty understood the great sorrow that was come upon them, and tried to check her sobs as she heard her papa's footsteps.

"My children," said Amos, taking Chubby in his arms, "God is going to take away your dear mamma from us. She wants to see you to say good-by. You must try to be very good and not cry."

He could say no more, but turned round to see if Nanny was there with Walter, and then led the

way up-stairs, leading Dickey with the other hand. Mrs Hackit followed with Sophy and Patty, and then came Nanny with Walter and Fred.

It seemed as if Milly had heard the little footsteps on the stairs, for when Amos entered her eyes were wide open, eagerly looking towards the door. They all stood by the bedside—Amos nearest to her, holding Chubby and Dickey. But she motioned for Patty to come first, and clasping the poor pale child by the hand, said,—

"Patty, I'm going away from you. Love your papa. Comfort him; and take care of your little brothers and sisters. God will help you."

Patty stood perfectly quiet, and said, "Yes, mamma."

The mother motioned with her pallid lips for the dear child to lean towards her and kiss her; and then Patty's great anguish overcame her, and she burst into sobs. Amos drew her towards him and pressed her head gently to him, while Milly beckoned Fred and Sophy, and said to them more faintly,—

"Patty will try to be your mamma when I am gone, my darlings. You will be good, and not vex her."

They leaned towards her, and she stroked their fair heads, and kissed their tear-stained cheeks. They cried because mamma was ill and papa looked so unhappy; but they thought, perhaps next week things would be as they used to be again.

The little ones were lifted on the bed to kiss her. Little Walter said, "Mamma, mamma," and stretched out his fat arms and smiled; and Chubby seemed gravely wondering; but Dickey, who had been looking fixedly at her, with lip hanging down, ever since he came into the room, now seemed suddenly pierced with the idea that mamma was going away somewhere; his little heart swelled and he cried aloud.

Then Mrs Hackit and Nanny took them all away. Patty at first begged to stay at home and not go to Mrs Bond's again; but when Nanny reminded her that she had better go to take care of the younger ones, she submitted at once, and they were all packed in the pony-carriage once more.

Milly kept her eyes shut for some time after the children were gone. Amos had sunk on his knees, and was holding her hand while he watched

her face. By-and-by she opened her eyes, and, drawing him close to her, whispered slowly,—

"My dear—dear—husband—you have been—very—good to me. You—have—made me—very—happy."

She spoke no more for many hours. They watched her breathing becoming more and more difficult, until evening deepened into night, and until midnight was past. About half-past twelve she seemed to be trying to speak, and they leaned to catch her words.

"Music—music—didn't you hear it?"

Amos knelt by the bed and held her hand in his. He did not believe in his sorrow. It was a bad dream. He did not know when she was gone. But Mr Brand, whom Mrs Hackit had sent for before twelve o'clock, thinking that Mr Barton might probably need his help, now came up to him and said,—

"She feels no more pain now. Come, my dear sir, come with me."

"She isn't *dead?*" shrieked the poor desolate man, struggling to shake off Mr Brand, who had taken him by the arm. But his weary, weakened frame was not equal to resistance, and he was dragged out of the room.

CHAPTER IX.

THEY laid her in the grave—the sweet mother with her baby in her arms—while the Christmas snow lay thick upon the graves. It was Mr Cleves who buried her. On the first news of Mr Barton's calamity, he had ridden over from Tripplegate to beg that he might be made of some use, and his silent grasp of Amos's hand had penetrated like the painful thrill of life-recovering warmth to the poor benumbed heart of the stricken man.

The snow lay thick upon the graves, and the day was cold and dreary; but there was many a sad eye watching that black procession as it passed from the vicarage to the church, and from the church to the open grave. There were men and women standing in that churchyard who had bandied vulgar jests about their pastor, and who had lightly charged him with sin; but now, when they saw him following the coffin, pale and hag-

gard, he was consecrated anew by his great sorrow, and they looked at him with respectful pity.

All the children were there, for Amos had willed it so, thinking that some dim memory of that sacred moment might remain even with little Walter, and link itself with what he would hear of his sweet mother in after years. He himself led Patty and Dickey; then came Sophy and Fred; Mr Brand had begged to carry Chubby, and Nanny followed with Walter. They made a circle round the grave while the coffin was being lowered. Patty alone of all the children felt that mamma was in that coffin, and that a new and sadder life had begun for papa and herself. She was pale and trembling, but she clasped his hand more firmly as the coffin went down, and gave no sob. Fred and Sophy, though they were only two and three years younger, and though they had seen mamma in her coffin, seemed to themselves to be looking at some strange show. They had not learned to decipher that terrible handwriting of human destiny, illness and death. Dickey had rebelled against his black clothes, until he was told that it would be naughty to mamma not to put them on, when he at once sub-

mitted; and now, though he had heard Nanny say that mamma was in heaven, he had a vague notion that she would come home again to-morrow, and say he had been a good boy, and let him empty her work-box. He stood close to his father, with great rosy cheeks, and wide open blue eyes, looking first up at Mr Cleves and then down at the coffin, and thinking he and Chubby would play at that, when they got home.

The burial was over, and Amos turned with his children to re-enter the house—the house where, an hour ago, Milly's dear body lay, where the windows were half-darkened, and sorrow seemed to have a hallowed precinct for itself, shut out from the world. But now she was gone; the broad snow-reflected daylight was in all the rooms; the Vicarage again seemed part of the common working-day world, and Amos, for the first time, felt that he was alone—that day after day, month after month, year after year, would have to be lived through without Milly's love. Spring would come, and she would not be there; summer, and she would not be there; and he would never have her again with him by the fireside in the long evenings. The seasons all seemed irksome to his

thoughts; and how dreary the sunshiny days that would be sure to come! She was gone from him; and he could never show her his love any more, never make up for omissions in the past by filling future days with tenderness.

O the anguish of that thought, that we can never atone to our dead for the stinted affection we gave them, for the light answers we returned to their plaints or their pleadings, for the little reverence we showed to that sacred human soul that lived so close to us, and was the divinest thing God had given us to know.

Amos Barton had been an affectionate husband, and while Milly was with him, he was never visited by the thought that perhaps his sympathy with her was not quick and watchful enough; but now he re-lived all their life together, with that terrible keenness of memory and imagination which bereavement gives, and he felt as if his very love needed a pardon for its poverty and selfishness.

No outward solace could counteract the bitterness of this inward woe. But outward solace came. Cold faces looked kind again, and parishioners turned over in their minds what they could best do to help their pastor. Mr Oldinport wrote

to express his sympathy, and enclosed another twenty-pound note, begging that he might be permitted to contribute in this way to the relief of Mr Barton's mind from pecuniary anxieties, under the pressure of a grief which all his parishioners must share; and offering his interest towards placing the two eldest girls in a school expressly founded for clergymen's daughters. Mr Cleves succeeded in collecting thirty pounds among his richer clerical brethren, and, adding ten pounds himself, sent the sum to Amos, with the kindest and most delicate words of Christian fellowship and manly friendship. Miss Jackson forgot old grievances, and came to stay some months with Milly's children, bringing such material aid as she could spare from her small income. These were substantial helps, which relieved Amos from the pressure of his money difficulties; and the friendly attentions, the kind pressure of the hand, the cordial looks he met with everywhere in his parish, made him feel that the fatal frost which had settled on his pastoral duties, during the Countess's residence at the Vicarage, was completely thawed, and that the hearts of his parishioners were once more open to him.

No one breathed the Countess's name now; for Milly's memory hallowed her husband, as of old the place was hallowed on which an angel from God had alighted.

When the spring came, Mrs Hackit begged that she might have Dickey to stay with her, and great was the enlargement of Dickey's experience from that visit. Every morning he was allowed—being well wrapt up as to his chest, by Mrs Hackit's own hands, but very bare and red as to his legs—to run loose in the cow and poultry yard, to persecute the turkey-cock by satirical imitations of his gobble-gobble, and to put difficult questions to the groom as to the reasons why horses had four legs, and other transcendental matters. Then Mr Hackit would take Dickey up on horseback when he rode round his farm, and Mrs Hackit had a large plumcake in cut, ready to meet incidental attacks of hunger. So that Dickey had considerably modified his views as to the desirability of Mrs Hackit's kisses.

The Miss Farquhars made particular pets of Fred and Sophy, to whom they undertook to give lessons twice a-week in writing and geography; and Mrs Farquhar devised many treats for the

little ones. Patty's treat was to stay at home, or walk about with her papa; and when he sat by the fire in an evening, after the other children were gone to bed, she would bring a stool, and placing it against his feet, would sit down upon it and lean her head against his knee. Then his hand would rest on that fair head, and he would feel that Milly's love was not quite gone out of his life.

So the time wore on till it was May again, and the church was quite finished and reopened in all its new splendour, and Mr Barton was devoting himself with more vigour than ever to his parochial duties. But one morning—it was a very bright morning, and evil tidings sometimes like to fly in the finest weather—there came a letter for Mr Barton, addressed in the Vicar's handwriting. Amos opened it with some anxiety—somehow or other he had a presentiment of evil. The letter contained the announcement that Mr Carpe had resolved on coming to reside at Shepperton, and that, consequently, in six months from that time Mr Barton's duties as curate in that parish would be closed.

O, it was hard! Just when Shepperton had become the place where he most wished to stay—

where he had friends who knew his sorrows—where he lived close to Milly's grave. To part from that grave seemed like parting with Milly a second time; for Amos was one who clung to all the material links between his mind and the past. His imagination was not vivid, and required the stimulus of actual perception.

It roused some bitter feeling, too, to think that Mr Carpe's wish to reside at Shepperton was merely a pretext for removing Mr Barton, in order that he might ultimately give the curacy of Shepperton to his own brother-in-law, who was known to be wanting a new position.

Still, it must be borne; and the painful business of seeking another curacy must be set about without loss of time. After the lapse of some months, Amos was obliged to renounce the hope of getting one at all near Shepperton, and he at length resigned himself to accepting one in a distant county. The parish was in a large manufacturing town, where his walks would lie among noisy streets and dingy alleys, and where the children would have no garden to play in, no pleasant farmhouses to visit.

It was another blow inflicted on the bruised man.

CHAPTER X.

At length the dreaded week was come, when Amos and his children must leave Shepperton. There was general regret among the parishioners at his departure: not that any one of them thought his spiritual gifts pre-eminent, or was conscious of great edification from his ministry. But his recent troubles had called out their better sympathies, and that is always a source of love. Amos failed to touch the spring of goodness by his sermons, but he touched it effectually by his sorrows; and there was now a real bond between him and his flock.

"My heart aches for them poor motherless children," said Mrs Hackit to her husband, "a-goin' among strangers, an' into a nasty town, where there's no good victuals to be had, and you must pay dear to get bad 'uns."

Mrs Hackit had a vague notion of a town life

as a combination of dirty backyards, measly pork, and dingy linen.

The same sort of sympathy was strong among the poorer class of parishioners. Old stiff-jointed Mr Tozer, who was still able to earn a little by gardening "jobs," stopped Mrs Cramp, the char-woman, on her way home from the Vicarage, where she had been helping Nanny to pack up the day before the departure, and inquired very particularly into Mr Barton's prospects.

"Ah, poor mon," he was heard to say, "I'm surry fur 'un. He hedn't much here, but he'll be wuss off theer. Half a loaf's better nor ne'er 'un."

The sad good-byes had all been said before that last evening; and after all the packing was done and all the arrangements were made, Amos felt the oppression of that blank interval in which one has nothing left to think of but the dreary future —the separation from the loved and familiar, and the chilling entrance on the new and strange. In every parting there is an image of death.

Soon after ten o'clock, when he had sent Nanny to bed, that she might have a good night's rest before the fatigues of the morrow, he stole softly out to pay a last visit to Milly's grave. It was a

moonless night, but the sky was thick with stars, and their light was enough to show that the grass had grown long on the grave, and that there was a tombstone telling in bright letters, on a dark ground, that beneath were deposited the remains of Amelia, the beloved wife of Amos Barton, who died in the thirty-fifth year of her age, leaving a husband and six children to lament her loss. The final words of the inscription were, "Thy will be done."

The husband was now advancing towards the dear mound from which he was so soon to be parted, perhaps for ever. He stood a few minutes reading over and over again the words on the tombstone, as if to assure himself that all the happy and unhappy past was a reality. For love is frightened at the intervals of insensibility and callousness that encroach by little and little on the dominion of grief, and it makes efforts to recall the keenness of the first anguish.

Gradually, as his eye dwelt on the words, "Amelia, the beloved wife," the waves of feeling swelled within his soul, and he threw himself on the grave, clasping it with his arms, and kissing the cold turf.

"Milly, Milly, dost thou hear me? I didn't love thee enough—I wasn't tender enough to thee —but I think of it all now."

The sobs came and choked his utterance, and the warm tears fell.

CONCLUSION.

ONLY once again in his life has Amos Barton visited Milly's grave. It was in the calm and softened light of an autumnal afternoon, and he was not alone. He held on his arm a young woman, with a sweet, grave face, which strongly recalled the expression of Mrs Barton's, but was less lovely in form and colour. She was about thirty, but there were some premature lines round her mouth and eyes, which told of early anxiety.

Amos himself was much changed. His thin circlet of hair was nearly white, and his walk was no longer firm and upright. But his glance was calm, and even cheerful, and his neat linen told of a woman's care. Milly did not take all her love from the earth when she died. She had left some of it in Patty's heart.

All the other children were now grown up, and had gone their several ways. Dickey, you will be glad to hear, had shown remarkable talents as an

engineer. His cheeks are still ruddy, in spite of mixed mathematics, and his eyes are still large and blue; but in other respects his person would present no marks of identification for his friend Mrs Hackit, if she were to see him; especially now that her eyes must be grown very dim, with the wear of more than twenty additional years. He is nearly six feet high, and has a proportionately broad chest; he wears spectacles, and rubs his large white hands through a mass of shaggy brown hair. But I am sure you have no doubt that Mr Richard Barton is a thoroughly good fellow, as well as a man of talent, and you will be glad any day to shake hands with him, for his own sake as well as his mother's.

Patty alone remains by her father's side, and makes the evening sunshine of his life.

MR GILFIL'S LOVE-STORY

MR GILFIL'S LOVE-STORY.

CHAPTER I.

When old Mr Gilfil died, thirty years ago, there was general sorrow in Shepperton; and if black cloth had not been hung round the pulpit and reading-desk, by order of his nephew and principal legatee, the parishioners would certainly have subscribed the necessary sum out of their own pockets, rather than allow such a tribute of respect to be wanting. All the farmers' wives brought out their black bombasines; and Mrs Jennings, at the Wharf, by appearing the first Sunday after Mr Gilfil's death in her salmon-coloured ribbons and green shawl, excited the severest remark. To be sure, Mrs Jennings was a new-comer, and town-bred, so that she could hardly be expected to have very clear notions of

what was proper; but, as Mrs Higgins observed in an under-tone to Mrs Parrot when they were coming out of church, "Her husband, who'd been born i' the parish, might ha' told her better." An unreadiness to put on black on all available occasions, or too great an alacrity in putting it off, argued, in Mrs Higgins's opinion, a dangerous levity of character, and an unnatural insensibility to the essential fitness of things.

"Some folks can't a-bear to put off their colours," she remarked; "but that was never the way i' *my* family. Why, Mrs Parrot, from the time I was married till Mr Higgins died, nine year ago come Candlemas, I niver was out o' black two year together!"

"Ah," said Mrs Parrot, who was conscious of inferiority in this respect, "there isn't many families as have had so many deaths as yours, Mrs Higgins."

Mrs Higgins, who was an elderly widow "well left," reflected with complacency that Mrs Parrot's observation was no more than just, and that Mrs Jennings very likely belonged to a family which had had no funerals to speak of.

Even dirty Dame Fripp, who was a very rare

church-goer, had been to Mrs Hackit to beg a bit of old crape, and with this sign of grief pinned on her little coal-scuttle bonnet, was seen dropping her curtsy opposite the reading-desk. This manifestation of respect towards Mr Gilfil's memory on the part of Dame Fripp had no theological bearing whatever. It was due to an event which had occurred some years back, and which, I am sorry to say, had left that grimy old lady as indifferent to the means of grace as ever. Dame Fripp kept leeches, and was understood to have such remarkable influence over those wilful animals in inducing them to bite under the most unpromising circumstances, that though her own leeches were usually rejected, from a suspicion that they had lost their appetite, she herself was constantly called in to apply the more lively individuals furnished from Mr Pilgrim's surgery, when, as was very often the case, one of that clever man's paying patients was attacked with inflammation. Thus Dame Fripp, in addition to "property" supposed to yield her no less than half-a-crown a-week, was in the receipt of professional fees, the gross amount of which was vaguely estimated by her neighbours as "pouns an' pouns." Moreover, she

drove a brisk trade in lollipop with epicurean urchins, who recklessly purchased that luxury at the rate of two hundred per cent. Nevertheless, with all these notorious sources of income, the shameless old woman constantly pleaded poverty, and begged for scraps at Mrs Hackit's, who, though she always said Mrs Fripp was "as false as two folks," and no better than a miser and a heathen, had yet a leaning towards her as an old neighbour.

"There's that case-hardened old Judy a-coming after the tea-leaves again," Mrs Hackit would say; "an' I'm fool enough to give 'em her, though Sally wants 'em all the while to sweep the floors with!"

Such was Dame Fripp, whom Mr Gilfil, riding leisurely in top-boots and spurs from doing duty at Knebley one warm Sunday afternoon, observed sitting in the dry ditch near her cottage, and by her side a large pig, who, with that ease and confidence belonging to perfect friendship, was lying with his head in her lap, and making no effort to play the agreeable beyond an occasional grunt.

"Why, Mistress Fripp," said the Vicar, "I didn't know you had such a fine pig. You'll have some rare flitches at Christmas!"

"Eh, God forbid! My son gev him me two 'ear ago, an' he's been company to me iver sin'. I couldn't find i' my heart to part wi'm, if I niver knowed the taste o' bacon-fat again."

"Why, he'll eat his head off, and yours too. How can you go on keeping a pig, and making nothing by him?"

"O, he picks a bit hisself wi' rootin', and I dooant mind doin' wi'out to gie him summat. A bit o' coompany's meat an' drink too, an' he follers me about, an' grunts when I spake to'm, just like a Christian."

Mr Gilfil laughed, and I am obliged to admit that he said good-by to Dame Fripp without asking her why she had not been to church, or making the slightest effort for her spiritual edification. But the next day he ordered his man David to take her a great piece of bacon, with a message, saying, the parson wanted to make sure that Mrs Fripp would know the taste of bacon-fat again. So, when Mr Gilfil died, Dame Fripp manifested her gratitude and reverence in the simple dingy fashion I have mentioned.

You already suspect that the Vicar did not shine in the more spiritual functions of his office;

and indeed, the utmost I can say for him in this respect is, that he performed those functions with undeviating attention to brevity and despatch. He had a large heap of short sermons, rather yellow and worn at the edges, from which he took two every Sunday, securing perfect impartiality in the selection by taking them as they came without reference to topics; and having preached one of these sermons at Shepperton in the morning, he mounted his horse and rode hastily with the other in his pocket to Knebley, where he officiated in a wonderful little church, with a checkered pavement which had once rung to the iron tread of military monks, with coats of arms in clusters on the lofty roof, marble warriors and their wives without noses occupying a large proportion of the area, and the twelve apostles, with their heads very much on one side, holding didactic ribbons, painted in fresco on the walls. Here, in an absence of mind to which he was prone, Mr Gilfil would sometimes forget to take off his spurs before putting on his surplice, and only become aware of the omission by feeling something mysteriously tugging at the skirts of that garment as he stepped into the reading-desk. But the

Knebley farmers would as soon have thought of criticising the moon as their pastor. He belonged to the course of nature, like markets and toll-gates and dirty bank-notes; and being a vicar, his claim on their veneration had never been counteracted by an exasperating claim on their pockets. Some of them, who did not indulge in the superfluity of a covered cart without springs, had dined half an hour earlier than usual—that is to say, at twelve o'clock—in order to have time for their long walk through miry lanes, and present themselves duly in their places at two o'clock, when Mr Oldinport and Lady Felicia, to whom Knebley Church was a sort of family temple, made their way among the bows and curtsies of their dependants to a carved and canopied pew in the chancel, diffusing as they went a delicate odour of Indian roses on the unsusceptible nostrils of the congregation.

The farmers' wives and children sate on the dark oaken benches, but the husbands usually chose the distinctive dignity of a stall under one of the twelve apostles, where, when the alternation of prayers and responses had given place to the agreeable monotony of the sermon, Paterfamilias

might be seen or heard sinking into a pleasant doze, from which he infallibly woke up at the sound of the concluding doxology. And then they made their way back again through the miry lanes, perhaps almost as much the better for this simple weekly tribute to what they knew of good and right, as many a more wakeful and critical congregation of the present day.

Mr Gilfil, too, used to make his way home in the later years of his life, for he had given up the habit of dining at Knebley Abbey on a Sunday, having, I am sorry to say, had a very bitter quarrel with Mr Oldinport, the cousin and predecessor of the Mr Oldinport who flourished in the Rev. Amos Barton's time. That quarrel was a sad pity, for the two had had many a good day's hunting together when they were younger, and in those friendly times not a few members of the hunt envied Mr Oldinport the excellent terms he was on with his Vicar; for, as Sir Jasper Sitwell observed, "next to a man's wife, there's nobody can be such an infernal plague to you as a parson, always under your nose on your own estate."

I fancy the original difference which led to the rupture was very slight; but Mr Gilfil was of an

extremely caustic turn, his satire having a flavour of originality which was quite wanting in his sermons; and as Mr Oldinport's armour of conscious virtue presented some considerable and conspicuous gaps, the Vicar's keen-edged retorts probably made a few incisions too deep to be forgiven. Such, at least, was the view of the case presented by Mr Hackit, who knew as much of the matter as any third person. For, the very week after the quarrel, when presiding at the annual dinner of the Association for the Prosecution of Felons, held at the Oldinport Arms, he contributed an additional zest to the conviviality on that occasion by informing the company that "the parson had given the squire a lick with the rough side of his tongue." The detection of the person or persons who had driven off Mr Parrot's heifer, could hardly have been more welcome news to the Shepperton tenantry, with whom Mr Oldinport was in the worst odour as a landlord, having kept up his rents in spite of falling prices, and not being in the least stung to emulation by paragraphs in the provincial newspapers, stating that the Honourable Augustus Purwell, or Viscount Blethers, had made a return of ten per cent on their last

rent-day. The fact was, Mr Oldinport had not the slightest intention of standing for Parliament, whereas he had the strongest intention of adding to his unentailed estate. Hence, to the Shepperton farmers it was as good as lemon with their grog to know that the Vicar had thrown out sarcasms against the Squire's charities, as little better than those of the man who stole a goose, and gave away the giblets in alms. For Shepperton, you observe, was in a state of Attic culture compared with Knebley; it had turnpike roads and a public opinion, whereas, in the Bœotian Knebley, men's minds and waggons alike moved in the deepest of ruts, and the landlord was only grumbled at as a necessary and unalterable evil, like the weather, the weevils, and the turnip-fly.

Thus in Shepperton this breach with Mr Oldinport tended only to heighten that good understanding which the Vicar had always enjoyed with the rest of his parishioners, from the generation whose children he had christened a quarter of a century before, down to that hopeful generation represented by little Tommy Bond, who had recently quitted frocks and trousers for the severe simplicity of a tight suit of corduroys, relieved by

numerous brass buttons. Tommy was a saucy boy, impervious to all impressions of reverence, and excessively addicted to humming-tops and marbles, with which recreative resources he was in the habit of immoderately distending the pockets of his corduroys. One day, spinning his top on the garden-walk, and seeing the Vicar advance directly towards it, at that exciting moment when it was beginning to "sleep" magnificently, he shouted out with all the force of his lungs—"Stop! don't knock my top down, now!" From that day "little Corduroys" had been an especial favourite with Mr Gilfil, who delighted to provoke his ready scorn and wonder by putting questions which gave Tommy the meanest opinion of his intellect.

"Well, little Corduroys, have they milked the geese to-day?"

"Milked the geese! why, they don't milk the geese; ye'r silly!"

"No! dear heart! why, how do the goslings live, then?"

The nutriment of goslings rather transcending Tommy's observations in natural history, he feigned to understand this question in an excla-

matory rather than an interrogatory sense, and became absorbed in winding up his top.

"Ah, I see you don't know how the goslings live! But did you notice how it rained sugar-plums yesterday?" (Here Tommy became attentive.) "Why, they fell into my pocket as I rode along. You look in my pocket and see if they didn't."

Tommy, without waiting to discuss the alleged antecedent, lost no time in ascertaining the presence of the agreeable consequent, for he had a well-founded belief in the advantages of diving into the Vicar's pocket. Mr Gilfil called it his wonderful pocket, because, as he delighted to tell the "young shavers" and "two-shoes"—so he called all little boys and girls—whenever he put pennies into it, they turned into sugar-plums or gingerbread, or some other nice thing. Indeed, little Bessie Parrot, a flaxen-headed "two-shoes," very white and fat as to her neck, always had the admirable directness and sincerity to salute him with the question—"What zoo dot in zoo pottet?"

You can imagine, then, that the christening dinners were none the less merry for the presence of the parson. The farmers relished his society

particularly, for he could not only smoke his pipe, and season the details of parish affairs with abundance of caustic jokes and proverbs, but, as Mr Bond often said, no man knew more than the Vicar about the breed of cows and horses. He had grazing-land of his own about five miles off, which a bailiff, ostensibly a tenant, farmed under his direction; and to ride backwards and forwards, and look after the buying and selling of stock, was the old gentleman's chief relaxation, now his hunting days were over. To hear him discussing the respective merits of the Devonshire breed and the short-horns, or the last foolish decision of the magistrates about a pauper, a superficial observer might have seen little difference, beyond his superior shrewdness, between the Vicar and his bucolic parishioners; for it was his habit to approximate his accent and mode of speech to theirs, doubtless because he thought it a mere frustration of the purposes of language to talk of "shear-hogs" and "ewes" to men who habitually said "sharrags" and "yowes." Nevertheless the farmers themselves were perfectly aware of the distinction between them and the parson, and had not at all the less belief in him as a gentleman

and a clergyman for his easy speech and familiar manners. Mrs Parrot smoothed her apron and set her cap right with the utmost solicitude when she saw the Vicar coming, made him her deepest curtsy, and every Christmas had a fat turkey ready to send him with her "duty." And in the most gossiping colloquies with Mr Gilfil, you might have observed that both men and women "minded their words," and never became indifferent to his approbation.

The same respect attended him in his strictly clerical functions. The benefits of baptism were supposed to be somehow bound up with Mr Gilfil's personality, so metaphysical a distinction as that between a man and his office being, as yet, quite foreign to the mind of a good Shepperton churchman, savouring, he would have thought, of Dissent on the very face of it. Miss Selina Parrot put off her marriage a whole month when Mr Gilfil had an attack of rheumatism, rather than be married in a makeshift manner by the Milby curate.

"We've had a very good sermon this morning," was the frequent remark, after hearing one of the old yellow series, heard with all the more satisfac-

tion because it had been heard for the twentieth time; for to minds on the Shepperton level it is repetition, not novelty, that produces the strongest effect; and phrases, like tunes, are a long time making themselves at home in the brain.

Mr Gilfil's sermons, as you may imagine, were not of a highly doctrinal, still less of a polemical, cast. They perhaps did not search the conscience very powerfully; for you remember that to Mrs Patten, who had listened to them thirty years, the announcement that she was a sinner appeared an uncivil heresy; but, on the other hand, they made no unreasonable demand on the Shepperton intellect—amounting, indeed, to little more than an expansion of the concise thesis, that those who do wrong will find it the worse for them, and those who do well will find it the better for them; the nature of wrong-doing being exposed in special sermons against lying, backbiting, anger, slothfulness, and the like; and well-doing being interpreted as honesty, truthfulness, charity, industry, and other common virtues, lying quite on the surface of life, and having very little to do with deep spiritual doctrine. Mrs Patten understood that if she turned out ill-crushed cheeses, a just retribu-

tion awaited her; though, I fear, she made no particular application of the sermon on backbiting. Mrs Hackit expressed herself greatly edified by the sermon on honesty, the allusion to the unjust weight and deceitful balance having a peculiar lucidity for her, owing to a recent dispute with her grocer; but I am not aware that she ever appeared to be much struck by the sermon on anger.

As to any suspicion that Mr Gilfil did not dispense the pure Gospel, or any strictures on his doctrine and mode of delivery, such thoughts never visited the minds of the Shepperton parishioners—of those very parishioners who, ten or fifteen years later, showed themselves extremely critical of Mr Barton's discourses and demeanour. But in the interim they had tasted that dangerous fruit of the tree of knowledge—innovation, which is well known to open the eyes, often in an uncomfortable manner. At present, to find fault with the sermon was regarded as almost equivalent to finding fault with religion itself. One Sunday, Mr Hackit's nephew, Master Tom Stokes, a flippant town youth, greatly scandalised his excellent relatives by declaring that he could write as good a sermon as Mr Gilfil's; whereupon

Mr Hackit sought to reduce the presumptuous youth to utter confusion, by offering him a sovereign if he would fulfil his vaunt. The sermon was written, however; and though it was not admitted to be anywhere within reach of Mr Gilfil's, it was yet so astonishingly like a sermon, having a text, three divisions, and a concluding exhortation beginning "and now, my brethren," that the sovereign, though denied formally, was bestowed informally, and the sermon was pronounced, when Master Stokes's back was turned, to be "an uncommon cliver thing."

The Rev. Mr Pickard, indeed, of the Independent Meeting, had stated, in a sermon preached at Rotherby, for the reduction of a debt on New Zion, built, with an exuberance of faith and a deficiency of funds, by seceders from the original Zion, that he lived in a parish where the Vicar was very "dark;" and in the prayers he addressed to his own congregation, he was in the habit of comprehensively alluding to the parishioners outside the chapel walls, as those who, "Gallio-like, cared for none of these things." But I need hardly say that no church-goer ever came within earshot of Mr Pickard.

It was not to the Shepperton farmers only that Mr Gilfil's society was acceptable; he was a welcome guest at some of the best houses in that part of the country. Old Sir Jasper Sitwell would have been glad to see him every week; and if you had seen him conducting Lady Sitwell in to dinner, or had heard him talking to her with quaint yet graceful gallantry, you would have inferred that the earlier period of his life had been passed in more stately society than could be found in Shepperton, and that his slipshod chat and homely manners were but like weather-stains on a fine old block of marble, allowing you still to see here and there the fineness of the grain, and the delicacy of the original tint. But in his later years these visits became a little too troublesome to the old gentleman, and he was rarely to be found anywhere of an evening beyond the bounds of his own parish—most frequently, indeed, by the side of his own sitting-room fire, smoking his pipe, and maintaining the pleasing antithesis of dryness and moisture by an occasional sip of gin-and-water.

Here I am aware that I have run the risk of alienating all my refined lady readers, and utterly

annihilating any curiosity they may have felt to know the details of Mr Gilfil's love-story. Gin-and-water! foh! you may as well ask us to interest ourselves in the romance of a tallow-chandler, who mingles the image of his beloved with short dips and moulds.

But in the first place, dear ladies, allow me to plead that gin-and-water, like obesity, or baldness, or the gout, does not exclude a vast amount of antecedent romance, any more than the neatly executed "fronts" which you may some day wear, will exclude your present possession of less expensive braids. Alas, alas! we poor mortals are often little better than wood-ashes—there is small sign of the sap, and the leafy freshness, and the bursting buds that were once there; but wherever we see wood-ashes, we know that all that early fulness of life must have been. I, at least, hardly ever look at a bent old man, or a wizened old woman, but I see also, with my mind's eye, that Past of which they are the shrunken remnant, and the unfinished romance of rosy cheeks and bright eyes seems sometimes of feeble interest and significance, compared with that drama of hope and love which has long ago reached its

catastrophe, and left the poor soul, like a dim and dusty stage, with all its sweet garden-scenes and fair perspectives, overturned and thrust out of sight.

In the second place, let me assure you that Mr Gilfil's potations of gin-and-water were quite moderate. His nose was not rubicund; on the contrary, his white hair hung around a pale and venerable face. He drank it chiefly, I believe, because it was cheap; and here I find myself alighting on another of the Vicar's weaknesses, which, if I cared to paint a flattering portrait rather than a faithful one, I might have chosen to suppress. It is undeniable that, as the years advanced, Mr Gilfil became, as Mr Hackit observed, more and more "close-fisted," though the growing propensity showed itself rather in the parsimony of his personal habits, than in withholding help from the needy. He was saving—so he represented the matter to himself—for a nephew, the only son of a sister who had been the dearest object, all but one, in his life. "The lad," he thought, "will have a nice little fortune to begin life with, and will bring his pretty young wife some day to see the spot where his old uncle

lies. It will perhaps be all the better for *his* hearth that mine was lonely."

Mr Gilfil was a bachelor, then?

That is the conclusion to which you would probably have come if you had entered his sitting-room, where the bare tables, the large old-fashioned horse-hair chairs, and the threadbare Turkey carpet perpetually fumigated with tobacco, seemed to tell a story of wifeless existence that was contradicted by no portrait, no piece of embroidery, no faded bit of pretty triviality, hinting of taper-fingers and small feminine ambitions. And it was here that Mr Gilfil passed his evenings, seldom with other society than that of Ponto, his old brown setter, who, stretched out at full length on the rug with his nose between his fore-paws, would wrinkle his brows and lift up his eyelids every now and then, to exchange a glance of mutual understanding with his master. But there was a chamber in Shepperton Vicarage which told a different story from that bare and cheerless dining-room—a chamber never entered by any one besides Mr Gilfil and old Martha the housekeeper, who, with David her husband as groom and gardener, formed the Vicar's entire establishment.

The blinds of this chamber were always down, except once a-quarter, when Martha entered that she might air and clean it. She always asked Mr Gilfil for the key, which he kept locked up in his bureau, and returned it to him when she had finished her task.

It was a touching sight that the daylight streamed in upon, as Martha drew aside the blinds and thick curtains, and opened the Gothic casement of the oriel window! On the little dressing-table there was a dainty looking-glass in a carved and gilt frame; bits of wax-candle were still in the branched sockets at the sides, and on one of these branches hung a little black lace kerchief; a faded satin pin-cushion, with the pins rusted in it, a scent-bottle, and a large green fan, lay on the table; and on a dressing-box by the side of the glass was a work-basket, and an unfinished baby-cap, yellow with age, lying in it. Two gowns, of a fashion long forgotten, were hanging on nails against the door, and a pair of tiny red slippers, with a bit of tarnished silver embroidery on them, were standing at the foot of the bed. Two or three water-colour drawings, views of Naples, hung upon the walls; and over the mantel-

piece, above some bits of rare old china, two miniatures in oval frames. One of these miniatures represented a young man about seven-and-twenty, with a sanguine complexion, full lips, and clear candid grey eyes. The other was the likeness of a girl, probably not more than eighteen, with small features, thin cheeks, a pale southern-looking complexion, and large dark eyes. The gentleman wore powder; the lady had her dark hair gathered away from her face, and a little cap, with a cherry-coloured bow, set on the top of her head—a coquettish head-dress, but the eyes spoke of sadness rather than of coquetry.

Such were the things that Martha had dusted and let the air upon, four times a-year, ever since she was a blooming lass of twenty; and she was now, in this last decade of Mr Gilfil's life, unquestionably on the wrong side of fifty. Such was the locked-up chamber in Mr Gilfil's house: a sort of visible symbol of the secret chamber in his heart, where he had long turned the key on early hopes and early sorrows, shutting up for ever all the passion and the poetry of his life.

There were not many people in the parish, besides Martha, who had any very distinct remem-

brance of Mr Gilfil's wife, or indeed who knew anything of her, beyond the fact that there was a marble tablet, with a Latin inscription in memory of her, over the vicarage pew. The parishioners who were old enough to remember her arrival were not generally gifted with descriptive powers, and the utmost you could gather from them was, that Mrs Gilfil looked like a "furriner, wi' such eyes, you can't think, an' a voice as went through you when she sung at church." The one exception was Mrs Patten, whose strong memory and taste for personal narrative made her a great source of oral tradition in Shepperton. Mr Hackit, who had not come into the parish until ten years after Mrs Gilfil's death, would often put old questions to Mrs Patten for the sake of getting the old answers, which pleased him in the same way as passages from a favourite book, or the scenes of a familiar play, please more accomplished people.

"Ah, you remember well the Sunday as Mrs Gilfil first come to church, eh, Mrs Patten?"

"To be sure I do. It was a fine bright Sunday as ever was seen, just at the beginnin' o' hay harvest. Mr Tarbett preached that day, and Mr Gilfil

sat i' the pew wi' his wife. I think I see him now, a-leadin' her up th' aisle, an' her head not reachin' much above his elber: a little pale woman, wi' eyes as black as sloes, an' yet lookin' blank-like, as if she see'd nothin' wi' em."

"I warrant she had her weddin' clothes on?" said Mr Hackit.

"Nothin' partickler smart—on'y a white hat tied down under her chin, an' a white Indy muslin gown. But you don't know what Mr Gilfil was in those times. He was fine an' altered afore you come into the parish. He'd a fresh colour then, an' a bright look wi' his eyes, as did your heart good to see. He looked rare an' happy that Sunday, but somehow, I'd a feelin' as it wouldn't last long. I've no opinion o' furriners, Mr Hackit, for I've travelled i' their country wi' my lady in my time, an' seen anuff o' their victuals an' their nasty ways."

"Mrs Gilfil come from It'ly, didn't she?"

"I reckon she did, but I niver could rightly hear about that. Mr Gilfil was niver to be spoke to about her, and nobody else hereabout knowed anythin'. Howiver, she must ha' come over pretty young, for she spoke English as well as you an'

me. It's them Italians as has such fine voices, an' Mrs Gilfil sung, you never heared the like. He brought her here to have tea wi' me one afternoon, and says he, in his jovial way, 'Now, Mrs Patten, I want Mrs Gilfil to see the neatest house, and drink the best cup o' tea, in all Shepperton; you must show her your dairy and your cheese-room, and then she shall sing you a song.' An' so she did; an' her voice seemed sometimes to fill the room; an' then it went low an' soft, as if it was whisperin' close to your heart like."

"You never heared her again, I reckon?"

"No; she was sickly then, an' she died in a few months after. She wasn't in the parish much more nor half a year altogether. She didn't seem lively that afternoon, an' I could see she didn't care about the dairy, nor the cheeses, on'y she pretended, to please him. As for him, I niver see'd a man so wrapt up in a woman. He looked at her as if he was worshippin' her, an' as if he wanted to lift her off the ground ivery minute, to save her the trouble o' walkin'. Poor man, poor man! It had like to ha' killed him when she died, though he niver gev way, but went on ridin' about and preachin'. But he was wore to a shadder, an' his

eyes used to look as dead—you wouldn't ha' knowed 'em.

"She brought him no fortin?"

"Not she. All Mr Gilfil's property come by his mother's side. There was blood an' money too, there. It's a thousand pities as he married a' that way—a fine man like him, as might ha' had the pick o' the county, an' had his grandchildren about him now. An' him so fond o' children, too."

In this manner Mrs Patten usually wound up her reminiscences of the Vicar's wife, of whom, you perceive, she knew but little. It was clear that the communicative old lady had nothing to tell of Mrs Gilfil's history previous to her arrival in Shepperton, and that she was unacquainted with Mr Gilfil's love-story.

But I, dear reader, am quite as communicative as Mrs Patten, and much better informed; so that if you care to know more about the Vicar's courtship and marriage, you need only carry your imagination back to the latter end of the last century, and your attention forward into the next chapter.

CHAPTER II.

It is the evening of the 21st of June 1788. The day has been bright and sultry, and the sun will still be more than an hour above the horizon, but his rays, broken by the leafy fretwork of the elms that border the park, no longer prevent two ladies from carrying out their cushions and embroidery, and seating themselves to work on the lawn in front of Cheverel Manor. The soft turf gives way even under the fairy tread of the younger lady, whose small stature and slim figure rest on the tiniest of full-grown feet. She trips along before the elder, carrying the cushions, which she places in the favourite spot, just on the slope by a clump of laurels, where they can see the sunbeams sparkling among the water-lilies, and can be themselves seen from the dining-room windows. She has deposited the cushions, and now turns round, so that you may have a full view of her as she stands waiting the slower advance of the elder lady. You are

at once arrested by her large dark eyes, which, in their inexpressive unconscious beauty, resemble the eyes of a fawn; and it is only by an effort of attention that you notice the absence of bloom on her young cheek, and the southern yellowish tint of her small neck and face, rising above the little black lace kerchief which prevents the too immediate comparison of her skin with her white muslin gown. Her large eyes seem all the more striking because the dark hair is gathered away from her face, under a little cap set at the top of her head, with a cherry-coloured bow on one side.

The elder lady, who is advancing towards the cushions, is cast in a very different mould of womanhood. She is tall, and looks the taller because her powdered hair is turned backward over a toupee, and surmounted by lace and ribbons. She is nearly fifty, but her complexion is still fresh and beautiful, with the beauty of an auburn blond; her proud pouting lips, and her head thrown a little backward as she walks, give an expression of hauteur which is not contradicted by the cold grey eye. The tucked-in kerchief, rising full over the low tight boddice of her blue dress, sets off the majestic form of her bust, and

she treads the lawn as if she were one of Sir Joshua Reynolds's stately ladies, who had suddenly stepped from her frame to enjoy the evening cool.

"Put the cushions lower, Caterina, that we may not have so much sun upon us," she called out, in a tone of authority, when still at some distance.

Caterina obeyed, and they sat down, making two bright patches of red and white and blue on the green background of the laurels and the lawn, which would look none the less pretty in a picture because one of the women's hearts was rather cold and the other rather sad.

And a charming picture Cheverel Manor would have made that evening, if some English Watteau had been there to paint it: the castellated house of grey-tinted stone, with the flickering sunbeams sending dashes of golden light across the many-shaped panes in the mullioned windows, and a great beech leaning athwart one of the flanking towers, and breaking, with its dark flattened boughs, the too formal symmetry of the front; the broad gravel-walk winding on the right, by a row of tall pines, alongside the pool—on the left

branching out among swelling grassy mounds, surmounted by clumps of trees, where the red trunk of the Scotch fir glows in the descending sunlight against the bright green of limes and acacias; the great pool, where a pair of swans are swimming lazily with one leg tucked under a wing, and where the open water-lilies lie calmly accepting the kisses of the fluttering light-sparkles; the lawn, with its smooth emerald greenness, sloping down to the rougher and browner herbage of the park, from which it is invisibly fenced by a little stream that winds away from the pool, and disappears under a wooden bridge in the distant pleasure-ground; and on this lawn our two ladies, whose part in the landscape the painter, standing at a favourable point of view in the park, would represent with a few little dabs of red and white and blue.

Seen from the great Gothic windows of the dining-room, they had much more definiteness of outline, and were distinctly visible to the three gentlemen sipping their claret there, as two fair women, in whom all three had a personal interest. These gentlemen were a group worth considering attentively; but any one entering that dining-

room for the first time, would perhaps have had his attention even more strongly arrested by the room itself, which was so bare of furniture that it impressed one with its architectural beauty like a cathedral. A piece of matting stretched from door to door, a bit of worn carpet under the dining-table, and a sideboard in a deep recess, did not detain the eye for a moment from the lofty groined ceiling, with its richly-carved pendants, all of creamy white, relieved here and there by touches of gold. On one side, this lofty ceiling was supported by pillars and arches, beyond which a lower ceiling, a miniature copy of the higher one, covered the square projection which, with its three large pointed windows, formed the central feature of the building. The room looked less like a place to dine in than a piece of space enclosed simply for the sake of beautiful outline; and the small-dining table, with the party round it, seemed an odd and insignificant accident, rather than anything connected with the original purpose of the apartment.

But, examined closely, that group was far from insignificant; for the eldest, who was reading in the newspaper the last portentous proceedings of

the French parliaments, and turning with occasional comments to his young companions, was as fine a specimen of the old English gentleman as could well have been found in those venerable days of cocked-hats and pigtails. His dark eyes sparkled under projecting brows, made more prominent by bushy grizzled eyebrows; but any apprehension of severity excited by these penetrating eyes, and by a somewhat aquiline nose, was allayed by the good-natured lines about the mouth, which retained all its teeth and its vigour of expression in spite of sixty winters. The forehead sloped a little from the projecting brows, and its peaked outline was made conspicuous by the arrangement of the profusely-powdered hair, drawn backward and gathered into a pigtail. He sat in a small hard chair, which did not admit the slightest approach to a lounge, and which showed to advantage the flatness of his back and the breadth of his chest. In fact, Sir Christopher Cheverel was a splendid old gentleman, as any one may see who enters the saloon at Cheverel Manor, where his full-length portrait, taken when he was fifty, hangs side by side with that of his wife, the stately lady seated on the lawn.

Looking at Sir Christopher, you would at once have been inclined to hope that he had a full-grown son and heir; but perhaps you would have wished that it might not prove to be the young man on his right hand, in whom a certain resemblance to the Baronet, in the contour of the nose and brow, seemed to indicate a family relationship. If this young man had been less elegant in his person, he would have been remarked for the elegance of his dress. But the perfections of his slim well-proportioned figure were so striking that no one but a tailor could notice the perfections of his velvet coat; and his small white hands, with their blue veins and taper fingers, quite eclipsed the beauty of his lace ruffles. The face, however —it was difficult to say why—was certainly not pleasing. Nothing could be more delicate than the blond complexion—its bloom set off by the powdered hair—than the veined overhanging eyelids, which gave an indolent expression to the hazel eyes; nothing more finely cut than the transparent nostril and the short upper-lip. Perhaps the chin and lower jaw were too small for an irreproachable profile, but the defect was on the side of that delicacy and *finesse* which was the

distinctive characteristic of the whole person, and which was carried out in the clear brown arch of the eyebrows, and the marble smoothness of the sloping forehead. Impossible to say that this face was not eminently handsome; yet, for the majority both of men and women, it was destitute of charm. Women disliked eyes that seemed to be indolently accepting admiration instead of rendering it; and men, especially if they had a tendency to clumsiness in the nose and ankles, were inclined to think this Antinous in a pigtail a "confounded puppy." I fancy that was frequently the inward interjection of the Rev. Maynard Gilfil, who was seated on the opposite side of the dining-table, though Mr Gilfil's legs and profile were not at all of a kind to make him peculiarly alive to the impertinence and frivolity of personal advantages. His healthy open face and robust limbs were after an excellent pattern for everyday wear, and in the opinion of Mr Bates, the north-country gardener, would have become regimentals "a fain saight" better than the "peaky" features and slight form of Captain Wybrow, notwithstanding that this young gentleman, as Sir Christopher's nephew and destined heir, had the strongest hereditary

claim on the gardener's respect, and was undeniably "clean-limbed." But alas! human longings are perversely obstinate; and to the man whose mouth is watering for a peach, it is of no use to offer the largest vegetable marrow. Mr Gilfil was not sensitive to Mr Bates's opinion, whereas he *was* sensitive to the opinion of another person, who by no means shared Mr Bates's preference.

Who the other person was it would not have required a very keen observer to guess, from a certain eagerness in Mr Gilfil's glance as that little figure in white tripped along the lawn with the cushions. Captain Wybrow, too, was looking in the same direction, but his handsome face remained handsome—and nothing more.

"Ah," said Sir Christopher, looking up from his paper, "there's my lady. Ring for coffee, Anthony; we'll go and join her, and the little monkey Tina shall give us a song."

The coffee presently appeared, brought not as usual by the footman, in scarlet and drab, but by the old butler, in threadbare but well-brushed black, who, as he was placing it on the table, said—

"If you please, Sir Christopher, there's the

widow Hartopp a-crying i' the still-room, and begs leave to see your honour."

"I have given Markham full orders about the widow Hartopp," said Sir Christopher, in a sharp decided tone. "I have nothing to say to her."

"Your honour," pleaded the butler, rubbing his hands, and putting on an additional coating of humility, "the poor woman's dreadful overcome, and says she can't sleep a wink this blessed night without seeing your honour, and she begs you to pardon the great freedom she's took to come at this time. She cries fit to break her heart."

"Ay, ay; water pays no tax. Well, show her into the library."

Coffee despatched, the two young men walked out through the open window, and joined the ladies on the lawn, while Sir Christopher made his way to the library, solemnly followed by Rupert, his pet bloodhound, who, in his habitual place at the Baronet's right hand, behaved with great urbanity during dinner; but when the cloth was drawn, invariably disappeared under the table, apparently regarding the claret-jug as a mere human weakness, which he winked at, but refused to sanction.

The library lay but three steps from the dining-room, on the other side of a cloistered and matted passage. The oriel window was overshadowed by the great beech, and this, with the flat heavily-carved ceiling and the dark hue of the old books that lined the walls, made the room look sombre, especially on entering it from the dining-room, with its aerial curves and cream-coloured fret-work touched with gold. As Sir Christopher opened the door, a jet of brighter light fell on a woman in a widow's dress, who stood in the middle of the room, and made the deepest of curtsies as he entered. She was a buxom woman approaching forty, her eyes red with the tears which had evidently been absorbed by the handkerchief gathered into a damp ball in her right hand.

"Now, Mrs Hartopp," said Sir Christopher, taking out his gold snuff-box and tapping the lid, "what have you to say to me? Markham has delivered you a notice to quit, I suppose?"

"O yis, your honour, an' that's the reason why I've come. I hope your honour 'll think better on it, an' not turn me an' my poor children out o' the farm, where my husband al'ys paid his rent as reglar as the day come."

"Nonsense! I should like to know what good it will do you and your children to stay on a farm and lose every farthing your husband has left you, instead of selling your stock and going into some little place where you can keep your money together. It is very well known to every tenant of mine that I never allow widows to stay on their husbands' farms."

"O, Sir Christifer, if you *would* consider—when I've sold the hay, an' corn, an' all the live things, an' paid the debts, an' put the money out to use, I shall have hardly anuff to keep wer souls an' bodies together. An' how can I rear my boys and put 'em 'prentice? They must goo for dey-labourers, an' their father a man wi' as good belongings as any on your honour's estate, an' niver threshed his wheat afore it was well i' the rick, nor sold the straw off his farm, nor nothin'. Ask all the farmers round if there was a stiddier, soberer man than my husband as attended Ripstone market. An' he says, 'Bessie,' says he—them was his last words—'you'll mek a shift to manage the farm, if Sir Christifer 'ull let you stay on.'"

"Pooh, pooh!" said Sir Christopher, Mrs Hartopp's sobs having interrupted her pleadings, "now

listen to me, and try to understand a little common-sense. You are about as able to manage the farm as your best milch cow. You'll be obliged to have some managing man, who will either cheat you out of your money or wheedle you into marrying him."

"O, your honour, I was never that sort o' woman, an' nobody has known it on me."

"Very likely not, because you were never a widow before. A woman's always silly enough, but she's never quite as great a fool as she can be until she puts on a widow's cap. Now, just ask yourself how much the better you will be for staying on your farm at the end of four years, when you've got through your money, and let your farm run down, and are in arrears for half your rent; or perhaps, have got some great hulky fellow for a husband, who swears at you and kicks your children."

"Indeed, Sir Christifer, I know a deal o' farmin', an' was brought up i' the thick on it, as you may say. An' there was my husband's great-aunt managed a farm for twenty year, an' left legacies to all her nephys an' nieces, an' even to my husband, as was then a babe unborn."

"Psha! a woman six feet high, with a squint and sharp elbows, I dare say—a man in petticoats. Not a rosy-cheeked widow like you, Mrs Hartopp."

"Indeed, your honour, I never heard on her squintin', an' they said as she might ha' been married o'er and o'er again, to people as had no call to hanker after her money."

"Ay, ay, that's what you all think. Every man that looks at you wants to marry you, and would like you the better the more children you have and the less money. But it is useless to talk and cry. I have good reasons for my plans, and never alter them. What you have to do is to make the best of your stock, and to look out for some little place to go to, when you leave The Hollows. Now, go back to Mrs Bellamy's room, and ask her to give you a dish of tea."

Mrs Hartopp, understanding from Sir Christopher's tone that he was not to be shaken, curtsied low and left the library, while the Baronet, seating himself at his desk in the oriel window, wrote the following letter:—

"MR MARKHAM,—Take no steps about letting Crowsfoot Cottage, as I intend to put in the widow

Hartopp when she leaves her farm; and if you will be here at eleven on Saturday morning, I will ride round with you, and settle about making some repairs, and see about adding a bit of land to the take, as she will want to keep a cow and some pigs.—Yours faithfully,

"CHRISTOPHER CHEVEREL."

After ringing the bell and ordering this letter to be sent, Sir Christopher walked out to join the party on the lawn. But finding the cushions deserted, he walked on to the eastern front of the building, where, by the side of the grand entrance, was the large bow-window of the saloon, opening on to the gravel-sweep, and looking towards a long vista of undulating turf, bordered by tall trees, which, seeming to unite itself with the green of the meadows and a grassy road through a plantation, only terminated with the Gothic arch of a gateway in the far distance. The bow-window was open, and Sir Christopher, stepping in, found the group he sought, examining the progress of the unfinished ceiling. It was in the same style of florid pointed Gothic as the dining-room, but more elaborate in its tracery, which was like petri-

fied lacework picked out with delicate and varied colouring. About a fourth of it still remained uncoloured, and under this part were scaffolding, ladders, and tools; otherwise the spacious saloon was empty of furniture, and seemed to be a grand Gothic canopy for the group of five human figures standing in the centre.

"Francesco has been getting on a little better the last day or two," said Sir Christopher, as he joined the party: "he's a sad lazy dog, and I fancy he has a knack of sleeping as he stands, with his brushes in his hands. But I must spur him on, or we may not have the scaffolding cleared away before the bride comes, if you show dexterous generalship in your wooing, eh, Anthony? and take your Magdeburg quickly."

"Ah, sir, a siege is known to be one of the most tedious operations in war," said Captain Wybrow, with an easy smile.

"Not when there's a traitor within the walls in the shape of a soft heart. And that there will be, if Beatrice has her mother's tenderness as well as her mother's beauty."

"What do you think, Sir Christopher," said Lady Cheverel, who seemed to wince a little under

her husband's reminiscences, "of hanging Guercino's 'Sibyl' over that door when we put up the pictures? It is rather lost in my sitting-room."

"Very good, my love," answered Sir Christopher, in a tone of punctiliously polite affection; "if you like to part with the ornament from your own room, it will show admirably here. Our portraits, by Sir Joshua, will hang opposite the window, and the 'Transfiguration' at that end. You see, Anthony, I am leaving no good places on the walls for you and your wife. We shall turn you with your faces to the wall in the gallery, and you may take your revenge on us by-and-by."

While this conversation was going on, Mr Gilfil turned to Caterina and said,—

"I like the view from this window better than any other in the house."

She made no answer, and he saw that her eyes were filling with tears; so he added, "Suppose we walk out a little; Sir Christopher and my lady seem to be occupied."

Caterina complied silently, and they turned down one of the gravel walks that led, after many windings under tall trees and among grassy open-

ings, to a large enclosed flower-garden. Their walk was perfectly silent, for Maynard Gilfil knew that Caterina's thoughts were not with him, and she had been long used to make him endure the weight of those moods which she carefully hid from others.

They reached the flower-garden, and turned mechanically in at the gate that opened, through a high thick hedge, on an expanse of brilliant colour, which, after the green shades they had passed through, startled the eye like flames. The effect was assisted by an undulation of the ground, which gradually descended from the entrance-gate, and then rose again towards the opposite end, crowned by an orangery. The flowers were glowing with their evening splendours; verbenas and heliotropes were sending up their finest incense. It seemed a gala where all was happiness and brilliancy, and misery could find no sympathy. This was the effect it had on Caterina. As she wound among the beds of gold and blue and pink, where the flowers seemed to be looking at her with wondering elf-like eyes, knowing nothing of sorrow, the feeling of isolation in her wretchedness overcame her, and he tears, which had been before

trickling slowly down her pale cheeks, now gushed forth accompanied with sobs. And yet there was a loving human being close beside her, whose heart was aching for hers, who was possessed by the feeling that she was miserable, and that he was helpless to soothe her. But she was too much irritated by the idea that his wishes were different from hers, that he rather regretted the folly of her hopes than the probability of their disappointment, to take any comfort in his sympathy. Caterina, like the rest of us, turned away from sympathy which she suspected to be mingled with criticism, as the child turns away from the sweetmeat in which it suspects imperceptible medicine.

"Dear Caterina, I think I hear voices," said Mr Gilfil; "they may be coming this way."

She checked herself like one accustomed to conceal her emotions, and ran rapidly to the other end of the garden, where she seemed occupied in selecting a rose. Presently Lady Cheverel entered, leaning on the arm of Captain Wybrow, and followed by Sir Christopher. The party stopped to admire the tiers of geraniums near the gate; and in the mean time Caterina tripped back with a moss rose-bud in her hand, and going up to Sir Chris-

topher, said—"There, Padroncello — there is a nice rose for your button-hole."

"Ah, you black-eyed monkey," he said, fondly stroking her cheek; "so you have been running off with Maynard, either to torment or coax him an inch or two deeper into love. Come, come, I want you to sing us '*Ho perduto*' before we sit down to picquet. Anthony goes to-morrow, you know; you must warble him into the right sentimental lover's mood, that he may acquit himself well at Bath." He put her little arm under his, and calling to Lady Cheverel, "Come Henrietta!" led the way towards the house.

The party entered the drawing-room, which, with its oriel window, corresponded to the library in the other wing, and had also a flat ceiling heavy with carving and blazonry; but the window being unshaded, and the walls hung with full-length portraits of knights and dames in scarlet, white, and gold, it had not the sombre effect of the library. Here hung the portrait of Sir Anthony Cheverel, who in the reign of Charles II. was the renovator of the family splendour, which had suffered some declension from the early brilliancy of that Chevreuil who came over with the Conqueror.

A very imposing personage was this Sir Anthony, standing with one arm akimbo, and one fine leg and foot advanced, evidently with a view to the gratification of his contemporaries and posterity. You might have taken off his splendid peruke, and his scarlet cloak, which was thrown backward from his shoulders, without annihilating the dignity of his appearance. And he had known how to choose a wife, too, for his lady, hanging opposite to him, with her sunny brown hair drawn away in bands from her mild grave face, and falling in two large rich curls on her snowy gently-sloping neck, which shamed the harsher hue and outline of her white satin robe, was a fit mother of "large-acred" heirs.

In this room tea was served; and here, every evening, as regularly as the great clock in the courtyard with deliberate bass tones struck nine, Sir Christopher and Lady Cheverel sat down to picquet until half-past ten, when Mr Gilfil read prayers to the assembled household in the chapel.

But now it was not near nine, and Caterina must sit down to the harpsichord and sing Sir Christopher's favourite airs from Gluck's *Orfeo*, an opera which, for the happiness of that generation, was

then to be heard on the London stage. It happened this evening that the sentiment of these airs, "*Che farò senza Eurydice?*" and "*Ho perduto il bel sembiante,*" in both of which Orpheus pours out his yearning after his lost love, came very close to Caterina's own feeling. But her emotion, instead of being a hindrance to her singing, gave her additional power. Her singing was what she could do best; it was her one point of superiority, in which it was probable she would excel the highborn beauty whom Anthony was to woo; and her love, her jealousy, her pride, her rebellion against her destiny, made one stream of passion which welled forth in the deep rich tones of her voice. She had a rare contralto, which Lady Cheverel, who had high musical taste, had been careful to preserve her from straining.

"Excellent, Caterina," said Lady Cheverel, as there was a pause after the wonderful linked sweetness of "*Che farò.*" "I never heard you sing that so well. Once more!"

It was repeated; and then came "*Ho perduto,*" which Sir Christopher encored, in spite of the clock, just striking nine. When the last note was dying out, he said—

"There's a clever black-eyed monkey. Now bring out the table for picquet."

Caterina drew out the table, and placed the cards; then, with her rapid fairy suddenness of motion, threw herself on her knees, and clasped Sir Christopher's knee. He bent down, stroked her cheek, and smiled.

"Caterina, that is foolish," said Lady Cheverel. "I wish you would leave off those stage-players' antics."

She jumped up, arranged the music on the harpsichord, and then, seeing the Baronet and his lady seated at picquet, quietly glided out of the room.

Captain Wybrow had been leaning near the harpsichord during the singing, and the chaplain had thrown himself on a sofa at the end of the room. They both now took up a book. Mr Gilfil chose the last number of the *Gentleman's Magazine;* Captain Wybrow, stretched on an ottoman near the door, opened *Faublas;* and there was perfect silence in the room which, ten minutes before, was vibrating to the passionate tones of Caterina.

She had made her way along the cloistered passages, now lighted here and there by a small

oil-lamp, to the grand-staircase, which led directly to a gallery running along the whole eastern side of the building, where it was her habit to walk when she wished to be alone. The bright moonlight was streaming through the windows, throwing into strange light and shadow the heterogeneous objects that lined the long walls. Greek statues, and busts of Roman emperors; low cabinets filled with curiosities, natural and antiquarian; tropical birds, and huge horns of beasts; Hindoo gods and strange shells; swords and daggers, and bits of chain-armour; Roman lamps, and tiny models of Greek temples; and, above all these, queer old family portraits—of little boys and girls, once the hope of the Cheverels, with close-shaven heads imprisoned in stiff ruffs—of faded, pink-faced ladies, with rudimentary features and highly-developed head-dresses — of gallant gentlemen, with high hips, high shoulders, and red pointed beards.

Here, on rainy days, Sir Christopher and his lady took their promenade, and here billiards were played; but, in the evening, it was forsaken by all except Caterina—and, sometimes, one other person.

She paced up and down in the moonlight, her pale face and thin white-robed form making her look like the ghost of some former Lady Cheverel come to revisit the glimpses of the moon.

By-and-by she paused opposite the broad window above the portico, and looked out on the long vista of turf and trees now stretching chill and saddened in the moonlight.

Suddenly a breath of warmth and roses seemed to float towards her, and an arm stole gently round her waist, while a soft hand took up her tiny fingers. Caterina felt an electric thrill, and was motionless for one long moment; then she pushed away the arm and hand, and, turning round, lifted up to the face that hung over her, eyes full of tenderness and reproach. The fawn-like unconsciousness was gone, and in that one look were the ground tones of poor little Caterina's nature—intense love and fierce jealousy.

"Why do you push me away, Tina?" said Captain Wybrow in a half-whisper; "are you angry with me for what a hard fate puts upon me? Would you have me cross my uncle—who has done so much for us both—in his dearest wish? You know I have duties—we both

have duties—before which feeling must be sacrificed."

"Yes, yes," said Caterina, stamping her foot, and turning away her head; "don't tell me what I know already."

There was a voice speaking in Caterina's mind, to which she had never yet given vent. That voice said continually, "Why did he make me love him—why did he let me know he loved me, if he knew all the while that he couldn't brave everything for my sake?" Then love answered, "He was led on by the feeling of the moment, as you have been, Caterina; and now you ought to help him to do what is right." Then the voice rejoined, "It was a slight matter to him. He doesn't much mind giving you up. He will soon love that beautiful woman, and forget a poor little pale thing like you."

Thus love, anger, and jealousy were struggling in that young soul.

"Besides, Tina," continued Captain Wybrow in still gentler tones, "I shall not succeed. Miss Assher very likely prefers some one else; and you know I have the best will in the world to fail. I shall come back a hapless bachelor—perhaps to

find you already married to the good-looking chaplain, who is over head and ears in love with you. Poor Sir Christopher has made up his mind that you're to have Gilfil."

"Why will you speak so? You speak from your own want of feeling. Go away from me."

"Don't let us part in anger, Tina. All this may pass away. It's as likely as not that I may never marry any one at all. These palpitations may carry me off, and you may have the satisfaction of knowing that I shall never be anybody's bridegroom. Who knows what may happen? I may be my own master before I get into the bonds of holy matrimony, and be able to choose my little singing-bird. Why should we distress ourselves before the time?"

"It is easy to talk so when you are not feeling," said Caterina, the tears flowing fast. "It is bad to bear now, whatever may come after. But you don't care about my misery."

"Don't I, Tina?" said Anthony in his tenderest tones, again stealing his arm round her waist, and drawing her towards him. Poor Tina was the slave of this voice and touch. Grief and resentment, retrospect and foreboding, vanished—

all life before and after melted away in the bliss of that moment, as Anthony pressed his lips to hers.

Captain Wybrow thought, "Poor little Tina! it would make her very happy to have me. But she is a mad little thing."

At that moment a loud bell startled Caterina from her trance of bliss. It was the summons to prayers in the chapel, and she hastened away, leaving Captain Wybrow to follow slowly.

It was a pretty sight, that family assembled to worship in the little chapel, where a couple of wax-candles threw a mild faint light on the figures kneeling there. In the desk was Mr Gilfil, with his face a shade graver than usual. On his right hand, kneeling on their red velvet cushions, were the master and mistress of the household, in their elderly dignified beauty. On his left, the youthful grace of Anthony and Caterina, in all the striking contrast of their colouring—he, with his exquisite outline and rounded fairness, like an Olympian god; she, dark and tiny, like a gypsy changeling. Then there were the domestics kneeling on red-covered forms,—the women headed by Mrs Bellamy, the natty little old housekeeper, in

snowy cap and apron, and Mrs Sharp, my lady's maid, of somewhat vinegar aspect and flaunting attire; the men by Mr Bellamy the butler, and Mr Warren, Sir Christopher's venerable valet.

A few collects from the Evening Service was what Mr Gilfil habitually read, ending with the simple petition, "Lighten our darkness."

And then they all rose, the servants turning to curtsy and bow as they went out. The family returned to the drawing-room, said good-night to each other, and dispersed—all to speedy slumber except two. Caterina only cried herself to sleep after the clock had struck twelve. Mr Gilfil lay awake still longer, thinking that very likely Caterina was crying.

Captain Wybrow, having dismissed his valet at eleven, was soon in a soft slumber, his face looking like a fine cameo in high relief on the slightly-indented pillow.

CHAPTER III.

THE last chapter has given the discerning reader sufficient insight into the state of things at Cheverel Manor in the summer of 1788. In that summer, we know, the great nation of France was agitated by conflicting thoughts and passions, which were but the beginning of sorrows. And in our Caterina's little breast, too, there were terrible struggles. The poor bird was beginning to flutter and vainly dash its soft breast against the hard iron bars of the inevitable, and we see too plainly the danger, if that anguish should go on heightening instead of being allayed, that the palpitating heart may be fatally bruised.

Meanwhile, if, as I hope, you feel some interest in Caterina and her friends at Cheverel Manor, you are perhaps asking, How came she to be there? How was it that this tiny, dark-eyed child of the south, whose face was immediately suggestive of

olive-covered hills, and taper-lit shrines, came to have her home in that stately English manor-house, by the side of the blonde matron, Lady Cheverel—almost as if a humming-bird were found perched on one of the elm-trees in the park, by the side of her ladyship's handsomest pouter-pigeon? Speaking good English, too, and joining in Protestant prayers. Surely she must have been adopted and brought over to England at a very early age? She was.

During Sir Christopher's last visit to Italy with his lady, fifteen years before, they resided for some time at Milan, where Sir Christopher, who was an enthusiast for Gothic architecture, and was then entertaining the project of metamorphosing his plain brick family mansion into the model of a Gothic manor-house, was bent on studying the details of that marble miracle, the Cathedral. Here Lady Cheverel, as at other Italian cities where she made any protracted stay, engaged a *maestro* to give her lessons in singing, for she had then not only fine musical taste, but a fine soprano voice. Those were days when very rich people used manuscript music, and many a man who resembled Jean Jacques in nothing else, resembled

him in getting a livelihood "à copier la musique à tant la page." Lady Cheverel having need of this service, Maestro Albani told her he would send her a *poveraccio* of his acquaintance, whose manuscript was the neatest and most correct he knew of. Unhappily, the *poveraccio* was not always in his best wits, and was sometimes rather slow in consequence; but it would be a work of Christian charity worthy of the beautiful Signora to employ poor Sarti.

The next morning, Mrs Sharp, then a blooming abigail of three-and-thirty, entered her lady's private room, and said, "If you please, my lady, there's the frowiest, shabbiest man you ever saw outside, and he's told Mr Warren as the singing-master sent him to see your ladyship. But I think you'll hardly like him to come in here. Belike he's only a beggar."

"O yes, show him in immediately."

Mrs Sharp retired, muttering something about "fleas and worse." She had the smallest possible admiration for fair Ausonia and its natives, and even her profound deference for Sir Christopher and her lady could not prevent her from expressing her amazement at the infatuation of gentle-

folks in choosing to sojourn among "Papises, in countries where there was no getting to air a bit o' linen, and where the people smelt o' garlick fit to knock you down."

However, she presently reappeared, ushering in a small meagre man, sallow and dingy, with a restless wandering look in his dull eyes, and an excessive timidity about his deep reverences, which gave him the air of a man who had been long a solitary prisoner. Yet through all this squalor and wretchedness there were some traces discernible of comparative youth and former good looks. Lady Cheverel, though not very tender-hearted, still less sentimental, was essentially kind, and liked to dispense benefits like a goddess, who looks down benignly on the halt, the maimed, and the blind that approach her shrine. She was smitten with some compassion at the sight of poor Sarti, who struck her as the mere battered wreck of a vessel that might have once floated gaily enough on its outward voyage, to the sound of pipes and tabors. She spoke gently as she pointed out to him the operatic selections she wished him to copy, and he seemed to sun himself in her auburn, radiant presence, so that when he made his exit

with the music-books under his arm, his bow, though not less reverent, was less timid.

It was ten years at least since Sarti had seen anything so bright and stately and beautiful as Lady Cheverel. For the time was far off in which he had trod the stage in satin and feathers, the *primo tenore* of one short season. Alas! he had completely lost his voice in the following winter, and had ever since been little better than a cracked fiddle, which is good for nothing but firewood. For, like many Italian singers, he was too ignorant to teach, and if it had not been for his one talent of penmanship, he and his young helpless wife might have starved. Then, just after their third child was born, fever came, swept away the sickly mother and the two eldest children, and attacked Sarti himself, who rose from his sick-bed with enfeebled brain and muscle, and a tiny baby on his hands, scarcely four months old. He lodged over a fruit-shop kept by a stout virago, loud of tongue and irate in temper, but who had had children born to her, and so had taken care of the tiny yellow, black-eyed *bambinetto*, and tended Sarti himself through his sickness. Here he continued to live, earning a meagre subsistence for

himself and his little one by the work of copying music, put into his hands chiefly by Maestro Albani. He seemed to exist for nothing but the child: he tended it, he dandled it, he chatted to it, living with it alone in his one room above the fruit-shop, only asking his landlady to take care of the marmoset during his short absences in fetching and carrying home work. Customers frequenting that fruit-shop might often see the tiny Caterina seated on the floor with her legs in a heap of pease, which it was her delight to kick about; or perhaps deposited, like a kitten, in a large basket out of harm's way.

Sometimes, however, Sarti left his little one with another kind of protectress. He was very regular in his devotions, which he paid thrice a-week in the great cathedral, carrying Caterina with him. Here, when the high morning sun was warming the myriad glittering pinnacles without, and struggling against the massive gloom within, the shadow of a man with a child on his arm might be seen flitting across the more stationary shadows of pillar and mullion, and making its way towards a little tinsel Madonna hanging in a retired spot near the choir. Amid all the sub-

limities of the mighty cathedral, poor Sarti had fixed on this tinsel Madonna as the symbol of Divine mercy and protection,—just as a child, in the presence of a great landscape, sees none of the glories of wood and sky, but sets its heart on a floating feather or insect that happens to be on a level with its eye. Here, then, Sarti worshipped and prayed, setting Caterina on the floor by his side; and now and then, when the cathedral lay near some place where he had to call, and did not like to take her, he would leave her there in front of the tinsel Madonna, where she would sit, perfectly good, amusing herself with low crowing noises and see-sawings of her tiny body. And when Sarti came back, he always found that the Blessed Mother had taken good care of Caterina.

That was briefly the history of Sarti, who fulfilled so well the orders Lady Cheverel gave him, that she sent him away again with a stock of new work. But this time, week after week passed, and he neither reappeared nor sent home the music intrusted to him. Lady Cheverel began to be anxious, and was thinking of sending Warren to inquire at the address Sarti had given her, when

one day, as she was equipped for driving out, the valet brought in a small piece of paper which he said had been left for her ladyship by a man who was carrying fruit. The paper contained only three tremulous lines, in Italian :—

"Will the Eccelentissima, for the love of God, have pity on a dying man, and come to him?"

Lady Cheverel recognised the handwriting as Sarti's in spite of its tremulousness, and, going down to her carriage, ordered the Milanese coachman to drive to Strada Quinquagesima, Numero 10. The coach stopped in a dirty narrow street opposite La Pazzini's fruit-shop, and that large specimen of womanhood immediately presented herself at the door, to the extreme disgust of Mrs Sharp, who remarked privately to Mr Warren that La Pazzini was a "hijeous porpis." The fruit-woman, however, was all smiles and deep curtsies to the Eccelentissima, who, not very well understanding her Milanese dialect, abbreviated the conversation by asking to be shown at once to Signor Sarti. La Pazzini preceded her up the dark narrow stairs, and opened a door through which she begged her ladyship to enter. Directly opposite the door lay Sarti, on a low miserable bed. His

eyes were glazed, and no movement indicated that he was conscious of their entrance.

On the foot of the bed was seated a tiny child, apparently not three years old, her head covered by a linen cap, her feet clothed with leather boots, above which her little yellow legs showed thin and naked. A frock, made of what had once been a gay flowered silk, was her only other garment. Her large dark eyes shone from out her queer little face, like two precious stones in a grotesque image carved in old ivory. She held an empty medicine-bottle in her hand, and was amusing herself with putting the cork in and drawing it out again, to hear how it would pop.

La Pazzini went up to the bed, and said, "Ecco la nobilissima donna!" but directly after screamed out, "Holy mother! he is dead!"

It was so. The entreaty had not been sent in time for Sarti to carry out his project of asking the great English lady to take care of his Caterina. That was the thought which haunted his feeble brain as soon as he began to fear that his illness would end in death. She had wealth—she was kind—she would surely do something for the poor orphan. And so, at last, he sent that scrap of

paper, which won the fulfilment of his prayer, though he did not live to utter it. Lady Cheverel gave La Pazzini money that the last decencies might be paid to the dead man, and carried away Caterina, meaning to consult Sir Christopher as to what should be done with her. Even Mrs Sharp had been so smitten with pity by the scene she had witnessed when she was summoned up-stairs to fetch Caterina, as to shed a small tear, though she was not at all subject to that weakness; indeed, she abstained from it on principle, because, as she often said, it was known to be the worst thing in the world for the eyes.

On the way back to her hotel, Lady Cheverel turned over various projects in her mind regarding Caterina, but at last one gained the preference over all the rest. Why should they not take the child to England, and bring her up there? They had been married twelve years, yet Cheverel Manor was cheered by no children's voices, and the old house would be all the better for a little of that music. Besides, it would be a Christian work to train this little Papist into a good Protestant, and graft as much English fruit as possible on the Italian stem.

Sir Christopher listened to this plan with hearty acquiescence. He loved children, and took at once to the little black-eyed monkey—his name for Caterina all through her short life. But neither he nor Lady Cheverel had any idea of adopting her as their daughter, and giving her their own rank in life. They were much too English and aristocratic to think of anything so romantic. No! The child would be brought up at Cheverel Manor as a protegée, to be ultimately useful, perhaps, in sorting worsteds, keeping accounts, reading aloud, and otherwise supplying the place of spectacles when her ladyship's eyes should wax dim.

So Mrs Sharp had to procure new clothes, to replace the linen cap, flowered frock, and leathern boots; and now, strange to say, little Caterina, who had suffered many unconscious evils in her existence of thirty moons, first began to know conscious troubles. "Ignorance," says Ajax, "is a painless evil;" so, I should think, is dirt, considering the merry faces that go along with it. At any rate, cleanliness is sometimes a painful good, as any one can vouch who has had his face washed the wrong way, by a pitiless hand with a gold ring

on the third finger. If you, reader, have not known that initiatory anguish, it is idle to expect that you will form any approximate conception of what Caterina endured under Mrs Sharp's new dispensation of soap-and-water. Happily, this purgatory came presently to be associated in her tiny brain with a passage straightway to a seat of bliss —the sofa in Lady Cheverel's sitting-room, where there were toys to be broken, a ride was to be had on Sir Christopher's knee, and a spaniel of resigned temper was prepared to undergo small tortures without flinching.

CHAPTER IV.

In three months from the time of Caterina's adoption—namely, in the late autumn of 1763—the chimneys of Cheverel Manor were sending up unwonted smoke, and the servants were awaiting in excitement the return of their master and mistress after a two years' absence. Great was the astonishment of Mrs Bellamy, the housekeeper, when Mr Warren lifted a little black-eyed child out of the carriage, and great was Mrs Sharp's sense of superior information and experience, as she detailed Caterina's history, interspersed with copious comments, to the rest of the upper servants that evening, as they were taking a comfortable glass of grog together in the housekeeper's room.

A pleasant room it was, as any party need desire to muster in on a cold November evening. The fireplace alone was a picture: a wide and

deep recess with a low brick altar in the middle, where great logs of dry wood sent myriad sparks up the dark chimney-throat; and over the front of this recess a large wooden entablature bearing this motto, finely carved in old English letters, "Fear God and honour the King." And beyond the party, who formed a half-moon with their chairs and well-furnished table round this bright fireplace, what a space of chiaroscuro for the imagination to revel in! Stretching across the far end of the room, what an oak table, high enough surely for Homer's gods, standing on four massive legs, bossed and bulging like sculptured urns! and, lining the distant wall, what vast cupboards, suggestive of inexhaustible apricot jam and promiscuous butler's perquisites! A stray picture or two had found their way down there, and made agreeable patches of dark brown on the buff-coloured walls. High over the loud-resounding double door hung one which, from some indications of a face looming out of blackness, might, by a great synthetic effort, be pronounced a Magdalen. Considerably lower down hung the similitude of a hat and feathers, with portions of a ruff, stated by Mrs Bellamy to represent Sir Francis Bacon, who invented gun-

powder, and, in her opinion, "might ha' been better emplyed."

But this evening the mind is but slightly arrested by the great Verulam, and is in the humour to think a dead philosopher less interesting than a living gardener, who sits conspicuous in the half-circle round the fireplace. Mr Bates is habitually a guest in the housekeeper's room of an evening, preferring the social pleasures there—the feast of gossip and the flow of grog—to a bachelor's chair in his charming thatched cottage on a little island, where every sound is remote but the cawing of rooks and the screaming of wild geese: poetic sounds, doubtless, but, humanly speaking, not convivial.

Mr Bates was by no means an average person, to be passed without special notice. He was a sturdy Yorkshireman, approaching forty, whose face Nature seemed to have coloured when she was in a hurry, and had no time to attend to *nuances*, for every inch of him visible above his neckcloth was of one impartial redness; so that when he was at some distance your imagination was at liberty to place his lips anywhere between

his nose and chin. Seen closer, his lips were discerned to be of a peculiar cut, and I fancy this had something to do with the peculiarity of his dialect, which, as we shall see, was individual rather than provincial. Mr Bates was further distinguished from the common herd by a perpetual blinking of the eyes; and this, together with the red-rose tint of his complexion, and a way he had of hanging his head forward, and rolling it from side to side as he walked, gave him the air of a Bacchus in a blue apron, who, in the present reduced circumstances of Olympus, had taken to the management of his own vines. Yet, as gluttons are often thin, so sober men are often rubicund; and Mr Bates was sober, with that manly, British, churchman-like sobriety which can carry a few glasses of grog without any perceptible clarification of ideas.

"Dang my boottens!" observed Mr Bates, who, at the conclusion of Mrs Sharp's narrative, felt himself urged to his strongest interjection, "it's what I shouldn't ha' looked for from Sir Cristhifer an' my ledy, to bring a furrin child into the coonthry; an' depend on't, whether you an' me lives to see't or noo, it'll coom to soom harm. The first

sitiation iver I held — it was a hold, hancient habbey, wi' the biggest orchard o' apples an' pears you ever see—there was a French valet, an' he stool silk stoockins, an' shirts, an' rings, an' iverythin' he could ley his hans on, an' run awey at last wi' th' missis's jewl-box. They're all alaike, them furriners. It roons i' th' blood."

"Well," said Mrs Sharp, with the air of a person who held liberal views, but knew where to draw the line, "I'm not a-going to defend the furriners, for I've as good reason to know what they are as most folks, an' nobody 'll iver hear me say but what they're next door to heathens, and the hile they eat wi' their victuals is enough to turn any Christian's stomach. But for all that—an' for all as the trouble in respect o' washin' an' managin' has fell upo' me through the journey—I can't say but what I think as my Lady an' Sir Cristifer's done a right thing by a hinnicent child as doesn't know its right han' from its left, i' bringing it where it'll learn to speak summat better nor gibberish, and be brought up i' the true religion. For as for them furrin churches as Sir Cristifer is so unaccountable mad after, wi' picturs o' men an' women a-showin' therselves just for all the world

as God made 'em, I think, for my part, as it's welly a sin to go into 'em."

"You're likely to have more foreigners, however," said Mr Warren, who liked to provoke the gardener, "for Sir Christopher has engaged some Italian workmen to help in the alterations in the house."

"Olterations!" exclaimed Mrs Bellamy, in alarm. "What olterations?"

"Why," answered Mr Warren, "Sir Christopher, as I understand, is going to make a clean new thing of the old Manor-house, both inside and out. And he's got portfolios full of plans and pictures coming. It is to be cased with stone, in the Gothic style—pretty near like the churches, you know, as far as I can make out; and the ceilings are to be beyond anything as has been seen in the country. Sir Christopher's been giving a deal of study to it."

"Dear heart alive!" said Mrs Bellamy, "we shall be pisined wi' lime an' plaster, an' hev the house full o' workmen colloguing wi' the maids, an' meckin' no end o' mischief."

"That ye may ley your life on, Mrs Bellamy," said Mr Bates. "Howiver, I'll noot denay that

the Goothic stayle's prithy anoof, an' it's woonderful how near them stoon-carvers cuts oot the shapes o' the pine apples, an' shamrucks, an' rooses. I dare sey Sir Cristhifer 'll meck a naice thing o' the Manor, an' there woont be many gentlemen's houses i' the coonthry as 'll coom up to't, wi' sich a garden an' pleasure-groons an' wall-fruit as King George maight be prood on."

"Well, I can't think as th' house can be better nor it is, Gothic or no Gothic," said Mrs Bellamy; "an' I've done the picklin' an' preservin' in it fourteen year Michaelmas was a three weeks. But what does my lady say to't?"

"My lady knows better than cross Sir Cristifer in what he's set his mind on," said Mr Bellamy, who objected to the critical tone of the conversation. "Sir Cristifer 'll hev his own way, *that* you may tek your oath. An' i' the right on't too. He's a gentleman born, an's got the money. But come, Mester Bates, fill your glass, an' we'll drink health an' happiness to his honour an' my lady, an' then you shall give us a sung. Sir Cristifer doesn't come hum from Italy ivery night."

This demonstrable position was accepted without hesitation as ground for a toast; but Mr

Bates, apparently thinking that his song was not an equally reasonable sequence, ignored the second part of Mr Bellamy's proposal. So Mrs Sharp, who had been heard to say that she had no thoughts at all of marrying Mr Bates, though he was "a sensable fresh-coloured man as many a woman 'ud snap at for a husband," enforced Mr Bellamy's appeal.

"Come, Mr Bates, let us hear 'Roy's Wife.' I'd rether hear a good old sung like that, nor all the fine 'talian toodlin'."

Mr Bates, urged thus flatteringly, stuck his thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat, threw himself back in his chair with his head in that position in which he could look directly towards the zenith, and struck up a remarkably *staccato* rendering of "Roy's Wife of Aldivalloch." This melody may certainly be taxed with excessive iteration, but that was precisely its highest recommendation to the present audience, who found it all the easier to swell the chorus. Nor did it at all diminish their pleasure that the only particular concerning "Roy's Wife" which Mr Bates's enunciation allowed them to gather, was that she "chated" him,—whether in the matter of garden

stuff or of some other commodity, or why her name should, in consequence, be repeatedly reiterated with exultation, remaining an agreeable mystery.

Mr Bates's song formed the climax of the evening's good-fellowship, and the party soon after dispersed—Mrs Bellamy, perhaps, to dream of quicklime flying among her preserving-pans, or of lovesick housemaids reckless of unswept corners—and Mrs Sharp to sink into pleasant visions of independent housekeeping in Mr Bates's cottage, with no bells to answer, and with fruit and vegetables *ad libitum*.

Caterina soon conquered all prejudices against her foreign blood; for what prejudices will hold out against helplessness and broken prattle? She became the pet of the household, thrusting Sir Christopher's favourite bloodhound of that day, Mrs Bellamy's two canaries, and Mr Bates's largest Dorking hen, into a merely secondary position. The consequence was, that in the space of a summer's day she went through a great cycle of experiences, commencing with the somewhat acidulated goodwill of Mrs Sharp's nursery discipline. Then came the grave luxury of her ladyship's sitting-room, and, perhaps, the dignity of a ride

on Sir Christopher's knee, sometimes followed by a visit with him to the stables, where Caterina soon learned to hear without crying the baying of the chained bloodhounds, and to say, with ostentatious bravery, clinging to Sir Christopher's leg all the while, "Dey not hurt Tina." Then Mrs Bellamy would perhaps be going out to gather the rose-leaves and lavender, and Tina was made proud and happy by being allowed to carry a handful in her pinafore; happier still, when they were spread out on sheets to dry, so that she could sit down like a frog among them, and have them poured over her in fragrant showers. Another frequent pleasure was to take a journey with Mr Bates through the kitchen-gardens and the hot-houses, where the rich bunches of green and purple grapes hung from the roof, far out of reach of the tiny yellow hand that couldn't help stretching itself out towards them; though the hand was sure at last to be satisfied with some delicate-flavoured fruit or sweet-scented flower. Indeed, in the long monotonous leisure of that great country-house, you may be sure there was always some one who had nothing better to do than to play with Tina. So that the little southern bird had its northern nest lined with

tenderness, and caresses, and pretty things. A loving sensitive nature was too likely, under such nurture, to have its susceptibility heightened into unfitness for an encounter with any harder experience; all the more, because there were gleams of fierce resistance to any discipline that had a harsh or unloving aspect. For the only thing in which Caterina showed any precocity was a certain ingenuity in vindictiveness. When she was five years old she had revenged herself for an unpleasant prohibition by pouring the ink into Mrs Sharp's workbasket; and once, when Lady Cheverel took her doll from her, because she was affectionately licking the paint off its face, the little minx straightway climbed on a chair and threw down a flower-vase that stood on a bracket. This was almost the only instance in which her anger overcame her awe of Lady Cheverel, who had the ascendancy always belonging to kindness that never melts into caresses, and is severely but uniformly beneficent.

By-and-by the happy monotony of Cheverel Manor was broken in upon in the way Mr Warren had announced. The roads through the park were cut up by waggons carrying loads of stone from a

neighbouring quarry, the green courtyard became dusty with lime, and the peaceful house rang with the sound of tools. For the next ten years Sir Christopher was occupied with the architectural metamorphosis of his old family mansion; thus anticipating, through the prompting of his individual taste, that general reaction from the insipid imitation of the Palladian style, towards a restoration of the Gothic, which marked the close of the eighteenth century. This was the object he had set his heart on, with a singleness of determination which was regarded with not a little contempt by his fox-hunting neighbours, who wondered greatly that a man with some of the best blood in England in his veins, should be mean enough to economise in his cellar, and reduce his stud to two old coach-horses and a hack, for the sake of riding a hobby, and playing the architect. Their wives did not see so much to blame in the matter of the cellar and stables, but they were eloquent in pity for poor Lady Cheverel, who had to live in no more than three rooms at once, and who must be distracted with noises, and have her constitution undermined by unhealthy smells. It was as bad as having a husband with an asthma. Why did

not Sir Christopher take a house for her at Bath, or, at least, if he must spend his time in overlooking workmen, somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Manor? This pity was quite gratuitous, as the most plentiful pity always is; for though Lady Cheverel did not share her husband's architectural enthusiasm, she had too rigorous a view of a wife's duties, and too profound a deference for Sir Christopher, to regard submission as a grievance. As for Sir Christopher, he was perfectly indifferent to criticism. "An obstinate, crotchety man," said his neighbours. But I, who have seen Cheverel Manor as he bequeathed it to his heirs, rather attribute that unswerving architectural purpose of his, conceived and carried out through long years of systematic personal exertion, to something of the fervour of genius, as well as inflexibility of will; and in walking through those rooms, with their splendid ceilings and their meagre furniture, which tell how all the spare money had been absorbed before personal comfort was thought of, I have felt that there dwelt in this old English baronet some of that sublime spirit which distinguishes art from luxury, and worships beauty apart from self-indulgence.

While Cheverel Manor was growing from ugliness into beauty, Caterina too was growing from a little yellow bantling into a whiter maiden, with no positive beauty indeed, but with a certain light airy grace, which, with her large appealing dark eyes, and a voice that, in its low-toned tenderness, recalled the love-notes of the stock-dove, gave her a more than usual charm. Unlike the building, however, Caterina's development was the result of no systematic or careful appliances. She grew up very much like the primroses, which the gardener is not sorry to see within his enclosure, but takes no pains to cultivate. Lady Cheverel taught her to read and write, and say her catechism; Mr Warren, being a good accountant, gave her lessons in arithmetic, by her ladyship's desire; and Mrs Sharp initiated her in all the mysteries of the needle. But, for a long time, there was no thought of giving her any more elaborate education. It is very likely that to her dying day Caterina thought the earth stood still, and that the sun and stars moved round it; but so, for the matter of that, did Helen, and Dido, and Desdemona, and Juliet; whence I hope you will not think my Caterina less worthy to be a heroine on

that account. The truth is, that, with one exception, her only talent lay in loving; and there, it is probable, the most astronomical of women could not have surpassed her. Orphan and protegée though she was, this supreme talent of hers found plenty of exercise at Cheverel Manor, and Caterina had more people to love than many a small lady and gentleman affluent in silver mugs and blood relations. I think the first place in her childish heart was given to Sir Christopher, for little girls are apt to attach themselves to the finest-looking gentleman at hand, especially as he seldom has anything to do with discipline. Next to the Baronet came Dorcas, the merry rosy-cheeked damsel who was Mrs Sharp's lieutenant in the nursery, and thus played the part of the raisins in a dose of senna. It was a black day for Caterina when Dorcas married the coachman, and went, with a great sense of elevation in the world, to preside over a "public" in the noisy town of Sloppeter. A little china box, bearing the motto "Though lost to sight, to memory dear," which Dorcas sent her as a remembrance, was among Caterina's treasures ten years after.

The one other exceptional talent, you already

guess, was music. When the fact that Caterina had a remarkable ear for music, and a still more remarkable voice, attracted Lady Cheverel's notice, the discovery was very welcome both to her and Sir Christopher. Her musical education became at once an object of interest. Lady Cheverel devoted much time to it; and the rapidity of Tina's progress surpassing all hopes, an Italian singing-master was engaged, for several years, to spend some months together at Cheverel Manor. This unexpected gift made a great alteration in Caterina's position. After those first years in which little girls are petted like puppies and kittens, there comes a time when it seems less obvious what they can be good for, especially when, like Caterina, they give no particular promise of cleverness or beauty; and it is not surprising that in that uninteresting period there was no particular plan formed as to her future position. She could always help Mrs Sharp, supposing she were fit for nothing else, as she grew up; but now, this rare gift of song endeared her to Lady Cheverel, who loved music above all things, and it associated her at once with the pleasures of the drawing-room. Insensibly she came to be regarded as one of the family,

and the servants began to understand that Miss Sarti was to be a lady after all.

"And the raight on't too," said Mr Bates, "for she hasn't the cut of a gell as must work for her bread; she's as nesh an' dilicate as a paich-blossom—welly laike a linnet, wi' on'y joost body anoof to hold her voice."

But long before Tina had reached this stage of her history, a new era had begun for her, in the arrival of a younger companion than any she had hitherto known. When she was no more than seven, a ward of Sir Christopher's—a lad of fifteen, Maynard Gilfil by name—began to spend his vacations at Cheverel Manor, and found there no playfellow so much to his mind as Caterina. Maynard was an affectionate lad, who retained a propensity to white rabbits, pet squirrels, and guinea-pigs, perhaps a little beyond the age at which young gentlemen usually look down on such pleasures as puerile. He was also much given to fishing, and to carpentry, considered as a fine art, without any base view to utility. And in all these pleasures it was his delight to have Caterina as his companion, to call her little pet names, answer her wondering questions, and have

her toddling after him as you may have seen a Blenheim spaniel trotting after a large setter. Whenever Maynard went back to school, there was a little scene of parting.

"You won't forget me, Tina, before I come back again? I shall leave you all the whip-cord we've made; and don't you let Guinea die. Come, give me a kiss, and promise not to forget me."

As the years wore on, and Maynard passed from school to college, and from a slim lad to a stalwart young man, their companionship in the vacations necessarily took a different form, but it retained a brotherly and sisterly familiarity. With Maynard the boyish affection had insensibly grown into ardent love. Among all the many kinds of first love, that which begins in childish companionship is the strongest and most enduring: when passion comes to unite its force to long affection, love is at its spring-tide. And Maynard Gilfil's love was of a kind to make him prefer being tormented by Caterina to any pleasure, apart from her, which the most benevolent magician could have devised for him. It is the way with those tall large-limbed men, from Samson downwards. As for Tina, the little minx was perfectly well

aware that Maynard was her slave; he was the one person in the world whom she did as she pleased with; and I need not tell you that this was a symptom of her being perfectly heart-whole so far as he was concerned: for a passionate woman's love is always overshadowed by fear.

Maynard Gilfil did not deceive himself in his interpretation of Caterina's feelings, but he nursed the hope that some time or other she would at least care enough for him to accept his love. So he waited patiently for the day when he might venture to say, "Caterina, I love you!" You see, he would have been content with very little, being one of those men who pass through life without making the least clamour about themselves; thinking neither the cut of his coat, nor the flavour of his soup, nor the precise depth of a servant's bow, at all momentous. He thought—foolishly enough, as lovers *will* think—that it was a good augury for him when he came to be domesticated at Cheverel Manor in the quality of chaplain there, and curate of a neighbouring parish; judging falsely, from his own case, that habit and affection were the likeliest avenues to love. Sir Christopher satisfied several feelings in installing

Maynard as chaplain in his house. He liked the old-fashioned dignity of that domestic appendage; he liked his ward's companionship; and, as Maynard had some private fortune, he might take life easily in that agreeable home, keeping his hunter, and observing a mild regimen of clerical duty, until the Cumbermoor living should fall in, when he might be settled for life in the neighbourhood of the manor. "With Caterina for a wife, too," Sir Christopher soon began to think; for though the good Baronet was not at all quick to suspect what was unpleasant and opposed to his views of fitness, he was quick to see what would dovetail with his own plans; and he had first guessed, and then ascertained by direct inquiry, the state of Maynard's feelings. He at once leaped to the conclusion that Caterina was of the same mind, or at least would be, when she was old enough. But these were too early days for anything definite to be said or done.

Meanwhile, new circumstances were arising, which, though they made no change in Sir Christopher's plans and prospects, converted Mr Gilfil's hopes into anxieties, and made it clear to him not only that Caterina's heart was never likely

to be his, but that it was given entirely to another.

Once or twice in Caterina's childhood, there had been another boy-visitor at the manor, younger than Maynard Gilfil—a beautiful boy with brown curls and splendid clothes, on whom Caterina had looked with shy admiration. This was Anthony Wybrow, the son of Sir Christopher's younger sister, and chosen heir of Cheverel Manor. The Baronet had sacrificed a large sum, and even straitened the resources by which he was to carry out his architectural schemes, for the sake of removing the entail from his estate, and making this boy his heir—moved to the step, I am sorry to say, by an implacable quarrel with his elder sister; for a power of forgiveness was not among Sir Christopher's virtues. At length, on the death of Anthony's mother, when he was no longer a curly-headed boy, but a tall young man, with a captain's commission, Cheverel Manor became *his* home too, whenever he was absent from his regiment. Caterina was then a little woman, between sixteen and seventeen, and I need not spend many words in explaining what you perceive to be the most natural thing in the world.

There was little company kept at the Manor, and Captain Wybrow would have been much duller if Caterina had not been there. It was pleasant to pay her attentions—to speak to her in gentle tones, to see her little flutter of pleasure, the blush that just lit up her pale cheek, and the momentary timid glance of her dark eyes, when he praised her singing, leaning at her side over the piano. Pleasant, too, to cut out that chaplain, with his large calves! What idle man can withstand the temptation of a woman to fascinate, and another man to eclipse?—especially when it is quite clear to himself that he means no mischief, and shall leave everything to come right again by-and-by. At the end of eighteen months, however, during which Captain Wybrow had spent much of his time at the Manor, he found that matters had reached a point which he had not at all contemplated. Gentle tones had led to tender words, and tender words had called forth a response of looks which made it impossible not to carry on the *crescendo* of love-making. To find oneself adored by a little, graceful, dark-eyed, sweet-singing woman, whom no one need despise, is an agreeable sensation, comparable to smoking

the finest Latakia, and also imposes some return of tenderness as a duty.

Perhaps you think that Captain Wybrow, who knew that it would be ridiculous to dream of his marrying Caterina, must have been a reckless libertine to win her affections in this manner! Not at all. He was a young man of calm passions, who was rarely led into any conduct of which he could not give a plausible account to himself; and the tiny fragile Caterina was a woman who touched the imagination and the affections rather than the senses. He really felt very kindly towards her, and would very likely have loved her—if he had been able to love any one. But nature had not endowed him with that capability. She had given him an admirable figure, the whitest of hands, the most delicate of nostrils, and a large amount of serene self-satisfaction; but, as if to save such a delicate piece of work from any risk of being shattered, she had guarded him from the liability to a strong emotion. There was no list of youthful misdemeanours on record against him, and Sir Christopher and Lady Cheverel thought him the best of nephews, the most satisfactory of heirs, full of grateful deference

to themselves, and, above all things, guided by a sense of duty. Captain Wybrow always did the thing easiest and most agreeable to him from a sense of duty: he dressed expensively, because it was a duty he owed to his position; from a sense of duty he adapted himself to Sir Christopher's inflexible will, which it would have been troublesome as well as useless to resist; and, being of a delicate constitution, he took care of his health from a sense of duty. His health was the only point on which he gave anxiety to his friends; and it was owing to this that Sir Christopher wished to see his nephew early married, the more so as a match after the Baronet's own heart appeared immediately attainable. Anthony had seen and admired Miss Assher, the only child of a lady who had been Sir Christopher's earliest love, but who, as things will happen in this world, had married another baronet instead of him. Miss Assher's father was now dead, and she was in possession of a pretty estate. If, as was probable, she should prove susceptible to the merits of Anthony's person and character, nothing could make Sir Christopher so happy as to see a marriage which might be expected to secure the

inheritance of Cheverel Manor from getting into the wrong hands. Anthony had already been kindly received by Lady Assher as the nephew of her early friend; why should he not go to Bath, where she and her daughter were then residing, follow up the acquaintance, and win a handsome, well-born, and sufficiently wealthy bride?

Sir Christopher's wishes were communicated to his nephew, who at once intimated his willingness to comply with them—from a sense of duty. Caterina was tenderly informed by her lover of the sacrifice demanded from them both; and three days afterwards occurred the parting scene you have witnessed in the gallery, on the eve of Captain Wybrow's departure for Bath.

CHAPTER V.

THE inexorable ticking of the clock is like the throb of pain to sensations made keen by a sickening fear. And so it is with the great clockwork of nature. Daisies and buttercups give way to the brown waving grasses, tinged with the warm red sorrel; the waving grasses are swept away, and the meadows lie like emeralds set in the bushy hedgerows; the tawny-tipped corn begins to bow with the weight of the full ear; the reapers are bending amongst it, and it soon stands in sheaves; then, presently, the patches of yellow stubble lie side by side with streaks of dark red earth, which the plough is turning up in preparation for the new-thrashed seed. And this passage from beauty to beauty, which to the happy is like the flow of a melody, measures for many a human heart the approach of foreseen anguish—seems hurrying on the moment when

the shadow of dread will be followed up by the reality of despair.

How cruelly hasty that summer of 1788 seemed to Caterina! Surely the roses vanished earlier, and the berries on the mountain-ash were more impatient to redden, and bring on the autumn, when she would be face to face with her misery, and witness Anthony giving all his gentle tones, tender words, and soft looks to another.

Before the end of July, Captain Wybrow had written word that Lady Assher and her daughter were about to fly from the heat and gaiety of Bath to the shady quiet of their place at Farleigh, and that he was invited to join the party there. His letters implied that he was on an excellent footing with both the ladies, and gave no hint of a rival; so that Sir Christopher was more than usually bright and cheerful after reading them. At length, towards the close of August, came the announcement that Captain Wybrow was an accepted lover, and after much complimentary and congratulatory correspondence between the two families, it was understood that in September Lady Assher and her daughter would pay a visit to Cheverel Manor, when Beatrice would make

the acquaintance of her future relatives, and all needful arrangements could be discussed. Captain Wybrow would remain at Farleigh till then, and accompany the ladies on their journey.

In the interval, every one at Cheverel Manor had something to do by way of preparing for the visitors. Sir Christopher was occupied in consultations with his steward and lawyer, and in giving orders to every one else, especially in spurring on Francesco to finish the saloon. Mr Gilfil had the responsibility of procuring a lady's horse, Miss Assher being a great rider. Lady Cheverel had unwonted calls to make and invitations to deliver. Mr Bates's turf, and gravel, and flower-beds were always at such a point of neatness and finish that nothing extraordinary could be done in the garden, except a little extraordinary scolding of the under-gardener, and this addition Mr Bates did not neglect.

Happily for Caterina, she too had her task, to fill up the long dreary day-time: it was to finish a chair cushion which would complete the set of embroidered covers for the drawing-room, Lady Cheverel's year-long work, and the only noteworthy bit of furniture in the Manor. Over this

embroidery she sat with cold lips and a palpitating heart, thankful that this miserable sensation throughout the day-time seemed to counteract the tendency to tears which returned with night and solitude. She was most frightened when Sir Christopher approached her. The Baronet's eye was brighter and his step more elastic than ever, and it seemed to him that only the most leaden or churlish souls could be otherwise than brisk and exulting in a world where everything went so well. Dear old gentleman! he had gone through life a little flushed with the power of his will, and now his latest plan was succeeding, and Cheverel Manor would be inherited by a grand-nephew, whom he might even yet live to see a fine young fellow with at least the down on his chin. Why not? one is still young at sixty.

Sir Christopher had always something playful to say to Caterina.

"Now, little monkey, you must be in your best voice; you're the minstrel of the Manor, you know, and be sure you have a pretty gown and a new ribbon. You must not be dressed in russet, though you are a singing-bird." Or perhaps, "It is your turn to be courted next, Tina. But don't

you learn any naughty proud airs. I must have Maynard let off easily."

Caterina's affection for the old Baronet helped her to summon up a smile as he stroked her cheek and looked at her kindly, but that was the moment at which she felt it most difficult not to burst out crying. Lady Cheverel's conversation and presence were less trying; for her ladyship felt no more than calm satisfaction in this family event; and besides, she was further sobered by a little jealousy at Sir Christopher's anticipation of pleasure in seeing Lady Assher, enshrined in his memory as a mild-eyed beauty of sixteen, with whom he had exchanged locks before he went on his first travels. Lady Cheverel would have died rather than confess it, but she couldn't help hoping that he would be disappointed in Lady Assher, and rather ashamed of having called her so charming.

Mr Gilfil watched Caterina through these days with mixed feelings. Her suffering went to his heart; but, even for her sake, he was glad that a love which could never come to good should be no longer fed by false hopes; and how could he help saying to himself, "Perhaps, after a while, Cater-

ina will be tired of fretting about that cold-hearted puppy, and then . . . ."

At length the much-expected day arrived, and the brightest of September's suns was lighting up the yellowing lime-trees, as about five o'clock Lady Assher's carriage drove under the portico. Caterina, seated at work in her own room, heard the rolling of the wheels, followed presently by the opening and shutting of doors, and the sound of voices in the corridors. Remembering that the dinner-hour was six, and that Lady Cheverel had desired her to be in the drawing-room early, she started up to dress, and was delighted to find herself feeling suddenly brave and strong. Curiosity to see Miss Assher—the thought that Anthony was in the house—the wish not to look unattractive, were feelings that brought some colour to her lips, and made it easy to attend to her toilette. They would ask her to sing this evening, and she would sing well. Miss Assher should not think her utterly insignificant. So she put on her grey silk gown and her cherry-coloured ribbon with as much care as if she had been herself the betrothed; not forgetting the pair of round pearl earrings which Sir Christopher had told Lady

Cheverel to give her, because Tina's little ears were so pretty.

Quick as she had been, she found Sir Christopher and Lady Cheverel in the drawing-room, chatting with Mr Gilfil, and telling him how handsome Miss Assher was, but how entirely unlike her mother—apparently resembling her father only.

"Aha!" said Sir Christopher, as he turned to look at Caterina, "what do you think of this, Maynard? Did you ever see Tina look so pretty before? Why, that little grey gown has been made out of a bit of my lady's, hasn't it? It doesn't take anything much larger than a pocket-handkerchief to dress the little monkey."

Lady Cheverel, too, serenely radiant in the assurance a single glance had given her of Lady Assher's inferiority, smiled approval, and Caterina was in one of those moods of self-possession and indifference which come as the ebb-tide between the struggles of passion. She retired to the piano, and busied herself with arranging her music, not at all insensible to the pleasure of being looked at with admiration the while, and thinking that, the next time the door opened, Captain

Wybrow would enter, and she would speak to him quite cheerfully. But when she heard him come in, and the scent of roses floated towards her, her heart gave one great leap. She knew nothing till he was pressing her hand, and saying, in the old easy way, "Well, Caterina, how do you do? You look quite blooming."

She felt her cheeks reddening with anger that he could speak and look with such perfect nonchalance. Ah! he was too deeply in love with some one else to remember anything he had felt for *her*. But the next moment she was conscious of her folly;—"as if he could show any feeling then!" This conflict of emotions stretched into a long interval the few moments that elapsed before the door opened again, and her own attention, as well as that of all the rest, was absorbed by the entrance of the two ladies.

The daughter was the more striking, from the contrast she presented to her mother, a round-shouldered, middle-sized woman, who had once had the transient pink-and-white beauty of a blonde, with ill-defined features and early embonpoint. Miss Assher was tall, and gracefully though substantially formed, carrying herself with

an air of mingled graciousness and self-confidence; her dark brown hair, untouched by powder, hanging in bushy curls round her face, and falling behind in long thick ringlets nearly to her waist. The brilliant carmine tint of her well-rounded cheeks, and the finely-cut outline of her straight nose, produced an impression of splendid beauty, in spite of commonplace brown eyes, a narrow forehead, and thin lips. She was in mourning, and the dead black of her crape dress, relieved here and there by jet ornaments, gave the fullest effect to her complexion, and to the rounded whiteness of her arms, bare from the elbow. The first *coup d'œil* was dazzling, and as she stood looking down with a gracious smile on Caterina, whom Lady Cheverel was presenting to her, the poor little thing seemed to herself to feel, for the first time, all the folly of her former dream.

"We are enchanted with your place, Sir Christopher," said Lady Assher, with a feeble kind of pompousness, which she seemed to be copying from some one else; "I'm sure your nephew must have thought Farleigh wretchedly out of order. Poor Sir John was so very careless about keeping up the house and grounds. I often talked to him

about it, but he said, 'Pooh, pooh! as long as my friends find a good dinner and a good bottle of wine, they won't care about my ceilings being rather smoky.' He was so very hospitable, was Sir John."

"I think the view of the house from the park, just after we passed the bridge, particularly fine," said Miss Assher, interposing rather eagerly, as if she feared her mother might be making infelicitous speeches, "and the pleasure of the first glimpse was all the greater because Anthony would describe nothing to us beforehand. He would not spoil our first impressions by raising false ideas. I long to go over the house, Sir Christopher, and learn the history of all your architectural designs, which Anthony says have cost you so much time and study."

"Take care how you set an old man talking about the past, my dear," said the Baronet; "I hope we shall find something pleasanter for you to do than turning over my old plans and pictures. Our friend Mr Gilfil here has found a beautiful mare for you, and you can scour the country to your heart's content. Anthony has sent us word what a horsewoman you are."

Miss Assher turned to Mr Gilfil with her most beaming smile, and expressed her thanks with the elaborate graciousness of a person who means to be thought charming, and is sure of success.

"Pray do not thank me," said Mr Gilfil, "till you have tried the mare. She has been ridden by Lady Sara Linter for the last two years; but one lady's taste may not be like another's in horses, any more than in other matters."

While this conversation was passing, Captain Wybrow was leaning against the mantelpiece, contenting himself with responding from under his indolent eyelids to the glances Miss Assher was constantly directing towards him as she spoke. "She is very much in love with him," thought Caterina. But she was relieved that Anthony remained passive in his attentions. She thought, too, that he was looking paler and more languid than usual. "If he didn't love her very much—if he sometimes thought of the past with regret, I think I could bear it all, and be glad to see Sir Christopher made happy."

During dinner there was a little incident which confirmed these thoughts. When the sweets were on the table, there was a mould of jelly just oppo-

site Captain Wybrow, and being inclined to take some himself, he first invited Miss Assher, who coloured, and said, in rather a sharper key than usual, "Have you not learned by this time that I never take jelly?"

"Don't you?" said Captain Wybrow, whose perceptions were not acute enough for him to notice the difference of a semitone. "I should have thought you were fond of it. There was always some on the table at Farleigh, I think."

"You don't seem to take much interest in my likes and dislikes."

"I'm too much possessed by the happy thought that you like me," was the *ex officio* reply, in silvery tones.

This little episode was unnoticed by every one but Caterina. Sir Christopher was listening with polite attention to Lady Assher's history of her last man-cook, who was first-rate at gravies, and for that reason pleased Sir John—he was so particular about his gravies, was Sir John: and so they kept the man six years in spite of his bad pastry. Lady Cheverel and Mr Gilfil were smiling at Rupert the bloodhound, who had pushed his great head under his master's arm, and was taking

a survey of the dishes, after snuffing at the contents of the Baronet's plate.

When the ladies were in the drawing-room again, Lady Assher was soon deep in a statement to Lady Cheverel of her views about burying people in woollen.

"To be sure, you must have a woollen dress, because it's the law, you know; but that need hinder no one from putting linen underneath. I always used to say, 'If Sir John died to-morrow, I would bury him in his shirt;' and I did. And let me advise you to do so by Sir Christopher. You never saw Sir John, Lady Cheverel. He was a large tall man, with a nose just like Beatrice, and so very particular about his shirts."

Miss Assher, meanwhile, had seated herself by Caterina, and with that smiling affability which seems to say, "I am really not at all proud, though you might expect it of me," said,—

"Anthony tells me you sing so very beautifully. I hope we shall hear you this evening."

"O yes," said Caterina, quietly, without smiling; "I always sing when I am wanted to sing."

"I envy you such a charming talent. Do you know, I have no ear; I cannot hum the smallest

tune, and I delight in music so. Is it not unfortunate? But I shall have quite a treat while I am here; Captain Wybrow says you will give us some music every day."

"I should have thought you wouldn't care about music if you had no ear," said Caterina, becoming epigrammatic by force of grave simplicity.

"O, I assure you, I doat on it; and Anthony is so fond of it; it would be so delightful if I could play and sing to him; though he says he likes me best not to sing, because it doesn't belong to his idea of me. What style of music do you like best?"

"I don't know. I like all beautiful music."

"And are you as fond of riding as of music?"

"No; I never ride. I think I should be very frightened."

"O no! indeed you would not, after a little practice. I have never been in the least timid. I think Anthony is more afraid for me than I am for myself; and since I have been riding with him, I have been obliged to be more careful, because he is so nervous about me."

Caterina made no reply; but she said to herself, "I wish she would go away, and not talk to

me. She only wants me to admire her good-nature, and to talk about Anthony."

Miss Assher was thinking at the same time, "This Miss Sarti seems a stupid little thing. Those musical people often are. But she is prettier than I expected; Anthony said she was not pretty."

Happily at this moment Lady Assher called her daughter's attention to the embroidered cushions, and Miss Assher, walking to the opposite sofa, was soon in conversation with Lady Cheverel about tapestry and embroidery in general, while her mother, feeling herself superseded there, came and placed herself beside Caterina.

"I hear you are the most beautiful singer," was of course the opening remark. "All Italians sing so beautifully. I travelled in Italy with Sir John when we were first married, and we went to Venice, where they go about in gondolas, you know. You don't wear powder, I see. No more will Beatrice; though many people think her curls would look all the better for powder. She has so much hair, hasn't she? Our last maid dressed it much better than this; but, do you know, she wore Beatrice's stockings before they went to the wash, and we couldn't keep her after that, could we?"

Caterina, accepting the question as a mere bit of rhetorical effect, thought it superfluous to reply, till Lady Assher repeated, "Could we, now?" as if Tina's sanction were essential to her repose of mind. After a faint "No," she went on.

"Maids are so very troublesome, and Beatrice is so particular, you can't imagine. I often say to her, 'My dear, you can't have perfection.' That very gown she has on—to be sure, it fits her beautifully now—but it has been unmade and made up again twice. But she is like poor Sir John—he was so very particular about his own things, was Sir John. Is Lady Cheverel particular?"

"Rather. But Mrs Sharp has been her maid twenty years."

"I wish there was any chance of our keeping Griffin twenty years. But I am afraid we shall have to part with her because her health is so delicate; and she is so obstinate, she will not take bitters as I want her. *You* look delicate, now. Let me recommend you to take camomile tea in a morning, fasting. Beatrice is so strong and healthy, she never takes any medicine; but if I had had twenty girls, and they had been delicate, I should have given them all camomile tea. It strengthens

the constitution beyond anything. Now, will you promise me to take camomile tea?"

"Thank you; I'm not at all ill," said Caterina. "I've always been pale and thin."

Lady Assher was sure camomile tea would make all the difference in the world—Caterina must see if it wouldn't—and then went dribbling on like a leaky shower-bath, until the early entrance of the gentlemen created a diversion, and she fastened on Sir Christopher, who probably began to think that, for poetical purposes, it would be better not to meet one's first love again, after a lapse of forty years.

Captain Wybrow, of course, joined his aunt and Miss Assher, and Mr Gilfil tried to relieve Caterina from the awkwardness of sitting aloof and dumb, by telling her how a friend of his had broken his arm and staked his horse that morning, not at all appearing to heed that she hardly listened, and was looking towards the other side of the room. One of the tortures of jealousy is, that it can never turn away its eyes from the thing that pains it.

By-and-by every one felt the need of a relief from chit-chat—Sir Christopher perhaps the most

of all—and it was he who made the acceptable proposition—

"Come, Tina, are we to have no music to-night before we sit down to cards? Your ladyship plays at cards, I think?" he added, recollecting himself, and turning to Lady Assher.

"O yes! Poor dear Sir John would have a whist-table every night."

Caterina sat down to the harpsichord at once, and had no sooner begun to sing than she perceived with delight that Captain Wybrow was gliding towards the harpsichord, and soon standing in the old place. This consciousness gave fresh strength to her voice; and when she noticed that Miss Assher presently followed him with that air of ostentatious admiration which belongs to the absence of real enjoyment, her closing *bravura* was none the worse for being animated by a little triumphant contempt.

"Why, you are in better voice than ever, Caterina," said Captain Wybrow, when she had ended. "This is rather different from Miss Hibbert's small piping that we used to be glad of at Farleigh, is it not, Beatrice?"

"Indeed it is. You are a most enviable crea-

ture, Miss Sarti—Caterina—may I not call you Caterina? for I have heard Anthony speak of you so often, I seem to know you quite well. You will let me call you Caterina?"

"O yes, every one calls me Caterina, only when they call me Tina."

"Come, come, more singing, more singing, little monkey," Sir Christopher called out from the other side of the room. "We have not had half enough yet."

Caterina was ready enough to obey, for while she was singing she was queen of the room, and Miss Assher was reduced to grimacing admiration. Alas! you see what jealousy was doing in this poor young soul. Caterina, who had passed her life as a little unobtrusive singing-bird, nestling so fondly under the wings that were outstretched for her, her heart beating only to the peaceful rhythm of love, or fluttering with some easily stifled fear, had begun to know the fierce palpitations of triumph and hatred.

When the singing was over, Sir Christopher and Lady Cheverel sat down to whist with Lady Assher and Mr Gilfil, and Caterina placed herself at the Baronet's elbow, as if to watch the game,

that she might not appear to thrust herself on the pair of lovers. At first she was glowing with her little triumph, and felt the strength of pride; but her eye *would* steal to the opposite side of the fireplace, where Captain Wybrow had seated himself close to Miss Assher, and was leaning with his arm over the back of the chair, in the most lover-like position. Caterina began to feel a choking sensation. She could see, almost without looking, that he was taking up her arm to examine her bracelet; their heads were bending close together, her curls touching his cheek—now he was putting his lips to her hand. Caterina felt her cheeks burn—she could sit no longer. She got up, pretended to be gliding about in search of something, and at length slipped out of the room.

Outside, she took a candle, and, hurrying along the passages and up the stairs to her own room, locked the door.

"O, I cannot bear it, I cannot bear it!" the poor thing burst out aloud, clasping her little fingers, and pressing them back against her forehead, as if she wanted to break them.

Then she walked hurriedly up and down the room.

"And this must go on for days and days, and I must see it."

She looked about nervously for something to clutch. There was a muslin kerchief lying on the table; she took it up and tore it into shreds as she walked up and down, and then pressed it into hard balls in her hand.

"And Anthony," she thought, "he can do this without caring for what I feel. O, he can forget everything: how he used to say he loved me—how he used to take my hand in his as we walked—how he used to stand near me in the evenings for the sake of looking into my eyes."

"Oh, it is cruel, it is cruel!" she burst out again aloud, as all those love-moments in the past returned upon her. Then the tears gushed forth, she threw herself on her knees by the bed, and sobbed bitterly.

She did not know how long she had been there, till she was startled by the prayer-bell; when, thinking Lady Cheverel might perhaps send some one to inquire after her, she rose, and began hastily to undress, that there might be no possibility of her going down again. She had hardly unfastened her hair, and thrown a loose gown

about her, before there was a knock at the door, and Mrs Sharp's voice said—"Miss Tina, my lady wants to know if you're ill."

Caterina opened the door and said, "Thank you, dear Mrs Sharp; I have a bad headache; please tell my lady I felt it come on after singing."

"Then, goodness me! why arn't you in bed, istid o' standing shivering there, fit to catch your death? Come, let me fasten up your hair and tuck you up warm."

"O no, thank you; I shall really be in bed very soon. Good-night, dear Sharpy; don't scold; I will be good, and get into bed."

Caterina kissed her old friend coaxingly, but Mrs Sharp was not to be "come over" in that way, and insisted on seeing her former charge in bed, taking away the candle which the poor child had wanted to keep as a companion.

But it was impossible to lie there long with that beating heart; and the little white figure was soon out of bed again, seeking relief in the very sense of chill and uncomfort. It was light enough for her to see about her room, for the moon, nearly at full, was riding high in the

heavens among scattered hurrying clouds. Caterina drew aside the window-curtain; and, sitting with her forehead pressed against the cold pane, looked out on the wide stretch of park and lawn.

How dreary the moonlight is! robbed of all its tenderness and repose by the hard driving wind. The trees are harassed by that tossing motion, when they would like to be at rest; the shivering grass makes her quake with sympathetic cold; and the willows by the pool, bent low and white under that invisible harshness, seem agitated and helpless like herself. But she loves the scene the better for its sadness: there is some pity in it. It is not like that hard unfeeling happiness of lovers, flaunting in the eyes of misery.

She set her teeth tight against the window-frame, and the tears fell thick and fast. She was so thankful she could cry, for the mad passion she had felt when her eyes were dry, frightened her. If that dreadful feeling were to come on when Lady Cheverel was present, she should never be able to contain herself.

Then there was Sir Christopher—so good to her

—so happy about Anthony's marriage; and all the while she had these wicked feelings.

"O, I cannot help it, I cannot help it!" she said in a loud whisper between her sobs. "O God, have pity upon me!"

In this way Tina wore out the long hours of the windy moonlight, till at last, with weary aching limbs, she lay down in bed again, and slept from mere exhaustion.

While this poor little heart was being bruised with a weight too heavy for it, Nature was holding on her calm inexorable way, in unmoved and terrible beauty. The stars were rushing in their eternal courses; the tides swelled to the level of the last expectant weed; the sun was making brilliant day to busy nations on the other side of the swift earth. The stream of human thought and deed was hurrying and broadening onward. The astronomer was at his telescope; the great ships were labouring over the waves; the toiling eagerness of commerce, the fierce spirit of revolution, were only ebbing in brief rest; and sleepless statesmen were dreading the possible crisis of the morrow. What were our little Tina and her trouble in this mighty torrent, rushing from one

awful unknown to another? Lighter than the smallest centre of quivering life in the water-drop, hidden and uncared for as the pulse of anguish in the breast of the tiniest bird that has fluttered down to its nest with the long-sought food, and has found the nest torn and empty.

CHAPTER VI.

THE next morning, when Caterina was waked from her heavy sleep by Martha bringing in the warm water, the sun was shining, the wind had abated, and those hours of suffering in the night seemed unreal and dreamlike, in spite of weary limbs and aching eyes. She got up and began to dress with a strange feeling of insensibility, as if nothing could make her cry again; and she even felt a sort of longing to be down stairs in the midst of company, that she might get rid of this benumbed condition by contact.

There are few of us that are not rather ashamed of our sins and follies as we look out on the blessed morning sunlight, which comes to us like a bright-winged angel beckoning us to quit the old path of vanity that stretches its dreary length behind us; and Tina, little as she knew about doctrines and theories, seemed to herself to have been both fool-

ish and wicked yesterday. To-day she would try to be good; and when she knelt down to say her short prayer—the very form she had learned by heart when she was ten years old—she added, "O God, help me to bear it!"

That day the prayer seemed to be answered, for after some remarks on her pale looks at breakfast, Caterina passed the morning quietly, Miss Assher and Captain Wybrow being out on a riding excursion. In the evening there was a dinner-party, and after Caterina had sung a little, Lady Cheverel, remembering that she was ailing, sent her to bed, where she soon sank into a deep sleep. Body and mind must renew their force to suffer as well as to enjoy.

On the morrow, however, it was rainy, and every one must stay in-doors; so it was resolved that the guests should be taken over the house by Sir Christopher, to hear the story of the architectural alterations, the family portraits, and the family relics. All the party, except Mr Gilfil, were in the drawing-room when the proposition was made; and when Miss Assher rose to go, she looked towards Captain Wybrow, expecting to see him rise too; but he kept his seat near the fire,

turning his eyes towards the newspaper which he had been holding unread in his hand.

"Are you not coming, Anthony?" said Lady Cheverel, noticing Miss Assher's look of expectation.

"I think not, if you'll excuse me," he answered, rising and opening the door; "I feel a little chilled this morning, and I am afraid of the cold rooms and draughts."

Miss Assher reddened, but said nothing, and passed on, Lady Cheverel accompanying her.

Caterina was seated at work in the oriel window. It was the first time she and Anthony had been alone together, and she had thought before that he wished to avoid her. But now, surely, he wanted to speak to her—he wanted to say something kind. Presently he rose from his seat near the fire, and placed himself on the ottoman opposite to her.

"Well, Tina, and how have you been all this long time?"

Both the tone and the words were an offence to her; the tone was so different from the old one, the words were so cold and unmeaning. She answered, with a little bitterness,—

"I think you needn't ask. It doesn't make much difference to you."

"Is that the kindest thing you have to say to me after my long absence?"

"I don't know why you should expect me to say kind things."

Captain Wybrow was silent. He wished very much to avoid allusions to the past or comments on the present. And yet he wished to be well with Caterina. He would have liked to caress her, make her presents, and have her think him very kind to her. But these women are so plaguy perverse! There's no bringing them to look rationally at anything. At last he said, "I hoped you would think all the better of me, Tina, for doing as I have done, instead of bearing malice towards me. I hoped you would see that it is the best thing for every one—the best for your happiness too."

"O pray don't make love to Miss Assher for the sake of my happiness," answered Tina.

At this moment the door opened, and Miss Assher entered, to fetch her reticule, which lay on the harpsichord. She gave a keen glance at Caterina, whose face was flushed, and saying to

Captain Wybrow with a slight sneer, "Since you are so chill, I wonder you like to sit in the window," left the room again immediately.

The lover did not appear much discomposed, but sat quiet a little longer, and then, seating himself on the music-stool, drew it near to Caterina, and, taking her hand, said, "Come, Tina, look kindly at me, and let us be friends. I shall always be your friend."

"Thank you," said Caterina, drawing away her hand. "You are very generous. But pray move away. Miss Assher may come in again."

"Miss Assher be hanged!" said Anthony, feeling the fascination of old habit returning on him in his proximity to Caterina. He put his arm round her waist, and leaned his cheek down to hers. The lips couldn't help meeting after that; but the next moment, with heart swelling and tears rising, Caterina burst away from him, and rushed out of the room.

CHAPTER VII.

CATERINA tore herself from Anthony with the desperate effort of one who has just self-recollection enough left to be conscious that the fumes of charcoal will master his senses unless he bursts a way for himself to the fresh air; but when she reached her own room, she was still too intoxicated with that momentary revival of old emotions, too much agitated by the sudden return of tenderness in her lover, to know whether pain or pleasure predominated. It was as if a miracle had happened in her little world of feeling, and made the future all vague—a dim morning haze of possibilities, instead of the sombre wintry daylight and clear rigid outline of painful certainty.

She felt the need of rapid movement. She must walk out in spite of the rain. Happily, there was a thin place in the curtain of clouds which seemed to promise that now, about noon, the day had a mind to clear up. Caterina thought

to herself, "I will walk to the Mosslands, and carry Mr Bates the comforter I have made for him, and then Lady Cheverel will not wonder so much at my going out." At the hall door she found Rupert, the old bloodhound, stationed on the mat, with the determination that the first person who was sensible enough to take a walk that morning should have the honour of his approbation and society. As he thrust his great black and tawny head under her hand, and wagged his tail with vigorous eloquence, and reached the climax of his welcome by jumping up to lick her face, which was at a convenient licking height for him, Caterina felt quite grateful to the old dog for his friendliness. Animals are such agreeable friends—they ask no questions, they pass no criticisms.

The "Mosslands" was a remote part of the grounds, encircled by the little stream issuing from the pool; and certainly, for a wet day, Caterina could hardly have chosen a less suitable walk, for though the rain was abating, and presently ceased altogether, there was still a smart shower falling from the trees which arched over the greater part of her way. But she found just

the desired relief from her feverish excitement in labouring along the wet paths with an umbrella that made her arm ache. This amount of exertion was to her tiny body what a day's hunting often was to Mr Gilfil, who at times had *his* fits of jealousy and sadness to get rid of, and wisely had recourse to nature's innocent opium—fatigue.

When Caterina reached the pretty arched wooden bridge which formed the only entrance to the Mosslands for any but webbed feet, the sun had mastered the clouds, and was shining through the boughs of the tall elms that made a deep nest for the gardener's cottage—turning the raindrops into diamonds, and inviting the nasturtium flowers creeping over the porch and low-thatched roof to lift up their flame-coloured heads once more. The rooks were cawing with many-voiced monotony, apparently—by a remarkable approximation to human intelligence—finding great conversational resources in the change of weather. The mossy turf, studded with the broad blades of marsh-loving plants, told that Mr Bates's nest was rather damp in the best of weather; but he was of opinion that a little external moisture would hurt no man who

was not perversely neglectful of that obvious and providential antidote, rum-and-water.

Caterina loved this nest. Every object in it, every sound that haunted it, had been familiar to her from the days when she had been carried thither on Mr Bates's arm, making little cawing noises to imitate the rooks, clapping her hands at the green frogs leaping in the moist grass, and fixing grave eyes on the gardener's fowls cluck-clucking under their pens. And now the spot looked prettier to her than ever; it was so out of the way of Miss Assher, with her brilliant beauty, and personal claims, and small civil remarks. She thought Mr Bates would not be come in to his dinner yet, so she would sit down and wait for him.

But she was mistaken. Mr Bates was seated in his arm-chair, with his pocket-handkerchief thrown over his face, as the most eligible mode of passing away those superfluous hours between meals when the weather drives a man in-doors. Roused by the furious barking of his chained bulldog, he descried his little favourite approaching, and forthwith presented himself at the doorway, looking disproportionately tall compared with

the height of his cottage. The bulldog, meanwhile, unbent from the severity of his official demeanour, and commenced a friendly interchange of ideas with Rupert.

Mr Bates's hair was now grey, but his frame was none the less stalwart, and his face looked all the redder, making an artistic contrast with the deep blue of his cotton neckerchief, and of his linen apron twisted into a girdle round his waist.

"Why, dang my boottons, Miss Tiny," he exclaimed, "hoo coom ye to coom oot dabblin' your faet laike a little Muscovy duck, sich a day as this? Not but what ai'm delaighted to sae ye. Here Hesther," he called to his old humpbacked housekeeper, "tek the yoong ledy's oombrella an' spread it oot to dray. Coom, coom in, Miss Tiny, an' set ye doon by the faire an' dray yer faet, an' hev summat warm to kape ye from ketchin' coold."

Mr Bates led the way, stooping under the doorplaces, into his small sitting-room, and, shaking the patch-work cushion in his arm-chair, moved it to within a good roasting distance of the blazing fire.

"Thank you, uncle Bates" (Caterina kept up her childish epithets for her friends, and this was

one of them); "not quite so close to the fire, for I am warm with walking."

"Eh, but yer shoes are faine an' wet, an' ye must put up yer faet on the finder. Rare big faet, baint 'em?—aboot the saize of a good big spoon. I woonder ye can mek a shift to stan' on 'em. Now, what'll ye hev to warm yer insaide? a drop o' hot elder-wain, now?"

"No, not anything to drink, thank you; it isn't very long since breakfast," said Caterina, drawing out the comforter from her deep pocket. Pockets were capacious in those days. "Look here, uncle Bates; here is what I came to bring you. I made it on purpose for you. You must wear it this winter, and give your red one to old Brooks."

"Eh, Miss Tiny, this *is* a beauty. An' ye made it all wi' yer little fingers for an old feller laike mae! I tek it very kaind on ye, an' I belave ye I'll wear it, and be prood on't too. These sthraipes, blue an' whaite, now, they mek it uncommon pritty."

"Yes, that will suit your complexion, you know, better than the old scarlet one. I know Mrs Sharp will be more in love with you than ever when she sees you in the new one."

"My complexion, ye little roogue! ye're a-laughin' at me. But talkin' o' complexions, what a beautiful cooler the bride as is to be hes on her cheeks! Dang my boottons! she looks faine an' handsome o' hossback—sits as upraight as a dart, wi' a figure like a statty! Misthress Sharp has promised to put me behaind one o' the doors when the ladies are comin' doon to dinner, so as I may sae the young un i' full dress, wi' all her curls an' that. Misthress Sharp says she's a'most beautifuller nor my ledy was when she was yoong; an' I think ye'll noot faind many i' the counthry as'll coom up to that."

"Yes, Miss Assher is very handsome," said Caterina, rather faintly, feeling the sense of her own insignificance returning at this picture of the impression Miss Assher made on others.

"Well, an' I hope she's good too, an'll mek a good naice to Sir Cristhifer an' my ledy. Misthress Griffin, the maid, says as she's rether tatchy and find-fautin' aboot her cloothes, laike. But she's yoong—she's yoong; that'll wear off when she's got a hoosband, an' children, an' summat else to think on. Sir Cristhifer's fain an' delaighted, I can see. He says to me th' other

mornin', says he, 'Well, Bates, what do you think of your young misthress as is to be?' An' I says, 'Whay, yer honour, I think she's as fain a lass as iver I set eyes on; an' I wish the Captain luck in a fain family, an' your honour laife an' health to see't.' Mr Warren says as the masther's all for forrardin' the weddin', an' it'll very laike be afore the autumn's oot."

As Mr Bates ran on, Caterina felt something like a painful contraction at her heart. "Yes," she said, rising, "I dare say it will. Sir Christopher is very anxious for it. But I must go, uncle Bates; Lady Cheverel will be wanting me, and it is your dinner-time."

"Nay, my dinner doont sinnify a bit; but I moosn't kaep ye if my ledy wants ye. Though I hevn't thanked ye half anoof for the comfiter—the wrap-raskil, as they call't. My feckins, it's a beauty. But ye look very whaite and sadly, Miss Tiny; I doubt ye're poorly; an' this walkin' i' th' wet isn't good for ye."

"O yes, it is indeed," said Caterina, hastening out, and taking up her umbrella from the kitchen floor. "I must really go now; so good-by."

She tripped off, calling Rupert, while the good

gardener, his hands thrust deep in his pockets, stood looking after her and shaking his head with rather a melancholy air.

"She gets moor nesh and dillicat than iver," he said, half to himself and half to Hester. "I shouldn't woonder if she fades away, laike them cyclamens as I transplanted. She puts me i' maind on 'em somehow, hangin' on their little thin stalks, so whaite an' tinder."

The poor little thing made her way back, no longer hungering for the cold moist air as a counteractive of inward excitement, but with a chill at her heart which made the outward chill only depressing. The golden sunlight beamed through the dripping boughs like a Shechinah, or visible divine presence, and the birds were chirping and trilling their new autumnal songs so sweetly, it seemed as if their throats, as well as the air, were all the clearer for the rain; but Caterina moved through all this joy and beauty like a poor wounded leveret painfully dragging its little body through the sweet clover-tufts—for it, sweet in vain. Mr Bates's words about Sir Christopher's joy, Miss Assher's beauty, and the nearness of the wedding, had come upon her like the pressure of

a cold hand, rousing her from confused dozing to a perception of hard, familiar realities. It is so with emotional natures, whose thoughts are no more than the fleeting shadows cast by feeling: to them words are facts, and, even when known to be false, have a mastery over their smiles and tears. Caterina entered her own room again, with no other change from her former state of despondency and wretchedness than an additional sense of injury from Anthony. His behaviour towards her in the morning was a new wrong. To snatch a caress when she justly claimed an expression of penitence, of regret, of sympathy, was to make more light of her than ever.

CHAPTER VIII.

THAT evening Miss Assher seemed to carry herself with unusual haughtiness, and was coldly observant of Caterina. There was unmistakably thunder in the air. Captain Wybrow appeared to take the matter very easily, and was inclined to brave it out by paying more than ordinary attention to Caterina. Mr Gilfil had induced her to play a game at draughts with him, Lady Assher being seated at picquet with Sir Christopher, and Miss Assher in determined conversation with Lady Cheverel. Anthony, thus left as an odd unit, sauntered up to Caterina's chair, and leaned behind her, watching the game. Tina, with all the remembrances of the morning thick upon her, felt her cheeks becoming more and more crimson, and at last said impatiently, "I wish you would go away."

This happened directly under the view of Miss Assher, who saw Caterina's reddening cheeks, saw that she said something impatiently, and that

Captain Wybrow moved away in consequence. There was another person, too, who had noticed this incident with strong interest, and who was moreover aware that Miss Assher not only saw, but keenly observed what was passing. That other person was Mr Gilfil, and he drew some painful conclusions which heightened his anxiety for Caterina.

The next morning, in spite of the fine weather, Miss Assher declined riding, and Lady Cheverel, perceiving that there was something wrong between the lovers, took care that they should be left together in the drawing-room. Miss Assher, seated on the sofa near the fire, was busy with some fancy-work, in which she seemed bent on making great progress this morning. Captain Wybrow sat opposite with a newspaper in his hand, from which he obligingly read extracts with an elaborately easy air, wilfully unconscious of the contemptuous silence with which she pursued her filigree work. At length he put down the paper, which he could no longer pretend not to have exhausted, and Miss Assher then said,—

"You seem to be on very intimate terms with Miss Sarti."

"With Tina? oh yes; she has always been the pet of the house, you know. We have been quite brother and sister together."

"Sisters don't generally colour so very deeply when their brothers approach them."

"Does she colour? I never noticed it. But she's a timid little thing."

"It would be much better if you would not be so hypocritical, Captain Wybrow. I am confident there has been some flirtation between you. Miss Sarti, in her position, would never speak to you with the petulance she did last night, if you had not given her some kind of claim on you."

"My dear Beatrice, now do be reasonable; do ask yourself what earthly probability there is that I should think of flirting with poor little Tina. *Is* there anything about her to attract that sort of attention? She is more child than woman. One thinks of her as a little girl to be petted and played with."

"Pray, what were you playing at with her yesterday morning, when I came in unexpectedly, and her cheeks were flushed, and her hands trembling?"

"Yesterday morning?—O, I remember. You

know I always tease her about Gilfil, who is over head and ears in love with her; and she is angry at that,—perhaps, because she likes him. They were old playfellows years before I came here, and Sir Christopher has set his heart on their marrying."

"Captain Wybrow, you are very false. It had nothing to do with Mr Gilfil that she coloured last night when you leaned over her chair. You might just as well be candid. If your own mind is not made up, pray do no violence to yourself. I am quite ready to give way to Miss Sarti's superior attractions. Understand that, so far as I am concerned, you are perfectly at liberty. I decline any share in the affection of a man who forfeits my respect by duplicity."

In saying this, Miss Assher rose, and was sweeping haughtily out of the room, when Captain Wybrow placed himself before her, and took her hand.

"Dear, dear Beatrice, be patient; do not judge me so rashly. Sit down again, sweet," he added in a pleading voice, pressing both her hands between his, and leading her back to the sofa, where he sat down beside her. Miss Assher was

not unwilling to be led back or to listen, but she retained her cold and haughty expression.

"Can you not trust me, Beatrice? Can you not believe me, although there may be things I am unable to explain?"

"Why should there be anything you are unable to explain? An honourable man will not be placed in circumstances which he cannot explain to the woman he seeks to make his wife. He will not ask her to *believe* that he acts properly; he will let her *know* that he does so. Let me go, sir."

She attempted to rise, but he passed his hand round her waist and detained her.

"Now, Beatrice dear," he said imploringly, "can you not understand that there are things a man doesn't like to talk about—secrets that he must keep for the sake of others, and not for his own sake? Everything that relates to myself you may ask me, but do not ask me to tell other people's secrets. Don't you understand me?"

"O yes," said Miss Assher scornfully, "I understand. Whenever you make love to a woman—that is her secret, which you are bound to keep for her. But it is folly to be talking in this way, Captain Wybrow. It is very plain that there is some

relation more than friendship between you and Miss Sarti. Since you cannot explain that relation, there is no more to be said between us."

"Confound it, Beatrice! you'll drive me mad. Can a fellow help a girl's falling in love with him? Such things are always happening, but men don't talk of them. These fancies will spring up without the slightest foundation, especially when a woman sees few people; they die out again when there is no encouragement. If you could like me, you ought not to be surprised that other people can; you ought to think the better of them for it."

"You mean to say, then, that Miss Sarti is in love with you, without your ever having made love to her."

"Do not press me to say such things, dearest. It is enough that you know I love you—that I am devoted to you. You naughty queen you, you know there is no chance for any one else where you are. You are only tormenting me, to prove your power over me. But don't be too cruel; for you know they say I have another heart-disease besides love, and these scenes bring on terrible palpitations."

"But I must have an answer to this one ques-

tion," said Miss Assher, a little softened: "Has there been, or is there, any love on your side towards Miss Sarti? I have nothing to do with her feelings, but I have a right to know yours."

"I like Tina very much; who would not like such a little simple thing? You would not wish me not to like her? But love—that is a very different affair. One has a brotherly affection for such a woman as Tina; but it is another sort of woman that one loves."

These last words were made doubly significant by a look of tenderness, and a kiss imprinted on the hand Captain Wybrow held in his. Miss Assher was conquered. It was so far from probable that Anthony should love that pale insignificant little thing—so highly probable that he should adore the beautiful Miss Assher. On the whole, it was rather gratifying that other women should be languishing for her handsome lover; he really was an exquisite creature. Poor Miss Sarti! Well, she would get over it.

Captain Wybrow saw his advantage. "Come, sweet love," he continued, "let us talk no more about unpleasant things. You will keep Tina's secret, and be very kind to her—won't you?—for

my sake. But you will ride out now? See what a glorious day it is for riding. Let me order the horses. I'm terribly in want of the air. Come, give me one forgiving kiss, and say you will go."

Miss Assher complied with the double request, and then went to equip herself for the ride, while her lover walked to the stables.

CHAPTER IX.

MEANWHILE Mr Gilfil, who had a heavy weight on his mind, had watched for the moment when, the two elder ladies having driven out, Caterina would probably be alone in Lady Cheverel's sitting-room. He went up and knocked at the door.

"Come in," said the sweet mellow voice, always thrilling to him as the sound of rippling water to the thirsty.

He entered and found Caterina standing in some confusion, as if she had been startled from a reverie. She felt relieved when she saw it was Maynard, but, the next moment, felt a little pettish that he should have come to interrupt and frighten her.

"Oh, it is you, Maynard! Do you want Lady Cheverel?"

"No, Caterina," he answered gravely; "I want you. I have something very particular to say to you. Will you let me sit down with you for half an hour?"

"Yes, dear old preacher," said Caterina, sitting down with an air of weariness; "what is it?"

Mr Gilfil placed himself opposite to her, and said, "I hope you will not be hurt, Caterina, by what I am going to say to you. I do not speak from any other feelings than real affection and anxiety for you. I put everything else out of the question. You know you are more to me than all the world; but I will not thrust before you a feeling which you are unable to return. I speak to you as a brother—the old Maynard that used to scold you for getting your fishing-line tangled ten years ago. You will not believe that I have any mean, selfish motive in mentioning things that are painful to you?"

"No; I know you are very good," said Caterina abstractedly.

"From what I saw yesterday evening," Mr Gilfil went on, hesitating and colouring slightly, "I am led to fear—pray forgive me if I am wrong, Caterina—that you—that Captain Wybrow is base enough still to trifle with your feelings, that he still allows himself to behave to you as no man ought who is the declared lover of another woman."

"What do you mean, Maynard?" said Caterina, with anger flashing from her eyes. "Do you mean that I let him make love to me? What right have you to think that of me? What do you mean that you saw yesterday evening?"

"Do not be angry, Caterina. I don't suspect you of doing wrong. I only suspect that heartless puppy of behaving so as to keep awake feelings in you that not only destroy your own peace of mind, but may lead to very bad consequences with regard to others. I want to warn you that Miss Assher has her eyes open on what passes between you and Captain Wybrow, and I feel sure she is getting jealous of you. Pray be very careful, Caterina, and try to behave with politeness and indifference to him. You must see by this time that he is not worth the feeling you have given him. He's more disturbed at his pulse beating one too many in a minute, than at all the misery he has caused you by his foolish trifling."

"You ought not to speak so of him, Maynard," said Caterina, passionately. "He is not what you think. He *did* care for me; he *did* love me; only he wanted to do what his uncle wished."

"O to be sure! I know it is only from the

most virtuous motives that he does what is convenient to himself."

Mr Gilfil paused. He felt that he was getting irritated, and defeating his own object. Presently he continued in a calm and affectionate tone.

"I will say no more about what I think of him, Caterina. But whether he loved you or not, his position now with Miss Assher is such that any love you may cherish for him can bring nothing but misery. God knows, I don't expect you to leave off loving him at a moment's notice. Time and absence, and trying to do what is right, are the only cures. If it were not that Sir Christopher and Lady Cheverel would be displeased and puzzled at your wishing to leave home just now, I would beg you to pay a visit to my sister. She and her husband are good creatures, and would make their house a home to you. But I could not urge the thing just now without giving a special reason; and what is most of all to be dreaded is the raising of any suspicion in Sir Christopher's mind of what has happened in the past, or of your present feelings. You think so too, don't you, Tina?"

Mr Gilfil paused again, but Caterina said

nothing. She was looking away from him, out of the window, and her eyes were filling with tears. He rose, and, advancing a little towards her, held out his hand and said,—

"Forgive me, Caterina, for intruding on your feelings in this way. I was so afraid you might not be aware how Miss Assher watched you. Remember, I entreat you, that the peace of the whole family depends on your power of governing yourself. Only say you forgive me before I go."

"Dear, good Maynard," she said, stretching out her little hand, and taking two of his large fingers in her grasp, while her tears flowed fast; "I am very cross to you. But my heart is breaking. I don't know what I do. Good-by."

He stooped down, kissed the little hand, and then left the room.

"The cursed scoundrel!" he muttered between his teeth, as he closed the door behind him. "If it were not for Sir Christopher, I should like to pound him into paste to poison puppies like himself!"

CHAPTER X.

THAT evening Captain Wybrow, returning from a long ride with Miss Assher, went up to his dressing-room, and seated himself with an air of considerable lassitude before his mirror. The reflection there presented of his exquisite self was certainly paler and more worn than usual, and might excuse the anxiety with which he first felt his pulse, and then laid his hand on his heart.

"It's a devil of a position this for a man to be in," was the train of his thought, as he kept his eyes fixed on the glass, while he leaned back in his chair, and crossed his hands behind his head; "between two jealous women, and both of them as ready to take fire as tinder. And in my state of health too! I should be glad enough to run away from the whole affair, and go off to some lotos-eating place or other where there are no women, or only women who are too sleepy to be

jealous. Here am I, doing nothing to please myself, trying to do the best thing for everybody else, and all the comfort I get is to have fire shot at me from women's eyes, and venom spirted at me from women's tongues. If Beatrice takes another jealous fit into her head—and it's likely enough, Tina is so unmanageable—I don't know what storm she may raise. And any hitch in this marriage, especially of that sort, might be a fatal business for the old gentleman. I wouldn't have such a blow fall upon him for a great deal. Besides, a man must be married some time in his life, and I could hardly do better than marry Beatrice. She's an uncommonly fine woman, and I'm really very fond of her; and as I shall let her have her own way, her temper won't signify much. I wish the wedding was over and done with, for this fuss doesn't suit me at all. I haven't been half so well lately. That scene about Tina this morning quite upset me. Poor little Tina! What a little simpleton it was, to set her heart on me in that way! But she ought to see how impossible it is that things should be different. If she would but understand how kindly I feel towards her, and make up her mind

to look on me as a friend;—but that is what one never can get a woman to do. Beatrice is very good-natured; I'm sure she would be kind to the little thing. It would be a great comfort if Tina would take to Gilfil, if it were only in anger against me. He'd make her a capital husband, and I should like to see the little grasshopper happy. If I had been in a different position, I would certainly have married her myself; but that was out of the question with my responsibilities to Sir Christopher. I think a little persuasion from my uncle would bring her to accept Gilfil; I know she would never be able to oppose my uncle's wishes. And if they were once married, she's such a loving little thing, she would soon be billing and cooing with him as if she had never known me. It would certainly be the best thing for her happiness if that marriage were hastened. Heigho! Those are lucky fellows that have no women falling in love with them. It's a confounded responsibility."

At this point in his meditations he turned his head a little, so as to get a three-quarter view of his face. Clearly it was the "*dono infelice della bellezza*" that laid these onerous duties upon him

—an idea which naturally suggested that he should ring for his valet.

For the next few days, however, there was such a cessation of threatening symptoms as to allay the anxiety both of Captain Wybrow and Mr Gilfil. All earthly things have their lull: even on nights when the most unappeasable wind is raging, there will be a moment of stillness before it crashes among the boughs again, and storms against the windows, and howls like a thousand lost demons through the key-holes.

Miss Assher appeared to be in the highest good-humour; Captain Wybrow was more assiduous than usual, and was very circumspect in his behaviour to Caterina, on whom Miss Assher bestowed unwonted attentions. The weather was brilliant; there were riding excursions in the mornings and dinner-parties in the evenings. Consultations in the library between Sir Christopher and Lady Assher seemed to be leading to a satisfactory result; and it was understood that this visit at Cheverel Manor would terminate in another fortnight, when the preparations for the wedding would be carried forward with all despatch at Farleigh. The Baronet seemed every day more

radiant. Accustomed to view people who entered into his plans by the pleasant light which his own strong will and bright hopefulness were always casting on the future, he saw nothing but personal charms and promising domestic qualities in Miss Assher, whose quickness of eye and taste in externals formed a real ground of sympathy between her and Sir Christopher. Lady Cheverel's enthusiasm never rose above the temperate mark of calm satisfaction, and having quite her share of the critical acumen which characterises the mutual estimates of the fair sex, she had a more moderate opinion of Miss Assher's qualities. She suspected that the fair Beatrice had a sharp and imperious temper; and being herself, on principle and by habitual self-command, the most deferential of wives, she noticed with disapproval Miss Assher's occasional air of authority towards Captain Wybrow. A proud woman who has learned to submit, carries all her pride to the reinforcement of her submission, and looks down with severe superiority on all feminine assumption as "unbecoming." Lady Cheverel, however, confined her criticisms to the privacy of her own thoughts, and, with a reticence which I fear may seem incredi-

ble, did not use them as a means of disturbing her husband's complacency.

And Caterina? How did she pass these sunny autumn days, in which the skies seemed to be smiling on the family gladness? To her the change in Miss Assher's manner was unaccountable. Those compassionate attentions, those smiling condescensions, were torture to Caterina, who was constantly tempted to repulse them with anger. She thought, "Perhaps Anthony has told her to be kind to poor Tina. This was an insult. He ought to have known that the mere presence of Miss Assher was painful to her, that Miss Assher's smiles scorched her, that Miss Assher's kind words were like poison stings inflaming her to madness. And he—Anthony—he was evidently repenting of the tenderness he had been betrayed into that morning in the drawing-room. He was cold and distant and civil to her, to ward off Beatrice's suspicions, and Beatrice could be so gracious now, because she was sure of Anthony's entire devotion. Well! and so it ought to be—and she ought not to wish it otherwise. And yet—oh, he *was* cruel to her. She could never have behaved so to him. To make her love him so—to speak such tender

words—to give her such caresses, and then to behave as if such things had never been. He had given her the poison that seemed so sweet while she was drinking it, and now it was in her blood, and she was helpless."

With this tempest pent up in her bosom, the poor child went up to her room every night, and there it all burst forth. There, with loud whispers and sobs, restlessly pacing up and down, lying on the hard floor, courting cold and weariness, she told to the pitiful listening night the anguish which she could pour into no mortal ear. But always sleep came at last, and always in the morning the reactive calm that enabled her to live through the day.

It is amazing how long a young frame will go on battling with this sort of secret wretchedness, and yet show no traces of the conflict for any but sympathetic eyes. The very delicacy of Caterina's usual appearance, her natural paleness and habitually quiet mouse-like ways, made any symptoms of fatigue and suffering less noticeable. And her singing—the one thing in which she ceased to be passive, and became prominent—lost none of its energy. She sometimes wondered herself how it

was that, whether she felt sad or angry, crushed with the sense of Anthony's indifference, or burning with impatience under Miss Assher's attentions, it was always a relief to her to sing. Those full deep notes she sent forth seemed to be lifting the pain from her heart—seemed to be carrying away the madness from her brain.

Thus Lady Cheverel noticed no change in Caterina, and it was only Mr Gilfil who discerned with anxiety the feverish spot that sometimes rose on her cheek, the deepening violet tint under her eyes, and the strange absent glance, the unhealthy glitter of the beautiful eyes themselves.

But, alas! those agitated nights were producing a more fatal effect than was represented by these slight outward changes.

CHAPTER XI.

THE following Sunday, the morning being rainy, it was determined that the family should not go to Cumbermoor Church as usual, but that Mr Gilfil, who had only an afternoon service at his curacy, should conduct the morning service in the chapel.

Just before the appointed hour of eleven, Caterina came down into the drawing-room, looking so unusually ill as to call forth an anxious inquiry from Lady Cheverel, who, on learning that she had a severe headache, insisted that she should not attend service, and at once packed her up comfortably on a sofa near the fire, putting a volume of Tillotson's Sermons into her hands, as appropriate reading, if Caterina should feel equal to that means of edification.

Excellent medicine for the mind are the good archbishop's sermons, but a medicine, unhappily, not suited to Tina's case. She sat with the book open on her knees, her dark eyes fixed vacantly

on the portrait of that handsome Lady Cheverel, wife of the notable Sir Anthony. She gazed at the picture without thinking of it, and the fair blonde dame seemed to look down on her with that benignant unconcern, that mild wonder, with which happy self-possessed women are apt to look down on their agitated and weaker sisters.

Caterina was thinking of the near future—of the wedding that was so soon to come—of all she would have to live through in the next months.

"I wish I could be very ill, and die before then," she thought. "When people get very ill, they don't mind about things. Poor Patty Richards looked so happy when she was in a decline. She didn't seem to care any more about her lover that she was engaged to be married to, and she liked the smell of the flowers so that I used to take her. O, if I could but like anything —if I could but think about anything else! If these dreadful feelings would go away, I wouldn't mind about not being happy. I wouldn't want anything—and I could do what would please Sir Christopher and Lady Cheverel. But when that rage and anger comes into me, I don't know what to do. I don't feel the ground under me; I only

feel my head and heart beating, and it seems as if I must do something dreadful. O! I wonder if any one ever felt like me before. I must be very wicked. But God will have pity on me; He knows all I have to bear."

In this way the time wore on till Tina heard the sound of voices along the passage, and became conscious that the volume of Tillotson had slipped on the floor. She had only just picked it up, and seen with alarm that the pages were bent, when Lady Assher, Beatrice, and Captain Wybrow entered, all with that brisk and cheerful air which a sermon is often observed to produce when it is quite finished.

Lady Assher at once came and seated herself by Caterina. Her ladyship had been considerably refreshed by a doze, and was in great force for monologue.

"Well, my dear Miss Sarti, and how do you feel now?—a little better, I see. I thought you would be, sitting quietly here. These headaches, now, are all from weakness. You must not over-exert yourself, and you must take bitters. I used to have just the same sort of headaches when I was your age, and old Dr Samson used to say to

my mother, 'Madam, what your daughter suffers from is weakness.' He was such a curious old man, was Dr Samson. But I wish you could have heard the sermon this morning. Such an excellent sermon! It was about the ten virgins: five of them were foolish, and five were clever, you know; and Mr Gilfil explained all that. What a very pleasant young man he is!—so very quiet and agreeable, and such a good hand at whist. I wish we had him at Farleigh. Sir John would have liked him beyond anything; he is so good-tempered at cards, and he was such a man for cards, was Sir John. And our rector is a very irritable man; he can't bear to lose his money at cards. I don't think a clergyman ought to mind about losing his money; do you?—do you now?"

"O pray, Lady Assher," interposed Beatrice, in her usual tone of superiority, "do not weary poor Caterina with such uninteresting questions. Your head seems very bad still, dear," she continued, in a condoling tone, to Caterina; "do take my vinaigrette, and keep it in your pocket. It will perhaps refresh you now and then."

"No, thank you," answered Caterina; "I will not take it away from you."

"Indeed, dear, I never use it; you must take it," Miss Assher persisted, holding it close to Tina's hand. She coloured deeply, pushed the vinaigrette away with some impatience, and said, "Thank you, I never use those things. I don't like vinaigrettes."

Miss Assher returned the vinaigrette to her pocket in surprised and haughty silence, and Captain Wybrow, who had looked on in some alarm, said hastily, "See! it is quite bright out of doors now. There is time for a walk before luncheon. Come, Beatrice, put on your hat and cloak, and let us have half an hour's walk on the gravel."

"Yes, do, my dear," said Lady Assher, "and I will go and see if Sir Christopher is having his walk in the gallery."

As soon as the door had closed behind the two ladies, Captain Wybrow, standing with his back to the fire, turned towards Caterina, and said in a tone of earnest remonstrance, "My dear Caterina, let me beg of you to exercise more control over your feelings; you are really rude to Miss Assher, and I can see that she is quite hurt. Consider how strange your behaviour must appear to her. She will wonder what can be the cause of it.

Come, dear Tina," he added, approaching her, and attempting to take her hand; "for your own sake, let me entreat you to receive her attentions politely. She really feels very kindly towards you, and I should be so happy to see you friends."

Caterina was already in such a state of diseased susceptibility that the most innocent words from Captain Wybrow would have been irritating to her, as the whirr of the most delicate wing will afflict a nervous patient. But this tone of benevolent remonstrance was intolerable. He had inflicted a great and unrepented injury on her, and now he assumed an air of benevolence towards her. This was a new outrage. His profession of goodwill was insolence.

Caterina snatched away her hand and said indignantly, "Leave me to myself, Captain Wybrow! I do not disturb you."

"Caterina, why will you be so violent—so unjust to me? It is for you that I feel anxious. Miss Assher has already noticed how strange your behaviour is both to her and me, and it puts me into a very difficult position. What can I say to her?"

"Say?" Caterina burst forth, with intense bit-

terness, rising, and moving towards the door; "say that I am a poor silly girl, and have fallen in love with you, and am jealous of her; but that you have never had any feeling but pity for me—you have never behaved with anything more than friendliness to me. Tell her that, and she will think all the better of you."

Tina uttered this as the bitterest sarcasm her ideas would furnish her with, not having the faintest suspicion that the sarcasm derived any of its bitterness from truth. Underneath all her sense of wrong, which was rather instinctive than reflective—underneath all the madness of her jealousy, and her ungovernable impulses of resentment and vindictiveness—underneath all this scorching passion there were still left some hidden crystal dews of trust, of self-reproof, of belief that Anthony was trying to do the right. Love had not all gone to feed the fires of hatred. Tina still trusted that Anthony felt more for her than he seemed to feel; she was still far from suspecting him of a wrong which a woman resents even more than inconstancy. And she threw out this taunt simply as the most intense expression she could find for the anger of the moment.

As she stood nearly in the middle of the room, her little body trembling under the shock of passions too strong for it, her very lips pale, and her eyes gleaming, the door opened, and Miss Assher appeared, tall, blooming, and splendid, in her walking costume. As she entered, her face wore the smile appropriate to the exits and entrances of a young lady who feels that her presence is an interesting fact; but the next moment she looked at Caterina with grave surprise, and then threw a glance of angry suspicion at Captain Wybrow, who wore an air of weariness and vexation.

"Perhaps you are too much engaged to walk out, Captain Wybrow? I will go alone."

"No, no, I am coming," he answered, hurrying towards her, and leading her out of the room; leaving poor Caterina to feel all the reaction of shame and self-reproach after her outburst of passion.

CHAPTER XII.

"PRAY, what is likely to be the next scene in the drama between you and Miss Sarti?" said Miss Assher to Captain Wybrow as soon as they were out on the gravel. "It would be agreeable to have some idea of what is coming."

Captain Wybrow was silent. He felt out of humour, wearied, annoyed. There come moments when one almost determines never again to oppose anything but dead silence to an angry woman. "Now then, confound it," he said to himself, "I'm going to be battered on the other flank." He looked resolutely at the horizon, with something more like a frown on his face than Beatrice had ever seen there.

After a pause of two or three minutes, she continued in a still haughtier tone, "I suppose you are aware, Captain Wybrow, that I expect an explanation of what I have just seen."

"I have no explanation, my dear Beatrice," he

answered at last, making a strong effort over himself, "except what I have already given you. I hoped you would never recur to the subject."

"Your explanation, however, is very far from satisfactory. I can only say that the airs Miss Sarti thinks herself entitled to put on towards you, are quite incompatible with your position as regards me. And her behaviour to me is most insulting. I shall certainly not stay in the house under such circumstances, and mamma must state the reasons to Sir Christopher."

"Beatrice," said Captain Wybrow, his irritation giving way to alarm, "I beseech you to be patient, and exercise your good feelings in this affair. It is very painful, I know, but I am sure you would be grieved to injure poor Caterina—to bring down my uncle's anger upon her. Consider what a poor little dependent thing she is."

"It is very adroit of you to make these evasions, but do not suppose that they deceive me. Miss Sarti would never dare to behave to you as she does, if you had not flirted with her, or made love to her. I suppose she considers your engagement to me a breach of faith to her. I am much obliged to you, certainly, for making me Miss

Sarti's rival. You have told me a falsehood, Captain Wybrow."

"Beatrice, I solemnly declare to you that Caterina is nothing more to me than a girl I naturally feel kindly to—as a favourite of my uncle's, and a nice little thing enough. I should be glad to see her married to Gilfil to-morrow; that's a good proof that I'm not in love with her, I should think. As to the past, I may have shown her little attentions, which she has exaggerated and misinterpreted. What man is not liable to that sort of thing?"

"But what can she found her behaviour on? What had she been saying to you this morning to make her tremble and turn pale in that way?"

"O, I don't know. I just said something about her behaving peevishly. With that Italian blood of hers, there's no knowing how she may take what one says. She's a fierce little thing, though she seems so quiet generally."

"But she ought to be made to know how unbecoming and indelicate her conduct is. For my part, I wonder Lady Cheverel has not noticed her short answers and the airs she puts on."

"Let me beg of you, Beatrice, not to hint any-

thing of the kind to Lady Cheverel. You must have observed how strict my aunt is. It never enters her head that a girl can be in love with a man who has not made her an offer."

"Well, I shall let Miss Sarti know myself that I have observed her conduct. It will be only a charity to her."

"Nay, dear, that will be doing nothing but harm. Caterina's temper is peculiar. The best thing you can do will be to leave her to herself as much as possible. It will all wear off. I've no doubt she'll be married to Gilfil before long. Girls' fancies are easily diverted from one object to another. By Jove, what a rate my heart is galloping at! These confounded palpitations get worse instead of better."

Thus ended the conversation, so far as it concerned Caterina, not without leaving a distinct resolution in Captain Wybrow's mind—a resolution carried into effect the next day, when he was in the library with Sir Christopher for the purpose of discussing some arrangements about the approaching marriage.

"By the by," he said carelessly, when the business came to a pause, and he was sauntering

round the room with his hands in his coat-pockets, surveying the backs of the books that lined the walls, "when is the wedding between Gilfil and Caterina to come off, sir? I've a fellow-feeling for a poor devil so many fathoms deep in love as Maynard. Why shouldn't their marriage happen as soon as ours? I suppose he has come to an understanding with Tina?"

"Why," said Sir Christopher, "I did think of letting the thing be until old Crichley died; he can't hold out very long, poor fellow; and then Maynard might have entered into matrimony and the Rectory both at once. But, after all, that really is no good reason for waiting. There is no need for them to leave the Manor when they are married. The little monkey is quite old enough. It would be pretty to see her a matron, with a baby about the size of a kitten in her arms."

"I think that system of waiting is always bad. And if I can further any settlement you would like to make on Caterina, I shall be delighted to carry out your wishes."

"My dear boy, that's very good of you; but Maynard will have enough; and from what I

know of him—and I know him well—I think he would rather provide for Caterina himself. However, now you have put this matter into my head, I begin to blame myself for not having thought of it before. I've been so wrapt up in Beatrice and you, you rascal, that I had really forgotten poor Maynard. And he's older than you—it's high time he was settled in life as a family man."

Sir Christopher paused, took snuff in a meditative manner, and presently said, more to himself than to Anthony, who was humming a tune at the far end of the room, "Yes, yes. It will be a capital plan to finish off all our family business at once."

Riding out with Miss Assher the same morning, Captain Wybrow mentioned to her incidentally, that Sir Christopher was anxious to bring about the wedding between Gilfil and Caterina as soon as possible, and that he, for his part, should do all he could to further the affair. It would be the best thing in the world for Tina, in whose welfare he was really interested.

With Sir Christopher there was never any long interval between purpose and execution. He made up his mind promptly, and he acted promptly.

On rising from luncheon, he said to Mr Gilfil, "Come with me into the library, Maynard. I want to have a word with you."

"Maynard, my boy," he began, as soon as they were seated, tapping his snuff-box, and looking radiant at the idea of the unexpected pleasure he was about to give, "why shouldn't we have two happy couples instead of one, before the autumn is over, eh?"

"Eh?" he repeated, after a moment's pause, lengthening out the monosyllable, taking a slow pinch, and looking up at Maynard with a sly smile.

"I'm not quite sure that I understand you, sir," answered Mr Gilfil, who felt annoyed at the consciousness that he was turning pale.

"Not understand me, you rogue? You know very well whose happiness lies nearest to my heart after Anthony's. You know you let me into your secrets long ago, so there's no confession to make. Tina's quite old enough to be a grave little wife now; and though the Rectory's not ready for you, that's no matter. My lady and I shall feel all the more comfortable for having you with us. We should miss our little singing-bird if we lost her all at once."

Mr Gilfil felt himself in a painfully difficult position. He dreaded that Sir Christopher should surmise or discover the true state of Caterina's feelings, and yet he was obliged to make those feelings the ground of his reply.

"My dear sir," he at last said with some effort, "you will not suppose that I am not alive to your goodness—that I am not grateful for your fatherly interest in my happiness; but I fear that Caterina's feelings towards me are not such as to warrant the hope that she would accept a proposal of marriage from me."

"Have you ever asked her?"

"No, sir. But we often know these things too well without asking."

"Pooh, pooh! The little monkey *must* love you. Why, you were her first playfellow; and I remember she used to cry if you cut your finger. Besides, she has always silently admitted that you were her lover. You know I have always spoken of you to her in that light. I took it for granted you had settled the business between yourselves; so did Anthony. Anthony thinks she's in love with you, and he has young eyes, which are apt enough to see clearly in these matters. He was

talking to me about it this morning, and pleased me very much by the friendly interest he showed in you and Tina."

The blood—more than was wanted—rushed back to Mr Gilfil's face; he set his teeth and clenched his hands in the effort to repress a burst of indignation. Sir Christopher noticed the flush, but thought it indicated the fluctuation of hope and fear about Caterina. He went on :—

"You're too modest by half, Maynard. A fellow who can take a five-barred gate as you can, ought not to be so faint-hearted. If you can't speak to her yourself, leave me to talk to her."

"Sir Christopher," said poor Maynard earnestly, "I shall really feel it the greatest kindness you can possibly show me, not to mention this subject to Caterina at present. I think such a proposal, made prematurely, might only alienate her from me."

Sir Christopher was getting a little displeased at this contradiction. His tone became a little sharper as he said, "Have you any grounds to state for this opinion, beyond your general notion that Tina is not enough in love with you?"

"I can state none beyond my own very strong

impression that she does not love me well enough to marry me."

"Then I think that ground is worth nothing at all. I am tolerably correct in my judgment of people; and if I am not very much deceived in Tina, she looks forward to nothing else but to your being her husband. Leave me to manage the matter as I think best. You may rely on me that I shall do no harm to your cause, Maynard."

Mr Gilfil, afraid to say more, yet wretched in the prospect of what might result from Sir Christopher's determination, quitted the library in a state of mingled indignation against Captain Wybrow, and distress for himself and Caterina. What would she think of him? She might suppose that *he* had instigated or sanctioned Sir Christopher's proceeding. He should perhaps not have an opportunity of speaking to her on the subject in time; he would write her a note, and carry it up to her room after the dressing-bell had rung. No; that would agitate her, and unfit her for appearing at dinner, and passing the evening calmly. He would defer it till bedtime. After prayers, he contrived to lead her back to the drawing-room, and to put a letter in her hand. She carried

it up to her own room, wondering, and there read,—

"DEAR CATERINA,—Do not suspect for a moment that anything Sir Christopher may say to you about our marriage has been prompted by me. I have done all I dare do to dissuade him from urging the subject, and have only been prevented from speaking more strongly by the dread of provoking questions which I could not answer without causing you fresh misery. I write this, both to prepare you for anything Sir Christopher may say, and to assure you—but I hope you already believe it—that your feelings are sacred to me. I would rather part with the dearest hope of my life than be the means of adding to your trouble.

"It is Captain Wybrow who has prompted Sir Christopher to take up the subject at this moment. I tell you this, to save you from hearing it suddenly when you are with Sir Christopher. You see now what sort of stuff that dastard's heart is made of. Trust in me always, dearest Caterina, as—whatever may come—your faithful friend and brother,

"MAYNARD GILFIL."

Caterina was at first too terribly stung by the words about Captain Wybrow to think of the difficulty which threatened her—to think either of what Sir Christopher would say to her, or of what she could say in reply. Bitter sense of injury, fierce resentment, left no room for fear. With the poisoned garment upon him, the victim writhes under the torture—he has no thought of the coming death.

Anthony could do this!—Of this there could be no explanation but the coolest contempt for her feelings, the basest sacrifice of all the consideration and tenderness he owed her to the ease of his position with Miss Assher. No. It was worse than that; it was deliberate, gratuitous cruelty. He wanted to show her how he despised her; he wanted to make her feel her folly in having ever believed that he loved her.

The last crystal drops of trust and tenderness, she thought, were dried up; all was parched, fiery hatred. Now she need no longer check her resentment by the fear of doing him an injustice; he *had* trifled with her, as Maynard had said; he *had* been reckless of her; and now he was base and cruel. She had cause enough for her bitterness

and anger; they were not so wicked as they had seemed to her.

As these thoughts were hurrying after each other like so many sharp throbs of fevered pain, she shed no tear. She paced restlessly to and fro, as her habit was—her hands clenched, her eyes gleaming fiercely and wandering uneasily, as if in search of something on which she might throw herself like a tigress.

"If I could speak to him," she whispered, "and tell him I hate him, I despise him, I loathe him!"

Suddenly, as if a new thought had struck her, she drew a key from her pocket, and unlocking an inlaid desk where she stored up her keepsakes, took from it a small miniature. It was in a very slight gold frame, with a ring to it, as if intended to be worn on a chain; and under the glass at the back were two locks of hair, one dark and the other auburn, arranged in a fantastic knot. It was Anthony's secret present to her a year ago—a copy he had had made specially for her. For the last month she had not taken it from its hiding-place: there was no need to heighten the vividness of the past. But now she clutched it fiercely, and dashed it across the room against the bare hearthstone.

Will she crush it under her feet, and grind it under her high-heeled shoe, till every trace of those false cruel features is gone?

Ah, no! She rushed across the room; but when she saw the little treasure she had cherished so fondly, so often smothered with kisses, so often laid under her pillow, and remembered with the first return of consciousness in the morning—when she saw this one visible relic of the too happy past lying with the glass shivered, the hair fallen out, the thin ivory cracked, there was a revulsion of the overstrained feeling: relenting came, and she burst into tears.

Look at her stooping down to gather up her treasure, searching for the hair and replacing it, and then mournfully examining the crack that disfigures the once-loved image. Alas! there is no glass now to guard either the hair or the portrait; but see how carefully she wraps delicate paper round it, and locks it up again in its old place. Poor child! God send the relenting may always come before the worst irrevocable deed!

This action had quieted her, and she sat down to read Maynard's letter again. She read it two or three times without seeming to take in the

sense; her apprehension was dulled by the passion of the last hour, and she found it difficult to call up the ideas suggested by the words. At last she began to have a distinct conception of the impending interview with Sir Christopher. The idea of displeasing the Baronet, of whom every one at the Manor stood in awe, frightened her so much that she thought it would be impossible to resist his wish. He believed that she loved Maynard; he had always spoken as if he were quite sure of it. How could she tell him he was deceived—and what if he were to ask her whether she loved anybody else? To have Sir Christopher looking angrily at her, was more than she could bear, even in imagination. He had always been so good to her! Then she began to think of the pain she might give him, and the more selfish distress of fear gave way to the distress of affection. Unselfish tears began to flow, and sorrowful gratitude to Sir Christopher helped to awaken her sensibility to Mr Gilfil's tenderness and generosity.

"Dear, good Maynard!—what a poor return I make him! If I could but have loved him instead—but I can never love or care for anything again. My heart is broken."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE next morning the dreaded moment came. Caterina, stupified by the suffering of the previous night, with that dull mental aching which follows on acute anguish, was in Lady Cheverel's sitting-room, copying out some charity lists, when her ladyship came in, and said,—

"Tina, Sir Christopher wants you; go down into the library."

She went down trembling. As soon as she entered, Sir Christopher, who was seated near his writing-table, said, "Now, little monkey, come and sit down by me; I have something to tell you."

Caterina took a footstool, and seated herself on it at the Baronet's feet. It was her habit to sit on these low stools, and in this way she could hide her face better. She put her little arm round his leg, and leaned her cheek against his knee.

"Why, you seem out of spirits this morning, Tina. What's the matter, eh?"

"Nothing, Padroncello, only my head is bad."

"Poor monkey! Well, now wouldn't it do the head good if I were to promise you a good husband, and smart little wedding-gowns, and by-and-by a house of your own, where you would be a little mistress, and Padroncello would come and see you sometimes?"

"O no, no! I shouldn't like ever to be married. Let me always stay with you!"

"Pooh, pooh, little simpleton. I shall get old and tiresome, and there will be Anthony's children putting your nose out of joint. You will want some one to love you best of all, and you must have children of your own to love. I can't have you withering away into an old maid. I hate old maids. They make me dismal to look at them. I never see Sharp without shuddering. My little black-eyed monkey was never meant for anything so ugly. And there's Maynard Gilfil, the best man in the county, worth his weight in gold, heavy as he is; he loves you better than his eyes. And you love him too, you silly monkey, whatever you may say about not being married."

"No, no, dear Padroncello, do not say so; I could not marry him."

"Why not, you foolish child? You don't know your own mind. Why, it is plain to everybody that you love him. My lady has all along said she was sure you loved him—she has seen what little princess airs you put on to him; and Anthony too, *he* thinks you are in love with Gilfil. Come, what has made you take it into your head that you wouldn't like to marry him?"

Caterina was now sobbing too deeply to make any answer. Sir Christopher patted her on the back and said, "Come, come; why, Tina, you are not well this morning. Go and rest, little one. You will see things in quite another light when you are well. Think over what I have said, and remember there is nothing, after Anthony's marriage, that I have set my heart on so much as seeing you and Maynard settled for life. I must have no whims and follies—no nonsense." This was said with a slight severity; but he presently added, in a soothing tone, "There, there, stop crying, and be a good little monkey. Go and lie down and get to sleep."

Caterina slipped from the stool on to her knees,

took the old Baronet's hand, covered it with tears and kisses, and then ran out of the room.

Before the evening, Captain Wybrow had heard from his uncle the result of the interview with Caterina. He thought, "If I could have a long quiet talk with her, I could perhaps persuade her to look more reasonably at things. But there's no speaking to her in the house without being interrupted, and I can hardly see her anywhere else without Beatrice's finding it out." At last he determined to make it a matter of confidence with Miss Assher—to tell her that he wished to talk to Caterina quietly for the sake of bringing her to a calmer state of mind, and persuade her to listen to Gilfil's affection. He was very much pleased with this judicious and candid plan, and in the course of the evening he had arranged with himself the time and place of meeting, and had communicated his purpose to Miss Assher, who gave her entire approval. Anthony, she thought, would do well to speak plainly and seriously to Miss Sarti. He was really very patient and kind to her, considering how she behaved.

Tina had kept her room all that day, and had been carefully tended as an invalid, Sir Christo-

pher having told her ladyship how matters stood. This tendance was so irksome to Caterina, she felt so uneasy under attentions and kindness that were based on a misconception, that she exerted herself to appear at breakfast the next morning, and declared herself well, though head and heart were throbbing. To be confined in her own room was intolerable; it was wretched enough to be looked at and spoken to, but it was more wretched to be left alone. She was frightened at her own sensations: she was frightened at the imperious vividness with which pictures of the past and future thrust themselves on her imagination. And there was another feeling, too, which made her want to be down stairs and moving about. Perhaps she might have an opportunity of speaking to Captain Wybrow alone—of speaking those words of hatred and scorn that burned on her tongue. That opportunity offered itself in a very unexpected manner.

Lady Cheverel having sent Caterina out of the drawing-room to fetch some patterns of embroidery from her sitting-room, Captain Wybrow presently walked out after her, and met her as she was returning down stairs.

"Caterina," he said, laying his hand on her arm as she was hurrying on without looking at him, "will you meet me in the Rookery at twelve o'clock? I must speak to you, and we shall be in privacy there. I cannot speak to you in the house."

To his surprise, there was a flash of pleasure across her face; she answered shortly and decidedly, "Yes," then snatched her arm away from him, and passed down stairs.

Miss Assher was this morning busy winding silks, being bent on emulating Lady Cheverel's embroidery, and Lady Assher chose the passive amusement of holding the skeins. Lady Cheverel had now all her working apparatus about her, and Caterina, thinking she was not wanted, went away and sat down to the harpsichord in the sitting-room. It seemed as if playing massive chords—bringing out volumes of sound, would be the easiest way of passing the long feverish moments before twelve o'clock. Handel's "Messiah" stood open on the desk, at the chorus "All we like sheep," and Caterina threw herself at once into the impetuous intricacies of that magnificent fugue. In her happiest moments she could never have played it

so well; for now all the passion that made her misery was hurled by a convulsive effort into her music, just as pain gives new force to the clutch of the sinking wrestler, and as terror gives far-sounding intensity to the shriek of the feeble.

But at half-past eleven she was interrupted by Lady Cheverel, who said, "Tina, go down, will you, and hold Miss Assher's silks for her. Lady Assher and I have decided on having our drive before luncheon."

Caterina went down, wondering how she should escape from the drawing-room in time to be in the Rookery at twelve. Nothing should prevent her from going; nothing should rob her of this one precious moment—perhaps the last—when she could speak out the thoughts that were in her. After that, she would be passive; she would bear anything.

But she had scarcely sat down with a skein of yellow silk on her hands, when Miss Assher said, graciously,—

"I know you have an engagement with Captain Wybrow this morning. You must not let me detain you beyond the time."

"So he has been talking to her about me,"

thought Caterina. Her hands began to tremble as she held the skein.

Miss Assher continued, in the same gracious tone: "It is tedious work holding these skeins. I am sure I am very much obliged to you."

"No, you are not obliged to me," said Caterina, completely mastered by her irritation; "I have only done it because Lady Cheverel told me."

The moment was come when Miss Assher could no longer suppress her long latent desire to "let Miss Sarti know the impropriety of her conduct." With the malicious anger that assumes the tone of compassion, she said,—

"Miss Sarti, I am really sorry for you, that you are not able to control yourself better. This giving way to unwarrantable feelings is lowering you —it is indeed."

"What unwarrantable feelings?" said Caterina, letting her hands fall, and fixing her great dark eyes steadily on Miss Assher.

"It is quite unnecessary for me to say more. You must be conscious what I mean. Only summon a sense of duty to your aid. You are paining Captain Wybrow extremely by your want of self-control."

"Did he tell you I pained him?"

"Yes, indeed, he did. He is very much hurt that you should behave to me as if you had a sort of enmity towards me. He would like you to make a friend of me. I assure you we both feel very kindly towards you, and are sorry you should cherish such feelings."

"He is very good," said Caterina, bitterly. "What feelings did he say I cherished?"

This bitter tone increased Miss Assher's irritation. There was still a lurking suspicion in her mind, though she would not admit it to herself, that Captain Wybrow had told her a falsehood about his conduct and feelings towards Caterina. It was this suspicion, more even than the anger of the moment, which urged her to say something that would test the truth of his statement. That she would be humiliating Caterina at the same time, was only an additional temptation.

"These are things I do not like to talk of, Miss Sarti. I cannot even understand how a woman can indulge a passion for a man who has never given her the least ground for it, as Captain Wybrow assures me is the case."

"He told you that, did he?" said Caterina, in clear low tones, her lips turning white as she rose from her chair.

"Yes, indeed, he did. He was bound to tell it me after your strange behaviour."

Caterina said nothing, but turned round suddenly and left the room.

See how she rushes noiselessly, like a pale meteor, along the passages and up the gallery stairs! Those gleaming eyes, those bloodless lips, that swift silent tread, make her look like the incarnation of a fierce purpose, rather than a woman. The mid-day sun is shining on the armour in the gallery, making mimic suns on bossed sword-hilts and the angles of polished breastplates. Yes, there are sharp weapons in the gallery. There is a dagger in that cabinet; she knows it well. And as a dragon-fly wheels in its flight to alight for an instant on a leaf, she darts to the cabinet, takes out the dagger, and thrusts it into her pocket. In three minutes more she is out, in hat and cloak, on the gravel-walk, hurrying along towards the thick shades of the distant Rookery. She threads the windings of the plantations, not feeling the golden leaves that

rain upon her, not feeling the earth beneath her feet. Her hand is in her pocket, clenching the handle of the dagger, which she holds half out of its sheath.

She has reached the Rookery, and is under the gloom of the interlacing boughs. Her heart throbs as if it would burst her bosom—as if every next leap must be its last. Wait, wait, O heart! till she has done this one deed. He will be there—he will be before her in a moment. He will come towards her with that false smile, thinking she does not know his baseness—she will plunge that dagger into his heart.

Poor child! poor child! she who used to cry to have the fish put back into the water—who never willingly killed the smallest living thing—dreams now, in the madness of her passion, that she can kill the man whose very voice unnerves her.

But what is that lying among the dank leaves on the path three yards before her?

Good God! it is he—lying motionless—his hat fallen off. He is ill, then—he has fainted. Her hand lets go the dagger, and she rushes towards him. His eyes are fixed; he does not

see her. She sinks down on her knees, takes the dear head in her arms, and kisses the cold forehead.

"Anthony, Anthony! speak to me—it is Tina —speak to me! O God, he is dead!"

CHAPTER XIV.

"YES, Maynard," said Sir Christopher, chatting with Mr Gilfil in the library, "it really is a remarkable thing that I never in my life laid a plan, and failed to carry it out. I lay my plans well, and I never swerve from them—that's it. A strong will is the only magic. And next to striking out one's plans, the pleasantest thing in the world is to see them well accomplished. This year, now, will be the happiest of my life, all but the year '53, when I came into possession of the Manor, and married Henrietta. The last touch is given to the old house; Anthony's marriage—the thing I had nearest my heart—is settled to my entire satisfaction; and by-and-by you will be buying a little wedding-ring for Tina's finger. Don't shake your head in that forlorn way;—when I make prophecies, they generally come to pass. But there's a quarter after twelve striking. I must be riding to the High Ash to meet Mark-

ham about felling some timber. My old oaks will have to groan for this wedding, but"—

The door burst open, and Caterina, ghastly and panting, her eyes distended with terror, rushed in, threw her arms round Sir Christopher's neck, and gasping out—"Anthony . . . the Rookery . . . dead . . . in the Rookery," fell fainting on the floor.

In a moment Sir Christopher was out of the room, and Mr Gilfil was bending to raise Caterina in his arms. As he lifted her from the ground he felt something hard and heavy in her pocket. What could it be? The weight of it would be enough to hurt her as she lay. He carried her to the sofa, put his hand in her pocket, and drew forth the dagger.

Maynard shuddered. Did she mean to kill herself, then, or . . . or . . . a horrible suspicion forced itself upon him. "Dead—in the Rookery." He hated himself for the thought that prompted him to draw the dagger from its sheath. No! there was no trace of blood, and he was ready to kiss the good steel for its innocence. He thrust the weapon into his own pocket; he would restore it as soon as possible to its well-

known place in the gallery. Yet, why had Caterina taken this dagger? What was it that had happened in the Rookery? Was it only a delirious vision of hers?

He was afraid to ring—afraid to summon any one to Caterina's assistance. What might she not say when she awoke from this fainting fit? She might be raving. He could not leave her, and yet he felt as if he were guilty for not following Sir Christopher to see what was the truth. It took but a moment to think and feel all this, but that moment seemed such a long agony to him, that he began to reproach himself for letting it pass without seeking some means of reviving Caterina. Happily the decanter of water on Sir Christopher's table was untouched. He would at least try the effect of throwing that water over her. She might revive without his needing to call any one else.

Meanwhile Sir Christopher was hurrying at his utmost speed towards the Rookery; his face, so lately bright and confident, now agitated by a vague dread. The deep alarmed bark of Rupert, who ran by his side, had struck the ear of Mr Bates, then on his way homeward, as something

unwonted, and, hastening in the direction of the sound, he met the Baronet just as he was approaching the entrance of the Rookery. Sir Christopher's look was enough. Mr Bates said nothing, but hurried along by his side, while Rupert dashed forward among the dead leaves with his nose to the ground. They had scarcely lost sight of him a minute, when a change in the tone of his bark told them that he had found something, and in another instant he was leaping back over one of the large planted mounds. They turned aside to ascend the mound, Rupert leading them; the tumultuous cawing of the rooks, the very rustling of the leaves, as their feet plunged among them, falling like an evil omen on the Baronet's ear.

They have reached the summit of the mound, and have begun to descend. Sir Christopher sees something purple down on the path below among the yellow leaves. Rupert is already beside it, but Sir Christopher cannot move faster. A tremor has taken hold of the firm limbs. Rupert comes back and licks the trembling hand, as if to say "Courage!" and then is down again snuffing the body. Yes, it is a body . . . Anthony's body. There is the white hand with its diamond ring

clutching the dark leaves. His eyes are half open, but do not heed the gleam of sunlight that darts itself directly on them from between the boughs.

Still he might only have fainted; it might only be a fit. Sir Christopher knelt down, unfastened the cravat, unfastened the waistcoat, and laid his hand on the heart. It might be syncope; it might not—it could not be death. No! that thought must be kept far off.

"Go, Bates, get help; we'll carry him to your cottage. Send some one to the house to tell Mr Gilfil and Warren. Bid them send off for Doctor Hart, and break it to my lady and Miss Assher that Anthony is ill."

Mr Bates hastened away, and the Baronet was left alone kneeling beside the body. The young and supple limbs, the rounded cheeks, the delicate ripe lips, the smooth white hands, were lying cold and rigid; and the aged face was bending over them in silent anguish; the aged deep-veined hands were seeking with tremulous inquiring touches for some symptom that life was not irrevocably gone.

Rupert was there too, waiting and watching;

licking first the dead and then the living hands; then running off on Mr Bates's track as if he would follow and hasten his return, but in a moment turning back again, unable to quit the scene of his master's sorrow.

CHAPTER XV.

It is a wonderful moment, the first time we stand by one who has fainted, and witness the fresh birth of consciousness spreading itself over the blank features, like the rising sunlight on the alpine summits that lay ghastly and dead under the leaden twilight. A slight shudder, and the frost-bound eyes recover their liquid light; for an instant they show the inward semi-consciousness of an infant's; then, with a little start, they open wider and begin to *look;* the present is visible, but only as a strange writing, and the interpreter Memory is not yet there.

Mr Gilfil felt a trembling joy as this change passed over Caterina's face. He bent over her, rubbing her chill hands, and looking at her with tender pity as her dark eyes opened on him wonderingly. He thought there might be some wine in the dining-room close by. He left the room, and Caterina's eyes turned towards the window—

towards Sir Christopher's chair. *There* was the link at which the chain of consciousness had snapped, and the events of the morning were beginning to recur dimly like a half-remembered dream, when Maynard returned with some wine. He raised her, and she drank it; but still she was silent, seeming lost in the attempt to recover the past, when the door opened, and Mr Warren appeared with looks that announced terrible tidings. Mr Gilfil, dreading lest he should tell them in Caterina's presence, hurried towards him with his finger on his lips, and drew him away into the dining-room on the opposite side of the passage.

Caterina, revived by the stimulant, was now recovering the full consciousness of the scene in the Rookery. Anthony was lying there dead; she had left him to tell Sir Christopher; she must go and see what they were doing with him; perhaps he was not really dead—only in a trance; people did fall into trances sometimes. While Mr Gilfil was telling Warren how it would be best to break the news to Lady Cheverel and Miss Assher, anxious himself to return to Caterina, the poor child had made her way feebly to the great entrance-door, which stood open. Her strength

increased as she moved and breathed the fresh air, and with every increase of strength came increased vividness of emotion, increased yearning to be where her thought was—in the Rookery with Anthony. She walked more and more swiftly, and at last, gathering the artificial strength of passionate excitement, began to run.

But soon she hears the tread of heavy steps, and under the yellow shade near the wooden bridge, she sees men slowly carrying something. Now she is face to face with them. Anthony is no longer in the Rookery: they are carrying him stretched on a door, and there behind him is Sir Christopher, with the firmly-set mouth, the deathly paleness, and the concentrated expression of suffering in the eye, which mark the suppressed grief of the strong man. The sight of this face, on which Caterina had never before beheld the signs of anguish, caused a rush of new feeling which for the moment submerged all the rest. She went gently up to him, put her little hand in his, and walked in silence by his side. Sir Christopher could not tell her to leave him, and so she went on with that sad procession to Mr Bates's cottage in the Mosslands, and sat there in silence, waiting

and watching to know if Anthony were really dead.

She had not yet missed the dagger from her pocket; she had not yet even thought of it. At the sight of Anthony lying dead, her nature had rebounded from its new bias of resentment and hatred to the old sweet habit of love. The earliest and the longest has still the mastery over us; and the only past that linked itself with those glazed unconscious eyes, was the past when they beamed on her with tenderness. She forgot the interval of wrong and jealousy and hatred—all his cruelty, and all her thoughts of revenge—as the exile forgets the stormy passage that lay between home and happiness, and the dreary land in which he finds himself desolate.

CHAPTER XVI.

BEFORE night all hope was gone. Dr Hart had said it was death; Anthony's body had been carried to the house, and every one there knew the calamity that had fallen on them.

Caterina had been questioned by Dr Hart, and had answered briefly that she found Anthony lying in the Rookery. That she should have been walking there just at that time was not a coincidence to raise conjectures in any one besides Mr Gilfil. Except in answering this question, she had not broken her silence. She sat mute in a corner of the gardener's kitchen, shaking her head when Maynard entreated her to return with him, and apparently unable to think of anything but the possibility that Anthony might revive, until she saw them carrying away the body to the house. Then she followed by Sir Christopher's side again, so quietly, that even Dr Hart did not object to her presence.

It was decided to lay the body in the library until after the coroner's inquest to-morrow; and when Caterina saw the door finally closed, she turned up the gallery stairs on her way to her own room, the place where she felt at home with her sorrows. It was the first time she had been in the gallery since that terrible moment in the morning, and now the spot and the objects around began to reawaken her half-stunned memory. The armour was no longer glittering in the sunlight, but there it hung dead and sombre above the cabinet from which she had taken the dagger. Yes! now it all came back to her—all the wretchedness and all the sin. But where was the dagger now? She felt in her pocket; it was not there. Could it have been her fancy—all that about the dagger? She looked in the cabinet; it was not there. Alas! no; it could not have been her fancy, and she *was* guilty of that wickedness. But where could the dagger be now? Could it have fallen out of her pocket? She heard steps ascending the stairs, and hurried on to her room, where, kneeling by the bed, and burying her face to shut out the hateful light, she tried to recall every feeling and incident of the morning.

It all came back; everything Anthony had done, and everything she had felt for the last month—for many months—ever since that June evening when he had last spoken to her in the gallery. She looked back on her storms of passion, her jealousy and hatred of Miss Assher, her thoughts of revenge on Anthony. O how wicked she had been! It was she who had been sinning; it was she who had driven him to do and say those things that had made her so angry. And if he had wronged her, what had she been on the verge of doing to him? She was too wicked ever to be pardoned. She would like to confess how wicked she had been, that they might punish her; she would like to humble herself to the dust before every one—before Miss Assher even. Sir Christopher would send her away—would never see her again, if he knew all; and she would be happier to be punished and frowned on, than to be treated tenderly while she had that guilty secret in her breast. But then, if Sir Christopher were to know all, it would add to his sorrow, and make him more wretched than ever. No! she could not confess it—she should have to tell about Anthony. But she could not stay at the Manor; she must go

away; she could not bear Sir Christopher's eye, could not bear the sight of all these things that reminded her of Anthony and of her sin. Perhaps she should die soon; she felt very feeble; there could not be much life in her. She would go away and live humbly, and pray to God to pardon her, and let her die.

The poor child never thought of suicide. No sooner was the storm of anger passed than the tenderness and timidity of her nature returned, and she could do nothing but love and mourn. Her inexperience prevented her from imagining the consequences of her disappearance from the Manor; she foresaw none of the terrible details of alarm and distress and search that must ensue. "They will think I am dead," she said to herself, "and by-and-by they will forget me, and Maynard will get happy again, and love some one else."

She was roused from her absorption by a knock at the door. Mrs Bellamy was there. She had come by Mr Gilfil's request to see how Miss Sarti was, and to bring her some food and wine.

"You look sadly, my dear," said the old housekeeper, "an' you're all of a quake wi' cold. Get

you to bed, now do. Martha shall come an' warm it, an' light your fire. See now, here's some nice arrowroot, wi' a drop o' wine in it. Tek that, an' it'll warm you. I must go down again, for I can't awhile to stay. There's so many things to see to; an' Miss Assher's in hysterics constant, an' her maid's ill i' bed—a poor creachy thing—an' Mrs Sharp's wanted every minute. But I'll send Martha up, an' do you get ready to go to bed, there's a dear child, an' tek care o' yourself."

"Thank you, dear mammy," said Tina, kissing the little old woman's wrinkled cheek; "I shall eat the arrowroot, and don't trouble about me any more to-night. I shall do very well when Martha has lighted my fire. Tell Mr Gilfil I'm better. I shall go to bed by-and-by, so don't you come up again, because you may only disturb me."

"Well, well, tek care o' yourself, there's a good child, an' God send you may sleep."

Caterina took the arrowroot quite eagerly, while Martha was lighting her fire. She wanted to get strength for her journey, and she kept the plate of biscuits by her that she might put some in her pocket. Her whole mind was now bent on going away from the Manor, and she was thinking of all

the ways and means her little life's experience could suggest.

It was dusk now; she must wait till early dawn, for she was too timid to go away in the dark, but she must make her escape before any one was up in the house. There would be people watching Anthony in the library, but she could make her way out of a small door leading into the garden, against the drawing-room on the other side of the house.

She laid her cloak, bonnet, and veil ready; then she lighted a candle, opened her desk, and took out the broken portrait wrapped in paper. She folded it again in two little notes of Anthony's, written in pencil, and placed it in her bosom. There was the little china box, too—Dorcas's present, the pearl earrings, and a silk purse, with fifteen seven-shilling pieces in it, the presents Sir Christopher had made her on her birthday, ever since she had been at the Manor. Should she take the earrings and the seven-shilling pieces? She could not bear to part with them; it seemed as if they had some of Sir Christopher's love in them. She would like them to be buried with her. She fastened the little round earrings in her

ears, and put the purse with Dorcas's box in her pocket. She had another purse there, and she took it out to count her money, for she would never spend her seven-shilling pieces. She had a guinea and eight shillings; that would be plenty.

So now she sat down to wait for the morning, afraid to lay herself on the bed lest she should sleep too long. If she could but see Anthony once more, and kiss his cold forehead! But that could not be. She did not deserve it. She must go away from him, away from Sir Christopher, and Lady Cheverel, and Maynard, and everybody who had been kind to her, and thought her good while she was so wicked.

CHAPTER XVII.

SOME of Mrs Sharp's earliest thoughts, the next morning, were given to Caterina, whom she had not been able to visit the evening before, and whom, from a nearly equal mixture of affection and self-importance, she did not at all like resigning to Mrs Bellamy's care. At half-past eight o'clock she went up to Tina's room, bent on benevolent dictation as to doses and diet and lying in bed. But on opening the door she found the bed smooth and empty. Evidently it had not been slept in. What could this mean? Had she sat up all night, and was she gone out to walk? The poor thing's head might be touched by what had happened yesterday; it was such a shock—finding Captain Wybrow in that way; she was perhaps gone out of her mind. Mrs Sharp looked anxiously in the place where Tina kept her hat and cloak; they were not there, so that she had had at least the presence of mind to put them on.

Still the good woman felt greatly alarmed, and hastened away to tell Mr Gilfil, who, she knew, was in his study.

"Mr Gilfil," she said, as soon as she had closed the door behind her, "my mind misgives me dreadful about Miss Sarti."

"What is it?" said poor Maynard, with a horrible fear that Caterina had betrayed something about the dagger.

"She's not in her room, an' her bed's not been slept in this night, an' her hat an' cloak's gone."

For a minute or two Mr Gilfil was unable to speak. He felt sure the worst had come: Caterina had destroyed herself. The strong man suddenly looked so ill and helpless that Mrs Sharp began to be frightened at the effect of her abruptness.

"O, sir, I'm grieved to my heart to shock you so; but I didn't know who else to go to."

"No, no, you were quite right."

He gathered some strength from his very despair. It was all over, and he had nothing now to do but to suffer and to help the suffering. He went on in a firmer voice:

"Be sure not to breathe a word about it to any

one. We must not alarm Lady Cheverel and Sir Christopher. Miss Sarti may be only walking in the garden. She was terribly excited by what she saw yesterday, and perhaps was unable to lie down from restlessness. Just go quietly through the empty rooms, and see whether she is in the house. I will go and look for her in the grounds."

He went down, and, to avoid giving any alarm in the house, walked at once towards the Mosslands in search of Mr Bates, whom he met returning from his breakfast. To the gardener he confided his fear about Caterina, assigning as a reason for this fear the probability that the shock she had undergone yesterday had unhinged her mind, and begging him to send men in search of her through the gardens and park, and inquire if she had been seen at the lodges; and if she were not found or heard of in this way, to lose no time in dragging the waters round the Manor.

"God forbid it should be so, Bates, but we shall be the easier for having searched everywhere."

"Troost to mae, troost to mae, Mr Gilfil. Eh! but I'd ha' worked for day-wage all the rest o' my life, rether than anythin' should ha' happened to her."

The good gardener, in deep distress, strode away to the stables that he might send the grooms on horseback through the park.

Mr Gilfil's next thought was to search the Rookery: she might be haunting the scene of Captain Wybrow's death. He went hastily over every mound, looked round every large tree, and followed every winding of the walks. In reality he had little hope of finding her there; but the bare possibility fenced off for a time the fatal conviction that Caterina's body would be found in the water. When the Rookery had been searched in vain, he walked fast to the border of the little stream that bounded one side of the grounds. The stream was almost everywhere hidden among trees, and there was one place where it was broader and deeper than elsewhere—she would be more likely to come to that spot than to the pool. He hurried along with strained eyes, his imagination continually creating what he dreaded to see.

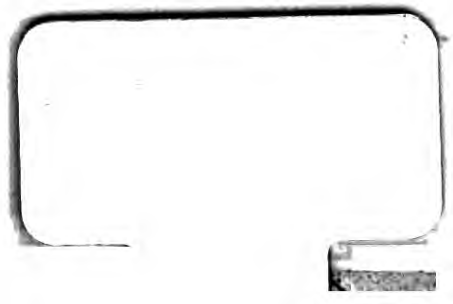
There is something white behind that overhanging bough. His knees tremble under him. He seems to see part of her dress caught on a branch, and her dear dead face upturned. O God,

give strength to thy creature, on whom thou hast laid this great agony! He is nearly up to the bough, and the white object is moving. It is a waterfowl, that spreads its wings and flies away screaming. He hardly knows whether it is a relief or a disappointment that she is not there. The conviction that she is dead presses its cold weight upon him none the less heavily.

As he reached the great pool in front of the Manor, he saw Mr Bates, with a group of men already there, preparing for the dreadful search which could only displace his vague despair by a definite horror; for the gardener, in his restless anxiety, had been unable to defer this until other means of search had proved vain. The pool was not now laughing with sparkles among the water-lilies. It looked black and cruel under the sombre sky, as if its cold depths held relentlessly all the murdered hope and joy of Maynard Gilfil's life.

Thoughts of the sad consequences for others as well as himself were crowding on his mind. The blinds and shutters were all closed in front of the Manor, and it was not likely that Sir Christopher would be aware of anything that was passing out-

side; but Mr Gilfil felt that Caterina's disappearance could not long be concealed from him. The coroner's inquest would be held shortly; she would be inquired for, and then it would be inevitable that the Baronet should know all.

END OF VOL. I.

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