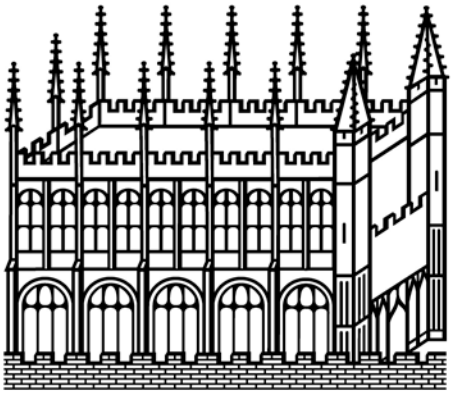

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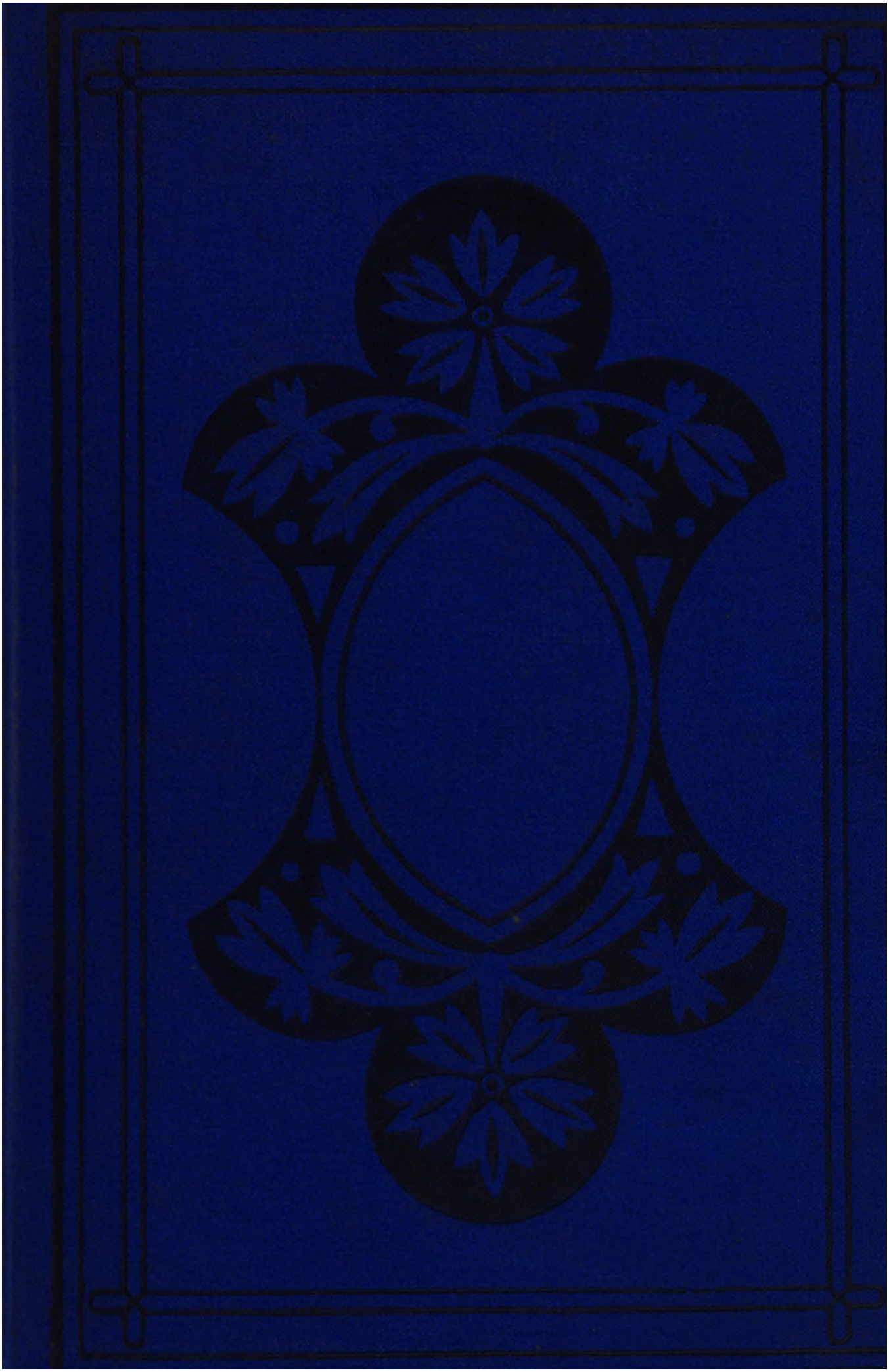

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A MARRIAGE OF CONSCIENCE.

A MARRIAGE OF CONSCIENCE.

A Novel.

BY

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In Three Volumes.

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A MARRIAGE OF CONSCIENCE.

CHAPTER I.

A FEW days having sufficed to exhaust the sight-seeing afforded by Palermo, though there is much to interest a traveller, both as to natural beauty and archæologic remains, in that remarkable city, Blomberg at the end of the week proposed to proceed on their tour of Sicily, to which Frank agreed readily, being anxious to reach Messina, and having a special desire to visit, *en route*, Catania and Taormina, places to which reference was made in the papers found amongst the fragments of his mother's possessions.

Our travellers had been furnished with good introductions to the English residents in Palermo

and were consequently received by them with that hospitality for which "Britishers" throughout the world are so justly renowned. But, in spite of the attractions of agreeable society, in something under a week, on a bright though wintry day, they left Palermo, at an early hour, in an open carriage, with the intention of making their way by moderate stages across the island to Girgenti, thence to Syracuse, Catania, and Messina.

Nothing could have been more exhilarating than the circumstances under which Blomberg and Frank started on their expedition, for though they left Palermo, where they had passed an agreeable time, with regret, it was without apprehension, as political disturbance had not as yet rendered travelling less enjoyable than it had hitherto been. No sense of insecurity had, since the Sardinian occupation, marred the social condition of the island, though many of the friends of order were disquieted by the attitude of the lower classes, who, as usual, misled by designing demagogues, only regarded the newly-proclaimed liberty as the commencement

of the exercise of unbounded selfwill and the absolute negation of all authority.

The dregs of society seemed to think it a matter of course that they were now to rise to a social grade equal to that of any of their fellow-citizens. Grave crimes were perpetrated with impunity; for who could with consistency punish evil-doers, when quite recently all the prisons of the island had been thrown open in the name of liberty, and the worst of criminals thus let loose on society?

Such was the condition of Sicily a few months after its occupation by the Piedmontese; but as yet there had been no actual insecurity to life or property in the case of travellers apprehended, nor was any violation of order anticipated; so that with light hearts, but with no display of wealth or importance, did the two young Englishmen set forth.

After a most agreeable day's journey they rested the first night at a tolerable inn, considering the accommodation to be found in the country they were traversing.

It is true that their sleeping apartment was next to the stable, and that the supper served to them would have been uneatable had they not supplemented it by stores brought with them by the forethought of the coachman and his assistants —two Sicilians hired for the journey by Frank, who had been careful to suppress the rank of his travelling companion, even at the hotel in Palermo, where they avoided the appearance of wealth or luxury as to either luggage or appointments, all valuables and superfluities having been left in Naples. They had but little money with them; for the owner of the hotel at Palermo, a Swiss, had given them a quiet hint as to the possible insecurity of the roads; though by far the majority of those to whom Frank had spoken of the proposed journey assured him that there was no danger to be apprehended on such an expedition whatever.

It was towards the close of the second day after quitting Palermo, that the weather having become chilly and dull, Frank, apprehending a fall of rain, was somewhat surprised at the slow

pace at which their coachman travelled, though there were no formidable hills to ascend to account for the tiresome rate at which the horses crawled along; each mile being done more slowly than the previous one, the horses showing no sign of fatigue as they had done on the day before, during which they had traversed some very steep inclines, and in one or two cases surmounted very stiff bits of road.

The scenery had been very fine, and the inspection of the natural beauties of the road, along which they had halted once or twice to visit hot sulphur-springs and other volcanic characteristics, had made this second day's journey especially interesting. As the day grew to a close, on which our travellers were expecting to reach Girgenti before nightfall, Frank, uneasy at the indications of impending rain, with no signs of the approach to any village or even habitations apparent, urged the driver more than once to increase his speed, but received for reply always some evasion, such as, the horses being tired from the previous day's journey; and as one of them had cast a shoe, they

must find a forge; they would reach Girgenti in twenty-four hours—the mode of reckoning time then still in use among Sicilians.

As they advanced along a bit of rugged road, the coachman suddenly pulled up, got down from his box, and invited Frank and his companion to alight.

"Why?" asked Frank.

"Because the road is bad, and the springs of the carriage are weak," replied the man.

"How much farther to the blacksmith?" asked Frank.

"Only a few steps," was the answer.

On hearing this Frank and Blomberg readily alighted, and advanced at a quick pace along the road a short distance ahead of the carriage, expecting in a few minutes to reach the promised shelter.

At a sudden turn of the path they encountered a party of three or four men, dressed in the ordinary costume of country people, each having a gun over his shoulder, who, having saluted the travellers politely, were apparently about to pass. At that moment the sound of wheels caused Frank to turn

his head just in time to see their carriage driven away at a violent rate in the opposite direction to that by which they had come.

Frank shouted to the driver to stop, and was about to set off in pursuit, when his progress was arrested by one of the men they had just met, who in a courteous but determined tone requested a few words with him.

"Do you mean to attempt to stop us?" asked Frank, unpleasantly impressed by the man's manner.

"It is my painful duty," was the reply of the man, "to request you to consider yourself my prisoner."

"What is your object? Do you demand money?" asked Frank.

"If your excellency will please to give us some; we are poor men."

"Don't send the carriage away then," said Frank. "I have no money about me."

"Oh, he is afraid to stop," replied the man; "he knows we are not to be trifled with."

"What do you want?" asked Frank, who alone was spokesman, Blomberg not being sufficiently acquainted with the language to understand the position of affairs, for so quiet and courteous was the demeanour of the assailants, that, in spite of their rough exteriors, and the fact of each one of them carrying a gun, it did not occur to him that they could possibly be brigands. He inquired of his companion what they meant; but for a moment or two did not receive any reply, Frank being lost in thought as how to act for the best.

The robber-in-chief, however, soon roused him by saying, still very politely:

"I must trouble your excellency to come with me. I have a horse close at hand for you, and your servant must get up behind one of my men."

As quick as thought Frank, seeing the mistake his new acquaintance had made, replied:

"My servant had better go back for the money you require, for I am almost penniless, and I promise I will remain with you till he returns. I assure you," he continued, "I have no money with me,

nor valuables, though I have orders for money at Girgenti; but between my servant and myself we have only a few francs."

By this time Blomberg, who had seated himself by the roadside, now rose, and addressing Frank in an impatient tone, said:

"I suppose that fellow will be gone some time to get a shoe put on. What do these fellows want?"

"Silence!" said Frank, in an authoritative tone. Blomberg, though much surprised, made no reply, as Frank, in an undertone, proceeded to acquaint him with the facts of the situation, and begged him to evince neither surprise nor indignation at anything that might take place. "Only obey me," he added in a loud tone.

Then turning to the man who had at first addressed him he proceeded to inquire what was demanded of him.

"Oh sir," he replied, "we are poor men. You English are so rich, especially a great lord like you."

"How do you know I am a great lord?" asked Frank.

"Because you look like one," said the man; "and one of my companions saw you on board the steamer from Naples, and heard you were a nobleman."

"Well," said Frank, "how much do you expect to get from me?"

"Ah, my lord! what are tens of thousands to you? You are English, you love liberty, and will help the sacred cause in Italy as other of your noble countrymen have done."

Frank smiled inwardly at this kind of champion of oppressed nationality, but made no reply for a few minutes, and then said: "I can give you no money; I have none with me, though I have a letter of credit," while, as he spoke, he held out for the inspection of his captor his pocket-book, containing an order for fifty or a hundred pounds on a merchant at Girgenti. "I have only this trifle besides," he added, at the same time displaying the contents of his

pocket, consisting of a few francs and a couple of napoleons.

"We cannot wait here all night," said the man. "It is getting dark, and the rain is coming on; so we must find shelter, and we have a long ride before we can get it. By-the-bye," he added, "I may as well borrow your watch; no doubt it keeps better time than mine."

"Take it," said Frank, as he handed over his watch and chain; "and as to money, let my servant go back to Palermo and fetch the amount I have promised to give you, for which I will give a written order."

"Who would pay such an order?" asked the man.

"Why the bankers in Palermo, or at Girgenti. I will write for a hundred pounds."

"A hundred pounds!" exclaimed the fellow. "Ten thousand, at least!" he added.

"I cannot give an order for such an amount," said Frank, calmly, though resolutely.

"Then, to horse," said the fellow. "Come

along, my men." With these words they walked on either side of their captives to a turn in the road, where, in a group, some horses were tied.

"Do not attempt to resist," said Frank to Blomberg. "It is useless."

"So I suppose," replied his friend. "We left the revolvers in the carriage."

"So much the better," thought Frank, as he prepared to mount the horse indicated to him by the man who had originally addressed him, and who was evidently the leader of the party.

Blomberg at first evinced reluctance to get up behind a dirty-looking fellow, and ride in Sicilian fashion; but after some little parley, and the promise of a few francs, the fellow gave up his horse to the supposed servant, and proceeded to mount behind one of his companions.

All this being accomplished in a very short time, they were about to start, when Frank, fearing the effect of the chill of night on Blomberg, and also from the appearance of the sky anticipating heavy rain, asked if he could not have his cloak,

which had been left in the carriage, "for I imagine," said he, "the coachman has not gone far."

"Who knows how to get it?" asked the captain of the band. "The coachman would not give it up."

"Send my servant back for it with one of your men."

"What, to be arrested?"

"No fear of that," said Frank; "the coachman, no doubt, knows you."

"Not a bit of it," was the reply; "he heard we were out, and that is why he turned back and left you."

"Where is he gone, do you think?" asked Frank.

"Oh, to a *fondaco* three miles from this; but there is a guard-house close by it, and no doubt an alarm has been given, so we dare not send."

"Let my servant have a horse, and he shall go alone and return."

"No, no," cried the man; "to horse, I say."

It was in vain to say more, for Frank's Italian, though he spoke it well, did not enable

him to argue a point with a Sicilian, who, in fact, from the diversity between the languages, only partly understood his meaning.

Frank and Blomberg rode on in silence for a couple of hours, being designedly kept apart by their companions. Their way lay through hilly paths and woods, along which they dragged, till they reached a miserable place, the ruins of an old mill, where there was a general halt: and it was evident the gang proposed to pass the night under such shelter as this place could afford, which was but slight, the roof being off in many parts, and none of it by any means proof against the weather, which was hourly becoming more tempestuous, though happily the rain kept off, the only sheltered places in the building being nooks in the wall; one of which Frank was invited by his captors to occupy, whilst Blomberg was allowed to appropriate another at as great a distance as possible from his companion.

Half perished, and nearly starved, our travellers passed the night, and it was with no

small relief that Frank, under a painful apprehension as to Blomberg's health suffering from cold and exposure, saw daylight return, and his companions engaged in making a fire, by which they prepared coffee, a proceeding from which they had been deterred during the night for fear the light might attract attention.

Frank could understand but little that was said among the gang, as they spoke a Sicilian dialect, but, catching a word now and then, was able to make out that they were anxious to avoid a military force, as to the whereabouts of which they were uncertain. Shortly after dawn the rain that had so long threatened began to pour down, and lasted so violently during the whole of the forenoon that the party remained weather-bound, with no other provision than a little bread and a few dried olives, which they shared with their prisoners.

Frank's anxiety on Blomberg's account was increasing every hour, when he was, in a measure, relieved by the captain addressing to him a proposal that he should give a bond for a large amount, and

send his servant on to Girgenti for all the money that the circular note could procure.

"I cannot promise to give you ten thousand pounds," said Frank; "I am not rich enough."

"Ah, bah! that will not do. We Sicilians cannot be easily made fools of. You can pay any sum. Will you sign this paper?" he added, producing a document which Frank saw at a glance would not be binding either in honour, conscience, or law. He did not, however, raise any objection on either score, but said:

"I will give you an order for one hundred pounds on Girgenti, and send it there by my servant, who will either return or hand the money over to anyone you may send with him, and I will remain with you till the messenger returns; and as to this paper," he added, "we will talk about it by-and-by."

The man seemed to hesitate, and at last consented to do as Frank had suggested; but now a new difficulty arose. Blomberg would not consent to leave Frank.

"Do you go, my dear fellow," he said, "and I will remain."

"I implore you to do as I ask," said Frank, speaking in a peremptory tone, as though addressing an inferior. "I can do better here than you," he added. "By going you will help my plans for escaping. One of us might get away from these rascals when it would be impossible for both to do so."

"Now," said the leader of the band, "your servant must start at once. We will send someone with him to receive the money. It is only three hours from this to Girgenti. We do not expect him to return, but you will give us your word of honour that he will neither betray us nor in any way attempt your rescue. Any such proceeding would cost you your life."

"I promise you," said Frank, "that he will say nothing to anybody as to the circumstances under which he is getting the money, or breathe a word of what has happened to us; and I promise to remain with you quietly till the money arrives."

"Can you trust him?"

"Yes," said Frank, "for I shall tell him that my life depends on his silence."

The man nodded in assent to this view of the case, and as Frank was taking leave of Blomberg in a way suitable to their supposed relative position, more than one of the band indulged in pantomimic action calculated to convey to Blomberg the dangerous position in which he was leaving his supposed master; it having needed all Frank's powers of persuasion to induce his fellow-traveller to accept the position assigned him, and to hurry his departure, as he feared the robbers might suspect the stratagem that was being employed, therefore it was with no small relief that he saw him depart. It was not that Blomberg's appearance was so inferior as to convey the idea of his being a servant, as that luckily the brigands had considered it to be out of all reason that a *Milord Inglese* should travel without a befitting attendant.

The report of an English nobleman having come across from Naples had been circulated in Palermo,

as some said on a visit of political significance, it being a fixed idea with many Sicilians that the invasion of Sicily by the agents of the King of Sardinia had been accomplished with the concurrence and assistance of the English Government, a view to which the presence of an English man-of-war off Marsala, at the time of Garibaldi's landing, had given much appearance of truth.

It was probably due to the view of Frank's political importance that he was enabled to negotiate with his captors as to the question of ransom; but the demand for the signing of the bond was not renewed, as within a few hours of the departure of Blomberg the brigands, alarmed at the supposed approach of an armed force, betook themselves to flight with increased haste, carrying Frank with them.

We must now accompany Blomberg, who, mounted on a tolerable mule, and accompanied by a lad on foot, proceeded at a slow pace and with a heavy heart on his road to Girgenti, fully convinced that, by having acquiesced in this

arrangement, he was best consulting the safety of his friend. He had ridden on some time along the public road, which had been gained soon after leaving the brigands, when his attention was called to a piece of paper which his guide handed to him. It was a note written by Frank to the following effect:

"Your companion will not go into the town with you, but will await your return with the money and the mule at a spot which he will indicate to you."

Blomberg stopped his mule to read this communication, and having done so looked round for his companion, and saw him seated by the roadside. Conversation between them was out of the question, neither understanding a word of the language spoken by the other. The Sicilian soon indicated that they had reached the spot where he was to wait, and pointed out the road by which Girgenti was to be reached, and where within half an hour

Blomberg found himself, and without difficulty reached the residence of the banker. It was somewhat late for business matters, but under the circumstances Blomberg at once applied for and got the necessary funds, with which he was about to hurry away when he was stopped by the banker, a very pleasant-mannered Englishman, who inquired whether he had heard of some travellers having been captured by brigands. Blomberg at once confided, under promise of silence on the part of the banker, who promised secrecy, being fully sensible as to the necessity of exercising extreme discretion under the circumstances, the real position of affairs, and was relieved to hear him say:

"I do not suppose your friend to be in any danger as to his life, though of course one cannot rely on the humanity any more than on the discretion of these gentlemen of the road."

"I trust there may be no attempt made to rescue him by force," said Blomberg; "as any such proceeding would, I am sure, endanger his life. I will engage to pay whatever sum may be

demanded to secure his safety," he continued, "and can give you any guarantee you may require for the money you advance, however large the amount."

"There are bodies of soldiers patrolling the country," replied the banker; "and it is just possible that they may fall in with your captors. But," he added, "everything is so disorganised, and the Government so desirous of conciliating the people, that I doubt any very active measures being taken against these rascals."

"Shall I send a larger sum of money by this messenger?" asked Blomberg.

"By no means," was the reply; "for if you appear rich these rascals will demand something enormous; so pay this at once; let matters rest as they are for a day or so, when we shall hear more of them."

"I wonder where I shall find that young fellow," thought Blomberg, as he proceeded to remount the mule, without taking rest or refreshment, and make his way to the rendezvous appointed with his late

companion. As he approached the spot he saw no sign of the lad, and the only living creature visible being an old woman, who, half seated on a bank, was engaged in spinning flax. She took no notice of the stranger as he passed and repassed her several times, impatiently awaiting the arrival of darkness and the person he desired to see, and of whose approach there was no sign even after night-fall had passed a full half-hour, and by this time it was dark. The old woman hobbled up to him, and said something quite unintelligible, and held out a bit of paper, the writing on which the darkness prevented Blomberg from being able to decipher; so, as he thought by a lucky inspiration, he struck a fusee, and saw again Frank's writing—an order to give the money to bearer. He had hardly time to glance at it when the old woman, uttering a low cry, puffed out the match, and held out her hand in frantic eagerness; but ere Blomberg could give her the money, she was gone, leaving him in possession not only of the cash, but the mule, which he did not attempt to remount, but, leading it to the side

of the road where there was running water, let the tired creature drink.

At that moment the sound of the tramp of horses broke on his ear, and in a very short time after he found himself arrested by a body of mounted soldiers. It was not difficult for him to explain to one of the party, a Piedmontese, that he was a traveller overtaken by night and going to Girgenti. This explanation did not satisfy the captors, who insisted on his remounting the mule, and accompanying them to the town he had just quitted. He elicited from the commander of the party that they were a party of carabineers acting as a military patrol who had been in search of brigands, but without success. He also discovered that it was the lighting of his fusee that had attracted their attention to the spot where they had found him, a circumstance which explained the sudden flight of the old woman shortly after reaching Girgenti; and, owing to the intervention of the banker, Blomberg was soon at liberty, though he had some little difficulty in evading the questions

of the authorities, so as to observe the promise he had made not to betray those who still held the precious life of his fellow-traveller in their hands.

Worn out in body and mind he at length reached the hotel, and tried in vain to get refreshment and rest. His position was most trying, and the irritation caused by it threw him into a fever, his sufferings being much aggravated by the return of a cough that had troubled him from time to time during the last few months, and which for the two following days confined him to his room with a feverish attack. The cough becoming much worse, especially at night, was at times so violent and attended by such alarming symptoms, that at the suggestion of the banker he was induced to seek the advice of an English physician, who had arrived a few hours before, and was about to proceed by steamer to Syracuse. Immediately on seeing the state of the patient, the doctor ordered some stringent measures to be adopted, and so anxious was he respecting the case, though unaware of the rank of the patient, that he postponed his journey in order to attend him.

He was not long in discovering that mental anxiety was aggravating Blomberg's physical suffering, and having elicited from him the cause of it, he at once consulted with the banker how it would be possible to take steps for the release of Frank, and at the same time not render his position with the brigands more perilous than they had every reason to fear it might actually be. Feeling that it would be useless to increase the hue and cry already raised, both banker and physician were fairly puzzled how to act.

In this difficulty they were much assisted by the arrival at the hotel of an English traveller, an unfrocked monk, who had been one of a community till lately in Messina, but which had been, under the Sardinian rule, broken up and dispersed. His knowledge of the country and people greatly assisted matters. He was an Irishman by birth, and having heard the whole story of the brigandage from Blomberg, and especially all the details of the payment of the money to the old woman, he entered with all the warmth of his national character into

the affair, and at once expressed his determination to take active though quiet measures for Frank's release.

"Offer to pay any amount," said Blomberg in an excited tone.

"I will not take any steps whatever," replied the monk, "unless you will promise me to calm yourself; why you are as excitable as one of my countrymen," he added with a smile.

"I will promise to do anything you may order if you will only secure the safety of my dearest friend, dear to me as any brother."

"You really must be more calm," interposed the doctor; "you are much better to-day, so much so as to enable me to continue my journey without any apprehension with regard to you. I am now going on to Syracuse, where I shall be for some time, and leave you with the utmost confidence to the care of your kind clerical friend."

Declining to accept fee or reward, the doctor took his leave, while Blomberg felt the greatest comfort and confidence in the assurance that the

worthy monk, Father Ignatius, would remain with him till such time as Frank should rejoin him.

For the next day and night did Blomberg's anxiety respecting Frank continue, in spite of the comforting assurances of the monk that he would soon return in perfect safety.

"I am sure," said he, "they will not kill him, or even ill-treat him."

"But will they not be enraged at the loss of the money I was to have sent?"

"They will know that you had no hand in their having lost it, and these people are not vindictive unless goaded to madness."

In wearisome expectation did another day pass without news of Frank, though intelligence had been received of a large band of brigands having been dispersed, if not captured, at no great distance from Girgenti.

CHAPTER II.

The consciousness that his companion was safe enabled Frank to support any amount of fatigue or privation, and he accompanied his captors almost cheerfully. He had no opportunity of closely observing his companions, as they were all muffled up, and desirous of concealing their features, with the exception of a young fellow by whom he was closely guarded, and whose manner and bearing gave evidence of his being superior to his companions. Encouraged by his polite deportment, Frank offered him the loan of a pipe, he having fortunately provided himself with a couple and a tolerable supply of tobacco. This civility was readily accepted and duly appreciated, and led to a

better understanding between the prisoner and his guard.

There must be decidedly some mystic influence in a pipe, that medium of peace and good fellowship between man and man, establishing, as it does, better feeling among the most hostile of savage tribes, and enhan cing the social enjoyment of civilised society. Nothing reconciles a man so fully and easily to both himself and his fellow-man as a few whiffs of tobacco, that great soother of all the unruly passions that distract the human breast. In all the varying circumstances of life, a pipe is man's chief consolation and help. In joy and in sorrow, in love and hatred alike, does it enable mortal man to bear with equanimity the ebb and flow of fortune. It is true that the power to enjoy smoking is not attained without a degree of suffering, as many a schoolboy can testify to his cost. Tobacco is a wild powerful creature, not to be captured and reduced to servitude without a struggle; but the mastery over it once gained, "the noxious weed" becomes the most faithful

of counsellors, the most subservient and devoted of slaves, the most luxurious of consolers, the best of peace-makers, since it is impossible that protracted enmity can exist between two men who have smoked a pipe or two together. This proved true in the case of Frank and his companion; for on the evening of the second day of his captivity it was that he shared with his companion the calumet of peace; and from that time a better feeling sprang up between them. They smoked at first for some time in silence, till at length the young Sicilian commenced a conversation by remarking that his companion seemed very tired; and on Frank admitting such to be the case, he said:

"Ah! you are not an English sportsman, then, for they bear much fatigue. I have known them," he continued, "come over here from Malta to shoot snipe; and they soon tire us out."

"They do not ride on day and night, as I have done," said Frank, "for the last forty-eight hours, with little or no food or drink. When shall we get any rest?" he asked.

"Who knows?" said the young man. "I hope to-night."

"What has induced you to take to such a life as this?" inquired Frank, emboldened in asking questions by his companion's style and bearing.

"Revenge!" was the reply.

"On whom?" asked Frank.

"The man who deprived me of the one being for whom alone I lived; but I am revenged, and I am happy, at least, so far as he is concerned, for he is dead."

"You are young," observed Frank, "to have endured so great a wrong as to call for deadly vengeance on your adversary."

"Young! I am but eighteen, yet old enough to love to desperation, and to kill the man who supplanted me. Yes, he is dead, and so is she."

"You surely did not kill a girl you loved?" said Frank.

"No, no; mother of me!" exclaimed the Sicilian. "'Twas he, the carrion, that killed her, and I avenged her and myself. I will tell you," he continued,

"when we halt, if you care to know the story of the miserable young fellow who talks to you."

"I should indeed be interested to hear the particulars of so sad an affair," replied Frank.

"I will tell you later on. They have passed the word that we are going to stop very shortly; and when you are rested we can talk."

The statement respecting the promised rest proved correct, for in a very short time a halt was made at the entrance of a cavern in a mountainous pass, wherein the whole party proceeded to bivouac, as though it were a place to which they were accustomed. With a saddle for a pillow did Frank, after a hasty and very limited snack, compose himself to sleep, nor did he wake till broad daylight was streaming in at the mouth of the cave. Rousing himself, he made his way through his still sleeping companions to the aperture, where he found his friend of the night before stationed as sentinel.

"Can I get a wash anywhere about?" asked Frank.

"No," replied the man; "there is only a little mountain stream close at hand, just enough water to drink from."

"May I go to it?" asked Frank.

"Yes," was the reply. "It is close at hand. Go."

Availing himself of this permission, Frank hastened to a fissure in the rock, whence there was enough water flowing to enable him, not only to drink, but to wash his face and hands; and having performed this apology for ablutions, of which he had been deprived for a couple of days, he returned to his companion, and proceeded to share with him the remains of his nearly exhausted stock of tobacco. As they smoked the young Sicilian resumed of his own accord the subject of their over-night conversation.

"You said you would like to know why I am here. I will tell you. I am the son of a man of good family at Termini, where I loved a young girl —Marianina. I loved her before I had ever spoken to her, and I loved her although I knew she was betrothed to another."

"Did she love you?" asked Frank.

"Does the flower love the sun?" was the reply. "We could not meet, for she was closely watched; but I never left the spot where I could see her, and there I stood gazing at her, as she sat in a window hour after hour."

Frank thought this must be a somewhat monotonous and tame style of love-making, though he was aware that it was the custom of the country for love-sick youths and maidens thus to carry on what we should term a flirtation.

"I loved her," continued the youth, "and at last, in desperation, I sought her father and disclosed to him my passion. He bade me abandon all hope of marrying his daughter, 'who will,' he said, 'within a week, become the wife of my esteemed friend and colleague the Baron Dolcibuono.' 'He is older than yourself,' I exclaimed. 'What does that matter?' he replied; 'he is rich; you have nothing. Go, we waste time.' I left the house in despair. I repaired to my post of observation and saw my angel at the window, and signalled to

her my desperation. She wept. I watched there for three days. I sent her messages as to my unutterable love through an old woman who had access to the house. On the third day after my interview with her father, I saw Marianina for the last time. She held up a bridal wreath and veil; she kissed her hand to me, and signified by the expression of her eyes that she loved me and me alone, and then I saw her no more. I watched her father's house in vain. I did not see her leave it. She must have been taken away by night to Palermo, where she was married."

"You had never corresponded with her then?" asked Frank.

"Never," was the reply. "I sent her messages and flowers through that same old woman."

"Had you never any more acquaintance with the young lady except from the distance of the window?" asked Frank.

"I saw her at church, and met her once at a ball during Carnival. I did not dance with her, but was her *vis-à-vis*."

"And yet you loved her so desperately," remarked Frank, half amused at the notion of such a courtship.

"Loved her! I was desperate. So much so that I had an attack of fever when I heard she was married," continued the Sicilian; "and as soon as I was convalescent I hurried to Palermo in order to see her. I managed to meet her once or twice, but she was always accompanied by her husband or a *gouvernante*. I saw by the glance she gave me when we met that she loved me still. I fell in with her husband and tried to quarrel with him, but he laughed at me. I should have done something desperate but for my mother, who followed me to Palermo, and with many tears besought me to return home with her, as she was now a widow. I did as she wished me. I went back to Termini and endeavoured to forget Marianina, but in vain. I hoped that she might yet be mine some day, and thus indulging in day-dreams I passed some months at home when the news reached me that my soul's idol was dead. I rushed as one distracted to

Palermo, to find that the sad news was too true. Yes, she was dead, and, as they told me, dead of a broken heart. She had led a life of misery with her husband; he was jealous of her and had ill-treated her. As my informant, an old school-fellow, was telling me this, the subject of our conversation came in view, for we were seated in the public garden. I at once rose, and, rushing to him, loaded him with reproaches and abuse. He retorted by calling me the vilest names, and aspersed the memory of my beloved. 'Villain and liar!' I exclaimed, 'she was as pure as the angels with whom she is now a companion, whilst you are only fitting yourself for your own home, the abode of the father of lies.'

"He raised his cane to strike me. Maddened with grief and fury, I sprang at his accursed throat, and threw him backwards with my utmost force. As he fell the base of a marble vase caught the back of his head, and he lay senseless at my feet. Had I been armed I am sure I should have killed him on the spot, but my companion interposed, and

hurried me from the spot, as two gendarmes who had witnessed the conflict hastened to assist the prostrate baron.

"I accompanied my friend to his house, a few miles in the country, where, in the course of the evening, a party of police came to arrest me, as the baron had died within an hour of our encounter. I managed to escape, and made my way to the mountains, where eventually I joined these men. As I heard there was a reward offered for me, I knew well what justice I—being a Bourbonist—should get from our accursed Sardinian rulers, the baron having been a great partisan of '*Il Re Galantuomo*,' who had bought his adherence by very handsome considerations."

"But, surely," observed Frank, "they could not, under such circumstances, consider you in the light of a murderer?"

"Perhaps not," replied the Sicilian; "but I know what my fate would be. Should I be arrested they would consign me to prison, where I should be detained perhaps for years without being brought

to trial, as is the case with hundreds of those who, being known to be friendly to the fallen dynasty, are under arrest at the present time. But I see our party waking up; we shall proceed on our journey very shortly. I do not ride with you to-day; but courage, my handsome young fellow, we shall meet again, and you have found a friend."

"I hope, when we see each other again," said Frank, "it will be under better circumstances."

As he spoke the young fellow rose from his seat and rejoined the others, and in a short time the whole band was again in the saddle, pursuing a journey that seemed as interminable as it was tortuous. They halted from time to time, but Frank missed his communicative companion, and was apprehensive that he had left the party—a circumstance he would have much regretted, as he felt that he had made a friend.

In the course of the time that they halted that night, and during the journey of the following day, Frank sought in vain the commanding figure and handsome face of the proscribed Sicilian, though

he was sensible of receiving better treatment in various small matters at the hands of his captors. The weather was very bad, and the country they traversed was away from the main-road, the mountain-paths by which they travelled being rendered almost impassable by reason of the incessant wet, and shelter of any kind being rarely met with, even during the night.

During the next two days after Blomberg's departure Frank was carried on, by short and slow journeys, through thickly-wooded mountain-passes—scenery which, under other circumstances, would have been highly enjoyable, but which, as he was, the prisoner found tedious and dreary. At times the band halted, apparently to debate as to their route and future proceedings, on which occasions they always withdrew to such a distance as to prevent the possibility of their prisoner overhearing the subject of their consultations, a precaution quite unnecessary, as he scarcely understood a word of the language or dialect in which they conversed.

Frank was especially anxious to learn whether

the money from Girgenti had been obtained; at least he put that question to the leader of the party, his real anxiety being to know that Blomberg was safe. He could get no answer to his questions, and lived in constant dread that his friend would place himself in danger in order to obtain his release.

At the end of the second day after Blomberg had left him there was a protracted halt of the party, and Frank felt convinced that the animated discussion carried on by his companions had reference to himself. His suspense on this head was soon relieved when a rough-looking fellow, whom Frank had not before noticed, approached the spot where he was sitting, and said, "You die in half an hour!"

Frank could not have believed it possible that he would have received such a communication with so much composure. He merely said, "Why?"

"We are betrayed by your servant, and surrounded by soldiers, so be ready to meet death."

Frank looked at the stalwart speaker, who had

a formidable knife in the sash he wore twisted many times round his waist. "I hope," he said, "you will shoot me."

"No, no; that would make a noise. I shall stab you."

Frank rose from his seat, and said: "If this is your resolve, let me prepare for death."

The man nodded assent, and Frank at once knelt down, and having made the sign of the cross, proceeded to collect his thoughts and fix them on eternity.

In a few minutes he heard a footstep approaching, and on looking up, expecting to behold his executioner, was surprised to see an individual by his side whom he had not before observed among the band, and who looked at him with an expression of good-will.

"Come this way," said the stranger, "and go into this cave," he added, pointing to a narrow fissure in the mountain-side.

Frank at once obeyed, and found himself in a very limited cavity, at the end of which there was

a sort of seat, on which Frank, utterly worn out, sank down, and, in spite of his critical position, fell fast asleep.

How long he had slept he was unable to conjecture, as, with a start, he awoke, with the thought of impending death before his eyes. He at once directed his thoughts to preparation for death, astonished to think that he could have slept under the circumstances. He judged that the night was young, as it was still dark, and he could hear no sound from without; and so he waited and watched from hour to hour, expecting, as daylight returned, that every minute he would be summoned to execution, the more so as he could hear both men and horses moving about.

"They no doubt mean to kill me and leave my body here," he thought; "and yet that man looked at me so kindly, as he ordered me in here, that I began to think I had found a friend. I will not buoy myself up with false hopes. I wish I could write a few lines."

With this thought, the desire for life seemed

to return with intense force, nor could he put away the sad and the painful considerations that crowded on his mind. With a strong effort of the will, he resolved to dismiss them, and devote his time exclusively to the affairs of his soul, as he heard voices close to the entrance of his prison.

"He is a Christian," said one of the band, in Italian. "It is a pity to kill him so young; and he may be able to help us."

"Have we not sworn to perish together?" was the reply; "and do we not owe our destruction to the treachery of the man he called his servant?"

The person thus addressed paused for a minute or two, and then said:

"When we are attacked, why not put him in front, and let the Piedmontese shoot him with us?"

"Bah!" was the reply; and then no more was said.

Frank, meanwhile, who had remained perfectly calm and collected, rose from his knees, and

advanced to meet his death, still more fully resolved to banish all worldly thoughts, and devote the last few moments of existence to his eternal welfare. The sentence of death passed on him was evidently not to be carried out at once, and so the day wore away, and still the condemned lived on, having had some food placed within the cave by an unseen individual.

A short time before sunset a couple of the robbers entered the prison, and approaching Frank, bound his arms tightly with a cord.

Frank felt his last moment had arrived. "They must intend to shoot me," he thought, as he quietly submitted to be bound, though he shuddered slightly, not from fear of death, but as the idea of being stabbed crossed his mind. No sooner, however, were his arms secured, than he was led out, not, as he imagined he was about to be, to the place of execution, but to the side of a horse, on which his guards having placed him, proceeded to follow their companions, who were slowly trotting away some little distance ahead.

For a greater part of the ensuing night did the band travel on, and, after a short rest, continued their weary march on the day ensuing, through the wildest mountain passes, and by rocky circuitous routes, till Frank was so utterly exhausted as to be hardly able to sit on his horse. So prostrated was he that his guards, feeling that he could not escape, relaxed the bonds from his arms. This afforded him some relief, though he had become quite indifferent to suffering, and even the prospect of death, however near it might be, gave him little or no concern. His mind, in spite of himself, would recur to mundane matters. He thought of Adèle, and the grief his fate would cause her, though he rejoiced above all, in spite of his own position, at Blomberg having escaped. He was at times terribly apprehensive as to the effect all the late events would have on his friend's health. In the dead of the night a rest of several hours recurred, which had the effect of so far recruiting our hero that he felt equal to continued exertion, the more so as he found a tolerable

supply of bread and olives, together with some wine and water, had been placed near him, within a sort of hut, to which he was consigned. He could not discover, among any of the band, the youth with whom he had held the conversation the day before, though he was sensible of being treated, in all respects, with more kindness and consideration than he had been heretofore. Before dawn the following day did the band continue their journey, halting only for a short time at long intervals, till all the party seemed overcome with fatigue and privation; Frank suffering much both morally and physically; for, in spite of fatigue, his anxiety as to Blomberg's health disquieted him so much that he hardly felt the want of food and rest. He would have perished with cold during the nights but that one of his companions, a middle-aged man, lent him a thick though tattered cloak. He had observed that this same individual had from time to time taken some interest in him, and it was on the third night after his capture that, as he rode on half asleep, he was

surprised to hear himself addressed by an individual, who spoke in an undertone, as he inquired, "Where are you going?"

"To Messina," replied Frank, thinking it was his former friend who addressed him; but, much to his disappointment, he found the speaker to be a much older man, who said:

"Do not fear; they shall not hurt you. You will go by Taormina," he added.

"Yes," said Frank; "but who are you?"

"No matter; go to Taormina and stop there; you shall hear news." With these words the speaker fell back, and the ride was continued in perfect silence for some time, till the wretched beasts on which the party were mounted gave such evidence of increasing exhaustion that rendered a longer halt than they had hitherto made absolutely necessary.

It was during one of the brief periods of rest that the mysterious stranger had first addressed Frank, and now, as they were with the utmost difficulty pressing forward at a slow pace, he again came up to his side and said, "Do not be afraid.

You shall soon be free; but do not attempt to escape till I tell you."

"I am not in the least afraid," replied Frank, in a somewhat haughty tone; "and I am not going to break my word."

"Ah!" exclaimed the man, "I know you are not."

Any further conversation was prevented by the halt of the party, and Frank, utterly exhausted, almost falling out of his saddle, made his way to where the grateful sound of water flowing broke upon his ear. It was a rough kind of fountain, at which both men and horses were eagerly drinking, and into which Frank at once proceeded to plunge his neck and arms—a proceeding which as much astonished his companions as it refreshed him. He next devoured with avidity a piece of bread given him by the same individual who had suggested the idea of flight.

Frank watched the proceedings of the party with the deepest interest, though almost overpowered by sleep, and was relieved to see them evidently preparing for a protracted halt.

The mules and horses were unsaddled, and their riders wrapped themselves in their cloaks and composed themselves to sleep; and our traveller, no longer able to combat the sense of drowsiness which overpowered him, was soon among the soundest of the sleepers. How long he slept he knew not, but on waking was surprised to find the sun shining. He sat up, looked round for his companions—men, horses, all were gone; and, what was more extraordinary, the fountain and its surroundings, near which they had halted, had also vanished, and he found himself lying alone at the foot of a steep declivity, which was covered with a dense grove of olive-trees. Hardly awake, he stared about him for a little time amazed, but at length rising slowly, and having looked around carefully, expecting to see his companions close at hand, was surprised to find no trace of them discoverable.

"They must have left me behind," he said; "but what could have been their motive? Perhaps they are not far off, and are lying in ambush to fire

at me if I should try to escape;" and as these thoughts crossed his mind he rose and moved cautiously among the thickly-planted trees. As he pursued his way, finding no one near, he came to the conclusion that he was at liberty. "Yes," thought he, "that man must have been instrumental in my deliverance. I think I should know him again, although I could not see his face and he spoke in so low a tone that I could not recognise his voice. I shall see him, I suppose, at Taormina, if I ever get there, for I stand a fair chance of dying of hunger in this wilderness. Well, at any rate, I'll make an effort for life."

Occupied with such thoughts, and still wondering to find himself at liberty, he walked slowly on through the wood, and was not a little surprised to reach, in a very short time, what seemed a high road.

Looking back at the trees from which he had emerged, he saw that they were part of a thick plantation that grew on the side of a very steep incline.

"I must have been travelling along that ridge," thought Frank; "but how did I get down, I wonder?"

As the mystery of his escape was not likely to be solved, nor his hunger appeased, under existing circumstances, Frank began to consider how it would be possible for him to make his way to some town or village. A fine open country la before him, but not a trace of a living being or human habitation was discernible. The sun was rapidly declining; and as he stood undecided as to which way he should turn, the sound of some one approaching on horseback struck his ear.

For a moment he thought he was pursued, and felt disposed to seek shelter in the wood again; but a moment's reflection caused him to abandon such a step, and in a few moments his apprehensions were relieved by seeing a man—evidently one of the peasant class—mounted on a strong mule, approaching him.

In answer to his inquiries, which he had great difficulty in prosecuting, he found that he was

near a town in the interior of Sicily, whither the good-natured Sicilian at once offered to conduct him, placing the use of the mule at his service, at any rate to convey him to an inn not far off. Frank, feeling that a walk would be a relief, declined the use of the animal, but accepting his newly-found friend as a guide, was within half an hour at a small town where rest and refreshment were to be obtained.

CHAPTER III.

It was a tolerably decent inn to which his guide conducted Frank, to whom it seemed a perfect paradise, though the only food to be obtained—pork sausage and bread—was not the best suited to a famished man. The bread was excellent, and furnished a tolerable meal, with some olives and fennel-root as a dessert; whilst the wine, though somewhat sweet, was drinkable.

Frank felt grateful to his late captors for not having taken from him the small amount of money he possessed, which enabled him to remunerate his guide and pay "mine host," by whom he was informed that he was on the high-road to Girgenti and that the mail would pass in a

few hours, by which conveyance he would reach that city early the following morning.

Frank eagerly accepted the offer of a bed, on which he slept soundly till it was nearly midnight, when he was roused by the arrival of the mail, in which luckily there was one place vacant, of which, it is needless to say, our hero gladly availed himself, and proceeded in a most uncomfortable, crowded vehicle for about forty miles, reaching his destination about ten o'clock the following day, where, after a few inquiries, to his great joy he found Blomberg anxiously awaiting the mail in the hope of getting news of him.

"How did you contrive to escape?" was Blomberg's first question. "I know they did not get the hundred pounds I sent; for the lad who came with me decamped without it."

"I can tell you nothing as to how I got out of the clutches of those rascals," said Frank. "Not that they behaved badly to me; in fact, I must have had a friend among them, to whom I owe my deliverance. Poor devils! they were half-

starved, and I could not," he added, "help pitying one of them, who told me his story. All of them appeared victims of circumstances. One man told me he was escaping from justice. He laughed at the word, saying, 'Fancy the Savoyard talking of justice! I do not consider myself guilty of any crime. I only killed a villain who had carried off my wife.' There was a nice-looking lad among them. He was escaping from the conscription. His father, who was with him, repeated to me a Sicilian proverb: 'Better a pig than a soldier.'

"There was one point on which they all agreed, and that was hatred of the Sardinian Government for molesting them. 'We expected it from the accursed Bourbons, who hunted us to death; but these are the real brigands,' said the leader of the band, 'and they cannot in fairness put us down.'" With these remarks, Frank went on to relate to his friends the circumstances under which he had regained his liberty.

"How was it the lad did not wait for the

hundred pounds?" inquired Frank; and on Blomberg relating how his endeavour to pay it over had been frustrated, both felt the more surprised at Frank's escape from death.

"I knew I could do nothing to help you," observed Blomberg; "and I trust you do not think I was indifferent to your fate in following your instructions as to not making any attempt for your deliverance."

"They would certainly have killed me had you done so," replied Frank. "I believe my life was actually in danger. I feel sure that I owe my safety to the interference of someone who had great influence with the band."

"I have got your watch," said Blomberg.

"How did you come by it? Did the robbers give it you?"

"No; it was returned to the banker by a priest, who would say nothing as to how he came by it."

"Of course not," said Frank; "it was no doubt an act of restitution on which the priest had insisted when he became acquainted with the circumstances under which it had been obtained."

"Some said the priest was in league with the thieves," said Blomberg; "not that I believed it."

"If that were the case," remarked Frank, "why should he return it; he would indeed be a fool, as well as a rascal, to play such a double game as that."

"I cannot express how very thankful I am at your being here all right," said Blomberg.

"I think we both had a narrow squeak for it," said Frank; "for, from what I could gather in the course of conversation, the men into whose hands we fell were not such desperate characters as a band they were on their way to join when I got away; but," he added, "here I am safe and sound. But, my dear fellow," he continued, as he looked anxiously at Blomberg's pale face, "how are you? I am afraid you have been making yourself ill with anxiety on my account."

"Oh no! I am not ill," replied Blomberg; "though I admit I have been sadly put out at the thought of your danger, and also by the supineness of the agents of the authorities here, who had heard

of your capture from another source, and who, I believe, had I raised an alarm, would neither have acted themselves nor have allowed me to have done so; but now you are safe I shall soon feel all right."

Blomberg spoke in a confident, cheerful tone, which partially reassured Frank as to the state of his companion's health, in spite of his appearance, which was very much the reverse of satisfactory.

"You must be dreadfully fatigued, my dear Frank," said Blomberg.

"Oh, not at all!" replied Frank. "Now the question is, how are we to get on; it won't do to run the risk of again falling in with our friends."

"Certainly not," said Blomberg. "We will consult our countryman the banker here, to whom I confided our story; and he has interested himself very much in the matter, though he quite agreed with you as to the inexpediency of attempting your rescue by force, a view in which a worthy monk—a delightful man—with whom I fell in, fully concurred. He was obliged to leave this morning, I am sorry to say, for Syracuse, where I hope we shall see him."

After due consultation with the banker, who

had been resident many years in Sicily, Frank and his companion decided to continue their journey by a steamer to Syracuse, and thence, after a short rest, proceed by sea to Catania and Messina; "for well as my Sicilian friends have treated me," said Frank, "I have no desire to experience any more of their hospitality."

Before quitting Girgenti our travellers visited the famous temples in the immediate vicinity of the city, and stayed for several days awaiting the steamer for Syracuse, a delay which enabled them to explore fully the monuments of antiquity with which the place abounds. After a week's rest in Girgenti, our travellers proceeded to Syracuse, where they met Father Ignatius, who was awaiting an opportunity for getting by steamer to Malta.

He was of the greatest service to our travellers, being thoroughly conversant with all the most interesting localities adjacent to the city, and willingly acted as guide to them.

He felt deeply interested in both the young men, especially in Blomberg, whose delicate ap-

pearance excited serious apprehensions in the good man's mind, which he did not fail to impart in a guarded way to Frank, who, acting on the suggestion of their new acquaintance, restrained as much as possible his companion from over-fatiguing himself in exploring the various sites and monuments of antiquity with which Sicily, especially Syracuse, abounds.

Blomberg, however, protested against being in any way treated as an invalid, although Frank, even before their friend Padre Ignatius had remarked on it, was uneasy at times with regard to his loved friend's health. The doctor who had attended Blomberg in Girgenti had left Syracuse before the arrival of his patient, and had gone into Catania. It was therefore from consideration of this that Frank, though naturally anxious to press on to Messina, resolved to take a long rest at Catania, alleging as a reason for doing so the necessity of getting rest, and therefore exploring at leisure the various places of interest in the immediate vicinity of that city.

Taking leave of their monastic guide, and ex-

pressing a strong hope of meeting him again in England, whither he was ultimately bound, they left Syracuse by steamer, and reached Catania in a few hours, whence it was Frank's design to proceed by land to Messina, in order to visit Taormina, a spot of extraordinary interest to our hero, not only from the fact of his hoping to meet his mysterious preserver there, but also because among the few relics of his mother he had found a few lines of Italian poetry, written in pencil, and dated "Taormina, May, 1837," and signed "Ernesto." The paper on which these lines were written enveloped two locks of hair, and had been carefully preserved with a tiny cross in a small silk bag, "which," as Mrs. Tozer stated to Frank, "had been removed by her after death from the neck of that sweet young lady, as would never 'ave touched it myself nor yet Mrs. Welbyn, only but for both of us thinking as it might lead to indemnifying that dear young creetur, if it was only for the infant's sake, as was you, my dear boy, I can swear to, and so could Mrs. Gordon, if

in England, as is Mrs. Welbyn's own dorter, and 'ad you in 'er arms just after I'd washed and dressed you, and never see such a fine-limbed boy, and that strong in the back as could sit up under the month."

Such was one of the many incidents that Mrs. Tozer related to Frank in connection with his birth; and it was on account of finding this paper that he had originally designed to visit Taormina immediately on his arrival in Sicily, and was only induced to defer doing so from the fact that the steamer for Palermo happened to start at the time which best suited his design for making a tour of Sicily. He had written to Adèle from both Girgenti and Syracuse, and had mentioned though he made light of his captivity. Just before leaving the latter place he received a reply, enclosing a letter from Madame De Courcy, couched in terms of warmest affection for him, and entirely withdrawing any opposition she had offered to his correspondence with her daughter. "I will go on to her at once, my own dearest Adèle," he exclaimed, and he wrote, "I am indeed now supremely happy;

the day-dream of my life is about to be realised. I only long for the hour that shall unite us. I shall be with you," he continued, "as soon as possible; but I do not like to hurry on, as my companion's state of health makes me fearful of over-fatigue in his case, for, next to yourself, I have no one so dear to me on earth as he."

"I must," thought Frank, "make every reasonable excuse for taking this journey easily, though it is a trial of patience to me; but I will forego any gratification for that dear fellow's sake."

It was with this resolve Frank quitted Syracuse, and arrived in a few hours at the ancient city of Catania, one of the finest in Sicily, and the abode of some of the most aristocratic families in the island, which can boast of having amongst its nobility the descendants of those whose names adorn the most illustrious pages of history, both modern and ancient. It was here that Frank became seriously apprehensive as to the state of Blomberg's health, and wrote to the Marchioness, informing her that an English doctor, a visitor at

Catania, had said it was only by the greatest care that a life, as Frank expressed it, "so dearly valuable could be prolonged." Nothing was said to the invalid, and Frank had managed to find abundant excuses for taking the journey easily, the Marchioness having written a short time before to beg that no consideration respecting the Marquis or herself might influence their movements. She did not appear to realise Blomberg's state as being that of an invalid; and, indeed, at times he appeared so full of energy that Frank began to think the doctor whom he had consulted was rather an alarmist. Blomberg rallied so much after his arrival at Catania, where they found excellent hotel accommodation, combined with such exquisite beauty of climate, that he readily agreed to Frank's proposition of making it their head-quarters for a short time, during which interesting excursions in the immediate vicinity could easily be made.

During their sojourn Blomberg urged upon Frank his making a trip to Messina, to which our hero did not refuse concurrence, and went thither

by steamer, returning by road, partly by the railway in course of construction, which brought him within a short drive of the much-desired locality of Taormina. So it was that most agreeably our travellers passed several weeks in Catania, exploring the subterranean remains of the ancient city so often the victim of earthquake and eruptions.

Whilst staying in Catania, Frank made one or two visits to Messina, stopping once or twice at Taormina and various other places of interest in the neighbourhood of Etna. They had both, from time to time, duly chronicled all their adventures in Sicily to the Marchioness, always making as little as possible of their brigand experiences, respecting which they both felt that it was useless to make any formal complaint to a government that was powerless to either suppress or redress the evil.

Frank's visits to Messina were necessarily short, but none the less gratifying, for he had, when there, opportunities of passing most of his time with Adèle; her good-natured German friends, on learning the relations existing between the young people,

affording them every facility in meeting. It is true that the journey from Catania to Messina, though made partly by train, was tedious, but it seemed as nothing to Frank under the circumstances. And so extremely rapid was the development of his passion for Adèle, that more than once he thought of making her his wife forthwith, and carrying her to Rome to ask Madame De Courcy's blessing. He did not venture to even hint at such a proceeding to Adèle, who, though she reciprocated his feelings of affection to the utmost, he knew would not act without her mother's fullest concurrence and approbation.

Twice did Frank stop at Taormina on his way from Catania to Messina, and anxiously did he look out for the mysterious friend he had encountered among the brigands; but to no purpose, for he saw no one who in any way resembled the personage he sought. And so passed away a fortnight, and at the expiration of that time Blomberg having expressed a wish to be moving in a homeward direction, Frank proceeded

to make arrangements for their departure. During their sojourn at Catania, Frank had made several unsuccessful efforts to learn something as to the fate of the brigands, whose daring exploits had already made the interior of Sicily a dread to travellers; but he was only informed that they had been dispersed, several of them having been killed and a few taken prisoners.

Frank felt anxious as to the fate of his preserver, with whom he had expected to have fallen in at Taormina, and had visited the place on two occasions alone, and remained some time in the village, and had lingered among the ruins of the temple and amphitheatre in the hope of encountering his mysterious benefactor, but all in vain—he came not.

Leaving Catania by the first train, our travellers reached Taormina sufficiently early to enable them to pay a long visit to a place rendered as attractive for its extreme natural beauty as it is interesting from its deeply interesting historical association.

CHAPTER IV.

It was on a bright day of February that Frank and Blomberg stood in the amphitheatre of Taormina, utterly lost in admiration of the scene before them, which seemed too glorious to be the effect of mere natural beauty, but conveyed rather the impression of some higher and brighter state of existence.

As they talked together, expatiating rapturously on the grandeur of the view by which they were surrounded, they observed a man seated at no great distance smoking a cigarette. His features were concealed as he bent his head, intent on examining the lock of his gun; he rose from his seat and turned away as our travellers passed, but took no notice of them till they were about to make their way out of the amphitheatre, when he followed their steps till, arriving at a place where, as two

persons could not pass abreast, Blomberg stepped ahead of his companions and turned a corner, leaving Frank a few steps behind, the stranger hurried up to him, and said in a low tone, "Will you meet me here this evening at this spot, about 'Ave Maria'—alone?"

Frank started, recognising in the sound of the voice the man he had been expecting to meet, though he could not be certain as to his identity. "Surely you cannot be——" he exclaimed; but the stranger made a hasty gesture indicating silence, and without waiting for a reply at once took another direction among the ruins, and was almost immediately out of sight.

Frank had given a hasty assent to the stranger's proposal, but had some little difficulty in inducing Blomberg to proceed to Messina without him. He, however, consented to do so when Frank stated that he had particular business in the place which might detain him till the following day. Frank had never in conversation with his friend even alluded to the subject of his parentage, so that

Blomberg in no way associated it with Sicily, but knowing that his father's brother had died in that country, thought it just possible that Frank had been commissioned by the Marquis to make inquiries respecting his eldest son.

Having seen Blomberg off, Frank waited till the close of day, and then repaired to the amphitheatre to keep his appointment with his mysterious acquaintance, whom he found waiting for him muffled in a cloak.

"Ah!" exclaimed Frank, "I know you better now, and am glad to meet again one to whom I am so much indebted. Who are you?"

He was stopped by the stranger, who replied, "Whatever I am, I am your friend."

"You do not deny that you rescued me from death at the hands of those by whom I was captured?" persisted Frank.

"What harm did they do you," said the stranger, "beyond a little rough travelling?"

Frank hardly knew how to reply; when the man continued:

"I am not here to discuss that affair, out of which you came 'all right.'"

"Ah, you speak English!" exclaimed Frank.

"Only a few words I learnt from my padrone, dead long since. But," he continued, "who are you?"

Frank, though nearly posed by the question so suddenly put, replied, "An Englishman."

"Ah! I know it; but who is your father?"

"Dead many years," replied Frank.

"Where did he die?" inquired the man.

"In this country I believe; but what do you know of me," continued Frank, "that you question me in this way on such a subject?"

"Will you come to my house?" asked the stranger; "it is close by. It is a desolate one now. My wife is dead, my boy is gone; but come," he added, "I have something of interest to say to you."

With these words he rose from the fragment of stone on which he had been seated and walked away, followed by Frank, whose heart beat rapidly

at the expectation of what he was about to learn on the one subject most interesting to him in life.

A few minutes' walk brought Frank and his companion to the door of a small one-storied house, into which the stranger, with many apologies, preceded his visitor, his object in so doing being to light a lamp, by the light of which Frank was able to see that the room was well furnished and in tolerable order, the bed which occupied one corner being scrupulously clean. The proprietor laid aside his cloak, and Frank saw before him a vigorous, middle-aged man with a pleasing expression of face.

"You are English, then?" he said, as soon as Frank and he were seated.

"Yes," replied Frank.

"Tell me your name."

"Frank Welbyn," was the reply.

"Was that your father's name?" asked the man.

"I cannot say," replied Frank, as the blood mounted into his face.

"Not say? Ah! then you are not of noble family?"

"I do not know anything of my family, and should not speak on such a subject to a stranger, but that I have reason to believe that my parents must have lived in this part of the world, and am hoping to find some trace of them."

"You speak Italian well," observed the stranger.

"I have studied it many years," replied Frank.

"Ah! but your accent is perfect; better than his was," he added, in a low tone. "Tell me," he continued, "do you know these arms?" and as he spoke he handed to Frank a rifle, on the stock of which was a small silver plate with a crest, coronet, and the letter M inscribed on it.

"Yes, I know those arms; they belong to a noble family with which I am acquainted."

"They are not yours then?"

"No," said Frank; "and why do you connect me with them?"

"Because I saw them on board the steamer on the dressing-case that belonged to you."

Frank said nothing for a moment; the dressing-case in question belonged to Blomberg. After a pause he said, "Why have you followed me up in this way?"

"For your good," said the man. "I met you first in the steamer from Naples, and heard you talking to the captain about Taormina, and was struck by your appearance. I saw you in the cabin rescuing the old lady from my comrades, who meant no harm. I called them off, feeling sure, from the moment I beheld you, that you must be my dear master's son. You are his living image."

"Who was your master?" asked Frank in a voice tremulous with emotion.

"He was English; he was good and noble."

"What was his name?"

"Don Ernesto."

"That is not English," replied Frank.

"No, no; that was the name he went by here. He lived in a little house on the side of the mountain; the place is a ruin now. Ah! he has been dead many years."

"Did he die here?" asked Frank.

"No, no; in the lazaretto at Messina. I tried to go to him, but they would not let me. Ah! how I loved him!"

"Was he married?" asked Frank, as his heart beat like a sledge-hammer whilst he waited for the reply.

"Ah! Poor dear girl, she said so."

"Who was she?" asked Frank, in breathless anxiety.

"La Signorina Cattarina. Ah! she was his wife. I know she was."

"Is she living?" inquired Frank.

"Ah! who knows?" replied the man; "but I think not, or she would have written to me as she promised the night we parted. She ought not to have gone that journey to England; it was too much for her, that voyage. Poor dear, she was about to become a mother."

At these words Frank sprang from his seat and felt inclined to embrace his informant as he said, "Tell me all you know of her and her family.

She was from Catania. You can learn her story there. But, ah! you know all the story," continued the man; "you are my dear master's son;" and as he spoke he seized Frank's hand and kissed it.

"No, indeed; I know nothing of my parents, though what you have been telling me coincides strangely with the little I have been told of the circumstances of my birth. Will you come with me to Catania," he continued, "and help me to make inquiries about this lady?"

"No, I cannot; I am in some difficulty with these accursed Savoyards, whom I hate worse ten thousand times than I did the Bourbons. My son, my only boy, was drawn for the conscription, which we were not subject to under King 'Bomba.' Ah! he was our king, with all his faults. So, as I would not let my boy serve, I got him away. He escaped, and found some friends, especially one, who was mixed up in some love affair, and was accused of murder, so had taken refuge in the mountains. I joined the band in search of him, and that is how I again fell in with you."

"Then, as I thought, it is to you I owe my liberty—perhaps my life! How can I repay you?"

The Sicilian said, "I am repaid already if you are my padrone's son, as I feel almost sure you must be. When I first saw you, and when I joined our friends in the mountain to look for my son, great was my surprise to see you their prisoner. I at once insisted on your release, and I do not know that I should have succeeded in liberating you, had not an alarm been given that a party of soldiers were upon us. A general stampede ensued —you were sleeping so heavily by the side of that fountain where we halted that I could not rouse you, so, as no time was to be lost, I caught you up in my arms and carried you to the edge of a steep incline and rolled you down among the olive-trees; and, satisfied that no harm would come to you, even if found by the soldiers, I hurried away only just in time to escape with my friends and my boy; and, after seeing him in safety, I made my way homewards with

difficulty, and have hovered about here to meet you."

"Where is the boy?" asked Frank.

"Oh, safe. He got away to Malta, where I propose to follow him. I only returned here to meet you and to secure some property, and now I shall depart at once."

"Can you tell me anything of a young man who rode by me for three days but left before I escaped?"

"Ah! Signor Giacomo," exclaimed the stranger. "Yes; he also got to Malta, and is gone to South America. He is a splendid fellow."

"I am glad to know he is safe," said Frank; 'and now let me know all respecting your late master and his wife."

"You shall hear all I know or have been told about them," was the reply. "In the first place," said Frank, "I must know all I can learn on the spot respecting the lady you call Cattarina, and you will, I know, help me very much, as you can give me the clue to her family."

"Oh yes; and I will remain here, where I am well known and quite safe, till you have made the inquiries you desire."

"I cannot return to Catania to-night," said Frank, as he was about to take leave of his newly-found friend. "I should like to see where your master resided."

"You can do so in the morning," said the Sicilian.

"At what time?" asked Frank.

"Any time after daylight. I will meet you here, and show the way; it is close by."

"Agreed," said Frank; "will it take much time?"

"Oh no."

"I only ask as I must return to Catania as soon as possible in the morning."

"All right," said the stranger; "you must now let me see you to the inn."

"I can find my way," said Frank; "it is but a short distance."

"I will accompany you to the door."

"What is your name?" asked Frank.

"Stefano Corbi."

"But," said Frank, when they were within a few paces of the little inn, "are you not running some risk in remaining here?"

"Do not be concerned about me. I shall not be betrayed, and I know the country too well not to be able to evade the vigilance of any of the agents of these accursed Savoyards."

"Ah! you are a partisan of the King of Naples," said Frank.

"Well, not exactly; he was not good, but he is better than his 'dogs'-blood' race of Savoy, who do nothing but rob and starve us."

"I will meet you in the morning, and then return to Catania to make all the inquiries possible, and afterwards see you again here within a very short time, if you can remain in this neighbourhood for a day or so longer."

"I shall meet you at the theatre to-morrow morning at daylight," said the man.

"I shall not keep you waiting," said Frank. "Good-night, good Stefano."

"*Addio, caro signor,*" he replied, as he seized Frank's hand and kissed it, and was gone in an instant.

CHAPTER V.

On his return to the inn, Frank was far too much excited to eat or sleep, though he found eatable food and a tolerable bed at his disposal. Having written to Blomberg explaining that he was obliged to return to Catania, he passed a sleepless night, occupied with thoughts of the past and future, rose before daylight, and repaired to the ruined amphitheatre, and there gloried in its beauties at sunrise till he was joined by Stefano, who was vexed at having been forestalled by his young padrone, as he would insist on styling our hero, to whom he at once proposed a visit to the residence formerly occupied by his late master.

A brisk walk up the mountain side soon brought

them to the site of the humble abode, now dismantled and deserted.

The situation of it was very fine, and though the house was little more than four walls, yet Frank gazed with interest on the spot, and was so occupied with hearing all the details Stefano gave of his loved master, that he had to hurry back in order to start, at the time he had appointed, for Catania, which he reached in the course of the day. Once there, Frank was enabled, by aid of the clue given him by Stefano, to find out the relations of Donna Cattarina. They either could not or did not care to throw any light on the subject of his inquiries. They were young people, and, as Frank learnt, had come from another part of the island to inherit the property in Catania to which they were entitled through an old marchese who had been immediate heir to the Baronessa d'Albino. Frank learnt this through a lawyer to whom he was recommended by the English consul. He was told also that there was a report of a young lady of the family having eloped with an Englishman some

twenty years since, and that she had subsequently returned, as it was said, a widow. Frank could, however, elicit but little that was to be relied on respecting her fate.

We must now retrace our steps in order to give our readers an account of the ill-fated girl, the subject of these inquiries, to whom they were introduced so many years ago. She had, shortly after being released from the lazaretto at Messina, returned to Catania in a state of extreme weakness, being kept in ignorance of all that concerned her husband, respecting whom she was only told that he was a worthless profligate, and would have abandoned her had he lived. This, she was informed, was the statement made, shortly after his death, by those who, as agents of the Englishman's family, had been sent from England to investigate all matters pertaining to him. Cattarina refused positively to believe any such reports or statements. The agents in question had asked for her, and stated that in answer to inquiries respecting her it was confidently asserted that the young girl who had been found with the

Englishman on board the speronare had died soon after her admission to the lazaretto. Others said that she had been taken away from the place of quarantine by her friends, and had died almost immediately afterwards. The fact being that the representatives of the late Baroness, anxious to hush up the scandal caused by the affair, had managed so to secure Cattarina as to baffle all attempts to discover any trace of her. She had been hovering between life and death for weeks after leaving the lazaretto, and when convalescent having become a prey to the deepest melancholy, was kept a close prisoner in a house at Messina, whither she had been removed at the time inquiries were being made respecting her.

Cattarina had been thus kept in perfect ignorance of all that was going on; in fact she had seen no one but an elderly nun, who had come to her in Messina, and had brought her thence by easy stages to her native city, where they arrived after dark.

There she was at once taken to the house of her grandmother, now in possession of the Marchese

Pepilino Tombolo, a very distant relation of the Baroness, who, having taken Cattarina's death for granted, had laid claim to the property of his late kinswoman. The arrival, therefore, of the real proprietor both startled and disconcerted him; but he received her with every demonstration of regard, recommended her living in seclusion for the present, and assured her that he and his wife would remain with her and protect her till her affairs could be legally settled.

The Marchesa, a very rigid, formal old lady, was cool but gracious to the young widow, though she expressed much regret that so young a girl should have trusted herself to an almost unknown stranger.

Her unfavourable view of the case was much strengthened when, a few weeks after her return, Cattarina was pronounced likely to become a mother.

"Oh Heaven!" exclaimed the old lady. "Ah, we did well to conceal her return! What a disgrace! What infamy!"

Cattarina, who in a state of despondency fre-

quently wandered through the vast apartments of the Palace, was at that moment, unknown to the Marchesa, seated in the deep recess of a window. She at once rose, and said in a firm though perfectly calm tone:

"Signora Marchesa, there is neither infamy nor disgrace attaching to me; I am the lawful wife of a man of high family in England."

"Ah, my dear child, you are a wife here; but not among those vile English, who are heretics, and know nothing of religion; they are the vilest of men."

"My husband was the soul of honour," replied Cattarina indignantly.

"Yes, yes, no doubt," said the Marchesa. "But you have told us nothing about him; let us hear who he was?"

Cattarina felt that her information on the subject of her husband's family was slight. In the early days of their love-making, she had been satisfied that Don Francisco knew all about him, and in the panic of their flight at the time of their

marriage she had asked, and he had said, nothing on the subject; and when they were picked up by H.M. frigate *Water Snake,* rapidly increasing weakness had prevented the dying man doing more than evincing by dumb show his anxiety to proclaim his companion to be his wife.

Under these circumstances Cattarina felt it would be more discreet to remain silent as to her late husband; although she announced it to be her intention to go at once to find his family in England.

This step she knew would be strongly opposed by both the Marchese and his wife; he not wishing her to be in a position to claim absolutely, on behalf of her child, her Sicilian inheritance, and the Marchesa considering that a sea voyage under such circumstances would be utter madness.

Cattarina, therefore, did not say much as to her future course, though she was resolved as to what it should be, for she had no confidence in her relatives; whilst she felt it would be difficult to get away, except by stratagem, from the power of those who had her in a state of imprisonment, to which

she for some time had submitted with an appearance of being satisfied to remain under their care.

The difficulty she experienced in carrying out her design of quitting Sicily arose from two causes: the impossibility of obtaining a passport without the concurrence of her relations, and the finding a vessel willing to take her without one.

At length, residence with her relatives having become utterly intolerable, the youthful widow proposed to go to Taormina and live there in seclusion, a proceeding which was not opposed by either the Marchese or his wife.

On arriving at the old villa where she had passed the happy days of her first love, she felt a sudden revulsion of feeling, and as though she were inspired with new life; her energy, however, far exceeded her physical power, but at any rate she was her own mistress, and although the sight of the house and its surroundings at first overwhelmed her with grief, all seemed to inspire the widowed girl with fresh courage.

The news of her return, which she deemed it

prudent to conceal as much as possible, reached the ears of Stefano, Ernesto's former servant, who had lingered in the neighbourhood, and he at once came to see her.

From him she learned that the English agents of his former master had come over, and, armed with the powers of the law, had taken possession of everything in the house of the stranger; but Stefano did not relate how he had judiciously anticipated their visit, and carried away all the movables on which he could lay his hands.

When he learned from Cattarina her design of going to England, he furthered it readily—in fact he did not regret her departure; and was of the greatest service to her in procuring secretly for her a passage to London on board a vessel that was loading wine at a small port near at hand.

Cattarina knew it had been her husband's intention to take her to England as soon as they were married, and as this design had been frustrated by his untimely death, she had resolved to carry it out at any cost.

The heroic girl had resolved to undergo any hardship and brave any danger, feeling that by this means only she could vindicate her own honour, and secure whatever might be the birthright of her unborn child.

These considerations supported her amid the horrors of a tedious voyage, the miseries of which were much augmented by the tipsy habits and fiendlike temper of the captain's wife; who, however, behaved more kindly to her as they approached the British shores, and repeatedly promised that she would protect her till she should consign her to the care of her friends.

On their arrival in London, Cattarina was informed that she could not remain on board the vessel, and that the sea-water had quite spoiled the few things she possessed when she left Sicily on board the wretched brig.

On the night she had sailed, the friendless and forlorn girl had given the skipper, a Maltese, a sum of money to defray the expenses of the voyage, having however concealed about her a much larger sum.

Without disputing the statement of the skipper's wife as to her clothes being spoiled, and only too delighted to escape from so dreadful a woman, Cattarina gladly accompanied the skipper ashore in order to secure a home, from which she could discover and communicate with her husband's family; and was, as we know, deposited more dead than alive in the lodgings he had secured for her.

Having failed to elicit anything of importance from Cattarina's relatives as to her marriage, Frank felt it was useless to remain any longer in Catania; so after giving the lawyer as ample instruction as lay in his power, he started for Messina, stopping at Taormina, anxious to convey to the faithful Stefano all the intelligence he had been able to procure.

Stefano listened to the particulars that Frank could give him with an air of mistrust.

"They know more than they care to tell," said he, when he had heard the statements made by the Catanese family. "Be assured my padrone married that young lady, or she would never have been

received by any of her relations when she returned a widow."

"How do you know that they were married?" inquired Frank.

"Because she told me so when she came to Taormina and passed two or three nights at that country-house where my padrone first met her when she came to pass the *villeggiatura* with her grandmother. I saw her there when she had resolved to go to England in search of her husband's family. I arranged for her passage from Riposto, and saw her on board the night she sailed."

Frank felt that he could embrace his informant.

"Why," he asked, "did you not tell me all this before?"

"Because," replied Stefano, "I waited till I could know what these people would say, and now I am resolved to find one who can tell us all."

"How will you contrive to do that?" inquired Frank, in an anxious tone.

"Let me alone; I know what I am about to do. I will find out those who had the care of the young

lady when I saw her last, and I will trace her, step by step, if it should be to her grave."

"Let me now hear all you know, I beg," cried Frank.

It was with the deepest interest that Frank listened to the full account that Stefano gave him respecting his young lady's flight from Sicily.

"Ah! the poor dear, I shall never forget her joy at seeing me again. It was here, on a Sunday, I met her as she was coming quite early from mass, attended by an old nun, one of the kind of good women that live in families and look after young ladies, whether married or single. The dear young lady gave a cry of pleasure when she saw me, and then began to shed tears; she would have stopped to speak with me, but her guardian said, 'No, no! it is not becoming in a lady of your rank to talk to a man of this class in the street.'

"'Come to see me at the house, Stefano,' said the young lady, 'as soon as you can.'

"I saw that the good old lady did not like this, so I merely said 'perhaps,' with a shrug of the

shoulders, as though I was quite indifferent; but as I passed close to the lady I dropped my cap, and as I stooped to pick it up I contrived to catch hold of the old lady's veil as though accidentally, and nearly pulled it off. In the confusion of setting her to rights I was able to say to the young lady, 'This evening—the old spot.' I spoke in our dialect, which I thought it possible the nun would not understand even if she heard me speak.

"I saw by a glance that the dear young lady caught my words, and agreed to do as I suggested; but the old lady was too sharp, for though I watched at the garden-wall all that evening, and the next, I could not get a sight of Donna Cattarina.

"On the evening of the third day I went boldly up to the house and asked to see La Signorina. The place was all confusion, and the only person visible an old woman who was acting as servant, and she at first denied that anyone was living there. I was almost in despair when I saw the nun in the garden. I made a rush to her, and said I had come to see my young lady, as I had something to tell

her about her sainted grandmother. I did not say a word about my dear master.

"The nun looked very grave, and asked, 'What a young fellow like me could have to say to a young lady about her family?'

"I said I wished to pay my respects as an old servant of the family.

"'You did so the other day in the street; and that is enough,' she replied; 'so now go, and do not trouble me again; the young lady does not wish to see you or anyone else.'

"'Doesn't she?' thought I, but did not say a word; and with much show of respect took my leave. 'There is something wrong here,' I thought. 'What shall I do? I will consult Santa. Women are so clever.'"

"Who was Santa?" asked Frank.

"Santa was my betrothed then. She died my wife, the mother of my boy. Ah! she was good, too good for me, blessed soul! Yes," he continued, "Santa was clever as she was good; the woman-servant at the house was her aunt, and through

her Santa made an appointment for me to see the poor dear young widow of my loved master. We met at the spot where he and she so often had been together, and where they parted when he went off to his own country just before his death. The young lady was overwhelmed with grief at seeing me, and told me she had only one wish; it was to go to England and find her husband's family, 'for the sake of her unborn child,' she said. 'My relations will not hear of my doing so; they are keeping me here a prisoner, though it was I who proposed to come to this place, hoping to have more liberty to get away than I had in Catania, and they think I shall die here unknown and forgotten, and they will have my property; but now I have found you I trust to make my escape, for I feel that you, my good Stefano, can and will help me.'

"'That I will,' I replied; 'but how can you go? Have you money? Above all a passport?'

"'I have plenty of money,' she replied. 'My own dear one gave it me;' and as she said this she burst into tears.

"'You know his name, and where to find his family?' I asked.

"'No; I do not,' she replied; 'all his papers have been given up to his agents, who, after his death, came from England and falsely said that he would have discarded me. I was too ill, too weak to know anything at the time; and I have since heard that they have denied me to have been his wife; but I know that I am. We were married in the church San Gregorio, near our palace, the day I left Catania with him.'

"'I know the church well,' I replied."

"You do?" cried Frank, in a tone of joy; "then you can supply a missing link; but tell me more of this unhappy lady."

"Ah! indeed I will," said Stefano. "At her request," he continued, "I made inquiries for a vessel bound to London; I knew there were plenty in Messina; but as she wished to escape unknown to her relations, and could not get a passport, it would not do to go there. At last I heard of a brig that was to sail from Riposto. I went to see

the captain, and told him I wanted a passage for my sister to London, where she was going to find her husband, a political refugee. He said he would take her, only he was afraid that his wife, who was on board, would be jealous; but he thought he could talk her over by the end of the week, when he expected to sail. How much can you pay? I promised him a large sum, twenty pounds in gold, and went on board the vessel with him to see if his wife would consent. Ah! what a fiery furnace that woman's face. She talked very loud, till I showed the money, and gave it to her; then she was more pacified, and at last consented to receive the lady on board.

"It was a terribly wet night; but with the help of my own loved Santa I got the dear young lady on board that vessel. Santa managed it all; but for her I could never have done it; she it was who got the young lady away from the house, for, just as it was dusk one wet evening, she went there to see her aunt, and walked into the young lady's room, and having slipped off a skirt she wore and a shawl,

went away at once by a back way. The dear young lady having put on the skirt and thrown the shawl over her head was about to leave the house, when whom should she meet but the nun, who said, 'My good woman, why are you here so late? You should not stop gossiping with your aunt so long. Now go at once, as I am about to have the house shut up for the night.'

"Drawing the shawl more closely over her face the young lady hurried away, and heard the good nun barring up the doors and windows. Santa, who was waiting close by, had to support the poor thing, so much agitated was she as to be hardly able to stand. So it was that they contrived to elude the vigilance of the nun, who locked up the house every evening before 'Ave Maria,' but she did not know on that evening that she was locking out the dear young lady, who had to rest for some little time concealed in a small pavilion on the garden wall, where she and my dear master used often to sit talking of an evening, with poor old Nina sitting on the wall half asleep. It so happened," continued

Stefano, "that Donna Cattarina had come from Catania with very few things, but had sent word to her relations that, as she did not intend to return to them at present, they had better send the remainder to her. Her relations gladly assented, and sent off her wardrobe. I had been apprised of this, and on the day that the young lady was to leave I met the man who was bringing the boxes at Giardini, and took them from him. There were three packages, and one so rickety I had a new box made. I left all at Giardini, and then in the evening went up to Taormina with a carriage to meet the young lady and Santa, and without any difficulty brought them to Riposto, where I put them into a small boat, and we were rowed out to sea. Though raining it was calm, and we did not wait for more than an hour when the ship, having cleared out of the little port, we got on board safely. My dear Santa did not like to quit the ship, so deeply interested was she in that young creature, but she could not leave her mother, who was ill. It was with great reluctance we left Donna Cattarina in charge of Captain

Morgan and his wife. I am sure the woman was drunk when we went on board, for she was sleeping like a pig, and her husband would not wake her. I was almost afraid to leave that sweet lady with such people; but she would go to England at any cost, and as I had no passport the captain would not take me, and so afraid was Donna Cattarina that her relations would stop her, that she would go at any risk. It was a dark wet night when Santa and I went ashore with heavy hearts, but it was useless to try to watch the vessel. I was up before daybreak and saw her standing far out at sea."

"What was her name?"

"*Sarah Flower,* and a brig. I had all particulars of her from the merchant at Riposto to whom she was consigned. I am now going to Malta, and I will find that captain, if alive; and, in any case, I can swear to the lady being put on board the vessel; so never fear you will get some of the information you require respecting the lady and her child. Ah me!" he continued in a reflective tone, "you must be that child, if living; he would be about two-and-twenty, your age."

Frank made no reply, but merely observed, "That in any case he would handsomely reward Stefano for his trouble."

"I require no reward," said the man. "I shall be proud to have been the means of doing justice to my loved master's memory."

"You will lose no time in getting all the information?"

"We must have patience," replied Stefano. "Give me your address in England, and you shall hear from me. It would not be well to state all one knows, and that is why I told you so little at first. I waited, for I was curious to hear what sort of a story her relations would make out. But here we are at the house the old Baroness used to live in, from which Donna Cattarina escaped to England, where my master in time gone by came every night to make love. Often and often have I waited here for him with his horse and dogs. I remember well the last time I ever saw him, the night he was starting for England, only two months before he died."

The house of the Baroness was shut up and

tenantless, but Frank gazed with interest on the spot so closely associated with her whom he now fully regarded as his mother, and for whose melancholy fate he would have felt commiseration had the case been one of the merest stranger. He felt tears in his eyes as he gazed with melancholy interest on the spot, and listened to Stefano, as he heard the sad story of Cattarina's flight from Sicily on board the *Sarah*—Morgan commander.

"You are sure it was an English vessel?" asked Frank.

"Certainly," replied Stefano, "though I am sure the captain was not English; he spoke Italian quite well."

"Would you sell me that gun you showed me at your house?" asked Frank.

"I will give it you, for I am sure it is yours," was the answer; "you must be my master's son. Ah! you know you are, and can tell me all about the poor young lady. I thought she would get all right in England."

"I can tell you nothing about her," replied

Frank. "I know the family to which your master belonged; his father is still alive, and will be glad to hear all that you have told me. But," he added, "you must let me pay you for the gun."

"Never," replied Stefano; "but if you will come again now to my house I will show you some things of the padrone's I would not let the people who came after his death to claim his property know anything about."

Frank at once accompanied his newly-found friend.

"I am about to leave it," said Stefano; "and shall be glad. Santa, my wife, is dead; our children, all but the boy, are dead too. I often thought it was a judgment on me for forsaking the poor young lady. I have here many trifles which belonged to my master. Here is a knife he gave me, and here are two guns."

Frank looked at them, but they bore neither crest nor initial.

"I gave those men who came from England just after his death all the papers. They wanted to frighten me, but they didn't know Sicilians well.

I never said a word about the lady, though they tried to make me. I humbugged them. I have nothing here of value, but would you like these?" he added, as he showed Frank a pair of small sleeve-links, on which was the Blomberg crest. "I've got his glass," he continued; "but I always had that, he gave it to my care."

Frank would have insisted on buying the sleeve-links, but Stefano was obstinate, and would take no money, though at length a compromise was effected, he agreeing to take a small curb watch-chain in exchange for them; but the gun he insisted on Frank accepting as a present. In vain Frank tried to induce Stefano to accept money in payment of the expense he would incur in going to Malta.

"I am going to Malta on my own business to see my boy; he is waiting there for me; he is mad to go to sea in an English man-of-war, and as he has been several voyages in the merchant service, who knows, I may get him on board an English ship. Anything to avoid serving the accursed Savoyards;

they are a thousand times worse than all the Bourbons put together. Once more, *addio.*"

Frank took a hearty leave of his friend, and made his journey to Messina lost in thoughts both pleasurable and painful. As he reflected that in proving his own identity as the lawful son of the deceased Lord Mildown he would be supplanting his dear friend and cousin, this consideration materially diminished the satisfaction with which he regarded the positive vindication of his mother's honour and the establishing of his father's integrity and good faith. He did not doubt but that Blomberg would act in the matter according to the dictates of his affectionate heart and generous nature; but, nevertheless, he almost hesitated as to pursuing the matter beyond the limits of his own satisfaction. "I may confidently place the whole state of the case before the Marchioness, to be guided by her sound sense and thoroughly kind feeling towards both myself and Blomberg, for I can entirely rely on her sense of justice as well as on what she will consider due to her husband's

family. It may be that this marriage is not legal; but I shall be more than satisfied to know that it was done in good faith by the parties who contracted it, and that it is sanctified in the sight of heaven."

CHAPTER VI.

On arriving at the hotel in Messina, Frank was much disconcerted to hear that the English gentleman had been attacked by fever, and was confined to bed. Hurrying to his apartment, he found Blomberg in a state of great prostration, though, in reply to Frank's anxious inquiries, he said, "It is merely a bad headache. I think I have got a touch of ague."

"Have you seen a doctor?"

"Yes," replied Blomberg, with a faint smile; "he ordered me hot lemonade, and said if I were not better to-morrow he would bleed me."

"I hope you will not allow him to do so," said Frank hastily.

"Oh dear no," replied Blomberg, in a heavy, drowsy tone. "I am not ill, I shall be all right in a day or so. I will try to go to sleep, so do not stay with me;" and he added, "I know how much you are wanted elsewhere."

Frank knew the meaning of this speech, and though most desirous to go to Adèle at once, delayed doing so till he had seen the doctor, who visited his patient in the course of an hour after Frank's arrival, and having pronounced him to be neither better nor worse, took his leave, remarking, "We shall see in the morning."

Highly dissatisfied with this view of the case, Frank at once went to Adèle, in order to obtain, if possible, further advice. Here a fresh disappointment awaited him, for she had left Messina that morning at almost a moment's notice, having been summoned to Rome in consequence of the sudden illness of her mother. So anxious, however, was Frank respecting Blomberg, that even this news did not affect him, his only anxiety being to obtain the help of either an English

or French doctor. He sent a message to Syracuse, in the hope that the English man who had given so unfavourable an opinion of Blomberg's condition a month previously might still be there.

The only consolation that Frank received, was in the affectionate expressions which Adèle had conveyed in a hurried note she had left for him, in which she stated her fears respecting her mother to be very great. "My engagement with the family in which I have been so long resident is nearly at an end, and they have very kindly released me."

Frank was hardly inclined to endorse this view of the case. He found Herr Leifman and his wife very sympathetic and kind in trying to assist him in getting further medical aid for his friend; holding out a hope that a relation of their own, an eminent German physician, would arrive shortly, who would, they were sure, bestow great care on the case, as they knew it to be the intention of that gentleman to make a somewhat lengthened sojourn in that part of Sicily. With this consoling assurance Frank returned to his friend's bedside, to

find him asleep under the charge of a servant to whom he had specially entrusted him.

It was not, however, a quiet or healthy sleep, as was evinced by the restless condition of the sufferer, by whose bedside hour after hour did Frank watch in the greatest suspense, waiting news of the doctor. As no answer from him arrived by morning, he was at a loss how to act, for meanwhile worse symptoms had developed themselves in the patient, delirium and access of fever having set in. Frank felt that his wonted self-possession was rapidly failing. "I shall go distracted," said he, "if this state of things lasts much longer, and yet I feel how much depends on my remaining calm under this agonising trial."

Looking to Him who can alone support us in our greatest need, Frank knelt to pray beside his much-loved suffering friend, whose condition seemed to become hourly worse, in spite of such alleviatives as the Sicilian doctor could suggest.

A terrible night ensued, during which the patient was in a state of high fever aud delirium.

Shortly after daybreak, to Frank's intense delight and relief, the English doctor arrived.

"It is a very serious case," he replied, in answer to Frank's almost breathless inquiries. "Has his health been declining very rapidly since I last saw him?"

"On the contrary," replied Frank, "he has been so much better of late that I looked on him as quite restored;" and then he proceeded to give an account of his friend's apparent improvement in health during the last month, and how that time had been employed.

"All you tell me is against him," replied the doctor; "I fear his strength will not hold out."

"Could he not be moved?" asked the now thoroughly alarmed friend; "it is all my fault keeping him here so long. Oh!" he exclaimed to the doctor, "save him—pray save him!"

The doctor shook his head as he took a seat by the sufferer's bed, having administered such remedies as he judged expedient.

The Sicilian doctor, who was present, urged the necessity of bleeding the patient.

"Just murder, clean murder!" exclaimed the English practitioner.

All day and all the ensuing night did Frank watch by his friend, whose suffering was aggravated by an incessant cough.

The English doctor, who delayed his departure, remained in the hotel; but all the attempts he made to arrest the devouring progress of the disease were of no avail.

Another long day passed, and at its close Frank, sitting almost worn out at the side of the bed, the image of despair, heard Blomberg pronounce his name.

He threw himself on his knees in a paroxysm of gratitude to Heaven and took the sufferer's hand.

"My own dear fellow," he said, "I am so glad, so delighted;" but he checked himself as he saw the sufferer's lips move. Drawing nearer to him in order to hear his words, he found himself clasped in the embrace of his dearly loved friend, who, in the lowest whisper, said:

"My mother—give her my dearest love; tell

her I am happy." He drew Frank's head more closely to him, and, imprinting a kiss on his forehead, sank back utterly exhausted.

A loud cry of anguish from Frank brought the doctors and others into the room, to find him prostrate on the floor beside the bed of his now departed friend.

Terrible to witness was the almost despairing grief of the survivor; so violent was it that for some time the doctor thought it best to let it have its sway, but at length he felt that something must be done to check its violence.

As he was debating what course to adopt, Father Ignatius, who had returned to Messina a few days previously, but had been absent during the last four-and-twenty hours, entered the house, and on being informed what had occurred proceeded to the room where Frank, seated by the body of his friend, was indulging in frantic grief.

"Young man," exclaimed the monk, "do you believe in God?"

The speech, and the tone in which it was made,

arrested Frank in a fresh outburst of grief, and great was his surprise on beholding the speaker, their recently-made acquaintance of Syracuse.

"I do! indeed I do, father!" he replied.

"Then," said the monk, "how dare you presume to impugn His justice or His love? If you really loved your friend, show it by resignation to the Divine will. Ask pardon for your past rebellion, and humble yourself before your Creator and Judge, and join me in petitions to the Throne of Grace for the repose of the departed soul."

As he spoke, Frank, devoutly crossing himself, sank on his knees beside his ghostly counsellor, and remained for some time receiving consolation and support from that source whence alone it can be obtained.

After a time the good monk said to him:

"Are you equal to assist me to perform the last sad offices for the dead?"

"Yes," exclaimed Frank, "I can do anything; but where," he continued, "can I lay him?"

"I will arrange that," said the monk. "He loved and feared God."

"Indeed, indeed he did," replied Frank.

He was checked in his speech by the monk, who said, "I know well his state of mind, for I had a long conversation with him only a few days ago, when I found him in our church at prayer;" and he added: "I have every hope as to his salvation. At any rate, he can be buried in our cemetery, which is still in use, though our community is broken up."

"I must communicate with his family," exclaimed Frank, "before I act in this matter."

"He must be buried at once, and I will give directions for the removal of the body to the church."

A few hours sufficed for all the necessary arrangements to be carried out; and the following morning, at the dawn of a heavenly day, did Frank, who had never left the body, see the perishing clay consigned to its last resting-place. It seemed to Frank an almost insupportable thought that the loved remains should be left among strangers;

but looking with faith to that better portion that awaits the blessed in their Heavenly Father's home, the mourner saw, with that complacency which religion alone can inspire, the grave close over all that could die of his beloved and loving friend.

Support was afforded to Frank by the presence of the monk, Father Ignatius, who had returned providentially within a few days from Syracuse, having been summoned by the local authorities to return to Messina for a time, in order to arrange some business matters connected with the convent, which the members of the Government who had seized the property of the convent found both difficult and even dangerous to deal with.

Under this good man's counsel Frank had been able to bear up under this most trying ordeal. Having communicated the news of the melancholy event to the relations of the deceased, and having nothing now to detain him in Sicily, he departed for Naples within twelve hours of the funeral, and found on his arrival there that the Marquis was

seriously ill, having been recently seized with two attacks of paralysis.

"The Marchioness talks of getting him home at once," said the medical man, a resident in Naples; "but I doubt his ever reaching England alive."

"Is the Marchioness aware of your opinion?" asked Frank.

"Oh yes," said the doctor. "I told her what a precarious state I considered him to be in; but for that I should have come to see the young fellow in Sicily."

Frank made no reply, being at that moment summoned to see the Marchioness, whom he found seated by the bed of her sleeping husband, and she held out her hand to Frank, and in a few hasty words expressed her regret at their recent loss. "I am sure you have done your duty by your friend," she said, as Frank, overcome by his feelings, retreated to the balcony, unable to repress an outbreak of grief; quickly recovering himself, however, he returned to the side of his benefactress, to express his concern at her trial.

"He has rallied," she said, "and will be better when we get him home."

"Are you not afraid of so long a journey for one so weak?" asked Frank.

"No; I am sure he will bear it. When he wakes," she added, "he will ask the first thing when we are going to start. So extremely restless is he and anxious to get home, that he had resolved before his attack to start for England as soon as you could rejoin us, little anticipating the sad event that has detained you."

Frank only replied to the effect that he was entirely at her ladyship's disposal, though it was a trial to him to leave Italy without seeing Adèle again; he had found letters from her announcing the improved condition of her mother, and her hope to see him soon. Under these circumstances he would naturally have wished to have made his way at once to Rome; but the condition of the Marquis was such as to render a land-journey out of the question, and it was consequently decided to convey him by the direct steamer from

Naples to Marseilles, and then by easy stages to England.

It was no small amount of self-sacrifice that Frank endured in taking this tedious journey, but of this the Marchioness knew nothing; in fact, so absorbed was she in her duties to her husband, that, though inexpressibly grieved and shocked at Blomberg's death, she had no time to dwell on the melancholy occurrence. This was as well for Frank, who, in spite of all his fortitude, was quite unequal to speaking about his departed friend. He had poured out his whole heart in a letter to Lady Mildown; this he considered a duty, but to others he was silent even in writing on the subject, having given barest details to the Marchioness, who had, as a matter of course, undertaken to convey the mournful intelligence to her husband, on whom it produced no apparent effect, he being, in fact, past feeling. He scarcely recognised Frank, and more than once called him Blomberg; then at times he would take his hand, and make vain attempts at speaking, totally unintelligible to everyone but his

devoted wife, who, under such trying circumstances, proved herself to be a true woman and faithful wife. She one day, in the course of their tiresome journey, became overcome by fatigue, and was urged by Frank to take more rest than she usually allowed herself.

"No," she replied; "I will never leave him. I owe him all that I possess, or ever shall possess in this world; he has been a good and indulgent husband to me, whom he raised from nothing to a position of wealth and honour. Whatever may be said as to my motives in marrying him, no one shall have any ground for saying that I have not kept my solemn vow to love, honour, and cherish till death us do part. I shall have plenty of time to rest by-and-by. I am equally obliged to you, Mr. Welbyn, for the kind anxiety you display for me; but I am sure you would respect me the less if you thought me heartlessly indifferent to my best of friends."

CHAPTER VII.

"You don't mean to say as he may be 'ome any minute, Tozer?"

"Yes, I do; leastways that's wot 'is letter says, as is two days old," said Tozer.

"Well then, it's a mussy as I've got my 'eavy wash over, and 'is bed got clean sheets on, and all ready aired."

Such were the remarks that Mrs. Tozer made to her husband as he communicated to her the contents of a letter from Frank, which he had found awaiting him on his return home. It was written from Paris, and announced the return of the party to England.

"Dear 'art," she continued, "and to think that

the young feller should be dead and buried over there, and the old grandfather still a-livin', though not expected to survive, as is what you must expect when you're over three score and ten, as the saying is, as that old lord must be full, accordin' to Mrs. Melcombe, as knowed 'im when just a-courtin' of his good lady, as is 'is third, and been a kind friend to Mrs. Melcombe, as knowed 'er mother, but speaks up for the Marchyness thro' 'er bein' that good to her little gal, as died five year ago. She's a kind 'art we knows thro' Frank, not as I fancies that Mrs. Melcombe, for she come 'ere a-pryin' for to see if there was anythink to be got out of that poor woman's things, as was nearly all made away with, no doubt thro' drink, as must 'ave starved but for Mr. Crocket, as in Mrs. Melcombe's opinion were actin' for others, as don't matter to me; but as I told 'er, I didn't want to 'ear no gossipin', so she dried up, as the Yankees says, and didn't come no more, 'cos I knows werry well as the dog as can fetch can carry, as the sayin' is; but, law, if the old

lord were to die, no doubt 'is widder would like to adopt Frank reg'lar."

"He's rather too old, and she's not old enuf for that," said Tozer; "but we shall soon hear more, for I knows werry well as Frank will be here to see us as soon as anywheres, and he says in this letter, as is wrote from Paris, that they are comin' on as quick as they can."

"And no wonder," observed Mrs. Tozer, "for I'm sure anyone must be glad to find theirselves safe out of Paris, as is always like a-settin' on the hedge of a wolcaner, as the sayin' is, for you may go to bed all right, and wake in the mornin' with a *coo de tar* a-ragin' under your nose as might shoot you down in the street; the same as young Dustin, as were a commershal, and went over in the jewelry line, and as near slortered as any lamb in tryin' to get to the railway station, and only saved 'is life thro' droppin' down a drain, as he were kep' in over two days, and come up more dead than alive, with no doubt putrid fever a-'angin' about 'im."

"You needn't go fidgetin' about nothink of that sort," said Tozer; "Frank is sure to look out sharp for anythink like that."

"Well, I do 'ope as he'll take care of 'isself," observed Mrs. Tozer, "for he's that 'ansome now, as I considers a reg'lar picter of a young man; and when I do see what rack and ruin young men do come to thro' bad company and drink, the same as Mrs. Waller's son as took to 'is bed ten days, and were the apple of 'er eye, as the sayin' is, and as fine-growed a youth as ever I see cut off in early bloom, as they laid 'im in 'is grave two days arter he came of age, as were a nice little property, and turned to gallopin' consumption, as he got from his grandfather, and all gone to cousins, as is only distant relations after all; and I do 'ope as that young nobleman have remembered Frank in 'is will, 'cos he might as well thro' not bein' able to take it with 'im, as we none of us can't nothink out of this world, as we didn't bring in."

"Frank's all right," said Tozer, "for wot with 'is brains and wot with the little property as he

have got, he'll make 'is way to the top of the tree some day."

"Well," said the prudent Mrs. Tozer, "so as he don't climb too 'igh, and don't trust 'isself to no rotten branches so as to get a bad fall, I don't care; but climbin' is slippery work, werry nigh were my death up the cliffs at Margit, as shows you did ought to look afore you leap, as I'm sure that poor Mr. Heapy, the sweep, is a warnin' agin all climbin', for though he were brought up to the business from a mere infant, and over sixty when he fell off that ladder, as he never got over, yet always said as it were the sut as he'd took into 'is constitution in infancy, when a climbin' boy, as 'ad settled in 'is back bone, and made it that brittle as it would snap like glass at the least touch, as is why he never couldn't look you straight in the face, for tho' he lived to come out of the hospital many years, yet never could straighten 'isself, not even in bed, as made 'im a burden to 'isself and all about 'im."

How long Mrs. Tozer would have indulged in her reminiscences of human infirmity in general

and those of Mr. Heapy in particular, it is of course impossible to say, had not her husband, who had been engaged in glancing over the paper, suddenly laid it aside, and having lighted a candle, turned off the gas "like a flash of lightning," as his wife observed, and announced it to be his determination to go at once to bed, a proceeding which much annoyed his better-half, who declared that being "took that sudden would make 'er 'ave more dreams than sleep that night."

It was as Frank's letter had conveyed to his humble friends: "There was a marked improvement in the state of the Marquis after a short rest in Paris. He had to a great degree recovered his power of speech, and so far regained his strength as to render his removal home by no means so difficult as had been anticipated." Such, however, was not the case, for during the short journey between Paris and London he was attacked by fainting fits of some duration, though of a nature not considered by the doctor, who travelled with the sufferer, as signs of immediate dissolution.

In this most critical condition did he reach his town residence, where, contrary to all expectation, he again rallied considerably.

On his arrival in Paris, where the condition of the sick man rendered a sojourn of some days absolutely necessary, Frank had gone to see the worthy Abbé Pitrou at St. Cloud, where an agreeable surprise awaited him, Madame De Courcy and Adèle having arrived there, a few days previous to his visit, with the intention of taking up their abode in a charming cottage adjoining that of the Abbé, on whose account they had selected their place of residence, law business rendering Madame De Courcy's presence in Paris a necessity for some considerable time.

"You have not received my last letter, addressed to you in Naples," said Adèle.

"No," replied Frank. "I was surprised at your silence; and, but for the Marquis's rapidly failing strength, I should have come to Rome, as I told you I had hoped to do."

"I am sorry you did not receive that letter,"

continued Adèle, "as I told you in it all about the termination of the tiresome law-suit with which mamma has been so long troubled."

"I hope it has been decided in her favour," observed Frank.

"It has indeed; so please, sir, to treat me with the respect due to an heiress," she added, "for I shall have, when the affairs are finally arranged, five thousand francs a year, and mamma a much larger sum."

It was with the most pleasurable emotion that Frank looked on his intended; for though she still retained the sweet girlish face that had first won his admiration, she had developed into a charming young woman; and as she stood before him, in an exquisite though simple toilette, he thought her by far the most beautiful creature he had ever seen. The surroundings of a most tastefully-arranged apartment, opening into a terrace-garden, redundant with all the beauties of an early spring day, added to the charm of the picture before him; and, as he folded her to his heart, he felt himself

to be one of the most fortunate of the human family.

There was no prudish folly about Adèle. As she spoke, in recognition of his love for her, her face lighted up with pleasurable emotion, combined with a slight blush, which seemed to give her an appearance quite angelic, and fully justified the ardour with which Frank conveyed his avowals of unaltered love and his congratulations on the improved fortunes of herself and her mother. Adèle, without being the ideal of female beauty she appeared to her lover, and which heroines are in general represented, had that charm of expression which renders a bright youthful face most attractive; and Frank might well congratulate himself on the possession of such a treasure of physical excellence, combined with such exalted worth.

His visit was necessarily a short one; and, on his return to the hotel, he took an opportunity of informing the Marchioness of the state of his affections, of which she, in consequence of long letters she had observed being both received and

despatched, had already her suspicions. Not only did she warmly congratulate, but heartily thanked Frank for the self-denial he had exercised in devoting himself so entirely to her interests and convenience by remaining with her at Naples, when his natural inclination would have called him elsewhere. He was amply compensated subsequently for his unselfishness by the very cordial manner in which Lady Cankerfield received his intended, and the kind invitation she gave to both Madame De Courcy and her daughter to visit her in England as soon as circumstances would admit of visitors being received by her.

Frank said nothing even to Adèle, though so interested in the matter, as to his birth and parentage, though he had confided to the worthy Abbé all the circumstances connected with the marriage of his parents; and it was through the instrumentality of that good man that he subsequently obtained all the particulars of his birth and baptism from the priest, an Italian, now on a foreign mission, who had administered the last

consolations of religion to the hapless Cattarina, and received from her the particulars of her marriage.

We shall not attempt to give our readers the details of the brief but happy interviews which ensued between Frank and Adèle; sufficient to say that they found each other unchanged in sentiment as in nature, and their happiness was complete when they looked forward to a speedy union—happiness only equalled by that which the good Abbé and the devoted mother experienced in witnessing the perfect harmony of thought and action that existed between the young people.

Nothing was said as to the precise time of their marriage, though Madame De Courcy informed Frank that one obstacle to his union with her child was removed. "For," she said, "I have been enabled to substantiate our claim to the property of my late husband, and my beloved child will have, though not a fortune, a very tolerable amount of dowry."

Frank said little on the subject, beyond expressing a confident hope of being, ere very long, in a position to marry.

"I have only one stipulation to make," said Madame De Courcy.

"What is that?" inquired Frank.

"That you will allow my child to be as near me as possible," replied the lady. "I know that your future career will render a residence in London necessary; and I fear," she added, "that my health would make living in that locality an impossibility for me."

"We will arrange everything to your satisfaction," replied Frank. "It has been our hope that you would share our home."

"No, my dear boy," said Madame De Courcy, "young people had far better start in life alone. I shall reside here, near my revered friend the Abbé, and you will come and visit me as often, and for as long a time, as you shall find it agreeable. When do you leave Paris?"

"To-morrow," replied Frank; "and I am

charged with Lady Cankerfield's adieux and regrets at not being able to see you again."

"Ah, she is too good!" exclaimed Madame De Courcy; "and a most charming, delightful person."

"She is indeed excellence itself," said Frank.

"Her style is so aristocratic," continued Madame De Courcy. "She is affable, without being patronising. Now go into the garden to Adèle, and don't be wasting your time gossiping with an old woman."

Frank took her hand and kissed it; and, after a more lengthened and tender leave-taking of his intended, returned to the hotel, whence, on the following day, the invalid and his party took their departure for England; where, on his arrival, after having rendered every possible assistance to the Marchioness, Frank repaired to the abode of his earliest friend, Mrs. Tozer, who was so delighted to see him that she actually had, as she termed it, a good cry then and there, for which behaviour she got a rough scolding from her husband, though, as he subsequently admitted, his own eyes were some-

what inclined to spring a leak at the affectionate greeting he received from Frank.

Mrs. Tozer had so much to tell "her dear boy" that she could hardly at times preserve even her wonted coherence.

One great piece of news was the return of his old friend, ''Melia Ann,' and her husband, Sergeant Gordon, from India, "as will drink tea 'ere the day arter to-morrow, as five o'clock as ever is punctual, and do 'ope as you may be able to drop in, as is as anxious to see you as if you was the two twins as they lost in India—as were a great blow—through the 'eat, as in general don't get through their teethin', except 'arf-castes, as in course, through 'avin' the nigger runnin' in their blood, don't 'ave no sunstrokes the same as them blacks over in 'Merryker, through natur' 'avin' 'ad a eye to their brains in givin' them that black wool for to purtect their thick skulls everywhere under the sun."

"All right, mother," said Tozer. "'Old on a bit with them niggers' wool and skulls, and let us 'ear more about them brigands."

"Ah!" replied Mrs. Tozer, "let's; for I'm sure I'm glad I never 'eard of your bein' took up like that, my dear boy, as couldn't never 'ave rested; and I should 'ave come arter you, if above ground, if I'd done it on my knees."

Not doubting his worthy friend's will to attempt such a feat in his behalf, Frank indulged her and Tozer with a detailed account of his adventures in Sicily, especially among the brigands, but sadly disappointed the kindly nature of Mrs. Tozer by declining more than a passing allusion to the illness and death of his more than brother—a subject above all others on which that worthy woman would have wished him to dilate to any extent; but Frank's heart was far too deeply touched by his loss to be able to command his feelings at the recollection, to say nothing of the details of that sad, sad event.

It was in consequence of Frank's descriptive power, at a late hour, that he and his friends parted for the night; Mrs. Tozer being in a great state of additional excitement on hearing that she

would probably be called on to go with Frank, and have an interview with a lawyer about his mother's property, and also the particulars of her death.

On more than one occasion after his return from Sicily, and during the time of their sojourn in Paris, Frank had given to the Marchioness all the particulars given him by Stefano respecting her whom the young man now regarded, with almost certainty, as having been identical with his mother, making as little allusion as possible to her husband, feeling that there was something doubtful, from a legal point of view, as to the validity of their marriage.

The Marchioness listened with the deepest interest to all that Frank told her respecting the ill-fated Cattarina and her husband, though she expressed no opinion as to the identity of Ernesto and the late Lord Mildown, but assuring Frank of her most earnest co-operation in his behalf, and directed him, as soon as they reached London, to visit the legal adviser of the Marquis, and lay before that gentleman all the particulars he

had learnt concerning a matter which interested him so deeply; and in consequence of this advice, on the second day after his arrival in town, did Frank visit Mr. Hunter and place in his hands all the evidence of his parentage that he had been able to collect.

"I found a letter awaiting me from the Sicilian servant of the late Lord Mildown," he said, "informing me that he had arrived in London just a day before I did, and has brought with him the captain of the vessel in which my mother came to London."

"It will be necessary for me," said Mr. Hunter, "to see all the parties concerned in this affair separately at first, and I should wish to commence with Mrs. Tozer."

"She will come whenever you may appoint to see her," replied Frank.

"The sooner the better," replied the lawyer; "this afternoon, if possible, when I will also see the Sicilian and the captain. I should like to see the property of your late mother," he continued.

"Let all concerned come as early as possible, as I shall have to see the Marchioness afterwards."

In consequence of these directions, about two o'clock did Mrs. Tozer, accompanied by Frank, arrive at Mr. Hunter's chambers, where, after a long and minute account of Frank's birth, and the death of his mother, she was introduced, without any preparation, to the man Morgan, whom, as she said, "she indemnified in a instant, though only a glance at him twice before in all my life, as were on the day he arrived at Mrs. Welbyn's, and could swear to him, though it was fust only through a pane of glass, and then the crack of the foldin' doors in makin' of the bed for that poor young creetur."

Mrs. Tozer's testimony as to the captain's identity was supported by that of Mrs. Gordon, "not as I'm one to give in to no 'ard swearing," observed Mrs. Tozer, "though in course your Bible oath is a solemn thing, though you may only kiss the cover; as even a Jew will stick to if took with

'is 'at on, and a Chinese if you breaks a saucer over 'is 'ead, as he considers binding, and certingly is good for trade with them, through bein' in the crockery line. Not but wot them as is liars will be liars all the world over, wotever they swears on, whether it's on books, or 'ats, or saucers, as some 'ave swore away a innercent life before now; and as to takin' away character, why they think nothink of it; though, in my opinion, you'd better take anyone's life than their characters, 'cos, arter all, wot is life without it?—as I told 'Melia Butt, as run away with a clerk at a brewery, as turned out a married man. 'Why,' I says, 'you may be ever so sorry, 'Melia, as you've been and disgraced yourself and your family; but,' I says, 'all your sorrer won't make you an 'onest woman, 'cos he's a married man.' And as to pity, it's cold work. But, in course, takin' of hoaths is all my eye nowadays, for wotever can be more solemn than gittin' married, when you promises before your Maker as nothink but death shan't part you, and then go and get a divorce and marry agin within three months?

as is black purgery, in my opinion. But then, in course, I'm a old-fashioned party as don't understand what is meant by morals, nor yet edication, as all goes one way, and is in favour of them as does 'rong, and the only fault is bein' found out; as ain't the way I should like any child of mine to be taught. And as to doin' as you'd be done by, as is the way I were brought up, now the thing is to do others, for fear as they should do you; and keep your word as long as it ansers your purpose, and tell a lie if you get anything by it, and, above all, when you do tell a lie, stick to it."

Mrs. Tozer delivered her views of the morality of the day in a tone so impressive, and with such volubility, as to duly impress her hearers, and to set at naught any attempts to check the flow of her eloquence; Tozer, the only person who ever succeeded in effectually silencing her, not being present.

There was, however, no occasion for any hard swearing, as Captain Morgan made no difficulty about the matter, and told his story bluntly and

plainly, his statement in every way tallying with that which Stefano had already made, both to Frank and the lawyer.

Morgan did not say much about the virtues of his departed wife, except that he was unaware of her having appropriated any of the property of the Sicilian lady, whom there was no difficulty in identifying, she being the only female passenger the captain had ever taken on board or brought to England.

"You are aware," said Mr. Hunter, "that your late wife left some property in this good woman's charge?" and as he spoke, he indicated Mrs. Tozer with his hand.

"There is nothing I wish to claim," said Morgan.

"But I should wish you to see them things," interposed Mrs. Tozer, who was not over-pleased at having been referred to as "a good woman," "through a party in the name of Melcombe as might claim 'em."

"I'll see them if you like," said Morgan. "As

to Mrs. Melcombe, she has no claim; they wasn't lawful sisters."

Mrs. Tozer, with the help of her friend Mrs. Gordon, produced two small foreign-looking packages they had brought for Mr. Hunter's inspection, identified at once by Stefano, as having been put on board the vessel by him, as the property of "La Signorina."

"Yes," said Mrs. Tozer; "and here is all that was in it." And as she spoke, she pointed to some trifling articles of dress.

"No papers?" inquired Mr. Hunter.

"Certingly not," replied Mrs. Tozer; "nor yet nothink of value."

Stefano, with the instinct of his race, and knowledge of the handicraft of his countrymen, shook the box, now emptied of its contents, and drawing a knife from his pocket, proceeded to pass it round the inside of the lid, which proved to be hollow in the middle, and in which a packet of papers lay concealed. "*Eccolo!*" he exclaimed, as he displayed to the wondering eyes

of the lookers-on a number of papers and other articles.

"Ah!" he said, turning to Frank, "I had this box made for her in Giardini, and Santa helped her pack these things away the night she went on board."

"These papers are indeed important," said Mr. Hunter, as he glanced through them. "Yes," he added, "here is the certificate of their marriage."

"Let me see it!" exclaimed Frank, as he took the paper from the lawyer, and, having read it, pressed the signatures to his lips, whilst Stefano actually wept for joy.

"I will take possession of these papers," said Mr. Hunter, "and discuss some other matters with you, Morgan, if you will call here to-morrow morning."

So fully was Frank's time occupied during the ensuing day that it was with difficulty that he managed to join Mrs. Tozer's tea-party. He made a point of doing so, in order to shake hands with his early friend, 'Melia Ann's husband.

His interview with them was necessarily a short one, but fully made up for when, within a week, he again appeared, accompanied by Stefano, at Mrs. Tozer's hospitable board, having previously announced to her, and his other humble friends, that he had every prospect of fully establishing his claim to the name and titles of the house of Blomberg. Both Mr. and Mrs. Tozer had seen him several times during the last days of the investigation of that important subject, during which Mrs. Tozer had been fully interrogated, and had somewhat tried the patience of the experts in law and genealogy by her voluminous evidence, and readiness to swear to certain indelible moles and marks on Frank's body, which were, she was given to understand, characteristics of his father's family.

CHAPTER VIII.

On the arrival of the Marquis and his party at Blomberg House, his condition was such that the Marchioness at once summoned his children to his bedside; both his daughters came forthwith as did his sister, Lady Caroline—the latter, on seeing the state of her brother, decided to remain with the Marchioness till all was over, a duty which neither Lady Bolderstone nor her sister seemed to recognise as incumbent on them; and after a short and formal interview with their parent took their leave, much to the relief of those about him.

The Marquis had barely recognised his daughters, though he had evinced deep though feebly-expressed satisfaction at the sight of his sister.

Lady Mildown had been at the house to receive the travellers and had been recognised most affectionately by the Marquis, who, for the first time, called her by her christian-name; and though he did not allude to her loss, it was evident by his manner that he intended to express his deepest sympathy with her. He patted her hand and said in a feeble tone, "Poor dear Maria." She had sufficient self-command to restrain any outburst of sorrow; in fact her grief had from the beginning taken the form of a woe too deeply-seated for any demonstration. In this respect her conduct had displayed a remarkable contrast to that of her husband, who gave way to violent expressions of alternate grief and rage. His wife said little to him, and took refuge in silence; even when she first encountered Frank she heard with mute grief the particulars of her son's death.

It was easy to see that Frank's was no simulated sorrow; and that surest form of condolence, sincere sympathy, made his communication a solace to the afflicted mother.

Lord Mildown did not put in an appearance at Blomberg House, but wrote a most insolent letter to the Marchioness, refusing to see her, charging her with being the cause of his son's death, and denouncing Frank as one of her creatures, and a designing adventurer who had been the ruin of his unhappy boy.

In conclusion he expressed it to be his intention to come and see his father, and trusted that, if there were any spark of decent feeling left in those about the Marquis, his son might be permitted to see him without the intrusion of any third person.

As he had fixed the time of his visit, no reply to this effusion was necessary; and the Marchioness directed that Lord Mildown should, whenever he called, be admitted at once to the Marquis.

He came, however, rather before the time he had said, and was shown into the room before the Marchioness had time to withdraw.

She advanced to meet him, and said in a low tone, "Avoid exciting him. I only address you

to prevent his suspecting there is anything like ill-feeling between us."

Slightly bowing, she left the room, and Mildown advanced to his father's side.

He was lying on a sofa, and looked very much older than when he left England, mainly owing, perhaps, to the fact that the days of *making up* were gone for him.

He looked at his son, and said, "Gus, they tell me your boy is dead; it isn't true, is it?"

The unfortunate father, thus addressed, sank on to a chair, speechless.

"Where is the Marchioness?" asked the Marquis. "Call her here. I can't have a scene. Where is Mr. Welbyn? I won't be left with my son. He only wants me to give him money. I won't. No, I won't."

"Has the doctor seen my father to-day, Graves?" said Mildown, in an undertone.

"Yes, my lord, and found him much weaker."

"Gus," said the Marquis, in a feeble voice,

rousing himself from a partial doze, "she has been a good wife to me, and a kind friend to you all; but you have hated her; now promise me when I'm gone that you'll behave better to her, that you'll treat her with respect; promise me!" he said, in an urgent tone.

Mildown made no reply.

"You won't?" exclaimed the old man. "Get out of my sight, turn him out of the room, sneaking cur that he always was!"

"I think your lordship had better go," said Graves.

"I will not," replied Lord Mildown. "This is all done on purpose. I will not endure it. I will have other advice. My father is insane, and I'll have him under proper restraint."

"For God's sake, my lord, don't talk in that way," said Graves, in an alarmed tone, as he saw the Marquis bursting with rage, and heard him exclaim, "Graves, kick him out — send for the Marchioness."

Graves stood irresolute as the door opened, and

Lady Caroline Dashwater entering, said, in a firm tone:

"Lord Mildown, leave this room instantly, or I shall order you to be turned out."

She pointed to the door, which Graves held open. There was an expression in her eyes such as Mildown had never before detected. He felt she was in earnest, and immediately withdrew.

For some time after the departure of Lord Mildown the Marquis remained perfectly still; and it was not till late in the afternoon that he said to his wife, "Laura, send for a clergyman, and I wish to see Hunter."

The Marchioness at once complied with these requests; and in the course of the afternoon the Marquis was visited by both his legal and spiritual guides, whom he saw alone, and was evidently much relieved in mind by their visits. The lawyer, who was attended by two clerks, remained a long time with his client, and in the course of his visit summoned two members of the household to the sick room. He subsequently had an interview with the

Marchioness, who was temporarily relieved from her attendance on the patient in consequence of his having from sheer exhaustion fallen into a deep sleep.

It was on the night following these events that, as his devoted wife sat watching the Marquis, under the impression that he was dozing, she heard him pronounce her name.

"What is it, dearest one?" she asked.

"Laura," said the dying man, "I have something to say to you—something very solemn and important. I have been a very wicked man."

"Well, dearest, and you are very sorry for it, as you have already said, and I am sure you ask forgiveness of Him whom you have offended."

"Yes, yes," he replied; "but I have done a great injury to a fellow-creature—to my own son."

The Marchioness concluding that he alluded to the late interview with Mildown, replied: "Do you wish to see him? Shall I send for him, dear one?"

He looked at her with an air of surprise as he

murmured: "I shall go to him, he will never return to me. I mean," he added, "my eldest son."

The Marchioness paused ere she attempted to reply, and then said: "Would you like to see Caroline?"

"Yes, yes," he added, "but at once."

"She is staying here," replied the Marchioness, "and will come to you directly."

The Marquis nodded his head in sign of assent to this proposal, and in a minute Graves was in the room in answer to a summons from the hand-bell.

"Send word to Lady Caroline that I wish to see her at once," said the Marchioness. "Say that it is nothing to alarm her," she added, in a low tone, "and ask Mr. Welbyn to wait a little longer in case I should wish to see him."

She then turned to the sufferer and held his hand, awaiting the arrival of her sister-in-law, whom a few minutes brought to the sick-room.

"Here is Caroline," said Lady Cankerfield.

The Marquis looked up and smiled. "I want you, my dear," he said, in a voice scarcely audible,

"to hear from my lips an important disclosure about poor dear Ernest." He spoke in so very low a tone, that the listeners drew quite close to him as he said, "Ernest was married, Caroline," he continued, "and his poor wife was cruelly disowned and abandoned. She may have been a mother, and it is likely that her child, my lawful representative, has been left to beggary or worse. I have done all that is now in my power to repair the wrong, and promise me then that you will both do everything that is possible to carry out my wishes and do that child justice."

"How do you know that Ernest was married?" asked Lady Caroline.

"He wrote me a few lines to say so. Oh, Elvey knew all about it, and with my concurrence went to Sicily, and agreed with the poor girl's family to keep her out of the way. He was a very bad——" he checked himself suddenly as he looked at his wife, and then added, "but I was worse, far worse. I cannot forget that I owe him a debt of gratitude for having given me the best of angels for a wife."

With these words he tried to raise the Marchioness's hand to kiss it.

She was kneeling by his side as she said: "My own loved husband, compose your mind as regards your late son. It is true that my stepfather did his wife and child a great wrong; but providentially we have been instrumental in the preservation of your grandson. I have been wrong," she continued, "in not having told you this before."

"Hunter has told me all that has been elicited; but Elvey had the papers that would corroborate everything."

"I know he had," replied the Marchioness.

"It seems strange that I should see things now so differently to what I formerly did; it is all your doing," he added, turning to the Marchioness.

"No, no," she replied; "and indeed you must forgive me for having kept all the facts that had come to my knowledge connected with your late son's marriage from you; but I was uncertain as to how you might feel about him or his."

"You were justified in your doubt," said the

Marquis; "you have never heard me pronounce his name. I was very angry, unjustly angry with him."

"So I had heard," said the Marchioness, "and I did not wish to revive unpleasant recollections, so did not mention the subject to you; but have waited in the hope of your being stronger. But now compose yourself with the knowledge that I have in my possession the proofs that will corroborate your son's marriage. Your sister is aware of all the circumstances which I have hitherto withheld from you in order to avoid giving you pain or excitement. Your grandson is alive and well, and you have been unconsciously his benefactor."

"Can I see him?" asked the dying man.

"You can and shall in a few minutes," was the Marchioness's reply; "but before you do so, let me ask you to send a message of peace and forgiveness to Augustus."

"He will not value it," said Lady Caroline, in an undertone.

"It is not on his account that I speak," replied

Lady Cankerfield; "it is a duty my husband owes him, and one I am sure he will fulfil." A look from the dying man was of assent, and then he again sank into a doze.

It was on this same evening that, on calling at Blomberg House, Frank, having heard a very bad account of the sufferer's condition, lingered, in compliance with the Marchioness's message, till a late hour, near the sick-room, in case he might be of any service to the Marchioness, who was in the habit of keeping her post of watching after having sent both Graves and the medical man away.

Frank was in the library adjoining the room where the dying man lay, quite absorbed in a book, when the door opened and the Marchioness appeared.

"Mr. Welbyn," she said, "will you come here?"

He immediately complied, and entered the chamber of death. Lady Caroline was sitting by the Marquis, who, propped up in bed, held out his hands.

Frank, at a sign from the Marchioness, took them in his, but was much surprised to find himself locked in the old man's feeble embrace, who said, "God bless you, my boy; forgive me all the wrong I have done you." Frank, almost petrified by this most unexpected occurrence, knelt by the bedside unable to speak.

"Bring the lights nearer," said the Marquis; "let me try and see his features."

A pair of candles were held close to Frank's wonder-struck face, and the Marquis said, "Yes; I see it now; I always knew the voice. You are," he continued, addressing Frank, "my son's child, my heir. Try," he said, "to discharge your duties better than——" He paused for a moment, and then said, "Give your uncle my dying love and forgiveness."

He continued to hold Frank's hand as he said to his wife, "Tell Adelaide and Augusta I forgive them all the pain they have given us both. Poor Maria, poor dear, she has lost her boy. Give her my love. You will be a son to her," he added,

turning his eyes on Frank, as, sinking back on his pillows fairly exhausted, he remained silent for a long time, and then became slightly convulsed.

"I will go for the doctor," said Frank.

"Do so," said the Marchioness, as she raised the sufferer in his bed, "though," she added, "I am afraid it is useless."

Lady Caroline gave a hasty glance at the dying man as Frank left the room.

"He is past human help," exclaimed the Marchioness, as she supported the head of her rapidly-expiring husband. "Do you know me, dear one?" she inquired, as she pressed the almost lifeless hand to her lips.

A faint smile broke over the pallid features of the Marquis; his lips moved as his wife bent down to hear him utter in a low whisper, "Yes, God bless you, and forgive me."

A solemn silence of some seconds ensued, seconds that seemed like ages to the kneeling women, whilst the last sigh escaped the once harsh, worldly-minded man who, under better

influences, had died with the words of contrition and charity on his lips.

"Laura," said Lady Caroline, as she pressed the widow to her heart, "we owe you much, for you have been the good genius of this house; but for you, my brother would have lived and died estranged from his family. You have not only benefited the living, but obtained justice for the dead, and I thank you with all my heart."

Lady Cankerfield could not reply; her heart was overflowing with sorrow, not that she affected any violent grief at her loss, but her nature, though ambitious, was noble and generous, and she felt the deepest gratitude to the man who had been instrumental in raising her to the position in life which it had been her aspiration from earliest girlhood to attain.

"I have only one regret connected with the identity of Mr. Welbyn as your nephew's son," she remarked.

"What is that?" exclaimed Lady Caroline. "Ah! I understand," she continued, "it is on account of

your interest in him appearing to arise from hostility to Mildown. Do not let that distress you for one moment; no one will regret his being displaced; besides, you have done nothing in any way beyond what is strictly just."

"No!" replied Lady Cankerfield. "I have never, till this evening, in any way referred to the matter of your eldest nephew's marriage, and cannot be suspected of having used any undue influence with my husband as regards the young man so remarkably thrown on my protection; for, as you know, although it has been during the ten days that have elapsed between the return of the Marquis to England and his death that these investigations respecting his grandson have been made, and the result of all that had been elicited from the man Morgan and others has been duly reported to me, I have intentionally abstained from conveying to my dying husband the positive intelligence of his eldest son having left a legitimate heir till now. As I have said, I dreaded the effect of such a communication, for though the Marquis had, from the

time of his hearing of Blomberg's death, frequently made reference to his eldest son, he had never, since I have been his wife, uttered his name till this evening, when he acknowledged Mr. Welbyn as his legal representative and heir."

CHAPTER IX.

We must now re-conduct our readers to Falklands, which, though presenting in the main much the same features as when we first introduced its beauties to our readers, is now presenting a very different aspect to that under which we last saw it, especially as regards the interior of the mansion; the windows now being closely shut, with the corridors and staircases draped in black. In the vast entrance-hall is placed the solid oak coffin of the late Marquis, surrounded by all the insignia of his rank and now departed grandeur, intermingled with the trappings of conventional sorrow. A solemn silence reigns without the house, broken at intervals by the tolling of the bell of the adjacent church, to the

vaults of which the mortal remains of the departed nobleman were about to be so soon consigned. As the morning wore on, a degree of bustle and excitement arose about the precincts of the house of mourning, attendant on the arrival of tenantry, neighbours, and friends of the deceased, assembled to pay him the last tribute of respect; and within a short time of their arrival all is ready to complete the mournful task. A solemn procession being formed, a stranger—a remarkably handsome, noble-looking young man — took his place as chief mourner. "Who is he?" whispered the followers. "The son of the late Lord Mildown," was the reply.

Just as the body is about to be borne from the Hall, the one who has hitherto been known as the bearer of that title entered the house, ghastly as death, and, after a hurried glance around, exclaimed, in a husky, hurried tone:

"I protest against this! I will not allow it!"

Mr. Hunter and Mr. Holmes were in a moment by the side of the highly-excited speaker; but their

attempts at silencing him were fruitless, and he was about to express himself with greater violence, when Lord Bolderstone, approaching him, said:

"Augustus, come with me. I must speak to you in private." And with these words, pronounced in a peremptory tone, he led his bewildered brother-in-law to an adjoining room.

Meanwhile, the funeral *cortége* having been formed, proceeded to its place of destination. In a short time all was over, and the eighth Marquis of Cankerfield laid in his family vault, with the impressive form of words with which the Church of England beatifies all those who are buried according to its rites.

The church ceremonies having been duly performed, the whole of the family party assembled in the library to hear the will of the deceased read.

It was a somewhat bulky document, and bore the date of some years previous. By its provisions ample means were allotted to the widowed Marchioness, to whom Falklands was bequeathed for her life. Handsome legacies were left to Lady

Bolderstone and her sister; some valuable jewellery was to be given to both. Lady Caroline Dashwater and Maria, "wife of my son Augustus," were both suitably remembered. Then followed some legacies to trusted agents and faithful servants. Then, in conclusion, the testator directed that the bulk of his estate should be disposed of as "I shall hereafter by codicil direct."

The Marchioness sat unmoved during the reading of the will, supported by Lady Caroline Dashwater, whilst at her side, standing behind her chair, stood Frank, looking more pale, if possible, than the excited Augustus, who, on seeing the lawyer about to fold up the paper he had just been reading, exclaimed, in a loud and angry tone:

"This is either a forgery, or the will of a madman! I give notice to all present, I shall contest it on the grounds of insanity, or undue influence!"

"There is the codicil to be read," observed Mr. Hunter, in a quiet tone.

"Let us hear it," said Lord Augustus, as he resumed the seat from which he had started.

"By all means," said the lawyer, as, with a clear voice and deliberate manner, he read as follows: "'Inasmuch as I have reason to believe that my eldest son, Ernest Blomberg—now deceased—did in his lifetime marry, and leave behind him legitimate offspring, I hereby give and bequeath to such offspring, or representative, the whole of my estate, personal and real, save and except the sums and property already bequeathed in my will; leaving the same in trust to my beloved wife Laura, Marchioness of Cankerfield, till such time as the authenticity of the said heir to my son Ernest shall be established.'"

"What is the date of that codicil?" inquired Lord Bolderstone.

"I drew it up," replied Mr. Hunter, "on the day before the death of the late Marquis."

"I thought as much!" exclaimed Lord Augustus. "It is a transparent fraud, framed to disinherit me, at the instigation of the vile persons who surrounded my unhappy father at the last."

"I would advise you not to speak of me as a

vile person," said Lady Caroline, "or I may think it worth while to punish your insolence."

She looked so scornfully indignant at her nephew as to make it doubtful whether she might not be contemplating bestowing on him personal chastisement.

"I am prepared to state on oath," said Mr. Hunter, "that I drew up this codicil at the direction of the Marquis himself, and that no one was aware of its contents except my two clerks, who witnessed it."

"It is a conspiracy!" shrieked Lord Augustus. "I will punish you all. And pray who and where is this supposed son and heir?"

"He is here," said Lady Caroline, as, taking Frank's hand, she led him forward.

"I suspected as much!" exclaimed Lord Augustus. "I have been watching this conspiracy as it has been in the progress of hatching. I knew that this workhouse-born *protégé* of my father's wife was designed to supplant me. A pretty sort of heir indeed! And pray where are the proofs of his legitimacy?"

"Your lordship," interposed Mr. Hunter, "has had due notice of the existence of this claimant, though you have chosen to ignore all communication on the subject."

Lord Augustus made no reply as he glanced over the papers held out to him for inspection by the lawyer. "Ah!" he exclaimed, "I observe all these documents profess only to be copies."

"I have the originals," observed Lady Cankerfield; and, as she spoke, she placed on the table the cash-box which Frank so well remembered her having carried off from Mr. Elvey's chambers at the time of that individual's decease.

"Here are the certificates of the marriage of the late Lord Mildown, which was doubly solemnised; here is a letter, addressed by him to his father, announcing his marriage, and also his will, by which he bequeaths everything to which he may be entitled to his wife and possible offspring."

Lord Augustus was silent for a time, as Frank, speaking in a low but decided tone, said:

"As far as I am personally concerned, the remarks on my birth would pass unnoticed; but it is due to the memory of my mother that I should state that not only was she my father's lawful wife, but by birth a member of one of the most aristocratic families in Europe. I have in my veins blood ennobled by centuries of honour and renown, and compared with which the honours and distinctions of the house of Cankerfield are things of yesterday."

"You are worthy," exclaimed Lord Augustus, "to represent a man who could stoop to the baseness of inducing me to cut off the entail for the benefit of the *protégé* of an adventuress. I little suspected my own father to be engaged in a plot to defraud me!"

"You forget yourself, Lord Augustus!" exclaimed Mr. Hunter, "as well as insult your father's memory, and misstate the facts connected with the cutting off of the entail, to which, as I know, you were a voluntary party, and received a large amount of ready money, as

well as your present settlement, in consideration of your doing so."

"I do not wish to bandy words with you, sir," replied the discomfited Augustus; "and I would thank you, in speaking to me, to address me as Lord Cankerfield."

"I can do nothing of the sort," replied Mr. Hunter, "and warn you against persevering in an infatuated attempt to dispute not only your father's will, but well-established facts as to the inheritance of his title and estates. You have, in common with the other members of your family, received formal notice of the marriage of your late brother with Donna Cattarina dei Paoli, and also of that lady having subsequently given birth to a son."

"It is a very well-planned story," remarked Lady Bolderstone, in a tone implying incredulity.

"A most remarkable coincidence that he should have been introduced so opportunely into my father's house," observed Lady Adelaide.

"Adelaide and Augusta," said Lady Caroline, rising from her seat, and advancing to her nieces,

"pray do not follow your unhappy brother's example by insulting your father's memory in the person of his widow. If you are bent on a course so utterly at variance with good taste and the conduct of ladies, you must indulge in it elsewhere, but not in my presence. You can, if you choose, try to induce your husbands to unite with your brother in the attempt to set aside your father's will; but I am sure they know too well what is due to their position to concur in any such attempt; and you may as well remember that, in so doing, you will forfeit all benefit in it, and throw the whole estate into the hands of the heir-at-law."

"You," exclaimed Lord Augustus, who had overheard the foregoing remarks, "have been my enemy all my life, and are now culminating your malice in thus siding with that woman, who has conspired to wrong and rob me, in the interest of one whom I regard as her paramour."

Frank, on hearing these words, sprang forward as though he would have throttled the speaker, exclaiming, in a loud tone: "Silence, you dastardly liar! I will readily allow you to say of me anything

your malice may dictate; but dare breathe a word of calumny against this lady, and I will chastise your insolence!"

As he spoke, he drew the arm of the Marchioness through his own.

She looked at him and said: "Remember!"

In an instant Frank had burst into an agony of tears, as he exclaimed: "Oh, forgive me. I forgot. You are his father."

Frank, as he spoke, extended his hand to his uncle, who turned away with an expression of disgust; the outstretched hand was taken, however, by his wife, who said: "My dear Frank, I know how good and loving a friend you were to my boy, and how dearly he loved you, and you will ever be to me as a son; you will, I know, do all in your power to fill the place he has left vacant in my heart."

Frank could not reply for tears, and looked around in the hope of being able to repeat his appeal for his uncle's forgiveness, but that individual had left the room.

During the foregoing scene Lord Bolderstone

and his brother-in-law, Lord Charles, had been holding a conversation in the deep recess of a window. When Lady Bolderstone began to speak her husband turned his head, and gave her a look so significant as to put a stop to what she was about to say, and from that time both she and her sister had maintained a rigid silence.

"Will you be so kind as to come here, my love?" said Lord Bolderstone, in a polite though not endearing tone.

"Adelaide, my love, I wish to speak to you," said Lord Charles.

The ladies at once crossed the room to their husbands, with whom they were soon engaged in close conference.

"I must now," continued Mr. Hunter, "in fulfilment of my duty, present the heir to the titles and honours of the House of Cankerfield to the members of his family." And as he spoke he took Frank by the hand.

The Marchioness and Lady Caroline at once offered Frank their warmest and most affectionate

congratulations, just as the deposed Lord Mildown re-entered the room.

"I am come," he said, "to protest against these proceedings. I shall at once enter a caveat against my father's will, and obtain an injunction in Chancery to restrain the action of his executors."

"Is it possible, Lord Augustus," said Mr. Hunter, "that you are going to be so infatuated as to persist in opposing your father's will and the well-supported evidence of your nephew's legitimacy? Believe me, you are being very badly advised."

"Really, Augustus," said Lord Bolderstone, interposing, "this is a most unbecoming proceeding. We have been furnished with the clearest proofs of this young man being your elder brother's lawful representative, and in my opinion, as also in that of my wife, it would be a most improper proceeding to attempt to dispute so just a claim, and we should neither of us be parties to any such step."

"Both my wife and myself entirely concur in what Lord Bolderstone has stated," said Lord

Charles to Mr. Hunter, as with Lady Adelaide he followed the example of Lord and Lady Bolderstone, who had already shaken hands with their newly-found relation.

Frank could with difficulty utter a few words in recognition of the kindness he was experiencing; and, after another ineffectual attempt to take his uncle's hand, he left the room accompanied by Mr. Hunter.

The ladies having retired at the close of these short proceedings, Lord Augustus was left alone with his brothers-in-law, from both of whom he received the salutary advice not to make a fool of himself.

"You do not think that I should have given way on the point of your disinheritance," said Lord Bolderstone, "without proper advice? We have had counsel's opinion on the legality of the marriage, and it is all right; and as for the young fellow, I like him."

"So do I," remarked Lord Charles, "and in spite of your insolence to him, Gus, I believe he will turn

out a trump. Take my advice, and make it up with him; send him a few words of kindness. It's a bitter pill, but you had better swallow it."

"It is very hard that you should all turn against me," whimpered Augustus.

Lord Bolderstone shrugged his shoulders, and remarked "that it was, perhaps, a pity that the late Lord Mildown had been so conscientious."

Lord Charles made some original remark about crying over spilt milk, and then asked his brother-in-law "whether it would be the thing to have a game at billiards?" a proceeding against which Bolderstone demurred. Leaving the disinherited Augustus to his own reflections, they adjourned to the smoking-room, both agreeing that it was far better to leave things in the hands of the newly-found heir than at the disposal of such a mean-spirited cur as the deposed Mildown.

The ladies of the family did not join the family circle that day. The young Marquis took the head of the table and did the honours to his two uncles, Mr. Hunter, and Mr. Holmes, and was in no small

degree gratified to receive, through Mr. Hunter, a pacific if not friendly message from Lord Augustus, who had left the house in the course of the afternoon, unaccompanied by his wife, whose proffered society he had not very graciously declined.

CHAPTER X.

"LAW, Tozer, whatever does the boy mean?" said Mrs. Tozer to her husband, as they sat discussing a letter just received from Frank, and written by him from Falklands the day after the events recorded in the last chapter.

"Why, his meaning is pretty clear, Mrs. T.," replied Tozer. "He wants to know what we should like to do—whether we should like to go into the country and live on one of his farms."

"Not for me," said Mrs. Tozer, "as London is quite good enough, for I can't bear them long-winded country lanes, and only a path across fields ankle-deep in mud, with a mad bull after you, or a dog as 'ave broke 'is chain a-'angin' on to you;

or, per'aps ill-used by a tramp, or a navvy; with your things put out to bleach stole by gipsies. No. You don't ketch me a-tryin' no country ways at my time of life, as couldn't milk a cow if it was ever so, an' 'ates the smell of pigs. And as to you, Tozer, if you was to take to sportive ways in your old age, and get throwed off with the 'ounds, and brought 'ome dead on a 'urdle, through your gun a-bustin', like old Squire Grampus, gettin' thro' a 'edge, why I should never 'old my 'ead up agin; and I'm sure you ain't no turn for farmin', as would be a-lettin' yourself down for to foller the plough-tail in the hevenin' of your days."

"How much more jaw are you a-goin' to give over it?" observed Tozer, when his partner stopped for breath. "Nobody wants you to go and live in the country."

"That's lucky," said Mrs. Tozer, "for if they did, I shouldn't go, as it ain't a place fit for anyone to live in, as 'ave been used to decent ways, where you can't get a bit of butcher's meat without bespeakin' of it for days. And as to milk and

butter—I can get better of Mrs. Champlin; not as I cares for 'er Welsh bread, tho' it's better than that 'ome-made country filth as is in general 'eavy as lead, and werry often bitter as sut. No, give me London, with decent shops; not as I 'olds with can meats nor yet soups, and preserved milk, as is wot I calls keg-meg; and as to them pickles and sauces as is all over the walls, I wouldn't eat 'em was it ever so, as can pickle my own inions and cabbage, and even a walnut for them as likes 'em, and I knows is sweet and 'olesome—the same as red-currant jelly and black-currant jams, as I makes myself, and both good with a sore throat."

"Well, then," said Tozer, "wot anser am I to give about a new 'ouse?"

"Tell that dear feller as we don't want nothink as long as they don't bring a railway through the place."

"He has set his heart on my having more of a gardin," observed Tozer; "and thinks we might fancy Norwood or somewhere a little way out of town."

"I ain't a goin' out of the bills of mortality," said Mrs. Tozer, "as long as I'm in this world; and 'opes not to live to be burnt when I goes to the next with none of these new-fangled rubbish by ways as they calls bein' incriminated. No! Give me my grave when my time comes, like my mother afore me, as tho' not buried in plumes, poor dear, as is wot I don't look for, was laid decent in 'er grave, with a 'ead and foot-stone as she'd put up for father, and two as died in infancy thro' cuttin' of their teeth and cross, and was constant convulsion from Friday night to the Sunday, as she never took 'er clothes off over a week, as is wot I calls somethink like a mother. But, surely, that dear feller is a comin' to let me see 'ow he looks now he's a real Markee, as is wot the old French priest said he was sure to be in 'is letter, as he 'rote about 'is baptism, as is legal, tho' it were done by a Cath'lic priest, as I see 'im do it with my own eyes arter he'd been and throwed a bit of ribbon over 'is shoulders, as is wot Frank told me were 'is stole, as seems a sing'ler thing for a priest to 'ave about 'im.

But, dear 'art, I must give over a callin' that dear boy by 'is Christshun name, tho' he won't never let me call 'im 'my lord,' I knows."

"Well, you'll soon have a chance of pra'tising," said Tozer, "for he's coming to see us the end of the week, on his way to France."

"Ah! I thought he'd soon be a goin' there, as is only nat'ral," remarked Mrs. Tozer; "and she must be grown into a lovely girl a judgin' from 'er fotygraft, tho' always fine eyes, not as that ain't no sign of nothink, for I'm sure I always looks a beast in one, and as old as my own grandmother, tho' I must say I wish she weren't a forriner, not as I'd say that to 'im for the world, thro' 'is own mother bein' that way of thinkin, poor dear, as wasn't no fault of 'er own, as looked like a angel, livin' or dead, as I can see 'er now layin' both. Ah! poor dear, it only shows as them runaway matches is bad things."

"Hold on, mother," said Tozer, "she only ran away from certain death."

"Ah, it's lucky as he were a man of honour, poor thing," observed Mrs. Tozer, "as wouldn't 'ave done the right thing by 'er in making of 'er 'is lorful wife if he 'adn't been——"

Her further remarks were checked, as her attention was called to a short note that Tozer had been writing to Frank, in which he expressed his thanks for all his offers, respecting which he added: "The missus and me will 'ave a talk with you when we meet."

"It certainly do read werry well," observed Mrs. Tozer, as she looked at the address on the letter, and read aloud: 'The Most Noble the Marquis of Cankerfield.' Ah, not but wot he was quite as noble when he was our poor boy," she added; "though I am glad as he is come out in his right colours, as always was a true nobleman, bless 'is 'art. I shan't never forget 'is little limbs, when quite a infant, and 'ow he would dash about in 'is sea-water bath when I took 'im to Margate, and crow agin, and cry when took out; and I always

said as 'is bather, as were Mrs. Grimes, 'ad done 'er dooty by dippin' 'im, as no doubt the sea air is a fine bracin' thing."

Towards the end of the week Lord Cankerfield paid his foster parents a visit; and never did a parlour present so bright an appearance as that of Mrs. Tozer on that occasion, all the furniture having been rubbed to a degree of polish that would have excited the despairing envy of the operatives of either Gillow or Banting; and never did a household in general exhibit a brighter air than did that of Mrs. Tozer on the evening that she was about to welcome her dear boy, in the possession of all his honours. Her dear mother's old silver teapot seemed gleaming with pleasure, the old-fashioned tea-service radiant, and the viands both abundant and appetising, and Sarah Ann in a brand-new cap and gown.

"He told me we was to be sure not to wait for 'im a moment, but give me 'is word, as he never broke in 'is life, as he'd be here as soon as possible after five," said Mrs. Tozer, who, apparelled in a

green satin turk, and a cap adorned with scarlet flowers, was about to make the tea. She would have worn slight mourning, but thought it would look forward. "I couldn't never be so cool over it," she said, "as I am, if I hadn't seen 'im at the lawyer's, this very day, to 'ear it was all settled; and he did look the lord all over, with 'is noble forehead as white as ivory, and them lovely teeth, as 'is dark mustarsh sets off double; and 'is deep mournin' seems to suit 'im down to the ground, as though he wears it deeper, out of respect for his grandfather; yet is a real mourner after that dear young cousin of 'is, as the least illusion to will bring a tear into 'is eye, as always 'ad a 'art like butter from a child; and you well remember, 'Melia Ann, how he fretted ever so long arter the death of your dear mother, as shall never forget findin' 'im myself a-settin' on 'er grave in the Tower 'Amlets simmetry, the Sunday after she was berried, a-cryin' fit to break 'is 'art."

"He's a splendid young feller, and a real ornyment to the aristocracy," said Tozer, "and so

said the lawyers, as in course is judges of a gentleman, and could pick one out of a crowd myself any day, for that matter. And as to that there uncle of 'is'n, as everyone despises, and is glad as he's done out of the title, why, in my opinion, he's more like a tailor out of work than anything else in this world."

"Ain't he precious savage, neither?" observed Mrs. Tozer.

"Savage ain't the word!" exclaimed Tozer. "I believe he did try it on to make a row over the funeral, as is a week to-morrow, and our boy is come up to get everything settled."

"I knowed he'd come to me at once," chimed in Mrs. Tozer; "and I can't think why they kept the old man so long above ground."

"That's his wife's doin'," said Tozer. "She's 'ad every respect paid to 'is memory, and he's been a-layin' in state both in town and country."

"It is wonderful to think how things have all turned out in that young man's favour," said Mrs. Gordon.

"You may well say so," replied Mrs. Tozer;

"for I'm sure it's been like puttin' a puzzle together a-gettin' 'is rights; and 'ow them odds and ends of 'is poor dear mother's 'ave all turned up trumps; as is wot both me and your dear mother always espected, as saved every pin's point to a 'air's breath of everythink as belonged to 'er; and then to think as that poor bedridden objic, as was all brought on through drink, should 'ave things as belonged to 'er, as in course must 'ave been a bad lot, to take up like that with a seafarin' man. And little did I think, in lookin' over them things, as there were more than meets the eye, as the sayin' is, in that box; though it never entered my 'ead, any more than anyone else's, as that fieldmale were a thief, though given to drink, as in course must 'ave been, and a reg'lar bad lot all round; for I'm sure that poor dear young creetur would 'ave moved the 'art of a stone. And as to that fellow Morgan, he was less than a man, and didn't deserve never to 'ave 'ad a mother of 'is own."

"Ah," remarked Mrs. Gordon, "men don't

think much about their mothers when once they get away from them, but it certainly is very gratifying to know that all has come right with regard to that dear lady's boy. What a lovely creature she was, and I know he was a nice weight to carry before he was six months; and mother wouldn't let me nurse him much, she was afraid he would make me crooked."

"As is wot 'ave 'appened to many a growin' girl afore now," observed Mrs. Tozer, "partikler when inclined to be round-shouldered, as you never was."

"What an extraordinary thing that you should have had the care of that Mrs. Morgan," observed Mrs. Gordon.

"Yes," said Mrs. Tozer, "and all through Frank, leastways I would say my lord, but she wasn't no good, and for my part never was, and took a fancy to that Maltee sailor, as is wot he is, as she fancied through being good-lookin' when young, as only married 'er for the money as were settled on 'er, and always ashamed on 'er, as were

that jealous of 'im as she would go to sea with 'im as he took to agin thro' bein' tired of 'er, and at last give 'er the slip an old fool, and serve 'er right, not as he did ought to 'ave deserted 'er somewhere's abroad, as he didn't deny, and were sent 'ome by the Inglish Counsel, and that's 'ow Mr. Blocket come to take 'er in, and there bein' a pen-shunner of a party as he managed the affairs on, and to think as there should 'ave been a double bottom to that box and me never to find it out, thro' not a givin' of it that thoro' good clean as I would 'ave done, if my own property, thro' always a dreadin' wermin a lurkin' in them paper-covered boxes as I did used to dread to see come into my 'ouse when in the lettin' line; partikler from aboard ship, as swarms in a general way; partikler with parties a emigratin' as I've 'eard a doctor say, as went two voyages with them, as he've knowed a fine infant pine away to a shadder, and die thro' bein' bit that orful, as no doubt them beastly things pisoned its little blood. I'm sure it give me an orful turn a findin' of myself face to face with that there

Morgin, with 'is ear-rings in 'is ears a lookin' like Paul Jones the pirate, as were hung in chains just above Blackwall Reach, and serve 'im right and all like 'im, as was wisible to the naked eye from Horselydown, as is where my grandfather come from as remembered the mutiny at the Nore, with Admiral Byng bein' shot like a dog for not puttin' of it down, as is easier said than done with a man like Parker, as were a real British bull-dog of a jack-tar, as would fight and would conker agin and agin as the sayin' is; but as to that Mrs. Morgin she must 'ave been a drinker all around, not but wot a little is good if not too often, and I'm sure it's a mussy as I had a little and good in the cupboard when they opened that false bottom, as is a thing I've known in a grate but never a box, for when that furrin' chap cut it out I thought that dear boy of ourn would 'ave took and fainted dead away, and so he would but for that drop I give 'im, as were only a thimbleful as the sayin' is, and a fine thing too, as my dear mother always kep' 'andy in 'er bedroom cupboard

thro' fear of bein' took sudden the same way as carried off a uncle of mine in twelve 'ours, not but I considers as 'is widow carried it too far in 'avin' of it under 'er piller night and day, leastways were found there when she died, as were two-and-twenty year arter she berried 'im, as shows as there's some 'as 'ave got 'arts as never forgets, as 'er last words to my dear mother was, 'Wotever you do, don't spill the licker of life as is preshus.'"

"I must say," observed Mrs. Gordon, "I never saw anyone so little altered as that Captain Morgan. I should have known him anywhere, through having looked him over the day he arrived, though I must allow a horror of him, for I used to dream of him and that poor young lady weeks and weeks after she died."

"Ah!" remarked Mrs. Tozer, "and I am so glad to know as there will not be a long law-suit about this 'ere title as I 'ad my fears over, tho' the lawyers didn't seem to think so thro' things bein' all so pat. Ah! your dear mother and me always did used to say as that boy were born with a silver

spoon in 'is mouth, as the sayin' is, and it's a real pleasure to think, 'Melia Ann, as you and your 'usband should become one arter all these years jest in the werry nick of time as the sayin' is, to see 'im get 'is rights."

"Yes," replied Mrs. Gordon, "and I do believe I could have sworn to that Morgan with my eyes shut."

"I don't think you could have sworn to me so easily," said Frank, who came in at that moment, having entered the house by the garden-door.

"I think I could, my lord," replied Mrs. Gordon, as the young nobleman took her hand, "for you've got your mother's lovely eyes."

"There wouldn't be no call for anyone to swear to you as long as I'm above-ground," said Mrs. Tozer; "but 'owever that forrin party, as was your father's servant, ever traced and tracked that Morgin arf over the world puzzles me. But them forriners is such ones for tracks, as is sent over to 'em by the shipload; as I've 'eard my own fust cousin say, as were a supercargo in the China trade, as the Chinese

will take tracks by the thousan', and testyments, too, for that matter, as they makes slippers on. But why ever your lordship come in on the quiet by the gardin-door I can't think."

"To show you that, in coming to your house, I am still at home," replied Frank. "You don't think I can ever for a moment forget what you have been to me, my dear friends?" And, as he spoke, the young man clasped a hand of each of his humble friends.

"Now, if you're a-goin' to talk like that," said Mrs. Tozer, "I must go out of the room. I can't bear it."

"If your dear mother had been spared to see this day," sobbed Mrs. Gordon, who fairly broke down at the reception given her by her former nurse-child.

"Don't say any more," said Tozer, who, with a strong effort at self-command, grasped Frank's hand. "We loves you, and are proud on you," he continued, "and should be if you was a dustman."

"Hallo! What's all this about?" said the loud

voice of Sergeant Gordon, who came into the room. "This ain't the way to welcome a young nobleman to his title and honours. Allow me, my lord," he continued, filling a glass of beer, "to wish you all health and happiness, and also to your good lady, as will soon be."

"And when there's a son and 'air espected," chimed in Mrs. Tozer, "if I ain't the first to welcome him into this wicked world, I shall take it werry much to 'art."

"I promise you anything," said Frank, "on condition that you never call me anything but your dear boy. I thank you all for your good wishes, and undertake that my wife, as soon as I've got one, shall come to thank you in person. And now give me a cup of tea to drink all your healths, as well as my own. I start for Paris by the mail-train, and all I can say is, that if you don't, every-one of you, ask me to do all in my power for you and yours, I shall not believe that you entertain the good opinion of me you profess."

CHAPTER XI.

Frank's somewhat hurried departure for Paris was by no means solely the result of his ardour to see his beloved Adèle, but the consequence of a letter he had received from her in reply to a few hasty lines he had written to announce to her that he had been acknowledged and received by his father's family as the heir to all its honours. He wrote as affectionately as he was wont to do, though decidedly more hurriedly than he had ever done, and adopted, moreover, a slight tone of banter, such as he had never been in the habit of indulging in when writing to his intended. "I hope," wrote he, "you will like me in my new character, though I do not yet feel quite reconciled to it myself, and

should indeed regret the access of rank and fortune if through them I should be less esteemed by those I have loved so long and so well."

"What can he mean?" thought Adèle, though not for an instant doubting his truth or love. But on proceeding to announce the news to her mother, she found the Abbé with her, and both apparently disquieted.

The Abbé held a letter in his hand, the contents of which he had evidently been discussing with Madame De Courcy, who, on seeing her daughter, exclaimed:

"Ah, my darling, you are here! Well, what news have you?"

Adèle replied by handing to her mother Frank's few lines, who, after perusing them, passed on the note, with Adèle's approval, to the Abbé.

The friends exchanged looks of concern and mistrust, duly observed by Adèle.

"What is the matter, dearest mother?" she exclaimed. "Why do you and the Abbé look so seriously at me?"

Neither made any reply for a few moments, both being so fully absorbed in thought about Adèle, to whom Frank had never made, as far as they knew, any positive offer of marriage, nor had he formally demanded her hand of her mother, though he had frequently spoken to both mother and daughter, as also to the good Abbé, of his approaching marriage with Adèle as a matter of course. In his letter, written to her from Falklands, on the day of his grandfather's funeral, he said: "I shall be with you as soon as I can possibly leave this, where I have much important business on hand, connected with my future, to which I must attend." He wrote also to the Abbé: "I am anxious to have the advantage of your advice as to the selection of a wife—a position which must be filled as soon as possible—and feel sure you will not oppose the speedy carrying out of this the most important step of my future life."

There are some natures to whom a joke on serious subjects is simply incomprehensible; and such was the case with both Madame De Courcy

and the Abbé. The lady at once jumped at the conclusion that the Marquis of Cankerfield would look for a wife in a higher station than that occupied by the young lady who would have been a suitable and desirable match for Frank Welbyn. The good Abbé was taken aback by the vehemence of the lady; and though he defended the good faith and honour of his former pupil, yet he could not withstand the excited mother, whose pride was touched by the apparent slight cast on her child.

No sooner did Adèle become aware of her mother's suspicions, than she protested most indignantly against any such view being taken of the possibility of Frank behaving so basely.

"You don't know the world, my child!" exclaimed Madame De Courcy.

"I am glad I do not," replied Adèle, "if the knowledge of it would lead me to think so vilely of one of the most noble-minded, loving-hearted young men who ever lived."

A torrent of tears here interrupted the speaker, and, for the first time in their lives, the mother and

daughter were on the verge of a positive disagreement. The feeling did not last a minute; for Adèle, on hearing her mother sob aloud, threw herself into her arms as she said:

"Dear, dear mamma, forgive me if I have caused you pain; but oh, I do love him so dearly, and am so sure of his love for me, that I cannot bear to hear it doubted, even by you. These expressions in his letters are mere pleasantry. I know him too well not to understand every word, every syllable, he writes."

"Adèle, my child, I merely speak in your behalf. We know not what complications may not have arisen in the case of a young man whose position in life is so marvellously and completely changed."

"Nothing on earth can change so fine a nature as Frank's. He is the soul of nobility; and, as to his love for me, it is as high-minded as it is pure."

"Dear child," interposed the Abbé, "it is not that your mother doubts the love of that young man for you, as she fears that, under his present circumstances, he may feel himself embarrassed by

his engagement to you. I do not share her sentiments, though I see her meaning."

"Ah! my child," exclaimed Madame De Courcy, "suppose he should marry you as a point of honour, and, in after-life, give you reason to think he had formed a *mésalliance?* Your love is that of boy and girl, sprung from an attachment formed when you were little more than penniless children. The case is much altered now that he is exalted to such a height of rank and fortune."

Adèle listened to her mother in silence, and then kissing her forehead tenderly, left the room.

"Poor child," said the Abbé, "the thought of losing him will kill her."

"Better that than she should live to be a neglected wife."

"Madame, madame," cried the Abbé, "indeed you take an erroneous view of this young man's character, for the integrity of which I would stake my life. This is pride, madame, which leads you to a breach of charity. I have been wrong to have so

far encouraged you in this feeling, which I ought at once to have repressed."

"Oh, my father!" sobbed Madame De Courcy, "I feel so acutely for my child, lest she should be exposed to the contumely with which my husband's family have treated both her and me; for, although my father was by birth noble, yet the family of my husband treated me, as you know, like an outcast; and have I not had the utmost difficulty in obtaining justice, in which I have now succeeded, after years of poverty and neglect?"

"I make all allowance for you, my child," replied the Abbé, "but cannot allow you to be either unjust or unkind."

As he spoke, Adèle re-entered the room with a letter in her hand, which she gave to her mother.

"Read that," she said, "dearest and best of parents; will that satisfy your anxiety in my behalf?"

Madame De Courcy read as follows:

"EVER DEAR FRANK,—I congratulate you with

all my heart on your titles and honours; but, considering the circumstances under which we became affianced lovers, and contrasting your present position with that in which you won my heart, I think it only due to myself to declare you to be entirely free from any engagement existing between us, and perfectly at liberty, as far as I am concerned, to select as your partner for life anyone who may be better fitted for the position than your still-loving

"ADÈLE."

As Madame De Courcy perused these lines, her tears fell fast, for she felt how great a sacrifice her child was making in deference to her mother's feelings.

"Adèle, are you sure you wish to write in this strain?"

"Yes, mamma. I am well aware how much pain this letter will cost Frank, but I send it as a proof of my entire confidence in his truth and unhesitating love for him."

"You are all my fondest hopes could have

desired, best and most loving of children," exclaimed Madame De Courcy.

"You must not send that letter," interposed the Abbé; "it would be to offer an insult to a man of honour. No!" he continued, "I will write in such a strain as will at once evoke the real sentiments of the young man, though I am equally confident with Adèle as to his truth and love."

A gleam of happiness played over Adèle's features as she saw the Abbé hold her letter in the flame of a candle till it was almost consumed, and then stamp the last fragment under his foot.

"Thank you a thousand times," she said, as she took the good man's hand and kissed it. "Thank you, both in my name and his, whose character you have so well defended."

The Abbé patted her cheek as he said:

"Good-night, my child, all will be well, I am sure. Good-night, madame, repose your honour and that of your child in me."

With these words the old man took his leave as mother and daughter, after a fond embrace, parted

for the night, each being too fully occupied with recent events to venture upon a further discussion of them.

Had a thunderbolt fallen on the lawn at Falklands, it would not have startled the new proprietor of that noble domain more than did the receipt of a letter from the Abbé two days following the scene between him and the mother and daughter. The good man wrote but shortly, asking to be informed whether Frank's feelings with regard to Mademoiselle De Courcy had undergone any change. "Be perfectly candid," wrote the Abbé, "and tell me plainly do you still wish to make her your wife?"

"What can this mean?" thought Frank; "surely Adèle cannot be false to me? Impossible! I will solve this mystery as speedily as circumstances will allow," and as he spoke he rang for his servant, and desired him to prepare to leave for town by the next train.

"I am going to Paris to-night," he added; "you will go only as far as London with me."

This sudden departure occasioned no surprise, as there was no one else at Falklands to whom it was necessary to communicate his intention, the house being deserted, the Marchioness being gone on a visit to Lady Caroline, and the other members of the family having dispersed the day after the funeral.

Frank reached town early in the day; and, having paid his promised visit, already described, to Mrs. Tozer, after a somewhat long interview with Mr. Hunter, proceeded to meet his servant at the station, and left by the mail-train for Paris. No one who had seen him during the day would have discovered by his manner that he was a prey to the deepest anxiety, nor did he realise the extent to which the Abbé's letter had affected him, till he was alone, making what seemed to him an interminable journey from London to Paris. It was a fine morning when he reached the gay metropolis, where, after indulging in a bath, he felt refreshed and equal to making his way to the residence of the Abbé.

He found the old gentleman in his garden, and was received by him with the utmost cordiality. A few words sufficed to clear up the absurd misunderstanding that had arisen.

"Dear Adèle!" exclaimed Frank; "what must she think of me? I must go to her at once."

"By no means," said the Abbé, "it is too early. You must take your breakfast with me. Not a word, I insist. Ah! you see it is ready," and as he spoke the good man led his young friend into his little dining-room, where a modest repast awaited them. "I shall now go," said the Abbé, when the meal was over, "and announce your arrival to the ladies. You can follow in ten minutes."

"Say five," said Frank, in a tone of entreaty. "I would go first," he added, "but for fear of giving Adèle a shock."

He accompanied the Abbé to the garden-gate, and watched him enter the house of Madame De

Courcy; and then, after having waited, in spite of his impatience, a full five minutes, he followed his preceptor's steps.

Poor Adèle had passed a wretched night, and had risen with a bad headache. She looked pale and haggard, and when she glanced at herself in the glass was pleased to think that Frank could not see her. As she stood near the window, she heard the click of the garden-gate, and looking towards it saw the Abbé entering the vestibule of the house.

"He brings me news of Frank," she said. "I will hurry down to hear what he says."

She paused to arrange her toilette with the usual care she bestowed on it, when she heard again the click of the gate. She turned to the window, and, in another instant, she was down the hall and clasped in her lover's fond embrace, with only the words: "Frank!"—"Adèle!" Then they entered the room where Madame De Courcy and the Abbé were seated.

The Abbé had only had time to warn his friend not to allow Frank to suspect that she had ever doubted him.

"I have to entreat you to be discreet on this point, for I can see that he would deeply resent such a suspicion having been entertained. I merely took it upon myself to assure him that you would not bind him to any implied promise to the fulfilment of which altered circumstances might disincline him, and he looked at me quite angrily as he replied that no alteration of circumstances could affect the word of a gentleman, or the sincerity of a lover."

It was in the course of that day that all the arrangements for the wedding were made, and it was fixed that it should take place quite quickly—in three months from the present time—so that both the Marchioness and Lady Caroline might be present.

Madame De Courcy explained to Frank that it was for her satisfaction the good Abbé had written to him, as she considered it due to her position that he

should be left entirely free under his altered circumstances.

"You surely did not think I was so mean, so worthless," said Frank, with heightened colour, "as to dream of breaking my word, even had my feelings with regard to Adèle undergone any change?"

"I did not think you would do anything unworthy of the man I both love and respect, as though he were my own child."

Frank never knew how far he had been doubted; for Adèle saw by his manner not only how correct her estimate had been of his love, but that she had fathomed the depth of indignation he would have felt at the barest suspicion of his want of good faith.

CHAPTER XII.

The wedding came off on a bright October morning, and was celebrated by the venerable Abbé at the small church of the parish in which the respective parties resided; Frank having, after a short visit to England, taken up his abode with the Abbé for a month—as the law required his being domiciled in France for that time—during the greater part of which Madame De Courcy and her daughter were in retreat at a neighbouring convent, which they only left two days before the wedding in order to receive the Marchioness and Lady Caroline. All went off smoothly and happily, but in the quietest manner possible, the bride and bridegroom starting, according to English fashion, on a wedding-tour

immediately after the ceremony, proposing to visit the South of Europe and remain abroad during the winter.

Frank especially wished that Mr. and Mrs. Tozer should have been present at his marriage, but found that they would so much prefer remaining in England that he did not press his wish.

"Why, you see," said Tozer, "we're all very well, and knows ourselves too well not to be no disgrace to you, but you see we don't feel at home not even alone with you here, and certainly we ain't no company for swells." This was said in reply to Frank's invitation, given by him in person to both Mr. and Mrs. Tozer, during a short visit they paid him at Falklands, to which place they were only induced to come on Frank's assurance that there was no one there but the housekeeper and one or two servants. "I couldn't no more set down to my wittles with powdered flunkies a 'overin' at my back than I could fly," said Mrs. Tozer, "as would be a jeerin' over my shoulder."

"No servant of mine would so far forget him-

self as to despise my friends," replied Frank, "but if it will make you more happy we will have a housemaid to wait on us."

"I certingly should feel more at 'ome with one of my own sect; for, though I must say as I've always found them fine-limbed young men as civil as if they was ingineers, as is the civil service all over, yet I always should look up to 'em and they must look down on me as am only five feet four in my shoes, and not one of them under six foot two, I should say at a guess, judgin' from behind the carridge and openin' of the door that time as I called on the March'ness, as showed me in as if I'd been a duchess; and as to livin' down near you, my lord, I'd rather be in Ratliff 'Ighway."

"Mrs. Tozer, you are breaking a rule," exclaimed Frank, "in calling me anything but Frank or dear boy, and I say to you as I have already said to your husband, you may live where you please and do as you please, provided you let me do as I please."

"We don't want nothing," interposed Tozer; "we've got two 'undered a year."

"I insist on buying and furnishing the house," persisted Frank.

"Well, in course I should like to live anywheres 'andy, as you could come to see us without a stoopin' too low, the same as your good lady, and a place as your servants shouldn't be ashamed on if sent to fetch me in a 'urry, night or day."

"All right, Mrs. Tozer," interrupted Frank, laughingly; "I shall settle all that with Tozer, but you must select the house and everything else according to your taste." These were Frank's parting words to his friend as he took leave of her at the railway-station on her departure for home, and before he left England he had the satisfaction of seeing the worthy couple established in a snug little cottage within half-a-mile of Clapham Junction, a spot selected as being, according to Mrs. Tozer, "contageous to all over the world, for," as she observed, "I've 'eard say as you can get a train from there to every station in life as is under 'evan."

In the course of their wedding-tour, the Marquis and Marchioness of Cankerfield revisited, in their yacht, Naples and Sicily, and made some stay in Catania, where our hero was enabled to establish his claim to his mother's property, which, though inconsiderable from a pecuniary point of view, was a public rehabilitation of the name and fame of the ill-fated Cattarina.

Stefano, who as body-servant accompanied the Signorino, as he always styled Frank, did not make any demonstration of his return to his native land, but for the most part kept quietly on board the yacht, contenting himself with denouncing to the crew the vile Piedmontese brigands that ruled his ill-fated country. The newly-married pair coasted round the island, but did not venture on any inland excursions excepting a visit to Taormina. Stefano had fallen in with his son at Malta, who, being heartily tired of the sea, gladly accepted service under Lord Cankerfield as gamekeeper under his father, who was to be advanced to that post on his return to England, house-service being distasteful,

whilst field sports were a real pleasure to both father and son. It was not till spring had well advanced that Lord and Lady Cankerfield returned home after having visited the Levant, Egypt, and the Holy Land. The dowager Marchioness and her firm friend, Lady Caroline, met the truly happy pair on their arrival at Falklands, to which place Madame De Courcy accompanied them from Paris. Frank did all in his power to induce the Abbé Pitrou to visit him, but in vain.

"No, no, dear child," said the old man. "I am too old to leave home any more; come to see me when you can, but leave me here for the rest of my days to pray for you and yours."

Lady Caroline had taken up her abode with her sister-in-law, at the latter's residence in Surrey—a most lovely spot—where, surrounded by an agreeable circle, the ladies passed the greater part of the year. Lady Caroline frequently urged the dowager to marry again. "What will you do," she said, "when I am gone? I am getting old, and you are in your prime."

"I have not yet seen anyone," replied the Marchioness, "to whom I would surrender my liberty. Remember, I have been too much spoiled as a wife to expect to find a second husband who would treat me with indulgence similar to that I experienced at the hands of your dear brother."

"He owed you more than he could ever repay," replied Lady Caroline; "and, knowing what a wife you have been, I am anxious that you should make some other man as happy as you did my brother."

Lady Cankerfield shook her head as she replied: "It would be impossible to find any man who would idolise me as he did; in fact, he so completely spoiled me, that I should be disappointed with any other man's treatment, however good and kind it might be; so, my own dear friend and sister, we will talk no more on that subject."

Lady Caroline sighed and was silent, though perhaps, in her heart of hearts, she was as well pleased at there being no immediate prospect of her present happy mode of life being interrupted.

Lady Augustus Blomberg was a frequent visitor

to the dowager; her husband never accompanied her, though he sent messages of a conciliatory nature to both ladies, having a latent hope that he might some day acquire a portion of his aunt's savings.

Neither Lady Bolderstone nor her sister kept up any acquaintance with their aunt or stepmother. They ignored the present Marquis of Cankerfield and his wife, and spoke of Frank as an adventurer. He, for his part, behaved with the utmost magnanimity; ordered game and fruit to be forwarded to them on a far more liberal scale than his grandfather had done. He had also made the most liberal provision for them both; but nothing could disarm their malevolence or curb their spite.

In the course of the year following his marriage Frank lost both his uncle Augustus and Lord Bolderstone. On hearing of the serious illness of the former, he, without a moment's hesitation, set off to visit him, but arrived too late to be recognised by the dying man. His visit was, however, a great comfort to the widow; and he was rewarded for his good feeling by receiving, through her, a

message of reconciliation from her hitherto implacable husband.

It was shortly after this melancholy event that Mrs. Tozer received an intimation that a visit from her to Blomberg House would be esteemed a favour; and thither, accordingly, she at once repaired, after making many comments thereupon, into which her dreams, and other portents, were largely introduced. "For," as she said, "I was dreamin' of fire, as I could not get out of my 'ead all night, as is well-beknown, means 'asty news."

"Why, hang it all," said Tozer, "you've been expecting to hear the last fortnight as you might be wanted."

"Yes, that's true," she replied. "But births, like deaths, always comes sudden at the last; and though, when I see that sweet young lady and her ma, the day after they come to town, as is now over three weeks, yet I couldn't be sure; though I must say as I've slep' with one eye open, like a 'are, with my box packed, these ten days. But I mustn't stop 'ere a jawin' with you, for there's the cab, as I

prefers to the rail, as is too many steps for me, as won't be 'arf a' 'our; and a pleasant ride, with both winders down. Not but wot that dear boy, as is as nervous as a cat, wanted to send the broom for me; as I wouldn't 'ave, a-knowin' as my things might scratch the panels, and look 'orty, as I considers out of character. Not but wot I am somebody in that 'ouse, as they all shows me that respect; though in course I takes my meals in the steward's room, thro' not a-wishin' to 'old my 'ead too 'igh, as keepin' to my own settin'-room would look like, besides bein' lonesome at meals; and I must say, as now I looks back, I feels a pride in wot I've done. Not but wot I only done my dooty; tho' I can't say as I am sorry now, as everythink 'ave turned out so right; as I 'ave 'ad the bringin'-up of a lord, as will know his way about the world better than if he'd 'ave been nussed in the lap of luxury, as the sayin' is, 'cos I'm sure everybody as ever see him always said as he was somethink out of the common way; and as to Tozer, he always said as he was a crown prince as 'ad been changed at

nuss, or somethink like that; as might 'ave 'appened easy, with all these 'ere royal families as 'ave been that knocked about, so might 'ave lost many a' infant in the 'urry-skurry, and 'ave never come to light; the same as them princes as was smothered in the Tower, and not certain as it was their bones as was found, years arter, behind a door, where no doubt them murderers 'ad 'id 'em, as might 'ave been some other royal foundlin's; as shows as they don't all get their rights. Not but wot murder will out, tho' 'Liza Grimwood never were, nor yet Great Coram Street; tho' I 'ave 'eard say as there ain't no doubt who done it, tho' he might smile when he were took up. But all as I've got to say is, that nothink won't never change that dear feller, as is proved by sendin' for me, as would do 'is dooty like Lord Nelson, with 'is 'ead on the block, and 'is telerscope to the blind eye, tho' he 'ad only one arm, and would 'ave went to 'is grave without a stain, only but for that fieldmale as died, in the rules of the Bench, as is done away with now, as my own aunt washed for, and said many a one

kep' up a gay time in, as wasn't no better than swindlers."

These last remarks were made to a friend who accompanied Mrs. Tozer, and deposited her safely at Blomberg House, where, within four-and-twenty hours of her arrival, the Marchioness gave birth to a son and heir. It would be impossible to give any just idea of the excitement that prevailed within those sombre walls during the anxious period immediately preceding the interesting event, an excitement which Mrs. Tozer did not share, but actually in a great measure allayed. She was, indeed, Napoleonic in the hour of sickness or trial. Her manner inspired confidence and commanded the respect of all around her; she was implicitly obeyed by even the medical attendant, of whose services she thought but little, though she treated him with marked deference; but when all was over, and she had placed in her own dear boy's arms his newly-born son, she fairly gave way and burst into tears, whilst the happy father was unable to control his emotion.

Mrs. Tozer's equanimity was speedily restored, the more so as she was afraid that Frank might give way on seeing his wife, and was consequently anxious to return to the Marchioness without evincing any signs of her late outbreak of feeling, and had her misgivings, as she subsequently observed, "About that mother of 'ern, as is no doubt a lady, but were not to be trusted in a sick-room thro' bein' French, as don't know nothing of infancy, thro' only 'avin' one and that years ago, as were born on the march, as she told me with 'er own lips; but as to that dear young Marchioness, she were as mild as a lamb and gentle like any suckin' dove as the sayin' is, and 'er only fear as she might do the infant 'arm, as I see there weren't no fear on with arf a' eye, not as he's as fine a child as 'is father were, as were a reg'lar prodigal son come 'ome; but as to this 'ere young lord he's wonderful strong and 'arty, and 'is mother a doin' as nicely as I could wish to see."

Such was the account Mrs. Tozer gave her husband of mother and child, when, on the evening following the interesting event, he called at Blom-

berg House. He begged that his visit might be kept from the Marquis; but this wish was not fulfilled, for the delighted father rushed into the room where Mrs. Tozer had received her spouse.

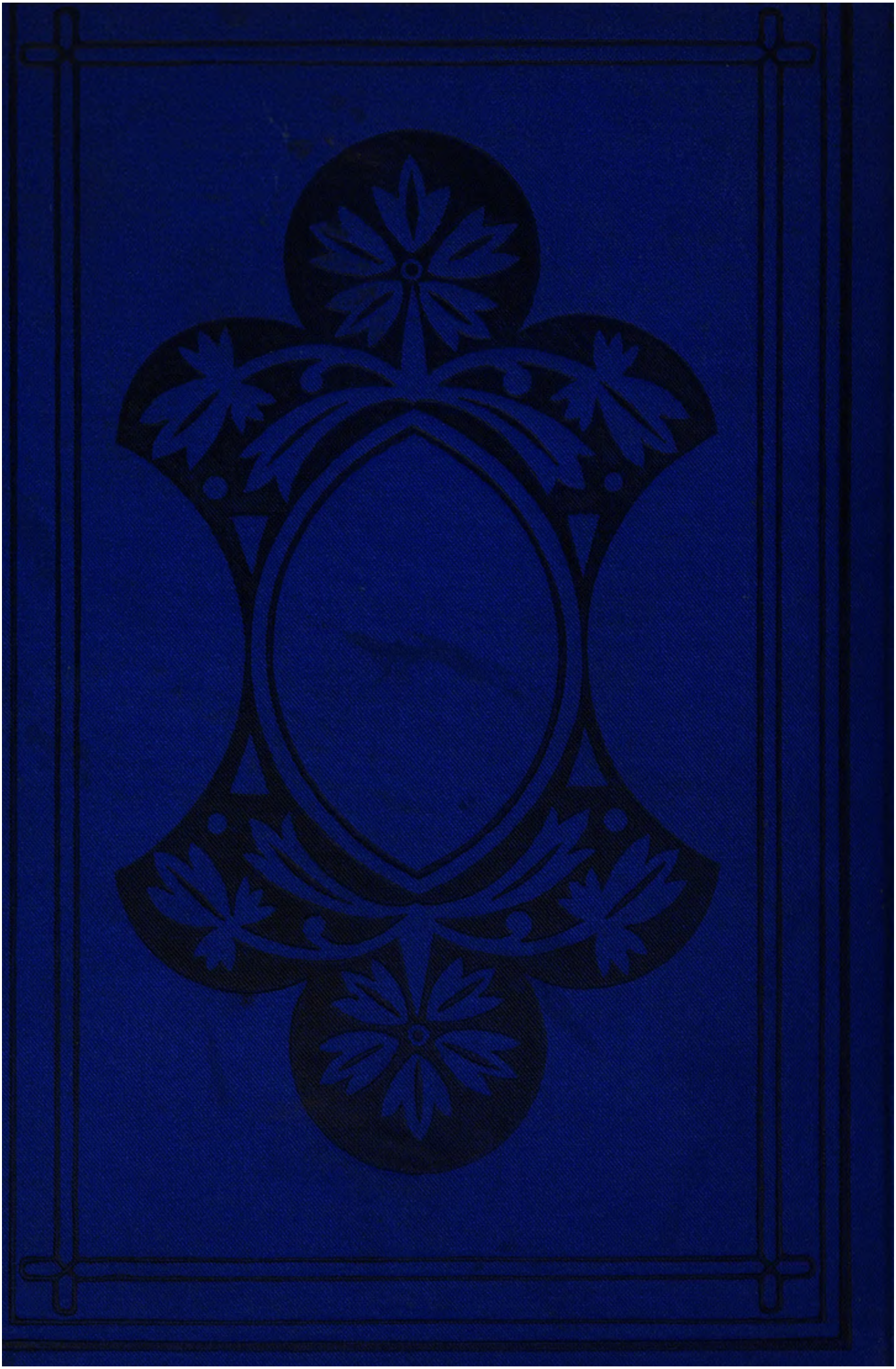
"I knew you would come to see my son," he exclaimed, as he grasped Tozer's hand. "Mrs. Tozer, please go and fetch him at once, that's a dear good soul," he said, "or, I mean, send for him."

"No one but myself and his parents have touched 'im yet, and nobody shan't, for the first week at any rate, for he don't want no nurse nor necessary evils about him." With these words she left the room, and returned in a few minutes bearing in her arms the heir of Blomberg.

"I can't say as I quite recalls your lordship at his age," said Tozer; "but as far as I'm a judge of such things, he's as fine a babe as ever I see."

"And sich a weight," added Mrs. Tozer; "and I will say as, barrin' 'is father, he's as fine and 'ealthy a child as ever was born, with no thrush nor nothink to teaze 'im; and as to 'is ma, she's surprisin' well and will be about agin in no time; and

as for me, I feel as I've lived long enough, now as I've see all this come about, and all as I've got to say, if he should 'ave a dozen brothers and sisters, I ain't a goin' to 'old myself engaged for no more, tho' I should love 'em all, God forgive me, as if they was fifty, just the same as if they was my own flesh and blood."

THE END.

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