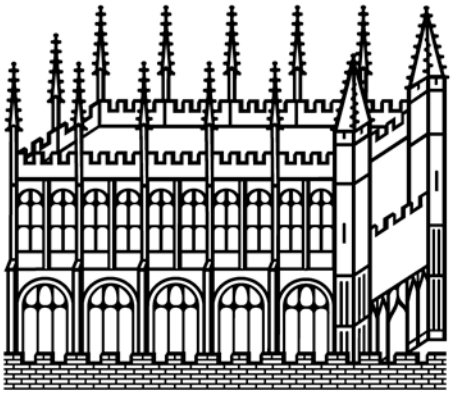

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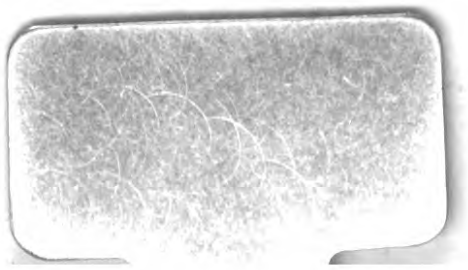
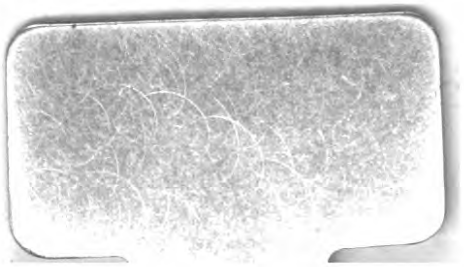
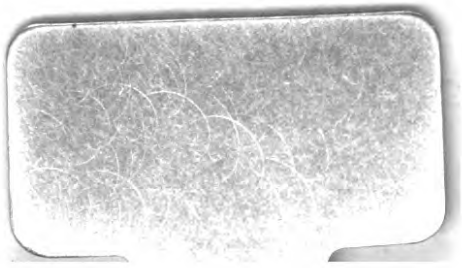
THIS YEAR.
NEXT YEAR.
SOME TIME.
NEVER.







THIS YEAR, NEXT YEAR, SOME TIME, NEVER.

BY

PUCK.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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ARGUMENT.

SOMETIMES in sunshine, sometimes in gloom, rolls on a broad stream—the river of Life, flowing from a hidden source into the fathomless ocean of Eternity. In it the busy fishes work out their appointed days, multiplying and preying on each other in the struggle for life, the fittest surviving. Weeds grow in this river, clogging its course while beautifying it to the eye; reeds fringe its banks, their tall, graceful forms nourished in their stateliness by the waters they adorn. On this river float down to the ocean branches of trees, and other waifs, tossed hither and thither by wind and current. Sometimes caught by the branches of bushes and neighbouring trees, the floating branch would seem to have found an anchorage; but not having sufficient force in itself to put forth roots to fix itself firmly, a breeze wafts it, or a current draws it forth again to its effortless, drifting course down stream, until it is met by other enticements or obstacles to hold it awhile in their embrace.

Nowhere taking root, with no fixed place in the river of Life, it is ever by intervals drifting onward, till it is lost to sight in the mighty absorbing ocean, leaving no trace behind in seed sown or in richer vegetation.

THIS YEAR, NEXT YEAR, SOME TIME, NEVER.

CHAPTER I.

IN a corner of England, in a county of which the inhabitants might boast—did people ever boast of things accidental—of the proud motto "Invicta," stands on a river I will call the Are, a town, whose name, Ware, is partly suggested by the river which flows through it. People who have acquired the art of seeing would describe Ware as a picturesque town, others less gifted would simply call it hilly. It is built on irregular elevations on either side of the river, which divides it into two unequal portions; the broad High Street and the principal business part are on one side, a railway station and the most attractive and elevated suburb are on the other. As background and fit setting to the town, at a distance not too great to dwarf them, or too near to over-

1

shadow it, run the range of chalk hills, known as the county's backbone.

Ware, like most other country towns, is but deadly lively, although the number of its inhabitants shows well in comparison with other towns of like non-manufacturing character. It is fortunate in possessing a few well-preserved relics of olden times in the palace, which is inhabited now by two families, each with an equal right to "Palace" on notepaper or cards, the college, and the museum—an old manor house. In its modern buildings it is peculiarly unfortunate; its red brick town hall is not even, from an architectural point of view, respectable; and its barracks, with which we are specially concerned, are mere huge wooden shanties.

In one of the rooms of this barracks, his quarters, on a bright gladsome afternoon of the poet's May, a day in which the mere sense of living should bring with it gladness, the occupier of the room, Captain Munro, a good-looking dark man, nearing the thirties, wears on his face an expression quite the opposite to genial; that being so, he shall be described more fully later on, when the impression he may make will have a chance of being more favourable. He looks in a bad humour, and he is. He is seated before a table littered with papers. He is looking up, listening, pen in hand, as a sign he wants to get on with his letter, to a healthy, broad-shouldered young fellow, a "sub" in his regiment, who has just come in to disturb him, very much disturb him, by asking him to drive over to Oaklands presently.

"Why can't Moore drive you?" he asks in a surly voice; "you two generally do go in couples when there is tennis on. You know I don't play the idiotic game, and don't care for the people we shall meet there."

"Oh, he has thrown me over. Just rushed off to London. A letter, or telegram, or something. Black is I don't know where; but he said last night he wasn't going. We were the only four of us asked for this afternoon, you know. She is a good sort and a civil woman, and as this is her first tennis this season, I think it will be very shabby if none of us go." The young fellow means to go somehow, but is trying to work on his friend's feelings. "The Scotts will know there is nothing on to prevent our going this afternoon," he adds.

"I was a fool not to say I had an engagement when she asked us to go over," growled Munro. "If you go once to these things, people always expect you after."

The young man, who knows his friend's idiosyncrasies well, has kept his best shot for the last. "I do want to go awfully, or I wouldn't bother you. Of course you might say, 'Go, then;' but you don't know the place. The lawn is as big as this barrack-yard pretty well, and they are all sure to be well at the other end of it. Picture me walking the whole length of that lawn alone; I should feel deucedly awkward, by Jove! But I see you don't mean to help a fellow out;" and the young man turns on his heels, as if to leave the room.

By the time he has reached the door, Captain Munro has relented enough to say in a reluctant way, "I suppose it will end in my going, but it's an awful nuisance. We needn't stay long, I suppose? I never play tennis, so perhaps they will leave me alone in future;" and then and there he determines that he will only be just as civil to these people as to escape being the other thing, and he does not think they will be so charmed with him as to care to see him again in a hurry.

The young fellow, having obtained his end, takes himself off without more ado as soon as the time for starting is fixed; and his friend, with a sulky face, tries to get his letters finished before starting for the scene of what he feels will be an infliction.

* * * * *

While the two men are driving to Otham, the village in which Oaklands is situated, I will post the reader, as much as is necessary, in their antecedents, pedigrees, and peculiarities.

John Munro, captain in the X. Y. Z. Regiment (late LV.), does not look what one would call every inch a soldier. He is upright, yet has a slightly apologetic gait. He is well built, and between middle height and tall.

His complexion is olive, his hair dark—it would wave crisply if enough of it were ever allowed to remain on his head to show the smallest indication of a curve. He does not look like a man who should have wavy hair, that being somehow associated with cheerfulness; while Munro, had he lived half a century

earlier, would have been much admired as a Byronic type of hero. In his face would have been read a past of crime, mystery, and gloom. His forehead recedes, but there are indications of power in a square chin and a determined-looking set of white teeth. His somewhat heavy moustache, approaching the lachrymose in shape, yet broadening and projecting a little into the sullen type—there is a great deal of expression in a moustache—shadows his mouth too much to allow the shape of it to be properly taken into account. His nose is of no particular order. His great and best point comes last: his eyes are wondrous—of violet grey, with depths in them in which one might lose one's self, yet unfathom them. They seem to speak for him, and assist him much in that way, as his powers of conversation are not great; they help to give a subtle meaning to even commonplace remarks made by him.

So think the women. He is well-beloved of women, pursued rather than pursuing; great in Platonic friendships, of which he manages to carry on a good number simultaneously. There is only one of these friends in the regiment, the rest mark his old quarters, or even Captain Munro, with all his experience, would find that a man may have too many friends for his comfort.

He can scarcely be described as popular in the regiment; he is a reserved man, not at all what men call a "good fellow." He only drinks in moderation, plays cards rarely, and dines as seldom as possible at mess.

He has a strictly Platonic friendship for the wife of one of the majors—she is not handsome. She is away just now, going through a long course of visits to friends, as the regiment goes to India in the autumn.

Munro is on fairly good terms with his brother officers, but only really cares for the boy by his side, whom he was good to in the first instance for his mother's sake, but now likes for his own.

Every one likes Cecil Fielding; he is so bright and good-natured—will take trouble for any one. He is a good-looking, fair young man of twenty-two; has merry hazel eyes, a square brow, straight nose, and a mouth faintly surmounted by a fair, silky moustache, that is too faint of marking to assist in giving character to the face. The spareness of this adornment is rather an annoyance to Cecil, but is really a boon, a satisfactory mouth being a rare sight. Cecil's is entirely satisfactory; there is tenderness and firmness in it, and when he laughs it curves into Cupid's bow, displaying freely his dazzlingly white teeth. He is somewhat apt to fall in love; hitherto he had shown himself equally ready to fall out of it again.

Both the friends' pedigrees are sufficiently good to stand any microscopic scrutiny, since they have stood the scrutiny of little Major Spalding, with whom good birth is a mania: no ancestor has been mixed up with trade for at least two centuries, and that is saying as much as many peers can say.

Fielding has attached himself strongly to Munro, who looks after him in a lazy way, dropping a word

of advice now and then in a casual manner, and seeming in no way his mentor.

Cecil has very little beyond his pay; his mother, who is a widow of quite moderate means, allowing him a small sum annually.

Munro has no near relations. He is fairly rich, judged by comparison with men of his rank; poor, he thinks himself; but rich and poor are relative terms, and of course he ought to know best. His tastes certainly are extravagant, and he has almost a mania for travelling. His hunger for leave is a joke against him in the regiment.

He is driving a nice little mare to-day, which gets over the five miles between Ware and Otham all too soon for her master, although he is proud of her performance.

Fielding has been chattering all the way. Just as they pass the church and adjacent vicarage, a tall, limp-looking man, proclaimed a parson by his clothes, is seen slouching along the road.

"Plays tennis, of course," says Munro. He has not made many remarks during the drive. "Goes regularly to every gathering within walking distance, I'll wager. Too many of those parsons about everywhere."

"Hum, can't play much by the look of him. I expect the pretty Lady Wade will be there; she is more in your line than parsons. She has too much flesh for tennis. He *was* screwed the other night. I don't give him many years if he goes on at the pace he's going." The "he" does not refer to the parson,

but to Sir Percival Wade, Bart., one of James's batch, who has become widely known by his sporting proclivities and general dare-devil conduct.

"She is good-looking enough, but not my style; too unwieldy; isn't tall enough for the weight she carries; gives herself beauty airs. I hate that."

"Ah, you will admire Edith Scott, the eldest, you know. She *is* graceful. She just can waltz. You watch her at tennis."

"Take care; this is number twelve, isn't it? Some day these attacks will prove fatal. I suppose this Miss Scott has money, eh?"

"I don't know, and I don't care; I am not mercenary. Some girls—this one, for instance—are better than fortunes. One can't expect everything. I wish I was rich, though."

"Exactly. I am glad you are reasonable enough to see that some one really *must* have money! What fortunes some of the American girls have. But they expect coronets in exchange for them. It does not seem to signify in the least how the money has been made; no one is ashamed of the source of the money if the girl is an American. They are not to my taste; I can't see the 'takingness' of American girls myself."

"Or of any other girls apparently, or you would not be a bachelor. Ah! if only *I* had your income."

"Ah, indeed. Why, you would have made a fool of yourself long ago, and consequently would not have this chance of doing it. I hoped you had been saved to cut your wisdom teeth."

CHAPTER II

OAKLANDS, the seat, by purchase, of the Scott family, is a large, well-built, genuine Queen Anne mansion. The front retains its original character, but the owner has considerably altered the style of the back, rather south-front, by throwing out a tier of bay windows to the left; his intention was to give greater length and more light to an already nobly proportioned dining-room, "the most important room in the house," Mr. Scott says. He has added a verandah along the whole front, and has built a billiard-room and large conservatory. He is fond of making alterations—improvements he calls them—born of Sunday *ennui*. The south-front overlooks a lawn of immense size. To the right of it is a shrubbery walk half a mile long, which leads down to the river Are, and running parallel with a small fenced-off park or huge finely wooded meadow. On the other side of the lawn are flower-beds and a rosery, Mrs. Scott's delight.

To-day is so bright and summer-like, that the awning is unfurled over the garden seat near the

house, sheltering Mrs. Scott, a pleasant-looking, scarcely middle-aged woman, from the glare of the sun.

Lady Wade is seated near her on a low garden chair, of which there are several standing about. She is a most striking-looking woman by virtue of her red-gold hair, rippling and abundant, of which she is very proud. She wears it coiled high on her shapely head, a few little rings of hair rest carelessly on her forehead, the perfection of art. She has pretty brown eyes, not very large, which harmonize with the tint of her hair. Her delicately shaped nose is not tip-tilted, but appears to have had its point slightly chiselled away, which gives a saucy look to her face. She has the caught-up top-lip, which usually goes with a nose of this kind. Her complexion befits her hair; her voice is bright and cheery, but somewhat thin. She is only clever in the sense of being quick of perception; she despises cleverness, and looks down on accomplishments which she has not troubled to keep up in her own person.

Her husband, Sir Percival, is seated at one end of the garden seat, his arm thrown over the back of it. He does not trouble to talk to Mrs. Scott, but shouts frequently in his high, shrill voice to four young girls who are playing tennis near—the two Scott girls, Edith and Mary, Miss Browne, and Margaret M'Arthur, Mary's governess. The set is over just as Munro and Fielding come from the house. Cecil knows nearly every one; but Munro has a good many introductions to get through, which he thinks a great bore,

and as soon as practicable he shelters himself under Mrs. Scott's wing. He remembers what Fielding said about Lady Wade getting hold of him, and intends to avoid her.

"Pretty, certainly, and bears looking into," he thinks; "but she won't have a chance to flirt with me." It is not that he dislikes flirtations, but he likes to drop into them gradually, not begin a red-hot flirtation at first sight. Indeed, he has a habit ot viewing every one at first with suspicion. Sir Percival leaves him alone; he does not remember to have met him when he has dined at mess, and concludes that he is not one of the "right sort." He amuses himself bantering Miss Browne, as soon as she comes up, on her attire, an entirely unobtrusive divided skirt.

"Going to exhibit your dress at the Health Exhibition, Miss Browne? You will give lectures, I suppose, which you will illustrate. I must come to hear you."

"I am not a fanatic, Sir Percival. Because I choose to wear a convenient form of dress, I have no desire to persuade others into it. There is a model at the Health Exhibition. I advise you to go and see it at once, as you take so much interest in woman's dress;" and she turns away from him somewhat contemptuously.

Mrs. Scott, who always feels nervous of a breach of the peace when the two are together, says to Sir Percival, "Had not you and Miss Browne better do your fighting at tennis? You will play this time, will you not? Of course you play, Captain Munro,"

she says, turning to him. "Miss Browne is an excellent partner."

"Good gracious," he thinks. The suggestion nearly takes his breath away. "That woman!" He is nearly sure he saw Lady Wade smile at Mrs. Scott's suggestion.

In his usual slightly drawling, indifferent tones, as if he has no convictions, he says, "Thanks; I don't play tennis."

"Not play tennis? I thought every one did, although I don't play, and Lady Wade does not care about it." That gives him an opening to make a remark to Lady Wade, but he does not seem to see it.

She does, and thinks, "What a fool the man is, although he looks interesting!"

Cecil, who has been standing a little apart, talking to Edith Scott, is afraid her mother will propose Miss Browne for his partner next, and hastens to engage himself, according to his own notions of what will be agreeable. "Will you play with me?" he asks of Edith.

"Certainly, if Sir Percival and Miss Browne will consent to play together. Don't you think," she says, with a sweet comical smile, "they would better enjoy knocking each other's balls about?"

Cecil thinks as she smiles at him that it is the sweetest face he has ever looked on. "Never mind what they like, *do* play with me," he says.

Sir Percival, intent on making up a set, looks at these two. "Won't do to propose dividing them—a case of spoons." He is determined not to play with

that Agatha Browne, so he proposes to Mary Scott a tall, vigorous girl of thirteen, that they shall try a single, and off the two go to another court.

Miss Browne asks the governess to be her partner against Mr. Fielding and Edith.

Then, that being arranged, Munro leaves his position behind the garden-seat, and takes a chair to the side of Mrs. Scott, to watch the play—an excuse for not exerting one's self to talk.

Lady Wade, although Mrs. Scott talks to her, and includes her in the conversation, feels left in the cold; and no woman likes that, and least of all one accustomed to command admiration and homage. She actually is driven to wish that the vicar, whom she never thinks worth powder and shot—she says he reminds her of a three-tuned organ, with wide gaps in the tunes. The first tune is this parish; the second, G——— Hill, where his curate life was spent; the third, his dogs—would come; he would be better than this. Descriptions of people are tedious, so is looking on at tennis where one is unoccupied, Lady Wade thinks. While the players variously, vigorously, or gracefully disport, they shall be photographed positively for the purposes of the story.

Sir Percival Wade is a short, fair man, well-built and athletic. He looks at his best in his flannels, and is wonderfully alert at tennis. His head and face nearly describe a triangle, by reason of a small-pointed beard, the facsimile of that on the face of his stone-ancestor reclining in Otham Church. His forehead recedes—or to begin at the top, his forehead slopes to

the nose, the nose to the chin, and the chin almost slopes beyond that. It is a hatchet-face: so little flat surface has it, that the eyes seem to look from the side, as one sees in a horse or donkey; they are small, grey, and restless. He is a restless, excitable creature —great at chaff; if he can't chaff a girl, he has nothing to say to her. Teasing and bantering are the only ways in which he notices women.

Agatha Browne, the woman here he can best take a rise out of, is a broad-shouldered woman of middle height, of an independent type. She is scarcely past one-and-twenty, yet has seemed a woman for some years. She is dark, has masses of black hair tossed on one side over her ample brow; behind, it is worn short like a man's. Her eyebrows are remarkable—thick and strong; her eyes, large and powerful. In a room full of people one would be attracted to her by the power of her eyes, and after looking at them no one else would seem to have eyes worth mentioning, their big light appearing to put out all the lesser lights. Their power is mesmeric. Her nose is short and broad; her mouth and jaw wide. She comes of a race not fined-off by corsets and culture. At first sight she would be called plain, but her face grows on one marvellously. She is an energetic, useful woman, and plays tennis as she does everything—in earnest.

Play goes on, with intervals of rest, for some time. It is all very well for the players, but for two of the onlookers, who have not much in common, it is wearisome. Neither Lady Wade nor Munro can appreciate

a pastoral life ; the fair scene before them counts for nothing towards enjoyment. A pretty view with Lady Wade is only something one can take people to see, for the sake of doing something.

Presently Lady Wade gives a little shiver. The wind is discovered to be east now the sun is losing power.

"You are chilly. Shall we walk?" asks Mrs. Scott.

That is not exactly what Lady Wade would like ; she is dumpy, and knows that she will look noticeably so in contrast with Mrs. Scott, who is a fine woman.

"No, thanks ; I like best to sit here, if I have the wrap I left in the hall. Captain Munro," she continues, before Mrs. Scott has time to make a suggestion, "may I trouble you to get it for me? it is a white wrap, in the hall ;" and she accompanies her request with a fascinating smile.

"Certainly," he answers, and goes off to find it ; but he is anything but gratified at his errand.

"I suppose she will expect me to put it round her," he thinks, "and stand about or sit by her. She was in a bad temper at starting, but has not improved."

He is well used to the fetch-and-carry business for a lady ; but he likes to offer it, not to be compelled into it.

He is a long time going to the hall and back. He can't quite make up his mind if he will simply give her the wrap or offer to put it on. Wishes himself on the road to Ware. Would get himself away if it weren't shabby towards Fielding.

When he goes back to the ladies, he is compelled to

say, "Allow me," as Lady Wade bends forward for him to put the shawl round her.

She holds him by her in conversation, which is principally questioning, until, seeing that she won't let him go yet awhile, he drops into the vacant chair by her side. She goes through a list of people living in the neighbourhood of Ware.

"You know the Gilmores, of course?" she says.

"I do not—much."

"I thought every one knew them, and especially the son."

"I have met him."

"Very likely we don't mean the same thing by knowing people; I don't mean intimately, of course. You know the Shrublands, of course; they are good-looking girls."

The catechism of mutual acquaintance at an end, with no better result than the above, Lady Wade begins to question him on his tastes. Mrs. Scott has gone into the house. There is no escape for him; he has to go through with it, but he looks and feels decidedly sulky.

"You hunt, of course? Which pack do you think best?"

"I don't hunt."

"Care more for shooting, perhaps?"

"No-o."

He is feeling terribly badgered. He hates being asked if he can do this and that. He thinks he will turn the tables on her. Women like her never like to hear a girl admired, so he says—

"Who is that pretty girl playing with—Miss Browne, I think her name is?"

"Do you think her pretty? She is Miss M'Arthur, the Scotts' *governess.*" She gives the last bit of information in rather a contemptuous tone.

Munro notices it, and resolves to talk to the pretty governess if he gets a chance; he has admired her figure and graceful movements all the afternoon.

"She looks very young," he says, "absurdly young to teach."

He soon has the opportunity he desires. "Vantage-all," is followed by "game" for Cecil and Edith, after a "five-all" set.

As luck will have it, Miss M'Arthur is nearest Munro as the players come up. "Take this seat, won't you?" he says. "You must be awfully tired. Violent exercise, isn't it?"

"I suppose it is, but I like it awfully; one gets excited, and it carries one on. I am always hoping to do better next time."

"I am sure you play very well."

"It is civil of you to say so. It is a pity you don't care for it. I always feel quite sorry for people who don't play; they miss so much. It excites me as going in an express train does, or driving quickly through the air in a dog-cart, or something high like that."

She looks very pretty and animated while she is saying this in an unaffected, pleasantly confidential way. She has large, soft dark eyes, thickly fringed

with long black lashes. She raises them to look frankly in his face, as if sure of his sympathy.

Captain Munro, who only spoke to her to pique Lady Wade, begins to feel quite a deep interest in her, especially when she speaks of her fondness for driving quickly in something high. He likes that. He is carried away by her unaffected enthusiasm, to the extent of saying—

"If it is anything as good as quick driving, I shall begin to think I lose something in not caring for tennis. The fact is, I really don't like taking trouble."

"That is a pity; but tennis is really no trouble, when you can play."

"That is it, don't you know."

At that they both laugh.

Lady Wade, who is voting Mrs. Scott's afternoons frightfully slow, gets up to go into the house; the others follow. There is tea in the drawing-room, where Sir Percival distinguishes himself by his attacks on Miss Browne, made in a squeaky voice that compels every one's attention, with the exception of Cecil, who is well placed near Edith Scott.

"They do say, Miss Browne," says Sir Percival, "that your kind of dress is only worn by a peculiar sect called the 'Anti-Matrimonial-Woman-Suffragites,' who have a club somewhere where they meet to denounce the powers that be—men among the powers that be, don't you see? What do you say to that?" and he laughs a little grating laugh.

"Contemptible little creature!" thinks Miss Browne. "You one of the 'powers that be,' indeed!" but she

tries to answer him indifferently, and keep her temper.

"The 'they' you speak of begins and ends with you, Sir Percival. Your imagination is wonderfully fertile, *sometimes*. If you were a born legislator, I should think it worth my while trying to win you over to *our* side of the Women's Suffrage question."

This is all as Greek to the other women, not one of whom even knows of the passing of the Married Women's Property Act last session. They are all, for once, quite delighted to see the vicar, who will create a diversion.

He enters, full of regrets and apologies for being so late. An old woman in an outlying part of the parish had been taken suddenly ill; he met the grandchild just as he was turning into the Oaklands, quite an hour and a half ago—here he takes out his watch to verify the statement—she was coming for him; and so, haltingly, tune number one on the organ goes on to its end.

He has deposited himself in a very low chair, the nearest to hand, between Mrs. Scott and Lady Wade, to whom he equally addressed little dribblets of talk during the consumption of huge slices of rich plum cake and numerous cups of tea. His walk has made him hungry, and he always drinks tea till he forgets how many times his cup has been filled; that is one of his little ways. He is a tall man with unusually long legs, which get very much in the way this afternoon; Sir Percival, who is here, there, and everywhere, nearly stumbling over them several times. No

one but the vicar believes these stumbles to be accidental.

The vicar's legs are always obtrusive in a drawing-room. This afternoon his chair is so low that it renders him helpless ; he can't get up from it with the care of his cup on his mind. He is an object of secret amusement to Munro and the governess, who exchange expressive glances.

After tea there is one more set of tennis. Miss M'Arthur and Mary do not play in it.

"Show Captain Munro the rosery," Mrs. Scott said.

He cares nothing about roses, but he appreciates a stroll with the pretty governess, and the child is not bad, he thinks at the end. She has taken him to see her pony.

"I often drive Miss M'Arthur into Ware," she said. "I go for music lessons three times a week. Mother wanted the master to come here, but I said no ; driving in for them would be delightful. And then we don't hurry home ; we generally go into the museum. I do love the museum ! Lovely old place ! I wish we lived there instead of in this commonplace house. Do you ever go to the museum, Captain Munro ?"

"No ; I go through the grounds sometimes. A short cut, don't you know, from the barracks to the town. Museums are stupid, don't you think ?"

"No, indeed I don't."

"Do you care for such places ?" he asks Miss M'Arthur.

"I like this ; it is such a charming old house."

"I must really go inside, as you both seem to think so much of it."

"I expect if you go alone," said the pert Mary, "you will go in at one door and out at the other, and miss seeing the old chapel and the very old room removed from Highstead and put up adjoining, and nearly everything worth seeing."

"Won't you show it me one of these days ?"

"Oh yes ; I will do the honours gladly. I shall fancy I am a lady of the olden times, welcoming a noble knight."

When Munro and Fielding take leave of Mrs. Scott, she gives them a cordial invitation to her Wednesdays.

"Yours is the best lawn I have ever played on," said Cecil ; "quite a treat."

"If you don't mind taking the chance of finding us out, come any day you like ; but on Wednesday we are always at home. I hope we shall see you also, Captain Munro. Although you don't play, you may get to like tennis in time."

CHAPTER III.

SIR Percival Wade is in a fairly good humour as he drives his wife home. He always gets as much B. and S. at Oaklands as he likes.

"There is no nonsense about Mrs. Scott," he tells his wife; "if a fellow can't drink tea, he can tell her so, and you can have what you can drink."

He plumes himself on having given Agatha Browne a good roasting. He pretty well upset her temper; thereat he laughs.

It adds to his satisfaction that his wife makes some disparaging remarks on Munro—calls him, among other things, "a fool," and "a conceited prig." That is quite his opinion. He saw at a glance that he was not one of "the right sort"—a mysterious term much in favour with Sir Percival, and presumed to mean that "the right sort" are a people like unto himself.

He is not in the least jealous of his extremely fascinating wife, and never appears to be. "It gives women no end of power over you, if they think they can make you jealous," he says. He thinks himself an exceedingly just man. He does just as he pleases;

and he tells her she can please herself—amuse herself as she likes. He thinks he is quite safe in saying that she was really awfully spoony on him at one time, and he does not see why she should not be so still. He is convinced that he is a good husband; compares himself with some husbands of his own acquaintance, and feels quite a virtuous glow come over him as he thinks of them.

Lady Wade's humour does not accord with his. She is not in a good humour. This has been a dull, wasted afternoon. So stupid to sit and look at a game you don't care about, and that makes your eyes ache. And then, such a thing has never happened to her before, that a man who has eyes should prefer talking to Mrs. Scott before her. She can't make it out; she knows herself to be both pretty and becomingly dressed.

She can't get over the slight, and is not exactly a genial companion, but inclined to be vexed at everything. Sir Percival gives her a chance to break out in the short distance from Oaklands to Crinton by saying—

"I am going into Ware when I have taken you home, and I won't forget to ask White who this Munro is."

She would like to hear something about him also; and she might have been certain that Sir Percival would go to Ware, or to some other places, where he would stay till the small hours. She has given up saying much about his habits, regular only in their irregularity. When he is at home he is no companion

to her; after dinner he sleeps, but it does not seem so lonely as being quite alone. She is fond of admiration. What pretty woman is not? The world says she is fast, and the straight-laced shake their heads over her, and bite their tongues very freely about her; yet she has never really given cause for scandal. She amuses herself with the men who come round here, and to her it has become almost a necessity to have one or two at hand, delighted to do her bidding; but up to this time her vanity, not her heart, has been touched. So matters stand when Sir Percival says that he is going to Ware.

"Another evening alone!" she says in a vexed tone. "I don't know what men think we are made of. How would you like spending so many evenings alone?"

"Not at all. I like society, you know; that is why I am going to Ware; and I have business. I've been backing—too heavily."

"And I like society, and hate to be alone."

"Come, Nelly, it's your own fault. Why don't you ask some one to stay with you? Any one to hear you talk would think I shut you up from seeing people, when you know I like the place to be alive with people, if they are the right sort. Now, don't be unreasonable."

"Unreasonable! You know how I hate to be called that. Unreasonable, is it, to dislike neglect, to feel hurt that you don't care as much about me as you do about your horses? I am sure you spend more time in the stables than you do with me when

you are what you call at home ; and you make much more fuss when a horse is ill than you do when I am."

"Because those confounded grooms can't be trusted to look after them properly. I am sure I always send for Mainwaring directly you are seedy, as he understands you, which I'll be —— if I do. Women never know when they are well off;" and he gives a vicious cut to the cobs to wake them up as he goes up the avenue to Crinton ; then swears because he has to wait for a groom to come to him. He had sent the groom with them off with a message ; finally he drives off without another word to his wife, or even a thought of her. He is a little uneasy about the coming Derby, and turns over in his mind the best way of becoming safe."

Lady Wade goes straight to her room, where she indulges in a good cry. She is of a nervous, excitable temperament ; prone to going up high in spirits, or down very low.

When the outburst has calmed a little, she wonders what she can possibly do with herself. A solitary dinner, a long affair where one feels conscious of the servants' presence ; and then what ?

She has no resources in herself against *ennui.* Usually when she is alone she takes up a novel to kill time, but she has nothing fresh to read. The fresh books from the Grosvenor don't come till to-morrow ; and she thinks, "If I had not gone to that stupid Oaklands, I could have got a book from Ware. I should have seen some people there."

The deepening gloom of twilight adds to her melancholy and discontent, without her knowing that it does so. She sits by the window, looking out at the trees that are becoming indistinct, and give her a creeping feeling, a feeling of fear of something undefinable.

She will not ring for her maid till the last minute. "They are always so curious, and know every change in one's face."

"If only I had something to love," she thinks, "how different life would seem! If my baby boy had lived, I should never have felt miserable and lonely like this. I could have gone to the nursery instead of being alone. He would have been old enough to talk and say 'mother,' had he lived."

She has never liked being alone, but to be alone when one is not good company to one's self is hateful.

"Shall I write to Maude to come to me?" she asks herself. "She is bright and cheerful; and perhaps if she were here, Percy would stay at home more." But she is not sure if she would like that.

People who knew them wondered that Ellen Gillroy should marry Sir Percival Wade. Cupid must have been deaf as well as blind just then; his voice is so exceedingly unpleasant.

Sir Percival Wade certainly is a baronet, and not only old as baronets go, but he is of a family so old that it can be traced back as a family long beyond the Conquest, until it is lost in a myth, the commencement of most pedigrees. To have been of the governing class on this island long before the Con-

queror landed—that much is matter of history—is surely better than being one of a poor needy band of foreign adventurers. The Wades have been a long time dying out as a family, thanks to frequent absorption of heiresses. Sir Percival, in his marriage, followed in the steps of the wise men of his race. Ellen Gillroy was an heiress, young, pretty, and with a charming figure in those days. Sir Percival proposed, after winning a steeplechase, over which Ellen Gillroy had been much excited.

How long does it take to see through Cupid's bandage? That depends on how long one can contrive to keep one's eyes shut. A few people never see completely through it.

Besides being an heiress, Miss Gillroy possessed the advantage of being well-born, and Sir Percival was considered a very lucky fellow.

About a year back great preparations had been made, and hope ran high that the coming child might be a boy. Sir Percival had bets on it, 'twas said; his gambling propensities turn every doubtful event into an occasion for a bet. His own reckless disregard of his wife's feelings lost him his heir.

He was always crazy in his love of adventure; perhaps it would be truer to say that he cannot exist without excitement.

He one day made the acquaintance of a celebrated aëronaut; then he could not rest till he had made a balloon ascent.

His wife, who at that time was still very fond of him, pleaded continuously that he would at least

postpone the ascent; but she pleaded in vain. He said there was no danger, that people would say he was afraid if he didn't do it, and that no woman should make him pass for a coward. "It is a pity," he concluded by saying, "that women will give way so to their confounded nerves. Why, there is no more danger in crossing the channel in a balloon than there is in risking a steeplechase. You did not make a fool of yourself when I rode Tomfool last month."

"That was different, dear," she said. "I know you can *ride;* but here your safety does not depend on yourself. Indeed, it is different."

But nothing moved him from his purpose. Tears only made him angry; and whenever she approached the subject, he would walk off.

The day fixed for the ascent came. The country folk from far and wide assembled in crowds in the meadow next the gas-works, to see the balloon and Sir Percival go up.

Country folk take an interest in a man who can do something they can see and understand; and Sir Percival hunts with both packs, rides hard and straight, and keeps himself well before the company by constantly giving people something to talk about. In Ware, only the other day, he cut a Salvation Army captain across the face with his riding-whip, because their noise frightened his horse.

When the day came, Lady Wade could not be persuaded to stay at home; she insisted on driving to the meadow to see the ascent. Her doctor was in

the carriage with her. He had slept at Crinton a week; her state of health had been so indifferent.

Sir Percival drove in his dogcart, and took care to keep away from his wife, dreading a scene; and, of course, he was surrounded by friends of "the right sort."

Just at the moment of the ascent, the huge inflated monster heaved and swayed, as balloons do. But the people of Ware did not know the ways and customs of balloons; those near thought they would be crushed. There was a stampede, with screams from several women.

Lady Wade, who did not rightly understand the occurrence, thought that it was all over for her husband. She too shrieked, and was driven from the ground in a fainting condition.

A telegram the next morning from St. Malo, where the balloon and its occupants alighted, found Lady Wade in an extremely critical condition. For a week her life hung in the balance. When the baby was born, it was dead.

CHAPTER IV.

I WON'T apologize for another introduction, but it shall be brief.

If other people are like me, an introduction is a pleasant event. "Yes; if people are interesting," will be the response.

I, of course, admit that some people are much more interesting and amusing than others; but no people, if one troubles to study them, are uninteresting. A drop of water, which appears to be nothing but a drop of colourless, tasteless fluid, if examined with a microscope, is found to be teeming with active life. The people one may have labelled "stupid" may have very original thoughts busy within them. Besides, there are the good man's weaknesses and the bad man's better instincts to discover and reflect on. Again, there is the economical man's one spendthrift propensity, and *vice versâ*.

That is the introduction to the introduction of John Scott, stockbroker, an exceedingly prosperous man, not entirely self-made, owing something to his father,

but more to his own luck, some would say. He has been lucky, or clever enough to have become possessed of a large income, which he spends freely.

His prosperous circumstances demand more notice than the man himself, who is in no way exceptional among his fellow-men. It is at home that he towers above every one. He is broad and short of stature; much indulgence in eating is putting the stones on him faster than he can contrive to carry them with comfort. He is fair and bald, and, if it were not for the hint of complexion given by his pale grey, slightly prominent eyes, one could not arrive at that conclusion unassisted, as he has no hair on his face.

He is ostentatious as well as hospitable. He believes in his daughter Mary, but not much in any one else. He has the love of rank innate in all upper middle-class Englishmen, talk and pretend to themselves as they may to the contrary. He does not love soldiers, whom he thinks look down on civilians ; while he tells himself that men of his own standing are, by reason of their wealth, the bulwarks of their native land, more than the men paid for fighting her battles.

He is autocratic master in his own house ; his wife had not even a voice in the furnishing of her boudoir ; his daughter Mary alone does not fear him.

He thinks he ought to rule absolutely. See what he does for them ! He goes to business early and comes back late, that they may have every luxury. He keeps up a fiction that his work is uncongenial, and that he would like the life of a country gentleman, while he does not even know how to get through the seventh

day and part of the sixth, when he rests from his city labour (?).

He gets back to Oaklands about seven in the evening, and the interval between his arrival and dinner is not a happy time for his household. He asks questions, finds fault with something, and wanders about in an aimless fashion, looking into this and that.

Even Mary keeps out of his way, until dinner-time, if she can. One of his rules is that she and Miss M'Arthur—he likes good-looking faces around him—shall dine with them every evening. Her mother thinks dinner at eight o'clock too late for Mary, who is only thirteen; but her representations of the evils of late dining and late hours for children have not made the slightest impression on him.

Mrs. Scott is always a little extra nervous on Wednesday, her "at home" day, especially if any young men have been to them. She does not discourage their coming; she likes young people to enjoy themselves, and delights to give her daughters pleasure—would not hesitate to bring on herself a scolding for so doing.

The first question he asks her this evening is, "Who came this afternoon?" His voice is thick, the voice of a very fat man.

"Sir Percival and Lady Wade; Agatha, of course; two of the officers came. Lady Wade does not play tennis, you know, and likes some one to talk to." (True in a way, Mrs. Scott, and certainly clever.)

"Which were they?"

"Captain Munro and Mr. Fielding, both quiet men. I think you would like them. Mr. Fielding you have seen, you know."

"Humph!"

"Sir Percival has quite lost his tameness, and was as active as ever. He said something about wanting to see you about one of the keepers."

That reminds him of a matter connected with the pheasants that wanted inquiry; much to his wife's satisfaction he goes off to make it, and she does not see him again till they meet at table.

Dinner would be a function as solemn as it is stately were it not for the lively, irrepressible Mary. Her sister seldom speaks before her father, who does not understand her, and thinks her wanting in affection because she is undemonstrative.

Every detail of the dining-room is well appointed; valuable and pleasing pictures line the walls, offering food for agreeable contemplation. The service is marvellously smooth, yet rapid; Mr. Scott will not endure slackness in duty among his servants, who know that if anything amiss comes under his notice, they leave on the instant. Mrs. Scott, who is easy-tempered, hates changes; she is constantly fearing that her husband, who admires gorgeous liveries, will one day exchange these small but useful men for two magnificent "Jeameses" in plush, etc.

The dinner this evening has given satisfaction; not even a look of reproach has she had to bear for her own or the cook's shortcomings. Ordering the dinner is one of her daily worries. She has to steer between

two shoals. If she goes too much on one side, he is stranded in gout; if to the other, in discontent.

If all goes as well as it has this evening, the half-hour of dessert is a genial time with the lord and master of Oaklands; he beams and expands, and sometimes perpetrates a joke or pun, picked up in the city. If any one has a request to make, this is the time for it.

Mrs. Scott has been talking to her eldest daughter of the necessity of giving a dinner-party. "Colonel and Mrs. Saville have never been asked to anything here, and it is so stupid to do nothing but exchange calls," she had said.

Edith entirely agreed with her mother. "Of course you will invite Captain Munro and Mr. Fielding?" she had added. She is getting to be very much interested in that young man. "He plays tennis so well," she tells herself.

That having been arranged between mother and daughter, as soon as the servants have left the room, Mrs. Scott says to her husband—

"My dear, what do you think of giving a dinner-party soon; not too big, you know, not more than twelve people?"

"Oh yes, father, do!" says Mary, "and let me dine with you. I am quite big enough, I am sure; and you want ladies. You can always get odd men to a dinner. Do say 'yes,' dad dear."

Dad smiles, but does not answer.

"Don't be absurd, Mary," her mother says. "Who ever heard of a child of thirteen at a dinner-party?"

but she feels half afraid that her husband may insist on the child appearing.

"Thirteen at dinner, Puss—unlucky number." They all try to smile, as the head of the family has made a kind of pun. The effect is ghastly. "Besides," he adds, "it is rude to invite one's self anywhere."

"What do you think, dear, about the dinner?" asks Mrs. Scott again.

"I don't see any particular objection," he says then, slowly, as if conferring a favour by it. "I have invited young Fairbrace—his father made a pile of money—down on Saturday week for a few days. We will have it while he is here."

"Oh, Edith," says her sister mischievously, "how I wish I were grown up instead of you! He was such a nice boy, with a weakness for chocolate creams. He used to patronize me, when he wasn't teasing me. But I dare say he is stupid and conceited now he is grown up—a regular masher."

"What a vulgar expression!" says her sister, blushing, however—she has a delicate skin, and blushes easily. "You seem to remember a great deal about Wat, much more than I do"—loftily.

"You remember to call him Wat, anyhow."

"You shall not tease Mary," says Miss M'Arthur, quietly.

"I did not mean to tease. I should like to be Edith, with no more regular lessons; but I would enjoy myself if I were, much more than she does. She takes everything so tamely; never gets what I call excited."

"That can't be said of you, Pussie," says her father, fondly. "You are like a young kitten, with all your troubles to come."

"But I don't see why one must have troubles. All elderly people shake their heads and talk like that when they see one a little jolly. I am sure people make their troubles oftener than not. Why, only yesterday I found old Nat in great grief, because he had made up his mind, all this long time beforehand, that we are to have a hard winter. 'They don't give outdoor relief now, and I'll 'ave to go to the house'"—she mimics the old man's tone. "If I were you, Nat," I said, "I would enjoy the summer that's before you, and then if the worst does come, and you have to go into the 'house,' you can do all your crying together then. I call that wisdom, Mr. Scott; don't you?"

"Yes, my little philosopher. But what was Nat's answer?" and the father has quite a chuckling fit at his daughter's sharpness.

"Say I may dine with you, daddy dear, and I will tell you." She has risen, and gives her father a hug and a kiss.

"You are teasing your father, Mary. Come and sit down," says Miss M'Arthur.

"Do as Miss M'Arthur tells you, Mary. I will tell you what you can have—anything you like, for dinner upstairs, unlimited viands. There! And you and Miss M'Arthur will be in the drawing-room when we come in; and you, Puss, must practise that you were telling me about, to play to the people."

Mary makes a grimace, and goes to her seat.

She knows her father's tones well; he means what he says now.

"What did Nat say?" asks her father, to cover her discomfiture.

"Oh! Nat said, 'That be very good advice, Miss Mary, and I could 'a talked so when I was young, and p'raps could 'a put troubles by a bit then; but now I's old an' weak, I jest set down an' fret under 'em. I ain't strong enough some days to do nothing else.' I did not know quite what to say to that, so I told him to cheer up, and I would give him my weekly pocket-money to keep him out of the 'house' this winter."

"And what will you do without chocolate?" asks her father.

"I must not eat so much; and perhaps sometimes a good-natured friend of mine will bring me some of those highly superior chocolates from London."

CHAPTER V.

THE start of Jack from Oaklands always causes some excitement in the establishment; even the maid-servants get to the windows to see his impatience to be off; there is something irresistibly comic in the fretting and fuming of so tiny a creature.

Mrs. Scott would not dream of being absent from the sight; yet each time she is terribly alarmed, and says, "Really you ought not to go without a groom."

"No room for him in a village cart."

"Village carts are such stupid things." Sometimes she is frightened into being much more emphatic than that.

It makes not the slightest impression on her daughter, who has not yet learnt what fear is. In the midst of much backing and rearing Miss M'Arthur manages to get seated; then Mary gives her mother a parting kiss, takes the reins in her hand, ready to seize her opportunity to step in. Once seated, the groom gives Jack his head, and off he darts, with a shake of it as if resenting an indignity, at the top of

his speed, requiring all Mary's power to hold him in, and all her wits about her to guide him.

Mary is intensely fond of her pony, and very proud of the notice he draws to himself as she drives through Ware. People who see the start from the "Rose" all prophesy that "they will come to grief one of these days." All the streets of Ware, with the exception of High Street, which has width to spare, are narrow, and many of them are exceedingly steep. Once before this, since the tennis Wednesday, these two have been into the town. Then Mary wished to look in at her favourite museum; but her governess had said, "We will wait till Saturday; we have more time then." She had thought much of the good-looking soldier who had been so nice to her since their meeting, but shrank from seeming too anxious to meet him.

The music lesson over, the two wend their way to the museum. "It will be pleasant on the grounds for a little, don't you think?" said Mary. "When I have been shut up in a little town-house, I always want a good breath of air; don't you? And I like to watch children's play; they have such queer notions."

"I don't object to their notions; it's their voices I object to when they are too near. But I can put up with them a little while."

They seat themselves under a fine tree, near where the pathway from the railway to Museum Street crosses the grounds, Mary's favourite position, as it commands an artist's view of the back of the old manor houses, which is by far the most picturesque

portion of it. But Mary can never be still or silent long.

"I want to see if that white shrub over there"—pointing to a distant corner—"can be *Andromeda florabunda.* I think it is too early for it to be out; don't you? I shall be back soon. Mumsy, dear, you don't mind, do you?"

Mumsy—her pet name for her governess—does not mind; so off she starts, at a swinging pace on her voyage of discovery.

While Miss M'Arthur sits musing under the elm tree, within sound of a hubbub of shrill little voices from children at play, awakened to more gladsome life by the cheerful spring-day, she would make a pretty picture.

She had a lithe gracefulness that strikes one even as she sits there. When she walks, the pose of her head as her whole carriage is perfection; her walk is the poetry of motion, not a succession of jerking propulsion, or a waddling progress, the result of tight lacing and outrageously high heels. She is dark, and has a soft olive skin. Her large eyes have a dreary melancholy look in their black depths; the lids are somewhat heavy. But all melancholy in eye and face disappears when she speaks, and when she smiles dimples reveal themselves perpetually. Her mouth is small; her lips more full than thin; behind them lurk the tiniest and whitest of teeth. It is a mouth made for smiles and kisses.

She is an orphan, born in Jamaica. She has no recollection of her mother; she often tries to recall

something of her, but cannot. Her father she remembers perfectly, and much of her early days, and her old coloured nurse. Her father was a Scotchman, of good family, living on his estates in Jamaica. Before he died he saw the island at its lowest ebb. He had been compelled to mortgage his estates heavily. After his death, which was sudden, it was found, when everything had been realized, that there were only a *few* hundreds left for his daughter. It was thought best that they should be expended on her education. She was sent to England, and placed in a school for five years, as it was thought that at the end of that time she would be able to assist in a school, or in some other way gain a living by teaching.

Through her schoolmistress—Miss Gore, who aforetime had been governess to Mrs. Scott—she obtained, after giving her services for a short time in her school, her present situation, which is as pleasant as governessing can be ; indeed, all the Scots are really very fond of Miss M'Arthur, and if some one of them, Mrs. Scott, or Edith, would just occasionally call her Maggie—she hungers to be called by her old familiar name—she would feel one of them, and think that some one really cared for her, and be happier.

Her lonesome feelings have come back to her as she sits alone near these careless, happy children. She is taken back to her own childhood and happy, beautiful home. Reared within sight of the Blue Mountains, in one of the earth's fairest spots, she has a keen appreciation of the beauties of nature. She tries to bring back the picture of her home, that

makes her sad; she brings herself back to the present with a smile at herself for indulging in the blues. Then she thinks of Captain Munro. "How nice it would be if he were to come this way now. That would effectually cheer her."

Presently she blushes with delight. Captain Munro is actually coming towards her at a quick pace, not appearing to notice anything around him.

For a second a shy feeling made her almost wish he might not see her. Perhaps he might think her waiting for him; then, as it seems that he really may not see her after all, that feeling completely changes to an overwhelming desire to be discovered. He might actually have passed without noticing her, so preoccupied is he, if it had not been for some children in his path, who have a skipping-rope quite across it. He expostulates, and motions them away. (Maggie is intently watching every gesture.) Then he, half turning round for a last remark to a boy who has shown a disposition to resent his reprimands, chances to look beyond the little group, and at once recognizes Miss—he forgets her name—the pretty little governess.

He lifts his hat, and goes towards her, without even thinking, "Shall I?"

"Alone?" he asks, after the usual greeting.

"Not exactly; my pupil is somewhere near."

"Of course, the child who positively likes museums. An odd taste, don't you think?"

"I really haven't thought if it is; I happen to share in the odd taste;" and Maggie's face dimples with a bright smile of amusement.

"Not really, do you?" He can't believe this bright-looking young thing can like such horrid places.

"You see, museums are in my way. Don't forget, please, that I teach some of the ologies, and there are fine specimens to illustrate my teaching over there."

She lifts her eyebrows in a comically deprecatory way as she says this, and there is a droll little twitch at the corner of her mouth that seems to contradict her words.

He thinks it is an awful shame this nice girl should teach anything, and run the risk of getting clever and horrid. "Is it an awful grind teaching children?" he asks.

"I don't know much about it. Teaching an intelligent child like Mary Scott is not bad at all. I can manage to keep quite one lesson ahead of her, you know. I should dislike immensely what I call governessing, drilling unruly children into shape, you know. I wanted a great deal of getting into shape when first I came to England; I had been so much indulged."

"Aren't you English?"

"I was born in Jamaica. Don't they call those people Creoles?"

They are again getting very confidential. He had been standing by her; now he seats himself. He feels very much interested in this pretty Creole.

"I rather think they do, but I am not dead certain. Would you like to go back there?"

"Oh yes! that is one of my happy dreams."

"Aren't your dreams all pretty happy?"

"Not quite always, when I think that I have no one belonging to me in the world. I am an orphan."

He looks exceedingly sympathetic, but he can't think of anything at the minute that it would be appropriate to say.

She guesses his dilemma, and changes the conversation before the pause has become awkward by saying, "I think I ought to be looking for my charge, as she seems to have forgotten she promised to come back here to me."

"Don't go!" then, recollecting that that entreaty may seem strange, he adds, "don't you know that is just the way to miss each other; while you are looking for her at another place, she will be here. It is always the way." He says this in a much more decisive tone than is usual to him.

"I think I see her coming," says Maggie, who has noticed the tone of entreaty in the "don't go," and is thoroughly amused at his attempt to explain it.

He wishes Mary had kept away longer; he gets on so well with this pretty little governess. It is new ground to him, and promises to be fertile. His first acquaintance among governesses is certainly charming.

"Miss—— I beg your pardon, I can't remember your name," he says to Maggie.

"M'Arthur," she says, a shade coming over her face. She had remembered his name perfectly.

He sees it, and hastens to explain, with a look that

shows him to be exceedingly anxious to propitiate her. "I am so awfully stupid over names, don't you know? Miss M'Arthur"—he smiles at her as he says it, as much as to say, 'I have it now'—"was getting quite anxious about you," he remarks to Mary, as soon as she joins them.

"Yes. Mary, where have you been? Jack won't like being kept waiting so long."

"Who the deuce is Jack?" he thinks.

"Jack impatient! that will be nothing new. But I really could not help being late. I happened to see Mr. Euraton. I asked him how his child was. He wished me to go in to see her, and that has made me five minutes late. Of course you have just come from the museum," she remarks.

"Indeed I have not," he begins contemptuously; then, remembering something, changes his tone. "I want to be personally conducted, you know."

"I should like the office of conducting you, above all things," says the child. "We shall be in Ware again on Tuesday; will you be here?"

"Yes, if I can manage it; thanks."

CHAPTER VI.

MR. SCOTT will not have his horses out on Sunday, let the weather be what it may. The seventh day should be a day of rest, he says, and that he stands by.

If mortifying his own flesh and the feelings of his woman-kind be meritorious, then this rule of his, that no complication of circumstances will induce him to break, should stand him in as a high figure on the credit side of his account.

When the ground is dry enough for the walk to church across the fields, it is pleasant to walk, and no one grumbles; but discontent finds vent, when Mr. Scott is out of hearing, on a day like this. Rain fell heavily in the night. The field-path is out of the question, and the Scott family, if they go to church at all, must tramp the longer way along the road, just like the common people, as Edith calls them, many of whom they pass in Sunday attire.

Edith is always late. Miss M'Arthur waits for her, and the two follow in the "Seventh Day Wing," some distance behind the rest of the family. She is not habitually a grumbler; her father's rules and

regulations are the only things that rouse her to complain. She is a tall, willowy kind of girl, more fair than dark. Her face in detail is difficult to describe. It has no salient features. It strikes every one as being a sweet face, and pretty, they added afterwards, the prettiness of harmony. She is not credited with possessing much character; but if any one told her that, she would not be in the least hurt.

There is hardly a sufficient number of houses anywhere in Otham to deserve the name of village. About a quarter of a mile beyond Oaklands there is one small assemblage of cottages lining one side of a meagre green. Among them is an unpretentious-looking chapel, drawing its congregation partly by reason of its "handiness." The other assemblage of cottages is about a mile nearer the church. These are put down anyhow, at a spot where two roads cross. There is a carpenter's workshop and yard, a smithy, and a general shop, displaying in its windows a sample of everything; this is also the post-office.

Not long after passing the cross-roads there is a gate, which opens into a hop-garden, through which is a short cut across the fields to Ware.

Edith, whose eye had pierced the dazzling vista of hop-poles, puts her hand suddenly on Maggie's arm, saying, "Look!"

"Where?" asks Maggie, who is not expecting that some one *may* walk over to church this morning from Ware.

"Among the hop-poles."

"And what brings that young man over here?"

Edith, blushing slightly, and trying to appear indifferent, says, "He knows the church has just been restored."

"Indeed, he is an archæologist, I suppose, come to see the old bits that have been unplastered. It would have been as near for him by the road. Now, he must walk back to the church." This is said banteringly.

"It seems stupid not to wait a second, don't you think, as he is just here?"

"Yes. But what would your father say?"

At a good pace, swinging his cane a little nervously, Cecil Fielding advances to greet them.

"I thought a walk out here to look at your restored church would be a good thing to do. The rain has made it pleasant," remarks the young man.

"Not a bad thought of yours. But you ought to have seen the church when the old vicar was here. We positively had to listen to *music* ground out to us. We have been grumbling about the rain. We don't like coming round by the road; the fields are so much pleasanter, when the grass is dry. My father won't let us have even one horse out on Sunday."

"What, never?"

"Never, under any circumstances."

"What a queer notion!" he thought. "Are any more of your people coming?" he asks. He is thinking, "I hope not, then they will let me sit by them." He has only met Mr. Scott once, and does not in the least *know* him.

"My father, mother, and Mary are in church by this time."

The question forcibly recalls to Edith her father's peculiarities, and makes her feel decidedly nervous. How can she tell Mr. Fielding that her father won't like him to go into church with them? She wishes Miss M'Arthur would help her.

"Are we late, then?"

"Not very. I thought you always went to church with the soldiers in the morning," Edith remarks.

"I get off it when I can—uniform a horrid bore."

Maggie thinks it incumbent to make this remark, "I don't know how they feel, but they look awfully nice."

"Yes," says Edith; "and English officers are the only officers who think their uniforms a disgrace."

"We don't do that, exactly."

"Mr. Scott said the other day," adds Maggie, "that the commander-in-chief once ordered an officer to wear it constantly for a month; I think it was as a sign that he was in disgrace."

"The German officers," adds Edith, "we saw at Hamburg last year, looked *well* in their uniforms."

He wonders if she admired any of those loutish fellows. The thought makes him a little savage.

"A good thing for them they are obliged to have on uniforms. They can't afford to wear other clothes," he says.

They have reached the foot of the hill, where the church stands in a valley, through which runs the Are. At the gate of the pretty churchyard, bright with

flowers, a bed of them running quite round the church under its walls, and the fresh green of the graves, turfed squarely, instead of reminding one by their shape of mummy-covers, they stop.

"This looks cheerful!" the young fellow says, as he holds the gate open for them to pass through.

Poor Edith looks appealingly at Miss M'Arthur, who, understanding her feeling like a dragon, says, "I hope you won't mind what I am going to say, but Mr. Scott is so very——" She does not know what word to use—"peculiar, particular I mean, that he would not like to see you come into church with us."

"He does not like young men," says the gentle Edith, dolefully, looking at him as if she would say, "Forgive him for not knowing better."

"What a queer—— I beg your pardon."

"It does not matter at all; it is very odd of him," says Edith, in a tone of conviction.

"But I have an invitation to dinner at your house."

"Yes, I know; one must have men to dinner, young men sometimes, to take other girls in, you know."

"He does not like them to talk to his daughter," explains Maggie. "He would label them all dangerous, and teach her, if possible, to avoid them."

"Then I am not to go in with you, and am to keep out of sight, if possible; is that it?"

"Yes"—eagerly. "Turn to the left when you go into the door; you will find a seat; and leave before us, please. Good-bye. It seems so stupid; does it not?"

"I am awfully sorry. Good-bye." He stands there until they are well before him, then follows, keeping to his instructions.

The bell ceases tolling as Edith and Maggie reach the porch. The old men of the parish let them pass first, then troop in, bent of form and tottery, clad in decent Sunday black, each with a very tall hat of a fashion long gone by, with which they cover their faces as they bend forward to invoke a blessing or observe a custom. As soon as they are seated, the young men, who have waited till the last minute, clatter in. Their gait is rolling, and their mien a mixture of sheepishness and assurance. One or two take their places in the choir. This is always the order of their coming in, at the end of their weekly churchyard confabulation, which is carried on by the dropping of occasional words. The agricultural labourer rarely talks. Old men who have been gardeners, or have mixed in some way with the quality, are sometimes garrulous; young men seldom. The old men mostly look meek and henpecked. With constant exposure to weather, they lose their power to work sooner than their wives do, and then the wife is truly the "missus."

There is nothing sufficiently remarkable about Otham church to take one's attention from the congregation, when it has been noted that all is in correct taste and order, within and without. The service decorously performed, the vicar's part being rendered in a somewhat limp and backboneless fashion, very trying to his saintly, energetic aunt, Miss Woolner.

This lady is as energetic and strict as her nephew is careless and accommodating. Her habit, when she first came, of taking everything into her own hands, caused great commotion in the parish, and threatened to empty the Sunday schools a short time back.

She had introduced into them a catechism, the teaching of which was not the generally received teaching of the Church of England. This somehow came under the notice of the dissenting minister, and caused, with a little judicious stirring, a flame of indignation to run from one end to the other of the parish.

The catechism was unanimously denounced as popish, and the children were instructed to give it back to their teachers, and tell them they "warn't" to learn that.

Then the vicar read the little book through, did not himself approve of it, and withdrew it. He hastened to smooth matters over by paying pastoral visits to all his flock. Being popular with all the women-kind —with the young by knowing all their little ones by name, with the old by listening to their troubles and ailments—he soon put matters straight for himself and schools, the odium henceforth resting on the severe-looking aunt, who is regarded as the "Scarlet Lady," the little children having a creepy dread of her.

It is not often the congregation includes two strangers of mark as it does this morning. The young man is in a retired position behind all the congregation, excepting the Wades.

Sir Percival's family enclosure, square and com-

modious, is in the chancel, and commands a view of everywhere. In it he slumbers over the family vault —his legs stretched on the seat—through certain parts of the service, after he has done his part of the day's proceedings by catching up the choir and coming in at the death in the responses.

The second stranger, Lady Wade's friend, Maud Darville, is a striking object anywhere, and especially in a congregation like this. She has no pretentions to beauty, but has a kind of assured "admire-me" air that carries her a long way on the war-path. She has a good figure, and a style that is her own. Edith looks admiringly at her, and wonders what Mr. Fielding thinks of her.

His thoughts do not often stray beyond three seats from the chancel, where he can see the graceful getting up and kneeling down of the girl with the sweetest face he has ever seen; of her father, who is also much in her thoughts. He thinks a fat man like that ought to be a good-tempered fellow enough. What a tyrant, not to let them drive, whatever the weather is, and to want to keep fellows off like that! A good thing his wife isn't of his way of thinking!

Miss Darville has, of course, obtained the information she desired about Fielding long before the service is over.

Sir Percival hearing, adds, "I will have him to lunch for your benefit."

But the young fellow remembers, and obeys his instructions. He is off like a shot, before the rest of the congregation have risen from their knees.

The vicarage is entered from the churchyard, which it faces. Miss Woolner, under her garb of unworldliness, her austere-looking black dress, without a superfluous yard of material in it, and her bonnet of quakerish shape and neatness, cherishes a strong love for the aristocracy. Indeed, she dearly loves a lord. The Wades are the best people in her neighbourhood, and by that merit stand high in her regard. She always comes early out of church, not quickly—her obeisance to the altar would preclude that—ready to exchange greetings with the Wades before they drive off.

This morning there is the usual gathering in front of the vicarage. Miss Darville, who has been posted in the village "who's who," and told that the Scotts are giving a dinner, is introduced to every one, and is becomingly civil.

Sir Percival looks round for Fielding, and for a great wonder abstains from remarking on his presence in church and his hasty disappearance; but then, Miss Woolner has taken temporary possession of him. He escapes her by the coming up of the vicar, and Agatha Browne, who stays in church to close the harmonium; not to "wait for the vicar," as his aunt says.

Miss Woolner watches Agatha's face as Miss Darville talks for a few minutes to her nephew. She is disappointed to find that, apparently, she is too much engaged in conversation herself to notice it.

* * * * *

Sir Percival, who is trying to drive the cobs from the back seat—he always likes to be doing something —asks Maud what she thinks of their lot.

"Not bad; the girl is pretty and unsophisticated. But where did that good-looking fellow go?"

"Ah, that interests you most! Can't say. Some of the others will be over by-and-by."

"Which?"—from his wife.

"What are they like?"—from her friend.

"Wait and see. Too bad to ask one to describe another fellow, 'pon my word!"

"Whom did you ask?" protests his wife.

"White, and that Munro, and any of them that like to come. I promised Maud to do my best to find her amusement."

"I thought you never met Munro?"

"They had a Derby sweep on, and he was in it. He knows something about bookmaking; not such a fool as I thought him."

"Did he say he would come?"

"Not exactly."

"Who is this man?" asks Maud Darville.

"A captain in the X. Y. Z.," says Sir Percival, who dearly loves teasing.

"I don't mean that only. What is he like?"

"Ask Nellie. Ah-ah!"—laughing in his highest key. "I'll bet six pairs of gloves you won't make anything of him; Nellie couldn't."

"Done!"

"What a jolly flat back you have got, Maud."

"Have I?"

"'Have I?' Why, you know you have."

Lady Wade does not like that remark from her husband, even to her dearest friend; she knows that it could not be applied to her now. "The dress *fits* remarkably well," she says.

CHAPTER VII.

MAY, that battle-ground of the seasons, now shows signs of a successful rally on the part of winter, allied with a strong east wind. Summer had given herself conquering airs too soon, and has to fall back, checked for a time, her forces paralyzed by this strong combination.

When Maggie draws back her curtain and looks out at the weather, she shivers at the sight of a thick powdering of snow o'er trees and lawn. A breath of the north has come down in the night in a snowstorm, bringing with it a temper-upsetting atmosphere, a pinching of features, and a blue tint in the skin that is not a beauty shade.

If Professor Owen, or any other eminent naturalist, had a single bone of an animal given to him, from that he could tell to what species it belonged, and with a few more bones he would be able to reconstruct the whole creature. A waking thought is like the naturalist's bone.

Maggie's first thought when she saw the snow this Tuesday morning was, "I shall not see him to-day, even if we can go for the music lesson."

When the next lesson day comes, although the weather is not genial, it does not prevent the usual mode of conveyance by Jack and the village cart.

On the same day Lady Wade, who has greatly lamented this inclement weather for her friend, drives her into Ware. "An awfully dull, stupid town; but, unless we are very unfortunate, we shall see one or two live men. I want you to win your gloves."

"A sell; he did not come on Sunday. Tell me some more about that little man Major White was laughing about. What was he saying about a little man and a wedding-breakfast?"

"He was speaking, dear, of a tiny little Captain Spalding of their regiment, a man completely wrapped in family. If he hears of a woman, he does not ask if she is good-looking, but, who is she? I must take care to let him know that your father is of the younger branch of the —— shire Darville's, and that your mother was a M'Intyre. They look upon the Dukes of A—— as mushrooms, don't they? At all events I will tell him so; then he will condescend to take a little notice of you—not much, though. He thinks every girl has designs of becoming Mrs. Spalding, and he is most circumspect. He actually left a place where he was stopping the other day, because the girls were too attentive to him."

"What an awful little prig! I must see him. But what was the speech you were trying to learn?"

"Wait a minute while I collect it. He was proposing the bride's health, you know. She was a cousin; so you will appreciate the self-gratulation of it.

'Such are the annals of a house that can boast that for the eight hundred years the family has been in England, no breath of shame has sullied its honour, and, as far as is known, no mean thought has ever entered the mind of a Spalding.'"

"Bravo! When the wine is in, the wit is out."

"I have never seen him take much wine. Those are his sober convictions. I am anxious for you to see him."

"And he goes to the Scotts', stockbrokers?"

"Yes; if one only went to people who have never had a mean thought for eight hundred years, and of pedigree the same length, one's visiting list *would* be small. We go, you know; and Mrs. Scott is a *lady*. He lays great stress on that. He would stand by his order, as somebody said once."

As they drive down the High Street, which is so broad that room has been found at one part of it for the Town Hall and a tail of small houses, making thereby a narrow street at the back, which Maud calls a dodging place, they see Mary Scott and her governess walk quickly across it, and disappear under the archway of the Rose Hotel, where there is an outlet through the market to the museum.

"I wonder where they are going?" says Lady Wade. "There is a way to the barracks there; perhaps they are going to meet some one. I don't like that governess."

"Can't we go that way? What fun to spoil sport!"

Mary racing off, after her three quarters of an hour of still attention, wild with spirits, to see if Captain

Munro is there to be shown her favourite place, had seen the Wade cobs in the distance, and had said, "Bother! Let us get away if we can before they come up. We neither of us like to be patronized, do we, Mumsy dear?" Mary congratulates herself and Mumsy on their success in evading Lady Wade and her friend, as they pass through the deadly lively little fruit and vegetable market. "I wonder if he will be there?" she adds.

They pass through the swing doors into the grand old oak-pannelled hall, with its modern failure in the way of staircase. They look round. No one is waiting there.

"We are only five minutes late," says the child. "It would do him good to live a week with Edie, if he can't wait five minutes for a lady."

"It is not at all likely that he will be here. I told you so before. You don't suppose he is as anxious to see the place as you are to show it." But for all her indifferent speaking, she is deeply disappointed.

"Shall we go outside? He may be waiting for us under that tree. We might sit there ourselves, if he is not there."

"Certainly not; this is scarcely weather in which one would sit under trees for pleasure, and I should not think of doing it. Which room do you want?"

"I must ask about his child," says Mary, starting after the curator, who has just passed in to the garden at the back.

Miss M'Arthur is vexed with her for going off in that way in the very direction she had in a way

forbidden her; but there is nothing for her but to sit down in the hall to wait until she comes back.

In another minute Maggie is flushing and dimpling with pleasure, as Mary comes in through the back entrance, followed by Fielding and Captain Munro. The latter had felt a little shy of coming, and had easily persuaded his friend to keep him in countenance when he told him whom he would meet.

"We have come for our lecture," said Munro, as they came up to her.

"I did not promise to give it," she answers. "This is Mary's ground."

"In which room do you lecture, Miss Mary?" asks Fielding.

"I did not promise anything of the kind. I only told Captain Munro what a charming old place it is. Isn't it nice?" she asks gushingly.

"Pretty well, as far as we have gone," replied Munro, in a critical tone.

"Never mind him," says his friend, "he never admires anything. I do. You show the place to me, and let him follow us or not, as he thinks best."

The two ascend the staircase. Maggie gets up to follow them, saying, "The child will thoroughly enjoy showing the things to any one who is appreciative."

"Then I had better keep away. I shall spoil all. I can't take an interest in fossils and stuffed birds."

"I am sorry you should have this infliction. Just look round at the rooms; then if you like to go, I will make an excuse for you to the others. I hate people to be bored when they are with me."

"Don't send me away like that," he says, looking pleadingly at her. "When one has come down from town to keep—what shall I call it?—a postponed appointment?—he does not expect to be sent about his business directly he appears."

She is charmed at this avowal, but tries very hard not to look ridiculously overjoyed. "But you don't like fossils and stuffed birds," she says lightly. "And you have kept your semi-appointment, and have brought a substitute as well. You will make me think you are great at keeping promises, even when you have been drawn into making them. The child did that, I think."

"I am quite as good at making excuses as at making promises, don't you know? I don't often get drawn into anything I *dislike*."

They had been walking slowly through a gallery that used to lead to the chapel belonging to the mansion. Mary and Fielding are in it, standing before portraits of the famous Duke of Marlborough, and the equally remarkable Sarah, his wife. They are discussing them with much animation. Fielding is glad to have an opportunity of ingratiating himself with a member of Edith's family. He knows that a younger sister can be a terrible nuisance if not friendly. Captain Munro, as they pass a bay, casemented window, in the embrasure of which there are seats, suggests that they shall sit a bit.

When they are seated, a new topic of conversation does not readily present itself. Maggie, who is usually fluent, is a little bewildered at the idea that her

companion actually came down from town to meet her here this afternoon. She has a vague wish that she could reward him by making it pleasant.

While he is thinking of something casual to remark—the window is just opposite the Marlborough portraits, and the gallery is narrow — his friend looks over to them and says, "What, tired already? You won't be much the wiser for this."

"Nor shall I, if I believe all you tell me," says Mary. "I am being awfully crammed, with nonsense I mean, Miss M'Arthur."

"Oh, come; that is too bad. I will only ask you for information. I won't hazard a single remark if you talk like that of me. What is that, now?" and he gradually leads his charge away from the others. He gives a shrewd guess that Munro brought him here to take the child off.

He had asked him in an indifferent way what he was going to do with himself.

"Nothing special that I know of. Why?" had been the answer.

"I have half promised the Scott child that I will look in at the museum."

"She won't be alone?" His thoughts had flown to the possibility of meeting Edith.

"No; the governess."

That was all; but Fielding, knowing that his friend did not like children, knew the governess must be the attraction.

A merry peal of laughter from Mary reached them

"I envy that child sometimes," Miss M'Arthur

remarks. "She enjoys things so thoroughly. She seems to have every possibility open to her that could make life pleasant. She has health, wealth, talent, common sense; she is true and loving; and what more can a woman have or wish for?"

"You have left out one very important thing."

"What?"

"You can't guess?"

"Beauty? I don't think there is much promise of that, and, with the generality of people, that would outweigh all the other qualities."

"I think Mary promises to be good-looking; her features, like her limbs, haven't got their correct proportions yet. But do you really mean that people—you mean men by that, of course—think like that?"

"Pretty well all do, I expect."

She looks quite horrified. "But you," she says, "surely you don't think so?" She is already crediting him with all the virtues, nothing short of perfection.

"I must confess I admire pretty women."

"What! any pretty woman? Merely a pretty face, and nothing more?"

"Any pretty face has lots of admirers, you know. I don't care for all pretty faces. Some good-looking women are not at all my style." He looks very admiringly at her speaking face the while.

His meaning is very clear; it makes Maggie feel uncomfortably self-conscious. She turns her face away to look out of the window as she says, "It is fortunate all people do not admire the same style of beauty."

"Yes."

In a second she says in a low voice—the gallery is not very high above the garden,—"Look, Captain Munro, at these pretty women; one is pretty, you must admit. You are in luck to-day"—a little maliciously.

"What a nuisance!" He had recognized Lady Wade and another lady just under them, evidently making for the back entrance of the building.

"They may only intend to pass through," suggests Maggie.

"And they *may* be coming here. *She is not* one of my favourites."

"And she *so* pretty!"

"I did not say *I* admired all pretty women. Don't you know, you are not fair."

"We had better let the others know they are coming," said Maggie, who thinks that if they are discovered it shall be together.

He follows her to the end of the gallery, opposite a polar bear, shot and presented by a Ware man.

Mary is just saying, "Some one has suggested our closer relationship to the bear than the ape."

"Isn't that song in Princess Ida about the ape lovely?"

Directly she hears who is coming, she suggests dodging. "I am sure they have come out of curiosity about us. That Miss Darville, I could see in church, has a very inquisitive nose. I saw them both look after us when we came under the Rose archway. Fancy her or Lady Wade coming into a place like

this to see its ordinary specimens!"—said with great contempt.

"You know the way about better than I do," says Miss M'Arthur. "You had better try to take us out without meeting them."

Mary is charmed with her office. "Follow me out of this, quick! This is a—what do you call it? *cul de sac?* Down here they would see us, too, directly, if they were to come in at the end."

In the gallery there is a long table covered with glass down its entire length; there is a door halfway down, leading to the chapel and to an *annexe*, an old room and staircase brought from Leigh after it had been condemned, and put up here to preserve it.

Mary leads, the others follow into the old part. There they wait to listen. No one, least of all Maggie, has any desire to venture down the forbidden staircase, which looks as it is described on large placards on either side of it—"Dangerous." There is also a rail across, to stop people from unconsciously venturing down.

All are listening. Maggie is looking very serious; the others seem to regard the adventure as amusing.

"What are you thinking of?" says Captain Munro, in a very low voice. "Tell me."

"That this looks as if we were doing something we were ashamed of."

"I don't think so."

Mary had heard Miss M'Arthur's reply, "Don't think that, mum dear; we are really only defeating

prying curiosity. It is nothing to them what we do. I shall let mother know."

While Fielding and Mary stay near the door of the gallery to listen for voices there, Captain Munro and Maggie go near the staircase, and look down.

"It looks shaky," he remarks. "If Mary or any of you were to break your legs going down, how dreadful that would be! worse a great deal than meeting fifty Lady Wades. I feel, insignificant as I am, that she does not like me, and that she would like to put me down. Don't you think one can instinctively tell the people who dislike one?"

"And the people who like one, eh?" This conversation is carried on in those exceedingly low tones used by lovers, with whom the lightest word is listened for. "I agree with you. Somehow I don't like her either; she gives herself beauty airs, don't you know?"

Mary comes on tip-toe towards them, followed by Cecil; to her this adventure is delightful, almost Robinson Crusoish.

"They are there," she says. "Now we must go down. They are certain to look in here; every one does."

"Let me go first," says Cecil, bending down and passing under the rail. "Mind your heads."

"Had I not better go first; I am not so heavy as the rest of you?" says Miss M'Arthur.

"I am not so heavy, Cecil," says Captain Munro, anxious to be first, so as to have charge of Maggie. "One on a step at a time," he continues, going first

to see if the wood will bear his weight, and then holding out his hand to Maggie.

So step by step, with much caution, they proceed, until they have turned the corner of the staircase, and are hidden from the view of the landing above. The others join them, and get out of sight also. Each stands on a separate step. It is very dusty down there. The end of the staircase forms a closet, where pails and brooms are stored. To get out of the door, even if it be not locked, would entail stepping into pails, and a bruising of shins, let alone the certainty of making a noise by knocking over the brooms, the place being nearly dark.

"They are coming," says Fielding, who is on a higher step than the rest. Mary feels an overwhelming desire to laugh, and has as much as she can do to keep it under. Maggie is afraid, somehow, that they should be discovered, and shrinks back nearer Munro, who can see enough of her face to read her fears on it, and feels a strong desire to draw her to him, to give her a sense of protection.

"What a queer old place!" says Miss Darville in ringing tones. "A staircase. Does it lead anywhere?"

The four conspirators hold their breath to listen. "May not this young lady, if she is very enterprising, venture a few steps"—in which case they must inevitably be discovered. "Never again," they mentally say.

"I don't know, but you see there is a rail across, and it is not safe. Come away!" And their voices gradually die away in the distance.

"Thank goodness, we are well out of that!" ejaculates Munro, when they are all safely out of the trap. Every one relieved is in high spirits. They brush each other, and laugh and chatter like children just let out of school. They stay some time longer in that part of the building, but no one troubles any more to look at the cases or anything in the museum requiring more thought than the pictures on the wall.

"Let me know how this ends," said Munro to Maggie. "If we don't meet before, I shall see you on Wednesday. Contrive to talk to me then. I do hope Mrs. Scott won't be vexed. I have an invitation to dinner for to-day week."

"You will come?"

"Shall I see you?"

"Yes, after dinner, if you come."

He does not say if he has accepted, but Maggie feels sure that she will see him that evening.

CHAPTER VIII.

"AT a meadow's length from the end of my park," as Mr. Scott calls the wooded enclosure at the back of his place, when speaking to people who are not likely to see it, runs the river Are. It reaches Otham after innumerable windings. The Scott girls and the governess oftener than not in the summer use it as their channel of communication with Ware. They all row very well; and in the Scott boathouse are two good boats.

To-day is warm and bright, suggestive of the river. When Mrs. Scott and her eldest daughter were in Ware in the morning, they had seen Fielding. He is always on the look-out for Edith now in High Street.

He had suggested that it would be pleasant on the river. Edith had echoed his suggestion, and Mrs. Scott had embodied it by saying, "Why don't you come to Oaklands that way presently? I will invite some more people, and those who like it can go on the river. Bring one or two men who can row a little with you."

The young fellow had brought with him Major

Spalding and Munro. They had arrived somewhat early, as Fielding would on no account miss the chance of walking by Edith down the shrubbery path that leads from the house to the river.

Mrs. Scott had called at Crinton on her way back and had secured the people from there for her impromptu boating-party.

The shrubbery path is charming. On the side next the park, which is planted with many sturdy oaks, giving their name to the place, and graceful elms, varied with birch, ash, beech, and chestnut trees, runs a finely turfed path, bordering a wider path of fine smooth gravel; on the other side of which is a broad belt of shrubs and spring flowering trees; bending laburnum, with its long tassels of gold; lilac, and its white rarity; the double cherry, with its clusters of pure white rosettes; the delicately tinted almond blossom; hawthorn, pink and white; and many other equally beautiful flowers, if not friends of such long standing, shed brightness on the scene and perfume on the air.

The weather is as genial and smiling as coquettish May, the old love of the poets, can be. The day and scene being perfect, any one would think that these well-dressed people, passing under the beautiful trees to a delightful pastime, would be atuned to day and place.

Alas, no! The serpent of discord coils itself in and out among the flock of little groups in this fair paradise also; only two escape its folds—the two entirely wrapped in one another.

Sir Percival and Miss Darville walk first. He is fairly content. He has pronounced Maud to be one of the "right sort," and has now completely carried her off for his amusement, she being the only woman present of the "right sort," and Agatha not being here to be chaffed. Maud is angry, but can't quite show it to her host. Captain Munro has at length been introduced to her. He looks unpromising; but she has ended by twisting unpromising people round her little finger before now, and it would be a hundred times more amusing to find out what he is like than to be walking with this fool. She is tired to death of Sir Percival, and if she has to go in the same boat with him, she is sure she will not be able to keep from saying something rude. "But he is so dense and conceited, he probably won't see it," she thinks.

Lady Wade and Major Spalding pass next. He is in a little mild simmer of satisfaction; he can talk to his companion without fear of being misunderstood. She is not nearly as well pleased. She finds the walk fatiguing, and her companion more than usually insipid; she knows everything about him, and he is not worth bothering with. Why did not that other man trouble to walk with her? The governess is not here. He can't actually prefer Mrs. Scott to herself. His insensibility piques her. Spalding had been introduced to Miss Darville. She casually acquaints him with her pedigree, by asking if he knows any of the ——shire Darvilles. Then, after a little talk about them, says, "Who is Captain Munro? You

are a great authority, you know, Captain Spalding, on such matters."

The little man charmed, gets readily on his hobby. After he has ridden it to death, and seems getting on to another kindred subject, she says, "What kind of man is he?" That is the question she had been leading up to. Spalding is not fluent at describing people. "He is a reserved man," he says.

"I should have guessed that." There is more than a shade of irony in her tone; but he does not detect it. "What else is there to be about him?" she continues.

"He, oddly enough, does not care for society, dines as seldom as may be at mess, and wants more leave than any other man in the service."

"Indeed! What does he do with it?"

"He has no end of friends in different places."

"Platonic?" The little fellow thinks she ought not to have asked him that.

"Ye-es," he replies, rather stammeringly.

"You do not say that very readily; but one can hardly expect a man to tell of his friend, unless it is to a greater friend still, and I am not that."

She looks at him in a most fascinating manner. He is feeling decidedly uncomfortable just now. Mary, who is a third wherever she goes, flits up, and walks a little while by them, and the little man feels safe.

Of the next couple, Mrs. Scott is content, Munro otherwise, he has not caught a glimpse of the governess, and now with this insane hurry to get to

the river, he may not get a chance to speak to her. Soon after they had left the house, he had made a desperate attempt to get back to it for a few minutes, by asking Mrs. Scott if he shall not go back for a wrap for her on the river. She had answered that some had gone on with the boat cushions. Then he resigns himself to walking by her side, from time to time pondering on the best way to get out of this water expedition.

Edith and her lover, who were behind all the others, walk in a path of flowers, not artificial, yet of their own making. They are the only pair with whom Mary has found herself unwelcome. She quite makes up her mind she will not go back to them again. As she comes up with the leading people, to talk to them for a change, Sir Percival is on the subject of balloon ascents; he has been indulging *à propos* of it on women's nerves in general, and his wife's in particular, much to Maud's disgust. She and Nellie are really friends. Their friendship was formed in the early days, when such a feeling is almost love, which it foreruns indeed, girls giving to each other from a welling fount of affection that later turns to love.

"Would you like to make a balloon ascent?" Miss Darville asks of the child.

"Above all things, the sensation of looking down over everywhere must be delightful."

"Makes one feel awfully giddy, I should say."

"Bravo, Mary!" says Sir Percival. "I will take you up with me the next time I go. Children have

no end of courage sometimes," he says to Maud. "Nellie used to have plenty." (Sir Percival is one of those *little* men who harp perpetually on one string at the time). "But the sex are all alike, not to be depended on; that makes Agatha Browne so wild when I say that she always says 'spare me the anecdote that is coming.'"

"What is the anecdote?" Maud feels compelled to ask.

"Why, you see, I had a mare once that seemed perfectly broken and free from vice; and then all at once, without any reason, she had her tantrums, kicked the trap to pieces, and could never be depended on again. They are all alike."

"What a treasure a perfectly broken-in wife would be!" she says satirically. "But, like the Irishman's horse, who died just as it had learned to live without eating—a loss to the Irishman that, no one wants to lose a horse—the perfectly broken wife would die on the day she became perfect, and so earn her husband's gratitude in addition to his approbation, by leaving him a widower, the last favour, making him a widower, being the greatest any woman can bestow on her husband."

"Ah! ah! ah!" laughs Sir Percival. "But how hard you are on women, if you think that a man is better off without a wife!"

"I did not say that. In the favour she confers in giving him the title of widower, he gains also the privilege of choosing wife number two, and number two is always best, you know."

"Do you think so?" he asks, not quite knowing how much is chaff of all this. "Would you marry a widower?" he asks.

"It is the height of my ambition to be number three; the second wife, I have noticed, is thought much more of than the first, and of course the third would be still more appreciated. Some one once told me to get "Round St. Paul's," to read some letters of a Deering to his *third* wife. They were positively lovely, nearly equal to Mary Stuart's to Bothwell."

This is as bad as Greek to Sir Percival, who says, "Some women seem to think a good bit of that kind of thing; but I have noticed that men who are good at that sort of thing aren't good for much else." Which must be very consoling to him, as no one could possibly accuse him of being great at letter-writing, a few all but illegible lines being the most that he does in that way.

He once confided to a friend thus, "You see it is considered rather caddish to spell badly, but not to write badly," hence the illegibility.

Once Munro had looked round for the chance that Miss M'Arthur may be following; but it seems as if he might be watching his friend and the girl, so he dare not look again.

The shrubbery walk is continued round the end of the park, terminating with a door in the wooden fence. Beyond this is the meadow which slopes down to the river. The river, which forms such a charming water-way either to Ware or towards its source beyond Leigh, in its winding course is fringed with

reeds and yellow flags, with here and there a growth of water-lilies, or pretty star-like blossoms. Trees seem sometimes to grow out of the water, others bend and overlap it lovingly—trees of hawthorn, white with fragrant blossom, beech, oak, ash, and willow, with its boughs dripping in the river. Behind tower stately elm and oak. Everything from the low level of the water seems noticeable and significant. Where the fields are covered with high flowering grasses, the ripening hay crop dotted with ox-eyed daisy and golden buttercup, one sees through into them, not down on them, and so discovers fresh beauty there. The banks sometimes slope up to pleasant garden lawn, or park, amongst houses, that stand revealed in unpretending aspect, not barred by wall and gate, a revelation, like a peep behind the scenes.

By the water's edge now, much arranging and discussion is going on. Sir Percival suggests getting the weights pretty equal, and then having a race to the nearest lock. Mrs. Scott does not catch what he has proposed at first. He is very shrill and insistent.

"What a noisy fool that is!" says Munro, aside to Fielding.

"Yes; but he shan't manage me, racing be ——"

"Miss Scott is coming with me; will you come?"

"I shan't go on the river. Mrs. Scott isn't going. I shall walk back with her."

"Just lend a hand a minute till we have got off; I shan't ask any one else, and they will think till

the last minute that you are coming. What a lark!" And the young fellow, delighted at the prospect of having no one but Edith on the seat in front of him, goes to tell her of the arrangement in high glee.

As that boat appears to have made up its crew without him, Sir Percival tries to readjust matters once more. He is already afloat and impatient to start. "Spalding, you are not exactly an athlete, but you can scull a little, will you go in Miss Mary Scott's boat with my wife? I will take you," he says in a low voice to Maud.

But he has reckoned without Maud, or his wife, or the vicar, who is now seen ambling down the slope towards them. It is not easy to retain a dignified attitude when coming down hill, as every one knows.

Lady Wade's remarks are made in pure good comradeship, not in jealousy, when she says, "I am going with you, Percy; and Mary, I dare say, will come with us, and help to amuse you." She wishes Maud to get what fun she can out of the excursion.

"I don't think that at all a good arrangement," he protests; "we shall be overdone with strength that way, and can't race."

Mrs. Scott hears the word "race." "I beg you won't think of that, Sir Percival," she says, in a flutter of alarm. "Indeed, if you want to race, I can t allow Mary to go in the boat."

"I don't see any fun in racing," says Spalding, whose element is not the water; besides, he does not see any fun in making himself uncomfortably hot to please Sir Percival.

"I think it awfully jolly," says Mary.

"I won't allow it," repeats Mrs. Scott to the vicar, who has joined the group. "Mr. Cumberland, will you go in this boat with Miss Darville—she can steer—and Captain Spalding?"

"I should be very pleased to go, Mrs. Scott," he says, "but I have left my aunt at your house, and she will be waiting for me."

"Never mind that; I am going in directly, and will keep her to tea."

When the start is at length effected, Mrs. Scott finds that Captain Munro has not got into the boat with Edith after all, and intends walking back with her to the house. They watch the boats out of sight, and cannot help laughing at the comical sight of tiny Spalding, who is stroke, having such a tall man as the vicar towering over him.

Munro can laugh now he has gained his point of not going on the river, without a word of fuss, and is quite an entertaining companion. "He improves very much on acquaintance," Mrs. Scott thinks. They become almost confidential during the walk back, and she ventures to ask a few questions about Mr. Fielding, whom any one, not wilfully blind, must see to be much struck with Edith. She thinks she leads to her point most diplomatically, while Munro knows her thoughts on the subject as well as she does herself. He is glad of the chance of doing his friend a good turn.

CHAPTER IX.

GIVE Miss Woolner a listener, and she forgets time, place, and almost persons, though she prefers an intelligent hearer to one who, like her nephew, hears her with his ears only.

Miss M'Arthur, who is rather a favourite, from not having strong convictions on church matters, which only she rightly understands, is entertaining her in the drawing-room, while her nephew goes to find the party in the long walk, as it is called.

Her entertaining consists in listening to accounts of the things that have happened to her relations and friends—sister this, or sister that—and to her friends' friends, and all their remote connections, till she is inclined to think that if the present excessive rate of mortality and mourning continues, Miss Woolner will not have a whole friend or relation left in the world.

Miss Woolner has an exceedingly active mind, which, when she came to Otham, two years ago, when her nephew was made vicar, she employed in reform-

ing the parish. Her catechism was the climax. Then her usually mild, indifferent nephew roused himself to put down his foot; the parish henceforth shall be his affair, not his aunt's.

Too dignified to fight where she cannot conquer, she henceforth devotes herself to organizing societies, and doing "good work" by letter. She is an associate of more than one society, and is a woman of some mark in the women's work branch of the Church.

The bitter drop in her cup is to see Agatha, a woman who is so benighted as to glory in the all but exploded name of Protestant, usurp her place in the parish. She dins the sins of allowing this so constantly in her nephew's ear, that he becomes at last bewildered as to which is the greater worry to him, his aunt, who persists in her strictness and believes the whole parish going to perdition, or the uncompromising Agatha, who will do as she likes, and is, by her strength of character and length of purse, a greater power in the village than himself.

Miss M'Arthur has a strong sense of the ridiculous. Miss Woolner is one of her amusements. She usually delights to hear her talk unrestrainedly, as she is now doing to her; but to-day Miss Woolner's words scarcely enter her mind. She would give anything she possesses to be of the river party, and would have finished the letter for Mrs. Scott, and joined them perhaps, if it had not been for this visitor, who will not even be induced to venture out on the lawn this lovely day, but sits content to pour out a flood of uninteresting talk, with her back to the charming view

over lawn and meadow beyond. Indeed, she prefers to look at the drawing-room, which has lately been refurnished in costly fashion.

Maggie sits where she can command the long walk till it dips into a hollow. How lovely it looks, with the overhanging branches fresh with tender green or varied flower, the bluest of blue skies overhead, and the singing birds carolling their gladness! From her own window, veiled behind its curtain, she had seen the three men arrive by that path, and there had watched them all going gladly, as it seemed to her, down to the river. One thing had pleased her—the order of their going. No one ever thought of feeling jealous of Mrs. Scott.

Maggie is much too unsophisticated to know how a little uncertainty of getting a thing enhances its value, and that her not joining the party she envies is making Captain Munro feel how greatly he desires to see her.

At the end of nearly half an hour of Miss Woolner's conversation, Maggie's heart gives a bound that flushes face and neck, and makes her tremble with delightful excitement. She has seen with whom Mrs. Scott is returning; and "Of course he will wait for the others here," she thinks.

She is quite surprised at herself to find that she is saying her "yes" and "no" and "really" to Miss Woolner in exactly the same tone as before. Feeling sure of not betraying her delight, she dares to draw Miss Woolner's attention to the advancing people.

"Mrs. Scott coming!" says Miss Woolner, rising to

look out. "But that is not Willie with her. Do you know who it is?"

"It is Captain Munro."

"I don't seem to remember him; I cannot have met him anywhere; my faculty of remembering people I have once seen is remarkable. The royal family have it also, I am told. Willie must have gone on the river. He sometimes talks of buying a boat; but I tell him that means a boathouse, and we have no land touching the river. Shall we go out to meet them?"

"Certainly," says Maggie, because she can say nothing else. But now she is sure of seeing Captain Munro in the course of a minute or two, she feels shy of going, and would have liked better that he should come to her.

Miss Woolner is a tall, massive woman, who looks taller than her actual feet and inches, by reason of her long, straight robe. She walks majestically and weightily. There is much character in a walk. To keep step with her would have completely upset Maggie's balance; so she does not try.

There is something peculiarly trying to people in her condition and Munro's, in having to advance within sight of each other for some distance. Maggie tries not to look too conscious, and succeeds in looking cold and indifferent.

Directly they have fallen behind, the two ladies vanish. They have already got to the stage when words are not necessary. As soon as they are out of hearing of the others, Captain Munro says—

"Was it all right? I was terribly afraid when I did not see you just now that something was wrong. Why didn't you appear? I thought you went everywhere with the child."

"Oh, she was not a bit vexed! She knows that Mary is full of fun, and not to be controlled sometimes."

"That is all right. I came to-day on purpose to hear about that, don't you know?"

"Did you really?"

"Really, or I should have gone on the river just now. But why did you not go with the rest? Don't you like the river?"

"Immensely." She is very happy, and feels inclined to venture to tease a little.

"Did you know *we* had come?" He does not like to say I; he is not a conceited man.

"Yes; I saw you from there—my window."

"And it was too much trouble for you to come down? You promised, you know, that you would find an opportunity to speak to me." He is looking serious and aggrieved now.

"And here is the opportunity," she says lightly, "which *I* have taken trouble to make."

Her face is dimpling all over; but he does not see, he is looking straight before him. She is just going to explain—they are close to the house—and she purposes telling him before they go in, when Mrs. Scott turns round, saying—

"Remind me, Miss M'Arthur, to tell gardener to send a clematis to the vicarage."

Miss Woolner had greatly admired one that grew over the verandah last year, and is reminded of it now.

They go into the drawing-room together, and the bell is rung for tea. Maggie makes it, as Mrs. Scott is a little fatigued with her long walk. Captain Munro passes the cups, but instead of lingering by Maggie, joins Mrs. Scott and Miss Woolner, and does not even look her way. Indeed, his aspect is so unpromising that she fears he will not come near her again to give her a chance to explain, and she feels horrid. To be so near him, and yet not able to put things right, it is disgusting.

Then she hears Mrs. Scott say, "You don't play tennis, or Miss M'Arthur would play with you. Do you care for bowls?"

Miss Woolner, Mrs. Scott can tell, is boring him terribly, and she wishes, kind soul, to give him a chance to escape.

He sees that Maggie is listening intently for his answer; so punishes himself to punish her.

"Thanks; I don't care for bowls much."

"I am afraid, then, you will find the time long till the others come back."

"Oh no; I can stroll down to meet them presently. I am used to walking alone."

To Maggie's ear this is said with more directness than is usual to him. How thoroughly she repents of her poor failure at teasing just a little, those only who have been in her position can know.

He brings a cup to be refilled, and naturally waits for it. His back hides her from the others, and she

looks up at him almost pleadingly, "Won't you let me try to teach you tennis?"

"Thanks. No; I hate it." That is strong for him, and she sees that he is thoroughly vexed.

The next time he brings a cup, she tries another way of putting matters straight between them. He still looks sulky, but is feeling more disposed to relent now that she is evidently sorry.

Miss Woolner is pounding away; no one but Captain Munro can hear her say, "I am going to confide in you." She smiles wistfully. "I have not yet finished the notes I had to write for Mrs. Scott; *she* came down directly I began. If you don't say you will play tennis, or bowls, or something, I must go to finish them. I have not been out of doors all this lovely day."

"That is hard lines," he says. "I will see what can be done for you."

When he is no longer wanted to fetch and carry, he goes to the open window and looks out; then he turns round, and says with a half-smile, "I think, Mrs. Scott, I should like a game of bowls; your lawn looks so smooth."

Maggie gives him a grateful glance. When they have passed the verandah, she says, "Thank you; but I am afraid it will bother you to play."

"No; that is, not much. But we need not find the bowls just yet, need we?"

"I suppose not. I believe they are put ready in that summer-house."

"In that case we will look in the other first; or do

you think we might venture to stroll down to the river first?"

"Perhaps you want to make your peace with the prettiest woman for twenty miles round, as I have heard Lady Wade called." One can't quite account for fancies and antipathies, but Maggie is inclined to be absurdly jealous of Lady Wade. She credits her with being able to fascinate any man if she chooses, and she suspects that she chooses here.

He, wishing to punish her for making him feel uncomfortable just now, says, "I don't know that I have sinned against the prettiest woman for twenty miles round, or, of course, I should wish to make my peace with her. That husband of hers is a brute."

Exactly Maggie's opinion; but she does not like the way in which he wakes into energy over those words, just as if she were his dearest friend.

"They say she was very fond of him once," she resumed; "at all events she had no one to please but herself, and she married him—married in a hurry. There was no time for repentance before marriage."

"You think, then, that people, if they repent, may back out of an engagement?"

She smiles.

"'Backing out' has a nasty sound; but speaking for myself, I would a hundred times rather a man backed out of an engagement than marry me after he had repented of it."

"You are right, I think. But don't you think long engagements altogether a mistake? If a man is not rich enough to marry the girl he likes, he ought not to

ask her, don't you know? I have seen the evil of long engagements."

"I know very little about it. We all have our theories, I expect."

"And yours is ——?"

"That engagements are tests. If people can't be true to each other through an engagement of a year or two, they cannot be true for life."

"Ye-es; but why can't people be fond of each other, true, and all that, without a formal engagement, every one knowing it and talking about it, don't you know? I don't see the good of all that; and then, if people change their minds, there would be no talk."

"You, I fancy, Captain Munro, do not believe in constancy." She is not quite pleased with his sentiments; she looks proudly at him, her little head thrown back, and her eyes calmly meeting his.

"Indeed I do," he answers, meeting her gaze steadily. "My idea of constancy is higher than yours; stronger than a mere promise. You were beginning to have quite a low opinion of me. Confess it. I like to hear what you think, you know."

"Do you?" They have forgotten their little jar, and are falling into the old confidential looks and tones.

"Yes."

"Shall I be quite candid?"

"Yes, quite."

"I will. I thought you might be like people one has heard of, who like the privileges of an engagement without its obligation, and——"

"Yes. Go on, please."

"I thought that mean. You don't mind? I know I was mistaken," she says sweetly and humbly.

"No. I asked you, you know."

"The bowls ought to be there," says Maggie, indicating the summer-house to the right of the lawn. They have come the long way round to it.

"Never mind the bowls; I don't care for games. Can't we stroll down the 'long walk,' don't you call it? I would much rather talk to you, and they will think we have gone to meet the others."

CHAPTER X.

A DINNER party, when the host is fussy, and not inclined to think anything can go well, is a trying event in even the best-regulated household.

Mr. Scott strikes the key-note of worry while he is dressing in the morning. He tells his wife that she must give a hint to Jones (the butler) that he will have to leave if he helps himself as freely to wine as he did at the last dinner party. "By the time coffee came he was quite muddled."

Mrs. Scott always shrinks from unpleasant duties. She hates to have to find fault; it troubles her. "Don't you think, dear," she says, "that it would make more impression if you were to speak quietly to him yourself?"

Then her lord and master bubbles over. "Too much trouble for you, I suppose. You think I have nothing to do but stay at home to look after the servants. You can't even speak to Jones! You know I have not time to do it before I start; and that if I do speak I shall get angry, and give him notice, and

then he will be careless to-night. And that horrid, supercilious-looking Mrs. Saville is coming. If things don't go right, I shall be exceedingly angry."

There is no need for him to tell his wife that; already, at the thought of it, he has worked himself into a rage. "Never mind, dear," she says, "I will say, if you like, that he is not to get the wine up till you are back to tell him about it; then he won't be tasting all day long."

This commends itself as a sensible suggestion to Mr. Scott. But it would be very much against the grain to fall in with it without protest; so he looks at his watch. "Half-past eight, I declare! I have no time for anything, so you must do as you like, I suppose;" and off he starts like a whirlwind to his breakfast.

Mrs. Scott comes in for more blame through her late appearance at that meal. She had loitered to save herself from worrying suggestions. After breakfast, Edith goes with her mother to her boudoir, where she makes a plan of the table, and marks the names of the people on it, to see how best to place them.

"We must not put Major White near Mrs. Saville; they detest each other, Mr. Fielding says."

"How tiresome! Do you remember why he was asked?"

"Yes; to amuse Sir Percival after dinner. Besides, it was only yesterday Mr. Fielding told me of the feud."

"Mr. Fielding seems to like talking to you, Edie. You must not think too much about him, child. Your

father does not like soldiers; and I am afraid he is not rich."

"Fathers and mothers are very mercenary, I think," her daughter replies. "Being nice counts for nothing with them."

"Indeed! it does with me; and I really like him very much."

"I am not going to have him sit by me at dinner to-night. My father ought to be satisfied. Look, mother." She shows her plan to her.

"Yes; Agatha between Major White and the vicar. Quite right not to put Sir Percival anywhere near to chaff her. I don't know what Mrs. Saville would think of them."

"Blame her, and excuse him, mother dear. He is a baronet, you know, and can say things that would be considered very vulgar if my father said them."

"I wonder if the flowers have come. I am afraid your father will consider us extravagant to send to Covent Garden for them when we have so many."

"He won't mind that, dear. It gives him the same satisfaction to have everything round him nice that I get from feeling well dressed."

"You are always well dressed, Edie."

"Yes, in a way; but I should always like my dresses made by Mme. ——, no maid's copies. But even Mme. —— does not always do one justice. One wants to be a personage for that."

"I am afraid you think too much of dress. You must never marry a poor man."

"I don't think a bit more of dress than you do,

dear; and about marrying a poor man, I must wait about that till I am asked."

* * * * *

Young Fairbrace was not able to come to Oaklands on Saturday; he had taken a run over to Paris with the Honourable Dick Santhorn. He is expected at lunch-time to-day.

"A stupid time to arrive," Edith says, "if there were not something doing to-night."

"But Dover is so uninteresting!" suggests Mrs. Scott.

"Not to sleep in; he will be falling asleep over dinner."

When Walter Maynard Fairbrace arrives—he is a little late in arriving—Mrs. Scott gives him a warm, but somewhat hurried, welcome, dismissing him to his room with the intimation that lunch is quite ready.

Then they have to wait some time for him. When he enters the dining-room, Mrs. Scott notices that he has changed his travelling suit for another. "He must think as much of dress as Edie does," she thinks. He offers his apologies for keeping them waiting, offers just the right mean, in a pleasant, assured manner. He is introduced to Miss M'Arthur, greets Edith and Mary in a friendly way, recalls youthful reminiscences to put him on an old friend's footing with them. He is extremely amusing; entertains them during lunch with anecdotes of well-known people and personages; describes his run over to Paris with Dick Santhorn, "Lord S——'s son, you know;" but is not too much engrossed in his recitals.

He finds time to admire the view from the dining-room window, and asks if that is the river he saw from the train.

Mrs. Scott inwardly congratulates herself on this desirable addition to her table to-night, while telling him she is afraid he will find their neighbourhood very quiet after Paris and his usual round of gaiety. "We have a few people coming to dinner to-night, Mr. Fairbrace," she continues; "but I am afraid it will seem slow to you."

"Don't call me Mr. Fairbrace, pray! I used to be Wat or Walter, you remember."

Mrs. Scott smiles. "I think Walter is a nice name," she says. "You seem to me to have outgrown Wat. I hope Edith, Mr. Fairbrace has some one nice to take in."

While Edith consults her plan, which she had tucked in her waistband as a reminder to leave it with Jones, he declares that above all things he likes dinner-parties, and that he finds country people exceedingly amusing.

"I am afraid that is because you make fun of us," says Mrs. Scott.

"I am afraid," says Edith, "you will think we have looked upon you too much as one of ourselves. You are told off for duty, an onerous but unpleasant duty, I am afraid you will think. You are to have the honour of giving your arm to the most elderly lady present."

"My dear, I did not notice. We must alter that."

"Don't trouble about me, Mrs. Scott."

"Now, as you have been so good-natured about that," says Edith, with a pretty look of fun in her face, "you shall hear whom you will have the other side of you; Miss Darville, a charming, lively girl, not a native of these parts. She is visiting people quite near here—the Wades. You know them, of course?" She is just a little pleased to be able to ask him that.

"Every one has heard of him since the balloon ascent; it was in all the papers. I have never met him. He is not much in town; principally known at race meetings, is he not? Lady Wade is pretty, I believe. Where does Miss—what is her name?—come from?"

"Her people have taken a villa on the Thames just now. Her father is a retired Indian official, I believe. But one can't ask her or Lady Wade about it exactly."

"She is awfully jolly," says Mary, who hates to be shut out of a discussion long.

CHAPTER XI.

"YOU will come down early," had been Mrs. Scott's parting remark to their guest, as they separated to dress for dinner, not so much on account of the *mauvais quart d'heure*, as the dread she has of her husband's probable ebullitions.

He promised readily, and he has redeemed his promise, although he would much have preferred making his entry in the face of all the assembled guests. He has plenty of easy assurance, and knows that he enters a room better than nine-tenths of the men of his acquaintance. He is mindful of all these little matters, which have helped him to social success.

Paterfamilias is standing in the "monarch-of-all-I-survey" position at his hearth, a mixture of pomposity and fidgetiness. He is very proud of his rooms, which have lately been redecorated; but he cannot enjoy anything completely, not even the sight of all this costly elegance. His wife is punctual, and looks very handsome in her brown velvet, old lace, and diamonds; but Edith is not yet down, and he fixes

on that topic for complaint, and is very severe on Edith. The entrance of Fairbrace stops him.

He enters with a pleasant smile on his face, saying, "How well these rooms light up! I must congratulate you on that. I was at B——, Lord S——'s place, you know, in the winter; he had just had his rooms similarly hung, but they were not nearly so good as this at night. Those raised birds and flowers"—advancing nearer the wall, followed by Mrs. Scott—"furnish the satin panels, as one may say, and give just a Japanese and artistic effect. I wonder more people do not have their drawing-rooms hung in this way."

"The expense stops them, my dear fellow," the mollified owner of all this highly praised elegance replies. "In fact, when I got the estimate from Gillow, I was staggered. I had, in point of fact, to get accustomed to the cost before I could decide to have it done. My wife's boudoir is in the same style, only in blue. Ah! you have seen it, of course. What do you think, now, this room alone—the walls and ceilings I mean—cost?" This is a delightful moment to Mr. Scott, and he always watches for the effect his announcement will create.

"I can't in the least guess. I am not good at figures."

"Not like your father." Fairbrace winces. He hates to be reminded that any one belonging to him has ever mixed in commerce of any kind.

"Look at the ceiling carefully first, and then I will tell you."

Edith glides in at this moment, and is amused at the sight of her father and Fairbrace, standing at the far-end of the room, with heads thrown back, gazing up at the ceiling.

The deep sounding hall bell is heard, announcing the first arrivals. Thereupon, in a leisurely way, and not at all as if they had any idea of getting into position, Mr. Scott and his young friend leave the survey of the decorations ; the former goes to the fire-place, and Fairbrace, addressing a remark to Edith, takes up an elegant and apparently careless attitude by her side.

He is what might be termed a pussy kind of man ; a well-trained puss will glide in and out among glasses and china without upsetting any. Fairbrace might be trusted in the same way anywhere, although he is almost portly in appearance, and, if not careful, may some day suffer in mind from *embonpoint.* He is a fair man, and wears a small, closely trimmed, pointed beard, a somewhat unusual appendage to a young man in these shaven and shorn days, which gives one the notion that he might be an author or artist. The beard is actually worn to hide an ugly mouth—which that and the moustaches cover—and a mean chin. His eyes are grey, forehead ample, and his nose is rather broad. He is a passable rather than a good-looking man ; but every one agrees that he is agreeable —that is his *rôle.*

The vicar and his aunt are the next arrivals, Agatha Browne chances to arrive at the same time.

" It is the elderly lady you are to take in," Edith

says, in a very low voice to Fairbrace, while her mother advances to meet them.

"Good gracious!" he softly breathes. But it is not Miss Woolner who causes this well-bred man to so far forget the orthodox impassibility of an Englishman on these occasions.

"Can it be a coat, this extraordinary young woman wears?" he thinks. The costume is not so very *outré*. Agatha wears a double-breasted black velvet jacket, which displays a white chemisette. Her plain linen collar is fastened with a large diamond solitaire. Her skirt is also of black velvet, and is not remarkable; but Agatha herself is. She would be the first person in a room to arrest attention; her powerful grey eyes, under thick straight eyebrows, and the mass of dark hair, tossed more than parted on one side, would compel one to look at her and wonder about her.

She has a short, decisive way of speaking; her conversation never seems trivial; there is weight in it even when she is speaking lightly or joining in trivial talk. Agatha Browne is a perfectly independent woman (an heiress), but she is not objectionable; the private opinion of almost everybody, not including Miss Woolner, is that she is not a bad sort, although it is the fashion publicly to make fun of her behind her back.

She is seated by Edith. Soon she has engaged Fairbrace, who can't long keep his eyes from her, and takes in every detail for reproduction to amuse people in the future with her peculiarities, in quite an animated discussion. She knows Paris well, and can

even discuss the relative merits of a dinner at Bignon's or at the ambassador's, although Agatha has only been once in Paris.

The vicar is sliding through one of his tunes to Mr. Scott; Miss Woolner is talking to their hostess, who is thinking, now Agatha has got into one of her discussions with Walter, "I should not wonder if she makes him forget that he is to take Miss Woolner in, and he will be offering his arm to her instead," when Captain Munro and Mr. Fielding are announced.

They arrive early, because Munro, at the opposite pole to Fairbrace, does not like entering a full room. Fielding, of course, is delighted to be early. At a glance he had seen that his Edith is not being monopolized by that fellow staying in the house. He looks a straight, bright, handsome fellow as he enters.

Edith is sheltered a little from her father's observation by Agatha and Fairbrace. She moves back her chair still more from his sight, as Fielding plants himself near her.

"I hope I am to take you in to dinner," is his first observation. He is devouring Edie with his eyes; he thinks she has never looked prettier than she does to-night.

She looks meaningly towards where her father stands, then gives a very slight shake of the head.

"Not possible." They are too near Agatha and her companion for her to say more.

He looks his disgust, as he may not express it. "Where shall I be? and where will you sit?" he asks in a very low tone.

She has an idea by the expression of Fairbrace's face that he is listening.

"You shall see, if you have patience. You are anxious to know if the sprightly Miss Darville will be near."

"'Pon my——" he begins.

Edith puts her finger to her lip, and then hastens to talk of other things.

"Won't you feel like a schoolboy, with your colonel and his wife here? By your showing, she looks after your morals closely," she says.

He understands and smiles. There is something very pleasant in this secret understanding.

"Exactly; she is a horrid busybody and prude. I hate prudes; don't you?"

"Does she not like any of you?"

"Picks holes in every coat but the adjutant's. He is a pet of hers."

"He admires one of her daughters, perhaps?"

"Admires them!"—contemptuously. "Which do you think? 'Spot' or 'Plain' White named them."

"He is detestable."

"They aren't really nice a bit, you know. You see what you think of 'plain' to-night; Spalding will be afraid to go near her."

The Savilles, they are all there, tall and fair. Captain White, and Major Spalding, who resembles a little bantam, come nearly together. Then the host becomes exceedingly impatient for the Crinton people to arrive. It is nearly a quarter of an hour past the time for dinner. It is really too bad; it is the height

of incivility to treat people like this. One or two men are exchanging a few remarks with him, but he scarcely heeds them, he is getting so fidgety and angry. The bell strikes the quarter; he can bear it no longer. He fusses up to his wife, forgetful of Mrs. Saville's neighbourhood.

"We really can't wait much longer; it is uncivil to keep people waiting like this." Then, "Have you seen Jones lately?"

"I dare say they will be here soon now. They are always a little late, remember." She ignores the Jones question.

"A little late! I call this very late."

"I hear wheels," says his wife.

His bland expression has returned by the time they are announced, and no one would imagine by his manner to Lady Wade, as he offers his arm to take her into dinner, that a minute before he was anathematizing her in his own mind—he always puts doubtful delinquencies on wives—as the cause of the delay that so much tried his temper.

There is not much to describe in a well-appointed, excellently served dinner. A dinner requires to be eaten to be appreciated.

The room is effectively but not dazzlingly lighted. The table is a flower-bed of choice blossoms, from which rise the silver fern-adorned stems of an exquisite pale pink dessert-service, on which are raised silver ferns and flowers, each plate being different. All kinds of fruit are in profusion. It is all very pleasant, or should be, to the guests.

The host, who must worry about something, and the hostess, who is acted on by him, are not quite content. He will persist on watching the butler closely, when he is not absorbed in the pleasures of the palate.

Lady Wade is on one side of him, Mrs. Saville on the other. It is the first time the latter has dined at Oaklands, and her surroundings demand her attention. She is a thin, pinched-looking woman, colourlessly fair, with small, restless grey eyes which pierce into everything. She makes a remark to Mr. Scott about his pictures, not with the idea of pleasing him—there are very few people she thinks worth pleasing, and from want of practice has unlearnt the art, if she ever had it. She pleases Mr. Scott involuntarily by asking who painted that centre picture, the landscape.

"That is Millais' 'Over the Hills and Far Away.' One of his finest, if not his finest landscape. I consider myself quite fortunate in getting it." It is the gem of his whole collection, and he is extremely proud of it.

"It is a fine picture," she remarks indifferently. "Your pictures are modern, I see." The tone of the last remark is supercilious.

Mr. Scott is too well satisfied with his own taste and judgment to notice it; besides, he would think nothing of her opinions unless they coincided with his own—people always going from place to place, with nothing valuable belonging to them. "I don't buy old masters," he replies, "because old masters which come into the market are more likely than not to be spurious. I like genuine things—genuine plate,

genuine pictures—which you can make sure of having if the artist is living."

Mrs. Saville does not continue the subject. She is now watching Major Spalding, whom she desires for a son-in-law.

Lady Wade continues the conversation by asking about a picture she can see, a girl in a transparent white dress, seated in a garden-chair, shading herself with a Japanese parasol. "A pretty attitude," she remarks. "Scarcely a pretty face, do you think, Mr. Scott? Too French."

"Exactly; but then, the artist, Tissot, is a Frenchman, and they don't often see pretty women."

Lady Wade laughs at his insular prejudices, and keeps the ball rolling. Munro is on the other side of her. She thinks he may gradually come to his senses if she does not notice him.

He is not at all grieved at being left to himself. By the time they have arrived at dessert, as he has not been bothered to talk, he makes a few unassisted remarks to Lady Wade, which, by the time the ladies retire, have developed between them into a quiet flow of talk. For the rest, Fairbrace and Miss Darville have "got on" capitally together; Captain White and Agatha apparently have "got on" well also. She always throws herself into the opportunity of the hour. In less than five minutes of being seated, she has discovered what manner of man he is, and, in pursuance of her custom, she draws from him what he is most master of, namely, the intricacies of book-making.

"The most sensible woman I have ever met," is his verdict; and if Sir Percival had not persistently drawn him the other way, he would actually have further improved her acquaintance in the drawing-room—an unheard-of proceeding that would have been on the part of young lady-shunning White. But then, he has been told that she is a rich heiress.

CHAPTER XII.

"WILL you play this valse, and let me put in a bass? Too much wine is not good for little boys, is it?" says Miss Darville, bringing 'Dream Faces' to Edith, who is seated at the grand piano in the inner drawing-room, which is really a music-room, though not specially well adapted for sound.

It is a charming room; the effect is particularly good as one enters it from the larger room by the wide doorway, with its looped-back curtains. Facing this entrance is the conservatory, which runs along the side of the house; it almost seems part of the music-room. It communicates with it by two wide French windows, through which one sees tall palms, ferns, and graceful creeping plants depending from the roof. A magic, soft effect is given to them by the light from Chinese lanterns.

"Certainly," says Edith, "I was only playing softly as an accompaniment to meditation;" and she looks towards the larger room, at the restless figures there. "People don't care to be asked to play soon after dinner, do they?"

"No; and your music was delightful. But the sound could not have penetrated to the dining-room."

"This will, I think, rouse them too." She seats herself. Her bass is certainly vigorous; it has the immediate effect of putting some life into the figures beyond, who show preparatory signs of movement, resembling the slow commencement of automatic wax-work newly wound up.

Edith and Maud Darville carry on a voluble conversation through their duet; Mary and Miss M'Arthur are near them.

"Look at Miss Saville; has she not artfully chosen that couch? Mother near her so as not to look too particular. How can she wear straw colour? Isn't the effect insipid? I should like to dress some people—not her; she is not worth it."

Then Edith tells the "plain" and "spot" names for the sisters in the regiment, and asks how she liked Colonel Saville?

"Uninteresting, very. Fancies his own singing a good deal, does he not? It seemed so to me."

"It is his little weakness. You will hear him presently, and the hard way in which his wife accompanies him. I wish Nellie was in here; we could get up a little sweepstake," remarks Miss Darville. "Don't be shocked—Sir Percival's example—since I have been at Crinton I have learnt to bet about everything. By a sweepstake I mean choosing which man comes through that doorway first. The one who guesses right wins the sweep."

"Do try it," says Mary, who had heard this, and indeed all the talk, which has interested her greatly.

"Not for anything but fun now," says Miss Darville. "You choose first, Miss Scott."

Edith would like to have named Fielding; she is sure he would like to come most; but she substitutes Colonel Saville.

"Now, you say some one"—to Mary.

"Mr. Fielding."

Miss Darville glances at Miss M'Arthur, uncertain if she shall be included. She thinks she does not look in the least like a governess; her black lace dress and quantities of crimson roses—Mary's offering—are exceedingly becoming to her.

Edith understands, and settles the question by saying to Miss Darville, "Now, you name some one. Will you be making up your mind, Miss M'Arthur?"

"Mr. Fair—something, the man who sat by me at dinner; I found him amusing."

"The vicar," says Miss M'Arthur, who, like Edith, has a favourite, but not the courage to back it.

"Look!" The effect is quite comic to the four girls, who are intently watching, unseen themselves, as the door opens at the other end, and more automata appear on the scene. Colonel Saville first; so Edith has won; Fielding is next; the vicar third.

"It is something that our men have places," said Maud. Some of the men come in with an indifferent wandering manner, others seem to have a point, and make for it.

Fairbrace, who had hitherto only admired Lady

Wade from a distance, now approaches Mrs. Scott to ask for an introduction. Lady Wade looks exceedingly pretty to-night. She wears a finely jetted black lace dress; not a particle of white anywhere. The black throws up the whiteness of her skin admirably. The only colour is in her fan, which is of crimson ostrich feathers.

Mrs. Saville asks a question of Captain Spalding and indicates a chair near her as a seat for him. He would have passed her for the music-room.

Captain Munro attaches himself to Mrs. Scott as his first stage, until the colonel's song shall be over. Fielding stands by her for the same reason. Agatha has taken up a book, in which she had become absorbed. She has not come to life with the entrance of the black coats.

Soon Mrs. Scott obliges Colonel Saville by asking him to sing. He goes readily, followed by his wife, into the music-room. Then Captain Spalding and the daughter are left *tête-à-tête.*

"What song can I find you?" asks Edith. "Perhaps you will prefer to look over it yourself."

He turns it over. He is a tall, slight man, with the sunny fair hair of a young child, in which a regular and smooth wave extends quite round his head, pronounced by one of his "little boys" to be artificial. That is doubtful, although the youngest was discovered afterwards with a handkerchief tied tightly round his own head at night, to keep a refractory lock in place. He has straight, bushy, almost white eyebrows, which redeem his face from the effeminate

insipidity of his colouring; Grecian nose; and weak jaw. One cannot say that his carriage was bad exactly; there is a backward slope in it. In walking, his feet and legs advance much before his body. He is a good man, having few enemies. He is also a good churchman. He plays the organ for the soldiers' service on Sunday mornings, and sings in the ordinary church choir in the evening. He is a martinet by force of training, and in his official capacity makes a good figure; but, uniform off, among his family, he is found to be but a doll of bran, and the China dolls of his household stick pins in as they please. He has selected a song, which his wife has pooh-poohed as hackneyed.

Edith and Maud say it is a great favourite of theirs, and beg to hear it.

He cannot refuse to sing, or his wife to play it; but she feels dreadfully annoyed that he did not listen to her.

While he sings, one pities. There is something saddening in the sight of a man or woman one respects making a satisfied exhibition of want of skill, taste, or talent. He is always a little nervous, although he does not own it even to himself.

It is over. A little pink with exertion and triumph, Colonel Saville receives a murmur of thanks from those around.

Munro and Fielding, who have waited till the King's song shall be over, now enter—some one had named him the King from a fancied resemblance to the spotless Arthur; his wife is often spoken of as the

Queen, not from her resemblance to Guinevere, but because she reigns.

"We must not ask you for another song yet," says Edith, politely. Mrs. Saville leaves the room. If he chooses to sing what these girls like instead of listening to her, he may play his own accompaniments. She is careful to avoid her daughter. Miss Woolner is quite at the opposite end of the room, so she goes by her, and finds her wonderfully entertaining; for so good a woman her fondness for spiteful gossip is marvellous. Her nephew joins them and seems not at all scandalized by it. Besides, in listening there is no exertion, and he is lazy. He chuckles an accompaniment from time to time. Poor little Spalding, who finds his position exceedingly uncomfortable, had suggested an adjournment to the music-room to hear Colonel Saville sing; but his opaque companion had said, "We hear better here, and it is cooler." Maud, who is very quick, seeing the position of affairs, said to Edith, "A fly in amber; poor fly! I shall be obliged to help it."

Miss Darville plays a brilliant mazurka; Colonel Saville, who hovers over the piano all the evening, as if he can't tear himself away, turns over the leaves.

Fielding suggests that the music would sound well from the conservatory, and it will be away from the King—his eye is not a tenth part as penetrating in these matters as his wife's; but Edith thinks it will be better not to go. She stands with him half in half out of the window, exchanging those little playful nothings that sometimes mean so much. These two

are supremely happy. Mr. Scott in the billiard-room, with Sir Percival and Captain White, is, in being out of sight, out of mind with them.

Mary is monopolizing Captain Munro, who has not yet reached Maggie. It was not in anticipation of an evening like this that she had but a short time since stood before her glass, careful to place her roses artistically, and arrange her hair so becomingly on her forehead. Her eager longing to see and speak to him has made, first, his entry here, and now his coming to her seems sadly procrastinated.

"He cannot care for me," she thinks "alas! and I told myself when I was dressing—hoping, yet fearing. I think if I knew that he loved me, I should go mad with joy. There is no fear of that now."

She tries very hard to look indifferent, and wishes she might be asked to play. Doing nothing but wait is sickening. When Miss Darville has finished her mazurka, she tries to make Captain Munro talk; but to her he is almost monosyllabic, and does not attempt to appear interested in her.

Agatha, who will do anything for Mrs. Scott, now seats herself at the piano. She has a magnificent contralto voice that it is a treat to hear; she has a throat that seems built on masculine lines, and she is broad of chest. Conversation is suspended to listen. "Do sing something more?" comes to her on all sides.

"Well, if you won't be shocked, I will. I must explain that the song is a parody, written years ago by a soldier now dead. It was illustrated in the

book I got it from by the author. Picture to yourselves a room overlooking a big river, on which you see a ship sailing into the distance. In the room are three mothers with their daughters, in different attitudes and stages of grief. The words of the refrain are a little altered, another word substituted for the colonel's name." Then, to the tune of the "Three Fishers," Agatha sings this :—

"Three maidens went swinging down High Street, Ware ;
Down High Street, Ware, they walked up and down.
Each thought which new colour would most ensnare,
And they stared at the officers loafing in town :
For in garrison towns there are harvests to reap,
And if moves be sudden, the girls are deep :
So an end to old maids' bemoaning !

"Three mothers sat looking sullen and sour,
And they cursed the scamps as their hopes went down ;
For they'd squandered their all, and they thought of the dower
That was *not* for their daughters, so freckled and brown :
But in garrison towns there are harvests to reap,
And mothers must work who have daughters to keep,
For fear of old maids' bemoaning !

"Three steamers are chartered for distant lands,
And blow off steam as the troops march down ;
And the mothers are left with the girls on their hands,
For the beaux they will never come back to the town :
But in garrison towns there are harvests to reap,
And if captains fail us lieutenants are cheap,
And good-bye to old maids' bemoaning !"

Agatha's song creates a sensation. Some think it lovely, others disgusting. "Not fit for a drawing-room or young girls' ears," says Mrs. Saville. Miss

Woolner is even more severe. The vicar chuckles over it in evident enjoyment, although he does not say that he likes it.

Fairbrace wants to hear what Lady Wade will say before hazarding an opinion ; her verdict will be his.

"Her own, I suppose ; very racy."

"That is a good word," he says ; "yes, it is very racy."

Their conversation does not deserve reproduction.

It is frequently not so much what is said as how a thing is said that makes its charm. Make a woman understand by look and tone—and they are not slow of understanding—that any remark coming from her is precious, and the rest is easy. If Fairbrace loves a lord, it is truer still that he loves a lady ; and he thinks himself very much in luck to have a chance to cultivate such a charming specimen as this. The two seem to the eyes of Mrs. Saville and Miss Woolner to be quite too much wrapped in each other, especially when he takes her crimson fan and proceeds to fan her with it.

Captain Munro at length reaches Maggie, but he does not draw a chair near, and to her appears indifferent in manner and constrained. She feels hurt, and does not help him to talk.

There is no one at the piano to cover sly attempts at conversation. Mary asks Agatha to take their profiles in a way she had explained to her.

"This room will not do ; we must have only one light."

"Come to the boudoir," says Mary.

"May I pin paper on the wall there?"

"Certainly."

The way to the boudoir is through the conservatory; on that account Fielding asks Edith to come too; he wants to talk to her alone, and thinks he may get a chance. She asks Miss Darville, who declines. "I shall go to the rescue of the fly; it is too cruel," she says. Mary asks Captain Munro to come. He also thinks the conservatory looks tempting, and accepts, feeling sure Miss M'Arthur will be of the party.

Before he can ask her, Mrs. Scott has said, "Will you sing 'Auld Robin Gray,' Miss M'Arthur?"

Mrs. Scott's request is as much a command as her Majesty's would be. As she seats herself, she sees Munro carried off by Mary. She had much difficulty in singing that pathetic old ballad, which is a favourite with Mrs. Scott.

So touching does her plaintive voice sound to her own ear in her present mood, that she can scarcely keep back her tears. She feels an intense longing to get quite away from every one, to shut herself up in her own room, to cry and school herself, and repent of her vain folly that made her think this indifferent man loved her, because he had troubled to talk to her as if he did.

In a moment all is changed. She sees the cause of all her miserable feelings advance towards her from under the palms. He had heard her song after all.

"Miss M'Arthur," he says, "Miss Mary has sent to ask you to come. They can't manage without you, she says."

She goes towards the window without a word, he following her into that Paradise for lovers, the softly lighted conservatory. Colonel Saville, who always takes the music-stool when it is vacant, is playing a nocturne of Chopin; the soft tones harmonize with the scene and time. Maggie is walking slowly on in a kind of dream, not speaking or looking at her companion.

When they have passed the second window, he puts his hand on her arm to stop her.

"They can do without us a few minutes longer. I want you to tell me what is the matter. Some one has vexed you; you have a tell-tale face."

This quiet man—of whom a girl who could not make him talk remarked, "Shakespeare fitted every one: 'That ever this fellow should have fewer words than a parrot, and yet the son of a woman,' was made for him—under the influence of the strange glamour of the scene, becomes actually fluent.

Maggie hesitates; it is not possible to tell him that he is the cause.

His warm hand is still on her arm. "Tell me, dear, what is the matter?" His tone is caressing, not a shade of his habitual drawl in it.

With a glad shyness she looks up into his face, that is very near, her eyes all love. "There is nothing—now," she answers.

"Silly child;" and he takes both her hands in his, and, bending down, kisses her. "I was only waiting a chance to come to you. Didn't you see I could not get away from *that* Miss Darville and the rest?"

She is ecstatically happy, expanding with glad contentedness. She can hardly yet believe which is real, this, or all the bitterness of a few moments since, which is fast vanishing into air. She could live—and die thus; but a maidenly instinct makes her say, "We had better go now."

"Just a minute longer," he pleads; "they don't really want us yet, you know. It is so pleasant here, after being on duty so long."

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When the shadow profiles of all have been drawn and cut out, Mary, followed more leisurely by the rest of the boudoir group, proceeds to exhibit them in the drawing-room, amid mild exclamations of, "Who is that?" "Very clever!" "Wants a pretty profile for it," etc. The carriages arrive, and adieux are made in the midst of this small excitement of Mary's.

CHAPTER XIII.

MUNRO and Fielding had intended calling at Oaklands the day after the dinner-party. The boy is anxious to counteract Fairbrace's attentions. He thinks it quite out of the question that a fellow could be long in the same house as Edith without getting spooney on her.

He is much disappointed when a steady downpour of rain renders their call an impossibility. He has come to Munro's quarters to pour out his discontent.

"I suppose that fellow will get Edith Scott to play billiards with him this afternoon."

"Very likely they will have had enough of him," suggested his friend; "and they will make an excuse to send him over to Crinton. He seemed struck last night in that quarter."

"Ah, some one else was struck too;" and the young fellow goes off into an uncontrollable fit of laughter.

"What do you mean?"—stiffly. Some people are desperately afraid they may be the subject of an

unshared joke, especially when the friend is young and irrepressible.

"Oh, it is White! The wonderful Agatha and her money-bags have quite knocked him over."

"But he was in the billiard-room all the evening."

"That is it. He contrived to lose no end of money that he hasn't got to Sir Percival. The Derby had finished him about. He is in a deuce of a hole. He wanted my help."

"But you didn't—— "

"No; not such a fool as that again. I wish he could pay me. I gave him good advice."

"Which he did not thank you for."

"I don't know so much about that. I am going to help him."

"I thought you said a minute ago that you were not such a fool as that."

"You did not let me finish what I was saying. I promised to help him write a letter to Miss Browne. I am to go to his room in ten minutes"—he takes out his watch, and looks at it ruefully—"and I don't know what on earth to tell him to say; and he is such an awful hand at a letter himself, and she is such a clever woman. I say, what ought he to say? Give one an idea; you write such a lot of letters."

"And how many out of the lot"—Munro smiles at the boy's eagerness—"do you suppose are proposals? What's the average, you know; the average of proposals?"

"You know what I mean, old fellow; you write to so many women. Now, I only write to my mother

yet"—a proud flush comes into the boy's face as he thinks of possibilities—"and White doesn't even do as much as that. Do help me!"

"I don't see how I can mix myself up in it. I would help you, if you wanted help; but White is a different matter. He will let it all out the next time he gets drunk."

"No; he has been drunk so many times he has got cautious. Do give a hint. Time's up." He goes to the door, opens it, and stands with it in hand. "If White comes to ask you, won't you just give us a hint?"

"Here, stop! come in a minute, and shut the door. Are you really both serious?"

"Yes; why not?"

"And do you really think that there is the slightest chance of Miss Browne marrying that fool White? Met once only, I believe."

"No; twice. I don't see why not. It is not every one would fancy him; but then, Agatha herself—good gracious!" and the young fellow indulged in another hearty laugh.

Munro smiles. But he has seen more of Agatha than Fielding, as they were helping together over the "shadows," and he has recognized her shrewdness and wit; but, for all that, his smile breaks into a laugh, and, his little protest over, the boy who has got the length of his foot is not surprised to hear him say—

"Well, it's no business of mine, and I hope the woman won't be such a fool as to say 'yes;' and I

don't see that I can do much good in it; still, if White and you can't get on, and he asks me himself, perhaps I may just give a hint, or—stop! don't say that I will criticise what the pair of you write, but try yourselves first."

"All right; the lover expectant will be getting impatient. Back in no time."

Left to himself, Munro thinks, "What a fool I have been to come round," and most devoutly hopes that his aid will not be invoked. Vain hope! In less than ten minutes his sanctuary is invaded.

"Can't get on," says Fielding.

"Shall be awfully thankful for a lift," says White. He has brought a blotting-book and large supply of paper with him. He looks helplessly about for a clear spot on the table where he can deposit it.

"I don't suppose I shall be much good," returned Munro unpromisingly; but he sweeps some of the papers that litter the table into a heap, to make room for White's supply.

"Oh yes, you will," says the young boy, who has entered into the project now with all the zest of a schoolboy over some forbidden exploit.

"What did you think of saying?" asked Munro.

"Oh, the usual thing, I suppose. Say I haven't known her long. But a soldier is here to-day and gone to-morrow, and hasn't much time to waste, you know."

"But I thought soldiers were supposed to have a good bit of waste time? She won't take waste, as a compliment, will she?" rejoined Munro.

White, usually hilarious enough, does not seem to see

the joke. He is down in the mouth. Luck has gone confoundedly against him lately; and although he has fallen in with Fielding's suggestion of proposing to Agatha—it may be remembered that the idea had presented itself to him the night before, when he was pretty full of wine, as he sat by her at dinner, and discoursed learnedly to her of horses—still he looks upon a match with her, notwithstanding her money and other attractions, in an uncheerful light on this penitential day. He is feeling the effect of last night's extra potations, and is suffering from an aggravated attack of blues. He does not feel inclined to see a joke at his own expense, besides which he had thought his suggestion for the letter rather brilliant. "If that doesn't do, what will? It would save a lot of trouble if you would draw up a sort of draft and let me copy it."

Munro looks ugly at having so much taken for granted.

Fielding hastens to interpose. "No; come, White, that's more than Munro bargained for. Sit down here." They seat themselves. Fielding takes the notepaper, and places it before himself. "Now, I will write down what you both, or either of you, say, and then we will weed it out after. It is easy to find objections; the thing is to write something. 'Dear Miss Browne,' I suppose there is no doubt about that," says Fielding.

"I don't know," says White. "Isn't 'my dear' more usual in the circumstances? eh, Munro. What would you say?"

"'To Miss Browne?'" asks Munro, with the first gleam of fun evoked by the affair lighting his eyes.

"Yes, 'to Miss Browne'"—testily. "I thought you knew it was Miss Browne."

"Oh yes, he knows that right enough," said Fielding, anxious to keep the peace and get on with the letter. "'My dear Miss Browne,' then. What else?" The major is on his mettle now, and becomes almost fluent.

"Why, something like I said just now. Apologizing for writing on such a short acquaintance. Bring in about last night, meeting her, you know, and—and—why don't you help a fellow?"

"All right. Let me write that, and then we can go on again. You seem in the vein."

White received the implied compliment meekly. He is rather of the bull-dog type, has a colossal throat and neck, small eyes, the apology for a nose of his breed, and red, fiery-red hair and moustache; the moustache ferocious, bristling over his mouth—not the Napoleonic, the Emperor's, the dandy militaire with waxed ends.

Fielding reads, "'My dear Miss Browne, I must apologize for venturing, on so short an acquaintance, to address you on a matter of great importance to me—may I hope to both of us? The chance meeting last night showed me how many ideas we have in common.' Eh, White, will that do so far?" asked the boy. "Eh, Munro? Rather neat for a first attempt, isn't it? but I am not unduly puffed up. You may criticise."

"That will do so far," interposes White, who feels

a little nettled with Munro's supercilious airs, and wishes he hadn't come to the fellow's room. What help is he giving? The boy and he would have done well enough without him.

Munro takes up a quill, mends it, and proposes to go on with his own letters."

"'The chance meeting last night showed me how many ideas we have in common.' What next? Now comes the real pith of the thing."

"Yes, come to the point now," says the major in an offhand way, as much to say it's an easy matter, but you may as well go on with it as you have begun.

"Yes; but it's just coming to the point that isn't easy. I have never written a letter of such kind before, you know, old fellow"—putting his hand appealingly on Munro's, who has just dipped his pen in the ink. "Do help me?" The table is small, and they are all near together; Munro and White facing each other, and the amanuensis is between them.

"You are getting on all right. Say something complimentary about her being clever, you know; those strong-minded women swallow any amount of that, don't you know?"

"Ah yes; say what a treat it was to me to meet a woman with so much intelligence. Something of that sort, you know, and that—all right, stop there! I have it"—he writes in silence for a few minutes. White amused himself by smoothing his long bristling moustache between his teeth to be gnawed, while he gazes up at a Bradshaw map pinned up over the mantelpiece.

Munro leaves off writing and watches him with undisguised contempt. "What is the fool thinking about; tracing the honeymoon route?" He strongly objects to even a suspicion of strong-mindedness in women; has decided that such women cannot be nice. But what he saw of Agatha last night had prepossessed him in her favour, in spite of her attire and principles; besides which, he is in a way the champion of all women whom ugliness has placed outside the pale of his sympathies, and is more especially their champion. If they are married, the husband always becomes objectionable.

"'The chance meeting last night showed me how many ideas we have in common' (horses and dogs is Munro's mental commentary); 'indeed, I may say that I have never before met a lady——' I am open to correction here. What ought it to be—lady, young lady, girl, woman? What shall it be, White?" asked his secretary.

"Young lady," says White sententiously. "They never object to being called young," he laughs coarsely.

"'Indeed, I may say that I have never before met a young lady,'" continues Fielding, "'whose conversation has shown so much intelligence, so much superiority to the generality of her sex. This superiority emboldens one on an acquaintance so short, that were you other than the superior woman you are, I should not dare to hint it. This superiority, I repeat, emboldens me to ask you, on so short an acquaintance, to be my wife.'"

"That's rather too point blank, isn't it?" interposes the lover. "Eh, what do you think?"

"Why, I think it's all right, or I shouldn't have put it," rejoins the boy pertinently, his pride of authorship wounded. "Well, what shall I say?"

The moustache got some vicious tugs that, had he been sensitive, would have made him cry out; but he is thick-skinned, of the genus pachydermata, and he feels it no more than an elephant would feel tickling. "What do you say, Munro?" he asks, after giving it a more than usually vicious twist.

"Why, I think unless you are going to fill a sheet or two it may as well come there. You must say something definite in a proposal, and your writing is bigger, a good bit, than Fielding's. I expect that would bring you somewhere down to the bottom of the third page, wouldn't it? Then there is the winding-up to come in it, remember!"

"Ah yes, exactly." Now the oracle has spoken, he is content. Munro has the reputation of writing and receiving twice as many letters as any other man in the regiment, so he ought to know. "I can't say anything about my prospects, I suppose?"

"What are they?" asks Munro, innocently. "You have nothing to settle, I suppose?"

"Oh no. But she is not the woman to care for money."

"You seem to have found no end out about the future Mrs. White in one night. What a sly dog!"

"Thought you didn't get on with women, didn't you, Munro?" White laughs. "I meant my prospects of commanding the regiment" ("If he can keep in it" —mental note of Munro's) "one of these days. As

I have no money, couldn't it be just hinted? And would you mention about India?"

"No; that ought not to weigh much with such a superior woman as you have assumed Miss Browne to be. I don't suppose a colonel is more to her than a major."

"Hang it all, Munro! I thought you were the one to suggest that bit about superior woman."

"Certainly I did; but after proposing in this off-hand way because she is such a superior woman, do you think if she is so superior that a mere matter of rank in the future would affect her decision?"

"Exactly," says Fielding. "Munro's right. It wouldn't do to say it with those other things we have said. Now we must humbly ask for an early answer. Stay! won't you ask if you might call on her for it? Isn't that usual?"

"Oh no, no"—in genuine terror. "I couldn't do that, you know."

"But, man, if she accepts you, you must go."

"Oh yes, of course; but that's different. Yes, of course"—as if to assure himself. "Of course I must go over directly, if she says 'yes.' Now finish, there's a good fellow, and then read it all out again.

"'I have, I know, little to offer but my esteem now, and—if you, my dear Miss Browne, will permit—my sincere affection in the future, should you honour me by placing your future in my hands.'" Fielding looks up again, "I don't see that I can say anything about an early answer; for isn't it usual to ask them to consider such an important step? White is naturally

impatient, but I don't think he can quite ask for an early answer. If it's a refusal, it is sure to come soon enough. 'Awaiting, with anxiety, your decision,

"'I am, dear Miss Browne,

"'Yours very faithfully,

"'_____'"

"Now read it through from the beginning," says White.

Fielding, in a theatrical manner takes up the letter and commences.

"'MY DEAR MISS BROWNE,

"'I must apologize for venturing, on so short an acquaintance, to address you on a matter of great importance to me, and may I hope to both of us? Our chance meeting last night showed me how many ideas we have in common; indeed, I may say that I have never before met a young lady whose conversation has shown so much intelligence, so much superiority to the trivialities of her sex. This superiority emboldens me on an acquaintance so short that, were you other than the superior woman you are, I should not dare to hint it. This superiority, I repeat, emboldens me to ask you, on this short acquaintance, to become my wife. I have, I know, little to offer but my esteem now—and, if you, dear Miss Browne, will permit—my sincere affection in the future, should you honour me by placing your future in my hands. Awaiting, with anxiety, your decision,

"'I am, dear Miss Browne,

"'Yours very faithfully,

"'E. J. WHITE.'"

"Yes, I think that will do very well," says the poor expectant, whose moustache had undergone more wringing while he listened to it. "I suppose the spelling is all right. There are some rather long words in it."

"Yes, the spelling is right. You can take it away now, and verify it by your dictionary before copying. I expect Munro has had enough of us by this time."

"Surely you don't doubt the spelling powers of a Cardwellian youngster, competitive exam., and all that! It might be different with us now. I suppose Mrs. White will write your letters in the future."

White does not make any reply. He has gathered his papers in his hand, and has risen from his chair; then he stands a minute in thought, which thought he confides slowly, thus, "I wonder when the answer will come. Dooced awkward to meet either Miss Browne or Sir Percival in the town just now. I don't want to say anything to him about time if it's all coming right; any one would lend on event if they knew I was going to marry twenty thousand pounds. I think I shall run up to town to-night, if I can get away, and then get down by the last train to-morrow night. I'm awfully hard up. Never been so hard up in my life!" and he hesitates.

If he expected Munro to offer to lend him a franc, he reckoned without his host. Munro has his own expenses, and certainly no money to lend to a man he dislikes as much as he does White. His feelings towards him are unmitigated intense dislike and

disgust. He bores him, too ; and no one quite forgives a person who habitually bores them.

Fielding is quick to perceive. He knows almost as well as a woman would all the shades and expressions of his friend's face. Up he jumps at once. "Well, I'm off! You are wanting to see the back of us, I know." Away he carries White, before his slow intelligence has comprehended that if he is to get money for current expenses, it will not be from the richest bachelor in the regiment.

A few minutes after Fielding is back, to tell that White wanted him to give odds on his marrying Agatha ; and he and his friend indulge in much laughter and joking at White's expense.

"You weren't fool enough to lend him anything, eh?" Munro asked, after a bit.

The boy does not answer.

"I didn't think you were such a fool."

"I know I am a fool, but I couldn't help it. The poor devil is awfully hard up. It's the last time. If this little scheme of his comes to nothing, he will have to clear out. He owes——" lowering his voice.

CHAPTER XIV.

EVERYBODY at the Towers has breakfast without the slightest pretence of concerning themselves with the breakfast of any other member of the family. It is never even eaten in the same room. The Towers is a big white modern residence, built, with some corrective aid from an architect, by Mr. Browne, after a plan of his own making. The plan included a suite of rooms for himself, his wife, and his daughter; and no three people could ever more isolate themselves from each other than do these. Mr. Browne can most certainly lay claim to the title he has of the most eccentric man in the country. He is a man who is unknown, save by report, and report, having no facts for ballast, runs riot strangely.

The only certain items in the reports are his great wealth, and Agatha's absolute command of twenty thousand pounds. That much of intelligence came into the neighbourhood in advance of the family, and, as regards Mr. and Mrs. Browne, it is their personality to the outside world; nothing more is certainly known of them, although reports fly high and wide. Neither

Mr. nor Mrs. Browne is ever seen at church. He declined the honour of a seat on the bench, which his solicitor suggested to him as a means of usefulness; and he has denied himself to every one—returned no calls.

The brunt of all apologies has fallen on Agatha's shoulders. She has borne it bravely; explained that her father has a distaste for society of every kind, and that her mother is too great an invalid to enter it. Mr. and Mrs. Browne remain mythical personages, of whom the village has strange tales, which filter through the high white walls that surround the Towers grounds. A mile in circumference, they and the Towers seem to court the observation that their owners shun. Until mechanism is in much higher perfection than at present servants must be a necessity even for a recluse, and it is through the servants that the village learns that that odd-looking, detached bellhouse-like structure is a home for birds, and that those white box arrangement hanging on the trees, that specially awoke village wonder—they may be seen when you are a long way off; the walls are too high to see anything inside them—are also shelters for birds, native birds, be it understood.

Furthermore, Mary, Jane, and Jennie confide to their eagerly listening friends, when they gossip outside the church porch on Sunday, or on their evening out, that master keeps himself to himself, and doesn't want to see no one; and missus, she has her rooms heated so that no one can't stay in them long, not even Miss Agatha, who always goes to see her mother twice a

day ; and mistress wants a deal of keeping up. The butler and maid are elderly people—man and wife—who came with the Brownes from the North, and have no confidants in the village. But for all that, the rumour gains ground that Mrs. Browne takes more than is good for her ; while Miss Agatha—she is a favourite with the servants—takes nothing stronger than water.

And the master? "Ah, he drinks his wine like a gentleman, of course ;" but no one seems to know the effect it has on him. Furthermore, the gossips say, "I had it from Mary Ann herself, 'that the master sometimes goes to town for five or six days, and nobody knows where he goes, or what he does.'"

The only way Mrs. Browne and Agatha know that he is going off the next morning is, that the night before he performs a serious duty. He goes to his wife's room when Agatha is there ; he exchanges a few words about the weather or the garden ; then he kisses each in turn on the forehead, says "good-night," and leaves the room. "Your father is going to town, then, to-morrow?" "I suppose so, mamma."

Mrs. Browne is a fretful, querulous, nervous invalid, trying now in things small and great, but usually ignoring important things, and making much of trifles. She is exacting, for instance, in the matter of being called mamma ; she does not like mother, which Agatha much prefers. Other little matters exercise her much, but as regards any real interest in her daughter or her pursuits, she is absolutely callous. She does not often say anything more about her

husband's periodical journey to town than I have reported, but occasionally she further remarks—

"Something will happen to me one of these days when he goes off like this, and Agatha will——"

"Hush, mamma!" interposes Agatha.

After a moment's struggle with herself, the mother proceeds. "Where can we send a telegram? Suppose that I get worse while he is away?"

"But we won't suppose that, mamma," Agatha replies cheerfully; but in her heart she thinks, "Poor mamma! as if he would care, or want a telegram to find him if it said that."

This much of the family life at the Towers is necessary to understand Agatha. Growing into womanhood, as she has done in such a peculiar moral atmosphere, can we wonder that she is unconventional and odd? It is to her credit, surrounded as she has been by selfishness all her life, that she has not become selfish, that she has formed a plan of life in which benefits to her kind enter largely, and that she is working out that plan energetically and continuously. Under her somewhat brusque manners, she but partly conceals a warm heart. Anything in the way of form is absolutely foreign to her. She is true as steel, and as sharp; and often when she treats things lightly, or with a joke, the lightness is only on the surface.

"If one did not try to pass things off in that way, they would weigh one quite down. What I can throw off, I do," she said once to Maggie. She does not like Mr. Scott; the rest of the family she likes. Mrs. Scott she loves. Who would not?

On this particular morning—a morning surely is special on which one receives one's first offer of marriage—Agatha is seated at her breakfast. She usually had a large semi-business, semi-philanthropical correspondence, with a huge leaven in it of begging letters to open as she sat at breakfast. She looks them over, selects Major White's to be first read, as she does not know the writing.

"Half-formed, looks like a schoolboy's hand, not good enough for a clerk or tradesman; besides, there is a crest that I do not know. From Ware, too. Somebody wanting votes for something, I suppose." Then she opens it; and Agatha's face, as she reads, would have been answer swift and sharp to even a man of half-opened intellect like Captain White.

"The fool!" she says aloud, as she crushes the letter together in her wrathful indignation. "It is an insult! The fool is hard up; I would rather he had asked me to lend him money, after twice meeting."

Then she looks at the letter again. "I am sure the man could not have written it." Then the more awful thought presented itself, "Can some one have played a trick on me?" She looks at it yet again, and a half-smile flits over her face for a second. Agatha has a keen sense of humour, and the "superior-woman" bait in the letter tickles her fancy. Then she gets on rapidly with her breakfast, reads quickly the letters, the outsides of which leave her in doubt as to their contents. Then, having got through her double duty, she rises quickly, gathers her letters together, goes to a writing-table in the bay window

that looks capacious and business-like enough for half a dozen women, opens an unlocked drawer and puts them in ; White's letter she has put back in its envelope and consigned to her pocket.

After that she goes to her mother's room, asks her usual little questions as to her health, and receives the unvarying answer, "A wretched night ; I have scarcely closed my eyes," etc., etc.

Agatha knows the greater part of this to be exaggeration or self-deception ; but she knows also the uselessness of trying to combat this fixed idea of sleeplessness that has taken hold of her mother. Then she tries, as she always does whenever the weather holds out any promise of brightness, to persuade her mother that it will be pleasant later on the terrace. She goes over her little string of inducements. "You will sleep better, mamma ; you will feel better ; you will give me pleasure. Do let me come for you at twelve o'clock." But all is ineffectual, and, with a sigh, Agatha leaves that subject and tries another. Tries to awake some interest in her mother for something outside herself. Some tale of suffering that they might help. But it is always the same thing, always the same apathy for the sufferings of another, and the bringing back of the talk to herself and her ailments.

After this depressing visit, Agatha, wet or fine, goes out into the open air, and tries by action, by a brisk—fierce, I had almost said—walk, to bring back to herself a sense that all is not hopeless, and that she herself is not so powerless for good as each day,

morning and night, she feels, when she cannot in the smallest degree give comfort to her poor self-bound mother. This morning she throws that feeling off quicker than usual. She had an irritant in her pocket that is more wholesome to carry than the weight of her mother's infirmities. Agatha, at a great pace, takes the road to Oaklands. The two houses are on the opposite banks of the river. The Towers, which is on high ground, is about a mile from Oaklands, as the crow flies. The respective boathouses are nearly opposite. Agatha has a key of the Scotts' gate, if it should chance to be locked; but they, the Scotts, have no corresponding privilege. Only once, when they called on the Brownes when they came to their place, have they been within those cemetery-like walls. Agatha gets into the boat with her faithful, four-footed friend Forge, and is quickly at the opposite bank. She makes fast her boat, and then on she goes at the same rapid pace through the meadows into Oaklands. She half expects to see some of them in the walk as she unfastens the gate; but no one is in sight.

The heavy rains of yesterday have spoiled the blossom of the hawthorn, the almond, and the cherry. The petals are scattered, but not in bride-like softness; they are damp, and rolling on the ground. The hardier rhododendron, and the syringa —English orange blossoms—show least signs of the ordeal they have so lately passed through. Agatha loves flowers and trees, and she notices the change, even in her present fiery mood. She arrives at the house without seeing any one but the gardeners, whom

she greets by their names, as if they were old friends; they are members of her club for working men. Usually on a fine morning like this, Agatha would have met Mrs. Scott, who loves her garden, pottering about in it, or Edith would be pottering here and there; but this "would-be man of fashion," as Agatha catalogues him, is doubtless still over his breakfast. That will be a nuisance; she wants to see Mrs. Scott first alone. There is just the chance that she may be in her boudoir. Through the conservatory, glittering with white azaleas contrasting with the noble green of the palms, she passes to the boudoir, where, to her delight, she finds Mrs. Scott alone, just rising from her toy writing-table.

She greets Agatha warmly; she likes her for her sterling worth, and pities her her loveless home. "There is something wrong," she adds. "Have you come to tell me, dear?" No one else thinks of calling Agatha "dear;" from Mrs. Scott she likes it.

"There is something wrong; I came to talk to you about it. Shall we be alone a little while here?"

"Oh yes; Edie is going to drive Mr. Fairbrace into Ware, and I can give you all the morning, dear, if you want it."

"Thank you; but I won't impose on your kindness to that extent. I want you, first of all, to look steadily at this"—drawing Major White's offending envelope from her pocket, and giving it to Mrs. Scott—"and tell me if you know the writing." Mrs. Scott takes it, and scans it carefully, looking rather puzzled.

"Do you know it?" asks Agatha.

"I have certainly seen writing that reminds me of it, and that lately, I think. I can't at the moment recall whose it is. Can you help me?"

"Have you destroyed the answers of your dinner invitations? It is like one of those, perhaps."

"No, I don't think I have. Mary has a crotchet now for saving all the paper, envelopes even, to sell it, the money to be put towards keeping Nat out of the workhouse. When I have letters now"—going to her Davenport—"I put them in this drawer till I have time to look over them before passing them on to Mary. The little puss"—fondly—"is getting quite parsimonious. There they are, Colonel and Mrs. and Miss Saville; a lady's writing." She tears it across, and drops it into her tastefully draped waste-paper basket. "Captain Minn; small writing, not like it at all. Ah! this is more like it. 'Captain White accepts,' etc., etc. Look at this, Agatha; it must be the same! It is such an unsophisticated hand. Look, they are the same!" Agatha verifies them over Mrs. Scott's shoulder. "Now sit down"—and she draws her friend towards a couch—"and tell me why this excitement about Captain White."

"Read this letter," says Agatha, "and then you will see. It is supposed to be a sort of treason, I believe, to show such letters; but such a cheeky fool as that deserves no consideration, no quarters."

"My dear!" and Mrs. Scott looks at her with a soft little smile, then reads the offending letter.

"Well," asks Agatha, "what do you think of that?"

"I think it very strange. You don't know him, do you?"

"Know him! In one sense I do know him, after exchanging half a dozen words with him once at Ware, and sitting by him for an hour or so at dinner the other night. He is an empty-headed sot! Does the fool think I want a husband so badly, that I am so outside the matrimonial market, that I shall take the first man who offers? I think it a deliberate insult! A greater bit of impertinence far than writing to ask me to share my money with him without any conditions. The conceited fool! I should like him to know that if I were starving—I mean it—and he were the richest man in the country, that I should hug starvation rather than that fool!"

Agatha had risen in her excitement, and was standing before her friend while she declaimed in this startling manner. The tears, partly of anger, partly of insulted womanhood, have come into her eyes—no further than that; she hates to cry, and by her powerful will the tears are sent back. But Mrs. Scott has seen them, and she feels sorry for poor fiery Agatha, who in some things is a little like her daughter Mary. She takes her hand. "Sit down, dear, and we will talk about it." She kisses Agatha when she is again seated by her. "And now, dear, tell me—I am quite in the dark—why you wanted me to verify the writing."

"I thought some one was joking with me. That no man, not even Captain White"—said with great

scorn—" would have been fool enough to have written *me* such a letter."

" It is very annoying. Still, dear, if it had been a joke it would have been much more annoying. You think of it in that way."

" It is very sweet of you to try to comfort me that way, but I can't quite take that comfort. Although the writing is real, I am sure the letter isn't. I am sure half the regiment has had a hand in that letter, and I have been, and am, the butt of them all."

" I don't see that, dear. Even if one or two have helped to write, you will send your answer, short and sharp, as then the joke will be all against the major. He is not a bit popular; and even those who helped him to write the letter will be as ready as any of them to join the laugh against him."

" Do you think so?"

" I do."

" Then I know what I will do. I will treat it as too ridiculous to be anything but a joke. I will return that letter to Major White, and pretend I think it a joke at his expense. That will be turning the tables on him with a vengeance, won't it?"

" Yes, dear; but will the stupid man understand? He may write to say it is no joke; and what then?"

" Oh, he won't do that; I will make him understand. Thank you for being bothered with me. Now I will go home to write the answer. You shall see a copy, if you like."

" I should like to see it. If you will wait a minute till I get a sunshade, I will walk a little way with you.

Forge, who has been waiting outside the conservatory guarding one of his mistress's gloves, springs up to welcome her, is patted into quietude, and walks meekly behind the friends. They talk of other things than the subject of the visit, until Mrs. Scott stops to say "good-bye," then Agatha remarks, "I wonder who wrote? Do you think Captain Munro and that honest-looking boy—what's his name?—had a hand in it?"

"Fielding. If he knows, I expect it will not be long before he tells Edie of it," says Mrs. Scott.

"Ah, I guessed that. I like what I have seen of the boy." He is only a year younger than herself, but she thinks and speaks of him as a boy.

"I like him; but, my dear, her father will never, I fear, consent to an engagement. He says that his girls shall never marry soldiers; he has a prejudice against them. Some old grudge really against one man. But when he has made up his mind for or against anything, no one can move him."

"And does Edie know all this?"

"I have warned her over and over again that her father will not let her marry a soldier. I think he would like this Walter Fairbrace to like Edie. I know it is safe to speak to you, Agatha."

"Quite safe. But is it wise that this young man should come here so often if it is not to be? I have watched the two, and I too think they are fond of each other. I wonder Mr. Scott sees so much of the officers if he dislikes them so. I would not run so great a risk, if I were he, of having my daughter stolen."

They unconsciously walk on again together. Mrs. Scott makes answer, "My husband does not forbid our knowing them, because the Wades always know all the military near, and it can't be avoided. I suppose he thinks that as we know his sentiments on the subject, there is not much to fear. Every day, when he comes home, he asks who has been here. As yet he is not suspicious. He thinks they all admire Lady Wade. Edie, to him, is as much a child as Mary. I am sure he has not dreamt of her holding out, if it should ever come to a struggle of will between them."

"Would she dare?"

"I think so. She inherits a little of his—firmness."

"Ah," said Agatha, shaking her finger at her, "you were going to say obstinancy. Own it."

"Yes, I own that I was; and it is really a better word after all."

"And you, what will you do? Can you be neutral?"

"I shall try to be; I can do most good in that part, I think. Mediation is my strong point. I am not a rash person. But I shall never take part against Edie."

"No, you are not rash. I am a thorough partisan, and if the young people want help that I can give, they shall have it. I will cultivate the boy. He won't like it at first; but I will find out, if I can, what he is like. You know, I fancy myself rather good at reading character. If there is none in the boy, after I have made him ashamed of writing that letter—if he did write it—I will help him."

"What a match-maker, Agatha!" Mrs. Scott has a comic smile on her face that quite contradicted the satire of her words.

"Yes, certainly; a match-maker, if that is being a match-maker. If I see two nice suitable young people being made miserable just because a middle-aged man, who happens to have power as the girl's father, does not like the young man's calling, then I feel tempted to take sides. I am a match-maker so far."

"You will marry some day, Agatha."

"Never, I think. You will hardly believe it that, practical person as I seem, I have rather romantic—I suppose I must call it—notions of love and matrimony. I have pretty well schooled myself to believe that I am little likely to meet a man who will love me as I should like to be loved; and some time ago"—here Agatha's voice loses some of its clear, direct tones, and she lowers it as her face looks troubled—"when we were not shut up to ourselves at home as we are now, I used to hear girls' spooney ways a good bit sneered at, and I made a vow, although I was only a child then, that no one should ever be able to speak so of me."

CHAPTER XV.

IF lovers get a forecast of paradise, mount to the seventh heaven, and know what it is to live a glorified, beatific existence, they at the same time subject themselves to falls that send them to the bottomless pit, the nethermost hell, where flames of passion torment, dark hopelessness, and teeth-gnashing reign supreme.

It is in the nature of the disease that these ups and downs should be without reason as often as not. The up, up, up, out-of-sight, perfect inflation feeling, and the down, down, down, like a stone, to crushed hopelessness, are frequently so much intensity of bliss and despair absolutely wasted. It isn't even an education that I can see. Nothing is learnt from it. The very next excuse for the ecstasy or despair finds the impassioned lover ready to take his seat in the balloon-car to soar away—whither? or fall into the nightmare that chains his perceptive faculties for all else but the misery of the moment.

Edie drives Fairbrace into Ware. What more natural? He is their guest and an old friend. No

one in their senses, one would think, could object to so simple a proceeding. But are lovers, who are not sure of the beloved ones' affection, ever reasonable?

While on the hall steps, Edie asks her companion if he will not drive; but he is one of those exceeding rare specimens of humanity who does not care to drive, and, stranger still to meet with, he is a man who is rather diffident of his powers to drive anything. Edie is glad that he declines the honour; she much prefers to drive her ponies herself.

They start well pleased with themselves and the world in general. They have become quite accustomed to each other, thanks to the rain of yesterday. They talk; but at first it is principally he who talks and she who listens. If Fairbrace were a woman, I should without hesitation describe him as a gossip. He likes the smaller details; he delights in talking of people. Certainly his people are mostly personages, and it is so interesting to hear all about them, of course. How so-and-so has a collection of rare eggs worth £30,000; how so-and-so has a monkey-room at ——. Nothing in it, absolutely nothing, that is not in some way connected with monkeys.

Edie asks a few questions, as is expected of her. She hears all the details of the room, and says, "It must be horrid to have a room like that." She always keeps out of the monkey-house at the Zoo. "If I collected anything, it would be something pleasanter than monkeys," she adds.

That suggests personalities to Edie, a much more interesting theme, and as they pass Crinton she

remarks, "You professed to tell us last night what your opinion of Lady Wade was. I thought it was rather mean of you to say the slightest disparaging word of her, after spending an hour or two happily in her society on a wet day. But I have noticed before" —she says it with an absurd little assumption of wisdom—"men think they must say something of the kind to please us. Now, will you tell me your opinion of Miss Darville—as you would tell it to a man, you know?"

He smiles, and says, "Certainly I will, if you will tell me just what you think of any one I like to ask about."

Edie's thoughts fly at once to Fielding. "If he should ask about him, how can I be quite truthful?" But not seeing a better way, or indeed any other possible course, she agrees to the exchange.

"And will you also," he asks, "say, as I make my remarks, if you agree or not? and I will do the same, if you like."

"Very well. Now begin."

"She is slightly *passé*."

"I have not noticed it."

He—"In strong lights."

She—"I don't know the sign quite."

He—"Of course not; how should you?"

She—"But she is nice, don't you think?"

He—"Very good-natured and jolly, but not quite good style."

She—"Oh, Mr. Fairbrace! what a disagreeable thing to say!"

He—"I thought I was to be quite truthful?"

She—"Yes, of course. I don't know the best people, as you would call them; but my small knowledge tells me that it is not by any means the best people I have met who seem to me to behave best. Surely you have noticed that?"

Contemptible as it may seem, Fairbrace will not unreservedly admit that. "Some very great ladies are charming," he replies.

She—"Yes; but others?"

He—"Well, others are mortals. Miss Darville is a trifle boisterous. She is so different to you!"—inflecting his voice exactly in the right degree.

She—"She is jolly, and has the experience I want."

He—"Surely you don't want her experience?"

She—"What do you mean? Why not? What are her experiences? She seems to have had a great deal of fun, and all that."

He—"Yes; but she has not been successful, you see, yet; and she must be eight-and-twenty at the least."

She—"It is horrid for you to say that. Do you suppose that is the aim of every girl? It is not."

"I was sure you would not be quite pleased; but what could I do? You told me to speak the truth. It is not the *aim* of every girl, certainly. It begins by being a dream, and then sometimes—I must be careful how I say it—at eight-and-twenty becomes an aim."

"Perhaps in some cases," Edie is obliged to admit.

She knows of some who live in the neighbourhood who have such aims.

Edie is silent for a minute, and Fairbrace thinks it unwise to pursue Miss Darville further. He is beginning to admire Edith Scott exceedingly, and if he had not pretty well made up his mind that his wife must have unbroken lineage to give as an equivalent for his wealth, he would seriously entertain the notion of making her that highly thought of personage in his estimation—his wife. He does not entertain that notion; but it is exceedingly pleasant to him to be talking to her, and there is a freshness about her indignation that he likes.

Has the reader ever asked his or her friend to define flirtation? I have. But better still than to hear the definition is to hear the excuses made by people you know well enough to accuse of flirtation.

My own definition after hearing the excuses would be, "Flirtation is an act all the world but I indulge in."

It is getting a little like flirtation on Mr. Fairbrace's part when he says, meaningly, "Now I may ask questions, may I not?"

She feels what is coming, and cleverly defers it. "No, indeed; your time has not nearly come. Do you think I have half finished my questions about what you think of Miss Darville? Not a word about her personal appearance, her taste, her dress, her cleverness. We are only in the first stage of the discussion. Don't you think her figure is good? You must think that, surely!"

"*You* are very clever, I know."

"No one has told me so before; but that is what you say to me. If I could only hear what you say of me, that *would* be instructive, I know."

"I will promise, on my word of honour, to say now, if you like, to you, what I would say of you."

She looks straight before her at her ponies, with a heightened colour, as he says this. She can tell that he is looking affectionately at her, and he is beginning to talk in a way not to her taste. She pretends to be occupied with her ponies for a minute; they get a cut that they do not deserve. Then she says, "Personalities are not so pleasant when it is the first or second person under discussion. I like worrying the third person, singular or plural. I have not finished worrying them yet. You know you are a great authority on ladies' dress; you were talking learnedly yesterday about it. Now, Miss Darville's figure, first, please; and then we will go to taste in dress."

"Well, it must be so, I suppose, if you wish it; but I am rather tired of Miss Darville. Her figure looks good; shoulders slope a trifle too much."

"I thought you would say that, because sloping shoulders are not fashionable. I wonder the sloping-shouldered beauties of the past, that I look at sometimes in old books of beauty that we have, can rest while their spent charm is being run down."

He laughs; they both laugh. Really she is much more amusing than he at first thought. When a pretty girl or woman is even slightly amusing, she is irresistible; then pearls and diamonds do indeed

drop from her lips. It adds considerably to her attractions in his eyes that she does not in any way encourage his advances. He has been a good bit spoiled by women. He is rich, sufficiently well-looking, and agreeable. Naturally, then, women have done their best to spoil him.

They are getting now to the stray villas that show the neighbourhood of a town, each with looking-glasses, draped in exactly the same way, in all the top windows. They pass some people, and there is more traffic, but the "more" is not much, and is not interesting; principally tradesmen's carts, with one or two carriers' vans. Then they meet a puny traction engine. It stops for them to pass. The ponies look at it skittishly. A little smoke puffs out to insult them, and in a second they are within an ace of the high footpath—an overthrow. There is nothing before them. A timely application of whip makes them forget the smoke, and start at a rattling pace along the narrow, steep street leading to High Street, which is nearly wide enough to permit a company of soldiers to march down it abreast. It is morning, and there are few carriages.

"I have to go to the post-office, to the library, and to the station. Will you take the reins while I get out to do my commissions? I won't be long."

"I will come with you. I like shopping."

She would much rather he did not follow her about from place to place. For the first time since their acquaintance, she hopes she may not see Fielding, or rather that he may not see her now. He will be sure to call after lunch.

She says, "As you please. The station is the farthest point; we will drive there first, I think."

As they drive down the High Street at a great pace — the ponies have not quite recovered their equanimity—she sees the man she would rather had not seen them; and they are past before she can bow.

Munro and Fielding had just come out from the passage that leads from the museum and barracks. They only came in sight as she was passing. He ought to have thought that she might not have seen him.

He has felt uneasy about him, and thinks the worst that can be thought. Fielding is struck a white heat directly at what he thought a cut, and he does not speak for a minute; a bad sign with him, who is usually so open and voluble. They walk a few paces in silence.

Munro is sorry for him, but does not know what to say. Fielding stops, saying, in a harsh voice, "Let us go back the way we came. I can't stand it again." And he turns half round.

"Nonsense!" his friend answers. "What is there to mind? Perhaps she has driven the fellow to the station; he may be going off to-day."

"Do you think so?"—eagerly.

"It is very probable; but if he does not go, I don't see anything to mind. It was wet all yesterday; what more natural than that they would drive him in here to-day?"

"But why should *she* drive him?"—indignantly.

"I say, old fellow, this is ridiculous. Why on earth

should she not drive him? You don't think the mother would, or Mary, or Miss—M'Arthur? She considers the power hers, I thought."

"Her mother should have come with her. I don't know what things are coming to"—virtuously. "Young girls ought not to be allowed to drive men about the country like this."

"He is an old friend."

"So much the worse. I hate old friends; they are so confoundedly presuming! Because, once upon a time, this man's father and mother knew old Scott and his wife, this man, on the strength of it, is to come here and put himself at once on intimate friendship terms with the girls. It's scandalous! I wonder a nice careful mother, like I thought Mrs. Scott, allows it!"

"Look! Those — people. They have stopped. What a nuisance! Must speak now."

Lady Wade, driving Miss Darville, has just passed them and stopped at the post-office, which is two or three paces in front of them. Disinclined as both men are for the encounter at this moment, they have been recognized, and must go on.

Both the ladies are in the phaeton; the groom has gone into the post-office. "How d'ye do?" is exchanged.

"Glad to get out after such a day as yesterday," Munro remarked.

"Indeed, yes; it was awful. After one had expressed a little surprise at the hail when it came rattling down, and a little more mild indignation at

the unreasonableness of such a day when we wanted tennis, we gave the weather up in despair, and buried ourselves in three-volumnal literature ; trash, I suppose you would call it."

" Not at all," drawls Captain Munro, in his lack-of-interest way, which makes people of quick feelings and temperament desire to awaken in him an interest in some one thing under the sun. If he were not good-looking and interesting-looking, no one would bother about him, or think him worth awakening. Then he adds, as an after-thought, "Time has to be got through somehow down here, and three-volume novels help one through. Some aren't bad."

"Oh, you suffer from that universal country malady, too much time then, Captain Munro ? "

" Who does not, in the country ? " interrupted Miss Darville, who is seated farthest from the pavement, but does not like to be out of the talk.

" Yes ; who does not ? "

Fielding, who has pulled himself together, remarks, " Didn't you play billiards for exercise ? I have heard of ladies doing that before now. Sir Percival might have improved the occasion for you. He was in great form the other night at the Scotts'. White was nowhere."

" Lady Wade and I were going to the billiard-room to take exercise, but we were stopped, and we forgot it."

One cloud lifts slightly from the boy's face. Fairbrace might have gone and stopped them. He would not have left Edith on the longest, wettest day of a

wet week, not even if there had been a funeral going from the house—a recollection of an awful time he once had. Surely the man would not have gone to Crinton if he had been much spooney, that is if he did go. He misses Munro's reply. What a good thing there is some one with him to take up the talk! He hears Lady Wade say—

"It is Miss Darville's last day with us, I am sorry to say. She is so fond of tennis. The Scotts are coming; at least I have asked them to come to us this afternoon. Mr. Fielding, will you come? Captain Munro, you do not play tennis, I remember; but there are one or two pretty bits of scenery I can show you, if you like to drive over."

"Thanks, very much," Fielding says, "I shall be delighted."

"Thanks," says Munro, hesitatingly. "I have a kind of half-engagement for this afternoon, I am afraid. If I can get out of it, I shall be pleased to come."

Off go their hats, and away drives Lady Wade with her friend, the sweetest of smiles on their lips. A little lower down she sees Spalding. She pulls up, and a similar colloquy takes place, with the same finale.

"We will turn down here," says Fielding. "As we are to meet by-and-by, and I don't care to be seen just now, I shall know the worst then; now I only make myself miserable guessing it. And she may think I am vexed, if she does not see us when she comes back. She must know how I used to loaf

about here for the chance of seeing her"—bitterly said.

They turn down Wharf Street, not a savoury thoroughfare, but they are safe not to meet any one they know. The river banks to the right and left of the bridge, leading from High Street to the railway station, have totally different characters. To the right is the commercial half, the wharves and storehouses. The river on this side of the bridge is wider. Barges come thus far, but do not very frequently go beyond. On the other side, it is picturesque and peaceful. The town rises high above the river; the old church crowns the height, and there is a ruin, a college, and an old bishop's palace standing, which are inhabited. It is here that Mary Scott leaves her boat, moors it opposite this same old palace.

As the two men thread their way back to the barracks by this unusual route of Wharf Street, Munro is thinking of Mary's boat, and wondering if they will come that way in the afternoon. He remembers that Thursday is music-lesson day, and they will come in some way or the other. What a nuisance that invitation to Crinton is! Of course the boy will want to be driven, and just now he hasn't the heart to grumble about it as he would like to do. He curses his fate for having brought him within reach of this invitation, and makes a mental note not to go into High Street at this hour again just yet.

They walk along in silence, both occupied with their thoughts, Fielding painting horrible pictures, until a small urchin, rushing out of a doorway just

in front of them, pulls them up short. He is pursued by an irate mother. This sudden onslaught nearly upsets Munro ; his foot touches the boy, who, to save himself, clutched hold of his trousers with his grimy hands, to swing himself round by their help. Horribly disgusted, Munro lets fall an ugly word or two, telling the woman she ought to look after her confounded children better. The mother's wrath, redirected from the urchin, then falls on him. As they pass along, some of the neighbours come out to see, and they pursue their way, followed by the virago's shouts of, "What business has swells down here? no good, I'll warrant!" etc., etc., the language getting more choice as she warms to her work.

This small incident makes Fielding smile. There are some people who would see a joke on their way to the scaffold. Munro is of quite a different sort. It aggravates his previous discontent. He can't forget the upset to his dignity, and the injury to his trousers; besides which, he wants a subject on which to vent his ill-humour, and here is a legitimate one. There is just one chance for him ; Spalding is certain to be going to the Wades, and he must contrive, if possible, that his going shall do for him. It is one of his rules of conduct to leave on all occasions a hop-pole for escape, so that when the time comes for doing a thing or going anywhere, he can back out of the thing or place without absolute dishonour. This not by any means exalted plan of action is an eminently safe one.

It is almost a matter of wonder that Fielding, who

is as open and unfinessing as a man can be, should be so much attracted to this elder man, many of whose ideas are totally opposed to his own. But he is absolutely unable to understand that part of his friend's disposition. He looks upon these semi-excuses as little amusing weaknesses, or rather jokes of his friend's, and sees him through his own clear eyes. It is an odd thing how chameleon-like people are; some change their skins to suit their company, while others are coloured by the mind's eye of those who look on them.

CHAPTER XVI.

LITTLE matters have a way of vexing and perplexing out of all proportion to their importance, one might venture to say. Yet who can tell what is a little matter? The fate of half the world has been altered by such a small matter as a fit of indigestion. The difference that a quarter of an inch, more or less, in Cleopatra's nose would have made, working through the imagination of a man on the history of pretty well a quarter of the world, has been quoted till her nose, if no other part of her, is embalmed in the safest of all relic chambers, the literature of the world.

By the time the two men have reached barracks, Fielding, instead of walking off his impatience and anxiety, has increased it. He wishes now that he had not run away; better, he thinks, to have known the worst than to live on in this torturing uncertainty for another three or four hours. To rest, to do nothing, is impossible to him; a stiff walk at a tearing pace would be a shade less unendurable. He must start

off somewhere. If it could be in the direction of his rival, with a chance of throttling him at the end, he would feel there was something worth living a few hours longer for. "I shan't go in. I'm going on to Stowe. Are you coming?" "I don't know," his friend answers; then he decides to go some part of the way to Stowe. That will give him more time to cast over in his mind the pros and cons for going or not going to Crinton.

This question goes over and over in his mind to the carol of the lark and the song of the other birds hymning their thankfulness for some gleams of sunshine. The day is not yet decided on the side of fair or wet. I don't think he hears the birds with his understanding. If he were thankful himself he might do so. Nature, in scenery and in its small life, does not make part of his daily interest and satisfaction. He has travelled a great deal, and has seen most of the celebrated bits of scenery in a quarter of the globe, with the sunrise and sunset effects on them, according to custom; but there is in him no fertile power of discovering for himself beauties in what he would call commonplace scenery. With him scenery is "something to see," nothing more.

Along the road, past park and pleasant hedgerow, green with the tender tints of youth and spring—the hardy hedgerows that can bear the cutting wind and biting cold without looking nipped and shrivelled—they pass without uttering a word. To the right run the chalk downs; to the left glistens the river in its zig-zag course, fringed with alders. The fields

between fit into each other in patchwork of irregular form but harmonious colouring, till they fade into the blue haze of distance.

If one persistently looks within, one loses the pleasure without. Fielding may be forgiven, but with his companion it is only a matter of whether or not he shall do a little violence to his own inclinations to oblige his friend.

For one five minutes he thinks he will go with him, call at the Scotts' when they will be out, and then go on to make a martyr of himself for an hour or two at Crinton—be shown the pretty bits of scenery. He thinks that he dislikes such scenery as Lady Wade can show him, tame pastoral bits that she will feel the pride of possession in, and will expect him to go into well-bred raptures over. Then he thinks of the river, of the pleasure of pleasing himself and this new little friend by a meeting. It becomes, in thinking of it, almost imperative on him to see her to-day. How she trusts him! Has he any right to cause her disappointment? She will hear at dinner that he was at Crinton; and what will she think of him? Nay, what will she not think of him?

Pondering thus, he determines that he will see her at any price. Then comes the endeavour to reconcile the two duties. Can that be done? Yes, he thinks it can, if chances are not against him in making them come by water. He does not think the day quite favourable for the river, and the pony would want exercising. So he quite decides on the middle course. He will go to Crinton for a short time, and he will

plead important business, and leave ; then, if all goes as it should, he will meet the people he wants to meet on the road. A look, a word only will tell her she is not forgotten. Having arrived at a decision, he breaks silence by unfolding as little as may be of his plan to his friend. He says that he *must* be back in Ware soon after five o'clock ; he has some important business to settle.

"As important as all that ? Can't it be done before you go ? I hoped you would see me through "—reproachfully.

"And so I shall see you through. It will be all right, and you will soon see that for yourself. I don't believe that fellow is much of a tennis player ; he does not look like it, and you will get your innings. My dear boy, I absolutely must be back soon after five. I can walk back in half an hour ; I can leave my trap for you and Spalding. You drive ; don't let him, unless you want to risk a smash, which wouldn't be agreeable to you or me. That's settled."

Lovers, when in the seventh heaven of paradise, are a weariness to their friends ; yet sometimes the friends can get some compensation out of smiling, in a superior way, at the infatuations of the poor deluded mortals. But a lover crossed, a lover banished from paradise in the air, as one may say of Fielding, falling, falling lower and lower yet, dreading the final crash, yet feeling that this suspense, this dropping down, down to destruction, if no hand is put out to arrest his fall, is fearful, is intolerable. It is the outer darkness of one blinded by previous glimpses of dazzling light.

A lover in these conditions is, no one can gainsay it, a nuisance, a weariness to the flesh.

When Edith and her attendant come back from the station, she looks rather anxiously for a chance of doing away the unpleasant impression the partial cut may have left on one of the two men. They are nowhere to be seen. She, as she comes out of each shop, sweeps the road right and left with a glance. Little Captain Spalding she sees, and Colonel Saville, with a music-book under his arm, going into St. Martin's to practise a fugue for Sunday's service. He says something about the pleasant evening he spent; and there are mutual inquiries for the absent relatives, a little talk, and then the phaeton comes up, and he stalks on to his practice better pleased than before. A little talk with a pretty pleasant girl has soothed a jarring discord, the home sound that was still ringing in his ear when he met Edith.

"I like Colonel Saville," she says. "Some women laugh at him a little. I don't see anything in him to laugh at. Do you?"

"No; but I suppose some people think it beneath his dignity to play the organ for the soldiers' service."

They chat all the way, but do not approach tender ground. There is a shade of something in Edith's manner that keeps away any tendency to it in Fairbrace. They overtake Lady Wade just before she reaches the garden gate. She has been in and out of sight, according to the nature of the road, most of the way from Ware. They pull up for a second.

"I sent a note before I came away, asking you to

come for tennis this afternoon. You will come, I hope? Don't be late. Miss Darville's last day, I am sorry to say. She has a seat offered her on a coach on Saturday—the opening day, you know, of the coaching clubs—and I can't reconcile it to my conscience to try to persuade her to give that up."

"That will be very nice," says Fairbrace. "I am going on Lord H——'s coach. I may see you, Miss Darville."

She smiles. "I hope there won't be an awful crush. I don't pretend not to be rather frightened, and really don't regret that the honour of the box-seat is not to be mine. I like to look far away from the horses; so I may possibly see you. Your friend, Lord H—— usually drives black browns, does he not?"

That was rather a good stroke of Miss Darville's, "your friend Lord H——" Fairbrace becomes convinced that she is very agreeable, and really appears in better style when you know more of her. He has not had time to become entirely used to his position among the upper ten. He has been steadily working up by dint of always cultivating the best people within his reach. Now he knows a good many of the "best people," and is tolerably intimate with some. He has quite a large number of country-house invitations in the autumn, and is a very useful man there; not greatly a follower of sport, he is available for getting up tableaux vivants, and is useful in designing and looking up authorities on costumes. He is not what you would call a dancing-man. I will illustrate his taste that way in his own words, confidentially

spoken to Mrs. Scott when she asked him if he liked driving.

"Not awfully. I like balls and dinners; and, of course, I dance. There are always people one must ask to dance; but valsing disarranges one so. You know what I mean" (Mrs. Scott tries to smother a smile and look sympathetic); "I like to be seen with a charming woman on my arm better than valsing with her."

He went down greatly in Mrs. Scott's estimation after this exposition. Whatever Mrs. Scott's ideas may be as to his eligibility as a son-in-law, she will not enter into them.

CHAPTER XVII.

"VERY good of you to come early," is Miss Darville's greeting to Edith Scott. "I think it will be fine now; but that shower while we were at luncheon frightened me considerably. Sir Percival is not back yet. I suppose it is hardly worth while to begin till some one comes. Mr. Fairbrace, you are not awfully anxious to begin? I know you have no super-abundant energy."

Lady Wade and her friend are in the drawing-room when the Scotts arrive. They stay a little while chatting. It is not the kind of day to find great or indeed any enjoyment in sitting in the open air; even strolling about does not greatly commend itself yet.

The Wades' drawing-room is nobly proportioned. I do not mean by that that the ceiling is so lofty that the people in it look like pigmies. It is objectionable that the human element in a room should appear altogether insignificant. The furniture is luxurious rather than costly; and there is a womanly aspect about the room, where Lady Wade's fiat is law,

altogether absent in the Scotts' magnificent rooms, furnished by Gillow and Mr. Scott. It is a large room.

One wide bay window overlooks the tennis court at the side of the house, the other windows open on the terrace at the back. This is the only garden Lady Wade has. The kitchen garden is on the left of the house, where are the servants' offices. This garden on the terrace is a succession of parterres, in which carpet gardening is seen in all its perfection, both on the terrace and on the bank below, which is separated from the park by an arbour. Just now the beds are not looking their best, the bedding-out being only just accomplished; but from the distance of the room the colouring is agreeable. Edith and Miss Darville seat themselves near the terrace window, and soon become confidential in their talk, or rather Miss Darville does.

Lady Wade looks very pretty to-day. She looks younger and prettier in a room than when in walking costume. A bonnet or hat covers too much of her magnificent hair, one of her great charms. There are only two faults in an otherwise perfect face: her complexion in her face is not of the delicate texture and colouring demanded by her hair, and her eyes are somewhat small and wanting in expression. We shall always talk of expression in the eyes, although, of course, every one in these electric-lighted days knows that the expression is in the muscular contraction of their surroundings, and not in the eyes themselves. When she is fairly bright, Lady Wade has

a roguish look in her face; her little white teeth flash, and she is altogether fascinating. Fairbrace is now contentedly within the area of her attractions. He is trying to persuade her that she, too, ought to go to town to-morrow, and show with her friend on Mr. Wayland's coach, or on some other. Mrs. Scott tries also to persuade her to go. She has, I think, made up her mind to it; but she loves to tease, and the more earnest Mr. Fairbrace becomes in his entreaties, the more she puts him off. In the midst of the persuasion the three soldiers are announced.

During the drive, the two men have drilled little Spalding in his part. He is to play tennis as much as possible, and he is to play with Miss Darville—at least if Sir Percival should not be at home.

The boy is pleased to see how the occupants of the room are distributed. After a few words to Lady Wade, he makes his way eagerly to Edith's side; but there is just a shade of constraint, it is hardly displeasure, on his open face. He speaks first to Miss Darville; then, holding out his hand to Edith, he says, "How d'ye do, Miss Scott. We have been feeling more than half-cut since the morning. You would not see us."

"Yes," backs up his friend; "we have been feeling awfully hurt since, I assure you."

"Poor fellows! how sad! Well, I only half saw you, and guessed the rest of you: so is that a half-cut?"

"That depends on the intention," returns Fielding, more than half mollified already. He can't hold out

five minutes under the charm of Edith's presence and caressing voice. "Now we come to the intention."

"And how will you find that out?" asks Edith, saucily. "Not even Bishop or Stuart Cumberland could tell my thoughts if I wished to hide them."

"Don't you think," suggests Miss Darville, "that it will be best to do our cutting at tennis, if it is to be done?"

The others smile. She gets up, and, turning to Lady Wade, says, "It is of no use waiting for Sir Percival, is it? He will come—some time."

"Please don't wait for him. Major Spalding, you and Mr. Fairbrace must, please, settle which will play to make up the set."

Spalding would much prefer fluttering about these two agreeable women to playing; but he remembered the duties of comradeship in which he had been coached on the way, and when Fairbrace says, "Won't you play the first set?" he does not make any more objection.

Munro goes on to the terrace, and there stands for a moment hesitating. What shall he do? Not go with the young people, certainly; they are paired satisfactorily to all appearances.

Fielding has taken Edith's racquet from her, and is swinging that and his own in a decidedly energetic, if not triumphant, manner, as he walks by her side to the court.

He must go back to the drawing-room. So far he sees his way. It is the problem of how to manœuvre himself out of it again that proves itself so stiff. Is

he expected to remind Lady Wade of her promise to show those bits of scenery that she spoke of? Suppose he says nothing, as most suggests itself to his mind? What if she should propose it just as he is going to make his excuses to return to Ware? He decides that he will say something about the view soon, and even ask to be shown it. So decided, he saunters back into the drawing-room and up to the group who now have the additional amusement, should they require any, of seeing tennis played. They are near the bay window that overlooks the tennis courts.

"You have wisely decided for comfort," says Mrs. Scott, in her pleasant way of welcoming him back.

"Yes, unless Lady Wade will give herself the trouble to leave these comfortable quarters to take me to see the fine bits of scenery she has told me of."

"By-and-by we will go, Captain Munro. But having spoken of my view, I am jealous for its reputation. I should like you to see it with the sun shining on it."

"Then I must hope the sun will shine very soon, or I fear I shall not see it to-day. I have an important engagement"—here he becomes fluent—"really a most important engagement in Ware at six o'clock. I shall have to leave here, I fear, quite by half-past five to keep it."

"That is most provoking. What shall we do?"—looking at her watch—"it is now a quarter to five. Shall we go, Mrs. Scott, or stay here? You decide for us."

"I don't like the responsibility of deciding anything," returns Mrs. Scott. "May I pass it on? Walter, go on the terrace and pronounce on the chance of those clouds dispersing."

Walter goes on the terrace. At that moment Sir Percival explodes into the room, followed by a loutish kind of fledgling, the eldest son and hope of a peer of quite respectable literary and moral reputation. Sir Percival soon carries his charge off to tennis. Lord Wylie is awfully good at it, he explains. Suddenly he returns.

"I say, there are some people you love on their way to call here, I shouldn't wonder." He gives a shrill laugh, and is off again.

"The Savilles, very likely," suggests Mrs. Scott.

"I do want to see the view, Lady Wade; do take me," says Munro.

Fielding, as he walked off with Edith, tries to make her tell him what her intentions were.

"I have not any," she replies demurely.

"Now, you know quite well what I mean; but you are horribly inclined to tease me this afternoon. If you have no intentions, won't you tell me your thoughts?"

"You don't pretend to be clever enough to guess them then?"

"No. Sometimes I almost think I can; but not now, not to-day. Women"—with a sigh—"are so changeable!"

"Do you know many women intimately? But give me my racquet, please; swinging them like that must

be good for the muscles, but you have knocked it twice."

"I will give it to you when you give up teasing me," the young fellow adds sadly. "You can't think how miserable you made me this morning."

"I made you miserable? how absurd!" She does not look at all sympathetic; an announcement of that kind seldom has any effect on a woman.

"You may think it absurd, but—oh, bother!"

They have emerged from the rosery that leads to the tennis court, and are close to Miss Darville and Spalding, who came round by another path and did not linger.

The sprightly Maud accosts them as they appear with, "Which side would you like? Not much difference, with no sun;" and they are obliged to leave for the present their interesting talk for commonplace, ordinary details.

Edith does not, sweet as she is, seem anxious to put the boy out of his misery. Opportunities for a few more words occurred every now and then at tennis, if the partners are of the same mind as to the desirability of it. In this case they are not of one mind; and when Sir Percival and a stranger appear, the chances in favour of Fielding's love horizon lightening is more remote still.

The young fellows' play is exceedingly sharp and vigorous this afternoon, and their adversaries have no chance against them, seeing which, Sir Percival soon proposes a more equal redistribution.

Fielding guesses what is coming, and says to Edith, in passing her, "Promise you won't forsake me."

The next time they are near she says, "How can I do anything?"

It is over. Lord Wylie is introduced. Maud at once monopolizes him. He is a shy youth with ladies —he has spent his time in gathering mud-honey—but she soon puts him at his ease, and he thinks that he should not dislike dances and garden-parties so much if one were sure of meeting girls as amusing as this one.

Sir Percival smiles at the situation, but it is not quite a pleasant smile. He feels a sort of host-right in Miss Darville, and the right a man thinks he acquires in a woman when he condescends to take more than ordinary interest in her. Sir Percival still thinks Maud exactly "one of the right sort." She has kept him alive, as he would say; and now, on her last day, he feels as sentimental as a man of his temperament can feel, when he thinks of it. "She takes no notice of an old friend, but seems quite wrapped up in a mere loutish boy." He feels a trifle sulky; but as he proposes seeing her to town to-morrow, thinks he will get a long talk to her then, so lets her go her own pace now, and does not spoil sport. He is quick-witted and prompt of action. "Those Savilles will be here soon," he says. "If we are not playing, Spot and Plain will have to be asked to join. You weren't equally matched before; we must alter that."

Fielding whispers very low to Edith, "*Please* don't play. Say you are tired."

"Miss Scott, you will play?"

"Excuse me," she answers, "I would much rather rest a little."

"Nonsense! *You* tired?"

"Yes. Really, Sir Percival, I shall like much better to look on."

"Then you and Spalding will play," he says, looking at Fielding.

They are both beginning an excuse. But is it likely that the young fellow is going to have his chance snatched from him just at the moment of hope, perhaps of victory; for if she wished to be unkind, would she have fallen into his notion of not playing this set? He gives Spalding a crushing look, as he says, in a masterful way, that he cannot gainsay, "Spalding will play." He throws himself into a chair and says, "I don't stir from here yet awhile. Look alive, Spalding! Plain will be down upon you, if you don't begin."

The effect of that is magical. Spalding is in his court in the twinkling of an eye. He has been a good bit chaffed about Plain's intentions and his evident admiration for her, since Wednesday night. Now he would rather, I think, face a cannon than put himself in danger of another such lengthened *tête-à-tête.*

"I thought that would fetch Spalding," remarks Fielding to his companion. "We have chaffed him unmercifully, till he is the soul of honour, you know, to that little creature; till we have half made him think he is expected by the royal family to propose. How uncomfortable we made him! quite miserable, I declare!"

"Really, how very kind of the 'we' to chaff the poor little fellow till he was *miserable;* and who are the 'we'?"

"Oh, Munro, and of course I was in it, and——"

"Yes, of course you were in it; it is so nice to be *miserable.*" She just glances at him for a second, then looks away. "Who is the other torturer?"

"White."

"I thought you three never had much to say to Captain White—did not approve of him, you know. Some betting transaction"—with great disdain—"brought you together, I suppose."

He has had little homilies before from Edith on the evils of betting, and he is most anxious to clear himself of that accusation at any cost.

"No, indeed," he says, "nothing of the kind, 'pon my word!" She looks slightly incredulous. "You don't believe me! Oh, Edith!"—he hardly knows what he says—"I have never told you a lie, not even a white one, in my life."

"We have not known each other very long; not more than three months, not a hundredth part of a life, I should think; so that may be as you say."

He looks round. "Those people will be here in a minute. You are terribly hard on me all round to-day," he says. "Do just take a turn with me, and then—I hope it isn't very mean of me; but if you give me your word not to tell any one—I will tell you a secret, will tell you why we got mixed up with White."

Every one loves, above all things, to hear a secret

Edith is quite mortal, and this cleverly laid bait takes her at once from her chair, meekly going with the boy to hear Captain White's secret. She could not, in her exigent circumstances, but have walked off with him in this willing manner, after his behaviour this afternoon, coupled with his having called her Edith.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHEN Fielding draws Edith away with the gossamer filament of a secret, for so young a man, and a man in love, his tactics are admirable. Certainly fortune favours him, or, to trace luck to causes, his action as head adviser and prompter in Captain White's proposal helps him now. He has come here to-day with a definite intention, the intention of saying something to Edith that will compel an answer from her.

Driving swiftly along through the air, his brain had got a fillip that made it work quickly. He went over what he would say to her. He thought of several things, but had decided that, after all, much would depend on her mood. Two things were clear to him: the first is, to get her away from the others; the second is, if possible, to tell about White. He has no compunction about that; one is always so certain of the absolute indivulgibility of the individual one desires to let into a secret. From White and Agatha the transition to themselves ought to be easy; driving along it seems quite easy, until he has come near the house, then it seems a little formidable. The Scotts

are not at home. Somehow he is depressed at driving away from the place without seeing his lady-love. By the time he had reached the drawing-room door, they are at the lowest ebb. Sure, then, although Edith is more inclined than is usual to fence and disagree with him, he does not altogether take it as a bad sign. His pleasure in her presence is so complete that it intoxicates him ; it steals over his senses. He drinks in delightedly all that she says, and likes it, whatever it may be.

They stroll across the lawn, and disappear into the shrubbery walk that skirts the rosery to the left and leads through a small gate into the park. Fielding has led her on with the thrilling narrative of the writing of the proposal, Edith merely from time to time asking a question. When he has come to the end, he is really proud of the part he took in it, and speaks of it all in a jubilant manner, which causes her to remark, "You seem rather proud of your part. I can't see why. I think Captain White a horror, and I have heard you say all sorts of things about him ; but I don't quite see why two of his brother officers should conspire to make him look ridiculous." She wonders if they are all alike, and love-making a joke to all of them. It is this thought that makes her severe.

"Ridiculous ! What do you mean ? "

"Why, of course Agatha will treat it as an insult or a joke. She, a water-drinker, must have been horribly disgusted by him as she saw him after dinner at our house."

"He wasn't very bad, was he? I didn't notice much."

"I am afraid you are too lenient to your friend's faults."

"That isn't a fault, surely, asking a girl to marry one?"

"Sometimes I should really be angry about it if Agatha were not quite able to give him a snubbing. She is our friend, you know. That disgusting Captain White has met her only at our house; and my mother is quite fond of her. I am quite glad that I am not an heiress, if it subjects one to this."

"But how can you in any way compare yourself to Miss Browne?" He makes a plunge. "You, without a penny in the world, would be an object of desire to any one; while Miss Browne would only be desirable to an impecunious man through her money."

Edith's colour deepens. He had spoken very meaningly. She takes no notice of the first part of his speech; his manner is particular, and she feels shy with him, and clings to Miss Browne to keep clear of what she longs, yet dreads, to hear. "If you knew more of Agatha, you would like her," she says.

"Like her, Edith?" They have stopped at the little gate, and his hand is on it. "How can I like or even notice any one when you are near?"

This is a supreme moment; but before capitulating she makes one more feint. "Then you must cultivate Agatha at a distance from me. She is rich," she says, not looking at him.

"Edith"—that is the second time he has called her Edith, but she does not resent it—"why do you say

that? Is it to remind me that I am poor, and that I must only think of a woman with money?"—bitterly. "You said just now that you were not an heiress; and I know that—that man—your friend, is rich. What am I to think? Surely, not that the girl that I have thought so good, so sweet, so pure, would sell herself? Surely, surely, I have not been so mistaken? Edith, you must have known for a long time"—the boy has known her three months, but love makes no epoch —"how much I love you." She is looking down, nervously playing with the fringe of a wrap he had put round her after tennis; she cannot think what to say. "Edith, you do not speak, and you half cut me this morning. What am I to think? Answer me; you must answer me this: Are you going to marry that man with the money?"

Gently spoken—"No."

"Have I deceived myself in thinking you cared for me?"

Another "No," softer than the first.

Then he takes courage. He comes nearer, and the arm that had been on the gate steals round under that wrap, until he has brought her nearer and nearer to him; then he bows his head, the audacious boy, and takes a long kiss from her full red lips, and whispers, "You have made me so happy; I do not know if I can bear it. It makes me giddy almost, my darling." And then he bends his head again, which is a bad thing for giddiness.

"But, *dear*"—the intonation is thrilling, quite stirring—"we really must talk sensibly now. I have

something serious to say. I ought not, I am afraid, have let you take everything for granted so." A sigh. "My father, I fear, will never consent; and what then? He does not like soldiers, and says he will never consent to his children marrying soldiers. I am afraid I have done very wrong to—like you, dear."

"'Like you!' say, 'love you,' not 'like.' Say it, and then we will talk seriously."

She looks into his eyes, and says, "Love you, then."

"No, not that; 'love you, dear.' Say that, darling, or I shall have to help myself to believe in my luck."

"Love you, dear," she more breathes than articulates, trying to loosen herself from his close enfolding "to talk seriously."

But he will not quite loosen her, but opens the gate; and they two pass together into the park, which is secluded, if no one is in it, but is not a complete cover like the overhanging shrubbery walk that they have come out from.

On they walk, in a blissful atmosphere emanating from themselves, bound up, enveloped in the mist of love themselves, as giants in it, and outside the mist all obstacles smaller even than their natural size. At last, but not till they have met an obstacle in the park boundary, they awake to the fact that they cannot wander on for ever; the thought occurs simultaneously that they will be missed, and that they ought to return.

"What will Lady Wade think of me? I did not remember that I was not at home," says Edith, ingenuously.

"Never mind what she thinks, darling," he answers; "but I suppose we must go back, eh? Your mother will be uneasy."

"Yes, certainly; and we must think about my father more seriously. Suppose"—and her hand tightens on his arm at the thought; "oh, suppose he will not let us meet any more! What shall we do?"

The boy can hardly bring himself down to the level of that supposition yet. "Your father is very fond of you, naturally." He thinks, of course, he must be. No father could withstand her long. "And surely he won't let a prejudice against a profession——"

"No, it isn't the profession he dislikes," she interposes. "He says soldiers don't make good husbands, that they wander about so much from place to place, not caring much what reputation they leave behind in any of them, till they don't care what they do. I suppose he means public opinion does not act as a moral policeman to keep them straight, as it does on men who live in a small town or village. Of course I don't know if he is right or wrong; but your colonel is a good man, I am sure."

"There isn't a more moral man living than our King; that ought to have a little weight with him, surely; and no one can say anything against my morals," says the young fellow triumphantly. "All the same, I feel awfully funky at the thought of seeing him; but I must see him soon, mustn't I? It would be mean to come to the house now without

telling him; besides, I know I should betray myself. I couldn't pretend to be even partly indifferent to you now, you know. When I see you, I want to——"

"Don't, dear; some one might see."

"May I tell your mother first? That will be easy. Your mother is awfully kind, always. You won't look upon my mother as a mother-in-law, I am sure; and she will love you at once, like her own daughter. Poor little mother!"

"I don't know if you may tell her. You will come over to-morrow, won't you?"

"Of course I will."

"Then I will tell you what I think about it. I don't want her to be blamed. Sunday will be the best day, I think."

"My pay, you know, won't be so bad in India. We can live upon it. You won't let me go alone, will you?" he says.

And so, in semi-serious and altogether absorbing consultation, they stroll back.

* * * * *

With the same background of mansion and trees in another part of the park, a totally different and much less sympathetic and exciting scene is being enacted.

Lady Wade and Munro, a little in advance of the other two, talk much of the Queen and the princess; objectionable they agree in pronouncing them all to be.

"Do you mean to tell me that you are specially in

the Queen's black books?" she says; "and, without appearing too inquisitive, might one ask how you got there? I can keep a secret if you tell me; wild horses won't drag it from me."

Just the shadow of a flush comes into his face as he says, "I haven't much to confess. My real sins are chiefly sins of omission in this case; but I dare say in that awful, blackening book of hers I am down for others as well, sins that she chooses to think I have committed. If you speak to a woman five minutes she sees harm, *unless* the woman should be one of her daughters. But no one that I have ever heard of ever did speak coolly to either of them for as long as five minutes."

"I should think not indeed. Those women give me a shiver down my back, as if I had taken cold, when I am near them; they are so chilling. I wish she would not trouble to call; I believe it is I who should call on her. I would not be civil to them at all if it weren't for that good, harmless kind of man, your King. Ah! I have just thought of a name to fit him exactly, King Arthur. Happy thought of mine, isn't it?" and she smiles, quite pleased with herself.

"Yes, very. That same idea struck Major Crayshay's wife, and that is how he came to be called the King. But the Queen's are not to be compared. Poetry is not much in my line, but after he had been named I looked into Tennyson."

"You don't leave one in doubt as to your appreciation of vice *versus* virtue—when vice is beautiful and virtue isn't, I mean."

"And you, Lady Wade, have you never been asked to vote for Arthur or Launcelot? A little bird whispered in my ear the other day that that was a question women were rather fond of putting to each other—voting for one or the other within closed doors, don't you know? And which do you think I heard gets out-and-out the most votes, eh?"

"Am I in the witness-box? Am I really to say which I think gets the most votes of the two?"

"Yes; I should like to know which you think."

"Why, I think, Captain Munro, that it would all depend on whether it was vote by ballot or not. That is always secret, is it not?"

He gives a little chuckling laugh at that, and says, "That is a very clever notion of yours, Lady Wade. Yes, vote by ballot is supposed to be secret. Now, which do you say?"

"Launcelot would have most votes. Is it not so?"

"You are right. He has something like in the proportion of nine out of ten, my friend tells me, and she says she knows it for a fact. Some libellous man or other once said that all women were at heart rakes. Fearful libel, of course."

"Yes, of course, a horrid libel. But I always feel tempted, somehow, to suspect prudish women of having something to cover. It is very uncharitable, I dare say; but those people make me feel ill. And really, you know, we have not been looking about us in the least." She stops, and half turns to the right. "There," she says, "that is a pretty peep-hole between those trees. You are expected at this point

to say, 'It is pretty,' and reserve your raptures for presently."

"This is an easy way of being personally conducted. It is awfully good of you to help one so. It is pretty."

"You are not very enthusiastic over scenery, are you?"

"That's hard on one. You tell me exactly what to say, and then don't think it strong enough." He turns round as he walks to look behind; then says quite seriously, "It is really very pretty. Will that do?"

"That is better. Perfect as regards words, but deficient still in *verve;* and that must be spontaneous. I can't give it, you know; can I?"

If that was intended as an opening for something pretty, it was not taken.

Now they are nearing the point where all the fireworks of enthusiasm are to be let off. A stream runs on the left of them, and the narrow path that they follow on its brink is arched over with the interlacing arms of the trees. On either side it is so for about a hundred yards or more; then there is an opening in the trees and a primitive rustic bridge spans the water, which is wider here. Through the opening across this gorge-ground of water framed by trees, the eye takes in a wide expanse of country, looking all the bolder and freer from the closed approach to its frame. The park and the greater part of the village is on high ground, and from this spot one looks down on innumerable acres of many-coloured fields, broken here and there by a farmhouse nestling in its buildings,

with now and then a group or fringe of sheltering trees left standing round. Here they all stand for a few minutes, looking over the wide panorama before them. Fairbrace makes up for any lack of praise in Munro; his fireworks are not of the comet order, but resemble a gentle shower of coloured stars or golden rain.

"Really a charming view, Lady Wade. These peaceful bits of English scenery are, I think, far superior to the contortions of nature, and this approach to it so well adapted to enhance its attractions. Natural? Is it really? This cutting away of the trees to make a frame as it were to the picture I quite thought your idea, and the bridge so well in keeping with the whole thing. Really exquisite. I have been admiring the interlacing of the trees; it reminds one of a Gothic aisle, as I said to Mrs. Scott as we came along. They have something like it at B——, Lord S——. Do you know it?"

"No, I do not."

"You are so extremely appreciative, Mr. Fairbrace, that I ought to feel more than reward, for that Gothic aisle," turning, as she speaks, to look at the vista through which they had come, and putting up her hand with a little flourish towards it. "Thanks for the idea" —a smile to be read more than one way plays about her mouth and eyes—"I shall use that judiciously in my trotting out. Captain Munro, I dare say you have been exchanging enthusiastic praises with Mrs. Scott. What have you to offer me? I am insatiable, am I not?" and she gives him a very encouraging gracious

smile. As in a family, the sulky, spoiled member is usually most humoured. Here the fluent, amiable, Fairbrace has been reeling off agreeable phrases by the yard, and she turns from him to extract a word or two from this unappreciative man, who in her own redundant imagination she is endowing with a great deal more appreciation than he is capable of feeling. Truly, speech is silvern, and silence golden!

"What has Mr. Fairbrace left me that would be original to say? I agree in all that he has said."

She thinks this delightful satire, and he goes up two at once. Then Mr. Fairbrace monopolizes her!

Munro talks to Mrs. Scott, and wonders how best to manœuvre himself away without being absolutely rude. He is half afraid if he does not disappear soon the Queen and royal family will be down upon them, and has been wondering, while looking over the wide panorama before them, whether there was a short cut from here to Ware without going back through the park.

CHAPTER XIX.

A SCENE of Arcadian peacefulness, a spot favoured by nature and improved by man; a fair picture of English country life. The smoothest of close springy turf, embowered in greenery; for background, one of the few Tudor mansions fire has spared.

Crinton "belongs to that happy moment in national art when purely domestic architecture was at its height." The projecting mullioned windows, in giving character to the style, suggest a vision of stately yet comfortable rooms of broken lines and cosy nooks. To the right is the rose garden; to the left is a belt of laurels, nearly hiding this nook from the drive. Inside the laurels are rhododendrons of all colours and tints, an undergrowth to the elms "that stately rear their heads." Seats are scattered about. The most important feature of the smiling spot to the owner is the tennis courts, set in the midst.

His foot upon his native heath, Sir Percival has just said 'a swear.' "How do I know where my lady is, you fool? Why did you admit people, if she is not at home? What do I keep you fellows for?" etc., etc.

Maud has advanced to the net, and has overheard the last remarks. "Who is it?" she asks.

"Mrs. and the Miss Savilles, miss," answers the man.

"I will go to them. My lady has gone to West Point. You had better make haste to tell her."

"What a nuisance!" she remarks, when the man has departed. "What is to be done? Of course they can see us all from the drawing-room. They must be asked to come out."

"Those girls are awful sticks, I know and will spoil all play," says Sir Percival.

"Must they come out?" asks Spalding, mentally quaking. He looks smaller than ever in flannels; his voice and his nose are the only big things about him. After hearing his voice, it seems as if one has to look for him. The voice is the voice of a big man.

"Who are these people that have stopped our game?" asks Lord Wylie.

"The wife and daughters of the colonel of the X. Y. Z.," explains Miss Darville. "Don't listen to what the others say; you are in luck to meet them. Come with me now, and make their acquaintance;" and she moves towards the house, glancing behind for him to follow.

"I say, not so fast! You look as if you are going to play one a trick. I say, old fellow"—to Sir Percival—"what are they like, now? The right sort, eh?"

Maud has given him a look which he understands.

"My dear boy, has not Miss Darville told you you are in luck? What more do you want? I will go with you, Maud." He feels highly virtuous at going to

play the part of host to these "old humbugs." He calls all people whom he dislikes old, irrespective of their age.

Mrs. Saville is a veritable iceberg, and any man might be excused for wishing to avoid her refrigerating atmosphere; even the most gushing of people cannot keep warm many minutes near her. Her daughters partly resemble her. There is a tale of the elder when she was eighteen. "A youngster and she got spooney on each other. She was discovered meeting him clandestinely. He had no prospects; so there was an awful row, and he had to exchange." So the tale runs. Now Miss Saville is six-and-twenty, her sister two years younger.

Since the episode referred to, the daughters have been carefully watched. Mrs. Saville intends they shall marry. But she was not young when she married, and she is ten years older than her husband. She thinks such marriage prudent. This gives her a wider choice for her daughters.

She is getting, however, anxious now that the elder shall be married. The two men in the regiment, Spalding and Munro, have not hitherto shown a due appreciation of the honour she would bestow on them. Indeed, she is beginning to be exceedingly severe on Munro; his sins, as he says, have been sins of omission.

As she sails majestically along by small Sir Percival, her two tall daughters following with Maud, whom they ply with short little questions, she is in her most genial mood. She has just been told that the stranger is Lord Wylie, and she feels that this is

a great opportunity. He is young, and her own experience has told her that it is then that men are inflammable and unsophisticated.

The daughters have heard from Maud who this young man is. Miss Saville magnanimously decides that her sister shall have every chance of improving the opportunity. He is too young for her. She has come to this decision, having persuaded herself, that because Captain Spalding is too gentlemanly to avoid her when doing so would be apparent, he is fond of her, and only wants encouragement to propose.

When the greetings have been gone through, Mrs. Saville says civilly, "Pray don't let us stop your game. I think tennis a delightful game." She does not really, calls it unlady like, but allows her daughters to play, because girls are nowhere in the country if they do not play. She brings into action her stereotyped smile for Lord Wylie, that only discloses a few of her large teeth. One feels that the exact proportion of them to be disclosed has been studied. A natural smile would spread that wide, thin mouth half across her face. "We noticed your agility from the window, Lord Wylie."

He feels quite nonplussed when a stiff strong woman singles him out before the others in this way. "I'm awfully dead on tennis; better than cricket by a long way," he replies, putting both hands in his pocket and wriggling.

"Yes, indeed. Cricket is such a dangerous game. I have not seen much of it, but Colonel Saville

likes us to look on sometimes when there is a regimental match. Only the other day a ball was struck into our tent; it was both dangerous and alarming."

"Oh, it isn't the danger, but the slowness of cricket I dislike."

While this exchange of ideas is going on, Miss Saville has been trying to establish with Captain Spalding a confidential basis on which further to build. "What a pleasant evening we had at the Scotts'; the music was charming"—so she would have had her smile be.

"Yes, the music was very nice," replies her victim; "and Mrs. Scott is a charming hostess."

"Yes"—confidentially—"I quite agree with *you*. But mamma did not much care to go"—dropping her voice still lower. "She does not like Mr. Scott; I don't know who would. But I am *so* glad we went, I *enjoyed myself* immensely."

This is too bad; it makes him feel hot all over. He wishes most devoutly that some one would do something. He looks at Sir Percival, but he is busy talking to Maud. Miss Saville seems waiting for a reply. He makes the most commonplace remark a man can make, and gets deeper in. "Do you like tennis?" he asks.

If you look for curves, you will see curves; if for angles, you will see angles. Miss Saville is looking for curves. She chooses to think that question of Spalding's shows an anxiety to secure her for his partner at tennis.

"I like tennis so much," she replies, more confi-

dentially than before; "but I am not a great player. You are, I know. It will be *so* good of you to take me on your side."

What can a man, unless he is half a brute, which the little fellow is not, reply to a speech of that kind?

"I assure you you are mistaken," he murmurs. It is not often he underrates himself. "I am a wretched player. Now, Lord Wylie has long arms" (he is careful not to say he is tall); "such an advantage, such a sweep, you know! He is a splendid player." He wishes he could think of some more things to say in praise of Wylie. Nothing else seems safe. He begins to draw on his imagination for his facts, after he has said, "He is in the Guards, you know—great at polo and tent-pegging, and all that. A very strong fellow." Why does not some one do something? This is dreadful; and the mother is near putting forth platitudes to Wylie, and appealing to her younger daughter Theresa to bring her into the conversation, with one ear always listening to him, he knows.

Miss Darville and Sir Percival pace to and fro wrapt in each other.

"What a wonderful young man!" Miss Saville is compelled to admit. "But there are qualities much before those you have so generously praised. A man may be an athlete, but he may have no mind," she says softly; she does not wish Lord Wylie to hear.

He had written a little poetry once; she must have heard of it, he thinks (she is continuing her praise of mind). Never to him has any music sounded so

pleasantly in his ear as Sir Percival's shrill voice, saying, "You are wasting daylight. I am not going to play" (now the voice sounds disagreeable), "and Miss Darville is tired ; so the rest of you must arrange."

"What a shame!" Lord Wylie began to say ; then stopped, and hoped no one heard, altered it into "unselfish behaviour. You are not really tired, are you ?" he turns to Maud and asks.

"Yes, I am tired, because I choose to be tired" ("What an objectionable girl," thinks Mrs. Saville ; "so free with young men !") ; "and it will amuse me very much to see you play tennis. Play for my amusement." She gives him a saucy smile ; then, speaking to Theresa Saville, she says, "You will play with Lord Wylie ? Here is my racquet, if you like it."

"Thanks," says Theresa, taking it and going off in triumph.

The look that Captain Spalding gave her is so piteously pathetic, that Maud ought to have felt compunction ; but she is not thinking of him just now. Her friend's husband has vexed her. He has tried to be sentimental and affectionate in manner, has told her he shall see her to town, and has begged her to call him Percy. "Ridiculous little creature ! And now he is sulky, and has taken himself off, because she laughed at him."

This was the manner of his going. "I say, you fellows, I forgot to ask you if you would have anything ; I am going to refresh. Come when you want a brandy and soda, you know."

"How dreadful!" Mrs. Saville thinks. She has

no further use now for her mask of suavity, and it is not comfortable to her. She drops it. It will be quite as well to let this forward girl see that she does not approve of her and her fast manners with the men. "Shameful, the way she was talking to Sir Percival just now!"

I doubt if any man, however exalted and glacial and disagreeable he might be, has ever or could ever snub another man as a woman can snub a woman if she is so minded. There is a cool superciliousness, an assumption of superiority, social and moral, with a dash of content in it, mingled sometimes with an air of distant patronage and condescension that is intolerable. Mrs. Saville expresses all this and more, if that be possible, in her manner now towards Maud, who is quick to see and resent it. If she dared she would get up and leave her. She can't in civility do that, so she thinks she will shock her, and then when the set is over take both the young men away from her daughters.

While she is wondering what offensive topic to choose, she happens to look to the rosery. The entrance to it is by an arched way of rustic wood-work some ten yards long, over which roses of all kinds, gloires, Banksia, cluster, and even monthly roses are trained. She thinks she catches sight of Edith Scott's retiring skirts. Miss Saville has seen also. She cranes her neck to discover if possible to whom the skirts belong; then she looks round at her mamma, who sees most things, but whose head does not chance to be turned that way. She is

an inquisitive young woman. When she has an opportunity, she asks her partner who it was. He is so badgered with these constant attempts at conversation, and at her little foolish, childish apology for not doing better, that he actually tells an untruth to disappoint her—mendaciously says he did not see any one; and as an untruth is an untruth in Captain Spalding's eyes, he does not look upon any lapse with one eye shut and the other not open. He feels in his small frame all the concentrated hatred of, I won't say "Chang the Chinese seems so meek," but of a Cetewayo towards his partner.

So desperately is he goaded that he actually for a moment, chancing to look at Miss Darville, thinks, "I shall have to marry some one to get clear of her;" and he says to himself, "Why not?" He is not a man of action; but I suppose bees have nearly driven a man mad before now. Miss Saville is honey itself to him. But he sees that with the honey she has also wax, and that she purposes building; that she has, in fact, begun to enclose him in a beautifully designed hexagonal cell that does not in the least commend itself to him as the home he could endure to live in. He rebels. Surely man is man and "master of his fate," and if he wants a cell and honey and all that, he at least likes to choose it, or appear to himself to choose it. When honey is a fancied necessity, one overlooks the wax part of the question.

Lady Wade appears on the scene just as the set is finished. It was a hollow affair, and the men are delighted that it is over. Sir Percival is with her and

the others, with the exception of Munro, who had taken his leave on the terrace just before. "I wish I could go away too," says Lady Wade, as he is going. "She won't stay much longer now, I hope. She shall have tea directly, and it shan't be too hot; cream if she likes, and a deluge of milk. I hope she takes milk in her tea. My roses will be out soon, I hope. Come and see them."

Maud, at sight of the relieving force, starts from her seat and hurries to meet her friend. Mrs. Saville, slowly rising, advances with her usual stately tread.

Lady Wade and she meet, and mildly gush in words. "I am so sorry you should have been shivering out here so long, Mrs Saville. Come with me, and let me give you some tea."

"I have really not felt chilly, Lady Wade. Miss Darville and I have endeavoured to entertain each other"—with a more than usually frigid look at Maud—"in your absence. My daughters have enjoyed the time so much. It is not often, dear"—to Christine, her eldest daughter—"that you play on such a perfect lawn, is it?"

This gives Christine a chance of praising everything. Theresa gushes likewise. A sense of favours hoped for. Visions of bees and honey and wax float with brighter days through one excited imagination; while the other has pictures of strawberry leaves shaped into a coronet, jumbled with the delight of taking precedence of nearly every one—a very natural, beatific vision for a second daughter.

One important feature in the attractiveness of after-

noon tea is the occupation it gives every one. Blessed are they that have something to do to stave off *ennui*, if that something be the next to nothingness of pouring out tea, handing it about, or drinking it. Lady Wade sits at her low table, that is scarcely big enough for her tea equipage, with a pretty little air of homeliness, and of making the best of her crowded tray, and of attending to every one's wants, that is quite overpoweringly fascinating. She is not displeased that her hand gets much honest display. It is a small hand, and has the childlike plumpness that includes dimples. She is especially pretty to look at in this room, with its background of carved oak, and its overmantle that more than one artist has loved to paint. Why it should be so, who can tell? Perhaps because of her figure. A short, plumpish woman and dignity are not consonant. Certainly with the setting of these surroundings Lady Wade looks charming.

Mrs. Saville draws her chair quite near to her hostess, who is an impetuous little woman, and would have liked there and then to have taken up her tea-table and have walked away with it, not that that would have aught availed. She for a time is the Saville fetish, to be propitiated meekly and constantly. Has she not strawberry leaves and flowers, wherein the bee may lurk, growing in her garden? If Mrs. Saville were thrown, a daughter would make the running for the stable. Indeed, as it is, they all careered round her, and made a fuss with her before subsiding into seats. They were free to do this, as Maud has kept her word. She is in great form some

little distance from her friend. Her position is judiciously chosen for isolating herself and following from the other *creatures.*

She feels hatred and all malice against Mrs. Saville, who had been politely snubbing her all the afternoon. Now her turn has come. Each of the three deep windows is a nook thoroughly adapted for her tactics, and either is sufficiently removed from the other to ensure privacy.

Captain Spalding, feeling a little vexed with her and every one he has spent his afternoon with, is, as they walk back to the house, inclined to attach himself to Mrs. or Miss Scott; but unless Maud can have captive the two men the Savilles delighted to honour, her triumph will be incomplete, and she intends that it shall be complete.

Lord Wylie had rushed to her side as soon as released. "'Pon my word, Miss Darville, you did sell me awfully! 'In luck to meet them,' you said. That has been going over and over in my mind constantly. I did not want to forget, you know, just to remind you of your heartlessness. Every time that sugar-stick did anything stupid, I said to myself, 'In luck to meet them.' When she spoke to me, which was pretty frequently, sometimes even before I answered, I said over to myself, 'In luck to meet them.' Now, what can you say for yourself for selling a fellow like that?"

"Repeat the same thing, of course—that you are 'in luck to meet them.' The study of mankind is woman, to slightly vary and improve a quotation we all know. To study one woman or one type of woman would

not enlarge your knowledge of womankind, would it? I have a laudable desire to complete your education, or, if not complete it, do a little towards improving your mind; and I am sure the acquaintance of any of those three would do your mind and morals no end of good."

"I say, I wish you would, though, complete my education. You would be the jolliest tutor I ever had. No one has ever been able to teach me much; but I am sure you could. But no more of these women, except at a distance, thanks."

"I am sure they seem very good, and you are most ungrateful. I won't give you up just yet, though. When you have made yourself useful to Lady Wade over the teacups, you may come and sit by me and drink your tea and wisdom from me at the same time there."

"Awfully jolly! Of course I will come; but must I drink tea? I don't care much about tea, you know."

"What a sadly benighted young man! Know, then, that you have missed all the highest flights of imagination. Tea sets loose all the exalted and brilliant thoughts bound in the brain."

"I say, that's beyond me. What a lot of tea you must drink, though, to talk like that!"

Now they have reached the drawing-room, and Maud has gone to her window. The two sugar-sticks, to quote Lord Wylie, have seated themselves on a round ottoman nearly in the centre of the room, a point of obstruction to any one going from Maud

or Edith Scott to the tea-table. Edith is feeling rather shy ; she seems to fancy people must read her secret if they look at her. She keeps near her mother; and, of course, the boy, triumphant and happy, can scarcely leave her side. Sir Percival, restless as usual, has ordered in an unlimited supply of B. and S. "Tea is only fit for women and milksops," he proclaims in his cockcrowing-it manner. Wylie, strongly apostrophized to join him, tries hunting with the hounds and running with the hare. He tosses off his huge tumbler to satisfy Sir Percival, and then provides himself with a cup of tea, with which to approach Miss Darville. While he is getting it from Lady Wade, Sir Percival goes up to Maud, swings himself down into a chair by her side, and stretches out his legs with an air of comfort and immovability, thereby somewhat barring the approach. "I don't believe you care a bit about such trash"—looking contemptuously at her teacup.

"Indeed I do; it is life and wit, and everything else; it is the key that winds me up in the morning, and keeps me from running down in the afternoon. You should try it, not abuse it. But, Sir Percival, you really can't sit there."

"Can't sit here"—with an ugly look coming into his face—"and why on earth not?"

"Because I have a little plot that I know you wouldn't spoil—I want to cut out those two sugar-sticks." ("Ah! ah!") "Don't; they are looking scandalized. Lord Wylie—he gave them that name—is coming back here to learn of me to like tea." ("Well,

but what has that to do with my being here?"—sulky again.) "Nothing, but to make my revenge complete on the mother—they may be harmless enough—I want your chair to be vacant when that mild little man comes round in due course to offer bread-and-butter; then, unless I have lost my cunning, he will drop into that chair and stay there, and my satisfaction will be complete. And you can watch the fun. It won't be long"—persuasively.

Mollified, he draws in his legs, and is on his feet in a moment. "But can't you give me something to do? this is awfully slow," he asks.

"Oh yes; keep those girls victualled, or that civil little man, with all his shrinking from them, will be obliged to go to them every two minutes."

"Now go. Look!"

Spalding is seen with a plate of bread-and-butter. Miss Saville is doing wonders in the way of getting through slices to bring him to her side. Twice already has he handed and she taken of that doomed plate, her sister contriving not to have finished her slice, as they have more than their father's talent for strategy.

Sir Percival explodes into the group of which Spalding is the centre, just as Miss Saville has said, in her most playful manner and simper, "We are frightfully hungry with the drive here and tennis. Do have compassion on us! Stay with us with that bread-and-butter. It seems giving you so much trouble" (sweet, considerate creature!) "to be constantly coming to us;" and she moved slightly to

make more room between them, and surely would he have been engulfed there had not Sir Percival opportunely appeared with—

"I say, can't you take some of that over to Miss Darville? she is famishing, she says."

Delightedly he strides away. Soon Sir Percival sees him drop into the chair designed for him. Then off he goes to take the plate away and bring it to the two girls, who, with every envious and uncharitable feeling tearing in their breasts, contrive to keep up a sufficient outward appearance of content and interest in their host's slangy talk (Theresa had not discovered Wylie's talk to be slangy); while in the face of them Maud is talking away merrily, and monopolizing as they never could monopolize men, if they had the experience of fifty years and the bloom of sweet seventeen. The budding strawberry leaves and the beehive fade almost away as they gaze.

How those insipid-looking, wooden-goddess kind of women can hate, Sir Percival does not know or care. He does not even guess that he is included with Miss Darville in their hatred. A woman hates a woman for taking a man away, as if a man were passive in the matter.

Miss Saville determines on a great *coup*. Sir Percival is talking most to her sister, whose budding hopes being less forward than her own, feel this nipping less. She rises from her seat slowly and imperiously, her eyes fixed on the recreant Spalding.

Sir Percival springs to his feet. "What is it, Miss Saville? anything I can get?"

"No, thanks"—bonnily; "I have something to say to Lady Wade, I have just remembered."

The move in its primary intention of bringing Spalding to her side is lost, but there remains a chance of good to be got from it in offerings of honey to the fetish; and besides, when a position is untenable and useless, it should be abandoned for a better. It does not require one to be a genius to see that. Her move causes a general breaking-up. Mrs. Saville had seen with disgust the overthrow of her daughter's aims, and the success of that "artful little person's low, palpable tricks to catch those foolish men," as she said to her daughters in that chaotic drive home in which much accumulated spleen was let off all round.

There is no persuasion to stay longer, only a joyful request to Fairbrace to ring the bell, whereupon Sir Percival, lingering for a moment, says, "Hold! I am going out; I will give orders about the carriage."

Even then the group in the window does not disperse. Not until Sir Percival comes back, and says, "Your carriage is ready now," to Mrs. Saville, does Spalding leave the window. Once more effort is made to capture him.

"Can we not take you back with us?" asks the Queen. "There is a vacant seat in our carriage, and I want to ask you about the character of a man in your company. His wife has applied to me. Jones is the name."

"Thanks, Mrs. Saville; I am driving with Fielding." (She gives that young man a look that plainly

says, "And what will be the end of you, if you hire a trap every afternoon?") "I will find out about Jones's wife, and let you know."

Then she passes on to Lord Wylie. There is a shade of reproach discernible even in the lack-of-expression eyes of Miss Saville, as she gives an affectionate pressure to the little man's fingers, swallowed up in her palm, and her "Good-bye" is linked sweetness long drawn out. It moves Maud to laughter when they are all well out of hearing; not the effect intended.

CHAPTER XX.

WHILE the afternoon has sped at Crinton in the way described, it has been dragging "on leaden wings" for our little governess, whose food now has become of a transcendental kind that wants constant renewal. One whole day without a sight of her archangel — that is his exalted rank in her imagination—and she hungers. Yesterday she had put her hunger off with the promise of food the next day. At luncheon she hears of the tennis to come off at Crinton. Her heart sinks. She feels sure somehow that he will have to be there, and she feels that another day is blank to her, not worth the living. She knows how dreary will be the drive that once of itself pleased her, and how more than usually deserted the streets will look. She does not get so enveloped in this new life of hope and fantasy as not to feel that she is losing her ballast of common sense, and rising quite beyond her power of guidance. She is already side by side with the exquisite feeling of love and trust and longing for the fulfilment of her idea; has the sense to know that she has embarked

her whole being, her whole future happiness, in this one venture; that this man in this short time has become more to her than life; that he is her life, and in times of half-reaction she is frightened with a vague fear.

She is not an entertaining or even responsive companion, Mary finds, as they drive to Ware. "Have you a headache?" she asks. "You ate scarcely anything at luncheon, I noticed. We will go into Foat's and have an ice when my lesson is over; tasting them the other night makes me want more."

Miss M'Arthur confesses to a slight headache (alike feminine excuse or penalty for excess of emotion), and thinks an ice will be a good thing; anything will be good that keeps them in Ware, or on the road to Crinton, she thinks, and has decided to lengthen their stay in town as much as may be.

The lesson over, they go to Foat's, where they consume, not ices—"The weather has not settled warm enough for them yet, miss," from the condescending young lady presiding over the buns. Miss M'Arthur thinks she would like tea; and they have to wait some time for it to be made. "Would you not prefer to walk into the room at the back?"—from the young lady.

"No, thank you," at once from Mary, who tries to see what is going on in the street. And with an appetite born of the tempting possibilities spread before her, she helps herself to first one and then the other of them in a state of revelment and delight, beginning at jam tarts, with variations, and running

the whole gamut of dyspeptic compounds fearlessly, until desire is cloyed with appetite. The next phase of the visit to the confectioner's will be Nemesis in the shape of a nightmare of appalling weight and terror. Once or twice Miss M'Arthur had suggested moderation. "Don't talk to me about moderation yet awhile, mumsy dear. Remember my respected father's words, 'She is a growing girl, grows fast too;'" and she mimicked her father's tone and almost his expression, so that mumsy could not but smile; and the condescending young lady with the heavy fringe, pretending to be busy at the desk, puckers her mouth, and tries to look as if she did not understand and appreciate. Foat's is a great gossip-shop, and she picks up a great deal to retail to her admirers. She takes a cake, and walks to the door to look out. "Ware is more than usually deadly lively. I wonder where the usual units and couples are?" Then she goes back to the counter, near the young lady.

"Anything going on to-day anywhere to empty High Street so completely?"

"Nothing particular, I think, miss," she replies; "only to-morrow is market-day, and people want to come in then."

Miss M'Arthur had been seated, not out of patience, for it pleases her to wait at a little white marble table so as to face the street. She also watches the passers-by. She sees one or two men she thinks are in the X. Y. Z. They have hats exactly like her hero's, and they have a drilled walk. The tea is brought piping hot. They empty the tiny milk-jug into their cups without

lowering the shade of their tea, and ask for more milk. Mary brings a heaped plate of dainties to supplement the bread-and-butter. "Do have some of these, mum; they are so nice."

"And good for headache, dear?"

"Wishing to be truthful, and not having a close acquaintance with aches, I am not prepared to say that they are or are not. My principles are to eat when I have a good opportunity, and I call this a good one. Isn't it cosy here? Such a change from everlasting schoolroom tea; everything seems nicer."

"Even the unwonted thickness of the cups that disappoints you when you are going to drink is nice, I suppose?"

"You are too particular. I wish you would try to enjoy this little tea party of mine with me without looking too closely into everything." Her cup rattles on the marble as she puts it down. Miss M'Arthur raises her eyebrows. "There," she exclaims, "I was just going to remark that you ought to marry a rich man; you are so fastidious. Now I, with my talent for making the best of everything, should be thrown away on any but a struggling man—a soldier with nothing but his pay. How jolly to make a barrack-room look bright with our trunks covered with cretonne! and what fun to nail up the pictures ourselves! and how we should laugh over it! That is what I should delight in."

"Yes, Mary, and you and your boy-husband would doubtless laugh also to see the uncomfortable faces of your guests after a short period of sitting on these

disguised planks. I shall feel all your flowered delusions before trusting myself on them."

Pictures crowd upon her while she speaks and listens of the happy life she too could lead, Sybarite as she is by nature, in a barracks even, so that he too would be content there. From where she sits she can see the entrance to the passage that leads to the museum and barrack-ward. When he comes back to Ware, it is by that way he will go if walking; for he has told her that he usually gets down in High Street, and sends the groom on with the trap. She is not expecting to see him yet, or she would not be lingering over her tea in this manner. But she likes to think of what he does, and she likes even to see where he has walked. She has forgotten Mary, who does not like to be forgotten.

When she was a tiny child, the nurse brought her down to be inspected by a lady calling on Mrs. Scott, who professed a great love for little children. The nurse was told to leave her with them. At first she was petted, and praised, and caressed, and made much of; then she was stood on the couch by her mother, and gradually, in the interest of some absorbing topic, forgotten. Presently a little whimpering noise on the couch recalled the child to them. "What is it, pet?" said her mother, taking the little fat thing from the couch, where she had seated herself, apparently overwhelmed with grief. "Tell mother, darling." "I—want —oo—to—talk—to—me," she said between her little sobs of grief at her own forlorn condition. This desire for active sympathy has strengthened with her years and grown with her growth. She likes to be all in all to

the people she loves. She looks hurt, and her mouth falls a little as she says, "Your thoughts are a long way from here, mumsy. Might one ask where they have flown?"

"Flown a long way, child, into a future invoked by your picture of ridiculous chintz-covered boxes."

Thinking of her, then, all the while. Quite young people look to being engaged and married themselves, all in due course, as a matter of course; but it does not enter into their yet narrow imagination that any one a few years older has the same dream. A few years older to the young makes an impassable gulf that they cannot bridge over.

"Cretonne, dear"—in recovered spirits; "they might slip off chintz, you know."

When she goes to pay for the feast, and Mary enumerates the different things she has eaten to the dark young lady—"Two of those, and one of that, and two of those, and two of these cakes"—Miss M'Arthur, aghast, says, "Child, surely you have not eaten all those?"

"Yes, I have. I like now and then to have enough. Now I shan't care much about these things again just yet." While they are waiting for change—at these country shops they usually have to send somewhere for change for a sovereign—she runs on with, "Have you never heard how I used to manage to get enough chocolate for a go when nurse had charge of me? She always said, you know, that sweets weren't good for children, and being a woman of unbendable firmness where other peoples' appetites were concerned,

she used to deal out to me the most absurdly small bit of chocolate that you can imagine each day. It would have been downright cruelty to myself to have given myself that little taste to set me off wanting more all through the day. No, nurse; I was too wise for that. I just used to save my quarter sticks in a little treasure box of my own, with a lock and key to it that I have now, for a whole week—think of that!—and then on Wednesday night, when I went to bed, I used to secrete all this tuck——"

"I wish you would not say 'tuck,' dear; it is like a boy."

"Very well, mumsy; I put all this refreshment under my pillow. How I used to wish nurse gone, that I might begin; and she always seemed longer pottering about Wednesday night than any other! And then when she had gone, what a feed I had! I can remember the taste of it, and how thirsty I used to be, even after I had nearly emptied the water-bottle."

"I wonder you were not sick, child, and sickened."

"No, I was never that; but for a day or two after, I remember, I could put my little bit of chocolate away in the hiding-place without having to overcome any temptation to eat it, which was rather a good thing."

"Now, I suppose, we must order Jack, must we not?" she remarks, as they leave the sickly atmosphere of Foat's, maker and provider of ball-suppers, wedding-cakes, and refreshments, for the fresher air of the street.

"I suppose so," rejoins Miss M'Arthur, having no reasonable excuse for more delay, and thinking that if Mrs. Scott should by any chance get home first that she will be uneasy about them.

They cross to the Rose, and order Jack to be put to, and brought to them at the library, where Miss M'Arthur remembers that he has said that he sometimes buys a paper or two for himself, not quite admissible at the club, because he liked the old man who never bothers and speaks to one. There they turn over a good many things, and buy a few quite at their own discretion, the proprietor following them about in an unobtrusive pet-lamb-like manner, and not once bothering them to buy this, or showing them that novelty.

At last Jack is off, after doing his royal-arms-unicorn feat of standing on his hind legs, to the great alarm of the meek librarian, who makes a feint, all trembling and useless as he is, of going to help the hostler at his head, and then thinking better of it, spins round and rushes into his shop, nearly tumbling up his steps in his unwonted haste, for the other parcel, which he thrusts into the cart in a scared push-for-your-life manner. He puts it in just before the final plunge, which takes them away at the tearingest pace any pony ever accomplished for the first half-mile, and the worst; the narrow streets are obstructed here and there by big vans loading or unloading at the frequent warehouses. If poor Mrs. Scott could see the first rush to-day of this madly indignant wee creature kept longer than it likes, she would most certainly have

a fit or hysterics, or perhaps both. Mary never speaks until they are out of the town. She has her feet well planted in front of her, her teeth are set, and all her senses alert. Miss M'Arthur enjoys the excitement of it when Mary drives. She would not for the world drive Jack, or any other quadruped, however superannuated it might be, herself. Being semi-tropical, she feels the cold, and says the weather here is scarcely ever hot enough for her to hold reins for a quarter of an hour without suffering from cold hand. She is glad to-day that the first rush is over without their meeting Captain Munro, as she doubts if her pupil could have pulled Jack in to stop without pulling his ridiculous little head off. He has been kept longer than usual from his corn, and evidently feels a vacuum that no tugging of his shall prolong.

In the meantime Munro has been doing his walk from —— at a swinging pace, and with the elastic spring arising from having got well out of a dilemma into freedom, with a fair prospect now of his other wish being realized. In those circumstances he speeds along, cheerfully for him, thinking a good bit of Maggie, picturing the child's glad surprise, and thinking, too, of other things as well.

The first small scattered villa is in sight. He scans the road anxiously. It will be a nuisance if he does not soon meet them. He gathered from Mrs. Scott that Mary had not gone by water. He had planned to meet them before this. One does not want to let every one into one's doings. Houses have eyes, and tongues go with eyes. Yes, he will walk back a little;

and so for a quarter of a mile he retraces his steps, looking behind every minute to make sure that they will not sight his back. He has just taken a long look when — rightabout face, and lo! he is walking unconcernedly towards Ware. As they approach, he steps into the road with the intention of being talked to. He shakes hands—does not entrust three fingers mistrustfully this time—with Maggie. "You walking, Captain Munro?"—in a tone that, had Mary had experience, would have betrayed the whole state of the case.

"Yes; I wanted to get away;" and the tetter-dog look in his eyes of having much to say and no spirit to say it in conveys all that she wants to know, and makes a volume of those few commonplace words.

"You are late, aren't you? No fault of Jack's, Miss Mary, I hope?" She is to be propitiated.

"No fault of Jack's! The little villian has made my hand ache, though! No; we have been having tea at Foat's."

"You don't do that often, do you?"

"We go there often for ices, in summer. We couldn't get them to-day. I thought a cup of tea would do Miss M'Arthur's head good."

"You have had headache?" and again the eyes speak volumes. "Has the tea done good?" and now his tone is caressing beyond betrayal point.

"Much better, thanks"—softly in his ear. She has forgotten aches. He is standing quite near her, with his hand on the little cart, nearly touching her arm.

"Has any one"—playfully—"tried to make you play tennis at Crinton?"

"No, thank heavens! Not that they could have made me make a fool of myself. I have been taken to West Point, to admire the view, by Lady Wade."

A shade comes over her face at that, when he at once sees he has not quite reached the quite-sure-of-you stage when men and women treat jealous feelings with as little compunction as a cat does a mouse it plays with (tortures). But, unlike the cat with the mouse, who, when she is weary of her pastime, ends it with a crunch that makes it disappear bodily, the human torturer leaves marks that never disappear.

Captain Munro hastens to add, "Mrs. Scott, and your friend, Miss Mary, I forget his name" (Mary nods, as much as to say, all right, I know, and I'm sure you don't want to) "went with us; but I was wanting to get away—particular business." He looks again in the before-mentioned manner at Maggie, and it is more than fair weather again. "Am I keeping you?" he asks, still with his hand on the cart, but with toes removed a trifle, Jack having commenced backing and plunging to remind his young mistress that patience is not one of his virtues.

She is occupied with him now, and is showing off her Jehu-ship to Captain Munro. Showing it off vainly; he only thinks, "What an impatient little brute it is. I hope they won't upset her one of these days."

"I am afraid," she answers, "that we shall not be able to wait longer; Jack is a spoiled child."

That "afraid" falls pleasantly on his ear, and impels

him, conscious as he thinks himself, to respond with, "When shall I see you again—Saturday? We didn't half do the museum that day, eh?" Back in the see-saw goes Jack. He is obliged to remove his hand; he manages to take hers for a second. Is it Jack's antics that makes the hand-taking into a tight pressure this time? "Saturday, then, the museum; *au revoir.*" He stands back, lifts his hat, and off they go again, shaken almost to breathlessness, but glowing with excitement. Maggie now is saying to herself, "Saturday, then; *au revoir;* the museum;" and she for the rest of the drive lives over and over again this short scene. Those eyes she sees again; their language she interprets again, greatly to her whole satisfying.

CHAPTER XXI.

CAPTAIN WHITE is in, what he would call, "a devil of a temper." He, too rhinoceros-hided as he is, has indulged in a dream, not of bliss and love, but of gold and the pleasures' excitements gold can buy. All the way down in the rapid train, his wine and tobacco stimulated brain was teeming with bright visions. He had gone to sleep, still steeped in them.

When he awakes in the morning, a small, very small, part of the vision remains; but before Agatha's answer is brought to him, the purport of his visit to town and the sequel to it must be set forth.

The forlorn hope that induced him to set out was an old aunt, rich and penurious. Although loving to hoard instead of spend, she had once or twice assisted her nephew with a *loan*, but has declared her firm intentions of never sending him another penny.

A call on Miss Alberta White would never be lightly undertaken, for three reasons: First, her deafness, which reduces speech communication with her

to the horn and tube level; second, Thomasine, her cat; third, her body and purse guard—a very old servant. A visit to her is a terrible ordeal.

On the strength of a mythical engagement to Miss Browne, her nephew hopes this formidable aunt will again lend money. He is prepared with paper and stamps. Ready money is to him the sinews of war and of victory. Tradesmen in Ware are getting frightfully earnest, and even insulting in their demands and threats. If this becomes known to the Brownes, he feels that all chance of the ducats will be gone. Driven by these terrible considerations, he betakes himself to that *ennui* accumulator, the suburb of London. I won't hurt Miss Alberta's feelings by naming which she inhabits—any suburb answers to that description; and it does not point out the place where Thomasine dwelleth to cat-snatchers eager for reward. "Not such a dull hole, after all," Captain White thinks.

The broad pavement in front of the chief shops is thronged now with children and nursemaids; certainly the proportion of perambulators is large, and impedes locomotion. The nurses and mothers find much to gaze at, and those who desire to keep their toes intact must look after them. It is four o'clock, and the rank and fashion of the side streets are promenading side by side with the nurses and their nurslings — fashion, in its early summer garbs of compromise, or extremes. Those with heavy winter jackets of brocade, none the worse for wear, struggle under them as long as possible. Other young ladies,

impelled by the opposite considerations, have discarded outer coverings altogether, and walk proudly conscious of their waists. There is a saucy look about some of these that attracts Captain White's eye. Many of the nurse-girls are—good looking, by Jove! and he pardons the children their existence, and has almost a lenient feeling towards perambulators. He loiters, having no wish to interview his aunt; only necessity drives him. The consciousness of being one man among fifty women is agreeable to him. He feels that he is giving the girls a treat! The observed of all observers, he walks with more than his usual swagger; a playful critic (regimental) even likened him to an erect frog. There is a width and front about him highly suggestive of froggy; besides which, his arms certainly seem set unusually far back. He gives his moustache frequent pulls, and, in the seventh heaven of gratified conceit, enjoys his triumphal progress to Acacia Cottage and his Aunt Alberta better than he could have thought possible.

Intoxication of any kind makes equilibrium a difficult feat. Instead of ringing the Acacia bell in a subdued and diplomatic spirit—the maid resented being hurried, and she is one of the powers—he, with bold-eyed houries rampant in his senses, gives a fierce, bold pull. Houries still hover round him. When the shrunken maid of sixty winters—one reckons summers in youth—hastened by the alarming urgency of the peal, quickly opens the door to him, he asks for Miss Alberta certainly, but is undecided quite as regards what he will say to his financially important

relative when he sees her. Rash man! and he with the ordeal of that tribe in store for him.

Before he is in that awful presence, he has put his foot in it most effectually. Thomasine, the gigantic, most luxuriant of luxurious cats, almost lives in the daytime on a pillow placed for her in dining and drawing room windows. They are bow windows, one on each side of the door, of southern aspect, and so especially grateful to Thomasine. She never walks abroad, and, peculiar of her kind, has no temptation to garden or tile perambulating. Instinct impels her, however, sometimes to move her enormous bulk slowly and lazily. Her parade-ground is the house. Old Mary, who brings her all her food, is a favourite; and whenever she is sufficiently awakened by the hall-bell, she rubs along by Mary to answer it.

The hall of Acacia Cottage is narrow. Captain White's head is proudly thrown back, and he has an expansive front, as I explained. What wonder, then, that in marching in he gives the unfortunate Thomasine, who moves slowly, and is accustomed to every one giving in to her, a kick, that sent her—"I can't tell you where!" But she mewed a terrible mew before disappearing; and the nephew, he used a big D——; the winter pippin shrieked! Miss Alberta, suspicious and curious, like all deaf people of her calibre, had erected herself, trumpet in hand, to hear who this impetuous visitor might be who had roused her and Thomasine from their afternoon siestas. (The bell was hung in the hall to prevent any one coming to the door without her knowledge). In the midst of the

uproar caused by the attack, her tall angular form looms terrible in her nephew's eyes in the doorway of her drawing-room, and the culprit, vowing vengeance inwardly against all cats, maiden aunts, and old servants, advances, with loud apologies, to meet her, his hand outstretched and his duty kiss ready. But Miss Alberta will have none of them; she will not see his hand; she ignores his apologies.

"My Thomasine! my precious Thomasine!"—her voice is throaty and loud, and she pushes past him, waving her trumpet in her indignation and grief. She is at the top of the kitchen stairs, and about to throw herself, it seemed, in her excitement down them.

But Mary flies to her side, "Mam"—quite sternly—"and with your bronchitis, it will be death to you on those damp stones. Let me bring her to you." She listens, and forbears.

Then her nephew goes up, and again attempts an apology. But she won't give him the help of the trumpet; and if she hears him, which I dare say she does—her senses are all sharpened by her excitement—she pretends that she does not. She is a big, heavy-faced woman, with a disagreeable protruding under-lip. The mention of bronchitis causes her to fill the pause with an open-mouthed cough, which occupies her till Mary appears, with her arms more than full of the injured Thomasine, looking larger than ever in her disturbed fur coat. Then the cough stops, and, with her trumpet tucked ignominiously under her arm, she takes her "darling, precious, lovely Kittums" from

her faithful maid, and carries her off into the drawing-room, followed closely by the other adoring woman.

The nephew says a muffled swear behind their backs; but his needs are pressing, and he cannot afford to go in and make other hair stand on end by reason of his highly spiced language, as the natural man impels, but turns on his heels, and sneaks into the room with an utterly tail-between-its-legs expression. There he stands, while the two women, the mistress seated, her precious on her lap, Mary kneeling before her, gently stretch out each of Thomasine's four legs, manipulate them, coaxing her with loving phrases to let them see that their precious has no broken bones. The legs pronounced intact, they proceed to the more difficult task of feeling her "darling ribs;" but as Thomasine is here fluffed, and is winking and blinking her eyes with satisfaction, they are at last obliged to be convinced that she has taken no bodily harm, "unless it be internal, mum," the fiend Mary suggests. Her mistress's nephew could have strangled her with satisfaction to himself. There upon her knees, he hates her more than he does the other cat, he thinks. There is no love lost. The provident woman with another's goods sees herself, should her mistress, please God, die of her bronchitis, the inheritor of much of her money, and as Thomasine's humble friend and guardian, in a smaller Acacia Cottage, or in this. She is, therefore, naturally suspicious of the only relative who tries to keep in her mistress's good books. Besides, she has a personal grudge against him on account of his systematic ignoring of herself. "He treats me as

if I was 'rocks and stones instead of flesh and blood,'" she confides to her friend—and may be something more one of these days, she thinks—the gardener, who spends two days each week in attending to the welfare of the Acacia garden.

"There is a power of work to keep it in order in only two days a week, and not even a bit of a boy to help one." But sometimes Mary lends a hand—she is a wiry little woman—and then they have a little beer together in the potting-shed, and they agree, "That if she is stingy, there will be more for them as comes after." This being the state of the case, it will be readily seen that old Mary is interested in making much of the treasure's ill-treatment by her rival. Those fiery red men are not usually endowed with a large stock of patience, and this is a trial for the richly dowered; but wait he must till this tomfoolery is over, and if ever he becomes the husband of this heiress he will come and give these women a bit of his mind once for all, and then never again darken his aunt's inhospitable doors. Not a glass of anything has she ever by any chance offered him.

He goes to the window that looks on the front garden, tiny and trim. He sees one or two petticoats pass the gate. "Oh, to be able to follow them, and get a better look at their faces!" but he cannot yet. Then he walks to the back, and looks out on the small lawn and the long vista of useful vegetation—the cabbages, potatoes, broccoli—growing there, edged by a row of currant and gooseberry bushes. There is nothing in that prospect to make time fly.

One vigorous tug of the fiery moustache and his mind is made up he won't stand this any longer ; he will say what he has come to say now, and a little more besides. In her present state of resentment against him, to represent his engagement as aught but a certainty would be suicidal, and he has not come all this way and put up with all this—for nothing. He walks towards his aunt. Where the—is her trumpet? Without it, if she so choose, she can as completely deny herself to him as if he were on the doorstep and she " not at home."

He sees it ; it is reposing on the table at her side, in front of some glacial looking-glass shades, covering ornaments that cost less than the shades did—Indian figures, twelve in all, and each isolated under its glass exhumator, showing the different employments of a retinue of servants in India. These, a pair of glass lustres for candles, and a clock on the mantelpiece, are the only ornaments in this austere-looking drawing-room. He goes to the back of his engrossed relative, reaches over her before she knows he is there, and possesses himself of her tube ; then he draws a chair to her side, presents her connector to her, and seats himself in a communicative and expectant attitude.

Sulkily she takes it, and without vouchsafing him a glance, and with an ominous shooting out of her under-lip, she adjusts the horn to listen to what he can have to say. His first words nearly choke him—" He is sorry for the accident, and hopes the cat isn't hurt ;" and he bellows this out lustily. Before he has finished his sentence, she takes her tube from her ear,

and says gruffly, "If you shout like that, James, you will break the drum of my ear, and I can't tell a word what you say when you shout." He fancies he sees a smile, the first he has ever seen on that old fiend Mary's face, and that, and having to repeat the apology in a more subdued voice, does not improve his Cayenne pepper temper.

But he tries again, and this time with better success. as regards intelligibility, but with no appeasement, "Sorry, James, and so you ought to be; but what good is being sorry? You can't undo the cruelty and fright that my precious has endured." That is in a way unanswerable, especially through a tube, and with a gloating third person listening. Little words and sentences one could use to another seem absurd and trivial when the listener, in an expectant manner, holds her formidable-looking machine towards one.

"I have something to tell you, aunt." He had forgotten, and was bellowing again. Down goes the tube, and the beforesaid admonition is repeated. More quietly he goes over his remark, which even to him begins to sound absurd, and not worthy the dignity of going that long way up a tube to her ear.

"Well," says his aunt, and she looks listening all over, even to the hand that has been fondling Thomasine. Mary does not stir.

This is too much; the impertinent wretch! "It is private, aunt." With difficulty he kept his voice down.

"You want Mary to go, then?" asks his unamiable

relative, determined, more even than is her wont, to be disagreeable to this graceless male reprobate, this thorn in the flesh, who seems to try to draw blood whenever he comes.

Without more ado, Mary betakes herself to the other side of the door, for external ear application.

The nephew then gives a little preliminary ahem, to give time for the old cat to get away, and then betakes himself to the serious business of his visit. Only those who have tried to talk through this kind of connecting link know what difficulties it places in the way of the non-expert. As White proceeds, he lifts his head to see the effect the startling news of his approaching marriage has on his aunt, thereby losing the focus of the aperture his voice is to be sent through.

"Eh! what's that, James? Surely no decent woman can be so hard up as to think of marrying you!"

The nephew is not over-sensitive, but he has his personal vanity, like other men, and does not take kindly to the suggestive remark. But he swallows his pride, and reasseverates the wondrous and circumstantial story of his approaching marriage to Miss Agatha Browne, only daughter of Nicholas Browne, of the Towers, Otham, and the undisputed mistress of £20,000. His voice rises to crescendo here, but for all that it reaches Miss White's senses; and her ready answer, "It is incredible, James; but I am glad to hear it, as now there is no need for you to come bothering me any more for my money, and I haven't

got any to lend, if you wanted it ever so much," staggered him for a moment, not longer. He remembers that she has always talked like that at the beginning, but has shelled out something in the end. He forthwith applies himself to explain his critical state of indebtedness and general hard-up-ed-ness. He concedes nothing this time, and the gloating enemy at the door enjoys herself immensely. Before he has spoken only of temporary embarrassments; now he takes his aunt into the Inferno of crushing indebtedness into which he is sinking, if she does not stretch out her hand.

The listening Mary is as much perturbed as is her mistress, the lawful recipient of this unpleasant *denouement* to the matrimonial projects before unfolded. She shakes her fist at the door, and says, with concentrated bitterness, "Not a penny more would I give you to save you from the gallows, you leech!" And she pictures herself, Thomasine, and her gardener in the frozen-out condition that aforetimes has caused gardeners to lift up their voices in plaintive appeal to a soft-hearted public.

The upshot, after much haggling between borrower and lender, is this, that if James sends her a note received by him from Miss Browne, notes of which he professes to have plenty, she will, by return of post, send him a cheque for £200, for which he gives her an I.O.U. on the spot. "So sure I am, dear aunt, of the money!" This is said in a jaunty tone and manner.

Mary quickly betakes herself to the sheltering

kitchen stairs. She knows from experience that as soon as the hat and stick can be collected, the fire-brand will have spluttered out of the room and house.

With £200 almost within his grasp, his hopes, as he retraces his steps to the railway station, are almost at zero. Cold water has been dribbled upon him at short intervals ever since he crossed the Acacia threshold, and has gradually lowered the fever heat of his entrance to its present low reading. He no longer passes back *œillades* with interest ; his thoughts are turned within, and the captain's roving eye sees, but observes nothing. He stamps up and down the high and draughty platform, still dead to the outside world. He had just missed one train, and has five-and-twenty minutes to kick his heels about at this confounded station. The second time he passes, he looks through the door of the refreshment-room, a sure sign of unprecedented head-turning that he has not before flown to that harbour of refuge ; halts, and turns in. As he enters the bright-coloured bottle precincts, a dark houri is dusting a glass, while another, with tinted locks, is reading a letter that seems to delight them amazingly.

The captain is welcomed by both as an old friend. He has never visited his aunt without looking in on them, and refreshing himself. The dark one, before he asks, pours out from a slender bottle a double quantity of *eau de vie ;* the fair one uncorks the soda, and his sparkling drink is handed him before he has been in their presence a minute. They know that

will brighten him up; and so it does, and he proceeds to joke and compliment in his usual free-and-easy style. The dark, "strapping" girl is his special friend; so after a minute of mixed badinage, her fair assistant betakes herself to the solitary perusal of her letter at the extreme end of the bar, to give the other fair play.

"You young ladies seem to give the postman plenty of work with all your letters," he remarks. "It looks as if you both read them. Do you call that fair? A fellow doesn't think he is writing to the whole station when he writes to one of you, I suppose?"

"I don't know what he thinks; but"—with a little toss of her head—"I don't hand my letters about to every one to read."

"No, of course not, dear"—banteringly. "You wouldn't let any one see one of mine, would you?"

"No; and I am not anxious to see one myself either." This is rather a high-flyer. She went to help at Cambridge last term, and the censors of undergraduate incense lighted to her charms so befumed her brain, she has not yet cleared it off, and she is a little short with this mature houri-killer.

"You shall have a *billet-doux* from me to-morrow morning," says Mr. White, solemnly. "Now promise, there's a dear girl, to answer it by return of post, because the little proposal I'm going to make will require an immediate answer." The major's gooseberry eyes are beginning to round themselves, and project in quite an alarming manner.

The dark beauty is mollified. She has quarrelled

—she has a fine spirit of her own—with her most ardent admirer, and is quite prepared to take up with another. Surely she is not going to make herself too cheap; besides, she may be reconciled after a bit to her old lover. It is well to have several strings to one's bow, in any case.

"Nonsense," is her sole reply.

"But it isn't nonsense, I tell you." The *eau de vie* has flashed an idea into his head that commends itself to him.

"But we don't even know each other's name, and I am not going to tell you mine"—coquettishly.

"Never mind your name, I can find a name for you. Just as well to be cautious in letters till you know me better. People don't use their own names in agony columns, you know. I shall address my envelope, 'Miss Agatha Browne.'" Here the dark houri was convulsed with laughter, which made her fair friend pause in her letter-reading and look towards her.

"Shall, 'pon my honour!" continues Captain White, waxing fluent. "'Miss Agatha Browne, The Towers' —you are so high up here—care of ——. Tell me your friend's name, won't you?"—coaxingly, and with quite an alarming propulsion of eyes over the separating barrier.

"Miss Shears," she answers, in the midst of her giggle.

"'Care of Miss Shears,'" he repeats, "'Refreshment rooms,'" etc., etc. He takes out his pocket-book, and makes the entry.

"What a funny man you are, to be sure!" and then they both laugh a good bit, and he refreshes.

"Mind," says the amorous White, shaking his finger playfully at her, "that you answer by midday post. I shall be anxious, dreadfully anxious, 'pon my honour."

"We don't get much time to write then, you know," she answers.

"Oh, a line or two will do; just say you accept my offer. It isn't my hand that I am going to offer all at once, but something jolly, I fancy."

"Say something nice, dear. Say you will be pleased to see me, and anything nice you can think of. The nicer it is, the better I shall like it. And don't forget, 'The Towers,'—nothing more, at the top; and sign yourself 'Agatha Browne.' Pretty name, isn't it, Agatha? You will see it in the agony column when I have no other way of communication."

"I don't think it is pretty; I like mine better. But why can't you *tell* me what you are going to write, and save the bother?"

"Bother! come that is unkind. Bother! why I shall treasure your letter no end. It's about going to Richmond on Sunday together, if I can manage to get away for it; I'm not dead sure till I get back to my club."

"Going to Richmond with a stranger, that's likely" —with a toss of her head.

"I thought a dinner at the Star and Garter was a pleasant way of spending Sunday; but if you have anything better on, I need not bother to write."

A dinner at the Star and Garter of all places, and the river all the rest of the time! Her late lover never proposed anything half so expensive. This must be an awfully rich man; and White goes up accordingly. A real gentleman, refusing him is not seriously to be thought of. "I doat on the river," she says relentingly, "and the Star and Garter is very nice." She speaks in a patronizing way of that hotel, as if she were quite used to going there, when her only acquaintance with it has been a view of it from the terrace above.

"Then I shall hope for a dear little note, just accepting and saying if the time I proposed to come will suit you. Needn't mention place, but it shall be Victoria Station, you will remember."

More talk of a light kind follows, until one or two men come in, and he has to stand a little on one side. The train comes up, and he leaves, with a parting expressive glance, the scene of the greatest stroke of Machiavelianism that he has ever attempted.

* * * * *

With eager haste White looks over his letters. He hastily tears open Agatha's. His own is enclosed, with this:

"Miss Brown begs to enclose Captain White a letter she received yesterday; he will see what an altogether ridiculous letter it is. She leaves it to his discretion to find out the perpetrators of the absurd joke, or to let the matter rest in the oblivion it deserves. In either case, she does not wish to hear more of the matter."

Although the arrangement with the station belle was made to meet this horrible contingency, he is not really prepared for it, and it comes as a terrible blow. His own letter returned in this ignominious manner; it is galling, insulting. Just like his luck, when he was intending to lead a domestic reformed life, so he tells himself *now*.

Fielding hasn't come near to ask about the answer even. Well, after all it is best so. Now that conceited fool Munro will never know. He tears the letters into shreds, and by the help of matches reduces them to ashes. He pours out some brandy with a shaky hand; then compels himself to look at his future. He must get away from here; it is all up with him. He must send in his papers, and start with his aunt's £200 to one of the colonies. If Agatha number two sends the note he expects, he will be off to wait for the cheque in London as soon as he has forwarded her note to his aunt. He must get away from this place without observation, when it is dusk.

CHAPTER XXII.

AMONG other things agreed on by Cecil Fielding and Edith Scott, during their memorable walk in the park, was the advisability of his not applying to Mr. Scott to ratify their engagement until Sunday, Edith explaining that her father found that a long day, and welcomed almost any one then.

"Perhaps, after all, dear, you ought not to come over till then. He may think my mother has sanctioned it; and whether it goes well for us or not, I expect she will be blamed. Are your husband friends like that? Do they always blame their wives when things go wrong?" She has such a sweet, soft look as she asks this question quite innocently.

"I don't know many husbands intimately, so I can't say; but those who do put the blame on their wives are brutes," responds her lover, looking indignant for all wives at the prospect of having such a sweet, lovable wife of his own before long. "I suppose I ought not to come before Sunday, as you say. But you will be in Ware one day, won't you, darling? and you will

write—be sure you write—if there is a scrap of news about ourselves you know to tell me?"

That evening, Mr. Scott was particularly genial, and most cordial in his manner to his guest. "Sorry you can't stay longer, but I shall expect you for the shooting. No use to ask you until October; you will be going north for the 12th, I suppose?"

This young man has a hold on Mr. Scott's liking difficult to understand. Mr. Scott is of a sturdy type of Philistine, believing in nobility and money. His young friend is a butterfly with artistic taste, and with only one definite desire to take higher flights. Can there be an inner Scott-cherishing sentiment for the son of an old friend; or does he, sturdy and independent as he professes to be, like to hear these anecdotes of the 'best' people; or is he trying his hand at match-making? In either case, all benefit by his increased urbanity. He takes more than his usual notice of his eldest daughter, and is especially anxious, for a wonder, to show off the little talent she possesses, as he thinks. He asks for music when he comes into the drawing-room, and says, "You play something to us, Edith."

That takes Fairbrace with her to the music-room, where they spend the rest of the evening. Fairbrace sings moderately well, and is his own accompanist when he chooses; but to-night he asks Edie to play for him, which she does sympathetically. She is in dreamland. If he were in front of her instead of behind, he would see, by the help of his eyeglass, a wrapt far-way look in her eyes, that would help more

to his enlightenment than his satisfaction. Edie looks especially graceful and pretty in the soft white or cream evening dresses that she always wears, and accustomed from her toddling days to spacious rooms, she moves in them with unconscious ease. And there is little doubt that the surroundings, even of an admittedly pretty girl, brighten her effect and enhance her value.

Fairbrace, under the influence of music, and in this all but *tête-à-tête* condition, is fast becoming sentimental. He makes one or two pretty commonplace speeches at his regret at having to leave the next day, which do not take much effect.

Edith says, matter-of-factly, "I thought this first meet was quite an event. I should like to be there very well. Do you go up with the Wade people to-morrow?"

Is she a little piqued that he has thought of going up with Miss Darville and Lady Wade? It is very likely, he argues, and wonders how he can do away with that impression. Miss Darville is bright and amusing, Lady Wade charming; but they do not move him in the same way that this graceful ingenuous young girl does. He means to come back certainly in October, and he will leave a good impression, perhaps a tenderness, behind—a foundation on which to build at his discretion.

The windows to the conservatory are conveniently open. Mrs. Scott has just been to remind them that it is late, and that the lord of the house is sleeping; and Fairbrace shuts down the piano, and then goes

to the window and looks out. "See," he says, "what a lovely effect the moonlight gives, shining through those creepers! I never remember to have seen a brighter night;" and he steps out into the moonlight.

Edith goes to the window and stops there. "Yes; how silvery and peaceful it looks! If anything could raise me into a poetess, it would be moonlight."

"Yes, moonlight stirs one's highest and best emotions. But you are not really out in it; come and look on the lawn." She just steps up to him and peers out, then goes back with a shudder. "You are cold?" he asks.

"Yes, that is it, I suppose; but in that glimpse only a queer feeling came over me when I saw the dark shadows of the trees and the cold white stillness of the lawn. I fancied myself——How foolish I am!"

He sees that her face is white; or is it the moonlight shining on it that makes it appear so?

"That feeling," he says, smiling, "is the poetic afflatus coming to you. To geniuses, things and sights are revealed, and visions are seen that don't come to mere ordinary mortals. Depend upon it, you are to be a modern Sappho. You will show me your verses when next we meet"—sentimentally uttered this—"though it is I who ought to be inspired and write verses in your honour. At the most, you would only write an ode to friendship; while I, if only the poetic fire would come to me, would pour out evermore on the perfections and sweetness of *my lady;*" and he looks tenderly at her.

She does not follow this lead in anything, neither by speech nor speaking silence. She has recovered now from her clairvoyance, and says quite in her usual way, "If the gift of poetry is so uncomfortable a gift, I won't desire it. So my ode to transmitted friendship—we younger people, you know, have taken each other over from our fathers and mothers, and don't know much about each other yet—is not even in prospect ; but my father won't call you his friend if you keep him out of his bed. Good-night, moon—" she makes a deep curtsy to it. "I never turn my money for luck and curtsy as mother does to baby moons, but I feel now that a mature moon is a power, and must be propitiated with ceremony and all reverence." Then she goes in, giving no more chances for sentiment, and walks straight across the music-room to her father and mother beyond, Fairbrace following her.

Mr. Scott has thrown off his slumberousness. "What, star-gazing, you young people, and forgetting bedtime! Going up with me to-morrow morning, Fairbrace? Breakfast punctually at 8.30, if you go."

"No ; I am not going quite so early as that, thanks. Mrs. Scott kindly said she would send me to the station later in the day. Time at this end is pleasanter than at the other to me."

"Oh yes, of course. Sorry you can't stay longer. Go when you like. Always pleased to see you, you know ; come whenever you like." He holds out his hand. Fairbrace makes a suitable acknowledgment for past, present, and future hospitality. Edith imprints her customary kiss on her father's ample brow, and

kisses her mother with more even than her usual warmth. The mother feels it, and half-guessing the cause, returns it with interest, murmuring "God bless you, my child." An altogether unprecedented formula with Mrs. Scott, who has a mysterious reverence for the very name of God; to her a name for Sunday only, sweet reverent soul!

Edith and her mother drive with their parting guest to Ware. Edith excuses herself from going to the station with him on the plea of shopping. For the moment Fairbrace's padding of self-complacency is pierced; then he consoles himself by thinking she is jealous—"She does not wish to see me going off with the others." On the strength of this idea, he fancies himself more than ever.

"So sorry to have to say good-bye," he says in his soft voice, that has a sound of coming from under a covering of eiderdown, as he helps her from the carriage. "I hope we may meet *very* soon."

* * * * * *

Fielding, who has contracted a habit lately of taking his letters to the post-office, there to buy and affix stamps with deliberation, is there when Edith enters. It is their first meeting in the new circumstance. The young fellow is eager and appropriative; Edith glad and a little shy. Out in the street they have a thousand things to ask and say, yet scarcely know where to begin. The pleasure of being together would suffice them, yet talk they must. What they say is mere babble; what they feel quite untranslatable.

* * * * *

When he has deposited Edith in her mother's carriage, there is a little talk of Fairbrace and Miss Darville and the Wades; then silence for a few minutes, broken by Edith, who, after giving her mother a kiss, says, "Dear, there is something I am dying to tell you; may I?"

"No, don't tell me, darling. I can guess, perhaps; but I must not be told."

Then there is much kissing, and tears are shed by the mother in a surreptitious way.

CHAPTER XXIII.

EDITH from the library begins her anxious watch as soon as lunch is over and her father has started, with cigar and *Saturday Review*, to which he is still true, for his Sunday stroll round his domains. Mary has gone to Sunday school ; her mother to her boudoir. Together they had watched Mr. Scott's retreating steps, each wondering what the return will be like ; then they separate. Edith feels that if she is with her mother, she will be obliged to give words to her anxiety.

The boudoir and library, one on each side of the hall, are the only rooms which have a view of the drive to the house.

Edith from the window watches, and thinks. She is greatly disturbed for her lover. "Poor boy ! it will be so disagreeable for him when my father puts his hand in his pocket and jingles his money, as I know he will, with his satisfied air of 'plenty here,' and asks him what he has got to settle on me. He settle anything on me, poor boy !" And she smiles

contentedly and happily, as if money is nothing but a bogie that elder folks use to frighten children with, and that the children soon learn to know it to be a bogie, and won't be frightened. Love, they know, is worth more than all the money in the world.

Edith, at this present time, is nearly as unpractical and innocent of the necessity of money in this world as a small child of only two summers' sojourn here.

She can't fix her attention on her book when at length she opens it, and attempts to read, thinking to make the waiting pass more quickly. Every minute she is looking over the book towards the gate by which he will come. Then she debates this question, "Ought she or ought she not to see him?" She arrives always at the same conclusion that, regardless of ought or ought not, she must see him.

At length—it had seemed endless waiting—she sees a horse's head at the gate. It is thrown back, and then she sees her darling, looking so bright and strong with energy; and she is not ashamed that he should see her watching for him. Why should she be now?

He is driving in Munro's cart. He quickly rings the bell. She opens the library door, as the maid passes to answer the peal. "Your master is in the garden. If it is a gentleman we know asking for him, you had best say that he is there, and ask if you shall fetch him." Then she remains near the half-opened door, a trifle undecided now; but if Jones takes him through the dining-room into the garden, she will see him for a minute, just to wish him good luck.

He is passing the door slowly, to see if she is in the

room, sees her and stops. Then she goes out to him. Jones, of course, is all ears. "Your father is in the garden, I am told."

"Yes; and I will show you which way he went. It is always the same route on Sunday. Down the long walk first, with halts to rest on each seat, and in each summer-house he sits a little. You will find him at the first summer-house, I think, and nearly through his first cigar. Shall Jones announce you?"

He does not wish to be announced. Jones vanishes. Then he looks round. No one is in sight, but it is a public spot, just outside the dining-room window, and he is obliged to content himself with one hasty kiss. Then they stroll slanting ways across the lawn to the entrance of the long walk. "My darling, wish me good luck," he says. "I am actually realizing now what an audacious fellow I am to dare to go up to him and ask for so much, and I have next to nothing of worldly goods, as you know, to offer. But he won't think that being rich in love will at all make up for other riches, I am afraid; and I would go through any probation, any trial that may be in store for me, so that in the end I might win you yet. To go to India without you will be hard lines."

"I believe it quite, you know I do; and I do hope he won't be vexed. But even if he seems vexed at first, you must not mind it; it is rather his way. I do so hope he will be in a good humour! Oh, if, dear,"—and she stops in her walk—"he should say we are not to meet for ever so long, not till I am one-and-twenty, what shall we do?"

"But I must see you. That is absurd. You frighten yourself, and—almost me."

She goes a little way further with him after this panic, and they vow hot vows of faithfulness through all waiting, faithfulness till death. Years even of waiting shall nothing change their love.

Under a double cherry tree she wished him "God speed." "Gather me a bit of that white flower, pet; now put it in my coat—a pin at the back." And now he is alone. Getting with every step nearer the awful ordeal, he half wishes he had been shown into a room upon him, as one may say; but no, that isn't really so; then he would have missed seeing his darling. What shall he say first? He had made up a little speech coming along. He had asked Munro before he went to town last night what he should say first to Mr. Scott. He had not greatly helped him. "Perhaps you will get some lead somehow. If not, say something about——. But I don't know what one would say. Writing would have been easier, wouldn't it?"

"A great deal easier," he had answered, "and if one were pretty sure it would be all right, that would have done, you see. But I shall have to try my powers of persuasion. I am not such a conceited fool as to think he is going to jump at me for a son-in-law."

He sees under a pink hawthorn tree a Chinese pagoda-like erection. This will be the first summer-house. It is of no use, he can't make up his mind to any set formula; he must trust to the inspiration of

the moment. When he is advanced enough to get a good view of the summer-house interior, he turns his head. A reprieve! He feels for a moment elated, but only for a moment. The awful presence is somewhere in advance, and on he must go to it. The next curve shows him his father-in-law by desire, sitting under an elm, his cigar nearly burnt out. Edie was right. He is either reading his newspaper intently, or he is half somnolent. His hat is tilted over his eyes, so that until he is close upon him he cannot be sure if drowsiness or absorbing interest holds him motionless and deaf to his distant steps upon the gravel walk.

Which is it? He is within speaking distance now. It is a disagreeable thing to have to wake a man, but prowling round him like a pickpocket is not to be thought of. Deeds requiring courage are done every day. In the heat of battle, excitement and emulation drive one on; a solitary spectator even is gigantic as a lever to raise one's courage, or its substitute; but our young hero has none of them. He treads heavily, and says in a loud cheery voice, "A pleasant day, Mr. Scott."

Mr. Scott gives a slight start, straightens himself, then gets up, saying, "A most interesting article in the *Saturday*." No one likes to be caught napping. "Didn't hear you coming."

"The *Saturday* keeps up its reputation still, I suppose," rejoins the young man. "These society papers must make a difference, I should think, in its circulation, though."

Mr. Scott is now wide awake, and is wondering what has brought this young fellow here to-day, Sunday of all days. Deuced familiar. He does not like it, and makes no effort to keep the conversational ball rolling. His cigar-end is dead, he finds; then he *must* have been asleep. He tosses it over the rails into the park-meadow, and does not proceed as, if he had been unruffled, he would—to help himself to another, after offering his case to his visitor. Men who smoke fully understand the importance of such apparently trivial matters.

Fielding, feeling slightly disheartened, plunges at once into the reason of his coming. "I must apologize for intruding on your reading, sir"—he thinks "sir" sounds deferential and suitable to the circumstances—"but I have something of great importance to say, if you will kindly give me a little of your time."

"The devil you have!"—ejaculated inwardly. "I can't imagine what you can have of importance to say to me. But my time now is at your service. Shall we walk?"

They walk towards the house, Fielding feeling that he has tough work before him. "I am not a good hand at talking, and I know that even if I were I could not half do justice to your daughter's goodness and amiability, and all that. The truth of the matter is, sir, that I love your daughter" ("Pooh, pooh"—angrily, from paterfamilias), "and, what is more important still, she loves me; and it is by her permission that I have come here to-day to ask your consent to our engagement."

Mr. Scott stands still; he feels that he can't go on walking by the side of this daringly cool young fellow. He must be silenced, emphatically, and at once. In his most lofty and superior manner, one hand in his pocket among his stamina money, in a hard, cold tone he asks, "And what have you to offer my daughter?"

"That is the worst thing about it, sir. I have only a hundred a year besides my pay; but we go to India in October, and then it will be double; and we could live very well on that there; and your daughter would not miss her luxuries and things there."

"And do you think for one moment that I will consent to my daughter marrying on nothing? Yes, sir; on nothing. I call your beggarly pay and a hundred a year nothing." He is lashing himself with "nothing" out of the calm sternness of the first moments into a fury.

The young man bites his lips, and thinks, "He is a bear, but, he is *her* father, and I must be patient;" and he answers deprecatingly, "I know it is nothing compared to your wealth, but your daughter overlooks that, sir. *Our* happiness is in it. You won't surely forbid our engagement! I had hoped that going to India—the increased pay—might have induced you to consent to our marriage before I go."

At the word "marriage," Mr. Scott and apoplexy struggle for a moment. He cannot find words to express his sense of the enormous audacity of the proposal. His daughter, whom he has destined for young Fairbrace, to be thus coolly appropriated by an

empty-headed soldier-boy, with nothing to keep her on, and for him to speak of taking her off to India, away from them all, as if she were part of her bag and luggage in this way; it is monstrous. Monstrous! and the jackanape has a white flower in his coat, as if he were a bridegroom already.

"Mr. Fielding," he says, and his face is red, and his hand is trembling from the excitement he has mastered, "once for all, I must put a stop to any hopes you and my foolish child may have had. I will *never* consent to her marrying you or any other soldier. I object to your profession, sir; and I will have no nonsense in the way of an engagement. My child shall be absolutely free; and I shall consider that you are acting a most unworthy, mean part, if you attempt to keep any hold on her childish fancy. My daughter, I would have you to know, is entirely dependent on me. You may have heard, doubtless you have, that she is *rich*" ("Sir!"—indignantly). "Hear me out! She has not a penny unless I give it to her."

"Sir, I do not want a penny of your money, but I do want your daughter. I know as well as you do that I am presumptuous in a way. But surely, sir, if you find that time has not altered our affection, you will relent; not in the matter of money, but in giving your consent," he utters, moving as if he has a hearty contempt for it—and so he has. If she were poor, there would be no difficulties probably in their way.

"I shall never relent; and the affection that you

talk so surely of, the passing fancy of a foolish child, will not last six months. I tell you, I will have no engagement, no letter-writing between you. While my daughter is under my roof, she owes me obedience, and I will see that I have it. And you will give me your word, as a man of honour, not to attempt to see my daughter, or write to her, while she is under age. Legally, I am aware that I cannot control her actions after that."

"Oh, sir, that is very hard!" They walk on now. Mr. Scott having said his say, both are silent for some little way. The young man's thoughts are chaotic; he does not know what he can say. A father has rights, certainly; but do not the rights of natural affection over-ride them? Mr. Scott is the first to break the silence.

"How long has this nonsense been going on? Does my wife know anything of it?"

"Your daughter promised to be my wife on Thursday, at the Wades' tennis. Mrs. Scott does not know a word of it. We" (how tenderly he says that little 'we!') "thought you should be spoken to first."

"There you have shown the only glimmer of sense in the whole transaction, and I hope you will have the sense to see the entire hopelessness of the whole thing. It seems to me a queer way of showing all this love that you talk of for a girl, to wish to drag her down into poverty that she, delicate and delicately nurtured as she has been, knows nothing of, or she would not be willing to be dragged into it. You would show your real love for my daughter best,

young man, by forgetting her, and so helping her to forget this foolish fancy."

In a way, what Mr. Scott says has truth in it. The young man feels if this were a light thing, a mere passing fancy, her father would be right. Something seems to tell him that his speaking to him thus, instead of in storm and abuse, would have made him feel doubtful himself for them both if the fancy were light. But not for a moment has he a doubt for himself. Youth is ever confident. He knows that there is but this one woman in the whole world worth striving for. For her there will, he sees it as her father puts it, be the deprivation of nearly everything that has made her life hitherto smooth and pleasant. But he can give her the satisfaction of love, such as she has not dreamed of, and for always—for as long as they both shall live.

He ponders all this as they get nearer and nearer the house. They come into the full sight of it on to the far-reaching lawn. Then he speaks. "Mr. Scott, I have been thinking of all that you have said, but I cannot in any way renounce my hopes, and I must see your daughter now before I go away. If you consent to that, then I will engage on my word of honour not to write to her, or try to see her until she is of age. The conditions are very hard;" and he heaves a big sigh.

"They may seem hard to you, but it is my daughter's future welfare that is my duty, and that I must look to. In my presence you may see my daughter

for a few minutes, then she will clearly understand my objections and the state of the case."

Nothing more is said. Mr. Scott treads his lawn like a peacock with all its feathers spread. He feels that he is master now of the situation. He knows what calf-love is, he thinks. His daughter he believes to be completely malleable, and the fact of their not having enlisted his wife on their behalf favours, so he flatters himself, that they could not count on her alliance. He does not credit his wife and elder daughter with any astuteness, and has not the slightest conception that they know his peculiarities, and allow for them. How should he? Who ever sees himself as others see him? The idea flashes through his mind, "if it were my little girl now instead of Edith, she might be hard to manage." Then he makes out a case in his mind against his wife. Distinctly she has been to blame. She knows so well that he will not have a soldier for a son-in-law, and she ought to have discouraged that young boy's visits from the first.

The young boy is in a dreamy state. He can realize nothing sharply, yet he thinks, "I shall see her in a few minutes now for the last time. Still I am to see her. It might have been worse." And he looks round on this fair spot, her home, for the last time, this pleasant spot where they have passed so many happy hours, falling deeper and deeper into Love's net. It will be a constant vision, a mental photograph, that he will carry with him to the far East, with the thought of her pure love, instead of the embodiment of love he has coveted.

He follows Mr. Scott into the library, and there they wait, not exchanging any words, until Edith comes in answer to her father's summons. As the door timidly opens both have their eyes fixed on it. She comes in with a sweet troubled look on her face. She has watched their approach to the house from her window from behind a curtain ; and she fears, from her lover's look then, that it is ill for them. She looks from one to the other. Fielding strides across to her, and it is with difficulty that he can restrain himself from taking her to his arms, and there kissing away that troubled look, of tears only just kept back, that he sees for the first time in his sweet one's face. He only takes her hand. Mr. Scott has also drawn near to her, as if half guessing what was in his mind.

"Edith," he says very sternly, "I suppose I must not blame you for this folly. You are but a child yet, and I have consented to Mr. Fielding seeing you this once more, that you may hear in his presence what I have to say—once for all."

She tightens her grasp of her lover's hand, and her lips quiver like a tiny child's on the brink of crying. Her father looks away from her face, and addresses the rest of his harangue less calmly to a bust behind her.

"I can never, I say, sanction or allow anything so foolish as this engagement you have fallen into, without in the least knowing what it means, or what is before you."

"I do know," she says.

'I care a great deal too much for your happiness to allow you to be entangled like this before you know your own mind; and while you are under age under my roof, I never will allow an engagement to this man, or any other of his profession. Now you understand what I mean, Edith. I will not permit this absurd engagement to go on." He stops a minute to regain breath. His words had at the finish nearly tripped each other up, his anxiety to say what he has to say and have done with it is so great.

"But, father," she says, "I have engaged myself to Cecil. I have promised to marry him." Her voice, faltering at first, gets firmer as she says the last words.

Cecil can't help it, father or no father. He whispers, "My darling."

This will never do. This is not what he, Mr. Scott, intended. The misguided child is getting stronger in her intentions, instead of giving them up as he had decreed. He looks at her with surprise, and does not again let his glance leave her face.

"You don't seem to understand, Edith, that until you are twenty-one you are not free to make contracts of any kind. In the eyes of the law you are perfectly free now from any foolish promise you may have unadvisedly made. Now listen to me carefully. Mr. Fielding has engaged, has given me his word of honour, that he will not see you, or write to you one word"—he gives an inquiring look in her lover's face, "until you are of age. On these conditions I allow

him to see you this once, to say 'good-bye,' briefly here in my presence." He is anxious to get this disagreeable performance over. It will do no one any good, and he is quite savage that the quiet of his day should be upset like this.

Not so Fielding. That questioning look in her sweet eyes gives him the desire and the eloquence to say much, that she may have no shadow of doubt of him ever, even with an antagonistic third person as auditor. "Yes, Edith, your father has the power to disavow our engagement, and he has my promise not to see you, or write to you, until you are legally responsible for your promises. He thinks that we are young and do not know our own minds, as he has told you, and that we shall have no desire to notify the promise when that day comes. Which day is it in July?"

"The 28th," she answers. Her eyes are fixed on his, drinking in each word and look.

"Your father thinks that by the 28th of July, two years hence, we shall have forgotten each other, that this childish fancy, as he thinks it, will be over. But I know my mind, I hope"—said proudly—"by this, and I know that I shall *never* change." And the young fellow looks the incorporation of fixed will, manly determination, and a constraining proof against time, and the strongest temptations weak flesh is heir to.

"You will ask me again when I am twenty-one?"

"I will."

"Pooh, nonsense; this is going beyond the agree-

ment between us. I can't allow this," interposes the over-ridden parent, greatly annoyed by the turn this interview is taking.

"And my answer, darling, will be the same; never doubt me." She throws herself into her lover's arms, and sobs hysterically.

Then Mr. Scott's angry fussation is extreme. He is half frightened by the violence of her sobs and exceedingly helpless. "At the sight of this abandonment of grief, Edith, I am ashamed of you." A smelling-bottle suggests itself to his overturned mind. He gazes helplessly round his domain for one. In an ordinary moment he would have laughed at the idea of looking for a smelling-bottle in so unlikely a place. Then he goes gently up to his daughter. She has not taken the slightest notice of his admonition, but is still sobbing in her lover's arms, he trying his best to soothe her. "Edith, I wonder you are not ashamed of this foolish conduct! Mr. Fielding, I must request you, sir, to leave at once. I am ashamed of my daughter."

"Won't you send for her mother, sir? I can't leave her in this state."

He is dreadfully cut up to see his darling, usually so quiet and self-contained, in this distressing state. He could leave her with her mother, but he cannot go while she is sobbing and grieving like this, unless her mother is with her. He tries his best to calm her; but she can't help herself—she has got beyond her own control now.

Mr. Scott is at his wits' end. He can't ring the bell

and let a servant into this absurd scene ; he can't go himself and leave the two together, that would be an entire reversal of his programme. Absurd ! But he must send this young man for his wife ; he is not going to quit the scene himself, that is quite certain.

"Mrs. Scott is in her boudoir, Mr. Fielding, or in the drawing-room ; you know the way. Send her here, please. Edith will do very well in this chair ;" and he wheels up a huge, cavernous leather chair for him to deposit her on.

Fielding feels the exceeding painfulness of the scene for both, and kissing her fondly for the last time, he gently disengages her hand from his shoulder, which it had grasped, saying, "I must go for your mother, darling."

She is sobbing with less violence now. He places her on the seat, and goes to the door.

Mr. Scott walks towards it also, saying in an undertone, "You will send Mrs. Scott at once. Don't detain her with explanations"—meaningly—"and you will not come back."

"May I wait to hear how she is, sir?—not to see her again!"

"No, Mr. Fielding. She will not be herself until she has heard you drive away."

Cecil gives a last look towards the chair, but the back is towards him. He can see nothing of his sweet darling ; so, seeing somewhat the force of Mr. Scott's reasoning, and the necessity imposed on him anyhow of complying, he goes on his errand, the last in this house, he fears.

Mrs. Scott is not in the drawing-room, but he finds her writing letters, or making a pretence of doing so, in her boudoir. She turns round as she hears footsteps, smiles pleasantly at sight of the young man. He is a great favourite with her. She can see that he is much moved.

"Mrs. Scott," he says hurriedly, "will you go at once to the library?" She gets up directly. As he walks by her to the hall, he says, "I wish I might carry away the comfort of feeling that you will be our friend."

She has guessed everything, and has been having an exceedingly anxious hour to herself. She holds out her hand to him. "I can give no encouragement. But I like you, and am your friend if you prove yourself worthy."

"Thank you," he says, with genuine earnestness; and the young man raises her hand to his lips, kisses it reverently, and without another word takes himself off to the stables.

The blind has been lowered. He sees nothing as he passes or repasses the window; but he knows that she will have heard him go, that her thoughts are of him, and he vows a vow that, come what may, he will be true. But the vow seems superfluous now. How is it possible for him to forget the sweetest, tenderest darling in all England? And had not the groom been there, he would have kissed the double cherry that she gave him to seal his vow.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHEN an autocratic plutocrat decrees that he will start for the continent two days after he has given the order to start, his woman-kind must haste then to obey. Nothing holds where money drives. Mrs. Scott had, in the first instance, pleaded for a little delay at Folkestone, to have travelling dresses made and sent to them there; but at that suggestion Mr. Scott was very wrath, not that there was any novelty in that. "Women make everything an occasion for new dresses," he said, "and always like to put obstacles in the way of doing everything reasonable." Then he had gone into an altogether unnecessary tirade against the stupidity and obstinacy of women—unnecessary, since his wife was one of the least obstinate of her sex, and if she had been any cleverer, he would have hated her. He likes to believe that he holds all wisdom, power, sense, etc., in his own person, for the use of the two.

She had at once seen the wisdom of an early start from home to Paris, thence to Switzerland, or any other part that her husband might finally settle on. She

does not even make a suggestion as to where most of their summer months shall be spent, but sees something good in every place that he seems to fancy. She knows that if she makes any suggestion of pretty spots, that if they go to them, when anything is wrong —and many things are constantly wrong while Mr. Scott is taking a holiday—that all the blame will be thrown on her shoulders. Poor Mrs. Scott had a bad time on Sunday, after she had gone with Edith to her room, and, having soothed and left her there, had rejoined her husband in the library. He bullied her as he had not dared to bully his daughter. He worked up to explosive pitch, and the streams of fiery lava overflowed in several directions. Everything that had vexed him for a year or two was thrown up, smoke obscured and hardly recognizable, but helping to the general storminess and terror of the scene.

Mrs. Scott was really frightened, more frightened for him than herself, although she, poor cushioning woman! had only fresh come from hearing her daughter's troubles, and was feeling weak, upset, and almost hysterical. But she feared her husband would have a fit, if he could not better control his temper. She said nothing knowingly to vex him. But when people are in a thoroughly bad humour, everything adds fuel to the flames, and silence even does not please them. To be put into a machine and shaken violently, to overawe and frighten them, might bring them to a better frame of mind ; but I know of nothing else. Some bullies are too great to be out-bullied, the only other alternative. At last, for very want of force,

this domestic volcano calms a little; but, terrible to relate, he will eat no dinner with his family that night. But if this unprecedented and altogether unbelievable mark of his displeasure was intended for the chastisement of his eldest daughter, he punished himself needlessly; for Edith did not come down to dinner to be lacerated by the sight of his empty chair. She had cried herself into a headache, and was lying quite still and tired out, in her darkened room, past thinking actively of anything just then. The dinner that night has two skeletons for Mrs. Scott, notwithstanding Mary's diverting chatter of her schoolboys, and her pride of the first yellow water-lilies of the season that one boy got for her.

The decree has gone forth. On Wednesday, at noon, they leave Ware for Folkestone, *en route* to Paris; that is all that is certainly known.

Among Mr. Scott's notions is one that women have no clear sense of honour. He may hold that they have also no souls, but, being orthodox, he does not air it. He does not trust his daughter Edith at all; he thinks it more than probable that she will write to her lover, and he is not sure of his holding to his promise of silence, if tempted to break it by a letter from Edith. He is determined that this foolish fancy shall be strangled, and, with the windpipe of correspondence—the life of distant lovers—under his finger and thumb, he is sure that he will succeed. But no letter must pass from one to the other. He has forbidden his wife to mention his plans to Miss M'Arthur and the girls until Monday; at first he

said they were not to be told of the project until Tuesday. "In that case, dear, there will be a difficulty in getting off by Wednesday. Think of the packing to be done! and Miss M'Arthur may have things to buy. May I not tell her?"

That is conceded; but Edith and Mary are not to be told until Tuesday. The permission to tell Miss M'Arthur is really conceded to her *beaux yeux.* To see the handsome governess at dinner adds greatly to Mr. Scott's satisfaction, or, to be exact, it is rather her absence from table that would displease him. In Mr. Scott's existence, it is the absence of things that vexes him. He sums up, not his pleasures, which, with the exception of eating and his love for his youngest daughter, are of a negative kind, but his annoyances. He counts by them, and certainly, as he is always on the look-out for them, he misses none.

Miss M'Arthur was utterly upset by the announcement. It is impossible to depict the overwhelmingly disagreeable effect of the news on her. All her hope seemed gone; every atom of it was embarked in this absorbing passion, and to know that they were to be taken away at once, for an indefinite time, seemed to her as for ever. Mrs. Scott had confided in her the reason of their hurried start, and her belief that they would stay away until the regiment sailed for India. It gave her as miserable and helpless a feeling as a shipwrecked man would have who should see a vessel, in which his hope of life lay, steam away, while he, helpless, can lift no voice or hand to stay

it, can make no sign of his longing for deliverance from it.

She listens as Mrs. Scott unfolds the plans and their reason, in a half-stupid condition, feeling sympathy with these young things, and envy also. They love, and they will wait. She knows nothing, has learnt as yet nothing of doubt-love's shadow.

Just as Mary and she are leaving the house, Mrs. Scott says, "As you want to buy some things, Miss M'Arthur, you can leave Mary at Mr. Palk's, if you like, for once; but come home directly after the lesson."

Kind, thoughtful Mrs. Scott, you little know the wild fluttering hope that rises thereat in one breast, and the torrents of speculations and questions it evoked from your daughter, who filled the time of the drive with her acute insistence. To feel themselves out of anything, is peculiarly distressing to young girls.

Now chance, or circumstances outside her control—for she will do her best to help chance—will decide her future for her. Saturday's meeting had been pleasant, how pleasant she now fully recognizes. He had put off going to town till a later than his usual train, that he might have this farcical natural history lesson at the museum from Mary. He had let that putting off incidentally drop from him more than he had pointedly told it her; but that seemed to her to show the shyness of his character, which trait in him she hugged to her comforting. "It will keep him a little," she thinks, "from getting on with women."

In the tiny view she has had of him, he has seemed not at all to care for other women. All her spare moments he occupies; and she has theorized over him and made discoveries in him which would greatly surprise himself could he know them.

He would be back from town early this morning, and she little doubted by his manner and the tone of "*au revoir*" that he will come across them after music lesson; and now there is to be no "after" for them. No after; if you had told her that there would be no hereafter for her, she would have treated that announcement as of quite minor importance to this "after" that haunts her drive.

At length Mary is safely deposited, and she is free to do the best she can. Her powerlessness to shape her fate at this critical moment in her life strikes her unpleasantly, gives her a sense of rebellion at her littleness; her want of power to fulfil the desires and longing that are so big and potent on her fret her exceedingly. Surely all this passion, this love, cannot be without intention and purpose. The God who overrules all things, even to the fall of a sparrow, will surely take account of her now, when she is as helpless as a sparrow. She walks almost the entire length of High Street in a leisurely manner, without seeing any one she knows, glancing at the possible shops as she passes, and stopping to look into the stationer and newsvendor's windows. To see Munro there is quite an off-chance at this time of day. She gets to the post-office without having met or seen any one who looks in the least like an officer. The glimpse

of one would have been encouraging. One swallow does not make a summer, certainly; but when one of those migrating birds appear, swallows are on the wing. To buy English postage stamps as a preparation for leaving the country would not, if we did not know that a post-office is a central depôt, recommend Miss M'Arthur to us as endowed with sense common or uncommon. But its result points certainly to the possession of a clairvoyant sense in that young woman. Directly she pushes open the heavy swing door, she perceives a swallow. *Je reviendrai*, Cecil Fielding. They flash on each other vicarious glances of gladness. She has been with the rose; he is a swallow. They shake hands as friends meeting unexpectedly after a longish separation. He wonders how much she knows. He asks, in anything but the conventional way, how Mrs. and the Miss Scotts are; and listens eagerly to her reply of "Pretty well. Miss Scott had a bad headache yesterday, but is better this morning." That is not much to hear, when you are burning with a desire to hear every little detail of the object of your affections.

"They are none of them in this afternoon, I suppose?" he asks.

"Only Mary." She wonders if she may tell him, as a secret, that they are going away. For his sake, and her own poor chance of seeing his friend before she goes, she thinks she must. What a good-looking fellow he is! She notices that the young man at the counter seems waiting to do her behests. "I must get my stamps," she says, and goes forward. That

is soon over. Then she says to him, "I have something to tell you, if you are walking my way."

How eager the boy looks as he holds the heavy door back for her to pass out. "What is it?" he asks, almost before it closes.

"I ought not to tell you, and it is not much; but it may prevent *your* going away just now. We start for Paris on Wednesday, *en route* to nobody knows where."

"You know everything," he says.

"Yes; Mrs. Scott has told me. I suppose it is best for Miss Scott and you."

"I suppose so," he answers lugubriously. "Captain Munro advised me to try for leave. I suppose that will be best, even now. I can't settle in this place five minutes now, I'm sure."

"Captain Munro?" How strangely even the name of the man moves her, and how wise of him! she thinks. "He is back, then?"

"Yes; came back early this morning. I have just come from telling him all my woes." He tries to smile as he says "my woes." "I had hoped," he continues seriously, "that I should have heard sometimes of Edith from him; but now you are all going away, that goes with the rest. I have no engagement to Mr. Scott to keep myself from hearing as much as possible indirectly of his daughter; and she would like to have seen Munro sometimes, I am sure. In India there would have been none of that, I know But not to hear a word of her all at once, after meeting so constantly, is hard lines. But I am

bothering you, as I bother Munro, with my troubles. It is very good of you to listen, and I hope walking with you won't be reported, and get you into disrepute with that cantankerous old fellow. A precious hard man that. Of course he knows nothing of me, and soldiers have a love and ride-away reputation, I know; but he need not have said everything he had to say in such a deuced unpleasant manner."

"That is always his way when he is put out. I wish I could help you, but you know that I can't much. I can never write to you because of Mr. Scott; but I think I know how you might hear occasionally of us. I don't feel like a traitor in the camp in giving you this hint. The camp is divided, and I do not side with the chief."

Eagerly, so eagerly, "Oh, thanks, so much. How?"

"Miss Browne might help you a little. We all write to Agatha when we are away, and if you can make a friend of her, you will do well."

The co-operative proposal flashes across his thoughts, and he feels rather ashamed of it now. "Thanks, so much. I will cultivate Miss Browne; but—— *Must* you go in here?"

"Yes; I have much to do."

"I wish I might wait for you. A woman's wit is quicker any day than a man's; now neither Munro nor I thought of your plan."

"You had better not wait, I think. I have told you all I can. I don't think you need fear Edith's changing."

"But that dandified fellow who has been down here,

her father will push that; and will she be able to hold out against her father? There's the rub. And I am sure that fellow is gone over her. I saw how he watched her that day at the Wades', although he was not much near her. What a long time ago that seems now! I don't see how he can help getting spooney if he sees much of her; and then other men will see her, and for two years and five weeks she will not see me, or hear from me. I shall be like a dead fellow to her. Can she hold out? Tell me what you think, Miss M'Arthur."

"Why can she not be faithful if you can? Surely it is not women who are most changeable! You trust yourself, I suppose?"

"Certainly"—in a most emphatic tone.

"Then, as you trust yourself, trust her, unless you think her less trustworthy than yourself. Look upon doubt of her as disloyalty to her, and drive it out when it comes between you. You would not be disloyal to her, I know. Look upon doubt of her as disloyalty."

Then, before the second greatest centre of gossip in Ware, before the shop window of the chief milliner's, with its discreet lace curtain (best of peeping screen) that forms a background to the three bonnets and two hats, the young fellow, all aglow with enthusiasm, and gratitude aroused by this pretty comforting advice, seizes his friend's hand, and shakes it with an almost painful heartiness. He would like to have kissed her, so pleased is he with this turn she has given to his devouring doubts.

She smiles, and says, "If Miss Thorpe's young ladies do not know that that hand-shake is for two, they will be putting two and two together in quite a wrong direction. Good-bye, Mr. Fielding; you have my good wishes, you know; and—remember me, please, to Captain Munro, when you tell him that we are going away." And she has vanished quickly into the, to him, sacred precincts over which Miss Thorpe presides.

As he walks off, quite in his old manner, brisk and blatant, the thought intrudes itself persistently that this friend in need had faltered a little over her message of remembrance to Munro, and then he remembers things he had barely noticed at the time—how Munro had seemed to take a good bit of notice of her; and as one good turn deserves another, he strides off with the intention of finding Munro, if he can, to give him that message of remembrance before she shall have left the town.

He looks in at the club, for the chance of his being there; but he is not. Then he stands outside a minute or two, looking up and down the street; but he is nowhere to be seen. Then he hurries off, by way of the museum grounds, to look for him in his quarters. He is only just in time. He meets the object of his search just as he is starting for a walk that shall bring him round by South Street into Bull Street, and from thence to High Street, at what he had calculated would be Miss M'Arthur's time of getting there after the music lesson.

Fielding tells him what we already know. Munro's

feelings about that "brute of a Scott" are as strong as his own; not that he confides them to him. He only says, "Sharp work, getting off by Wednesday. I must call to-morrow. Where did you say you left Miss M'Arthur?" He looks very decidedly put out; looks ugly, in fact. When he has heard her whereabouts, he says, "I shall stroll down that way for the chance of a 'good-bye.' I don't suppose I shall see her to-morrow." Fielding would like to have gone back with him, but he knows that he would be *de trop*.

No two people have exactly the same way of setting about the accomplishment of an object. Cecil is surprised to see that Munro does not attempt to take the short cut into High Street, by which he came, which cut leads into it nearly opposite Miss Thorpe's establishment. Instead of following that path, Munro strikes across the museum grounds, which course will take him into North Street, and thence down that to the top of High Street. It is a mixture of reasons that leads him to this devious course. He wants time for reflection, and it is one of his maxims with women not to appear too eager. He is decidedly vexed that Miss M'Arthur is going away so abruptly, and for an indefinite time; most likely they will not be back to Otham until he is on his way to India. He anathematizes old Scott heavily. It's deucedly perplexing having to decide anything in such a confounded hurry, and in such a cold-blooded manner. One thing is certain, he is not at all prepared to say anything definite to Miss M'Arthur; but it is equally certain that he will not lose sight of her entirely, let what will happen.

She has, he finds, insinuated herself into his heart, and has taken a pretty large lodgment there, and her going away from the place does not please him. Certainly he expects to get pretty long leave soon, and he does not see why he should not go to Switzerland as well as anywhere else, if they go there. But there is no telling, old Scott may, and probably will, object to his neighbourhood now. Never mind, he must find a way to see her somehow, and to manage that he must know their movements; in fact, somehow they must write to each other; but how? He turns at this point of his reasoning into High Street. Good gracious! bearing down on him in full sail are the Queen and princess. To have to stop and set forth amiabilities to them, or even to endure their being set forth to him, in his present mood, is entirely out of the question. Without a moment's hesitation he turns abruptly into the nearest shop, without an idea of what he will ask for there, and without a clear notion of what shop it is until he is almost in it. It chances to be the jeweller's, the best of its kind in Ware. In it at the counter, all attention, stands an obsequious shopman, ready to do his bidding. But what is it?

"Show me some studs," he says mechanically. He does not in the least want studs, which fact is born in on him by the time a choice of studs is spread before him. He just looks at one or two sets, then casts about for an excuse not to buy. Then the thought comes to him that he will buy something—a keepsake for the child.

He turns over the studs a minute or two, but is really debating what the souvenir shall be. A ring? She could not wear it, he supposes, without exciting remarks. A locket? Yes; that can be kept out of sight. Yes, a locket will do. The choice does not take him long, but for all that he loiters, all the while keeping a sharp look-out on High Street. By going to the door he can see Miss Thorpe's shop. He stays in his retreat, looking at one thing and the other, until he sees her come out of the milliner's.

She glances up and down, he observes, as if looking for some one; then walks down the street into Bank Street. So far good; he guesses where her steps tend. He quits his observatory, and walks quickly down his side of the Street in that direction.

His tactics are well planned. He crosses into the lower part of Bank Street, and there comes upon her in that comparatively secluded spot. Before she sees him, he notes the intensely sad expression of her face. He carries about in him a large store of pity for women, which is often drawn upon, but though the increasing demand lessens the quality, it does not interfere with the quantity of the store. He is like the milkman who adds water when the demand is great. Just now it is the rich milk of human kindness that he bears. When she raises those somewhat heavy eyelids, thickly fringed with lashes, and sees before her the man who so fully occupied her thoughts, the change from sadness to joy in her face moves him greatly. He had meant

to be cautious, self-contained; but his wisdom has gone like the wind.

When he has taken her hand, and she is looking up into his face, her own is all aglow and dimpling with gladness. The light and passion in his in no way lags behind. She sees it, and is content.

"You have seen Mr. Fielding?" she asks.

"Yes; so vexed. You can spare me just a quarter of an hour, can't you?" She assents; he places himself by her side. "We will go down by the river; it is quiet there. I want to hear your plans."

"I have no plans," she answers sadly. "What plans can I make? Mr. Scott makes the plans for all. Do you think I would have gone away now from choice?" and she looks up at him with a little reproach in her gaze.

"No, I don't think so, dear, for one moment. When I said plans I meant about writing, you know, to let me hear where you are and what you are doing from time to time. I shall get long leave soon, I hope, and I shall go somewhere on the continent. Why should not that somewhere be near you, eh?" All this in a cooing tone, which gives a meaning beyond their dictionary meaning to the words.

Her answer is given to the meaning she finds there, when she says, flashing a happy look on him, "Oh, will you do that? How nice! But is writing possible? How can you write to me?"

"That is what we must arrange between us some-

how, don't you know? Mr. Scott seems to have an absurd prejudice against soldiers. You can write to me, you know; and you will, won't you, child?"

"Yes," she answers simply, and without a shadow of coquetry.

"And now, how can you get a letter from me? Have you no friends, no school friends, who would forward a letter to you?"

"I have only one friend besides the Scotts and Miss Browne. Am I not badly off?" and her mouth quivers slightly as the thought of her friendless condition presents itself. "She is an old governess who was very good to me when I first came, a poor little shrinking, shivering creature, to England. She is really the only friend I could ask anything of."

They are by the river now, under the walls of the old palace and the churchyard—a comparatively quiet spot, but there are workpeople belonging to a timber yard on the opposite bank of the river. This Captain Munro sees, and perforce contents himself with taking the hand near him, which he holds and presses warmly.

"Don't say that, dearie, any more. I want you to look upon me as a friend like that; I want you to tell me anything and everything about yourself. We don't know so very much about each other yet, perhaps, but writing will make us better acquainted; and, child, *always* remember this—that I cannot write to you as much as I should like. But you can write as often as you will to me; there is nothing to prevent that, is there?" Quite a long speech for

Captain Munro this, and delivered with unusual fluency and rapidity.

She does not answer for a second, and he repeats, "You will write to me often, won't you?"

"Yes; but——," and she stopped.

"What does that 'but' mean, dearie?" and he looks into her face with a devouring glance, that in itself shakes her hesitation.

"It means," she says, giving him back a look in which doubt dissolves into trust and perfect faith, and the gladness born of it—a look which ought to have awakened compunction in any but a thorough-paced roué's heart, as she says in silvery tones—"that I am foolish, and fancy that I may doubt you if I do not have letter for letter."

"Silly child!" he answers, in quite a superior, patronizing way. "Can't you see that I can't please myself about it as you can? Promise me"—they have got to the end of the path, where steps lead into the churchyard, and he stands still a moment, she very near him—"that you will not doubt me *ever*, even if you should not get letters when you look for them."

He is looking very solemn now, and shuts her hand in his; and she answers as solemnly, "I promise."

Then they turn and walk silently for a minute side by side, and the lapping of the water on the bank, and the noise of the sawing of timber that comes softened across the river, and the glad song of birds, make an accompaniment not inharmonious

to their respective thoughts—which, however, are diverse. He is wondering if he shall give the locket now, or wait till they meet again.

He is the first to speak. "You will write, then, from Paris, as soon as you know where you will go from there; and you will give me this lady's address? Stay, though; you had better give it me here, to make sure." And he draws from his pocket a letter and pencil. He writes down the address as she tells it to him. Then he resumes, "If this lady changes her residence, be sure you tell me, and you will put forwarding my letters right with her, won't you? And whenever you change your quarters, let her know. You understand that—all that?"

"Oh yes, I understand. I like receiving letters, and I shall like so much to have yours. There is no fear but I shall take all proper means to get them;" and she smiles contentedly.

Then they talk a little of the young lovers, until they near the end of the walk that leads to the High Street and the shops she has still to visit. By parting here they can get back separately to the town.

"I must do my shopping now, I am afraid," she says.

"Then I suppose," he replies, "I had better say good-bye here, as I could only be with you a minute or two longer."

There they stand, both reluctant to part, and he with something to say that will not get itself said.

"I must go now," she remarks again, and holds out her hand to him.

He can't make up his mind even now, and loitering

here in this way is unwise. Ah, well! they will meet soon; there is no hurry, and Ware is a great place for gossip, and this person is getting nearer. It must be good-bye. Above this flashes through his mind as he holds her hand, "We shall soon meet. Tell me everything when you write, remember, dear—everything about yourself."

Another hand-pressure, and they separate, not in any way dissatisfied. She is happy in that she will see him again shortly. He is likewise content. He has been untrammelled by any ties but those that set lightly, far too long for him to be in any hurry to take any engagement on himself. He intends to be married one of these days, when he has left the service, which time may be soon or not; it will depend on circumstances. Meanwhile, it is best to let things slide. He has seen a good deal of engagements hastily made and as quickly repented. He will keep clear of that, if possible. The last is always, if not the dearest love, quite the sincerest, and the one that somehow fits one best. Miss M'Arthur is just the height of his heart, and has got into it, and will always have a place there. If he were really rich, he would marry her to-morrow and leave the service. Of course she is not, as regards birth and that, what he had looked for in his wife, but she is a dear little thing, and so fond of him; and after all, a man can't have everything.

CHAPTER XXV.

WE are all more or less spoiled children. We all feel that for us all things ought to go well. Some of us have a sort of notion of the problem of life, with its innumerable failures and difficulties, for others; but we all, somehow, exempt ourselves from the "man is born to sorrow as the sparks fly upward" theory of life. And when sorrow comes, or when even a temporary barrier, a mere gorse hedge, is interposed between us and our desire, we kick against the pricks like a very spoiled infant, and make ourselves and all around us as uncomfortable as may be, because we cannot have our own way.

Mr. Scott is personally conducting his family to Paris, in this exceedingly anti-enjoyable frame of mind. His will has been crossed where he least looked for opposition, so he would say; but we who know him better than he knows himself, know that from nowhere in his family does he expect, or will he brook, the slightest opposition. His will is a law from which there can be no appeal, and no equity court presided over by his wife can smooth it or change it

in the smallest degree. A mere suggestion of any kind of modification of his decrees, acts as goadingly on him as the traditional red rag to the arena bull, and causes him to rush blindly on, but not in his case to his own destruction.

Mrs. Scott, at the outset of preparing, did not doubt but the maid was to be taken. She chanced to say something before her husband—her actual words to him at this period are as few as possible—that showed him that she took it for granted Martin was to go with them. He turned upon her thereat, in his surliest manner, saying, "You need not think I will be bothered with that woman again, or any other maid." This was at dinner. No answer was made, but an additional stillness fell on the party. Even Mary is beginning to be afraid of her father's mood. She has discovered the cause of it, and disapproves strongly of her father's conduct. She cannot tell him this, and for the first time in their life a cloud has come between them, which causes constraint. He feels this strongly, and it angers him more than ever against his foolish, obstinate eldest daughter and her absurd fancy. Edith presents an ill-used, reproachful appearance in these days, which is an intolerable, ever-present offence to him.

Shut up in a railway carriage for hours with her is exasperating. He can't help seeing her, and he, a ruler in his office and in his house, feels that there is a spirit of revolt growing up in the bosom of his belongings. It annoys him, and is disturbing to his self-complacent, masterful disposition. Add to this

a feeling that he is being hurried by the folly of women, he thus generalizes into a thoroughly distasteful position, one of dependency, in a way, on them. His knowledge of French, and command of intelligible words in it, are extremely limited. To have in the smallest particular to show his inferiority, is peculiarly galling to his bumptious nature. Constantly he knows that he must apply to some one—to Mary, chiefly, he decides. There will be the pretext that it will be good for her to air her French.

They arrive at Folkestone late for the *table d'hôte* dinner at the "Pavilion." Their bedrooms are small, and they have in these circumscribed spaces to make the necessary ablutions and toilette arrangement for dinner in double-quick time. Edith and unpunctuality are synonymous. She seems physically unable to hurry; she is also deficient in the faculty of apportioning time. Its flight is always a matter of surprise to her when Martin is at hand to remind her of it, and help her to catch at its skirts. She has never yet taken time by the forelock; the necessity, I think, does not greatly present itself to her. She bemoans Martin. Not having packed her bag, she does not know where to put her hand on anything. Her mother admonished her to hurry. Her father said they must be ready in ten minutes. But her hair must be rearranged, and every one knows that you can't hurry over that; if you attempt to do so, you only defeat your own intention of being quick. Put a pretty girl or woman before a glass to adorn herself, the flight of time is almost unheeded by her;

or, at all events, it is as nothing compared to the importance of a becoming arrangement of *coiffure.* Hair must be re-ringed when it has become straight; and what are ten minutes?

Edith has got about half-way through the arrangement of curls, when a loud, impatient knock on her door sounds unwelcome to her ear. "Who is it?" she asks. She knows, of course, but that suggests itself in the place of "Come in."

It is her father, perambulating the corridor to get together his party. "We are just going down; aren't you ready?" does not greatly disturb her. There is no train to catch, and no one need wait for every one at hotels; so she says quite coolly, "I will come down as soon as I am ready; no one need wait for me."

This from his daughter vexes him greatly and much. Irate, he posts off to his wife's room, to pour out there the vials of his indignation at this cool effrontery and want of punctuality of her eldest daughter. She, poor woman, in her effort to screen Edith, vexes him still more by saying, "You see, she has been used to Martin, and she misses her."

"That is just like you; you excuse her in everything, and throw the blame on me because I wouldn't be hampered by that fool of a woman, who has no more sense than a cow. You must do it to annoy me, I think." And he twists his undignified, plump little self impatiently away from her.

"My dear, remonstrated his wife," "how can you say such a dreadful thing? It is tiresome Edith

should be late; but you go down with Miss M'Arthur and Mary, and I will wait for her. I am sure she can't be long. We shall be down by the time you have chosen the wine." Choosing the wine is an important matter with Mr. Scott.

But no, that method of smoothing affairs, or indeed any pacificatory method, would be distasteful to him. It almost seems as if he wishes to pile up his grievances against his daughter until she is smothered by them, so that he does not see that she is his daughter. He will not let his wife go to hurry her, and he will not go down until they are all ready. He is obstinately decided on that point. Mary and Miss M'Arthur come to the rendezvous, Mrs. Scott's room; then he betakes himself to the dressing-room. He is determined to be as uncomfortable as possible in the sight of every one. Poor Mrs. Scott, who had sent Miss M'Arthur, as soon as she appeared, to hurry the culprit, very meekly suggests the drawing or reading room for him and Mary. But no; Edith shall be made to see the enormity of her misdemeanour in not being ready, as he enjoined, in ten minutes, which she would not see, he tells himself, if they were filling the waiting-time naturally. Mrs. Scott sits down helplessly to wait. Mary chats away blithely. Her sister's peccadillos do not disturb her serenity, and the prospect of foreign travel excites her pleasantly. Five minutes drag themselves out to seem like ten. Mr. Scott may be heard pacing to and fro, to and fro, the circumscribed limits of his room, like a caged tiger. Then Miss M'Arthur comes back to say that Edith

is all but ready—will overtake them before they get to the dining-room. The footsteps have stopped that this message may be audible ; then they go on again, more impatient still.

At length Edith appears, and the women troop down together. "We are ready, dear," Mrs. Scott had said; but her husband vouchsafed no reply. He feels explosive, and fears the sight of the culprit may cause him to go off. He does not wish to see any of them, and he desires to punish indiscriminately, and he wants his dinner. Conflicting desires these. After a few minutes' cogitation, he takes his hat downstairs with him. At the foot of the staircase he hesitates a second as to which way he shall turn. Then the disagreeable expression on his face deepens into very disagreeable, and he puts his hat on his head in a manner that fixes that and his determination together, and then he leaves the hotel.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Scott is going through a form of dinner with an anxiety and perplexity that banish appetite. Mrs. Scott has the wine-card handed to her. She looks at it, but cannot say what wines they will have until her husband comes. Every time the door opens she looks toward it. The girls and Miss M'Arthur look at the people at the principal table, and remark on them to one another.

"Fossils mostly," says Mary. Any one over thirty looks fossilish to this very young girl.

"I don't agree with you," her sister replies. "Look, those are quite young people—a bride and bridegroom, I should say." She looks at Miss M'Arthur as she

makes that final remark. She likes to give Mary a quiet snub, to counteract the spoiling she gets from her father and mother.

They discuss some of the other people, and do not seem in the least appalled by the vacant chair.

But Mrs. Scott cannot talk; she enjoys nothing. What shall she do? Go and look for her husband, or send Mary? He will not like missing his dinner. How tiresome it is!

"Mother," says Mary, "I want something to drink. Can't you order some claret without father? he can have what he likes when he comes, you know. He would not like us to drink strange water, I am sure."

"No; don't drink the water," her mother answers. "Just go to your father's room—you know the number—and see why he does not come down."

"It is so unfortunate," says gentle Mrs. Scott, not wishing to reprove her daughter, yet feeling that she ought to say something to Edith, to prevent the recurrence of this uncomfortable state of things. "Nothing vexes your father more than to be kept waiting, especially at dinner-time. I hope, Edie dear, that you will not keep him waiting again; it upsets him so."

"Then he should not let such little things upset him," says Edith, with that lofty scorn of dinner and the indulgence of a gross material appetite, felt by young girls absorbed in the, to them, more ethereal desires of love and sentiment.

"But, dear, it is not a little thing to your father, and he thinks he has had much to vex him lately; and

you know he is never genial when he is going to any country where they don't speak English. I am sure, when we were at Hamburg last year—and we were there for him then—he was always wishing himself at home, and I am sure I wished heartily that we were at home times out of number."

"Poor mother! But I can't see that he has anything worth speaking of to vex him. Now, I have something to feel vexed, and sad about surely, if any one has;" and she sighs deeply. "Who wanted to start off like this? Mary is the only one who cares to go, and he is generally very ready to please her. I would a thousand times rather be at Oaklands than in the loveliest spot in the whole world. You must know that, mother, I have a great deal to try me and make me miserable; but what has he? If he had only been good to us"—Cecil and herself—"he might have been enjoying his dinner at home. I can't think that things should go smoothly with him just now."

This was a long speech for Edith, and in a way convincing to her mother, who quite agreed with her about Cecil; but Mrs. Scott loves peace. When her husband is in a bad temper or vexed with Edith, she is miserable. Besides which, she well knows his disposition; she knows that every discomfort of this trip will be an additional objection to the match her daughter has so much at heart. But she is not altogether good at explanations, and Edith is not very quick of perception. She is, however, going to try her best to be convincing, when an interruption occurs.

The waiter comes to change plates, and he hovers over them after this until the door again opens, and Mary appears alone. She looks excited, and walks hurriedly up the room.

"He is not upstairs," she says; "and I looked to see if his hat was there, and it is not, so he must have gone out. What a pity it is you were so late!" she says in an undertone to her sister, as she seats herself by her. "He must be awfully vexed not to come to dinner."

Edith does not deign to reply to her, but, addressing her mother, says, "He has gone for a walk. We may as well go on with dinner; it looks so stupid to be waiting like this."

Then Mary takes up the wine-card and points out what she thinks they might have; and Mrs. Scott, too much worried to care what she eats or drinks, orders it mechanically. Silence takes them all; even Mary is anxious, and, for a wonder, quiet. Gradually the people at the long table disperse, and they are the only creatures in the big room. There is no hum of conversation, and they more distinctly hear the waves breaking on the sea-shore. The wind, too, sounds higher. It has a shrill, whistling sound, as of anger and a desire to lash the waves into fury—sounds most unwelcome to the ears of the would-be voyagers of to-morrow.

At length dinner is ended. It is nine o'clock; too soon to go to their rooms. "Such cold, small rooms," Edith says; "they make one shiver, even in this weather, to look at them."

"We must put up with them for one night. If we had telegraphed, we should have had better rooms. We must do that in future."

They go into the drawing-room, which has a fair sprinkling of people—birds of passage—in it. They take up some newspapers and read, or pretend to read, a little. Some of the occupants of the room are chinning a little and making talk; but it is dreary work with the other unsympathetic folks looking on. One model woman is busily occupied knitting a sock. The probable bride and bridegroom declare themselves as such by their manner. They are seated at a table, writing letters. They look over each other's letter occasionally with a delighted air of new and strange proprietorship. When the letters are finished, they pass them to each other to read, and they exchange also expressive glances. Miss M'Arthur and Edith note this, and telegraph their knowledge by a look; then they muse. Mary is quite absorbed in a thrilling account of a desperate burglary, after the manner of the young when they take up a newspaper. To Mrs. Scott the time drags very heavily. Like most sympathetic, affectionate souls, she always imagines the worst when her fears and anxiety are aroused, and she is imagining all sorts of dreadful things as happening to her husband. She hates cliffs. It is dark; he may have gone over. An old gentleman creates a little diversion by his entrance. He is the brother or husband of the industrious one. He has a loud voice, or she is slightly deaf. He goes up to her, and, in a cheery tone that is heard all over the room, proclaims his satisfaction with himself.

"We are going to have a gale," he says. "If it is rough to-morrow, as I hope it may be, there is some talk of trying Shield's method of pouring oil on the water at the entrance of the harbour. Queer notion that! Wonder where that metaphor of 'like oil on the troubled waters' comes from, eh? D'ye know?"

"From the Scriptures," says the industrious one, severely, not stopping the click of her needle for one second.

"Really! Very strange!" And then he enters on a long discursive account of pumping machines and other arrangements in readiness for the trial, until he becomes somewhat of a nuisance. The people who had looked up and appeared to be interested, soon look bored as his prolix explanations go on, interspersed with forecasts of rough weather, which at last seem to affect the bride and bridegroom, who exchange remarks. Then there is a whispered consultation, after which they proceed to add postscripts to their letters.

At a quarter to ten Mrs. Scott looks at her watch, and suggests going to bed.

"What, without tea or coffee?" Mary says, in an astonished way. She had calculated on all grown-up privileges, and feels defrauded.

"I did not think of it," her mother answers wearily; "and now it is too late for you. It would keep you awake half the night; you are not used to it." Mary makes a little grimace of doubt and discontent. "I am sorry I forgot to order tea. Miss M'Arthur, would

you like some now? It is not too late, perhaps, for you. What do you say, Edith?"

Both Edith and Miss M'Arthur decline it. Then, that being decided so, they retire to seek their rooms. Mary, the widest awake of all, is seized with a desire to relate the circumstances of the burglary she has read, but no one encourages it. Edith says, "Pray don't tell horrid tales; the wind is melancholy enough. I don't know what you would have been if you had had tea, as you wanted just now."

Her mother even desires to get rid of her. So at last, feeling somewhat ill-treated, she shuts herself in her own room, where she may be heard making a great and unnecessary commotion with her trunk, which was not to be opened. It is new, and the first one of her very own, with her own initials on, that she has had, and the pride of possessing it is overwhelming. She had, by her own desire, packed it entirely without help, and now her brimming-over energy impels her to unfasten the straps and look in it for something she chooses to fancy indispensable.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AFTER a night spent in strange, uncomfortable beds, sleep fitfully coming and going in unison with the wind of this tempestuous night, our travellers meet in the morning. "Be *quite* dressed by nine o'clock," had been Mrs. Scott's last and most emphatic injunction over-night; and all are ready, thanks to Miss M'Arthur's helpful supervision.

Between her and Edith the freemasonry of love secrets has established a strong bond of union. Edith's great resource in these days is to talk of her Cecil to her late governess. Even the fondest of mothers, at this stage of a young girl's life, is of little comfort as a love-confidence receptacle. The *confidante* must be a woman with like feelings, or the capacity for them. The mother of a grown-up family has not usually retained the romantic illusion of youth.

Sullen and aggrieved-looking, Mr. Scott meets the family eyes. He is seated at the same round table at which they dined the previous night, in the seat

that was then vacant. It is back to the people in the room. He is poring over a "Bradshaw," and just lifts his head to return the morning salutations, then goes on with his researches until breakfast is brought.

He is pink about the eyes, and has altogether a dissipated look. Naturally, if a man dines alone who requires for the proper discussion of his dinner two or three kinds of wine, he will not have forgotten his potations by the next morning. Martyr as he looks, and would have his family believe him to be, he had not spent an altogether uncomfortable evening. While his poor wife had shivered at every fresh gust of wind, picturing him vexed and exposed to its fury, he had been driven to the West Cliff Hotel, and there, comfortably housed, had enjoyed a very good dinner, and the consciousness of having fitly punished his offending family. He hopes this will be a lesson in crossing him that they will all take to heart. When he returns late to the Pavilion and his anxious wife, he shelters his secret by a fit of dumbness. That he does not break that night. His wife, wise in her generation, remarks only on the weather the next morning—wonders if it will be smooth enough for them to cross that day. To that he snarls that of course crossing is out of the question, and implies by his manner that it is so through some fault of hers.

At breakfast, Mary's efforts and the superior quality of the viands cause him presently to unbend slightly, and he vouchsafes the information that he had been looking at "Bradshaw" to see if he could not utilize this waste day by going to town. Mary says, "Don't

go to-day. We want you to take us on the pier to see the oil act."

No one else makes a remark, and he will not say whether he will go or stay. This state of indecision lasts throughout the morning, and affects all unpleasantly. No one can settle to anything while he is so undecided.

Edith and Maggie are both wishing to write to Agatha; to them both she is an interesting link to their loves. Through her they hope to hear of them. She spent the greater part of their last day at Oaklands, and was posted fully in the Cecil and Edith affair. She has promised faithfully to write often and circumstantially of all that takes place in Otham and Ware.

Cut adrift suddenly, as Edith feels herself to be, from the mooring in Cecil's heart, that she had pictured as her resting-place, she hungers for news of him. The sight of his name in print or in a letter will have a dumb eloquence to her. She even begins her desultory newspaper reading now with "Naval and Military Intelligence," and the *Gazette* for the off-chance of seeing the regiment only in print. Maggie is very little, if any, wiser; a strong head when overcome is no wiser than a weak one for the time being, and she also glances at the same.

If Mr. Scott stays in Folkestone to-day, writing to Agatha will be out of the question; when he is in the bosom of his family, he expects that his family will be at his disposal. He would view with suspicion the writing of a letter in his presence so soon after

starting, and he would equally suspect and dislike either of his women-kind closeting herself. Mary is the only member of his family who desires his presence; she wishes greatly to go on the pier. The notion of being blown about does not appal her as it does the others, who feel qualms of consternation at hearing the mandate issue that they are to dress, and he will take them on the pier before he goes to town.

"A blow in the wind!" The very words seem invigorating to some people. They picture the delight of it, the battling with the elements, which is to some nostrils as the breath of life. The glowing and the tingling, the excitement and the overcoming. But to others "a blow in the wind" means only discomfort, discomposure, and all dismal things. Picture, then, the mood in which Edith and Maggie, who hate wind, array themselves for this coming struggle. The open space between the hotel and the harbour station is a very battle-ground for the wind; it seems to meet there from every quarter. Mr. Scott's whole attention is claimed by his hat; and indeed, each one is fully occupied with her head-gear and the untwisting of skirts. Sometimes the wind comes from one side, and takes the light weights along almost faster than they can go; sometimes it runs them along in another direction, helter-skelter, whether they will or no. They present a most ludicrous spectacle, but no one out in the wind has the inclination to laugh at another. The least discomposed of the party is the one with the smallest sense of humour—Mr. Scott, his rotund

little figure, with head bent and hat held on, deviates but slightly from the direct course to the station.

Once within the partial shelter of its walls, the girls break into laughter at their deplorable appearance, and the remembrance of the sport they have been to the wind. Edith's gauze veil has got off her hat under her chin, and they have to retire to the waiting-room to readjust it. When they come out on to the platform, Mrs. Scott quite innocently remarks to her husband, "The train you thought of going by starts from here, does it not?"

He looks upon that remark as an intimation that they would rather he went to town to-day, and from that moment he drops completely his half-formed intention of going. But he does not tell it; he merely says in a short way, "Yes; they all do."

"This is comparatively nice," says Edith to Miss M'Arthur. "But how dreadful it must be on the pier!"

Before Miss M'Arthur has time to answer, Mr. Scott, without appearing to have heard her remark, says, "Come, we shall all catch cold in this draughty place. We will go to see what they are doing with the oil." Thereupon he goes on to the pier, and the women are constrained to follow him.

They keep as long as they can in the shelter of the custom-house; then they brave a wetting to see three casks at the pier end, with tubes inserted, connected with small forcing-pumps. In answer to inquiries as to when the trial is to be made, they learn that it will not come off until to-morrow; the gale has sprung up so suddenly that there has been no time

to give notice to, and get together, the distinguished party who are to inspect the experiments. A good part of the morning is dawdled away at the station, when they get back to it. A few men stroll in and buy newspapers, and walk about aimlessly. At length the hotel is regained after another running-the-gauntlet of rude Boreas and his crew from other points of the compass.

After lunch the wind abates a little, and again they are all taken over the same ground as they traversed before. They spend more time than they did in the morning, seeing trains shunted. They are taken on the pier, where they try to shelter themselves behind railway carriages and any cover they can find. This second expedition is undertaken in search of appetite for dinner. No one murmurs audibly, but inwardly there is much mutinous discontent. High Street would have been more sheltered, and a sight of such shops as it can boast more to their taste than the view of the raging sea, exposed as they are to a second wetting from it. One wetting occasionally is a not altogether disagreeable novelty, but two!

One good result of the plethora of time on their hands is that Edith's curls get early attention, and no one is guilty of being late for dinner. They are placed in a row at the long table, where most of the people of the night before, prisoners like themselves, are seated. All goes well for some time with Mr. Scott; but, unfortunately, Edith is seated next a stranger, a good-looking, middle-aged man. They had passed each other in the morning on the pier,

just as a wave came over and sprinkled them all. The stranger recognizes Edith as one of the party he saw, and remarks that he hopes they did not get very wet, and then they fall naturally into conversation. He looks and seems unexceptionable, and she sees no harm in talking to him. Indeed, they are both of them quite glad to exchange a few words with some one fresh, to break the monotony of what has been a tedious day—a lost day of waiting, with no particular occupation or amusement.

There is a simplicity and grace about Edith that is extremely fascinating, and makes her easy to get on with. By the time dinner is half-way through, she and her companion are skimming fluently over all kinds of current topics. The first cravings of the mighty appetite he had spent the afternoon in acquiring being greatly appeased, Mr. Scott has leisure to notice that Edith is talking to a stranger, a man—in his eyes a great misdemeanour, to be stopped immediately. He tells his wife to tell Edith not to talk to the man. Hateful commission for poor Mrs. Scott, who does not know how it can be done without the stranger hearing and knowing. Besides, they are talking, and she cannot get a chance yet. This angers her husband, who would have had no delicacy himself about breaking in on the conversation, and cannot understand the sentiment. His wife explains that she will tell Edie as soon as possible, then, much troubled, gropes under the table for her daughter's foot, which she touches to warn her that something is wrong.

As soon as Edith can make an end of their topic of conversation, she turns inquiringly to her mother, who says in a very low voice, "You are not to talk but to me, your father says."

Edith's eyes sparkled ominously with the indignation that this tyrannical order gives her. For one little moment she is strongly tempted to be headstrong and disobey. Her mother divines her feelings, and helps her back to a less defiant mood by talking to her incessantly. Presently, among a flood of nothings that she utters, she alighted on a question that interests her daughter—she asks what address she gave Agatha in Paris?

"*Poste restante*, I suppose?" she adds.

"No; we were so decidedly told we were going to Hotel Continental, I gave her that address, naturally as being quicker and less trouble."

"Yes, I know; but I can't persuade your father to telegraph for rooms, and we may not get in. He says it is an unnecessary expense; he who never seems to study that in a general way. It will be tiresome if her letter goes there; a bother to get it, I expect—a great bother. It will be vexatious. Try again to persuade him to telegraph. Everything seems going wrong already," she says wearily.

"To think that I may not exchange a few words with any one but ourselves! Am I never to speak to any one?"

"Hush, dear; don't talk about it now."

"What can I talk about? I suppose I must go on saying something or the other to you, and that

engrosses one just now. One can't make talk easily to one's mother, especially after having spoken to almost no one else for two days. We have talked the wind down, I believe; we have talked so much about it to-day as that poor Mrs. Carlyle used to write noises down, for her cantankerous husband."

"Then, we have done a good thing; we don't want to wait here. If we had known about this extra day, we might have had our dresses ready to take with us. I am afraid their being sent on will be a perplexing business, and vex your father."

And so they talk. Once during dinner the stranger makes a remark to Edith, which she answers monosyllabically and constrainedly, her eyes cast down, her colour heightening painfully as she speaks.

This he notices. For a minute he wonders if he has said anything to offend, thinks over what he has said, and feels in that reassured. However, one thing is certain; for some reason or caprice his fair neighbour does not wish him to talk any more to her. Well, so be it. Women are enigmas. But this girl seemed so naïve and fresh, he can't help wondering at the sudden change. He is a little piqued, too; he who prides himself on his exclusiveness, to be repulsed in this way, it isn't flattering to his self-love. Women hitherto have liked to be spoken to by him, when he has taken the trouble to speak to them. It isn't pleasant to be snubbed. So, for the rest of dinner, he guards strict silence.

When dismissed to their rooms for the night—which dismissal is at an early hour, on the pretext

of rising early for the crossing the next day, which they all know perfectly well to be a pretext, as the boat does not leave till twelve o'clock—Edith feels that they are being sent off like this for fear her stranger shall presently invade the drawing-room and breathe the same atmosphere with themselves. "That is all the harm he could do us. He is a gentleman," she said indignantly, "and must feel the cut I had to give him keenly. I am sure he would not wish to come near us after that; and if he had to be in the same room with us, he would take good care not even to look our way." So Edith unbosomed her indignation to Miss M'Arthur, into whose room she had gone to ask if she had a postage-stamp. She has written a few lines to Agatha, to give *poste restante* address for Paris.

"I am afraid she won't get it in time," says her confidant, looking in her purse for a stamp. She holds out two to Edie, who says, "I only want one, thanks!"

"You had better take the other; it ought to be a lucky stamp. When I went to get them, I met somebody, don't you know?"

"Dear Cecil;" and she puts the stamps to her lips, not for the purpose of wetting the gum. "How hard my father is, to think that I shall not see him again for two years. If only I had money, I would go to India with him." ("So would I," thinks Maggie, substituting her own 'him'). "I don't want it exactly for myself," says the young girl loftily. Money seems a small matter to her who has always had so much that she does not know its value and the discomforts

the want of it entails. "I could be happy without it with Cecil; but, poor boy, he has only enough for himself. I could not hint at going to him empty-handed. If I had only a hundred a year of my own, I would write to him. But what is the use of talking like that? I haven't it, and can do nothing but save a little, a very little money. It is Cecil it all rests with now, and he told you he was going to economize. Tell me over again, dear, just what he said to you that last day, only Monday, but it seems like an age."

Then Maggie, such interpolations as "dear fellow," "dear boy," frequently occurring, tells, for at least the fourth time, the story of the meeting at the post-office, the walk, with what he said, and she said, and how he looked, the story that Edie has learnt so well that once when Maggie failed of a word or two of the narrative, she at once supplied them.

How to get her letter posted to-night is the next consideration. Her father, she thinks, is in the smoking-room, and she dares not go down with it. "What shall I do?" she asks.

"Ring for the chambermaid," suggests Maggie, "when you get to your room."

They stand a minute by the open door for the chance of seeing one pass. They hear footsteps advancing. There is a bend in the corridor, and they cannot yet see who it is. "It may be my father," says Edith, putting her hand tremblingly on her companion's arm, and slipping her letter into her pocket as the idea that it may be her father suddenly occurs to her.

"Good night," says her friend ostentatiously, as she perceives a stranger advancing. "There won't be any wind to keep you awake to-night." They both feel rather foolish discovered looking out this way, Edith especially so, as she recognizes that it is her neighbour at dinner who is passing. He just glances at them, lifts his hat with an expressionless face, as if he had not seen her before, and passes on.

"I am afraid this doesn't look well," said Miss M'Arthur. "We shall learn in time that we are not at home, and that when we stop in public-houses we must not fancy that we are at home."

CHAPTER XXVII.

NO wind, but the heavings of a spent storm cause the crossing the next day to be one of very mixed pleasure. At starting there was novelty, exhilarating air, a fair sky, and a full compliment of fellow-travellers to take one's attention, and all seemed going well. Mr. Scott, with his youngest daughter, trod the deck proudly and steadily. He had Mary on his arm tightly, to steady her, he said; but the advantages of support were equal, I should say. He spoke knowingly to the sailors while plying them with questions, and for a short space appeared to have found a little enjoyment in life. Edith is not directly before him to keep open disagreeable memories. He has left her seated with his wife and Miss M'Arthur, well in the centre of the boat, sheltered by the cabins and facing the breeze. He considers the securing of that spot directly he got on board, a master stroke of astuteness, and he plumes himself on it. He does not care particularly for that spot himself, he likes a more open space, and he and his favourite can settle themselves where they will presently. Now they are

leaning over the ship's side, looking at the shore, which seems to be gradually leaving them. They are listening to the man with the thin companion, who was so well posted in the arrangements for oiling the water on the evening that they arrived at the Pavilion. Now he is greater than ever, for he thinks he has an abuse to unmask. He considers that the experiments ought to have been made yesterday; that it was flunkeyism (he is attached to that word and uses it with peculiar emphasis frequently) on the part of the authorities (he does not venture on names) that prevented the trial being made. "I know for a fact," says he, "that everything was in readiness, and Shields, son of the inventor, on the spot. Then why didn't they begin?" He works himself up and pounds away at the cold-looking woman who belongs to him, with a very evident relish. He is of the stuff demagogues are made of. He feels defrauded, because he has, as he thinks, been done out of the sight that other more important people may be got together to see it. That he makes into a grievance, and instead of seeing reason in it, he distorts the occurrence into a job, flunkeyism, and what not.

Mary is listening with much amusement to all this bubbling up about nothing, this storm in a teacup, when her father says, "Come away!" impatiently, and in an entirely different tone to that he has used since they have been on the boat. He was impatient all the morning before starting, but that was to be expected in him, and they had tried not to mind it. But what has changed him now all at once?

"Do stay a little longer. I do like listening to this funny little man, who looks like a round-faced pig on his hind leg," she whispers.

"We have had enough of him," he answers. "I want to look after your mother." Regretfully Mary goes with him. She thinks it is great nonsense. They are all right.

As they make their way to the others, she becomes convinced that something has put her father out of temper, but she cannot guess what. She had heard a few words from Edith to her mother about some vexation put on her the night before, and by dint of much questioning one and another she had found out pretty well all there was to know; but the man Edith was forbidden to speak to she did not know. Being exceedingly quick in adding two and two together, very soon after being seated by her father in a line with the others, he mounting guard over them, she arrives at the conclusion that the obnoxious man must have crossed her father's vision, and caused this disagreeable curtailment of her new experiences. "How stupid of everybody!" she thinks. "What did Edie want to talk for? she has not usually so much to say. And how absurd of father to take any notice of it! I am sure I shan't be able to keep from talking to any one nice who speaks to me. New people are such fun."

No one talks much. They have a store of newspapers, besides some books to read. But Mary can't fix her attention. She longs to be here, there, and everywhere. She is sure she shall feel ill if she isn't

amused. She is beginning to notice the motion of the boat with sensations of dislike. She wishes some one would talk to her to take her attention from it; but no, they are all absorbed apparently in their reading. Why can't she read and forget all about this recurring down motion? She tries, but unsuccessfully. "This will never do. Biscuits are good things to eat. I will have a biscuit."

"Dear," she says to her father, "I want a biscuit. May I go with you to get one?"

He thinks that he should not object to a B. and S., and perhaps a biscuit. There is a good bit of motion as they get towards mid-channel. His annoyance, too, at that man being a fellow-traveller has somewhat abated. This being so, he rises with alacrity, and offers his arm to Mary. He is at heart glad of an excuse to get refreshment. He does not feel altogether sure of himself; and to a man who commenced treading the deck as if he were at least a member of the R.Y.C., there would be something ignominious in being the first to retire, or indeed a want of dignity in retiring at all.

Directly they have gone, Edith says to her mother, "Of course you know why he came to sit over us?"

"No, dear," her mother says innocently. "Why?"

"He came to mount guard because that man who sat by me last night chances to be on the boat to-day. What can he take me for, mother?" Her fair young face flushes, and tears come into her eyes. "Here, only on Sunday, he saw how much I loved Cecil; he heard what I said to him; and now not a week

passed, and he is afraid about another man. It is wicked, it is monstrous, because I love Cecil and was not ashamed even before him of my love for him, that he should think me capable of looking at another man, without the thought of Cecil being always with me, always first in my mind. Must I go through, to him, my creed every morning, my belief to Cecil, my love for him, and my unalterable determination to await his coming, with what patience I can? Must I vex him in that way to escape this disgraceful spying—this treating his daughter as if she were——"

"Hush, my darling," interrupts her mother, taking her daughter's hand in hers. "I can understand how you feel, and indeed, dearie, you misunderstand your father—you misunderstand each other. Your father has exaggerated notions, I admit. He is so suspicious of strangers, and he thinks you are young and don't know the ways of the world; that is all, dear. I told your father this morning, I thought the best plan would be for him to say before us all that he does not wish us to talk to strangers. Mary, I said, was far more likely than any of us to transgress in that way, and it was only fair to all of us to be told. Here is Miss M'Arthur"—and she turns her face with a would-be cheerful look on the governess—"as likely as any of us to transgress, if any one invite her on her favourite books. I mention that, not to bring you into disrepute, you know, but just for everybody's sake. So I dare say, some time in the train, something will be said, and no one must feel

hurt at it. We shall all be in the same boat when he has spoken. So you see, Edie dear, you have mistaken your father quite about this."

"I do know him, dear," says Edie, looking, however, less like tears; "for why should he have come here directly he saw that man? He should have trusted me, after he had said I was not to speak to him."

Then the subject dropped, and the three betook themselves again to their books. Mary succeeded in wheedling her father into keeping away for a little while from their party. He was the more inclined to do this, as he saw the stranger seated at a distant part of the boat, entirely occupied with a magazine. He raised his eyes from it, however, when they had all but passed. This quiet, unpretentious man is a distinguished officer in her Majesty's service, a general. If only Mr. Scott had known it, what a revolution it would have caused in his views respecting him! But how could Mr. Scott, and such as he, be supposed to guess that this modest-looking man of middle stature is a general on the active service list? Why, if Mr. Scott had been a general, he would have strutted more than now, if possible. This is an exceedingly observant man, a reader and leader of men. To him every face is a history or a prophecy. This habit of noticing things had been most useful to him in his career, and he never lets it fall into disuse. Indeed, it has become second nature with him. His quick glance takes in instantaneously something of the face and all the carriage of this consequential-looking, fat little man, whose

uprightness, as he passes the fellow he snubbed through his daughter last night, causes an additional wrinkle to join the others in his rotund back-waist. He at once sums him up, and then mentally pigeon-holes him. "A nice-looking young girl, walks uncommonly well, even here, and linked with him. Seen a face something like hers before. Ah! last night. She's here, then, and that's her father. Shouldn't wonder if that cad told her not to talk to me." He had not given his pretty dinner neighbour a thought this morning—had actually forgotten her existence. He had been busy up to starting writing numerous letters. Now he thinks that presently—he has nearly used up his magazine—he will take a stroll, and see if that other handsome girl he saw in the corridor last night is with her.

Lunch against time at a railway buffet, or rather under the impression of little time—for they never seem in France to start their trains till every one is ready—is a confusing scramble. For the first ten minutes the garçons, although they look active enough, don't seem to attend to any one's wants, but appear hustled hither and thither, without rhyme or reason, amidst a perfect Babel of sounds.

Mr. Scott cannot get the attention to which he has been accustomed, and he is considerably annoyed thereat. He has called out "Garçon" almost incessantly since they have been seated at the small table. "Oui, M'sieu. Oui, oui," has hailed around him, but no garçon has paused long enough to hear his orders.

"I see," said he, looking more than usually red in the face from flurry and excitement, "one must help themselves here if they are to get anything. These foreigners are such confounded fools! They've no system in anything, and lose what heads they've got just as they are most wanted. Come, Mary, we will get something to eat somehow."

They make their way slowly and with difficulty through the crowded *salle*. The traffic of two days had been brought over in their boat, which causes this extra wild excitement and running to and fro.

Mary rather likes it. Her sensibility has not yet attained to the height of headache from noise and worry. When they have secured some plates of chicken, the problem is how to take them, without a spill, to the others. Presently Mary is brought up with a jerk by somebody suddenly rushing across her path. This sudden stop brings her neck sharply against the edge of a plate, being carried aloft behind her.

"Pardon," says a distinctly English voice.

The pain is for a moment sharp, but does not prevent Mary turning her head to glance at her pleasant-voiced compatriot, who chanced to be the man her father forbade her sister talking with, returning also from a foraging expedition, when this collision occurs.

"I hope I did not hurt you much," he says anxiously.

"Not much," says Mary, cheerfully. But he sees that she is troubled to keep the tears the pain brings from coming into her eyes. "I backed on you," she adds, as she moves on.

"Plucky child that," he thinks, as they are separated. "Bad that such a consequential cad should have two such nice children."

The journey to Paris is eventless. Although the train is a full one, by reason of heavy tipping Mr. Scott, to his high satisfaction, secures for himself and family a carriage to themselves. The satisfaction is hardly shared by all. Mary has no book in which she is much interested, and would have liked the distraction of a stranger in their compartment, a Frenchman or woman to watch, and perhaps to air a little of her French on. Family parties in exceedingly favourable circumstances may be enjoyable, but the experiences of at least nine people out of ten count the other way. Acting solely to one's company is not likely to draw out one's best. Even a single spectator is enough to make one smooth the wrinkles out of socks, and tread in one's buskins tightly.

Just as they arrive at S——, Mr. Scott, waking up from a reverie—he is one of those people who resent the notion of sleep having overtaken them—begins to hem, and then stutter out some commonplace remarks about suspicious characters generally; then proceeds to remark that English and American girls are supposed to be heiresses, and that adventurers are on the look-out for introductions to them. He corrects himself here. No; I don't mean introductions. They talk without, and sneak into a family that way. I don't wish any of you to talk to strangers. Hem! One never knows what they may be."

This injunction is received in absolute silence. Nothing vexes a noisy, talkative person more than no reply.

"You understand. I won't have it," he adds.

Still no one finds a response. Being treated like schoolgirls does not dispose them to answer amicably, until Mrs. Scott supplies one. "Certainly, dear," says she placidly, the fire of rebellion having been long ago quenched in her.

"It is better to know something of people," Miss M'Arthur answers diplomatically. His gaze had rested on her as if to compel acquiescence. But she feels now as the girls do, that it might be pleasant to exchange a few words sometimes with a person next one. "How will Captain Munro fare?" she thinks.

"Of course," says Mary the ever-practical. "But if one never speaks a word to any one, how is one to know anything about them? Nice people travel, surely?" and she thinks of the encounter with the plate. He was nice!

"But, Mary," Edith says, "it is not the best people who would talk about themselves in a *casual* conversation." This is intended for her father. "One can judge something by tone and manner, I think."

"Yes; that's just what all fools think," he says shortly, "and get taken in nicely in consequence. The more plausible a fellow is, the more one ought to suspect him. People wouldn't trouble to be so precious civil if they hadn't something to gain by it. I always suspect your plausible people. A man with

a good balance at his banker's need not toady any one." He feels that to be a noble sentiment, and expands in uttering it. He is satisfied to have come so easily out of an encounter of tongues with his woman-kind.

Arrived in the bustle of the Paris station, Mrs. Scott, Edith, and Miss M'Arthur are left outside, while Mr. Scott and Mary go to see the luggage cleared. As they passed in, they met General Taylor, the stranger, coming out. He lifts his hat and smiles. Mary gives him a little nod and smile in return. She is behind her stern parent, the spirit of whose homily she thus infringes.

In passing the rest of Mr. Scott's party, he notices that they are besieged by anxious, vociferous men, all offering their services to see their luggage cleared. They are all too much bewildered to make it understood that they do not need assistance. "What eyes that dark girl has!" he thinks. "Shall I offer to explain to the men? I would directly if it weren't for that cad." He meets Edith's appealing eyes; she half opens her mouth as if to speak to him. That decides him. "Can I be of any use to you in this bewildering place?" he asks.

"Thanks, so much," says Edith. "These people *won't* understand us, I think. My father has gone to see about clearing our luggage, and all we want of these men is to be left alone. Will you kindly make them understand that?"

With a word or two spoken authoritatively, the stranger sends the too officious men away. Then

mindful of the return of the cantankerous head of this interesting family, he does not make an excuse to linger in conversation; he only asks if he can be of any further assistance. Mrs. Scott and Edith both thank him, and say that there is nothing more that he can do for them. When he has gone away, Edith says to her mother, "Well, dear, is he not exceedingly nice? Was it not horrid to have to snub a man like that?"

"Yes, dear," her mother is constrained to answer. "But your father did not know the kind of man he was," she adds apologetically.

"Perhaps not, but he might have trusted me to know. What would he do with daughters like Maud Darville? Nothing would stop her talking to whom she pleased, I am quite sure."

"Not now, perhaps; but she would not have become independent like that if your father had been hers. But I wish they would make haste. We shall be behind every one at the hotels, and even if we get in shall have to put up with anything, which will vex your father."

After an interval of waiting, Mr. Scott appears in a terribly upset condition. He has been crowded; he has been put on one side, treated as a nobody, and hustled here and there. He very soon lost his temper, and then it fared even worse with him. Small people put in authority are apt to be autocratic, and they highly resent any appearance of temper and impatience from those for the time being subject of them. More than one of Mr. Scott's trunks had been over-

hauled to give him a lesson in the futility of impatience, and the necessity of conciliating the powers that be.

Mary even is out of temper, but from a different cause, which she confides to her governess thus. "I hope much that my father won't always choose me to go with him, if he is going to bully people and get out of temper. I would rather go alone. I should hand my keys with a smile, and I don't believe then they would look into a single thing." Miss M'Arthur makes no reply, but she devoutly hopes that she may not be told off as interpreter to Mr. Scott.

Arrived at Hotel Continental, more vexation awaits them. Not a room is to be had in the hotel, and they require four or five *en suite.* To be told that you might have had them had you telegraphed in the morning is anything but consoling, when your wife has advised that course all along, and it was only a love of having one's own way absolutely that prevented your taking her advice.

Tired, hungry, and disconcerted, our travellers are taken to Hotel de Louvre. There the same reception awaits them.

More tired, more hungry, and more disconcerted, and in absolute silence, they are driven to the Grand Hotel. The prospect of a lodging here is somewhat brighter. There are three rooms vacant—two on the first floor, one on the third. For what seems a long time to the over-fatigued women, who do not mind where the rooms are so that they get a resting-place, Mr. Scott hums and ha's over securing these rooms,

and is once on the point of starting off to try for better accommodation at another hotel, when he chances to notice the tired look on the usually bright face of Mary, and that makes him hesitate, and finally decide on having the luggage taken down here. With a grumbling accompaniment they proceed to the lift. The expressions of discontent cease when Mary incidentally says, "Isn't this the hotel where the lift flew up to the top and killed some people?" Edith turns paler than fatigue had already made her.

Mrs. Scott shivers, and says, "You should not say such uncomfortable things;" while the effect of the idea on Mr. Scott is actually great enough to stop for a time his murmurs. Indeed, he is lost in thought—perhaps of the vast hereafter; who shall say?—until they arrive at the third story, where Miss M'Arthur is inducted to her room. Then the others descend, but not by the lift, to their rooms on the first floor.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE first day spent in Paris is hot—exceedingly hot. Too hot to allow Mr. Scott to go anywhere or do anything, but wander up and down the shady side of the streets. He gets one idea only into his head presently—the post-office. Thither they find their way. They all go in ; then all are alike eager to get letters, even Mary and Miss M'Arthur, who only expect them in an under-current way.

Scott and M'Arthur seem easy names to know by their sound, but the official requires to see an envelope of theirs addressed, as a guarantee to their right to their letters. Mr. Scott, luckily for his short temper, finds one in his pocket ; then Mrs. Scott and the girls write their names on a bit of paper, which is graciously accepted as sufficient in their case.

"What nonsense!" says Mr. Scott. "You should have had them all enclosed to me ; much less bother that way." There he leaves the subject for the present ; he is too much engrossed by the letters given him. They all watch him closely as he looks at the address of each of his five or six letters. He

knows that they all hang on his movements now, and he lingeringly tantalizes them. Mary tries to peep over his shoulder ; half playfully he tries to hide them from her.

"That is a lady's writing. Isn't it for one of us?" she asks coaxingly. "Don't be uncomfortable, mother dear ; it is the writing of a much older lady than you are."

"Come," says Mr. Scott, walking towards the door, Mary close up to him, "what do you mean by pretending to know everything?" he says to her. "The age of my correspondent indeed!" and he slips his letters into his pocket, and she comes to walk by his side.

"How horrid of you to hide them because you know I am interested in letters! You used to let me open them for you at home, and look at the insides even. It is unkind. But there, I know that letter I saw you looking at was from a distinctly middle-aged woman, who learnt to write in the days when only a small flowing hand was taught ; so, you see, I can find out that much in a glance."

"You think you are very clever, puss, but you don't know everything," he says good-humouredly. The receipt of so many letters has pleased him. He is now making his way to the Tuileries gardens, where he proposes sitting in a shady spot to read them ; but he does not tell his following where they are going to be led—he likes to be blindly followed.

Miss M'Arthur has heard Mary's remarks, and feels most uneasy about the letter under discussion. She

remembers that it is one of Miss Gore's, her old schoolmistress's, little ways always to address her letters to Mr. Scott, and then put "Miss M'Arthur" humbly down in the corner. At Oaklands no inconvenience resulted from it. The man sorted the letters, and the few for her were always sent up to her safely. What *will* happen now if Mr. Scott opens this letter, and sees another enclosed to her in a man's handwriting? For, of course, if this letter is from Miss Gore, it is because she has a letter to send from Captain Munro, otherwise she would not have written so quickly; of that she is quite sure. Her writing, too, is old-fashioned, small and flowing, as Mary has described this. What can she do? To be suspended between overpowering desire—one minute thinking, "Oh, my darling, if it should be a letter from you, what joy unlooked for!" that thought drawing her up to the seventh heaven of bliss, to be brought down heavily the next minute to the hard ground of disagreeable, compromising facts—is a position sufficiently distressing without the sickening longing to know the worst—the best. Which will it be?

Where are they going? Why will he not open these letters that he has been impatient to get at once, and put her out of her misery? She feels so helpless, so stupid to outside influences, so out of keeping with the surrounding lightness and brightness of this pleasure-loving city. She is walking between Mrs. Scott and Edith, so cannot even hint to the latter that the letter may be for her. They both talk to her, and she answers as in a dream, without

conscious will in answering. She is thrilling with suppressed excitement. She feels that Mary is her only chance—a straw to clutch at; but her chance of getting hold of her is very small. She cannot, in her position, make an alteration in their order of walking. All is left to chance. To some weak but sanguine-minded beings that might not be so galling as it is to Maggie, who hates the feeling of impotency in shaping the course of her own life.

"If Mrs. Scott sees Captain Munro's letter, I shall be sent away at once, in dire disgrace—I know it; and he is only a few paces from one, with this all-important letter; yet I, with a proper share of brains and will, surely can think of no plan to prevent this, but walk helplessly along to my doom. It ought not to be so. Of any one else, if I read of it in a book, I should say it is not fate, it is sheer incompetency." She ought to find a way out of the dilemma; if she does not, she deserves the consequences.

They have been making a detour again, instead of going direct to the gardens. Whenever a shop or a building takes Mr. Scott's fancy—and it is much oftener a shop than a building—he always makes for it. In this way he gets out of the direct route to where he is going. He has mastered the bearings of the principal thoroughfares in Paris, and when he keeps in them can find his way very well about; then all goes well. But his habit of going off into side streets, led on out of his way by shops, in directions as erratic as a butterfly leads a child, brings him frequently very far out of his intended course. He never

owns that he is at a loss, but goes on and on for the chance of coming to a familiar street. Mary can see now, by the short answers she gets to her remarks, and the gloomy expression on her father's face, which looks very red and hot, a condition of body not conducive in Mr. Scott to patience, that something has gone wrong. He has been obliged to abandon his plan of only going in streets with a shady side to them.

She half guesses the reason, and puts a great deal of restraint on her ready tongue and quick wit to prevent a remark that will show her knowledge of the strait he is in; and, of course with the confidence of youth, she thinks that she could easily find her way about Paris, and she burns to have a finger in finding their course, wherever that course may be. But she tries to talk about the shops and people as they wander on, still in the same order.

At last Rue St. Honoré is struck—welcome find! They cross it, and are soon in Rue de Rivoli, and facing the gardens. The crossing is somewhat wide and busy. Being out of his monosyllabic sulks, Mr. Scott stops here to superintend the crossing of his people. Here is the opportunity Maggie has been so anxiously longing for. She says to Mary, "Wait for me, dear."

Mary waits, not sorry for a change of companion. She begins a voluble account of how much they must have gone wrong, at least a mile out of their way, when Miss M'Arthur says, quite abruptly—she is too anxious to wait till Mary has run down—

"I am rather expecting a letter from Miss Gore. Do you think the letter you saw—you were criticising the writing when we came out of the post-office—could be from her? She always addresses her letters to your father, and puts my name in the corner; a very stupid plan of hers."

"Ah! then I do know the writing, after all. I thought I had seen it before; of course, it is Miss Gore's. I know her funny little, screwed-in 'Miss M'Arthur.' I will go and ask for it for you."

She is just rushing off, when Miss M'Arthur stops her a second. "Be careful what you say, Mary. What are you going to say?"

"I know what to say, I assure you. I will be beautifully polite for you, and cautious;" and off she goes.

She overtakes her father just as he is making for a seat. "Daddy, dear," she says, "I have, I think, made a discovery, and it speaks well for my astuteness in guessing middle age from handwriting. That letter from a lady that I have been so curious, and you so delighted about, isn't for you at all. I am sure it is from Miss Gore; and if you examine the envelope carefully, you will see 'Miss M'Arthur' down in the left-hand corner. That's Miss Gore's way of humbling her, and exalting you, sir; and if I were Miss M'Arthur, I would not have it. It is very stupid and disagreeable for every one—for you especially"—they are standing in front of a seat now, and Miss M'Arthur has just joined them—"for you especially," she repeats. "It would be so disagreeable to you to open another person's letter."

"Certainly," he says. "An enclosure to you, Miss M'Arthur, addressed to me, would be better, I think. It would certainly simplify it to have all letters addressed to me." He takes out his letters, and goes carefully over them.

"Ah yes. Mary was right; it is for you;" and he gives it to Miss M'Arthur, who receives it, to all appearance, calmly. But she does not dare to look up; she is afraid the excitement might be seen in her eyes, an excitement altogether out of proportion to the receiving of one of Miss Gore's tepid effusions.

"Thank you," she says, putting it into her pocket.

"I should certainly have opened it, if Mary had not recognized the writing," he says. Then they all sit down.

"I wish I had a letter to read," says Mary.

"So do I," thinks Edith. "I hope Agatha's letter to me is not at Hotel Continental; I don't see how I am to get it from there. I am not enjoying Paris a bit. I wish we could start for wherever we are going at once. I should like to know where we are going. I believe he is suspicious of everybody, and won't tell us till the last minute. It is so awkward not to know. Anyhow, I will write to Agatha to-day; perhaps she might show him (darling!) my letter. There would be no harm in that. Agatha has made no promises to my father. Fancy, Cecil walking down High Street with a divided skirt! I hope the dear boy won't be awfully chaffed;" and she sits and dreams. The strangeness of her surroundings, and the shrill little voices of the miniature French men

and women playing near, do not enter into her consciousness, flooded as that is with Cecil and all belonging to him. She thinks that she is unhappy, of course; but that may well be doubted while she has faith, and the elasticity and hope of youth.

* * * * *

Not till after lunch (oh! painful dragging of every minute, with that letter burning a hole in more than her pocket) does Miss M'Arthur have a chance to lock herself into her third-floor room. Her hands tremble with excitement, so that she can scarcely tear open her letter. Yes, there is an inner envelope, so well secured with gum and wax that she has difficulty in tearing off one tiny corner. It is of toughish, mediæval paper, this envelope. At last she gets a finger in, and tears it along. She has no time to waste in gazing on the address—the first bit of his handwriting she has seen—or to examine the seal, his crest doubtless. All to be duly examined at bedtime, when she can take as much time as she likes from sleep; time will be her own then. And sleep, with that little letter under her pillow, will be long in coming to-night. That letter, to her, priceless. Not much in it, really; but the fact that this languid nil-admirer kind of man has been impelled to write first to her, after all his apparent cautiousness, and fear of troubling Miss Gore too often with his letters, makes every word in it precious, and gives to them all a hidden, intense meaning. Words may mean so much or so little.

"Ware, Thursday.

"MY DEAR MAGGIE,

"I have been hesitating how I would begin to you; anything more formal did not recommend itself, for we are to be friends—great friends, are we not? So you won't begin, dear, *please*, by being vexed with me. Why am I writing? To set you an example in *every way*. Besides, I want to hear how you are getting on so far. You know you can write to me *as often as you like*, so don't wait until the T (that will stand for tyrant, in future) decides on your final resting-place, but let me have news of you so far. I was sorry not to see Mrs. Scott when I called. Not much to tell here. I have actually talked to your friend, Miss Browne, for a good quarter of an hour; and, really, she is not so objectionable, after all. Fielding and I were together, and we escorted her the whole length of High Street. There's nuts for gossips! Seriously, though, she isn't bad; and Fielding will soon be quite devoted to her. She praised you all tremendously—I mean with one exception. Where she couldn't praise, she was silent, which shows she has some wisdom. If she doesn't look out, she will have this love-sick boy at her heels, as close or closer than her dog, whenever she comes into town. A fine fellow, Forge (you see I know his name). But don't let that rouse jealous feelings. I frequently prefer dogs to their mistresses, and more often still to their masters. Miss Browne has her own attractions, *and she is an heiress!* And we all love heiresses, don't we? I can imagine *you* saying something like that of *us;* true in a way, if only the

right people were heiresses. The King has been singing at a concert for more local charities, and he is as nervous as a girl still, though he has been before the public some time now; music actually shook in his hand when he came on. No nervousness about the Queen; she took possession of the piano as if she meant punishing it—and she did. We all applauded.

"I hope to get away in a fortnight. No time for more, dear. I ought not perhaps to have written this, but you are so lovable, my wisdom goes with the wind. Write *soon* to let me know you are not angry with me, dear.

"Ever believe me, yours affectionately,

"JOHN.

"I shall run up to town on Saturday; *so dull* here now. White bolted; more about him in my next."

Surely, with the delighted Maggie we may go the length of thinking this a charming letter. Three things go to the making of an interesting, satisfactory letter. It should have something in it of the person who writes, and some human element of gossip, and a good bit of direct appeal to the taste, feelings, and individuality of the person to whom the letter is addressed. Personality from beginning to end. The letters of quite poor people are often masterpieces, for this reason. They speak direct, the one to the other.

Only ten minutes to read this letter in, to think of it, and read it again. Yes, the second reading pleases as much as the first, and that critical test being

over, the fourth and the fifth, and so on readings—mounting I know not how high—are safe to give, if possible, yet more pleasure.

Reluctantly she puts it in the envelope, then looks at that. "Do I like the writing quite? Yes, I do like it, because it is *his*. But if it were not his I fancy I might not like it much." To think that she, who is so far gone in love, can attempt even that poor pretence of being critical, makes her smile.

Then she gets up from the low easy-chair where she has enjoyed her letter, and walks to the toilet-table to see herself in the glass before going down. She is quite struck with her own face; it looks so beaming and pretty. "I suppose I fancy myself more," she thinks, "because I have seen a good many plain women to-day. I wonder where one should go to see pretty Frenchwomen!" But wherever the pretty Frenchwomen may be, she does not think they (her own party) need fear comparison with them. A good many men had looked very much at them this morning, and Mr. Scott had scowled back his objections to that.

How happy she feels, that she is pleasant to look on. Her beauty and the love she has, which love can never be excelled, is all she has to give him—she who would freely, joyfully give him worlds, if she only had them at her disposal.

She would like now, while the impression of this letter is vivid, the outlines sharp, to write the answer, but that must wait until night. Sunday makes no difference to posts going out or coming in in Paris,

she remembers; that is good. She turns round just as she is leaving the room; there by her chair is poor Miss Gore's unread letter. She smiles as she goes back for it. "How fortunate I saw it! Mrs. Scott will ask me how she is; perhaps Mr. Scott also, if he feels civil. How foolish I should have looked if I had not read it!"

It was short. The poor dear thing had evidently hurried to save the mail. She hoped they would have a pleasant trip; sent kind remembrances to all the Scotts. She was feeling low, her sight failed her a good bit, writing was becoming difficult, and it wound up with just these few warning words, which were the gist of the whole letter. "In asking me to forward letters to you while you are on the continent, you say that they are from a friend against whom Mr. Scott has taken an undeserved prejudice on account of his calling, and quite apart from his own merits. I know that you have always spoken of Mr. Scott as taking very strong dislikes to people. But does that justify you, my dear Margaret, in entering into a clandestine" (that word is so like the poor thing, thinks Maggie) "correspondence with a friend, a gentleman? I am sure I hope I am not doing wrong in forwarding these letters. I don't want to seem to preach to you; young people always resent advice, I find; but I hope you will not attach too much importance to these letters from your friend. I am old-fashioned, perhaps, but in my young days gentlemen were not in the habit of corresponding with young ladies as friends. You have neither father

nor mother, my dear child, and so must forgive me if I from time to time give you a few words of advice and warning."

"What a kind old thing it is, and how glad she will be for me some day, when I can tell that all is well for me!" thinks Maggie, as she takes her way trippingly downstairs. "She is romantic even now, and will feel quite proud of her little share in this romance of ours, one of these days."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE Scotts have been at that charmingly situated hotel, Beau Rivage, Ouchy, about a week. When Mr. Scott, making excursions from his head-quarters at Geneva to some of the well-known beauty spots on its lake, first saw this hotel and grounds, shaded by fine trees, running to the water's edge, he decided that here should be their resting-place; no need to go further or stay longer in hot, wearisome Geneva. Here they would come at once.

He was in his element that day. The manager could not only speak a little English, but he knew English very well; and Mr. Scott, the reins in his own hands again, could state his requirement, make his terms, and choose his suite of rooms without aid or hindrance. On that day, the first time since leaving England, he saw everything through rose-tinted spectacles. With Mary he was almost enthusiastic about the views of those lovely distant mountains seen across the lake. With his wife he had appreciated the shade the trees afforded from the, sometimes to them in their greatest walks, overpowering heat of

the sun. Under them, much to her comfort, he had smoked the cigarette of peace.

They had been obliged to leave for Geneva before dinner, but Mary had extracted from him the promise that when they came there to stay they might stroll in those lovely gardens every evening after dinner—a concession due to the rose medium through which he was seeing everything, and which causes Mary to expand into the following confession.

"I was quite sorry you were able to get that comfortable-looking salon with a balcony *en suite.* I was afraid you would like to smoke on that, and then we should be mewed up there, and I should have to get some needlework, because Miss M'Arthur does not like to see me idle, you know. And all the time I should have been longing to make the most of that lovely garden. I should like to live out of doors there. Think, there will be the sunsets, and the moonlight to see, and you can smoke and be happy, and we can stroll ever so far by the lake when you are with us. Oh, it will be delightful to get away from Geneva. I hate Geneva! If it were not for those dear little birds in the hall and that musical-box, I should dislike it more than any place I have ever seen."

Mr. Scott's satisfaction with Beau Rivage, even after a week of the monotony of life spent in one place, continues. Each day he has found something to do, or to approve of. The telegraph office in the big hall of the hotel kept him amused the only wet day they have had since they have been at Ouchy. He

likes sitting in a sheltered seat in that big hall, and now he always smokes cigarettes, and as he bears in mind the injunction of a great modern authority to throw them away when about half-smoked, he is much employed during these days in the important business of lighting cigarettes. By that means the *ennui* that breeds discontent and all manner of evils has been kept fairly at bay.

Another source of distraction is an acquaintance he has made, an American staying at this same hotel, a gentleman, a Bostonian, whose ancestor had committed the crime of serving Oliver Cromwell as his secretary. On the death of the Protector, to save his neck he took it to the New England, and his descendant is a living proof that genius, worth, and backbone may be hereditary. Mr. Price is accompanied by his son, an intelligent, precocious boy of twelve, who argues with Mary on all conceivable topics under the sun. They both let their tongues outrun their discretion in the heat of youthful partisanship; but they can't do without each other, and soon come together again for fresh argument, after the hottest of hot disputes.

Mrs. Scott is passing these days in lazy contentment. Her lord and master is amused. Edith has not lately come under his displeasure; she is learning to do without a maid, and seems happier in herself. Her mother more than half guesses that Agatha's letters are an important factor in the change, and she is glad that her child has some consolation without disobeying her father's commands. She would like,

if she dared, to know what Agatha says of the boy. She, too, has not in the least outlived her interest in a love affair, and is as romantic and unworldly as either of her daughters. She does not care to walk far at any time—a stroll in the grounds, and then a seat with needlework and book. She is oftener busy with some fanciful work than her book. A walk up that long dusty hill to Lausanne is her greatest horror. She has been once; and she is glad she has seen the cathedral; the toil to get up the endless steps to that was rewarded, certainly. She is quite content to have been there *once*, and can't understand the girls' and Miss M'Arthur's enthusiasm about it. They are always ready to go to Lausanne. Her husband, too, he likes the shops; but now that he has the companionship of the American he does not drag her everywhere. A man is much better, she argues, when he has another man to talk with. Some men get a little dogmatic with their women-kind, and this man is a good companion for him; he treats women with so much deference. That is one very nice thing about Americans.

She is sitting working and musing alone this morning in the shade of a clump of trees and tree-like shrubs. Her husband and Mary, with Mr. Price and his boy, have gone across to Evian for a few hours. The lake is too placid for her to feel any anxiety about the excursion to-day; and Miss M'Arthur and Edith have gone to Lausanne again.

One of the great attractions the place has for them is its post-office. As soon as Edith knew they were

to stay at Ouchy, she wrote to Agatha, asking that her next letter might be addressed to Miss M'Arthur, Poste Restante, Lausanne; "for," she said, "my father may think it odd that you write so often, and your letters are everything to me." She is rather expecting a letter this morning.

Maggie had written to tell "John" that he might address his next letter to her there instead of to Miss Gore; and she also is on the tiptoe of expectation. This letter may tell her when he is coming, and his plan of action.

As the two girls toil up the hill in the full rays of the sun, they talk little. Both of them would have climbed Mont Blanc if the letters they want had been *poste restante* there; but all the same they feel very hot and somewhat tired. Maggie is wondering if she shall be obliged to tell Edith of what Miss Gore calls "her clandestine correspondence." She must if there is a letter for her at the post-office from Captain Munro.

They duly present themselves. Miss M'Arthur, wiser than on her first visit to a post-office in Paris, shows an envelope, and asks if there are any letters. A good bit of time is taken up by the official in looking over letters, comparing them with the envelope, and then looking at more letters. Finally, two are selected, compared again with the envelope, and at length handed to the anxiously waiting owner.

"They do all that to appear important, I believe," she says, as they walk away down the street.

"Yes, the fussy creatures. I expect Agatha has

written to you this time really, but she knows you will show me. Don't you want to open it? Shall we go in here and have something iced to drink? I am so thirsty; and then you can open the letter, and while we rest we can read it together."

"I know some one who does want to open the letter badly or see me open it. Yes, we may as well go in."

They ask for iced lemonade, and then sit down side by side. Maggie puts her small letter in her pocket. It is one of Captain Munro's little peculiarities never to use a full-grown envelope.

"Perhaps you would like to look at your little letter first?"

"No; that can wait;" and she proceeds to open Agatha's. There is no mistaking her dashing characters. They read it together.

"MY DEAR MISS M'ARTHUR,

"I am obeying orders, keeping a promise, and pleasing myself, 'a fortuitous concourse of atoms,' and giving you, I hope, an agreeable and edifying whole in this letter, which you as proxy receive for an absurd love-sick little maiden. How I have allowed myself to become mixed up with this pair of young lunatics, I don't exactly know; and still less do I know why I listen, without contradiction, to a long list of the perfections, amiability, sweetness, sensibility, and general superiority to all the rest of her sex, of a girl I have known for several years, without having thought her more than nice. And I shall get talked

about too, all for nothing. On Sunday evening, while I was wrapt in my voluntary, refusing to be distracted by whole garlands of artificial flowers on hats just in front of me, something drew me out of myself and projected my gaze far over the distracting bobbing around garlands. The 'something' drew other eyes than mine to it. When such a *rara avis* as a flamingo —I knew the bird to be a flamingo, the country folk only guessed it by the stride—comes boldly into a church hitherto consecrated to rooks, crows, barn-door fowls (with a few young cochins), geese, ducks, and such domestic and semi-domestic creatures (our game-cock is pursuing his slumbers, varied by his crows, elsewhere just now), one can imagine the fluttering and smoothing of feathers caused thereby. When that model of propriety for the whole village and five miles round, myself—harmoniumist, blue ribbonist, tea and coffee palace queen, and extinguisher-in-general to absurd lucifer-match flames that aren't strong enough to light Hymen's torch, and if they were, haven't got money to pay for it—saw the flamingo apparently bent on marching straight over such obstacles as the before-mentioned garlands and the harmonium to gain her side, most likely with a view of turning over the music for her, as if she were in a drawing-room, her feelings become much too awfully intense for her own powers of description. What that rash bird would have done, and what more shocks my system would have sustained without an involuntary end to my voluntary, good bustling Mrs. Bennet, by capturing him, saved us from more than

guessing. As he was put into a seat where he could not see me when kneeling, and where he was enabled, by craning his neck while sitting, to make sure of my not having decamped, and where, I believe, that only the barrier of the harmonium kept him, while on his legs, from striding over the flowers to tell me of some fresh perfection discovered in his goddess, calculated to make him in the future specially and supremely blest, I think he must have found it a distracting service.

"In the sermon I more than divided with the vicar his attentions; for I think, as all good boys should be, he was taught to look at the parson while preaching. Otherwise, with Edith for his text, he would have found sermons, not in stones, but in my stony stare. I was compelled to crushingly, stonily stare, to keep up, in the face of a curious congregation—yes, the bucolic mind is stolidly curious—my reputation as an example. Fancy the fiendishly saint-like delight of my rival, Miss Woolner, if she had caught me tripping. It would have been up with all those banners of saints that she has got embroidered ready, and that her nephew has got sense enough as yet to keep out of church, and down with Protestantism of which I am the champion, at once and for ever. I make her so wild, I will be proud of that name of Protestant that she regards with horror. She, and such as she, speak always of the Holy Catholic Church, and still oftener of the Church, and want the title of Protestant to be relegated to the Nonconformists. I have been reading Froude on

'The Oxford Counter-Reformation,' and feel Broader than ever since, and more Protesting than ever against the claims set up for the Church. If Miss Woolner—Sister of Bethany, and one of the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament, etc.—and I meet, and she provokes me by her supercilious airs of sanctity and superiority, I am afraid I shall, primed by Froude, go off with a great bang, but shall not silence the enemy's guns.

"For having been docile and quiet, I rewarded Edith's young man by allowing him to walk home with me. I told him I was making great sacrifices; I postponed a choir practice till Thursday to do it. He said it was very kind of me; and so it was. And then he cut that short by asking if I had had a letter from Edith; and as I had not received a letter since we met on Friday, he proceeded to give me something to write about. He is soon, he hopes, going to have leave; he hopes to get it at the same time as Captain Munro. He is going to the lakes to see his mother. I should think she is a jolly sort of woman by what I could disinter of her; but he would slip away from the subject to get on to another. How much his mother would like somebody else, and once on somebody, I could not bring him back to his mother. He says Captain Munro is going to Paris, and perhaps to Switzerland; he hopes his friend may come across you there, then he will hear of you that way as well as my way. The boy makes sure I shall write to him.

"As no followers are allowed to enter the Tower grounds, we farewelled at the gate of that mysterious

domain. It was not dark enough to hide completely the homes for idle dicky-birds hung about in the trees, with which my eccentric progenitor is sowing the first seeds of idleness and subsequent pauperism in the bird world, and which may some day lead to the necessity of a C.O.S. among the feathered tribes. Full as he was of his adorable Edith, I saw him glance at the boxes and smile. The thought occurred to me, as I have a reputation beyond the five-mile radius from here of being eccentric, that he might regard these boxes as an expression of my eccentricity. I could not suffer that belief to take root. The eccentric daughter of an eccentric father likes to choose her own forms of departure from the beaten track of commonplacisms. Though evolved doubtless from his more than paternal care of feathered bipeds, is her peculiar interest in unfeathered bipeds, who are not quite up to keeping themselves erect without help from a stronger back-boned specimen of their species, his daughter does not wish to carry the weight of those boxes on her back. Therefore, in answer to the smile which he tried to smooth out when he saw me looking at him, I said, 'I wish I could laugh with you, but I can't quite manage to do that. I have got beyond a good many prejudices, but the old-fashioned notion of the unseemliness of laughing at peculiarities in my own father and mother remains. If I dared to laugh with them I would; I can't laugh at them.'

"I am afraid with my heroics I made the poor boy thoroughly uncomfortable; and I know that the sound of my own high-flown sentiments touched a

chord that moved me unpleasantly. I hate to weep. Don't picture me weeping, pray, on this occasion! I only bade him 'good-bye' hurriedly, told him I quite forgave him, but that if he minded I shouldn't forgive myself for making him feel uncomfortable.

"And then, he was outside the walls, and I in; he doubtless thinking by the time the gate was shut of some one else, we went on our opposite ways. You, dear, can't guess how the shutting of that gate, when I am inside our place, seems to shut out hopefulness and human sympathies: with the shutting I take up a load of duties as hopeless as regards results as the work of Sisyphus.

"I can do so little for my own parents. My father and I, like two highly electrical bodies, repel each other; my mother, I can only buoy out of the sea of weariness and depression in which she exists, just so long as I can give off hopefulness from myself and she can take it in, and she wearies first in the process.

"I don't know why I am unburdening my troubles like this to you, unless it be that my safety-valve, Mrs. Scott, is out of my reach. Give that sweet woman my love, and say anything pretty for me about missing her that you can think of.

"Tell Mary that she will be sorry to hear that her favourite scholar, Furber—I forget his name for the moment; not the red-headed boy—has rheumatic fever; caught a chill somehow. I will look after him for her. The vicar and I met in his room promiscuously a day or two ago. The mother had gone to take supplies to her husband in the hay-field, and the boy was alone

in the house for awhile. I arrived first at the cottage, could find no one downstairs, so went up to see the boy, Forge following me. I had not been sitting long by the bedside when I heard a commotion among the hens and a squeaking, and the barking that must have come from Judy and Punch; then I guessed that the vicar was coming up the chase. Presently a knock on the door. I did not stir; thought Sweet William could go away if he thought every one was out. But no; I heard a voice—you know the vicar's sliding voice, with a drop in it—calling Mrs. Fur-ber, Mrs. Fur-ber. No one answered. Forge would have barked if I would have let him. Then I heard steps coming up those rickety stairs, and the vicar appeared, followed by those yelping curs, Judy and Punch. Fearing a scrimmage, I sent Forge to lie down under the bed, out of the way of temptation to an engagement with his old foes. But of course those inquisitive, badly brought-up little curs went sniffing about, and wouldn't let him alone. The vicar and I were consulting about the boy quite amicably—he is a kind-hearted fellow—when a fearful row came from under the bed, which being rickety and slight shook with the onslaught; for of course when Judy and Punch broke the peace, Forge was not slow to defend himself, and pitch into mother and son. So great was the tumult that the vicar's mild 'Judy, come here! Punch, lie down! etc., etc.,' could not be heard; in fact, the barking and yelping might have drowned a much more stentorian voice than his. It drowned mine! I could not let the poor invalid be annoyed any longer, so I took my whip and without any com-

punction—there were two of the vicar's dogs to one of mine, remember—I slashed away under the bed with it, until I cleared it of the combatants. Poor William was in great distress for Judy, and tried to take her up in his arms to save her, thereby narrowly escaping the fate of all who meddle in a fight. I sent Punch flying downstairs, and administered a tongue-banging to Forge, which he can't abear. He looked up at me in a most piteously appealing manner that touched my heart, but did not stop my harangue. I intended it as a lesson to the vicar, who had picked up Judy, and was fondling and doating on her in a most sickening fashion. Between talking to the boy, he would say, 'Poor paw, then!' 'how is her poor paw?' etc. The little wretch, fondled into being a humbug, would whine and shiver, and look miserable just like a human impostor. Having arrived first, I took myself away first. I hope the poor boy will be none the worse for the disturbance. I must go to see him again to-morrow.

"The vicar ought to have apologized, I think; but I dare say by this time, Judy and Punch having recovered from their fright, he is chuckling over the rage I was in. Tell Mrs. Scott this; it will amuse her. What a long rigmarole I have written! Not enough about Cecil in it, eh, Edith? You are insatiable. Well, he has not pined to a thinning extent. As I sat face to face within five feet of him on Sunday evening, I can be quite positive on that point. I read a good deal in his face, determination in his strong jaw, hopefulness in his nose, which does not dip at the point, I was pleased to see. I don't like those doubting,

desponding, dipping tips to a nose; they are a bar to advancement. His rather deep-set blue eyes have a clear, honest regard in them that I also like. If that boy ever does a mean action, he will never cease to be ashamed of it and himself. His ears are harmonious and unobtrusive. I am an anxious inquirer, yet a tyro in the meaning of ears. One never sees two pairs exactly alike. What do they indicate? What are they the outward visible sign of? Julius Cæsar and Cardinal Manning had ears almost alike: in what are those two men alike? We know the minor working of the mind of the man of our own day, and the acts, if not the motives, of the other: in what are they alike? But Cecil's ears are carrying me beyond a twopenny-halfpenny postage into unexplored regions, and very likely beyond your sympathies. So I forbear to ride them further. Once for all, and to all (I fear to start off on a fresh topic), love, and good-bye.

"Yours always, with high consideration,

"AGATHA."

While reading this lengthy epistle the two girls had almost forgotten their whereabouts, and this letter made Edith forget the little one that was handed with it. Getting up from the reading, and restored partially to a consciousness of her surroundings, she discovered that they had been, and still are, an object of marked interest to the pleasant-faced mistress of the shop and a duplicate daughter, who had been intently watching them.

They laugh at themselves when they are outside.

"Our faces must have been a study for those kindly souls," remarks Maggie. She sees a clock just then which reminds her that time has been flying to them. "Half-past twelve! What sinners we are to leave your mother alone all this time! We can walk fast down-hill, that is a comfort. I don't mind running a little when we are out of sight, if you don't?"

"But I do mind, not the running, but the state of heat we should be in. Mother would be more distressed at our appearing, red and breathless, than at being kept a little while from luncheon."

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