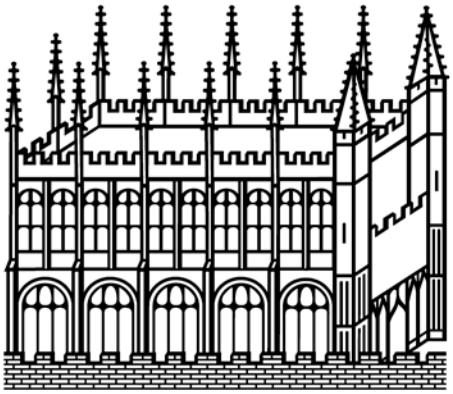

VERE OF OURS,

THE EIGHTH OR KING'S.

A Novel.

BY

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VERE OF OURS,

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CHAPTER I.

MANGO GARDEN.

Oblivious of any impending troubles, Vere wandered onward, with cigar in mouth and umbrella over his head, for the day was one of intense heat, yet, singular to say, there was not much sunshine; but he had donned a pith helmet, which he had worn many a day in the East, and thought that, with it and his West Indian suit, he 'looked somewhat like a guy.'

Though a soldier and somewhat of a man of fashion, Herbert Vere had an artist's eye, and was a passionate admirer of that grand mistress, Nature; hence the beauty and grandeur of the distant mountains, with the won-

drous fertility and loveliness of the foreground, were full of charms for him; for there were groves of the stately palmetto, of the cocoa-nut tree, the graceful papaw, the mango, and the shaddock.

In some places between the hills the cane-fields appeared in all the splendour of their bloom, each cane shooting up tall, straight, and slender, till terminating in a delicate lilac-tinted flower, which waves gracefully in the breeze, when there is any; but on this day Vere was conscious of an unnatural stillness in the sultry air.

He passed the place where once a great and lofty mountain stood, till, during one of those terrible throes of Nature we have referred to, when, in 1692, an earthquake shook the whole island, it sank into the earth, and a lake of four leagues in extent took its place. Here and there he passed some picturesque negro villages, each little house composed of wattles plastered and whitewashed, each surrounded by a garden intersected by lanes, bordered with all kind of fragrant plants and flowers, and shaded by a profusion of trees—orange, shaddock, cocoa-nut, and pepper.

He had proceeded some miles—he neither knew nor cared in what direction, till a flash of green lightning made him pause and look about him, when he found the sky darkening fast, and the heat becoming so intense, combined with moisture, that he felt as if in a Californian vapour bath.

After passing the last negro village the path had become deserted and lonely; there was no one to direct him which way to turn, and he was irresolutely pursuing a mere track between groves of magnificent trees; and if he had forgotten it was now the rainy season, and in one of the hurricane months too, he was speedily reminded of it.

The dire stillness around him suddenly became broken by the roar of a tempest of wind that swept through the hollow between the mountains, and nearly threw him on his face; the whole atmosphere darkened and became misty, as if filled with smoke, through which the sun appeared red; the air became suffocatingly hot; while thunder rumbled over the peaks of the now dark and sombre mountains, the rain began to descend in torrents, and Vere, wheeling about, fairly fled for shelter

to a grove of breadfruit trees, the enormous leaves of which, eighteen inches in length and breadth, and all of a beautiful green, so suit their colossal dimensions.

He had barely reached this bower, when he found another fugitive from the storm, in the form of a young lady, come flying thither also, palpitating like a scared bird with plumage ruffled, to whom, while politely touching his pith helmet, he proffered—mechanically perhaps—the use of his umbrella; we say mechanically, as it was scarcely required under the dense foliage of the trees, on which the tropical rain was now descending with a sound like the roar of a cataract, and quickly forming the narrow path Vere had so lately pursued into a fast-running rivulet.

She declined the umbrella, saying, 'Thank you, but this will not last, I know, and I am not far from home; but I fear a tempest may follow, and then—'

'What then?'

'I shall not know what to do, unless papa sends out some one of his negroes to search for me.'

'Why?'

'A hurricane is no slight matter to face,' she replied, with a little nervous laugh.

'Permit me to be at your service. I shall not leave you until I have escorted you to a place of safety.'

'Thanks, very much. But, after England, I am not much used to these storms; they terrify me.'

'Ah, you have been in England?'

'Yes, for several years.'

'In what part, pray?'

'Chiefly London; then sometimes Brighton.'

They had now ample subjects to talk about, though in the past it was impossible to forget the present, with the mighty rush of the rain, the bellowing of the wind, the croaking of the scared parrots and other birds in the branches overhead, and the occasional red gleams of lightning that penetrated the leafy masses of foliage.

Vere could see that his companion was perfectly ladylike in tone, in bearing; that she was graceful and handsome in figure. Her dress was a simple white muslin, through the thin material of which the perfect outline of

her arms and shoulders, when not concealed by a loose jacket of white silk, became plainly visible. Her face was concealed by a thin white veil tied tightly under her hat and chin, but through it he could perceive that she had fine, dark, and animated eyes; and this she did not remove, as she said that, though she felt it suffocating, she dreaded the lightning. On one arm she carried a pretty cane basket, in which were some medicine vials and some creature comforts she had been conveying 'to the mother of old Quashy, one of papa's negroes,' as she informed Vere, when overtaken, like himself, by the tempest.

For nearly an hour they had been talking of London, and all that it suggested of scenes and places they had enjoyed in common, till the girl began to be alarmed, for, although the tempest was not increasing, it showed no signs of abating; and even to Vere's mind, all unaccustomed as he was to the West Indies, there occurred floating fears—induced by all he had read—of tornadoes and hurricanes there, when whole towns were unroofed and swept away, when birds were blown out to sea and the sea rolled over the land, and when the mighty

force of the wind was such that, at Barbadoes in 1780, a twelve-pounder was blown, on its wheels, for the distance of one hundred and forty yards.

Now and then, amid the rush of the rain and the booming of the wind, the sound of a bell, and at times of a conch-shell, came faintly, but from a distance; and then the young lady informed Vere that she had no doubt some of her father's negroes were searching for her, as it is by the sound of these instruments that they are summoned to their work in the fields before sunrise. But time passed on, no succour appeared, and the now pendent leaves of the grove were fast ceasing to be a shelter, as the rain penetrated them.

The wind still came in stormy gusts, but the lightning had passed away. The girl removed her veil, and displayed to Vere a face of very rare beauty and purity, with a straight nose and delicate nostrils, eyes full of animation, by turns tender and arch, but dark and seducingly handsome; yet he started on beholding it, for to him her face was a perfectly familiar one.

How, when, or where had he seen it be-

fore? Her beauty was pale, yet dark, with strongly defined eyebrows, a contour as patrician as that of Gertrude, but with more of humour and more of character in her features than were possessed by that gentle and, perhaps, too facile girl.

'Miss Bellingham!' he exclaimed, as he suddenly recognised the face he looked on.

'What, you know me?' she asked, with an expression of astonishment that made her lovelier still. 'Where have you met me?'

'I never looked upon your face till this moment, yet every feature of it is familiar to me as my own.'

'I shall not trouble you for any explanation, sir,' she replied, with sudden hauteur, thinking that he was presuming on the situation; and she seemed preparing to leave their present shelter at all risks.

'Pardon my abruptness,' he said; 'but I have seen a photo of you—'

'With whom—who has it?'

'Your godfather, the captain of the Bannockburn. I saw it in his album when at sea.'

'And you have actually remembered it all this time?' she exclaimed, in a different tone.

'All this time!' repeated Vere, resolving to say nothing about Moreno and that other photo, with the terrible vow penned upon the back thereof.

'Is not this a singular coincidence?' she asked, with one of her sweetest and brightest smiles.

'It is at least a very delightful one to me,' replied Vere, gazing upon her with an admiration which he felt some trouble in concealing; for she was evidently, with all her gentleness, a proud girl, and might be prompt to take offence.

'You reside near this, Miss Bellingham?' he asked, after a pause.

'Only about a mile from here, or little more—at Mango Garden, papa's residence; and if you will kindly give me your arm, I may make my way there with your assistance. I could not, amid this tempest of wind, do so alone.'

She gathered her thin muslin skirts, re-tied her veil, and, taking the arm of Vere, clasped it firmly as they emerged from under the dripping leaves; for she was entirely free from self-consciousness, and perhaps too unversed

in the ways of life to make her hesitate—at such a crisis especially—in availing herself of the aid of Vere, with the idea that he was a stranger, and might be glad of any pretext for making the acquaintance of a handsome girl, especially that of a well-known heiress like Virginia Bellingham of Mango Garden, or Farm as it was often called, from her father's vast sugar-mills.

The rain had ceased, or nearly so; yet there was quite enough moisture in the air to thoroughly soak and drench both Vere and his fair companion, whose thin muslin dress soon clung as closely to her delicate and beautiful figure as she to his arm, which more than once he had to put fairly round her, lest she should be swept away—literally torn from him—by the fierce gusts of hot wind against which they struggled, sometimes breathlessly and almost in vain—gusts on the wings of which the affrighted birds flew hither and thither; and tempests of wet leaves, twigs, fruit, and branches were blown in every direction as they were rent from the wildly-tossing trees.

'Do hold me fast!' exclaimed the girl in

her terror; and Vere, whose umbrella had long since vanished into the sky, certainly left nothing undone to aid, guide, and secure his companion; so, despite its discomfort, he could not but feel that 'the situation had its charm.'

'Thank Heaven, we are almost at home now!' she exclaimed breathlessly. White, panting and laughing the while, she clung to his arm, with both her hands interlaced upon it.

By this time they had reached the end of an avenue formed by double lines of magnificent palmettos, and before them rose the mansion of Mr. Bellingham, which was exactly —though, perhaps, more magnificent—built upon the same model used by all West Indian planters. It was of wood, partly raised upon handsome pillars, and consisted of a single floor. A long gallery, called a piazza, ran the whole length of the edifice, and terminated at each end in a large square room. On each side of this piazza were the bedchambers and other apartments, with stately balustrades and flights of steps descending to the lawn.

Around the whole mansion was a spacious

verandah, with movable venetian blinds to admit the air. One of the end rooms alone had sash-windows because of the rains, which, when they come, are so heavy, and shift suddenly with the wind from side to side, that all blinds in a West Indian house are obliged to be kept closed, and consequently, while they last, the rooms are all in oppressive darkness, save that which has the sashed windows.

So intent was Vere, after bestowing a single glance at the residence, upon assisting his drooping (and certainly dripping) companion up the flight of steps which led to the entrance-door, that he failed at first to see a fine-looking old man with silver hair, whose gentlemanly air and bearing his loose jacket, vest, and pantaloons, all of them white stuff, and his broad straw hat, with a brim of twelve inches beyond the crown, could not disguise or conceal.

'My dear child,' he exclaimed, starting forward and taking her in his arms with tender anxiety, 'you have not suffered any injury? You look so pale, Virginia.'

'O papa, it is nothing; I am only wet,

and, but for this gentleman, might have been blown quite away. He has brought me here so nicely, so kindly.'

'Sir, I thank you,' said Mr. Bellingham, lifting his hat and presenting his hand with a friendly grasp. 'I despatched negroes in every direction to search; but in vain. The fellows are getting too lazy and sulky to work, and we can't whip them now as we used to do in the good old times.'

'We heard them blowing conch-shells, however,' said Miss Bellingham, letting down the wetted masses of her glorious hair.

'Though over-joyed to see my girl safe, I was somewhat scared on seeing her approach clinging to a perfect stranger.'

'I shall not say good-bye, though I give you all my thanks; for I know papa too well to think he will let you depart in this storm. But I must leave you and change my dress,' said Miss Bellingham, as she laughingly ran along the piazza to her room.

'And you, too, must change your dress, and dine with us, Mr.—'

'Vere. I command the detachment that came lately into Morant Bay.'

'Where, if all tales be true, you have not come a bit too soon. But I am glad to see you, sir, at Mango Garden; and now for some brandy-and-water, and then a change of attire. We dine in less than a hour.'

And apart from gratitude for having been of service to his daughter, Mr. Bellingham, with that warmth of hospitality which is so truly West Indian, welcomed Vere to his house and table all the more heartily that he was a stranger, a soldier, and a bearer of the Queen's commission—one's best passport in our colonies. And soon after, when this young lady, who, assisted by a little negro girl, had made a rapid toilette, and entered the drawing-room looking, save that the masses of her damp hair were left still loose—looking as perfect in attire and bearing as if she had neither been sodden nor scared—she fairly laughed outright on beholding Vere clad in a white suit of her father's—the same kind of attire in which the old gentleman went about the cane-fields and sugar-mills, but a world too small for the tall and broad-chested figure of Vere; yet very handsome he seemed to look in it for all that, and so Virginia thought.

As Vere looked about him, the story of Manuel Moreno came unpleasantly to his memory when it was recalled by an exhibition of the old gentleman's family pride, by drawing his attention to a faded and sorely-cracked old portrait of that Colonel Bellingham who had come out with Penn and Venables, in the days when the conquering Cromwellians traversed Jamaica in their steeple-crowned hats, falling bands, and buff coats, fighting the Spaniards in the tropics clad in the same uncouth attire with which they met the Cavaliers at Naseby and the Scots at Dunbar.

'My daughter, Mr. Vere, is said to bear a remarkable likeness to the worthy colonel,' said Mr. Bellingham; 'and it is singular how, in good families, likenesses are reproduced in successive generations.'

Vere, however, failed to see it in this instance, as the nose of Colonel Bellingham was like nothing else but a huge potato, in which it resembled the 'Bardolph snout' of his leader the Protector.

'And so your name is Vere?' said the old gentleman, after a pause.

'Vere of the Eighth.'

'A well-known name to me, sir; we have had one in our family. My ancestor, Colonel Bellingham, when he came here in the days of the Commonwealth, brought with him his wife Priscilla, a worthy dame, who came of the old Essex Veres, like Sir Horace, who was Lord of Tilbury, and his more famous brother Sir Francis. And from her he named the parish of Vere in this island, where the Braziletto Hills rise. So egad, sir, you may be a kinsman of ours, for all we know!'

Vere bowed, hoped it might be so; for certainly he would have no objection to claim so sweet a cousin as Virginia, even in the remote degree that Scotch and Welsh folks reckon.

Like all Creole girls, she had a languor in her beauty, in her motions, and in her eyes, that proved very captivating, and reminded Vere of some Eurasians he had seen in the East. She had 'Cupid's fosses,' a dimple in each cheek, when she laughed; and these always appeared at the most perilous moments, when her eyes were full of fun or coquetry. Yet when calm or in repose, and not excited about anything, her patrician face had a pen-

sive expression, while its paleness—which was far removed from aught of a sickly pallor, but was creamy rather than white—was beautiful; and then, though but a planter's daughter, she carried herself like a princess, with an exceeding and surpassing grace, which was one of her most potent charms; and, as usual with all Creole girls, the English education had perfected all that seemed perfect enough before. She danced with grace, could sing divinely, play equally so, and knew the works of all the best current English authors; but also, like Creole girls, she had their usual faults—an utter lack of industry, with an ignorance of domestic economy; but as her father's heiress, and an only child, perhaps she could do without either.

The storm which had been the means of affording Vere his pleasant introduction to the household at Mango Garden passed away into the ocean. The evening was a fair, soft, and serene one; but he was pressed to remain—for that night at least—the guest of Mr. Bellingham, and found himself, with that hospitality which is so genuinely West Indian, placed upon the footing of an old friend, with

no attention omitted that might enhance his welcome.

The dinner was perfect—from the turtle-soup to the dessert of grenadillos in malmsey, and the pile of dewy mangosteens which Virginia, with her own white hands, arranged in the silver basket; for she had the delicate touch and eye whereby some women can impart artistic taste to anything.

The great retinue of black servants somewhat reminded Vere of Bengal, save that in Jamaica they were fully clothed from head to foot; and one—Mr. Bellingham's special valet—a negro named Quashy, of gigantic stature, and certainly ferocious aspect, wore a species of livery, and, having been born on the estate, though of slave parents, spoke tolerable English.

After dinner Miss Bellingham opened her piano; and Vere soon discovered that she could play with skill and sing with exquisite taste, without afflicting the listener with those drawing-room 'heartrendings' which are generally so much in vogue; and as hour pleasantly succeeded hour, Vere could scarcely realise the idea that he was quite established as an

ami de la maison at Mango Garden, and seated beside the beautiful Virginia Bellingham, of whom he had heard so much at the mess, the Admiral's Pen, and elsewhere.

CHAPTER II.

'MAMMON WINS HIS WAY.'

LONG ere the time referred to in our last chapter, Lady Templeton and her daughters had been again in London—back again to town—back to the old routine of balls and routs, *fêtes*, flower-shows, and, as the season advanced, to garden-parties, a drawing-room or two, to polo at Lillie Bridge, dinners at Richmond, the ride in the Row, the drive in the Park, as of old, ere Gertrude knew Vere, and ere he left England and her. But this routine —no novelty now—was to be varied by a marriage in the family—the marriage of poor little Rosamund—after which tragedy Gertrude hoped they would all go back to Ringwood Hall.

Ere they had left the latter for London, she had been compelled to comport herself as if no gloom had fallen upon her heart, to act in charades, and to sing in duets—the beloved

old duets in which the voice of Vere, so well attuned, had replied to, or mingled with, her own, so that when she sang with others she almost felt as if Herbert were hovering near her chair, and was not far, far away; and in these, as in other scenes, she had to bear her part with an ever smiling face, while marvelling if, amid all the throng in which she mingled, and which buzzed so vapidly around her, there was another woman who, like herself, sighed for the sound of a hushed voice, and for an absent face, she never more might see.

How often now, amid these gay crowds and brilliant, yet inexpressibly dreary—because heartless—scenes, did all, at times, seem to fade away and be replaced by that twilight meeting at the mossy stile, and that bustling scene when the soldiers marched so merrily from Aldershot, and none seemed sad save him, whose wistful eyes met hers, so inquiringly and upbraidingly, for the last time!

Truly there was an amount of enthusiasm, with earnest and pure love, in the heart of Gertrude, which her mother would have deemed alike 'bosh' and 'bad form.'

Of the movements of Herbert, whom she was quite conscious of having used so ill, while influenced by a cruel misconception, she knew nothing and had heard nothing. Opposite his name in the *Army List*, as well as opposite those of Kyrle Desborough, Toby Finch, and some others, she saw the letter *d*, as 'detached,' and she was aware that their companies were still in Jamaica.

After her cutting treatment of him, did he still treasure her memory, and still love her in thought? It was more than she deserved—more than she could hope; and to what end or purpose was the hope fostered or brooded over now!

Vere had now been gone for several months. The rest of the battalion had not followed the three companies that were sent off in such hot haste; she was sure of that, as she had watched the papers, and made casual inquiries of those who were well up in such matters; so, surely, these three companies would return when the expected troubles in Jamaica were over. The first month or year of separation proves generally the longest. The longest? Her separation seemed final, because it was her own

doing, her mother's influence, and, lastly, Jocelyn Derinzy's guile. Oh, how she loathed Derinzy, with his fair fly-away whiskers, china-blue eyes, and calm insouciance; his general air of boredom, as if it were too great a trouble to exist on God's fair earth in any way! If time goes on she fears she may not miss Vere so much as she does now, and Gertrude shrinks from such an anticipation; and he—he who has no real reason to remember her lovingly and trustingly—even kindly, but only as a cold, calculating, and selfish girl, who treated him insolently—O Heavens, yes, insolently!—will he not seek the love of another?

Thus, by a species of mental vivisection, did Gertrude laboriously torment herself, while recalling ever and anon the expression of his passion-pale face on that night they met and parted at the stile, and the wistful—ay, half-despairing—glance which met her stony stare at Farnborough Station. With all these thoughts in her mind, she was never permitted by Lady Templeton to forget the views the latter entertained with regard to the colonel. Derinzy had been wild—nay, was a little wild, perhaps, yet—the matron would

say, 'he must have his fling—all young men have.' But even Maud admitted that the future viscount was 'a mild' five-and-thirty now.

Lady Templeton was in a high state of elation. Sir Ayling Aldwinkle's solicitor, by a single cheque on Coutts & Co., had swept away all her pestilent encumbrances, and Rosamund's magnificent settlements were all as secure as the Bank of England.

'And Winklestoke, my darling child,' she urged, 'is a veritable Aladdin's palace.'

'Without the roc's egg so coveted,' simpered the elderly lover.

'Oh, that is in the West Indies,' thought Maud, with a cold glitter in her eye.

So, on the day her doom was irrevocably fixed, poor Rosamund came listlessly to breakfast, left her letters unopened, ate nothing, was silent and *distraite*. The wretched meal over, she wandered—as one who would leave all thought behind her—listlessly from the drawing-room to the library, the conservatory, and the music-room. Then she opened a piano; the air she struck on, mechanically, was full of memories of *him*, and her eyes filled with hot and unbidden tears.

She had hoped against Hope itself that 'something would turn up' (as Mr. Micawber says) to change her dreary destiny; but all chance of that was past now, and she abandoned herself to the current of Fate as unresistingly as if she was being swept down the current of Niagara; and when her mother said, 'Do not look at me, my child, as if I were injuring you, instead of doing my best to serve your interests as a loving mother and friend;' she shivered with disgust at the heartlessness with which she felt she was sold—literally sold like so much land—and sacrificed to keep up appearances.

'O mamma, is there nothing in your own heart—no memory of your girlhood,' she urged piteously, 'that will speak for me in such a time as this?'

'None,' was the grim reply. 'I was never at any time given to sickly sentimentality,' she added, as some rumour had been given her of a secret attachment somewhere. 'Forget your visionary hopes and degrading regrets, and remember that your fanciful troubles are somewhat small as compared with what mine would have been had not Sir

Ayling acted in the princely manner he has done.'

It is only after a free indulgence of grief that the heart first feels a species of respite from it—a respite that may be born of great weariness; so it was with Rosamund Templeton, who now became calm, but still remained wretched.

It was hot and breathless August now, and the London season was long since past and over; so very few were in town to speculate on the subject of her marriage, when the day came, as it did, inexorably.

'Rosamund Templeton,' said Lady Grundy, 'is actually about to marry a man old enough to be her grandfather, and for the sake of his money—it can't be his title, for she is a peer's daughter, and he is only a baronet—a girl just eighteen! It is an abyss of degradation, my dear!'

She was always, others said, self-willed, ambitious—unlike other girls—odd, and hoidenish. Yet sweet little Rosamund was none of these; only her good-natured 'friends' misjudged, while anxiously looking forward to the magnificence of her routs, recep-

tions, and drums after the honeymoon had waned.

'Oh, that I might die before night!' was the first thought of the poor girl on her marriage morning; but she felt that she was too young and strong, and too full of life, to find such an escape. Yet the pallor of her wan face, the strange and hunted expression of her eyes, and the deep shades beneath would not be concealed.

'Rosamund!' exclaimed her mother, with more asperity than sympathy, 'this is intolerable—you must pull yourself together, if one may use such a phrase.'

'You, I know, are sorry for me, Gertrude,' whispered the girl, as she nestled her sad little face in the white neck of her sister, whose tears mingled with their kisses; and so the morning of the marriage day crept on.

'How many brides go to the altar with hearts that would bear inspection by the men who take them there?' asks the author of the *Moonstone.*

With what horror Rosamund looked upon the bridal dress she was to wear—evening dress in the glare of the August noon! Yet

it was, as Lady Templeton said, perfect, and quite in accordance with her family and the position of her intended husband; and she had but one thought, that a correct description of it should be sent to the *Morning Post* and *Court Circular*, that all the world might know it was 'a dress of rich white duchesse satin, with transparent sleeves of point de gaze; that the skirt was all ornamented with orange blossoms and gardenias over plessis of satin; and that a Brussels lace veil completed her toilette.'

Then would follow a description of her jewels and presents, with the costume of her six bridesmaids, with the inevitable enamel lockets, the gift of the bridegroom, with the bride's initials on one side, and his armorial bearings on the other—quarterly—first and fourth, *azure*, three winkles, *argent;* second and third, *gules*, three periwinkles, *or;* and the ancient motto, '*Volo, non valeo.*'

To Rosamund the whole details of the morning, the rapturous expressions of the maid who attended her, of her bridesmaids, their kisses, and the sham congratulations of four (in addition to Maud and Gertrude),—

all seemed portions of a hideous dream. So seemed the very brightness of the sun, though she was of course reminded that happy was the bride the sun shone on; and, like one in a dream, she found herself taking the arm of her brother, Lord Templeton, a cheeky young specimen of an Eton lad, who thought the whole affair great fun, and was much disposed to chaff his intended brother-in-law, and might have done so, but for the wretchedness he read in his sister's face as he led her into that famous temple of Hymen, St. George's, Hanover Square, 'the fashionable marriage shop,' as his little lordship called it to his horrified mamma; 'a shop,' he added, 'which should be dedicated, not to St. George, but St. Valentine.'

CHAPTER III.

ST. GEORGE'S, HANOVER SQUARE.

For more than a century this famous, yet far from magnificent, fane has been preferentially the temple dedicated for the celebration of fashionable bridals. It was built in the time of George I., when all taste was at its lowest ebb, on ground belonging to an old Whig general; and it was named not out of compliment to the slayer of the dragon, but as a graceful tribute to the first sovereign of the House of Hanover who condescended to reign over these realms. For years it was celebrated for the marriages of enemies of the House of Stuart alone.

Since those days in that fane how many thousands of fair fingers have been encircled by the mystic emblem of eternity; and how many thousands have knelt before its communion rails, mumbling hastily and nervously, in confusion, that portion of the Book of

Common Prayer devoted to the solemnisation of matrimony! St. George's, Hanover Square! Why, the very name of the church is associated only with groves of orange flowers and wedding favours; with snowy veils encircling maiden brows, white satins, bouquets, and Brussels lace; with beauty and youth, blushes and tears, simpers and jokes, joy, wealth, and rank; with Rimmel and Swan & Edgar.

Yet no more beautiful bride ever appeared before those well-worn hassocks than the now passive and pallid girl whom the young Lord Templeton led forward to hear, by the side of Sir Ayling Aldwinkle, the words that were to bind her for life, after the quaint formula of the special licence had been seen to.

The bewitchingly inquiring, we may almost call it insolent, little glance which Rosamund was apt to bestow on such a lover as Sir Ayling, and which seemed to express, 'Who or what on earth are you?' was gone now, and never, never more would be in her sweet girlish face. Behind her, clad uniformly alike, with bouquets, came her six bridesmaids, four of whom, of course, were delighted with the idea of the bridal, and only too anx-

ious to disport themselves thereat, feeling that they ranked only second in importance to the victim—for such she was; so true is it that 'a man may marry the woman he wishes to marry, but a woman can only marry the man who wishes to marry *her*.'

If Sir Ayling Aldwinkle seemed absurd in the character of a lover, how much more was he absurd and odious in that of a bridegroom! As one who, he not unnaturally conceived, was about to become a member of the Ringwood family circle, Sir Ayling had chosen the tall and *distingué*-looking Derinzy for his groomsman; a dreadful mistake on his part, so far as comparison in personal appearance went.

The colonel's grandfather, the viscount, was alleged to be almost dying now; so, fully countenanced by Lady Templeton, he was hovering near Gertrude; and after his watery blue eyes had rested with a quizzical expression on the bridegroom, whose lean fingers had great difficulty in discovering the whereabouts of the wedding ring at the very moment it was wanted, they wandered over the ladies present, with the usual assumption of

criticism, impertinence, and indifference they were wont to wear; yet those he regarded thus had all the soft and rich patrician beauty of Tyburnian belles.

'I heard of this engagement at the club,' lisped a *blasé* brother Guardsman, 'but couldn't believe it—thought, if it existed at all, that it was only one of those affairs that are to be broken—not by death, but by the close of the season; and here we are!—poor little goose! or knave—'pon my soul, don't know which the girl is! Jocelyn, you know the family well, I believe?'

Derinzy's face darkened a little; but he could not fail to overhear many similar remarks from persons lured into the church by curiosity, the brilliance of the *cortége*, and the jingle of the marriage bells, and who contrasted the youth and beauty of the girl with the age of the ailing, but fashionably attired, old pantaloon to whom she was consigned; and much of contempt was mingled with their pity.

'He is very old, shaky, and all that,' said the former speaker; 'it is a doocid mistake.'

'Perhaps,' replied Derinzy; 'but some one has written that "the moment a girl is engaged

to be married to a man, people seem to think they are privileged to abuse him."'

'Ah, I never quote; don't read much, you know. What's the use?'

'Such a flutter Sir Ayling is in!' whispered another of the Brigade, Sir Ascot Softeigh.

'Poor old devil! Feels himself an object of interest,' was the comment of some one else.

'"Maidens, like moths, are ever caught by glare;
And Mammon wins his way where seraphs might despair."'

'But where the deuce is the glare here, man?'

'In old Sir Ayling's cheque-book,' said Sir Ascot.

When the latter looked upon his bride, pure as the lily, there was a bright gray glitter in his usually fishy eyes; and he chuckled to himself at the thought of how all those young fellows envied him, chuckled with an air that was half mischievous, half malicious, and wholly triumphant; and to Gertrude, who looked on with her heart full of intense pity, with his thin aristocratic nose and pointed chin, he seemed a kind of veteran Mephisto-

pheles in the smartest of morning costume; and as she knelt with Maud and the four other bridesmaids at the altar, she marvelled in her heart with whom, if ever, she would kneel, as Rosamund was now doing, in such a place.

Not with Vere she was assured, and not with Derinzy she prayed in her inmost heart. The sacrifice made by the hapless Rosamund had saved them from monetary trouble and all its contingent speculation and discomfort, if not shame. No other victim was required; thus, if further tyranny were attempted with her, she thought she could be a governess, deaconess, sister of mercy, or something else, it mattered not what. Brought up as she had been the thought of poverty scared her; but surely all dread of *that* was passed now; and some people might think that Rosamund had only attained early the full desire of the belle of the season — marriage with the richest bachelor; but poor Rosamund was just 'out,' and, oh, Sir Ayling Aldwinkle was such a terrible bachelor! And all these wretched ideas floated through the mind of the girl, kneeling there in all her bridesmaid's bravery, while the solemn words of the sixty-seventh

psalm were in progress on the other side of the altar rails.

Passive and indifferent to all around her though Rosamund had become, she was sensible of a singular start given by Sir Ayling Aldwinkle during one part of the ceremony, and also of a glance, almost a frown, his eyes gave towards a certain pillar of the church. Those of Rosamund travelled mechanically in the same direction, and she encountered for a moment the fixed, steady, and hostile, yet somewhat sad, gaze of a stranger, a rather plainly clad but handsome woman, who, on finding herself discovered, shrunk hastily back, mingled with the crowd, and disappeared.

This was the only incident of the day—a trivial one, but one which Rosamund was fated to recall at a future time—that roused her for a moment from the apathy in which she was sunk—she, the sacrifice, the hapless victim of the Templeton family; and when next she roused herself she was in the vestry, with congratulatory friends crowding about; and we are bound to record the fact that, when her mother kissed her, one solitary tear *did* appear in each of the cold and glittering eyes

of that noble dowager; and then, to the resounding notes of Mendelssohn's Wedding March, she went forth, as in a dream, leaning on the arm of her husband.

Then followed in all its usual routine and splendour the marriage breakfast, at which the little Lord Templeton got 'tight as a drum,' as he phrased it, and at which Gertrude obtained, in the most casual way, some information that gave her food for thought for some time to come.

Among the bridesmaids there chanced to be a Miss Finch, a merry bright-eyed girl, a relation of Sir Ayling Aldwinkle and sister of our friend Toby of the Eighth, who was then amusing himself with sundry flirtations in the neighbourhood of Morant Bay; and from her Gertrude heard something she would rather *not* have heard; for we are compelled sometimes to hear that which we never can forget.

Had she heard from her brother lately? It was Maud who asked the simple question, but with that serene indifference and composure of manner that belonged to Maud and no one else.

Oh, yes, she had heard from poor Toby by

nearly every mail since he left Southampton; he was a dear kind brother, and so fond of her!

Had he given her any news of his friends in the Eighth?

Oh, yes; Toby had told her a good deal about his particular friend Vere especially, added the girl, laughing.

What was it? asked Maud of a purpose.

Herbert Vere had fallen most desperately in love with a beautiful Creole, or the beautiful Creole had fallen most desperately in love with him—she forgot which—the belle of Jamaica, whose papa had become so attached to Vere, that the latter was quite neglecting all his military duties, and had actually taken up his residence at the fair one's—or rather, she supposed, dark one's—house, Cucumber Garden, or some such funny name.

Gertrude turned away, for she felt that the somewhat mischievous eyes of Maud were upon her. She had listened to all this and even more, told in the way of girlish gossip and small-talk; and as she did so, she felt the blood rush to her pale face, and a sick faintness steal over her; while the buzz, brilliance,

and gaiety of the marriage breakfast seemed a species of phantasmagoria, and the stately room, with all its fashionable guests around her, like a whirlpool of bright laughing faces, costumes, light, and colour.

Then an enforced calmness possessed her, and she was compelled to say in her heart,

'What right have I to be sorry or glad—interested in any way—with news from the West Indies? He may love—yes, he may marry his Creole girl, if he chooses; but he can never forget the time when *I* was all the world to him!'

Between him and her there was neither tie nor confidence; and 'confidence,' says Florence Marryat, 'is the very soul of love, without which it has but a temporary existence. True deep-rooted love is not a plant of such delicate growth that it can be torn up and cast out to wither in a day.'

Gertrude thought of this, and also that, if he actually loved this seductive West Indian girl—for that she must be seductive jealousy left her not a doubt—then in that case his passion for herself could not have been a deep-rooted one.

Her classic beauty roused at that moment the genuine admiration of Derinzy, while her listlessness of manner piqued his pride. She looked so charming, with a soft delicate loveliness that only wanted the animation she cared not to give it to become brilliant; but when he addressed her once or twice in his capacity of groomsman, she barely answered him, and he drew back, twirling his long moustache with a 'worried' air.

The 'season' was long since over, and Gertrude had gone through it all uncomplainingly—a model of patience. It had dragged itself to an end; and Rosamund's marriage was to be the sequel, so far as the Ringwood family was concerned. Gertrude with wonder heard people declare it to have been the gayest and most delightful season heard of in London for years.

To her it seemed a monotonous memory of crowded drawing-rooms, where she and others waxed pale in the glare of lamps (and the perfume produced by exotics and Rimmel), as they sighed for the wandering breeze that came from a curtained balcony or staircase.

The beautiful West Indian! Was it jeal-

ousy made Gertrude Templeton repeat these words to herself ever and anon? If not, whence the bitter pang that seemed to shoot through her heart, and yet to linger there? But what reason had she to be jealous? Had she not by her own lips forbidden him to hope, thus thrusting his heart on himself, and on any woman who would have it? and, more than all, had she not finally put upon him an insult by her manner—after *all* that had passed between them—inexplicable, and unexplainable, apparently, now?

Yet her heart ached with pain at the idea of him being happy with a new love: he was once so good and loyal, tender and true, to herself; and now, in fancy, she saw the eyes that had whilom turned so lovingly to her own looking down on this new face; and thus, as her jealousy 'made the food' it fed on, she deplored that she had ever seen, ever known, or learned to love, Herbert Vere.

How she courted solitude, and longed to be again at Ringwood Hall! There, in loneliness, she had the liberty of indulging in her own thoughts; but in society she felt the slavery of having to interest herself in persons,

places, and things she cared nothing about, and had to go through the world with a perpetual company-smile on her lips—it seldom reached her eyes now.

When again she heard of Herbert Vere, it was through the medium of the public prints, when affairs in Jamaica had come to the musket at last; and such wild work was being enacted there as the Antilles had not seen since the terrible old Maroon war; and amid the perils of that wild work his life was hourly cast.

But now she was roused from thought by a general movement of the whole company; the bride had changed her costume, and was about to leave her paternal home for ever.

The carriage, with four magnificent high-stepping grays, was at the door; and Sir Ayling, his old heart swelling with all the pride of proprietary—feeling that she is mine—mine—*mine*—appeared, hat in hand, with a thin dust-coat thrown over one arm.

'Miss Rosamund, are you ready?' he asked, smiling.

Whereupon Maud whispered to Lady Templeton that it was a bad omen, surely, in

him to forget already that she was Lady Aldwinkle.

'Folly!' said the dowager; 'how can you think of such trifles?'

There was no superstition of the heart about *her*.

Heedless of the genuine English well-bred horror of a 'scene,' or of exhibiting any human emotion, Rosamund clung passionately to the neck of Gertrude, and whispered,

'O Gerty, my darling, my darling, if you do not marry Vere, die rather than do as I have done!'

At last all the stereotyped kisses had been exchanged, smiles exhibited, tears shed, and, amid showers of rice, to which were added a few old slippers from the adjacent area, 'the happy couple' took their departure, and then the guests, with the usual conviction that a marriage is but a dreary affair in general, began to take their departure, and soon silence reigned in the drawing-rooms and great dining-hall of the Ringwood family.

The last to depart was Jocelyn Derinzy, who did so with an air of as much discontent as it was possible for a creature so

magnificent, solemn, and unimpressionable to exhibit.

'You have grossly affronted the colonel, Gertrude!' said Lady Templeton, with some severity of tone; 'and only think of *your* doing so on this most important day too!'

'Have I, mamma?' asked Gertrude wearily.

'Yes.'

'Well, mamma, if he chooses to be offended, what of it?'

'Only this trifle—that I hope you are satisfied now, by having, perhaps, by your bearing before all these guests—a bearing in the worst possible form—lost, perhaps, the title of viscountess, with settlements only second to those of your fortunate younger sister.'

'I was only weary, mamma—weary and *distraite*.'

'Wherefore *distraite* on a day of joy?' asked the dowager snappishly and loftily.

'I fear some unmeaning remarks of Miss Finch have upset Gertrude,' said Maud, unclasping two magnificent bracelets Sir Ayling had given her.

'Oh, about *that* Mr. Vere, I believe!' said

Lady Templeton; and Gertrude winced at the relative pronoun and her mother's more than usually cutting tone. 'I have read, truly, somewhere, once let a woman "fancy a man to be a hero, a martyr, a patriot, or any other uncomfortable celebrity certain to make a bad husband, and she will be ready to throw herself at his head, just as if such is not the very last man in the world she ought to select."'

'I am not aware, mamma, that Mr. Vere of the Eighth is either a hero or a martyr,' replied Gertrude, with difficulty restraining her tears, and seeming still to hear the wheels that bore away her beloved little sister; 'nor have I selected him for a husband.'

'Those are the wisest words you have uttered for some time, my dear. Marriage may be the affair of a lifetime, even between couples with some disparity in their years, as there is in those of Rosamund and Sir Ayling; but his settlements were princely, princely,' added Lady Templeton, fanning herself; 'and *next* time we know not what may happen—our Rosamund may choose for herself. Indeed, Sir Ascot Softeigh, after he had taken too

much champagne, said almost as much to me this morning.'

'For such a remark his name should be struck off our lists,' said Gertrude, thinking the while how heartless the speech of her mother was.

Long, long years might follow that wedding; but for Rosamund, *not* for Sir Ayling Aldwinkle certainly. It was a marriage that for Rosamund had no future; it could only be some years of calm misery, vacuity, and then perhaps, with all 'the princely settlements,' perhaps an aimless and hopeless widowhood.

CHAPTER IV.

ARRIVAL OF THE BRIDE.

In preference to the Continent, where they were certain to meet every one they knew, the newly-wedded pair proceeded by train to the country seat of Sir Ayling, the carriage and horses being all transferred to the trucks, as if by magic, at St. Pancras.

'No good can come of such a marriage!' said the most gentle and charitable; while the malevolent and the gossip-loving echoed the words to the full, but in a different spirit, and with very different anticipations.

And charming looked the beautiful, though touchingly pale, girl in her travelling dress, which was so suited to her blonde complexion and golden-tinted hair, pearl-gray silk, with a bonnet so tiny that it seemed to consist of a single feather formed into a circle, and the white veil of which she kept tied tightly under her chin—too tightly Sir Ayling thought.

Of his words and caresses she was almost oblivious; she heard the former and shrinkingly endured the latter, as one in a horrible dream; while the *coupé* in which they were seated sped on with the train, in a second-class carriage of which, no doubt, his valets and her maid were having their own servants'-hall jokes over the whole affair.

Rosamund felt as if all the world were one mass of unreality. Married—all was over—there could be no reprieve but death—no going back now. The thought—the conviction—terrified and stunned her!

'Ah,' she thought, 'how true it is that we cannot serve God and Mammon; and at the altar of the latter most cruelly has my life been laid down to-day! Plays and novels always close with a wedding, as if life ended there. Oh, would that it did, so far as I am concerned!'

But ever before her was the thought of the grim and receding future—the horrible, cheerless, joyless, unloved, and unloving future.

Rosamund was a curious compound, and, with all her hoidenish love of gaiety, was wont

to spend hours in the old shady library at Ringwood Hall, among books antique, quaint, and forgotten now. There the somewhat parallel sorrows of Julia de Roubigne had made a deep impression upon the girl, as the matrimonial net was being woven around her; and now, when shrinking from Sir Ayling's arm and side, she recalled a letter, where the heroine writes to her friend: 'Maria, in my hours of visionary indulgence, I have often painted to myself one—no matter whom—comforting me amidst the distresses which misfortune had laid upon me. I have smiled upon him through my tears—tears not of anguish, but of tenderness; our children were playing around us, unconscious of misfortune; we taught them to be humble and be happy; our little shed was reserved to us, and their smiles to cheer it. I have imagined the luxury of such a scene, and affliction became a part of my dream of happiness.'

But of the latter there could be none in store for Rosamund, and her thoughts were sad and terrible for an enthusiastic young girl on her marriage day; yet she made a resolute attempt to appear composed and to listen to

Sir Ayling, who, perceiving that she *did* recoil from his blandishments, as he flattered himself, in childish or girlish fear, was good-natured enough to attempt to interest her in the passing objects—spires, villages, woodlands, and uplands—now steeped in all the golden glory of an August sun, while ever and anon he looked at his watch and calculated to a nicety the time at which they must reach the station and quit the train for Winklestoke.

But ever and always, out of the chaos of her thoughts and of all that seemed to gather round her, came the strange face and wistful eyes of the woman she had seen in the church, and the general expression of whose sharp features had an unwarrantable and most unpleasant fascination for Rosamund, who strove not to think about her.

Once again they were in a well-hung and luxuriously-cushioned family carriage, with its four gray high-steppers in their flashing silver harness, followed by a mail-cart with all their luggage. The well-wooded roads were swiftly traversed in the deepening twilight; ere long the lodge-gates of Winklestoke were past, and the preparations there to 'welcome

home the bride' brought neither joy nor satisfaction to the suffering heart of Rosamund; but they were all to be undergone nevertheless.

There were the cheers of the tenantry, the shouts of the Giles Chawbacons and Timothy Tugmuttons in canvas frocks and hobnailed shoes; the dreadful music discoursed by the band of the Aldwinkle Rifle Volunteers on the lawn; an address, delivered by a steward, butler, or some one in black, at a triumphal arch of evergreens, while the village bells chimed pleasantly in the distance; and then Sir Ayling handed his bride from the depths of the carriage at the open door of a stately old English mansion, where the now world-weary girl became an object of intense interest, admiration, and too evidently some little commiseration to the whole household assembled in the hall, through which she had to pass, between two lines of them facing inwards, all curtsying or bowing, their faces wreathed in smiles got up for the occasion.

Undoubtedly Winklestoke looked like what it really was, a magnificent old mansion, to the aching eyes of Rosamund, as the carriage,

with its stately high-steppers, swept up to the perron that led to the grand entrance, whence a flood of warm light seemed to gush into the evening outside. It was Tudoresque, and somewhat in the style of Ringwood Hall, but twice its size, and had in its substructure some fragments of the Norman castle, built upon the site of the old Stoke or wooden dwelling of the Saxon Winkles of Aldwinkle.

The great stone staircase reminded Rosamund of Hampton Court, especially as it was all frescoed by the brush of the same decorator who adorned that palace, Antonio Verrio, who died in the year of the Union, 1707, and whose florid designs—gods, goddesses, fruit, flowers—covered the walls pell-mell. This staircase was vast in size and extent, and its shadows would have been ghostly, but for the flood of light from a vast chandelier, which pervaded every part of it.

Off it opened a stone-flagged hall, having a mighty oaken table and high square-backed chairs, in which old Noll had sat with Monk, Hesilrig, and others, when on the march to Scotland, greatly to the disgust of the then lord of Winklestoke. On the walls were Van-

dykes, Lelys, and so forth, in faded frames. In other rooms was furniture of Queen Anne's days—settles whereon Addison might have lounged, or Clarissa Harlowe have graciously accorded the tips of her fairy fingers to Sir Charles Grandison, while kneeling before her 'refulgent magnificence;' and there were brass-bound escritoires, at which she might have penned her replies to her solemn, distant, and courteous adorer. On every hand there seemed to open long suites of old-fashioned rooms, panelled with oak, hung with pictures and heavy draperies.

Everything was stately and grand, and bore the impress of rank and family; but as the girl looked wearily around her she thought she should have preferred 'the shed' of Julia de Roubigne better, if the said dwelling, however humble, were to be shared with Kyrle Desborough.

While Sir Ayling repaired to the stately dining-room, where a paragon of respectable butlers poured out some refreshing beverage for his delectation and mumbled his congratulations, Rosamund was conducted by her maid to the rooms that were prepared for her;

and notwithstanding all that she had seen and been accustomed to in London and elsewhere, their luxury, splendour, and the general atmosphere of wealth and taste that pervaded them could not fail to impress the girl, all weary and heart-stricken though she was.

Wax candles in blue Sèvres branches lighted the gilt tables and carved mantelpieces of white marble, which were exquisitely garlanded with flowers. No fires were in the grates, the month being August, but they were marvels of elegance and polished steel, and filled with artificial flowers. The draperies were of the most delicate satin, the boudoir and dressing-room were miracles of taste and elaboration, and the low Arabian bed looked as if meant for the bride of Aladdin, save that it had around it rugs that were pure white, and soft as the bosom of a swan, the softest and downiest that Siberia could furnish.

Her maid deposited Rosamund's magnificent morocco travelling-bag, and hastened to relieve her of her shawl, when the girl, whose whole soul at that moment was longing for the voice, the presence, and the kiss of her sister Gertrude, said, so petulantly and

half imperiously, as if now thoroughly hunted and worried,

'Leave me, please, for a little time; when I require you I will ring.'

On this the girl curtsied and withdrew, to make her report in the servants' hall, and compare notes with the gossiping and now fairly-wondering denizens of that locality, to whom the extreme youth of the bride was a source of immense speculation; so much so that even her beauty was forgotten amid it, by the women at least.

But the moment the girl left her, and Rosamund found herself alone, the kind of false excitement which had sustained her since the morning, since the time she had been in the hands of fashionable *modistes* and bridesmaids, now completely gave way; the room swam round her, she sank upon a sofa, and felt as if she were dying.

And with a prayer in her heart and on her pallid lips, she earnestly hoped she was so, as sight and sound left her and she became perfectly insensible.

Half an hour, an hour, passed away; the bridegroom fidgeted about the dining-room,

sipping some Chablis from time to time, and comparing his watch with the great ormolu clock above the mantelpiece.

'Lady—Lady Aldwinkle is very long. What can detain her thus?' he muttered aloud. 'Oh, doubtless her maid is giving a finishing touch for the fiftieth time to some part of her costume. Ah, the little rogue is anxious to please me after all!'

And then the old fellow chuckled as he surveyed the remains of what had undeniably been a handsome young face some forty years ago, and thought what 'a sad dog' he was yet.

At last he rang the bell and desired the maid, a little impatiently, to see after her mistress, who he was confounded to find had been all this time in her room alone.

The abigail knocked again and again without receiving the faintest response.

'She's asleep!' thought the girl, opening the door softly; 'and how deadly pale she looks!' she added, as she saw the breathless figure recumbent on the sofa, with a face white as Carrara marble reposing on an outstretched arm.

Something of indefinable awe and dread

crept over the girl, or rather superseded surprise; for she thought that *she* would not have slept or been 'taken like this' on her marriage night. She drew nearer, and her dread deepened. The dark lashes lay still and motionless on the marble cheek, without the slightest quiver or flicker, and the pale face looked painfully, terribly still in its marble-like repose.

A piercing shriek escaped the girl, who rushed from the apartment, and came flying like a scared bird down the grand staircase.

'Dead—dead—my mistress is dead!'

Such was the wild cry with which she startled the household of Winklestoke, inspiring a panic of horror in the hearts of all; but certainly in none more than poor old Sir Ayling, who became almost palsied with terror.

Selfish, feeble, and superstitious, with weakness that was childish and unpardonable in his horror of a dead thing, this old man, so near his own grave, dared not go near her, touch her, or look upon her, the lovely bride of that auspicious morning, and around whose shrinking form his lean arm had been lovingly

the live-long day; and a tumult of terrible and aggravating, rather than sorrowful, thoughts swept over him.

Ill, dying, dead, or what, upon her bridal night! If the story got abroad, as it must do, Sir Ayling Aldwinkle, who loathed scenes, worry, speculations, and explanations, 'and all that sort of thing,' instinctively and nervously beheld, with horrible anticipation, the newspaper paragraphs, the *post-mortem* examination, and the coroner's inquest, with all its morbid elucidations, evidence, pros and cons, learned vulgarity, and the prodigious excitement and *esclandre* of the whole affair in 'society,' that stupendous bugbear.

Mounted messengers scoured all the district for doctors; the telegraphs to London and elsewhere were set to work. Sir Ayling drained the last of his Chablis, and sat in an armchair, polishing his bald head with a white-silk handkerchief, and looking the picture of well-bred misery and woe as the night of his marriage—that most terrible night—wore on.

CHAPTER V.

VERE'S REFLECTIONS.

At the time of the ill-omened marriage we have just related, either Miss Finch or her brother Toby had greatly exaggerated, or at least anticipated, the state of affairs at Mango Garden.

Vere certainly did avail himself of the old planter's (Mr. Bellingham's) hospitality to remain in his mansion on the night of the storm; and on that occasion, Vere, though as a soldier accustomed usually to be able to sleep anywhere and with a total indifference as to his surroundings, either from the closeness of the atmosphere or the chatter of the negroes outside and other external sounds, found sleep almost impossible, and for hours he gave way to reverie, in which thoughts of Gertrude, of Virginia, of Moreno and the discontented blacks, and then of Gertrude, again and again occurred to him.

The moon was shining brightly above the mountains, and at such a time the negroes are fond of sitting up the greater part of the night in the verandahs, conversing and telling 'nancy stories,'—*i.e.* tales of ghosts and hob-goblins,—or singing to the banjo, tambourine, and pipe; but on this night, as there was a strong infusion of politics in the subjects of conversation, they were gesticulating violently, and chattering like so many monkeys—Quashy, the valet, taking the lead in everything, and being daringly noisy. And so, with their strange voices and occasional bursts of savage-like laughter in his ears, while watching the red fireflies flashing about near the open spars of the green jalousies, Vere thought with some surprise over the pleasant quarters in which he so suddenly found himself.

Virginia Bellingham was undoubtedly beautiful, and her image occurred to him again and again. Was this the effect of fancy, or the jolly planter's heady Madeira?

'Gertrude!' he muttered, 'God knows that from my heart I now wish that I had never seen—never, never known—you! But hearts don't break nowadays.'

Brooding, he thought over all the stories he had heard, after the small hours at mess or elsewhere, told in a maudlin way, when brandy-pawnee and 'mild weeds' succeeded the wine, by fellows who became suddenly seized by tender memories or confidential fits, and who kept their faces unseen in shadow as they made, while inspired by some craving for sympathy or to excite interest, revelations they would never have done if quite sober or in the light of open day; and he marvelled if a time would ever come when he too, a fogey, would play this game, 'and make a donkey of himself,' and be deemed a bore by subs. who were now at school.

Toby Finch, Clive, Prior, and the doctor, though all young comparatively, were wont to prose in this fashion when they had too much wine under their belts; but Kyrle Desborough, though some years their senior, never indulged in this weakness, and usually proved a cynic listener and commentator. His story, whatever it was, and that he had a story none in the corps ever doubted, was a point too tender with him to be trotted out for speculation; but all the mess knew how Toby Finch had

been jilted, because his *innamorata* preferred a carriage and pair to himself; how Clive's darling had died of a fever up-country on the very day they were to have been married; how Prior's intended had been dazzled by a title, and just after he had despatched to her an epistle full of expressions of undying love he saw her marriage among the fashionable intelligence; but the assistant-surgeon's 'escape from the noose,' as Desborough called it, was the strangest of all; and always provoked the laughter of the mess, to whom he lugubriously related it when the night was far advanced.

When they were at Malta, he had become entangled with a bewitching little Maltese. Charlie had seen lots of pretty girls—ay, beautiful girls, he was wont to say—and had admired them only with the eye of an artist; but now it seemed that the face of his Maltese belle, when, with her eyes sparkling under the black-lace faldetta, she smiled on him, was the only one in the world for him. They had met at the general's ball and many other places; they had 'done' together all the delightful little excursions in the neighbour-

hood, the Gardens at Floriana, the ride to Sliema, the shady Boschetto, and all the lions of the two islands; they had flirted in the boxes of old Manuel Vilhena's theatre, and even sought solitude and each other's society tenderly in the odious catacombs, where certainly the doctor found himself, in a manner, at home; and the marriage day was actually fixed at last. So the doctor gave a farewell dinner to Desborough and a few other chums in the Auberge de Provence, where much more wine was consumed on the occasion than was good for the party, who drank the health of the bride and bridegroom, and extolled the beauty of the former again and again, till the time came for separating, and Charlie Capsicum and Desborough, steadying each other as best they could, betook them to the barracks, by those 'cursed streets of stairs,' which Byron has anathematised, scrambling on, when the light of a golden dawn was beginning to tint the blue waves of the Mediterranean, and eclipse the lamps of the Madonnas at the corner of every street.

Dubious of their way, they had gradually ascended all the flights that lead to the Strada

Reale, when Charlie gave a lurch, and was on the point of descending again with terrible rapidity, when the strong hand of Kyrle caught him; but just in time.

'Take care, doctor,' he exclaimed, 'or by Jove there will be a vacancy in the medical list.'

'O Signore,' exclaimed a girl breathlessly, as she threw back her faldetta, 'are you a dottore?'

'Bedad, he is, my dear; do you want him?' answered Kyrle.

'O Signore, O Signori!' exclaimed the girl, in the greatest tribulation, 'come with me; the Signora is dying!'

'The Signora—who?'

Neither of the friends caught the name; but they followed the girl into a handsome house, above the door of which was a tiny Madonna in a niche, with a lamp burning before it. Our doctor had not in excess the perceptive faculties at any time, and they were more than very clouded now, when he was ushered into a luxurious chamber, where a lady was in bed, and seriously ill to all appearance.

Her face, half turned away, was a beautiful one, and seemed not unfamiliar to him; or rather *their* faces, for between the wine he had imbibed, and more than one tumble he had had on the flight of stairs, Charlie Capsicum was sorely troubled in mind to decide whether he had one or two patients before him.

'The Signore Dottore has come *too late*,' said a lady, who was in attendance; 'it is all over.'

'What is all over?' asked Charlie, as the strange but very unmistakable voice of a little babe was heard like that of a cricket somewhere; and then the patient, for there was but one, turned her pale face towards him, and a low cry escaped her when he recognised his intended. So there was the end of a great mystery; and Charlie walked home to his quarters in St. Elmo a soberer man than ever he had been for months before; and such was the reminiscence with which he was wont to favour the laughing lingerers at mess, after more allowance of wine had gone round than the messman could reckon.

Vere thought over all these and other stories, we say, and wondered if *his* turn

would ever come to be seized with absurd fits of confidence. No, no; he would take a lesson by Kyrle Desborough, and be close as a smith's vice. Then he thought again of Virginia Bellingham, and fell asleep with the pleasant memory of her voice in his ear, and the knowledge that he was to meet her on the morrow.

Next day the planter would by no means hear of Vere returning to Morant Bay, urging that Finch could look after the detachment well enough, he had no doubt; and Vere remembered that as it was Saturday there would be no parade—moreover, he was his own commanding officer; and then the grace with which Miss Bellingham, clad in the airiest of muslin morning costume, presided over the luxurious breakfast table, proved the strongest argument of all; so Herbert Vere remained, yielding in spite of himself to the charm of her presence, and the piquancy of her manner.

Her dark and defined eyebrows were very slightly arched, but gave great character to her face; and when she spoke her eyes dilated and sparkled, while the face itself possessed some subtle charm apart from the perfection of

features. Her nose was straight and determined, as her mouth was delicate, feminine, and gentle. She was colourless, save such colour as the white rose has; yet the girl was in full and perfect health, though in all her actions she seemed to Vere one of the most gracefully indolent fair ones he had ever met. She seemed to recline rather than sit, to glide rather than walk, but all this charming languor was the result of her West Indian rearing; and she formed a wonderful contrast to the negro valet or factotum of her father, who hovered constantly near her chair, and seemed to have eyes for her wants and wishes alone, a tall powerful sable giant named Quashy, whose form was like that of a bronze Hercules, in whom every muscle, nerve, and fibre had been developed to an extreme by outdoor exercise; and in whose undoubtedly ferocious face on this morning a lowering expression seemed to hover.

Mr. Bellingham detected this, and inquired the reason.

Quashy asserted that he had seen a black cloud pass over Mango Garden that morning about dawn, and that in it he could distinctly

see the eyes, mouth, and nose of his brother Pluto, who had died in the prison of Morant Bay, where he had been put for stealing game by Massa Ketelhodt; and at the name of that official his eyes shone with a lurid glare, and he showed all his white glistening teeth like a ground shark.

'That will do, Quashy; you may go!' said Mr. Bellingham, with some annoyance of manner. 'You see, Mr. Vere, the spirit that is already manifesting itself so fast among these people. Matters are daily looking worse and worse, and we know not where the growing insolence of these blacks will end.'

Vere thought of the speaker's nephew Moreno, and of the startling contents of that individual's pocket-book; he thought also of the terrible vow recorded on the flyleaf thereof, and his eyes naturally rested on Miss Bellingham; but he remained silent on the subject of her dangerous relative, whom it would have been bad taste to have mentioned.

'I have heard my grandfather—he was fourth in descent from the Cromwellian colonel—tell of the terrible atrocities incident to the revolt of the Maroons here in his time,' said

Mr. Bellingham, 'when property to the value of nearly two millions was destroyed, and in one way or other seven hundred stalwart negroes were put to death. The aim of our blacks in the present day is simply to emulate that vast conspiracy, which in San Domingo had for its object the total extirpation of the whites, and the establishment of an independent negro government throughout the whole island. On that occasion, so profound was the secrecy, so perfect the cunning and dissimulation of the slaves, that the dreadful catastrophe was in no way apprehended till it burst with a fury surpassing the recent Indian Mutiny. In the night, the beautiful plains that lie in the north of Hispaniola were sheeted with fire, and the labour of a hundred years, years of care and toil, perished in a few hours. Like tigers unchained the negroes flung themselves upon the unhappy planters and their families, massacred them without pity, and tossed them into the flames. In lieu of standards, the negroes marched with European infants on their pikes, and in the lust of their cruelty they slowly sawed many women asunder. What the negro was then he is *now*,

while emancipation has only made him more cunning, sensual, lazy, and dangerous. All the wild work of those days we may expect to see acted here again at any hour,' added the old gentleman, glancing with some anxiety towards his smiling daughter.

'But the negroes here have been somewhat open in their proceedings,' replied Vere; 'and we are completely forewarned.'

'Happily so; yet, nevertheless, we live, as it were, with a volcano below our feet.'

Ere half the day had passed Vere was surprised to find how intimate he had become with his new friends, and how completely he was at home at Mango Garden; but this arose from his own frank geniality on one hand, and free-handed West Indian hospitality on the other.

Horses were ordered, and he accompanied Mr. Bellingham and his daughter over the sugar-estate, which, as usual, was divided into portions—one-third in canes, one-third woodland, and one-third in luxuriant pasturage; and the old gentleman, having some important business to conduct with his overseer, ere long left Vere to the guidance of Miss Bellingham,

who showed him the vast mills, which were worked by mules when there was no water; the boiling-houses, with all their mysterious assortment of pans and boilers; and the hundreds of negroes at work as clarifiers, distillers, carpenters, coopers, wheelwrights, and smiths, and all singing so merrily, and chattering so gaily over their work, that it seemed impossible to suspect that secret thoughts of revolt and massacre were lurking in their hearts. There, too, were others at work upon the boxes of indigo, coffee, chocolate, pimento, and ginger for exportation, all bearing evidence of the industry and wealth of the owner of Mango Garden.

So most of the afternoon was passed in the society of its heiress; and as she and Vere slowly rode under the avenues formed by foliage the most beautiful and varied in the world, they permitted the reins to drop on their horses' necks as they idled along, or only paused when she drew Vere's attention to some distant view of the dark-blue sea, as seen through some long green vista of the teeming landscape. Yet the afternoon did not pass without a somewhat significant incident.

A band of negroes appeared suddenly at a part of the road, carrying on their heads bundles of ripe sugar-canes to one of Mr. Bellingham's mills; and as they passed, Vere saw his fair companion's face grow ashy pale, while, as if inspired by sudden terror, she clung to the horn of her saddle.

He instinctively followed the direction of her eye, and saw—he could have sworn it, though he remained silent on the subject—among the passing band one who was *not* a negro. He was a young man of colour, and his dark face, half hidden by the green bundle he bore, was that of Manuel Moreno!

If so—and that it was he Vere had not the shadow of a doubt—what object save jealous espionage and ultimate treason could bring that reckless and unscrupulous personage among his uncle's negroes, disguised as a labourer, and at such a time?

The same thoughts occurred to Virginia Bellingham, yet neither she nor Vere adverted to the subject, as it was one which neither of them could precisely approach; but the incident had the effect of curtailing their ride, as she suggested that they should turn their

horses' heads homewards to the villa, where Quashy, the gigantic negro, was jangling the dinner-bell in the verandah.

The next day, and the next too, found Vere still lingering at Mango Garden, and becoming interested in negro politics and the process of making sugar and molasses, and the rise or fall in the prices of these wares. Somewhat sore at heart after his affair with Gertrude Templeton, he was far from indisposed to find a solace in the undoubtedly charming society of a beautiful Creole girl like Virginia Bellingham; so he yielded to the course of events, and deemed it the wisest and most pleasant way of passing his time on that most dull and unprofitable of all duties, the command of an isolated detachment in a district new and strange to him.

CHAPTER VI.

VIRGINIA BELLINGHAM.

With all his genuine hospitality and kindness of heart, the old gentleman was somewhat of a bore with his pride of family; and Vere with good-humour and politeness had to undergo ever and anon a list of ancestry, with reference to a large framed and glazed family-tree (that beat any cabbage-tree 'all to nothing,' as his listener thought), and to certain hereditary features and traditional peculiarities that would have been intolerable to listen to, but that Virginia, the laughing Virginia, seemed to be the darling embodiment of them all in the fancy of the doting old man, in whose estimation Vere rose immensely when he mentioned that he believed he could point to tombs wherein lay his ancestors, the Earls of Oxford, who had their house and garden where now their bones lie—in the old and disused churchyard of St. Swithin the Confessor in the city of London. In Mr. Bellingham's

eyes this at once placed Vere on the footing of a relative; it sounded quite like a patent of nobility; and Virginia listened to them both with her dark eyes full of mischief, while her pretty fingers unconsciously picked the marabout trimming from her fan, as she more than half suspected that their visitor was pandering to her father's fanciful pride.

We have said there was a species of languor over all the actions and bearing of Virginia Bellingham; but these were naturally born of the climate she inhabited and the life she led, like other Creole ladies.

She rose at an earlier hour than she had been wont to do in London; and in the most bewitching of dishabille—a dishabille in which she had the subtle art of making herself actually appear to be handsomer than she really was—she appeared at breakfast, after which, if not reading one of the last novels, she idled over fancy-work, or, since the advent of Vere, at her piano. Two hours before dinner were allotted to a 'beauty sleep,' or an elaborate toilette for dinner, after which the evening was devoted to music, gaiety, and dancing if guests or visitors dropped in. Thus do the

girls of the Antilles pass their morning in inactivity, the day in dreaming, and the evening in pleasure. 'This is the custom of the country,' writes one who knows it well. 'The system of education may be blamable, but the fair beings educated should not partake of the blame; and even if the idleness of the lovely Creole were deserving of censure, yet there is so much to admire in her character, so much purity in her heart, so much affection in her spirit, so much gentleness in her manner, that it were impossible not to lose all memory of her faults in the pleasing contemplation of her many virtues.'

Vere, we have said, was his own commanding officer; hence he had plenty of time at his disposal, and every hour he could spare from his detachment was spent at Mango Garden. With Mr. Bellingham and Virginia he rode or drove through the savannahs and vales, where the breeze from the sea came laden with the fragrance of a thousand fruits and flowers, and they explored together the whole country round the great estate, as far as the Guava Savannah, Manchioneel Head, and the Diver River.

Mr. Bellingham had eccentrically adopted Vere as a kind of kinsman—a friend certainly; and with such a girl as Virginia it was only too easy, with all her alleged pride and hauteur, to glide into a brotherly and sisterly friendship, to draw back from which would have been prudish and ungracious, but the continuance of which was perilous work, in the voluptuous climate of the Antilles particularly.

Between them there sprang up a confidence that seemed like real friendship, if such could exist between two of opposite sexes at their years, and both so personally attractive. If they thought it was only friendship they were foolish, as it requires deeper roots than their intimacy possessed; but they had close and perilous confidences, telling such things as none but old friends tell to each other; yet, amid all this, we doubt much if Vere ever ventured to whisper one word concerning Gertrude Templeton.

Hence, as day succeeded day, there seemed at last to be some foundation for that rumour which reached Gertrude on the fatal marriage morning, and which was, perhaps, the last thing that Vere wished should ever reach her.

Was he beginning to care for Virginia Bellingham? But in this sense *care* is a word which a brilliant writer asserts to be the modest euphemism 'in which a woman disguises the bold word *love*;' and what reason had Vere now to care for any one else?

He and she had gone on from point to point in a mixture of earnest and confidential jesting that was fast becoming perilous work between two whose eyes were so much disposed to seek, to dwell on, yes, and court each other's gaze; yet no word of aught that savoured of more than friendship, or open and pleasant intimacy, had escaped the lips of Vere while turning from time to time to that perfect and beautiful face, which was so rich in all its attractiveness, and which claimed, coaxed, and commanded admiration.

Withal—the ideas of mere friendship, platonism, and so forth—Vere found himself drifting—drifting into a very decided affair with Miss Bellingham; and the little *dénouement* came about in the usual way.

'How very odd it is!' said the young lady one evening, after a pause in their conversation.

'What is odd?' asked Vere, bending over the bright smiling face.

'That some eight or nine days ago we knew not of each other's existence, and now we have suddenly become quite intimate.'

'Delightfully so.'

'But you must not think that I am so candid, open—what shall I call it?—with every one as I am with *you*.'

'I am enchanted to hear you say so.'

'But then it is not as if you were one of ourselves. You are here only *en passant*, and will soon weary of Jamaica and the life we lead.'

'But not of Mango Garden and all its charms, surely?'

'Of Mango Garden and everything,' replied Virginia, almost with petulance, as she slowly fanned herself.'

'Do not say so—it is impossible!' said Vere, feeling alike the necessity and the impulse for saying something tender. 'I shall never forget the hours of pure delight I have spent with you, Miss Bellingham.'

She cast down her long lashes, and light and shadow came alternately over her beauti-

ful face, with every motion of her large feather fan, as she asked, with a low voice,

'How often have you said as much—perhaps far more—to others?'

'I could not do so.'

'Why?'

'Because I have never spent hours of delight with another,' replied Vere, feeling that he could say so with truth, as those he had passed in the society of Gertrude were hours of tender anxiety rather than of unalloyed pleasure.

'You mean me to believe this, and you are sure of what you say?'

'Sure as that I live and am now addressing you,' said he, taking her unresisting hand in his, while he could see that the heaving of her bosom increased with each respiration.

'In all this you mean that you are actually making love to me?' asked the girl, while something of quiet drollery mingled with coquettish delight in her sparkling eyes.

'In all this I mean that I love you, Virginia!' he exclaimed, pressing her hand to his lips.

'Hush—don't! here comes that odious Quashy!'

And Quashy it was, with a hideous grin on his sable visage, a grin that went literally from ear to ear, dividing his face as it were in two, as he seemed quite to understand the situation, and with many apologies came to close and secure the jalousies for the evening; and ere Vere could resume where he had left off, they were joined by Mr. Bellingham.

Vere was not a vain young fellow; but had he been so, he could not fail to have been flattered in finding himself the escort and companion of a girl whose position, wealth, and beauty made her the acknowledged belle of the island, and to be moreover quite the *ami de la maison* at the residence of her father. Yet these ideas never occurred to him, though others did.

Among these was a doubt if he were acting honourably in permitting himself to drift into a passion for a girl whose family might have other views for her—a passion that he felt was born of idleness and opportunity quite as much as her wonderful attractions; and to what end

would an engagement be? So pondered Vere. He could ponder in this instance, though he had given his whole soul to Gertrude. To what end? he asked of himself again. He could not settle in the West Indies, and Mr. Bellingham would neither be expected to uproot his household or part for ever with an only child on whom he doted.

Yet, with all this casuistry, he felt himself powerfully drawn towards Virginia, she was so winning and every way lovable. 'Good Heavens!' thought he; 'to think that a photo and the offer of an umbrella should have led up to all this!'

To draw back in any way was impossible now, so Vere resolved to permit himself to drift with the tide—the whole situation was too seductive for resistance; and side by side with her he sat at the piano, and though no more of love was said between them then, it was implied by their very silence, as hand touched hand in wandering over the keys together, and in the dusk she felt his breath stirring her hair, so closely were they seated, as he bent over her, and she sang to him.

Like poesy to the poet, music came to Vir-

ginia Bellingham as a gift direct from Heaven. She was passionately fond of it, and at times she seemed to give her whole soul to it. To Vere it proved indeed 'the food of love,' and hour after hour passed on this evening as he sat beside her, while she played the symphonies of Beethoven and the masses of Mozart, with, at times, a tender Irish melody between. More than once they engaged in a duet together, while papa Bellingham, weary after a long day's ride about his cane-brakes, was fast asleep in an easy-chair; and when, in one instance, Vere's voice trembled audibly as it mingled with her own, she could little know that it was because he had sung the same duet with *another*, and at that moment was marvelling whether it were possible to love *two* women at once!

Amid all this the attention of Vere became roused by seeing palpably the dark outline of a man's figure distinctly traceable outside the jalousies of the verandah; he could see also a face pressed close against them, and two eyes, amid the dusk, glaring in upon himself and Virginia—eyes that glittered like those of a cat or a rattlesnake!

He started to his feet, and then the eavesdropper vanished.

'What is it?' exclaimed Virginia, clasping his arm with both her hands.

'Fancy, perhaps. I thought some one was peeping through the venetian blinds.'

'For Heaven's sake don't say so!'

But Vere was certain that it was *not* fancy; and the suspicion occurred to him, as perhaps it did to Virginia, that the lurker was her dangerous cousin, Manuel Moreno.

Vere could feel that the girl was trembling violently; he drew her tenderly close to him; his arms went round her, and her face fell on his neck; and thus in silence the great secret of both their hearts escaped them, and Vere retired to his room that night with a conviction of the necessity for addressing Mr. Bellingham on the subject; an intense anxiety as to what the views of the old gentleman—easy-going though he was—might be; and, more than all, a sense that the joy of being loved by a girl so beautiful and brilliant as Virginia was not without its shadow, and this shadow was her dangerous cousin.

That he was the lurker, inspired by jeal-

ousy, suspicion, and rage, Vere could scarcely doubt; and he smiled scornfully at his own thoughts; for he felt intense pique, annoyance, and degradation at the idea of such ignoble rivalry. In England he had been jealous of that tall oaf Derinzy; but Moreno was a rival of a very different stamp—an outlawed man of colour and a reckless desperado, who had registered a terrible vow that he would shoot down like a dog any one coming between himself and his cousin; one who was quite capable of keeping his word, and whom Vere knew to be lurking on the estate unknown to Mr. Bellingham.

'Bah!' thought Vere; 'if the worst comes to the worst, I don't believe the fellow will dare to cross me!'

And then he thrust all thought of him aside, to dwell upon the soft image of Virginia and the joy of the past evening—that long and silent embrace so near her sleeping father's chair; and then came painful doubts of how the affair would end—doubts he would fain have shrunk from amid the flush of a new passion, but yet was compelled to face and sift.

This new love had filled up the vacuum—

the craving for some one to love and be loved by—that Gertrude had left in his heart. Well, that object was so far attained, and with considerable celerity; but Virginia's father might have serious objections, and the morrow might see the door of Mango Garden closed on Vere for ever. If the old gentleman's views were favourable, what might his stipulations be? Could Vere consent to leave his regiment—the Eighth, to which he was so passionately attached—could he relinquish England, and settle for life in the West Indies? With all his love for Virginia, these would be bitter pills to swallow. Though Mr. Bellingham always spoke of England as 'home' he had never been there, nor had any of his predecessors been since the days of the Cromwellian colonel; and he had no more idea of going there than to the summit of the Andes; so in this instance, prejudice on one hand and tender affection on the other might raise serious barriers on the part of her father, though 'home is not any special house or piece of ground in the universe; it is only that spot or succession of spots where a man sits under the shadow of a vine he has planted, and gathers his house-

hold treasures around him. Home, thus, is everywhere on earth.'

But 'home' in the West, as in the East, Indies, and in all our colonies, means Britain. The merchant receives his consignments from 'home;' the regiment is going 'home;' and usually all who go to these climes have ever a vague hope—have ever the desire—that on realising a competence they will go 'home'—a hope, in too many instances, fated never to be realised. But Mr. Bellingham never thought of England as 'home' in this sense. He only used the term by force of habit; for his real home, like the graves of his family, lay under the shadow of the vast hills that look down on Morant Bay; and Vere knew not what he had to hope for from the old West India planter.

The morrow was to produce much, more than Vere could quite anticipate; and though it might be the last night he should ever sleep under the same roof with Virginia Bellingham, he slept eventually.

CHAPTER VII.

MANUEL MORENO.

FULL of her love, her new-born joy, and all the happy thoughts it suggested, Virginia Bellingham left her room betimes on the morrow and issued into the garden, where she could sit in a bower and watch the windows of Vere, on whose breast she had reclined last night; and dreamily the girl rehearsed all that episode again and again.

Around her the garden, in its tropical beauty, was a veritable Eden; yet flowers are seldom cultivated in the Antilles, as they flourish wild, but are splendid in their tints and wondrous in their beauty; and the bower in which she sat was shaded by shaddock and custard-apple trees, about the stems of which twined the grape and the tendrils of the melon, and on their branches could be seen from time to time the large and bright green lizard named the guana, which is harmless, beautiful,

and, singular to say, fond of music; and, fixing her eyes on one of these, the girl, in the happiness of her heart, began to sing to it in a low soft voice, till a step on the gravel disturbed her. A fierce clutch was laid upon her arm, and two dark eyes, flaming with anger and evil passions, were bent upon hers, as she found herself face to face with her dreaded cousin, Manuel Moreno.

'You here again!' she exclaimed; 'how rash of you! If papa sees you—'

'What then? and what care I who sees me now? With all his alleged goodness of heart, I know that he is quite capable of forgetting the kinsman in the magistrate, and handing me over to the authorities; but now, thank Heaven, *their* tenure of office is a brief one.'

He breathed shortly and quickly as he spoke; his dark eyes were literally aflame with suppressed rage, and the copper tint of his face, which came of his mixture of Spanish and Maroon blood, was pale even to ghastliness; and altogether Manuel Moreno looked a very unpleasant and dangerous fellow.

'If it is money you want, Manuel, I have

none to give you,' said Virginia, with reference to past occasions when she had more than once in secret replenished the exchequer of the outcast.

'I do not want money, cousin,' said he bitterly, yet sadly.

'What then?'

'I came only to see you, but I have seen more than I expected. I have seen you and your popinjay Englishman — your buckra officer.'

'Buckra! Manuel, do not speak thus, like—like—'

'Like what?' he asked fiercely.

'Well, a negro.'

'I am well-nigh one—a man of colour. Aha, my pretty cousin, it will be something to be that by and by.'

'When, Manuel?'

'When every white man's throat in Jamaica is cut—sliced, like a ripe pumpkin.'

'This officer of whom you speak is merely my father's guest.'

'And your lover!'

'You have no right to say so.'

'No right, perhaps; but I have reason,'

he replied, eyeing her gloomily. 'Curse him!'

'Oh, why, Manuel?'

'Curse him again, I say, because you ask me why!'

Virginia looked at her furious kinsman imploringly. Her eyes were limpid, pure, and soft, ever changeful with all their depth of colouring, but their tender expression only seemed to add fire to the young man's fury; yet he said quietly,

'You know, Virginia, how deeply I love you, and that while I live you shall never become the wife of another.'

'These words are vain and foolish,' said she imploringly. 'Begone, I implore you, lest my father find you here.'

She had then, however, a greater dread of Vere appearing, and she knew the desperate violence of which Manuel was perfectly capable.

'Your father!' said he scornfully; 'I shall teach him yet that I will have justice.'

'Justice, Manuel?'

'Yes, I will have revenge; and what is revenge but a wild kind of justice?'

'But revenge on whom?'

'On him—on the Englishman—on you, if I am crossed; as God hears me, I will!'

Manuel scraped a vesta against a tree and lit a cigar, and the coolness of the proceeding, as contrasted with the utter ferocity of his tone and eyes, gave double point to his threats. But Virginia, with all her dread of him, became indignant.

'Must I remind you, Manuel,' said she, 'that you are an outlaw, and that to be here is full of peril for you?'

'I know all that your father is capable of doing to me, his only sister's son; but among his negroes I am safe; they know, value, and love me, if he and you do not.'

'Manuel, how cruel of you to talk thus!'

'Cruel! Come, I like that,' said he, with a bitter laugh. 'You loved me once, Virginia.'

'I *never* loved you in the sense your words imply; and how dare you say so, Manuel?' she asked, while her eyes sparkled with indignation. 'As a cousin I tried to do so, all undeserving as you were and are, and I have certainly pitied you; more I could not and cannot do.'

'I seek not even your pity, though I would lay down my life for your love. Last night I had a dream, Virginia. I held you in my arms, and yours were around me lovingly. I was about to kiss you when a man tore us asunder—that man by whose side you sat and sang last night. But even in my dream, Virginia, I had my revenge; for, in fancy, I laid him dead at my feet,' added Manuel, in a low and concentrated voice, while his lips seemed to become parched, and his eyebrows were so contracted that they met together; and Virginia, with all her knowledge of his character, became filled with anguish and alarm, but with something of honest indignation too.

'You love him, then?' asked Manuel huskily.

'By what right do you ask?' she demanded, as she rose to withdraw.

'The right of priority.'

'Fool!'

'The right of a kinsman, then.'

'That right you have forfeited.'

'How?'

'By your ingratitude to papa, and the disgrace brought upon us by your bad actions.'

'Ere long, any way, I shall have the right of a protector,' said he, with a triumphant tone; 'one who can save you and yours from a miserable death.'

'I know the meaning of your words, Manuel,' said Virginia sorrowfully; 'they forbode your own destruction. For Heaven's sake, I say, leave me and quit this place for ever!'

'You utterly forbid me to hope, then?'

'Yes—now and for ever.'

'Enough!'

He hissed the word through his clenched teeth as he gave her arm a fierce clutch, and his eyes glared into hers; then he uttered a terrible malediction, and quickly left her.

Virginia's eyes were full of tears. She drew up the muslin sleeve of her morning dress, and saw that her snowy arm bore the dark livid marks of his iron fingers; and these ominous marks were visible to the eyes of another, who now approached her—Vere, who had seen her parting with Manuel Moreno; had seen him grasp and menace her, and who was perfectly conscious of her agitation; and yet, inspired by a feeling that he could scarcely

define, he ignored the whole affair, as he drew her arm caressingly within his own and kissed her on the cheek.

He could not trust himself to speak of Manuel Moreno to Virginia; his utter disdain of such a rival was too strong within him—an outlaw, a horse-stealer, a felon, and a *débauché*, it was altogether too absurd to think of him; yet, at that moment, he disliked the general air of Virginia, and her decidedly *distraite* aspect. He was in perfect ignorance of all that had passed, and he could only think, What power, if any, had this devilish cousin over her, and were women, as cynical Kyrle Desborough was wont to aver, 'all alike'?

He had seen her bare her arm after Manuel's angry clutch, and even now he could see the marks left by his fingers on her tender skin beneath the thin and delicate muslin sleeve; and Vere clenched his teeth as he thought, How dared the fellow to touch her thus?

Terror lest Manuel should be lurking near, and that some unseemly *rencontre* might take place, made Virginia at once retire indoors with Vere, who in the delight of her presence

soon forgot all about her troublesome kinsman.

His intentions of speaking at an early period to Mr. Bellingham on the subject of his favour or consent were frustrated for the time by the absence of the old gentleman, who, with his overseer, as Quashy informed him with a remarkable grin, which Vere remembered at a future time, had gone to a distant part of the estate, where there was a species of riot among the negroes of a village; and thus left utterly alone with Virginia, the hours passed by of a day of delight that, for various reasons, he was never to forget, because of the events that followed it.

As Vere gazed fondly at her he thought what a creditable wife she would be even in London society, or to parade under the critical eyes of Gertrude Templeton—for Gertrude was nothing now to him. Yet he instinctively shrank from the idea of such a parade; and as Virginia turned her eyes to his there was in them a light that was not the light of the tropical sun, but the light that God gives to the eyes of those who love and love truly—the light that, once seen, is never forgotten.

Nor did Vere forget that tender light when other days came—and these days were coming faster than he could anticipate.

Noon had passed; there was no appearance of Mr. Bellingham's return, and Vere was roused from his dream of pleasure by Quashy—the inevitable Quashy, who seemed to be most annoying, watchful, and ubiquitous—bringing him on a silver salver two letters, which he announced had just been 'brought by one buckra soldier from Morant Bay.'

The missives proved to be one from Kyrle Desborough and another from Toby Finch; so, while Virginia lingeringly left him to make her usual afternoon toilette, Vere opened the letter of his old friend first, and, under all his present circumstances and surroundings, the contents provoked his laughter sometimes.

'How are you, old fellow—well and jolly, I hope? The old West Indian question, when asking after a friend's health, "Is that man dead yet?" is no longer in use now; but if not dead to the mess, to us, and to the world, you are something near it, by all accounts. What the deuce is all this we have heard from

Toby Finch? And how long do you mean to leave your detachment to that deluded youth, who has gone wild after some coloured girl? and how long do you mean to linger in those bowers of Armida called Mango Garden? "When you are ill-used by one woman there is great comfort in telling it to another, because, in nine times out of ten, the other always takes your side." Do you find it so with the bride of the Blue Mountains—the queen of sugar-cane and sugar-candy? This has been a mighty prosaic proceeding on your part. Toby tells us how you fell in with your divinity and won her eternal gratitude, not by rescuing her from a mad bull or a runaway steed at the verge of a terrific cliff, from Maroons or tigers, or anything else you choose, but by simply offering her the use, or the share rather, of an umbrella, just as you might have done to a little milliner in Oxford Street. I hear that she is lovely enough to put in peril a love that was true, that was freely and frankly returned, and not hedged round by the conventional selfishness of aristocratic snobbery.

'You know what I mean, old fellow. She

may be wooed and won, whisper revenge and wounded self-esteem, especially if you still remember that frigid "cut" at Farnborough. Farnborough! How long ago it seems since that cool and delicious spring morning, when the Sebastopol bell clanged ten, and we marched from Aldershot to that wretched little railway station which is associated only with the arrival and departure of redcoats! But don't hook yourself in revenge, whatever you do, and rush from single blessedness into double wretchedness; but remember with Pope that

"Woman is at best a contradiction still." '

('How cynical poor Kyrle is!' thought Vere; 'but then he knows not Virginia.')

'Stick to your Creole, old fellow, at least while the *affaire de cœur* lasts. Few of us have tenacity of character enough to adhere to one damsel, an absent one especially; and you remember Tommy Moore's advice—"When far from the lips of those that we love," &c. Though I say stick to your Creole for fun and to fill up the time, don't make a fool of yourself further. I promised more than one girl at Aldershot to bring you safe home again;

and I hear that *la belle* Bellingham is the most capricious little beauty that ever broke a man's heart, and is just as much a creature to look beautiful and be admired—not loved—as any in the Lady's Mile at home. But now, all joking apart,' added Kyrle, 'a shindy is decidedly impending in Jamaica, and something seems at hand more exciting than a sham fight on the lines at Chatham or the Fox Hills at Aldershot.'

As a species of addendum to this, the missive of Toby Finch contained but two lines:

'Return *instantly*—a row on the *tapis;* we are to be under arms all night!'

Delay after this intelligence was impossible, and Vere knew that, at all hazards, he must immediately repair to his post.

Virginia heard that he had received letters, and drew near him, her rapid and earnest glance bringing with it a quick and sweetly thrilling sense of their secret understanding.

'And you must leave me?' she asked.

'Instantly, darling; but for a little time only, I hope.'

He looked tenderly down on the little white face that was so lovingly upturned to

his; there was a brief embrace, a long and clinging kiss—a kiss that was not unseen, for Manuel Moreno and Quashy were both lurking near, in a thicket of shaddock trees; and in another minute Vere was galloping, with all the speed one of Mr. Bellingham's best horses could exert, back to Morant Bay.

The unconcealed tenderness of the farewell and long gaze of Virginia after her departing lover, till a turn of the avenue shut him out from view, filled Manuel with rage and jealousy, while the negro rolled his great eyes hideously, for he too had his thoughts of *a white wife.*

'By golly, Massa Moreno, we must do for that buckra soldier!' he exclaimed; 'cut um throat—pull out um gizzard—have um liver reeking hot—have um heart's blood! Oh, lorry gorry, Massa Manuel!'

'Yes, Quashy, the time has come now when we shall make an end of these cursed whites, and be free—free as air—free as the men of Hispaniola—lords of the soil we tread on!' replied the other, in a low voice of concentrated passion. 'Then you will stand by me to-night, Quashy?'

'To the death, Massa Manuel—to the death, by golly!'

Then the confederates—for such they were—shook hands with stern energy and separated.

That evening seemed a long, long one to Virginia, and she felt intensely lonely without Vere. He had become, as it were, a member of their little circle, and in the pleasant *abandon* of daily intercourse he had been taken into all the family plans and projects; and while she dreamed and mused over the absence of her lover, she forgot that her father had not yet returned, and that his visit to the negro village was somewhat protracted.

On reaching Morant Bay Vere found his detachment all quartered, for the time, in an empty granary, with forty rounds of ammunition per man in their pouches; for 'the row' referred to by Toby Finch was supposed to be imminent, and it was necessary to have their party together and at the ready disposal of the local authorities.

A quarter-guard was detailed, a sentinel posted at the granary gate, and the evening melted into night so tranquilly that Vere

began to hope the alarm was a false one, and to speculate upon his return to Mango Garden.

The sun had long since sunk into the blue Caribbean Sea; the atmosphere was cool and pure, yet inducive of languor; the fireflies were flashing about, and the silver moon was rising above the jagged peaks of the Blue Mountains, when Vere, tired of Toby's chatter, and, more than all, of his persistent quizzing and chaff about Virginia Bellingham, went forth to muse on that young lady and enjoy a havannah, taking the precaution, however, to have his sword and revolver with him.

Humming a song in unison with the hour —a song Virginia had playfully sung to him more than once, and was old enough and quaint enough to have been brought to Jamaica by Colonel Obadiah Bellingham of the Ironsides—

'When the hollow drum has beat to bed,
And the little fifer hangs his head;
When still and mute
Is the Moorish flute,
And watching guards nod wearily'—

'By Jove, we are in for it at last!' he sud-

denly exclaimed, as the clangour of drums, bells, cries, and conch-shells came suddenly upon the breeze, while flames began to redden the sky in various directions; but to Vere's eye they seemed chiefly in the direction of Mango Garden, a conviction that filled his soul with terror and apprehension, lest Mr. Bellingham's most gloomy anticipations were about to be realised in terrible earnest.

CHAPTER VIII.

A GLANCE HOMEWARD.

NOTWITHSTANDING that startling cry, which terrified all the household at Winklestoke, poor Rosamund had only fainted, and was brought round by the care of her maids and the old housekeeper; and amid all his joy at her recovery Sir Ayling had one emotion of selfish satisfaction—that he had escaped the nine days' wonder her death must have occasioned among that small section of mankind, the fashionable world of London.

For many days after her arrival at Winklestoke the girl was seriously ill, but in spirit rather than body.

Their marriage, with all its elaborations of ceremonial, had been accomplished. To the fullest extent Rosamund had indulged her sorrow and aversion; but ere long the turbulence of both had begun to subside, though the conviction, the keen sense, that her life

was cast away and would be a loveless and joyless one, pressed heavily on her heart, but more as a still grief than an active one; and there was one emotion, most useful perhaps towards cure, a conviction that stole sometimes upon her, that she had been without proper pride in permitting a secret attachment to overcome her fancy, and if this strengthened, the time might come when she might with apparent, if not real, tranquillity behold Kyrle Desborough the husband of another.

Another! Married though she was, she recoiled from the thought of *that* as yet.

Her marriage was not the realisation of a young girl's dream of what such a tie should be. All those phrases, so stereotyped, yet so true, of a union of souls, of ideal love, of the communion of intellect and sympathy, elective affinities, and so forth, were thoroughly dead letters in her instance. The young, innocent, and eager soul was thrust back upon itself, and Rosamund yearned for another love than the querulous heart of Sir Ayling Aldwinkle could accord her.

She looked so young and charming, though ever sweetly feminine, that some who watched

her almost hoped that a time might soon come—was that hope cruel, uncharitable, or wicked?—when a new life would be opened unto her; but unfortunately for these speculators Sir Ayling seemed to grow more hale apparently day by day, to be 'quite frisky,' as Maud averred, and to have taken a new lease of existence.

Rosamund might have sought forgetfulness by plunging into the whirl of gaiety and such fashionable dissipation as London furnishes so readily for a wealthy, titled, and beautiful young matron; but a sense of something closely akin to shame—shame for her marriage—repressed the poor girl for many months; hence she shunned society instead of courting it, and recoiled upon herself.

Some one has written with considerable truth that a man's *real* courtship should begin upon his wedding-day, and it seemed to be so with Sir Ayling Aldwinkle. In his senile fashion he worshipped the shadow of Rosamund, and the very ground she trod on. Though querulous, having a decided temper of his own, and full of old bachelor habits, he was never weary of smiling and gazing on her,

of patting, petting, and caressing her, for she was verily the idol, the love, the beautiful toy of his old age; but all this palled upon the girl, and it made her soul sick within her to know that she was, what she knew her own servants called her, 'an old man's dearie.' And she always felt herself like a ward with her old guardian, a daughter with her father, nay, a granddaughter, anything but a wife with her husband, whom sometimes she would in this spirit unconsciously offend.

'My dear Sir Ayling,' said she, when one day he had been petulant with her, 'what can I do to please you?'

'Kiss me,' said he, as she stooped over his chair.

And she did so, but it was on the top of his *bald* head; and this became a source of irritation by all it suggested.

Of the unquestionable magnificence and luxury of Winklestoke she had never taken heed. They were associated with too much of unhappiness and degradation in her mind, connected, as she deemed them, with the price for which her mother bartered her.

There was ever a solemn hush about the

grand old house, a kind of repose, but no real joy. It was their honeymoon, and they would have no visitors for some weeks to come. She was sated with fine clothes and the family jewels, to which her husband and her friends had added more diamond crosses and hearts, brooches and bracelets, than she could wear in the longest lifetime.

She was certainly pleased with the carriages, which there had been no necessity for ordering anew, as Sir Ayling's 'turns out' had always been perfection; but at one of Tattersall's crack sales he had got some beautiful horses for her especial benefit, while a whole suite of rooms in the most pleasant wing of Winklestoke had been furnished for her with luxury and splendour befitting a princess. Yet Rosamund felt as if she spent her girlhood in a dream, and that it was now too late, too desperate a thought or hope, ever to begin life over again. She could imagine no future, and nothing but passing the days in dull and dogged calmness if possible.

She thought she had got over her fancy for Kyrle Desborough, and had begun to think of him as we do of those who are dead

and gone, as utterly beyond her reach; and oh, how long, long ago it seemed since that night of passion and bewilderment in the conservatory! The kiss and the abstraction of her glove—it was all a bagatelle to him, as we have shown, a mere bit of fun, *pour passer le temps;* but Rosamund had never, never forgotten the episode; for Kyrle's kiss was the first, last, and only one that had ever stirred her heart.

One day it chanced that her maid was assorting or clearing out some of Rosamund's wardrobes in her dressing-room, and in one of the drawers thereof she found a coloured photo of Kyrle Desborough in full uniform, with all his medals and the V.C. on his breast; and Rosamund had some trouble in concealing from the inquiring eyes of her abigail the emotion this discovery excited within her.

She thrust it back, closed the drawer, and sighed bitterly. Anon, when alone, she drew forth the miniature, which brought before her to the life Kyrle's dark and handsome face, with his bright peculiar smile, and she gazed at it with an expression of eye that might

have puzzled Sir Ayling, and certainly would not have met with his approval.

Then something like an emotion of guilt came over her, and she felt her pale face flush scarlet. She thought of Robin Gray, and the words,

'I daurna think o' Jamie, for that would be a sin;'

and kissing the senseless card, put it gently in the fire, and watched the flame consume it.

Never more would she trust herself to look upon that handsome face again, with such emotions at least. Subsequent events, by a species of distempered fancy perhaps, had made this dead love a dearer and treasured thought to the girl; but the tears she often shed over it in secret were seen by Heaven alone, and when yielding to such thoughts she would deem herself both weak and wicked.

'To him I could be nothing now even if we met,' she would ponder; 'but was I ever anything? We could but meet as strangers who had never known each other; and, thank Heaven, there is but a slender chance of our ever meeting at all. Yet how dear he was

to me in secret!—how dear he can never know.'

'Are you quite happy, darling?' her mother asked her, with a hypocrisy that kindled the ire of the girl.

'Of course I am, mamma,' she replied; 'I have the most splendid jewels, the most brilliant toilette in London, and I go to the Drawing-room next week. What more could I desire?'

But the smile of Rosamund was a ghastly one. Would the soft tints of the sweet wild rose ever come back to her cheek, or the heart-born laugh arise on her lips again?

Sir Ayling could perceive that her spirits drooped more than her outward system; she seemed more melancholy and full of thought when she deemed herself unnoticed, and often smiled when she was saddest, and every way affected to appear otherwise than she really was—miserable.

But she was not entirely without food for other thoughts. The mysterious woman who had been present at her marriage, and whose face and glance seemed to exercise a curious effect upon her husband, had been seen by her

more than once in the vicinity of Winklestoke when no one seemed to know anything about it; and once, when driving in her pony phaeton through the park, she was almost certain that she had seen Sir Ayling part—and with some *empressement*, though in great haste—from her at a wicket in a thick holly hedge, beyond the screen of which Rosamund could see him, if he it was, no further.

Rosamund was conscious too, as the woman passed her, of detecting in her face a strange, sardonic, and bitter smile, the source of which was a puzzle or a problem the weary spirit of the girl disdained to solve by making the slightest inquiry.

But a time was in the future—a time remote then—when an event was to occur and a meeting to take place that was destined to exercise a terrible and evil influence on the lonely reveries, the sad thoughtful hours of the girl-wife—hours spent in solemn dreariness of summer and autumnal twilight.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BLACK INSURRECTION.

THE crisis had come. The revolt of the negroes under Bogle, Moreno, and others—the revolt, of which none could precisely see the end—had taken place!

On the evening we left Vere getting his small party under arms in hot haste, vast armed mobs, intent on vengeance, they scarcely knew for what, were approaching Morant Bay.

It would seem that, on a preceding day, a negro, said to be from Mango Garden, was brought up for trial before the justices, accused of certain crimes and misdemeanours; but ere the proceedings closed, a numerous band of black peasantry, from the neighbouring estates, led by Quashy, Mr. Bellingham's giant negro, preceded by a band of music, and all armed with bludgeons or other weapons, surrounded the Court-house, and publicly avowed their

determination to rescue the prisoner if he was convicted.

By order of Baron Ketelhodt, an attempt was made to seize Quashy and others who were prominent; but that sable personage—strong in the belief that, by means of an Obeah, he possessed some magic superiority, which alike protected him against wounds and the danger of being taken prisoner by any white man—burst into the Court-house at the head of his wild rabble, all inflamed with new rum, as maddening in its effect, at times, as the hemp-seed or *bhang* of the Hindoos, and rescued the culprit.

A solitary constable boldly offered resistance, but was appalled by the aspect of Quashy, now stripped to the waist, and wearing only a pair of short red and white striped cotton trousers, fastened by a belt which held a knife and pair of old brass-butted pistols. Towering above all his compeers, in the red glow of the setting sun that shone through a window of the hall, his herculean form had something, in its muscular rigidity and activity, of a demoniacal aspect, as with one hand he tore the black felon out of the dock, and

by the other stretched the luckless constable at his feet, accompanying each rapid act with a yell like the roar of a wild animal.

To seize him by numbers was impossible then; the conviction that he was impervious to lead or steel imbued him with a mad and blind confidence that rendered him fearless; and any negro, who might have been disposed to law and order, had too wholesome a fear of his Obeah, his power and vengeance, to attempt obstruction or remonstrance; so Quashy bore off his man in triumph, accompanied by Manuel Moreno, for whose apprehension, on other charges, warrants had long been out.

No further riot than this rescue from justice appears to have ensued at that time; and, singular to say, the magistrates thought so little of the occurrence—startling though it was—that they took no immediate steps to communicate with the executive government.

Shortly after warrants were issued for the capture of some thirty of those most prominent in this outrage; but the strange wild notes of the conch-shell were heard in all quarters, among the plantations, in the woods, the cane-brakes, and the villages; and the

negroes gathered in bands—in many instances under their long since and secretly chosen captains—of fifty, but armed now with pikes, cutlasses, muskets, and bayonets, and put all authority at defiance in and about Morant Bay.

On receiving tidings of this revolt from the custos, Baron Ketelhodt, the Governor of Jamaica lost not a moment in getting succour from the general commanding at Kingston, and a strong detachment, to reinforce Vere and keep order, was instantly detailed from the garrison; while Kyrle Desborough with all speed was sent to Captain de Horsey, the senior naval officer at Port Royal, to request that a man-of-war should take the troops without delay round by the Palisades and Yallas Bay to their destination. That officer lost no time in getting his ship ready for sea. She was the Wolverine, of twenty-one guns and 400 horse-power. In eight hours from the time the tidings of a revolt reached Kingston, the required troops were on their way; but meanwhile affairs had come to a crisis at Morant Bay, and a terrible massacre of English people had taken place.

On the evening in question, when Vere had come in such haste from Mango Garden, so confidently was an outbreak anticipated that every planter and white man had repaired to Morant Bay, with the best arms they could collect—swords, revolvers, and double-barrelled rifles; but instead of taking these means of defence with them into the Court-house—their general rendezvous—they foolishly left them at hotels or in the houses of friends in the town; while to the volunteers, who had been ordered out by Baron Ketelhodt, only ten rounds of ammunition per man were served out.

The meeting to consult on the state of affairs took place, and then it was noticed by the baron and others that the black landed proprietor, Mr. G. W. Gordon, whose name became so fatally conspicuous, whose duty it was to be present, and who was always conspicuously so, was now *absent.*

So numerous and well armed were the negro bands, so incessant were the blowing of conch-shells and the ready responses to them from all quarters, so ominous was the bearing and so open the threats of the entire coloured

population, that Captain Hitchins, who commanded the volunteers, objected to a man of them leaving his post even for a moment to procure refreshments; and he barely had them formed upon their regular place of parade when a messenger came galloping up.

'They are coming—they are coming from the plantations everywhere!' cried this personage; 'they are coming in thousands, and will be upon you!'

But ere the volunteers, after being joined by Vere's little party, were drawn up in front of the Court-house, the rebels had routed the armed police, sacked the station, and appropriated every musket and cartridge in the place.

In front of the seat of authority a vast mass of maddened negroes, excited by rum, the hope of licence of every kind, in which murder and robbery were but minor elements, surged and seethed and yelled to and fro, their yellow eyeballs shining with a species of infernal joy, their white teeth glistening like those of sharks, their whole gestures and aspects—their very antics—savouring of something diabolical and infinitely dangerous, as

they were all well, though variously, armed with muskets and fixed bayonets, cutlasses, fish-spears, long poles with billhooks attached to them, or stones or bottles; and, led by a powerful negro with a pistol in each hand, they advanced in an unwieldy mob across the courtyard, accompanied by a truly infernal discordance of horns, conches, drums, yells, and shouts; while, scared and terrified, those of the white population whose windows overlooked the scene, and who all knew their able defenders were few, gazed with blanched faces and fearful hearts upon the catastrophe that rapidly ensued.

Vere looked everywhere, even with his field-glass, among the seething mass in front; but was unable, in the mingled light of the stars and torches, to discover either Manuel Moreno or his *fidus Achates* Quashy, and his heart sank within him with the very natural dread that they were at the work of outrage *elsewhere*.

Unarmed, as they nearly all foolishly were, by their own unpardonable oversight, the white gentlemen rushed from within to man the Court-house door, while Baron Ketelhodt,

with a loud voice, besought all to keep the peace.

'By golly, we want no peace!' was the united shout of all; and to evince this, showers of missiles were poured among the troops, and three volunteers—Captain Hitchins, Sergeant McGowan, and Ross, a private—fell severely wounded, the latter mortally, as an eye was scooped out of his head, and he died soon after.

Waving a white handkerchief to show that he wanted peace, the baron, amid a shower of missiles hurled by cowardly and savage hands, continued to read the Riot Act, prior to which ceremony the troops could not fire; and while this form, of which the negroes were ignorant, was in process, Vere felt his blood at fever-heat, as the words of the baron were met by senseless shouts of derision, and, closing in upon the volunteers, the negroes, while uttering most diabolical threats, struck up their weapons and proceeded to hurl stones, bottles, and brick-bats through the windows of the Court-house; so the crash of glass and frames mingled now with the terrible medley of sound on every hand.

At last the Riot Act was read; then Vere

gave the order for his little party to wheel up *en potence* on the flank of the volunteers, and thus a cross fire of fifty yards, without sighting the rifles, was poured upon the rebels, who fell over each other in shrieking heaps. But the rest, on suddenly being joined by 500 well-armed negroes from another point, undeterred by the deaths or wounds of their comrades, made a simultaneous rush upon the troops, and completely overpowered the small body of volunteers (at whom their hate and vengeance seemed chiefly directed), and, separating them from Vere's party, compelled them to retreat in one direction; while he, keeping the blacks in check with the bayonet, fell back a little way, and was finally compelled, by the pressure of numbers, to retire towards the granary, as the volunteers had fled into the Court-house, from the shattered windows of which they fired briskly, while their wretched ten rounds per man lasted, on the wild hordes of infuriated rebels who surged around the building—infuriated all the more that they had drawn and tasted blood, and become excited by the genuine negro lust of carnage and cruelty.

Tired of firing back at the Court-house windows, even after the volunteers and the helpless creatures within had expended their ammunition, the rebels determined to change their tactics. A strong west wind was blowing from the hills that look down on the Morant river, and of this they resolved to avail themselves, and set fire to the edifice (which was constructed of the most inflammable material) on its western side. More than once they had failed to force a passage into the building, against the door of which they had been led by the unknown negro referred to, in rear of whom the sable rabble spread out fanwise, or, if we may be pardoned the pedantic simile, like the Roman triangle at the battle of Ecnomus or the double phalanx of Epaminondas, though the mass of its component parts bore personally, in attire, a pretty close resemblance to the grotesque and would-be dandy nigger minstrels of Whitechapel and Mile End, with the genuine plantation nigger bare to the waist and below the knee, but in heart and spirit like to incarnate demons.

Torches were now brought in numbers, and in their glare the frightful horde of

negroes could be distinctly seen, armed with muskets and bayonets, billhooks and pikes, all yelling, and in some instances pitchforks seemed to form devilish horns to the dark faces. One leader harangued them vehemently; but none listened to him, as all were intent on whetting each other's spirit of vengeance by singing the famous negro song of Jamaica,

'Massa, me no dead yet—carry um along!'

According to local tradition, about the beginning of the present century, the father of Mr. Bellingham, when any of his slaves became old or useless, was in the habit of having them borne to a certain rocky hollow on his estate, and left there to be devoured by kites or wild animals, before life had departed, to the end, it was alleged, that he might be saved the cost of their maintenance. But it chanced on one occasion that a poor wretch—the father of Quashy—who was being thus disposed of, had strength left to say, 'Me no dead yet, massa,' and implored pity. 'Carry him along,' was the stern response; so Quashy the elder was left in the hollow, stripped, to his fate, which he contrived to

escape by crawling out and reaching Kingston, where, many months after, he was met by his former master, who, though astonished, had still presence of mind to claim the 'dead alive,' who afterwards lived to a great old age, under the care and protection of Virginia's father, a planter of a very different stamp and character. But the episode, brief as it is, gives us a forcible idea of the slave system as it once existed in the Antilles; and now the song made upon it, chorused by thousands of hoarse, guttural, and unmusical voices, rolled out like thunder on the night, accompanied by the twangle of banjos and blowing of conch-shells, while fire was being applied, as we have said, on the windward side of the large wooden Court-house, and bodies of the rebels formed a close cordon around it, to slaughter all who might attempt to escape.

Among those within it were the Baron von Ketelhodt and his son, many magistrates, Captain Hitchins and the survivors of his volunteer force, with several other gentlemen, including the rector of Morant Bay and his three sons.

In a few minutes the edifice was a mass of

flames, and the molten lead from the roof began to run through certain openings upon the unfortunate creatures below, many of whom were helpless and streaming with blood from gun-shot wounds; and so inflammable were the materials of the building, that it was evident the impending descent of the roof would cause the destruction of all.

It was determined to make a rush and attempt to break through, though shots were now flying in all directions, and those who fell under them were fortunate in escaping a more terrible death.

A few found temporary shelter in an adjacent edifice; but it too was fired, and all were driven forth by the flames to a terrible fate at the hands of the negroes; for then commenced, we are told, 'those fearful and bloody acts, which were only paralleled by the massacre at Cawnpore. The cries for mercy, the savage yells of the women hounding on the men, as each new victim was discovered, and the heavy thuds of the cutlasses on the bodies of the butchered, were heard above the rattle of the musketry (for Vere's men had opened fire again) and the hissing of

the devouring flames. The Baron von Ketelhodt, the Rev. Mr. Hershel, and Lieutenant Hall were beaten to death with sticks. Captain Hitchins, faint with the loss of blood, owing to his numerous wounds, and utterly unable to resist, was slowly hacked to death by a negro with a cutlass, who sat down to his diabolical work as coolly as if he had been chopping wood. The Rev. Mr. Hershel's tongue was cut out, and the fingers of Baron Ketelhodt were severed from his hands.'

Save two, who were left for dead, with frightful wounds, the entire volunteer force perished, and with them nearly all the principal inhabitants of the district. In some instances the brains were scooped out of the heads of the victims, mixed with rum, and drunk amid shrieks and yells of savage exultation.

All unforeseeing such a terrible catastrophe as this, so perished these unfortunate creatures, at the very time when their wives and families were awaiting their return to their snug and pleasant villas embowered among groves of orange, shaddock, and lemon trees.

Maddened by all these awful proceedings,

and the desolation that seemed coming over the once flourishing town of Morant Bay, Vere felt inclined to rush on and seek dire vengeance with the bayonet; and had he proposed it, every one with him, from Toby Finch to his drum-boy, would have followed him. But a moment's reflection showed him that he, and every one there, would have perished amid that armed horde, without effecting anything; for though a brave fellow, Vere was not rash. 'The true hero,' it has been justly said, 'is not he who cannot realise death, and who dashes on the enemy's guns, confident that they will not harm him; but rather the man who, having calculated the possibilities, and feeling that death is most probably in store for him, nevertheless girds up his loins with the courage, not of unconsciousness, but of determination, and prepares him for the fight.'

Midnight saw the horrible massacre end, when the negroes, intoxicated with rum, excitement, and the lust of bloodshed, hurried off in small parties, to attack the isolated plantations, and carry the spirit of insurrection throughout the island. At this crisis it

was deemed a special interposition of Providence that the Maroons, so formidable from their number and character, and whose loyalty was so doubtful in consequence of their recent rebellion, which took more than a year to suppress, and with whom it was well known the rebel leaders had been secretly tampering, happily decided on casting their fortunes with those of the white people. They protected Bath, a town in the eastern part of the island, and like its English namesake famous for hot springs; they captured Paul Bogle, the real leader of the Morant Bay rebels, and many other ringleaders; and by their general conduct evinced the value of their military services, and the danger they would have proved as foemen; for they are the 'Children of the Mist' of Jamaica romance, and have their haunted Nancy Town among the mountains, the mysteries of which no white man has ever succeeded in unravelling or describing.

The hours passed slowly on, and Vere's men could neither lie down nor relinquish their arms, as they knew not the moment they might be attacked from some quarter; and ere long, over the smoking ruins of the Court-

house, with all its ghastly piles of black and white corpses, the glorious West Indian dawn came in. The valleys with all their luxuriant groves were still veiled in purple shadow, while the peaks of the Blue Mountains seemed tipped with crimson fire, and the waves around the distant promontory were rolling in golden light, and the insects, chiefly butterflies, were rising in clouds from the rich herbage and grass, wherever one's foot fell; and all Nature seemed jewelled and enshrined in glorious sunshine. But the heart of Vere was oppressed with the bitterest anxiety, and full of a dread that he cared not to impart to Toby Finch, who more than once asked him bluntly,

'What the devil are we to do now?'

It was a pertinent question, for there was no appearance of the Wolverine with the troops, and they had no one to receive immediate orders from, as all the persons in authority were lying dead in or around the ruins of the Court-house.

During these doubts, a man of colour was stopped by Vere's sentinel as he attempted to pass his post.

'I have a note for your officer,' said the

stranger, who seemed weary worn and in the highest excitement.

'A note for me?' said Vere, who heard him speak; 'from whom?'

'The overseer at Mango Garden.'

Vere tore it open, and found it contained but two lines:

'*Help us, for God's sake. Mr. Bellingham has been brutally murdered, and his daughter carried off!*'

This brief notice of events so terrible made Vere's blood run cold. Virginia carried off—by whom? The bearer could not, or perhaps would not, afford him the least information on the subject.

Might it not be all some dreadful mistake? But that was impossible; the note was proof of some dire calamity having happened, and its words seemed written in letters of fire before him.

The non-appearance of Manuel Moreno, and of Quashy too, among the insurgents was quite accounted for now; and in horror Vere remembered the circumstance of the former lurking in disguise on the estate, and the

blasphemous vow he had in writing called upon Heaven to register.

For a moment the soul of Vere died within him, and in terror for Virginia his very heart seemed to fill with tears. Carried off, and by murderous hands! carried off, and at such a time, when her very race and colour marked her as a helpless victim! Now, how he repented all his selfish casuistry, and thought that all the world would be well lost for the love of Virginia Bellingham!

Instant action afforded him some relief, and with his party, all in light marching order, having left their knapsacks behind them, he quitted the now desolate and blood-stained town of Morant Bay, and, moving at a quick pace, struck at once into the well-known path that led to Mango Garden.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE WILD CANE-BRAKE.

In the evening after Vere left her, the hours passed slowly and anxiously with Virginia, whom the protracted and unaccountable absence of her father began to alarm; and seated alone, in the twilight, she ceased to idle over the keys of her piano, and listened to every passing sound, expectant of his horse's hoofs in the avenue, or his well-known step in the verandah without. Quashy also was absent, none knew where; so the wax-lights were brought in by another negro, to whose care she consigned her household pet—a tiny negro boy, whose glossy skin was of the most sable tint; for frequently in the West Indies the mistress of an establishment, in addition to her birds or spaniel, pets a little black or coloured child, who ultimately grows up to be useless to herself or any one else; but Vir-

ginia's pet, in this instance, was an orphan born on the plantation.

Suddenly she heard a step in the verandah; it was lighter than her father's, but she sprang forward and opened the jalousie, to be confronted by—Manuel Moreno! His cheek was flushed with a rich colour, that showed distinctly under his clear copper-tinted skin; and his dark beady eyes were sparkling with excitement or recent exercise, she knew not which. But what chiefly attracted the attention of Virginia was the circumstance that he had a waistbelt, in which were stuck a cutlass and revolver, and that he carried a double-barrelled gun in his hands.

'You here, Manuel — you?' she exclaimed, in dread now lest her father might arrive.

'Yes, I, cousin.'

'But *here?*' she persisted.

'Why not?' he asked angrily.

'What rashness—in my father's house!'

'Where should I be but in the house of him whose heir I hope one day to be?' he asked mockingly, with a sneer of malice in his eyes.

'Manuel, why do you come thus, and armed too?'

'Because, my dear cousin, the time has come for the free men of Jamaica to wear and use such tools as these. The blacks have revolted; the whole island is up; the whites are doomed, and I alone can protect and save you. Come with me instantly, ere it is too late.'

Virginia, naturally pale, now grew pallid, but still regarded him incredulously. She was aware of the rumours and perils of the time, thus her first thought was of her absent father.

'Come with me—come!' he repeated, attempting to take her hand; but she shrank from him, and placed it behind her.

'Is there danger abroad?'

'Danger!' said he, laughing; 'there is war—bloodshed and massacre on every hand; and erelong the rioters will be here.'

'Where's papa? I cannot go without papa,' said the girl piteously and in growing terror; for the tone and bearing of her cousin carried conviction with them at last.

'Your "papa" is safe enough by this time,' replied Moreno, with a fierce but unfathomable

smile. 'Come with me, I say; another minute and it may be too late!'

'Where?'

'Anywhere; but here you cannot remain to fall the victim of the first negro who finds you. All on the estate are in arms, and will doubtless sack the house; and you know what negroes are when they are maddened by rum and frenzy. Listen, do you hear that?'

Manuel dashed open one of the jalousies, and Virginia could hear the sound of a negro chorus, rising and falling on the soft night wind. Sometimes it seemed to die away, as if the singers had descended into a hollow, and then it swelled out loudly, as if given by hundreds of voices, and the chant was the ominous one,

'Massa, me no dead yet—carry um along!'

Manuel knew, though she did not, that the singers were bearing with them the horribly mutilated body of her father, for the express purpose of terrifying her and torturing her mentally, before perhaps they destroyed her. And those people were wretches to whom the good old planter had been, during his long life-

time, a generous employer, a benefactor, and a father. Nearer and nearer they came, and shouts and howls began to mingle with their chant; then the glare of torches was seen among the trees, from which the parrots were scared in flights.

'They are passing the house, I think,' said the pale girl, now glancing imploringly at her kinsman, who at all times inspired her with terror, even when she had pitied him and, unknown to her father, relieved his wants.

'They are *not* passing the house,' said he, now taking in his her passive hand.

'Papa not here—not here yet! Oh, how *can* I go with you, Manuel, and alone? Already my eyes are red, and my hair is all anyhow,' she added, glancing at herself in a mirror.

'Red—why are they so?' asked Manuel, with a jealous gleam in his eyes; 'and as for your hair, I don't think it will be noticed much in the forest or cane-brake, where we shall have to hide till I can place you somewhere in safety—as my wife.'

Virginia did not hear the last word, as Manuel was busy extinguishing the wax-candles; and, throwing over her a long dark

poncho wrapper to conceal her white-muslin dress, he led her out of the house by a private door, of which he was perfectly cognisant; while the rabble, who bore her unfortunate father's body in a blanket, debouched from the avenue before the principal entrance, where they were joined by all the black servants of the establishment, male and female; and a scene of riot, devastation, disorder, and the wildest orgies ensued; but, being aware that Moreno was one of themselves, and regarded Mango Garden as his own property, they did not, as in so many other instances, destroy the house by fire.

To do him justice, in the first flush of their fury he feared them for his beautiful cousin, and he was anxious to protect her for his own sake. He knew well that to destroy the white women and girls formed no part distinctly of the revolters' general plan, as they were to be preserved as wives for the victorious negroes; but Manuel Moreno feared justly that he might have many sable rivals in the first fury of the outbreak he, Bogle, and Gordon had so successfully, as yet, brought about; and he was not without a very dis-

tinct dread, in particular, of Quashy, from certain remarks that personage, now a captain of fifty negroes, had let fall with reference to his beautiful mistress; and of this brother patriot he resolved to rid himself by a bullet on the first convenient opportunity.

While hurrying along by his side, and finding the shouts and general uproar at Mango Garden were waxing faint, as the distance increased between her and that place, it seemed to Virginia—accustomed as she had ever been to ease, security, wealth, and luxury—altogether intolerable and incredible that she, her father's daughter, should be flying like a fugitive—and a penniless fugitive too—from her own house in the night; but she yielded to the energy of Moreno; and to the terror of the time was now added a double dread for the safety of her father and that of Vere, whose very presence in Jamaica had come to pass through the anticipation of what had now occurred—that terrible revolt of the blacks; a revolt all the more dreaded by the whites, whose minds were full of the great East Indian Mutiny of eight years before.

With all her West Indian languor and

softness, Virginia Bellingham was meant by nature to be neither a saint nor a martyr. She had both mettle and capacity to face much when thoroughly roused—the mettle of old Colonel Obadiah, her father would have said; for she possessed a power of will and an energetic activity that few would have expected. And it was fortunate for her that she did so, when flying by night, through secret paths, known better to Moreno than to herself, into the heart of a wild cane-brake, where nothing was heard but the buzz of insect life, and where the tall slender shafts that towered skyward, and spread out like a reedy sea for miles on every hand, shut out the red glare of the incendiary fires that were shooting up on the Blue Mountain estate, and other plantations, where the negro peasantry had risen on their masters.

'Surely we are safe now, Manuel? I can go no further,' said Virginia faintly.

'Be seated then, cousin,' said he, indicating the root of a gigantic cane, where she threw herself wearily down, and covering her face with her hands began to moan and weep for her father. He was old, unarmed, single-

handed, and helpless, and altogether so unlike Vere, who was young, strong, able, and surrounded by stout and well-trained European comrades. She was completely crushed in spirit; her pride of bearing was gone, bowed down by calamity and peril. But feeling that she was completely at his mercy, Moreno viewed her with a species of gloomy complacency, yet without an atom of pity or compunction; though well aware that her father, save himself the only kinsman she had on earth, was at that moment lying dead, a cruelly murdered man, under the roof of his own hospitable dwelling, the victim of those who had been employed by him for years, and for those years had been fed by his bounty.

Roused perhaps by the presence of the solitary pair in that wild cane-brake, there issued a singular humming noise, chirping and croaking, on the earth around and in the air above them, among the spreading tufts of the lofty canes; large beetles went banging about, making a sound like a humming-top; bats flitted to and fro; while fireflies flashed about like red sparks; and there came at times the croak of the tree-toad, an inoffensive reptile,

about six inches long, from a neighbouring pool: all of which would have proved a source of much disgust and many terrors to any other European girl save a Creole; thus Virginia was heedless of them.

Encouraged by the isolation of their position, and feeling the necessity as well as the desire to say something to alleviate her growing dismay, Manuel placed his rifle against a cane, and kneeling beside the shrinking girl, endeavoured to console her; but with all the slimy suavity he possessed, in virtue of his coloured blood and half-Maroon father, he was not successful in his efforts, and only blundered and succeeded in rousing anger with her fear.

'As your cousin, you know that I have a right to protect you,' said he, placing a hand upon her shoulder; 'and protect you I will from the whole world, and more.'

'More?'

'Yes—from yourself.'

'Myself?'

'Yes, dear cousin, dearest Virginia!'

'Will you please to explain without these absurd expressions of endearment, which, if they were unwelcome to me when under my

father's roof, must prove still more so here in this place, and circumstanced as I am now.'

'I mean, then,' said he, eyeing her almost malevolently and certainly gloomily, 'that I shall prevent you from becoming the victim of either black or white.'

'Against the latter I need no protector, Manuel.'

'Shall I speak more plainly?'

'If you please, Manuel.'

'Then I shall prevent you from becoming the victim or the wife, which you will, of that buckra officer who dared to take my place at Mango Garden.'

'Buckra again; how like a negro you *will* talk, cousin!'

'Sneer as you may—' he began furiously.

'I do not sneer at you, but I pity you, Manuel,' replied Virginia gently, and fearful of rousing him in such a place.

'I do not seek your pity, Virginia.'

'What then?'

'Your love,' said he, in a low and agitated voice, as he bent closely over her.

'Is this the place, I say again, to talk in such a strain to me?'

'Pardon me, cousin; I know how weak and foolish girls can be; and you, Virginia—you—'

'Say on; well, what of me?' she asked impatiently.

'You are angry with me.'

'Nay, Manuel, I am not; there is my hand.'

He took its soft white fingers in his caressingly, and said very gently,

'I was about to say simply this: that overborne, carried away—how shall I phrase it?—by this Englishman Vere, you may, under the influence of five minutes of folly and weakness, have said "yes" to a proposal involving the whole of your future life.'

'And if I did,' said the girl impetuously, 'what then?'

'The more potent reason that I, your cousin, Manuel Moreno, should save you from him and from yourself,' he replied firmly, almost sternly.

With her large soft eyes slightly dilated, Virginia looked upward at the speaker, and while longing for day—as midnight was long since past—she said gravely, yet gently,

'Let there be no more of this, Manuel; it wearies, it worries, and pains me. I know, of course, the drift of it all, for we have gone over the same dreary ground before. You wish me to marry you; to be your wife, Manuel.'

'O Virginia!'

'Why, cousin Manuel, there is an expression in your face too often, and it is there now, that might, nay, would, make any woman, who was less than a devil, afraid to marry you.'

'In-deed!' said he, syllabling the word, and now eyeing her almost savagely, as he clutched her delicate shoulder with his strong hand.

'Begone, Manuel Moreno!' she exclaimed, now gathering courage and starting to her feet, with her dark eyes aflame, as she writhed herself haughtily free of his bold grasp.

'And leave you here alone—alone in this wild cane-brake—and at such a time?'

'Yes; begone, I say. Papa must and shall take legal means to protect me from such intrusions and outrages as yours.'

'Legal means?'

'You understand me; yes.'

'By putting warrants in force, I suppose,' said Moreno, laughing genuinely at the idea.

'How, matters nothing to me.'

'Well, your precious papa will cross my path in this world no more.'

At these words a deadly fear seized her.

'O Manuel, what am I to infer?' wailed the poor girl piteously.

'Just what my words imply.'

'Have you—have you,' she asked, with a terrible effort, while leaning against a tall swaying cane, and pressing a hand upon her heart,—'have you dared to raise your hand against him?'

'No; though little daring there would be about it.'

'Villain, villain!' exclaimed Virginia, as a terrible light began to dawn upon her; 'did you forget he was your own kinsman?'

'Kinsman! he disdained to claim me as such. But even had I claimed him, that would not have saved him from his fate, or having the contents of his shattered head mixed with brimming bumpers of rum. Now, my pretty cousin, you know all.'

Virginia scarcely heard the closing words of his detestably brutal speech. She reeled wildly round, made a clutch at some fancied support, and fell on the ground in a breathless faint.

CHAPTER XI.

IN HIDING STILL.

As he gazed upon the helpless creature, now so completely in his power, now so utterly at his mercy, passion, not love—for love is ever pitiful—stirred to furnace heat the heart of Manuel Moreno. With this sensation were singularly mingled those of revenge, jealousy, and avarice—revenge on his kinsman, her father, who had so justly made an outcast of him; jealousy and hate of Vere; and avarice, in the desire to be lord and master of his uncle's estate and wealth, in right of propinquity and blood, and, more than all, as the husband of his daughter and heiress.

But were this lifeless-like faint no faint, but death, all might be lost! The awful brutality of his last speech to her, spoken in a gust of rage; the reference to an act, in cannibal savagery far out-heroding any outrage in the Indian Mutiny, now occurred to

Manuel, and actually brought with the recollection of it a temporary sense of humiliation and shame. How could he have said it to her—he a civilised man, albeit so wild in the impulsiveness of his savage nature?

Stooping softly over her, he soon assured himself that she had merely fainted, and would soon, he hoped, recover. He felt her heart—its pulsation was barely discernible; he put his ear to her parted lips, but could discover no respiration. It would come anon, he thought; and, dipping his handkerchief in a runnel that trickled through the waste, he bathed her temples tenderly in the cool water. And now he did what he had never dared do before: he clasped her to his breast; he caressed her hair, her hands, and he kissed her unconscious face again and again, till the very ardour of his endearments seemed to recall her to the world, and to a sense of her own danger and her own exceeding misery.

Suddenly she opened her eyes, like an awakening from a terrible dream to a more terrible reality, and while a sharp but faint cry escaped her, with all the strength of her small hands she repulsed and drove him back.

Staggering upward, she clung to a cane for support, and disdaining the assistance of his hand, warned him back by a repellent gesture of her own, and he began again to eye her moodily.

That she, a highly-bred and accomplished English girl, accustomed to every luxury and ease that wealth could give her, should be an outcast in that desolate cane-brake, face to face with, and the victim of, as melodramatic a ruffian as ever figured in the pages of Gustave Aimard, or on the boards of an American theatre, seemed an unreal and altogether intolerable position.

But had not English ladies quite as gently nurtured, as gently bred, and in many instances more highly born, been, by hundreds, the victims of outrage and butchery, during the great Indian revolt, and at the hands of men who in their ideas of civilisation were unchanged as those who fought in the Patan wars, and under Mohammed Ghori?

Could the gentle Gertrude Templeton, of whose existence she knew nothing, and who at that precise time was driving home from a ball, after being carefully and somewhat

ostentatiously shawled by Derinzy, have seen her supposed rival, the belle of Jamaica—yea, and of all the Antilles—prostrate in spirit, crushed with grief and horror, in that lonely cane-brake, and crouching under the dark and menacing eyes of Manuel Moreno, she must have pitied her from her soul.

Manuel had beheld with considerable satisfaction the returned energy of Virginia, all supremely wretched though she was; for his first suspicion, when she fainted, that she was dead had filled him with terror; for with all his avowed love, the idea of death had terrified him, and he was coward enough and superstitious enough to have fled and left her there.

He took her right hand between his own; it was listless, passive, and wet with her tears. He dropped it with an air of annoyance; and, scraping a vesta against a cane, proceeded quietly and coolly to light a cigar.

She now passed a hand across her forehead, and threw her hair back from her temples, as she said in a singularly touching voice, and with some bewilderment of manner,

'O Manuel, have pity on me; you are the

only kinsman I have in the world besides my dear papa; assure me that this is all some dreadful dream. Why did you bring me here?'

'To save you from the negroes. You are in no dream at all; surely the canes in this wild brake, and the stars that shine overhead, are patent enough. No house is so safe a hiding place at present as this, Virginia. But a little time, and we may return.'

'To Mango Garden?'

'Yes, my dear cousin.'

'When, Manuel?'

'When you are sensible, and Mango Garden is mine.'

'Yours!' she exclaimed, while her eyes flashed.

'Precisely so, cousin; but please do not raise your voice so.'

'Why?'

'Because others than ourselves may be among these canes to-night, or this morning rather.'

'What others—fugitives?'

'Or negroes in search of them.'

'Vere—Vere—Herbert! Oh, the horror

of all this!' moaned Virginia, but luckily in a voice too low for the listener to hear.

'I am but one man, and might have to oppose many, if they attempted to take you from me, Virginia, and, with all the love I bear you, I might fail to—'

'Love!' she exclaimed, in a tone of loathing; 'you dare to talk of love to me, and at such a time as this?'

'When could there be a better?' he asked, almost languidly, while knocking the ashes from his cuba.

'After the awful revelation you made me?' she murmured, in a voice choked with tears.

'Revelation—I—when—what?' he asked, with cool effrontery.

'Of my darling papa's death.'

'Surely you mistake!'

'Oh, no; oh, no!' wailed Virginia; 'in that I made no mistake.'

'What did I say?'

'I can scarcely tell you the exact words; but their horrible import brought conviction and horror to my very soul, Manuel!'

'There has been some mistake—some misconception of my words,' continued he

plausibly, as her grief worried him and defeated the object he had in view—to bend her to his will, and force her, for safety and protection, to accept his love. Thus, so far as her father was concerned, he was glad to tell her *pro tem.* any falsehood to soothe and quiet her; and as the drowning grasp at straws, so did Virginia cling, in her exceeding misery, to any hope held out to her by her wily cousin, and in that he was but too successful.

'Assure me of this, and I will bless you—even will I kiss you, Manuel Moreno!'

And in the outburst of her great gratitude, her sweet quivering lips, all wet with her tears, touched his thick black moustache for an instant.

'I wish you could assure me as well of something else, my sweet cousin.'

'Of what, Manuel?' she asked, eluding his arm.

'That your affair with that Englishman Vere was only a flirtation.'

'I never flirt,' said the beauty, almost coyly now, in the great revulsion of her spirits.

'O Virginia!'

'I am only civil to people who are civil to me. But what was that? Did you not hear something among the canes, Manuel?'

'I heard nothing,' said he; but he cocked the locks of his double-barrelled rifle, and peered into the gloom, out of which the slender stems towered into the starlit sky, with an expression of face that showed—if compelled to do so—he would let fly at any intruder without much compunction.

They listened intently; in the vast extent of the cane-brake there was no sound, save the occasional plash when a leaf, overcharged with dew, let its diamond-like contents drop on the grass below; the insects had ceased to hum, and the croak of the tree-toad had died away.

A whole day of seclusion and partial starvation, save so far as wild fruit is considered, now passed in that dreary place; another night followed, and Manuel Moreno, with considerable exasperation, was beginning to reflect that neither in the matter of his love nor his monetary prospect had he bettered himself by the revolt.

'You look weary, cousin,' said Manuel, as

he could see the almost ghastly pallor of the girl's face in the first ray of dawn, now coming in with its tropical rapidity.

'And I am weary, Manuel, nigh unto death, after the two nights of horror I have undergone; but thank you, dear Manuel: your assurances of papa's safety have filled me with such joy that, with all my weariness of body and spirit, I cannot sleep. Yet would that I could do so till my darling papa comes to waken me!'

Manuel thought her sleep would be a long and lasting one under these circumstances; but seeing how her head drooped he merely said,

'If you can sleep, do so, and restore your strength; that poncho of mine is impervious even to the dew; so sleep, Virginia, and I will watch. Sleep, dear cousin,' he continued, with more of real compassion and tenderness than he had ever shown before. And after all her terrible and varied tumults of thought, yielding to his entreaties and her own dire necessity, Virginia, at the root of the same great cane where she had sat down overnight, actually dropped into slumber at last—a slumber born of toil of the mind and body, toil of the

heart and soul—all unaware that she slept with her sweet face upon the shoulder of Manuel Moreno—her serpent cousin.

Dark though his complexion, he was undoubtedly handsome in figure and face, but the dominant characteristics of his features were vanity, sensuality, and utter selfishness, with much of cruelty; and in the furtherance of his own ends there was no length he was not perfectly capable of going.

Meanwhile the vast morning sun came up in his glory from the Caribbean Sea, and between a deep and stupendous ravine—a rift cleft by some throe of Nature—in the Blue Mountains his light was poured like a crimson and then like a golden flood above the summits of the lofty canes, though all remained in purple twilight below; for so thick was the foliage and intervening greenery that no ray of sunlight ever penetrated to where Virginia lay. But now the hum of busy insect life began again in the wild brake; the bats had vanished, but the brightly plumaged little paroquets flitted to and fro, making the whole instinct with life.

So intently was Manuel Moreno watching,

and with glowing ardour, the fair face of the sleeper, so alluringly soft and innocent in the helpless expression of its perfect repose—the dark lashes, so lately matted with tears, closed upon the cheek; the delicate eyelids that quivered ever and anon, as if she dreamt of sad things in her sleep; the parted lips, to which the colour was now returning again, and between which he could see her pearl-like upper teeth;—so intent, we say, was the watcher on all this that he was quite unaware of a *third* personage being added to the group—a herculean and gigantic negro, of vast proportions and muscular development, a man of the most repulsive aspect, who came crawling along softly on his hands and knees, his eyeballs gleaming like those of a cobra, with a long sharp knife clenched in his glistening teeth, and who restrained his very breathing till his colossal hand had clutched the throat of Manuel with savage tenacity of grasp.

'Quashy!' exclaimed his compatriot, in a choking voice, and the next moment he found himself pinned helplessly to the earth.

CHAPTER XII.

A BROKEN HOME.

We have said that, in the horror of his mind and the great hurry of his thoughts, bodily activity and exertion were a species of relief to Herbert Vere, who, to Finch's well-intentioned and genuine hopes that the whole thing might prove a hoax or mistake, had no replies to make, as the affairs of the past night had too terribly evinced the atrocities of which the negroes were capable, and the idea of Virginia being in their power—carried off by them, as the fatal note had it—put him beside himself with rage and fear; and his soldiers, who had never before seen him excited, gazed at each other in silent speculation, as they pushed forward at a rapid pace, which ever and anon broke into a double march.

Toby Finch had no stale jokes to repeat on the subject of Miss Bellingham now. He saw how thoroughly Vere was roused, crushed,

and excited; and, as an English gentleman, Toby shared to the fullest extent his comrade's terror and anxiety that a lady should be in hands so terrible.

They could but anticipate the worst that was possible; yet their ideas could take no form in words; and the memories of Delhi and Cawnpore were sadly fresh in their minds.

'Yes, yes,' Vere muttered, as if assenting to some thoughts of his own; 'he was right who wrote that "human life is a sort of target —misfortune is always firing at it, and hitting the mark." But in few human lives—even those of soldiers—do misfortunes such as this occur.'

'We may yet be in time to save her, Vere; have some hope.'

'I have none, Toby.'

'What then?'

'Something better,' said Vere, through his clenched teeth.

'What can be better than hope?'

'In this dreadful instance, resolution and the intent to have vengeance, so far as martial law will give it to me. These wretches are

all at our mercy now, and not a man of them shall escape,' exclaimed Vere, whose excited imagination pictured Virginia Bellingham in all her beauty and utter helplessness, the sport and victim of a band of yelling negroes, if she had not—as he too surely anticipated—perished under their hands already.

The morning was one of wonderful beauty even for the Antilles; and mighty peaks and splintered cliffs of the Blue Mountains, with all the wealth of forest that clothed their sides, stood clearly up against the softer azure of the cloudless sky; and as Vere with his party proceeded further inland, and thus attained higher ground, they could see the ocean in their rear spreading far away to a horizon that was perfectly undefined, so completely did sea and sky seem to blend or melt together into one.

'There is a war steamer rounding the headland to the westward, Mr. Vere,' said a sergeant named Wilton.

'It is the Wolverine from Kingston,' added Toby Finch, adjusting his binocular; 'she is full of troops. Kyrle Desborough and the rest of our fellows, no doubt.'

'On, on!' exclaimed Vere; 'we can neither halt nor linger now.'

Steaming with what breeze there was, the war ship formed a beautiful object as she glided on the glassy sea slowly along the coast, while high into the soft and ambient air the smoke from her funnel rose in a thin straight column, till it melted imperceptibly away.

Excited fugitives, some of them planters, mounted and well armed, informed Vere that the insurrection was spreading, and of the risk he ran in venturing inland with so small a party of troops; but he was resolved to proceed, and he knew that his men would follow him anywhere; and now that their blood was fairly up they looked as if ready to face anything.

One fugitive announced that the rebels were in arms on Sir William Fitzherbert's estate, and had barbarously destroyed his overseer; that at Amity Hall, twenty miles from Morant Bay, Mr. Hire had been killed, and many other whites left for dead; and all confirmed the murder of Mr. Bellingham. 'That other persons were not subsequently

killed,' says a writer on this revolt, 'is due, not to the mercy of the rebels, but to the fact that for the most part their intended victims had escaped into the woods or cane-fields, or out to sea in canoes. Let the words of the rebels, heard by Mr. Harrison of Hordley estate, the warnings given to Mr. Hinchelwood of the Mulatto river, and many other facts and statements given in the correspondence published in the Blue-books, declare what would have been the fate of the white men and ladies and children had they been got hold of. . . . It would be impossible to convey within any reasonable limits the prompt and decisive action of Governor Eyre at this critical juncture. So great was the danger of the whole black population rising, if the rebels were allowed to get beyond the Blue Mountain range into the interior of the island; so dreadful were the accounts of apprehended outbreaks in every district; so small was the force of military at his disposal for the protection of the entire colony, that the only surprise is that throughout that terrible period he remained so cool and collected, and was enabled to act with such consummate judg-

ment. One single false step, one moment's hesitation, and Jamaica would have been taken from our grasp, to be reconquered only with a still more terrible loss of life, and at a price frightful to contemplate.'

Here and there, as Vere's party advanced, the smoke of incendiary fires ascended high into the air, from the extensive green savannahs and deep shady ravines in the mountain sides; but he was agreeably surprised that there was no such appearance in the direction of Mango Garden, the non-destruction of which was owing to the interest which the conspirators knew Manuel Moreno to possess therein.

Certain remarks that passed between Vere and Toby Finch, and were overheard by the soldiers, made them quite *au fait* of the tender interest the former had in the lost lady, apart from humanity and duty, and thus they became as full of sympathy and enthusiasm in the task before them as if Vere's case were each man's own; and the soldiers saw in his face now, for the first time, a dark black look that marred the expression even of his handsome features, while in silence, and with something of that quiet and stern concentration of

thought and purpose which reminded Vere of the advance from Mungalwar on Lucknow, his little band went quickly on, with their rifles at the trail, amid a breathless atmosphere, between fields of coffee, ginger, and cotton, and groves of cedar and mahogany.

Erelong the rows of cabbage-trees with their graceful waving foliage, some more than a hundred feet in height, showed Vere that they had reached the Bellingham estate, and soon other familiar objects met his view. He passed the place where with Virginia he had found shelter under the leafy branches from the rain and storm, and where his chance introduction to her came about. How well he could recall her face, her figure, and all that had occurred, and the appearance of the old planter, her father, as he welcomed them at the door of his hospitable mansion!

There too was the Shaddock Grove, which, from the similarity of the name, made them often recall and speak laughingly of the Shaddock Grove of Bernardin St. Pierre's delightful romance, and that other Virginia who was so sweet, so gentle, and ill-fated. The eyes of Vere were wandering over ravines and

clefts in the mountains, where often he had driven or ridden with Virginia Bellingham, and where they had idled for hours with their reins dropped loosely on their horses' necks, when suddenly Sergeant Wilton, who was a wary old soldier, exclaimed,

'Look out, Mr. Vere; there is steel flashing in yonder field.'

'Halt!' cried Vere; 'where, Wilton?'

'On our left, sir.'

The sergeant was right; for in the place indicated, among a late field of maize, Vere detected the glittering tips of one or two bayonets, and was certain that an ambush awaited him there; so he threw out his little force in skirmishing order on the move and opened a random file-fire, which had the effect of dislodging from their concealment some thirty or forty armed negroes, who, after firing a few futile shots, took to flight with yells of rage and terror, leaving some of their number killed or wounded behind them.

Oddly enough, in one or two instances, where the woolly heads suddenly sank down, bare black feet appeared instead, as the

stricken bounded about in their agony and fear. Through the yellow maize swept the red-coated skirmishers at a rush with a cheer, and issued upon the lawn before the mansion of Mango Garden, where Sergeant Wilton appeared with a prisoner, a tall and herculean-like negro, whose red tongue was lolled out, and whose face became almost pea-green in his terror of his captor's sword-bayonet, by which he was pricked forward without much mercy till he was in front of Vere.

'Quashy!' exclaimed the latter, in astonishment.

A half-spent ball had struck the negro on the back of the head and partially stunned him; yet he had the cunning to throw away his weapons, and, when captured, to assume an air of injured innocence, and to welcome Vere as 'Massa Bellingham's friend' very warmly, but with an air of bewilderment and consternation that sprang less from the perilous predicament in which he found himself, than from the startling conviction that he had been struck down by a bullet and become the white man's prisoner, and that consequently he had no Obeah at all.

The Obeah man had deluded him, after the most solemn incantations, made by means of earth gathered from a grave, and broth made, not unlike that of Macbeth's Witches, with the liver of a white cock, the feathers of a crow, egg-shells, and the teeth of a snake.

'Is it true that your master has been killed and Miss Bellingham carried off?'

'Too true, Massa Vere, too true. O poor Massa Bellingham! poor Massa Bellingham! He good massa to poor black nigger; yet him dear old head all smashed like a pumpkin. Oh, lorry gorry! oh, lorry gorry!' he added, affecting to whine and weep. Thus he succeeded for a little time in deceiving Vere, who knew him to have been one of Mr. Bellingham's most trusted servants; moreover he was only found near the house, and without arms.

Subsequent evidence adduced before one of the many courts-martial held for the trial and execution of the insurgents, and especially at one of which Vere was himself president, proved that it was by the hand of Quashy that Mr. Bellingham fell, having his

brains dashed out by a club; and that the vile ungrateful negro was full of rage and jealousy on finding that his young mistress had escaped, and, more than all, had been carried off by Manuel Moreno, whom he conceived to be fighting at Morant Bay.

The apparently quiet departure of the cousins had been observed by the little boy of whom Virginia made a household pet, and Quashy had been hurrying in pursuit with a party at the very time the latter had been detected in the field of maize by Sergeant Wilton.

Mechanically Vere entered the house to prosecute his inquiries. Could it be, he asked himself, that he was again in Mango Garden? And so full had he been of exciting thought amid the broil of the night, that it was scarcely possible to realise the conviction that but yesterday evening he had been there with Virginia, and sat with her hand in hand and eye bent tenderly on eye. The drawing-room windows were open, and the warm morning air came through them laden with the delicious fragrance of Virginia's roses, that grew in masses round the pillars of the

verandah. And where was she who loved so well to tend them?

With her music strewed all about there stood her open piano, just as she had started from it when Manuel Moreno suddenly entered. Would her delicate fingers ever touch its keys again? A sense of her presence, given by these inanimate objects, made her undoubted absence more terrible; for these silent witnesses filled the heart of Vere with a grief and dismay beyond the power of language.

On every hand and in every room were signs of the havoc and devastation made by Quashy and his gang overnight; furniture smashed, mirrors and vases, statuary and ornaments all wantonly broken. Those household *lares* or *penates*, the pride of the old planter's heart, the portrait of Colonel Obadiah Bellingham in his corslet and falling bands, and the genealogical tree, in which his descendants figured so amply, had been all slashed, torn, and riddled, while he lay dead and mutilated on the floor of the room where they hung.

Vere's investigations were very brief, as the pursuit and rescue of Virginia, or the

task of avenging her, required instant consideration.

Complicity in guilt or sympathy with the black cause, stupidity or fear, rendered the dead man's household, especially the female portion thereof, unable or incapable of giving him either aid or information, as their whole minds were intent on pandering to that superstition which is so rampant in the Antilles.

All the mirrors and looking-glasses that were left unbroken were covered or turned to the walls, lest the spirit of 'Massa Bellingham, or of Missy Virginia,' if she too were dead, should be reflected in them; all the water in the house was being carefully emptied, that Death might cool his dart in it; and beside the dead planter a jar of water, with a light to be kept burning for nine nights, was placed, to enable the spirit of the deceased to quench his thirst if it returned; and many other mummeries imported from Africa by the negro slaves of old were in process at Mango Garden, when Vere, with a heavy and anxious heart, and with Quashy as his guide, turned his back upon the desolate dwelling, and marched quickly up the mountain path

that led towards the cane-brake, as Quashy, from instincts of his own, from traces he had discovered, and certain information that had been given him, was sure that Virginia and her captor were in the vicinity of that place.

Vere had offered him a keg of rum, a gold watch, anything he could wish for, to aid in the errand of mercy; and Quashy, who had views of his own in the matter, not the least of which was to achieve his liberty and join the revolted negroes, acquiesced most readily; but night had closed ere plans were adjusted and preparations made.

A bribe was offered the negro on one hand, with the distinct intimation on the other that on the slightest indication of treachery or attempt to escape he would be shot down without the smallest mercy, and in this arrangement Quashy acquiesced with an indescribable grin.

Dawn was close at hand when the pursuing party reached the cane-brake, between two mountains, the rugged cliffs of which were tufted with the richest foliage. Guided either by instinct or foreknowledge—which, Vere and Finch never knew—the negro

speedily selected the same narrow pathway which Moreno and Miss Bellingham, the latter wearily and with fainting steps, had traversed together; and after daylight fairly broke, bursting suddenly upon the world in a flood of ruddy golden light, as it generally does in the tropics, the quick eyes of Quashy detected in several places among the soft pulpy leaves and bruised grass, in places where Vere could see no trace at all, the footmarks of two persons—marks that were those of a man by their weight and size, and others that were as evidently those of a woman by their shape and being smaller and lighter, and in one spot where some mud lay they were distinctly seen beyond all doubt.

In one place the fag end of a cigar and a vesta match were found; further on a piece of scarlet-silk ribbon, evidently a knot from the muslin dress which Vere remembered Virginia wore on the evening he last saw her.

Some yards beyond was a fragment of the fragile dress itself, adhering to a species of cactus plant. Each of these indications of being on the sure trail elicited chuckles from Quashy, and led him to indulge in many

strange negro ejaculations expressive of extreme satisfaction, while they filled the mind of Vere with mingled hope and dismay.

Bad as Moreno was, and capable of any atrocity, Vere confessed to himself that Virginia was safer in his hands than in those of the negroes. Whether this precious cousin had the power of protecting her from his black compatriots; whether he feared his ability to do so now that the dreadful storm had burst, and the die of rebellion been cast; or what was his precise object in luring Virginia from home, and keeping her for some thirty-six hours like a gipsy in that desolate cane-brake, it is impossible now to say with certainty; but any way, the terrible sequel to the episode was close at hand.

CHAPTER XIII.

A FATAL RESCUE.

THE party guided by Quashy had proceeded nearly to within a hundred yards of where we left Virginia sunk in the deep slumber that comes of weariness of mind and body, while Manuel Moreno watched her, when the negro paused, and said to Vere,

'Massa Moreno and Missy Bellingham are in de cane-brake.'

'I should hope so, after bringing us all this distance; so remember your promised rewards, Quashy, rewards which I shall double.

'Speak low, Massa Vere, speak low!' said the negro huskily.

'Are we so close to them?' said Vere, in a whisper.

'I tink so, massa; but no sure quite,' replied Quashy, stooping (for in stature he tow-

ered over Vere by a head), and applying his great red blubber-like lips closer to the ear of the listener than the latter relished.

'Close up, men,' said Vere, in a low voice to his soldiers, who silently cocked their Enfield rifles; 'we shall go on at a rush.'

'No—no—no, Massa Vere!' exclaimed Quashy, in his low husky voice.

'Why?' asked Vere impetuously.

'Dat spoil all; better go back to Mango Garden.'

'How—what *do* you mean, fellow?'

'Hush! You want to catch Massa Moreno and save Missy Bellingham?'

'Of course,' replied Vere, with fierce impatience; 'the latter at all hazards. So why all this twaddle?'

'Well, by golly lorry, you no like to do either by rushing on,' replied Quashy, with a diabolical grin.

'Why not?'

'On the first alarm he will kill her and himself too.'

'Can you think so?' asked Vere, with agitation.

'Me sartain, massa, me sartain.'

'It is his savage nature which speaks,' said Finch.

'It is um savage knowledge of what Manuel Moreno can do, massa officer,' said Quashy sententiously, as he drew himself up to his full height, with that air of unintentional mock dignity which a negro can so well assume, and which at another time would have been amusing, as he put his hand on his heart and rolled his big beady eyes in an alarming manner; 'if discovered, I tell you, Massa Vere, he will kill rather than yield Missy Bellingham to you or any man.'

'Is he quite capable of that, Quashy?'

'Cut gizzard out of um own father, if he wanted it.'

'We must surprise him.'

'Massa Vere not able to do so.'

'What then?' asked Vere, sighing with rage at all this most unexpected parley.

'Allow me to follow him trail alone, like a snake; you guard the cane-brake along all this side of the way, and no let Massa Moreno escape, while I creep in and cut um throat if I can.'

'Your idea is not a bad one, Quashy,' said

Vere; and little foreseeing how he was to be deluded by the artful savage who addressed him, and whom he simply believed to have been a faithful and attached servant of Mr. Bellingham, he acceded to the plan, and softly posted his party in extended order, at more than the usual distances, as a chain of sentinels or skirmishers, with orders to shoot down or bayonet any man they found who refused to surrender, or seemed to be making his escape; and in this fashion they remained among the canes and jungle, crouching and listening intently and in perfect silence, while Quashy crept onward alone and speedily disappeared.

For some time all remained intensely, oppressively, and to Vere it seemed painfully, still; the buzz, the hum of insect life, amounting almost to a booming sound at times, alone was there. The minutes that elapsed seemed as if hours, and suspicion suggested to Vere that Quashy might have deceived him, and only crept away, not to return, but to achieve his own liberty, if he had really incurred any penalty.

Suddenly there rang out amid the stillness of that desolate place a horrible and despairing

cry, followed by the shrill and prolonged shriek of what was evidently the voice of a female, making all who heard them start convulsively.

'Forward, men!' cried Vere, brandishing his sword; 'forward, my lads, and look well about you!'

Instinctively converging to the point whence the cries came, the soldiers made their way through the wilderness of cane and jungle, and among the first to reach the spot were Vere and Finch.

There, on his back, lay Manuel Moreno dead, with the blood yet welling forth from two deep gashes in his breast, and in his grasp was the fragment of a muslin skirt; but where was the negro guide, and where was Virginia?

But a little way from where the dead man lay, with the insects already battening in his oozing blood, the cane-brake ended abruptly at the verge of a precipice, whence could be seen on one side an extensive view of wood and savannah, stretching away towards the Blue Mountains, and, on the other, broken cliffs and rugged ground, beyond which lay an inlet of the sea.

'Silence! listen!' said Vere, in a breathless voice; and all listened. But not a sound was heard save the chattering of the paroquets overhead; nor could a trace of Quashy or the girl be seen. The soldiers then scattered about in the brake, shouting singly, then by twos, threes, and all together, but there came no response; and there was but one way the missing could have gone unseen—down the precipice; and that such was the fact some proof was afforded by the discovery, within a few yards of Moreno's body, of the strong tendril of a wild vine, hanging over the verge, half rent and torn recently, and there too the turf marks of fresh abrasion.

'By Heaven, sir, there they are, the nigger and the lady!' cried a corporal, as from the verge of the cliff where they stood, upon a plateau of rock, about sixty feet below, the sable form of Quashy, half naked, lithe and powerful, was seen with his victim—whether dead or alive it was impossible to say—flung over his shoulders like a scarf.

'What does he mean? what took the fool down there?' said the soldiers.

Blind desperation, revenge, and death,

Vere thought. Quashy now looked back to the group of soldiers gathered on the wall-like cliff above him, and shaking his clenched hand at them in defiance, uttered a mocking shout, and, ere a shot could be fired at him, plunged over a ridge, and with Virginia in his grasp disappeared.

For accoutred soldiers, or almost any man who was not so desperate and furious as the negro Quashy, to descend where he had done was impossible; but Vere's men, almost without waiting for any word of command, divided into two parties, tacitly to all appearance, and choosing two ways, went plunging down the face of the declivity, out of which the precipice abutted, and in a few minutes they came rushing up the ridge beyond which the negro had vanished with his victim.

Until we are thoroughly roused we know not the wells of passion that may be in us. Civilisation, fashion, and custom keep them pent and in subjection; but a time comes when the impulses of human nature prove too strong for cold custom, colder fashion, and enforced civilisation, and then the true devil

that lurks in the human heart has full sway; thus, at the time we are now describing, Vere felt himself in his just fury as savage as the savage he was pursuing.

Beyond the ridge was an expanse of broken ground, scattered canes, wild tobacco plants, watercourses, ravines, and dry nullahs intersecting a long slope that terminated in a cliff above the inlet of the sea referred to.

Suddenly a shout burst from the soldiers, who were all hurrying forward in a kind of semicircle, but scattered far apart, as the figure of Quashy became visible again, but at a great distance, so much time had been lost by the *détour* made to gain the lower ground.

The light figure of the girl he carried, and from whom no cry for aid or fear escaped, seemed but as that of a child in the grasp of Quashy; a dark bronze-looking Hercules, who united the lithe activity of the antelope to the strength of a bull, as he went rushing wildly onward. More than once his foot tripped and he fell with her in his arms—fell heavily; a maddening sight to all, but to Vere especially. He knew that her delicate limbs must by this time be a mass of bruises and discolorations,

by the force and fury of the negro's grasp, apart from those falls on the rugged ground. While his soldiers ever and anon dropped on their knees and took aim, yet feared to fire lest they might injure the young lady, Vere more than once tried his field-glass for a moment; but excitement dimmed his vision, he saw nothing, and when he looked again the savage was further than ever ahead, and, hemmed in by the soldiers, was swiftly breasting his way uphill and towards the cliff that overhung the sea.

With what object?

What could it be but vengeance now, not escape! Quashy's object at first had no doubt been to achieve the latter, after killing Moreno and securing Virginia as his prey; but his plans or hopes were evidently baffled now.

'Your rifle, please, Sergeant Wilton!' exclaimed Vere; 'at all hazards I must try to bring the scoundrel down.'

'You are trembling, Vere,' said Toby Finch; 'give me the rifle, and I will shoot.'

In his intentness of purpose Vere never heard his brother officer, but quickly sighting the rifle for some two hundred yards' distance,

he knelt, aimed, and fired. The negro threw up his arms wildly for a moment, permitting Virginia to fall heavily on the ground; then stooping he clutched her again, and with a cry like the last yell of a dying fiend he again resumed his flight.

'Another shot—another shot, sir; try again!' cried the soldiers.

'Shoot, for God's sake, Tom Kenny!' said Vere to one whom he knew to be a crack shot.

The soldier instantly knelt, with left elbow on his left knee, sitting well back upon his right heel, and his butt firmly planted against his right shoulder in the grasp of the left hand. He took aim, but paused, saying,

'I cannot fire, sir.'

'Why?'

'For fear of hitting the lady.'

'At this distance? Aim low.'

'There is a draw on my trigger, sir.'

'Give *me* the rifle!' cried Vere impetuously. He then threw himself flat on the earth, in the Wimbledon fashion, at full length, with the weapon resting firmly on the turf, and he aimed at Quashy's legs, as he would

have done at the running deer ahead of the object—fired, and Quashy reeled.

'Hit again, hit again; hurrah!' cried the soldiers. 'Here is another cartridge, Mr. Vere; have another shy, sir.'

Shot after shot were sent after Quashy, so the spell that withheld the hands of the men seemed broken; but while still staggering onward, with blood streaming from his limbs —blood that dyed with crimson the rent and tattered muslin dress of Virginia—he placed her between him and the line of fire, as a species of buckler, and menacingly brandished his knife above her head, as much as to say that he would use it without mercy if fired upon again; and, while the soldiers paused in irresolution, he vanished into another ravine; and again they went plunging on in fierce pursuit, animating each other by shouts and cries.

Side by side in the hunting-field, neck and neck at a hurdle-race, shoulder to shoulder in the charge on more than one Indian battle-field, had Vere and Finch been together, but never had they felt the fierce and high excitement of the present chase for life and death.

Was Virginia dead, or in a helpless swoon? It was impossible to say. Thrice when the savage had fallen with her, or permitted her to fall on the turf or rocks, she was seen to lie still and motionless, till he picked her up and swayed her over his left shoulder, with her head and long dark dishevelled hair drooping downward, as he ran on and on in his terrible race.

Now, as they came scrambling out of the last hollow, a terrible tableau met the eyes of Vere, Finch, and Sergeant Wilton, who had distanced all their comrades.

Clearly defined against the blue sky, on the very verge of a beetling cliff that overhung the sea, white, boiling, and foaming three hundred feet and more below, were the figures of the negro and his victim, who had evidently recovered her senses; revived perhaps by the pleasant breeze that came from the open sea. She was on her knees, with her back to Quashy, with her hands crossed upon her bosom.

The left hand of the giant negro was wreathed amid the masses of her beautiful hair; his right held aloft the knife, which he

again brandished menacingly towards his pursuers, who could hear his savage laugh, though too far off to see his ghastly smile—ghastly indeed, for he had lost much blood from his wounds.

Neither could they see the saint-like expression of resignation in the wan and woful face of the poor girl, who felt that her last hour—nay, her last moment—had come, and that she was to perish terribly and cruelly, under the very eyes of the man she loved, and who, she knew, loved her well. But there was little time given for thought, for prayer, or for reflection now.

'He is just a hundred yards off,' said Tom Kenny; 'I can safely put a bullet into him now; no fear of hitting the pigeon and missing the crow,' he added, almost with a smile; and, taking a brief aim at the broad bare breast of Quashy, fired.

Again the latter threw up his arms wildly as his blood spurted, for the ball must have pierced him through and through. He reeled as if about to fall. For a moment Virginia was free, and was in the act of rushing towards Vere, when Quashy, exerting the last

efforts of death, despair, and savage vengeance, clutched her in his arms, and sprang with her over the cliff, whence they fell whizzing through the air, to vanish among the surf that seethed three hundred feet below!

A shout of sorrow and rage—rage that so many armed men—all trained soldiers—should be baffled thus by one—escaped the soldiers, and then they surveyed each other in silence.

To Vere's natural sorrow and horror was added the most terrible contrition for the manner in which he had permitted himself to be deluded by Quashy. With all his past Indian experiences, the simple and confiding English officer knew not the depth of treachery and bloodshed of which the negro was capable.

To Quashy and his compatriots it signified nothing that Mr. Bellingham and other planters had always treated them since the emancipation like Christians, when most of them were mere savages, believing in Obeah men and worshipping fetishes; had paid them fair and liberal wages, helped them in sickness, and befriended them in health. They hated

their masters as white men, collectively rather than individually, and, perhaps more than all, traditionally, on the score that all masters were buckra tyrants, and all black men were slaves.

Vere's heart was more crushed and stricken than it had ever been after a sanguinary battle; for in no battle had he ever lost more than a dear comrade or so; but now his blood seemed to freeze. He covered his eyes with his hands to shut out the glare of the tropical sun, and turned away from the cliff, lest the sight and sound of the sea below might drive him mad.

'The curse of Heaven be on the blazing nigger! and, oh, but he was hard to kill!' said Tom Kenny, surveying the gouts of blood that covered all the place, while mechanically putting another cartridge into his rifle.

But for the presence of Toby Finch, the sergeant, and the soldiers, as breathless and blown they all came scrambling up in quick succession with their rifles, the unfortunate Vere could scarcely have believed that the whole episode was aught else than a dreadful dream, from which he would waken to find

Virginia, with her music, flowers, or birds, as usual in the shaded drawing-room at Mango Garden!

The perfume of the flowers about that horrible cliff affected him as musk does some delicate persons. He grew giddy, and would have reeled towards its verge but for the strong hand of Sergeant Wilton, who grasped his waistbelt and dragged him back.

Virginia, with all her loveliness and wondrous attractions, was gone—gone, at peace and at rest, as completely as if she had never existed, and no hand, save that which raised Lazarus from the dead and restored the widow's son, could bring her back. All was over now; but it was an awful ending and an awful grave!

From the day he first met her, and after which their intimacy so speedily ripened into friendship, and from friendship warmed to love, he seemed to re-read their past as if it were all condensed into one brief sentence; and he reproached himself with not having, he feared, appreciated Virginia enough.

But his sorrow as yet was not a passionate one. The catastrophe was so sudden, so dead-

ening, by a strange sense of its unreality, of its being impossible, that he felt and seemed stunned and stupefied; and, like a man in a dream, mechanically took the proffered arm of Toby Finch, and set out with his party on the return to Morant Bay.

When full reflection came he longed intensely to turn his back for ever on the Antilles; but there was no time accorded him for mooning by the sea or searching by its rocky shore; for there were other homes in Jamaica then as desolate as that at Mango Garden—homes where women's hearts were breaking, and their tears flowing over the fallen, the murdered, and the lost. So much work was yet to be done—savage and disastrous, though justly retributive, work—ere he was to see the Blue Mountains melting into the sea; and the fate of her he had lost steeled the heart of Vere—all kind, gentle, and generous though he was—and he betook him to the task of punishment, for a time, with a severity of which he could not have believed himself capable.

CHAPTER XIV.

NEWS FROM ENGLAND.

About a week after the outrages we have narrated, Vere—glad to be once more with, and under the command of, his old chum Kyrle Desborough—found himself fortunately despatched from the vicinity of Morant Bay, which he now loathed, to other scenes. The governor and General Nelson had made arrangements to save Port Antonio—a rich and beautiful district—from the rebels, who were committing rapine and havoc about twelve miles to the eastward thereof, and were known to be meditating its destruction. Hence a number of the English settlers had taken shelter on board of a large American ship, whose commander, to save them, humanely put to sea.

By occupying Port Antonio in time, the authorities not only saved that district from total destruction, but they met and barred the

progress of the insurrection to the eastward of it, and accomplished some important results in a very brief space of time.

All the troops that could be spared from Kingston were effectively disposed of by being landed on each side of the island to the eastward, whence they marched down on the blacks, and completely crushed them in time. One post was established at Morant Bay, another at Port Antonio, and the ground between was occupied by the friendly Maroons. Thus the whole of the rebel force was completely hemmed in within the country eastward of this line; but meanwhile the alarming reports which came from every other quarter of Jamaica, and the evident intention of further revolts if opportunity favoured, caused the gravest anxiety in the minds of all the whites.

The total number of her Majesty's troops in the whole island at this crisis was only a thousand men: of these five hundred were engaged in repressing the rebellion, in a district occupied by fully forty thousand blacks; while the other five hundred were required to protect and garrison Kingston, Up Park Camp, and Newcastle; and even when succour came

from Barbadoes and Nassau, the whole number only amounted to seventeen hundred bayonets.

The rebels in arms were Africans, as uncivilised as they were when in their native wilds, and to such the lash and the bullet could be the only arguments applied. A thousand of their dwellings were burned by the troops; and though the fact sounded startling to English ears, it should be borne in mind that they were only wretched little huts of cane and thatch, and that in no instance was any hut destroyed unless the plunder taken from our colonists was found in it, thereby showing the complicity of its owner with the revolt.

At Kingston, General O'Connor took all the measures necessary for the protection of the city by increasing the horse and foot volunteers, and enrolling all pensioners. Gordon was captured by the Maroons, and delivered by them to General Nelson, who placed him on board H.M.S. Wolverine, after which he was tried by a court-martial, which found him guilty of the massacre at Morant Bay, and generally of riot, rebellion, and insurrection,

and sentenced him to death. Accordingly he was hanged over the arch of the ruined Court-house, wherein so many of our people had perished; and with that event, which made some noise among certain sympathisers in England, ended all that Vere had to do with the brief insurrection in Jamaica.

The military duty of hurrying from place to place, the courts-martial, and the executions attendant thereon, formed almost a relief to his heated mind, after that awful catastrophe by the seashore. The Jamaica colonists are exceedingly fond of 'playing at soldiers;' and, considering how monotonous life is in the Antilles, it is not to be marvelled at that whatever creates stir and excitement proves pleasing. But it was no playing at soldiers while the storm raised by Bogle, Gordon, and Moreno lasted, creating those events which will long figure in the *nancy* stories of the future—for these stories are a species of nursery and legendary tales, with which the negroes amuse and terrify each other and the young children of their master's family, the principal ingredient being the marvellous and startling, yet generally ending with a good

moral. Accompanied, as they often are, by wild and mournful chants, they have all the influence of ghost stories, with much more ingenuity; and have hence an impression on the young that is far from salutary.

But to return to our own story. The 'shindy,' as Desborough called it, was entirely over, and martial law had ceased. Vere was again in his old quarters at Up Park Camp, after having had more to do, he averred, 'than Œdipus or the devil himself,' and having twice escaped assassination—once in particular from a negro who lurked in a tree, and tried to lasso him with a noosed rope, in which attempt he was 'potted' by Tom Kenny; and one evening, early in the autumn of the year that had been so eventful, saw him and Kyrle Desborough lingering together over their cigars and a glass of grog, just as we found them in their hut at Aldershot in the lines of the first brigade of infantry in our opening chapter.

They had much to converse and think about, as that evening they had recent news from England, a luxury of which the peripatetic nature of their recent avocations had completely deprived them.

Vere had been somewhat changed of late, and apt, whenever occasion offered, to indulge in solitude, to 'moon,' as Desborough said, and often was only to be found in the evening by the glow of his cigar, when sought for in the verandah of his quarters by him and Toby Finch.

The wonderful scenery of Jamaica now had lost its charms for him, or only engendered sadness by its association with the fate of Virginia; and he longed for the time when he should bid adieu for ever to the broad waters of the Caribbean Sea, that rippled on the shore among cowries and all kinds of beautiful shells, with the white foam, precursor of the coming breeze, cresting its tiny waves; the soft loveliness of the mighty hills; the wondrous serenity of the azure sky; the vast savannahs of emerald hue, and the woods of mingled green and russet. And now that Virginia was no more, he thought, with a certain emotion of compunction, how readily he had abandoned himself to the love of her, and sought her love in return, as if seeking thereby to crush out that which he felt for Gertrude Templeton.

He was always sadder after having dreamt of Virginia; for 'in a dream,' says Miss Braddon, 'we always forget there is such a thing as death.' The dead seem always to live again. Why is this? It can only be accounted for by the hypothesis that we too are then in a species of spirit land. And Vere was apt to be rather harassed than soothed by certain wild suggestions and hopes on the part of good-natured Toby Finch—born of novel-reading apparently—to the effect that Virginia might not have perished after all.

'We did not look enough to see if there were any boats about—or saw none if we did look—or a passing ship,' said Toby, in a confused way.

'Well, and what then?'

'She might have been picked up, saved, and taken away to Hispaniola or Cuba.'

'Saved from the grasp—the death-clutch—of that incarnate devil? O Toby, how can you talk so?'

'Well, I am sure I have read of such things; things quite as out of the way.'

'In romances?'

'Perhaps.'

Vere shook his head sadly.

'Yes, old fellow, but truth is stranger than fiction,' persisted Toby; 'you may meet her suddenly on a promenade at Kingston, at the next governor's ball perhaps—who the deuce knows where?—and—'

'Finch, do stop, please.'

'Well, pardon me, Vere, if I offend or suggest hopes that may never be realised.'

Kyrle Desborough indulged in none of his jokes and philippics against the sex now, and pleased Vere by his kindly remarks and sympathy concerning the poor girl whose fate was so terrible.

'And you were very fond of her?' he asked on one occasion.

'Fond is not the word, Kyrle; never was; now least of all,' replied Vere emphatically.

'Well, I *am* sorry for you, from my soul I am,' said Kyrle, pressing his hand; 'but,' he added, after a little pause, 'are you not sure that she was catching your heart on the rebound, as it were?'

'I can't think so. I don't wish to think so now, at all events, when her poor unburied body is tossing in yonder horrid sea.'

'Off Shark Point,' said Toby Finch parenthetically.

'One's blood runs cold when thinking of the whole affair, Kyrle. I wish you had seen and known her. Well, this Jamaica business is over now; and if the rest of our battalion is not sent out, home we go, of course, and the sooner the better. I loathe the whole island now.'

'I have had my sorrow, shock—what you will—also, Vere; but I never look back at it.'

Every one of the mess knew that Kyrle Desborough had met with something in his past life, but at what precise part in his march through it no one was ever told; for he kept his own secrets, as we have elsewhere said, so the curious could only marvel and conjecture vaguely.

All Vere's recollections of Virginia Bellingham were tender and pitiful. She had been so loving, so trusting, and their passion free from all those trammels which beset his affair with Gertrude, whose unaccountable coldness to himself he scarcely cared to think of now. In fact he had quite dismissed it from his consideration for some time past, for

he was haunted by the memory of Virginia. The brief story of his love for the dead girl was not associated with kettledrums, West End crushings, and steeplechase balls; it seemed rather an idyl amid tropical sunshine, green leaves, and flowers, and the murmur of sparkling waters, the warbling of birds, and the freshness of the Caribbean Sea.

'He'll get over it, Toby,' said Kyrle Desborough; 'I never knew a fellow circumstanced as he was that didn't come to grief in some way.'

'How?'

'I mean when on detachment he is sure to spoon on some girl in pure idleness and vacuity—even his landlady, perhaps, if nothing better comes to hand. He talks to her as a friend, on wet days especially, when he can't get out; then, if pretty, he cares for her as a brother; perhaps they do music and chess together. Then, some fine night, through the medium of a champagne cup or a stiff glass of grog, he discovers that she is downright lovely. I have gone through a crossfire of all that sort of thing, and of everything of the kind you can think of, Toby, and have

never yet made such a fool of myself as I hear you were nearly doing with the coloured girl you used to meet under the cabbage trees at Morant Bay, till the nigger shindy came and saved you just in time. By Jove, Toby, the Horse Guards should define some distinct line of action for fellows left to themselves on detachment. It is all the more necessary in these cramming days, when exams are all the go, and it is more necessary for an officer to be up in Chaucer's obsolete barbarisms, and to prove the superiority of ding-dong-dido over do-di-ding-dong, than to be able to handle a regiment or even a company.'

And now to return to the news that had come from England, and which the two friends were discussing with the aid of some mild cubas and *brandy-pawnee*, as they called it in India.

A desolate change had come over the once beautiful Mango Garden, but Vere of course would visit it no more. To whom the property, so coveted by Manuel Moreno, had gone he knew not; but he had stood by the grave of the poor old gentleman with Toby Finch, Kyrle Desborough, and the planters of

the district as reverently as if he had been indeed his son.

Virginia! He thought what could ever blot out the recollection of her face, so sweet and pure, so bright and loving, as he had seen it last? Yet that evening's news from England gave him cause for some reflection.

Some back numbers of the *Times* and *Morning Post* had reached the mess, and in these journals, under the items of fashionable intelligence, had been announced, though at different dates, the marriage of Rosamund Templeton to Sir Ayling Aldwinkle, and the presentation at court of 'Viscount and Viscountess Derinzy on *their* marriage.'

Recent events that we have narrated enabled Herbert Vere to read and re-read with more complacency that which must otherwise have given him a shock.

'So Gertrude is married!' said he, and quietly laid the paper down.

'And Rosamund too, the "Fair Rosamund," the admiration of all the subalterns in Aldershot!' added Desborough, laughing, as he tossed the end of a cigar out of the window and selected another from the box.

'What a world it is, that world of fashion!' he added, laughing.

'Married to old Aldwinkle,' said Vere; 'it is an atrocity!'

'By Jove, it is superb!'

'Well, let us hope her cloud has a silver lining.'

'Silver! I believe you, my boy—a gold one; but not one to be happy under. Poor girl! But how often have I told you that, like all their set and class, these Templetons were a selfish and cold-blooded lot!'

'But I ever thought better of Rosamund!'

'How? Is she not just one of those girls "who either never fall in love at all, or do so according to a parental Act of Parliament, passed in the reign of good King Mammon," who, by the way, is still king of these realms?'

'You wrong Rosamund,' urged Vere; 'for if that girl had a fancy in the world, Kyrle, it was for your own unworthy self.'

'I don't like to think so. I have no vanity to flatter; moreover, I am careful not to be bitten by a little aristocrat again.'

'*Again!*'

'Did I say so?'

'Yes; and thereby hangs a tale.'

Kyrle Desborough was silent for a few seconds, and then, with one of his cynical laughs, he said,

'I am usually pretty close about myself, but the word escaped me somehow; yet I don't mind you, Vere, who are a true friend.'

'You too have found some bitterness in your time?'

'There is deuced little I haven't found or done,' said Kyrle evasively; 'yet I often wonder in what form will such wretches as that sordid old woman Templeton — such titled snobs—exist on the other side of the grave, if at all.'

'How?'

'Because they live for this world alone, and seem to have no inheritance in the next; and the only love they believe in is one that enables them to queen it in society—a love clothed in purple and fine linen, bedecked with jewels.'

'Kyrle, how strangely bitter you are!' said Vere, thinking of the word that had escaped his friend.

'Not at all; the girl's marriage is only

another specimen of the high-bred heartlessness peculiar to her set, who sacrifice anything for rank and money.

"Let wealth and commerce, laws and learning, die,
But leave us still our old nobili-ty!"

And yet, and yet,' added Kyrle, after a pause, 'though I always thought myself pretty familiar with the psychology of the weaker vessels, I was not quite prepared for this. Poor little girl!'

Vere was half suspecting that Desborough, though he knew him to be not in the least egotistic, was thinking that he *might* have had pity on Rosamund, and saved her from the fate before her, even at the risk of his jolly bachelor days and nights, rights and liberty, latch-keys and unlimited cigars. But how little could the two men, who were so freely canvassing the subject of her marriage, have known of the agony that was in the heart of Rosamund after Kyrle marched to embark, and the wild imploring letter she penned for him —a letter penned, but never posted!

'It is strange how the girl was brought to consent,' said Vere, who, oddly enough,

spoke more—if he did not think more—of the marriage of Rosamund than that of Gertrude.

'There is nothing strange in it,' replied Desborough, as he drained his iced grog; 'man alive! they are all alike, those folks of the upper ten. There were the mater's debts and troubles, the insolence of tradesmen, and those worse than tradesmen—attorneys, the family poverty and the struggle for great appearances; *per contra*, a house like a palace in the country, another in Portland Place—change all over the world, gold and jewels galore, the family diamonds after being reset, freedom from all annoyance, freedom as a matron to any amount of flirtation; carriages, horses, a box at the opera, and as many servants as she chose to hire and feed at home or abroad.'

A time came, however, when Kyrle Desborough, who could little foresee it, was to recall with real regret and compunction the sharp remarks and mocking speeches he had made on the marriage of Rosamund.

Vere had no bitter comments to make on that of Gertrude. It is not pleasant to find one's existence ignored, and oneself tho-

roughly supplanted; but as yet he felt only regret that such a girl as Gertrude should, under any influences, have married such a creature as Jocelyn Derinzy.

'Poor Gertrude!' he would mutter; 'but what does it matter to me now?'

Yet somehow the sun of the Antilles seemed less bright, and life there, such as it was, after the late calamities, less pleasant; but, thank Heaven, 'the Queen's morning drum' beat as usual for duty, and day after day went by.

It was brown autumn in England now; and in the hot breathless time of the Caribbean rainy season Vere could see in fancy the rich cornfields at home, heavy with wavy golden grain; the trees just touched with russet, or it might be red or yellow; the fragrant clover-fields, with the fly-bitten cattle standing therein, mid-leg deep, under the shady chestnuts; the crows wheeling in the blue welkin; the evening chimes coming sweetly from the old square village spire, all massed with ivy, their jingle telling of peaceful, beautiful, sylvan England—England in the mature glory of a cool autumn evening; and then indeed did the

soldier's heart go home—home over the far tropical seas—with a yearning that is unspeakable.

As for his late love affair, as Kyrle Desborough said, he would get over it in time; but all human life is made up of getting over things. Moreover, as a lady writer says with much truth, 'love in a man's life occupies about three lines in a volume; he does not take it through every page and allow it to head each new chapter; it crosses the stage of every human existence; but there are too many actors in the drama of a male career for love long to find standing-room before the scenes.'

CHAPTER XV.

THE MYSTERY AT PORTLAND PLACE.

MEANWHILE how was fortune using the girl of whose marriage at that time Kyrle Desborough was taking so harsh a view?

Everybody who was anybody was of course out of London—town was empty; but Sir Ayling Aldwinkle found, as he alleged, some necessity connected with county interests for living at his house in Portland Place. Gertrude had accompanied Rosamund, so whatever the old baronet's business might be, the sisters were with him.

Like every other place the parks were empty; there were no visitors, and the days passed in a somewhat dull manner in that long and stately street, where, in the season, peers and even princes reside, and where occasionally a heraldic hatchment powdered with tears shows that they have exchanged their palatial dwellings for the narrower and humbler home

that is allotted to all. Yet the street is quiet usually, even when the season is at its flush, strangely so when we consider that it is so near to Oxford and Regent Streets—two great arteries of busy crowded London, with their strings of vehicles of every kind and size, their brilliant shops, and uncounted thousands hurrying to and fro.

Having but little to attract her attention, it was thus that Rosamund began to observe that Sir Ayling, who daily went forth at a particular hour, instead of turning down the street towards his club, left his house on foot, and entered the gardens of Park Square, a place usually frequented by nurses and children only.

Surprised by the frequency of this occurrence, and by certain episodes at Winklestoke having become suspicious, while disdaining to mention them even to the sister she loved so much, and blushing for what she was about to do, she one day took her own key and also entered the gardens, but by another gate. Sir Ayling, who, with his little Dundreary skip assumed to hide the uncertainty of gait induced by age and gout, had preceded her,

was nowhere to be seen in the pathways or bowers. Whither could he have vanished?

Supposing that he must have gone into the northern portion of the gardens adjoining the Outer Circle, she descended into the little dark tunnel which leads thereto beneath the Marylebone Road, and there saw her venerable spouse in close, earnest, and to all appearance tender conversation with the very object of her suspicions—the woman she had seen on her marriage-day, and at Winklestoke.

'So—so,' thought Rosamund, 'it is here he attends to the interests of the county.'

To advance was to meet them; to retire might attract their attention; and, shrinking aside into a shadowy recess, she was compelled to overhear much of a conversation that sorely perplexed and insulted her, but which she failed to completely understand; yet she would have been more than human had she not listened.

'You are still harping on the old string,' said Sir Ayling, with a little testiness of manner.

'Pardon me,' said the unknown, who was ladylike, handsome, and apparently about

forty years of age, as we have stated; 'of course I cannot think, sir, that your motives in making this most absurd marriage—'

'Absurd!'

'Well, unwise—were mercenary.'

'I should think not, my dear. Lady Templeton took deuced good care of that, with her solicitors' assistance,' replied Sir Ayling, laughing till his Parisian teeth shone white in the twilight of the long archway. 'But you, even as a child, have ever been accustomed to gratify your own inclinations, in defiance of check and remonstrance, till I have been compelled to tie my purse-strings.'

'And what am *I* now?'

'Dear to me still, despite all your little follies and errors, despite your profuseness and improvidence.'

'Thanks for the admission,' she replied, kissing his long thin white hand; 'you know the tender claim I have upon you.'

'Have I ever ignored it in the most valuable sense?'

'So far as money goes, never.'

'You have still confidence in me, dearest ——?'

Rosamund failed to catch that name or word.

'Yes; but my position is a sad one. Why should I not be where *she* is?'

'She?'

'Well, Lady Aldwinkle, as I must call her.'

'My darling, you are absurd. Kiss me!'

('How intolerable is all this!' thought Rosamund, trembling she scarcely knew why.)

'Have I ever failed in my proper affection for you?' asked the unknown, in a very sweet and earnest tone of voice.

'Never, my dear one; nor have I failed you.'

'Save in keeping my existence unknown to all the world,' she said sadly and reproachfully, 'while flaunting before it that girl who seems so cold, so passive, and so lifeless.'

'Cold she certainly is to me; but as for being passive, she has a will of her own in trifles at times. She actually insisted on having my new carriage lined with blue, because it suited her complexion better than maroon.'

'Well, when a man at your years—'

'No, don't be rude, Birdie.'

'Takes to wife a young girl, and one so well born—'

'Stuff! And then she resented, with all her passiveness, what she was pleased to term my pulling all our bedroom at Winklestoke to pieces, that I might insure perfect polarisation, and, by lying due north and south, secure—with the polar current—the soundest of sleep. This she was pleased to stigmatise as "the faddiest of fads"—most undignified language, you must admit.'

The woman laughed, but not merrily.

'But now I must go,' said Sir Ayling suddenly. 'Here are the gold and enamelled jewels I promised you. They are not too grand for your present position, and will admirably become you. Your little charges in the garden must be impatient by this time; so ta-ta, darling.'

And presenting her with a morocco case, he tenderly kissed her on both cheeks, and hurried away with his funny little skip; while the recipient of his attentions also retired, but by the opposite end of the passage; and to Rosamund's mind there was something sig-

nificant even in that. It savoured of secrecy, of preconcertion and prearrangement.

The girl smiled scornfully and proudly as she issued into the sunshine; and, resolving never more to enter these gardens, sat down in a bower for a few moments to reflect on all she had heard and seen. But all she had listened to gave her no actual clue to the relations between these two, who conversed so freely of *herself*.

She had not an iota of jealousy on the subject; for she felt neither love nor respect—not even gratitude—for what had been done by Sir Ayling Aldwinkle to her family, as all that she deemed but as a part of the price he paid for herself. She felt only indignation that he should dare to canvass some of her petty actions with another; and with it contempt and much of anger, with wounded pride and alarm in the dread of some horrible public scandal.

Who could this dreadful and mysterious woman be? Rosamund remembered her keen and haunting gaze upon her fatal marriage-day, and conceived she could only be some one with whom Sir Ayling had been entangled

in past time, and who exercised over him some fascination still. He was old enough and had been gay enough, the good-natured world said, to have been entangled a thousand times.

She dared not speak on the subject to Lady Templeton; for though she knew that lax views of men were taken and unreprehended by that noble matron, in her first burst of indignation she was quite capable of rushing to those horrors, her solicitors, at Gray's or some other Inn; and once in their mischief-making and money-grasping hands, there was no saying how, when, or where the matter might end.

These meetings seemed to savour of an obscure intrigue—an intrigue of which she could scarcely believe Sir Ayling to have been guilty even in the heyday of his youth; for he was eminently and undoubtedly a proud and aristocratic man in all his ways and ideas, and all his bearing and turn of thought.

But none can fathom the treachery of which the human heart can be guilty, or the follies into which an old fool, if judiciously flattered, may fall, thought Rosamund; and

her pretty nostrils and sweet lips curled and quivered with angry scorn as she thought of the whole affair, but determined somehow to get at the bottom of it. Yet, with all her determination, long, long was she baffled, till one day—an eventful day she was never likely to forget.

That Sir Ayling should express affection for this woman, whom he called 'Birdie,' gravely puzzled Rosamund.

He seemed, with all his querulous senility, so thoroughly devoted to herself, so proud of her fair dazzling beauty, of her extreme youth and acknowledged attractiveness and many accomplishments, and ever so ready to lay at her pretty feet all that taste and wealth could furnish, as prodigally as if he were the Genius of the Lamp; and yet, under the influence of this woman, this mysterious 'Birdie,' he was rude enough to revert to such a trifle as the re-lining of the carriage!

'But as we live we learn,' thought the girl; and as her heart went forth to one who was far away, the hot tears blinded her tender eyes, and, like a child, she bowed her head on her pretty hands and wept—wept bitterly;

oh, how bitterly!—over the inexorable present and the past—the irrecoverable past; while the false vows she had feebly called on Heaven to hear, before the gloomy altar of St. George's, seemed to rise up before her in letters of fire.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SISTERS.

'I WENT to the house of God, Gertrude, and I made faithless promises. The "I will" I uttered there was the most perilous one a woman can make; and how have I kept it?—in spirit at least. But *now*—'

There was some unuttered threat on the lips of Rosamund as she rushed into the dining-room where Gertrude was reading, as in the drawing-rooms and every other part of the house the carpets were rolled up, the gaseliers and furniture all encased in holland stuff, imparting the usual ghostly aspect to everything the mirrors reflected.

'My darling, what on earth is the matter?' exclaimed Gertrude, as the book fell from her hand. 'How pale you look!'

Then somehow, when Rosamund felt the soft arms of her gentle sister go lovingly round her, half her troubles seemed to slip

away; but the other half remained; and Gertrude gazed with tender sorrow on the beauty of the sweet little face, wherein patience and pathos mingled with a great brilliance of expression.

If Rosamund had a sore, or rather a weak, point in her character, it was pride.

With such a mother, she could scarcely have been without it; and now, despite her habitual patience, her mouth, with all its cherub-like prettiness, was supercilious, and her little aristocratic head, with all its wealth of bright golden hair, was crested proudly up as she told her story to Gertrude, who, in alarm and bewilderment, heard for the first time of this mysterious woman.

'Who is this woman that he meets in secret, and to whom he gives presents? Who is she? Where does she come from? What influence has she over him?' said Rosamund.

'How can we tell?' replied Gertrude sadly. 'She is some pensioner perhaps.'

'People don't give cases of jewels to pensioners, and meet them in tunnels and archways. I don't believe she is anything of the kind,' continued the girl passionately.

'What do you think, then, Rosamund?'

'Think! I scarcely know what to think. But I know what I fear.'

'And what do you fear, darling?'

'That she is his—wife.'

'Wife! wife, Rosamund!'

'Yes.'

'Then what are you?'

'Yes, what, in that case?'

'Rosamund, you are too absurd.'

'How can we know but that he might have married beneath him—married some one of whom he is ashamed—pays for silence and all that? Don't we read of such things every day in Mrs. What's-her-name's novels?'

'But not in *Debrett*, as mamma would say. You are foolish, child.'

'Men will be men and must sow their wild oats,' Lady Templeton had told Gertrude, with reference to the Derinzy affair and the keeper's daughter at Ringwood Hall—that episode which had inspired her then with such disgust of the tall staff-colonel, and had so disastrous an effect upon her relations with Herbert Vere; but could she, or would she—Lady Templeton—take so lenient a view of the 'wild

oats' of the venerable baronet of Winklestoke, now that all her debts were paid, and her daughter so nobly dowered?

It was difficult to say. As a woman of the world, Lady Templeton's views were somewhat flexible, though she had a horror of scenes and scandals that bordered on quarrelling, and was fond of quoting a writer who says that 'certainly there is one merit in people of station, that they are not nearly so quarrelsome among each other as people of *no* station at all.'

'Remember, Rosamund darling,' said Gertrude, after a pause, 'you brought, as mamma often says, your husband nothing.'

'Nothing!' repeated Rosamund, her eyes flashing through their tears as she glanced at her face in an opposite mirror, and, with quick tremulous hands, threw back the masses of her brilliant hair, which had—as they had a way of doing—fallen loose.

She was now beginning to value her beauty and know the power of it, a perilous thing for the child-wife (for she was but little more) of an old man like Sir Ayling Aldwinkle.

'Mistaken marriages happen every day in

the week—even in London alone,' said Gertrude gently.

'But mine was no mistake,' exclaimed Rosamund passionately; 'it was a crime—a crime—a crime, the effects of which may recoil on those who brought it about!'

Never had Gertrude seen her so excited, and she was cut to the heart.

'Who could the "little charges" be of whom Sir Ayling spoke to this woman?'

'Yes, who?' repeated Rosamund, with quivering lips.

'Did she look like a nurse?'

'No; she is perfectly lady-like, even good style.'

'And pretty?'

'More handsome, I should say, than pretty.'

'And young?'

'No, about forty, apparently; but even she is too young for Sir Ayling's years.'

Poor Rosamund half forgot herself.

'It is altogether incomprehensible,' said Gertrude; 'but as it may be quite explainable, we must not speak of it to mamma, but wait and watch. We are surrounded by

secrets of which we know nothing. Remember what Metastasio says:

"If every one's internal care
Were written on his brow,
How many would our pity share
Who raise our envy now!
The fatal secret when revealed
Of every aching breast
Would show that only when *concealed*
Their lot appears the best."'

'It may be so, but it is hard to console oneself with an old rhyme,' said Rosamund petulantly; and to Gertrude it seemed that the blight which Fate had cast upon her own love affair was a small calamity as contrasted with the hopeless position of Rosamund. Though she never spoke of Vere now she had not ceased to think of him.

His eye would never turn to hers again, or his voice fall on her ear as it had done, and doubtless had been falling on the ear of that luckless West Indian girl; but tantalising memory told her that it was all a man's voice ought to be—clear and pleasantly intoned, strong and sweet and caressing; at least it had ever been caressing to her.

Among the many exciting details of the

Jamaica revolt the tragedy at Mango Garden had found its way into the English papers, nor were exciting cartoons thereof omitted by the illustrated journals; so Gertrude was quite *au fait* with the whole conduct of Vere at the sack and destruction of the Court-house at Morant Bay, the assassination of old Mr. Bellingham, and the abduction of his daughter, together with the ardour and precipitation with which Vere had attempted her rescue, but had been baffled by the cunning of a savage negro; and Gertrude saw in fancy the chase—the fatal chase up-hill—the catastrophe, and much more that never happened.

'Well, well,' she thought, 'if he loved her—as even these odious papers assert—he must have ceased to love me; and the assurance of this will surely make it easier to forget the old love and the old regret, and the wrestle with life would then be over.'

In one sense they were all over and done with; yet in her heart the girl shrank from Jocelyn Derinzy, and all the more so when she considered that strangely-mated and unequally-matched pair, little Rosamund and Sir Ayling Aldwinkle, bound together for life

—a short period now for the latter, certainly; but perhaps too long a period for the other to drag her matrimonial chain, well gilded though it was.

That it was a chain Rosamund had not to learn. She had felt the yoke even instinctively before it was put upon her; and the day was coming—or had come—when, with all his assured vanity and old foppishness, Sir Ayling would make the discovery for himself.

Unlike the marriages of those who wed and find they have made a grand mistake in each other, the strange sense of aversion, dissatisfaction, and disappointment had all been a prevision with Rosamund.

Amid the splendour in which he had enshrined her, and the luxuries with which he surrounded her, Sir Ayling, on more than one occasion, found her shedding tears. Tears! For whom did they flow? For no one in reality, but simply because the girl was fighting with a tie she loathed—affecting, but scarcely even that, an attachment or gratitude she did not feel.

But poor Rosamund, as yet, had failed in no point of wifely duty; in no neglect of her

position as a *grande dame*, as mistress of a large household, and the custodian of her husband's honour; though she strove to forget herself—to kiss her pretty little childlike hand when Sir Ayling Aldwinkle went simpering forth, twiddling his eyeglass, to mount his quiet old nag, and to smile when he came back from his club, the Row, or the House; and she did by him all her 'duty,' till, in thought, she loathed and detested the word, and prayed that Heaven in its goodness might accord her something else.

In her marriage *she* had made no mistake, as she never doubted what it would prove. Sir Ayling Aldwinkle's heart was old and worn; and hers, though in the flush of youth, was—so far as he was concerned—a heart of ice; and he now took all its iciness with an amount of jauntiness that was provoking even to her indifference, especially when she looked back to the love she had borne Kyrle Desborough — the love that had neither been asked of nor offered to her; and to that episode in the conservatory, the recollection of which always gave her an emotion of the deepest annoyance.

CHAPTER XVII.

'BIRDIE.'

YOUNG though she was—barely nineteen—Rosamund had already reached 'that point in life when,' according to Miss Mulock, 'we cease to be afraid of evil tidings, since nothing is likely to happen to us beyond what *has* happened.'

She thought she had become utterly indifferent to everything, yet the sudden advent of 'Birdie' was a shock to her, nor was the affair likely to pass soon away.

Returning one day from a four-o'clock drive in the then empty Row, she asked if Sir Ayling had returned from Westminster, whither he had gone 'on county matters.'

'No,' replied the servant; 'but a lady is waiting for him in the library.'

'A lady—who?'

'She would give neither name nor card, my lady.'

'Strange!' said Rosamund; and as some vague suspicion flashed upon her she went straight to the library, and found herself face to face with 'Birdie.'

The quick eye of Rosamund saw the unknown had on a necklet, with pendant locket and bracelets of gold and blue enamel—*the* identical suite, no doubt, so recently given in the adjacent gardens; and, to make matters more startling, on the locket were the letters 'A. A.' in a bold monogram.

There was something in the wearer's face that forbade scrutiny; it was not as yet defiant, but rather calm and sad in expression.

'Woman, who are you, pray?' asked Rosamund, without responding to the bow with which the visitor arose and greeted her.

'I am not wont to answer questions asked in such a tone,' was the gentle yet haughty reply.

'Pardon me if I spoke harshly; but what are you?'

'What Fate has made me.'

'And what may that be?'

'Nearer to Sir Ayling Aldwinkle than you, who treat me thus haughtily.'

'Nearer than I?'

'Yes,' replied the other, controlling by her teeth the quivering of her nether lip.

'Nearer than I—his wife?' queried Rosamund.

'Yes.'

'You are mad!'

'I am *not* mad, Lady Aldwinkle,' replied the other calmly.

'Oh, you call me that, at all events; but may I ask what is your secret business here?'

'That is my affair.'

'But with my husband?'

'Yes.'

'This is gross insolence; the servants shall expel you—the police look after you.'

At these threats the woman's eyes sparkled, her nostrils quivered, and her pale cheek flushed, making her look really bright and handsome in her defiant spirit.

'You dare not!' she exclaimed.

'Dare not!'

'No, even you, girl, dare not.'

'This is too much. You shall leave this house instantly, and beware how you ever

enter it again. Secret meetings in parks and gardens are one style of impropriety, but for creatures of your class to come here is insolence intolerable. Begone instantly, lest worse come of it!'

The woman's fine eyes flashed through the sudden tears that started into them.

'I will spare myself more humiliation and you further annoyance or the chance of a scene for the *present*, young lady,' said she, moving towards the door; 'but my time may come yet.'

Rosamund rang the bell, and the hall-porter ushered the stranger out, receiving at the same time orders that he was 'never to admit that person again.'

The whole situation was new to Rosamund; it seemed bad form, low, intriguing—she knew not what; while she had a keen sense of being mortified and insulted, with a great longing to have 'a good cry' over it, but not a tear would come.

Was this unexpected cross put upon her as a punishment for permitting her thoughts to stray after Kyrle Desborough? and was this but the beginning of some dark ending?

For people heard of such strange events in all classes of society now.

A vague wish that her brother, the young lord who was then in the playing fields at Eton, were twice his present age, that he might probe this secret and protect her, occurred to Rosamund; but, save Gertrude, she had no refuge, and shrank from communion with her mother.

For her religion was no refuge; brought up as she had been, she was almost callously indifferent to all connected with it. She said her prayers certainly, and read her Bible, as her governess had taught her that it was necessary to do these things; but she did so by rote and rule in the most formal and unreflecting manner.

The tall footmen (carefully matched), with their plush breeches, canes, and bouquets, were, like the velvet hassocks she knelt on, quite as much a part and parcel of the whole thing as the said prayers and Bible reading. She 'went in' for matins and evensong, ritual and intoned services; but beyond all these poor Rosamund's ideas on religious subjects were rather hazy; but that they were so was

not her fault, but the fault of her family and the circle in which she moved.

Yet times there were when a wild vague yearning of a sense and wish for something better and purer and more satisfying to her spirit came into the heart of the girl.

The hour was late, and it was not until after she had returned from an evening musical party that she had an opportunity of questioning Sir Ayling on the subject of his visitor.

Her rich dress had been thrown aside, her diamonds all deposited in their velvet cases by Parker her maid, and charming, indeed, the girl looked in a dressing-robe of light-blue silk, with delicate lace trimmings, and her golden hair drawn into a thick coil.

'Shall I brush out your hair, my lady?' asked the maid, pausing with a large ivory brush in her hand.

'No, thanks, Parker; I want nothing more,' said the girl wearily. 'Here comes Sir Ayling. Good-night.'

The baronet, in a rich dressing-gown girt with a silk tasselled cord, came in with his little skip, and, apologising for his protracted absence, was about to kiss her cheek, when

Rosamund interposed her quick little hand, and said quietly,

'Stop, Sir Ayling, till you answer a question I have to ask.'

'And this question, my darling, is—'

'Who *is* Birdie?'

Sir Ayling started and changed colour, or rather grew paler than was his wont, for his complexion was of that colourless gray peculiar to his years. Surprise, indignation, and alarm were all visible by turns in the thin wrinkled face, together with a comical kind of twinkle —but for a moment only, as the situation seemed a grave one—a twinkle, as if he rather relished, or did not dislike, the idea of being suspected of gallantry, of being deemed 'a gay dog' at his years; but that was a fleeting emotion, as Rosamund steadily repeated her question.

'I do not know any such person,' he replied doggedly.

'Your face confesses that you do, Sir Ayling; and I beg that you will not condescend to the meanness of denial.'

'Well, who informed you of the existence of such a person?' he asked haughtily.

'Your own lips in the first place, herself in the second.'

'My own lips!' said Sir Ayling, with some alarm; 'do I mutter in my sleep? And herself, you say?'

'Herself; she to whom you gave the suite of jewels in the garden.'

'I have then been spied upon!' exclaimed Sir Ayling, with indignation, as the intolerable and degrading idea of having been watched, by a detective, perhaps, flashed upon his mind.

'Who is this strange woman who meets and visits you openly or secretly, as suits herself apparently?'

'If she visits me openly it is evident, then, that she has nothing to conceal.'

'But you, less brazen than her, have, I presume?'

'Allow me to suggest, Lady Aldwinkle—'

'I will have no suggestions!' cried Rosamund impetuously, as she stamped her little foot.

'As you will; then—'

'What then?'

'I shall be silent.'

'What if I make it a public scandal?'

'Better not,' said he, with an air of menace she had never before seen him assume, while his eyes sparkled, and his long, thin, aristocratic nose seemed to become longer and thinner than ever.

'By what right,' he said, after a pause, 'do you pry into my affairs, Lady Aldwinkle?'

'By what right, Sir Ayling, have you secrets and secret meetings with women unknown to me?'

'Upon my honour, Lady Aldwinkle—'

'Your honour!' was the contemptuous interruption of the indignant girl. And so they separated, she with her teeth clenched beneath her firm and closed lips.

Though she had ever been cold, passive, and too plainly indifferent to all his kindness and attention, never before had there been aught approaching to anything so unseemly as the scene of that night.

Poor old Sir Ayling! whatever his relations with Birdie might be or might have been, or whatever her undue influence over him, he was exceedingly loth to think that there was quite a breach between himself and

Rosamund; and thus next morning he laid his thin hand caressingly upon her rich golden hair. Ere he could speak she shrugged her shoulders, and said peevishly,

'I do wish you wouldn't bother.'

It was the first time she had ever spoken thus; and he *did* feel put out.

'Rosamund,' said he.

'Why do you fidget me?' she added apologetically, in a lady-like if not a wife-like spirit, for most worrying to the girl were those attentions she had no wish for.

It would be better, she thought, to lament the dead, the vanished touch, and the stilled voice the poet sings of, than be compelled to endure the caresses of one who was more than ever repugnant to her now.

From this time forward, either at Portland Place, at Winklestoke, or elsewhere, the current of matrimonial life did not flow so smoothly with this ill-matched pair as it had done before the advent of 'Birdie.'

There were grave doubts in the mind of Rosamund concerning her husband and this unknown, who had been daring enough to threaten her in her own house, that though

silent for the present, a time to be otherwise would come anon; and these doubts, for reasons of his own, Sir Ayling Aldwinkle was too proud apparently or too defiant to dispel by any explanation; so in greater coldness of bearing and caprice of manner they passed the time, their intercourse in society to all appearance unchanged, though they had their own secret thoughts and bitternesses.

With those of Rosamund were mingled sometimes angry visions of revenging herself in some way, she scarcely knew how, for the heart of the girl was so pure and innocent.

The winter passed away at Winklestoke and Ringwood Hall, the London season of another year drew nigh, and once more the West End became 'a hotbed of folly and fashion.'

CHAPTER XVIII.

MORE CAUSE FOR THOUGHT.

DESPITE the splendours of Winklestoke and of Portland Place, with gay company, servants, equipages, dress, and all that wealth could surround her with, Rosamund was a lonely girl—she was not a woman yet.

'All things come alike to all,' she had heard a popular preacher urge one day again and again on his hearers; and Rosamund marvelled what the words meant. Were all lives like hers?

To the old bachelor baronet she was a wife altogether beyond his ken or calculation. Aware of the vast disparity in their years, he had feared—notwithstanding all that he had done in a monetary way for Lady Templeton—that Rosamund might have proved capricious, might have nagged and sulked at him; but he failed to understand how or why a creature who was once so light and joyous

had become passive, listless, lifeless, and heedless of him and all the world now — only showing fire and animation once, on the occasion just referred to.

Sir Ayling had an angry consciousness that he seldom appeared to the best advantage when by the side of her he wished most to please. When he rode or drove with her he was often cross—very cross—she proved so attractive in the eyes of men, and then he felt himself somewhat of an old fool.

Yet for her, more than all the world, was it that he came forth, curled, padded, and stayed by the hands of his model valet, with faultless gloves and glazed boots. With all these accessories, nevertheless, Time went rigorously on. Wrinkles had replaced dimples, as they always do, and the bald circle on the crown of his head was long since past concealment or 'dodging' now, and he reviled in his heart jolly Admiral Weatherly when, in Rosamund's hearing, that ill-bred seaman spoke of 'we old fellows, who can remember so and so,' referring to some event of thirty years before she was even in her berceaunette.

She, on her part, was now realising to the

full all the dire convictions that had come on her when the alliance was first proposed to her by Lady Templeton; and more than these; for, from the moment that she had suspicions of Sir Ayling and his mysterious friend, she deemed but too readily that she had a right to dislike the husband whom she had never loved and never respected, notwithstanding all that he lavished upon her; and there was between them a distinct apple of discord now that did not exist before, and unpleasant remarks sometimes passed between them.

Thus one day, when idling dreamily at the piano, playing the accompaniment of a song in which Desborough was wont to accompany her, and in which now memory and fancy brought distinctly back the notes of his voice, she started up in haste on seeing her husband's face in the opposite mirror, wearing somewhat of a sardonic expression.

'As usual,' said he, 'sad—*triste.* Can I do anything to rouse you?'

'Nothing,' said she pettishly; 'I want nothing.'

'But to be let alone—alone to mope.'

'If you please, Sir Ayling.'

'How studiously you call me *Sir* Ayling!

'Well, it is your name, is it not?'

'Its formality sounds unkind between us, Rosamund. I fear we shall never win the Dunmow flitch of bacon.'

'Few married couples do,' replied the girl, with her proud lip curling; 'there are so many fools in this world.'

'I don't quite see the drift of your remark; but I hope you think every one should marry.'

'So they should, if possible; and,' she added, with face half averted, 'more than ever, if possible, marry the right person.'

'Have *you* not got the right person?' asked Sir Ayling quietly, but with a gloom in his eye.

'I have not said so,' replied the girl wearily.

'Surely you don't think so,' he urged.

'My thoughts are my own,' replied Rosamund, almost angrily, as she turned once more to the piano.

By the mere force of circumstances and her surroundings the luckless girl was induced to brood morbidly over the idea of Kyrle Desbo-

rough as the man who, under more propitious auspices, might and should have been her husband; and at times there was something of fanaticism in the tenacity with which she clung to it, thus fencing herself against temptations close at hand.

Had she partially loved, or even respected, the husband to whom her mother had tied her, she might—especially had she been a religious girl—have prayed for strength to regard Desborough as something now far beyond her reach; but she never did, and under the present circumstances was less likely to do so.

Yet times there were that Rosamund, when alone and full of thought, would colour with anger—anger at herself, at her own weakness and infirmity of purpose in nursing, amid her splendid surroundings, a secret fancy for this handsome and heedless officer, who was now so far away, and whom neither her acknowledged beauty, nor her rank as the daughter of a peer, could lure to her feet.

A little gleam of sunshine came into the fancied gloom which surrounded her, and her listlessness received a fillip from a very simple

circumstance. Riding in the Row one day, attended by her groom only, she came suddenly upon a soldier of the Eighth, 'the Eighth or King's.'

The man was leaning against the iron railing, evidently surveying the novel scene with interest; but he looked wan and thin, though evidently tanned and bronzed by a tropical sun. She checked her horse, drew a little way out of the careering throng, and desired the groom to bring the soldier to her.

Tom Kenny—for he was no other than our friend the marksman—came forward with much surprise expressed in his somewhat wasted face, saluted and came to attention, curious to know what so beautiful a lady had to say to him.

'I see that you belong to the Eighth or King's,' said Rosamund.

'Yes, ma'am.'

'And have been abroad?'

'Yes; I have just come home from the West Indies. I was sent home invalided in poor health.'

'Ah, it is a bad climate, then, Jamaica?'

'Not at all, my lady; but the rum—at

least as we got it — *is* precious bad, and I never could abide sangaree. Moreover, I was wounded in the leg, and the scar gangreened after on the march.'

'When — wounded — where?' she asked anxiously.

'When Mr. Vere—Captain Vere as he is now, my lady — opened so skilfully an enfilading fire on those murdering niggers at Morant Bay.'

'Was Captain Desborough there?'

'No, ma'am; he was at Up Park Camp, miles away, that night. He is the captain of my company, and there ain't a better officer in the Queen's service.'

'And you left the West Indies—'

'Only six weeks ago, ma'am, for Fort Pitt; but they might as well have let me come home with my comrades, who are all sailing on the sea by this time, as Captain Desborough's command is ordered back to join the battalion.'

'And when are they expected to land?'

'That I can scarcely tell you, ma'am, but they will all be soon in old England again.'

Greatly to poor Tom's surprise, she slipped a sovereign into his hand, and bowing her handsome head in reply to his profound salute, rode off. This soldier had seen, and doubtless spoken with, Kyrle Desborough since *she* had; hence the meeting was full of interest to her.

Coming home. Kyrle Desborough was coming home, and she thought with mingled fear and joy that she would be sure to meet him in the same houses and places where she met him before.

'Oh, I must not—must not see him. The wife of Sir Ayling, I have striven to do my duty as such,' she whispered to herself; 'and know that to love another—even when him I cannot love—is a sin of the heart; so Kyrle I must avoid; and, thank Heaven, the season is over, and ere he returns we shall have left London.'

But these half-uttered resolutions and intentions were all mere sophistry and apologies to propriety, for even while forming them in words she was brooding with tremulous joy over the news she had so suddenly received.

She galloped home, hurried away to her own room, and declining the assistance of Parker, threw off her riding-habit, and gave way to the tumult of her thoughts.

'Oh, I am married, I am married now! I cannot, I ought not to, go on thinking of him as no righteous married woman can ever think of another not her husband. O God, help me!' she cried, and yet half feared her poor timid cry might be heard.

So, by duty or by chance, Kyrle Desborough was coming back. 'Is anything chance? Does our own *will* sooner or later accomplish for us what we desire?'

Great as the world is, it is a small place in some respects, and people turn up and meet each other unexpectedly by the most singular coincidences and freaks of chance. Thus Rosamund had never been without a wild hope, desire, certainty, what you will, that again she should meet Kyrle Desborough—whether married or single, she knew not; only that there was in her heart the blind desperate certainty that they must somehow or somewhere meet again, and now the time was coming.

Then her former thoughts of duty, doubt, propriety, and fear occurred to her, and she asked of herself to what end was all this tumult in her breast. Sir Ayling was quite at a loss to account for the capricious state of the girl's spirits that evening, and his surprise took the form of irritation; and when she was running her fingers over the keys of the piano, and singing softly the words of 'Auld Robin Gray,' he asked sharply why the deuce she always played *that* vulgar Scotch song, and who the devil was the Jemmie it was such a sin to think about? It should be borne in mind that Rosamund had not accorded to her a *chance* of obliterating, or even of weakening, the strong fancy she had conceived for Kyrle Desborough.

Had a lover nearer her own years been permitted to address her, had her husband been more in accordance with her age and ideas, even though chosen by match-making Lady Templeton, the fancy might, nay, most probably would, have died out; but thrust back upon herself as the girl's heart was, with all its joyous and youthful impulses, there the fancy was, and there it remained.

But eccentric though some may deem it, it was, as yet, her safeguard; for the circle in which she moved, the girl-wife of an old man like Sir Ayling Aldwinkle, was deemed fair game for every *roué* in the Household Brigades or out of them.

Yet to do Rosamund justice, we must admit that she was honestly glad when they took their departure for Winklestoke, where she felt she would be safe from temptation and that turbulence of spirit which meeting Desborough in society would be sure to occasion her, as the return of Vere was certain to do in the heart of Gertrude.

In the vanity of Sir Ayling's mind it never occurred to him to think, 'I have been selfish, unjust, and have done this young girl a great wrong in marrying her, and blighting her future life.'

And, as yet, he had never had occasion to find fault with her, save for her listless indifference whenever they were alone. Amid all this he was very proud of her. Rosamund might have squandered thousands had she chosen to do so; but this she did not, though her *forte* was the graceful reception of com-

pany. She was still in her girlhood, yet she —through indifference, and really a half-dislike of society—had attained, as Lady Aldwinkle, an amount of self-possession that matrons of maturer years seldom possess, and had the happy power of putting all at ease to perfection.

CHAPTER XIX.

'FOR HE'S A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW.'

THE brief but fierce excitement of the negro insurrection over, time seemed to pass slowly in Jamaica; but passed nevertheless inexorably there, as elsewhere, and much patrol duty succeeded the more active operations, the courts-martial, and the executions which excited such a *furore* among certain classes in England.

Autumn, winter, spring, and summer, as we term them in Europe, had come and gone unmarked in that region of eternal summer, save as the dry and the rainy seasons, or the months of hurricane; but to Vere—a captain now—the months had seemed as years, in his longing to leave the Antilles; and the time came at last, and in the summer of old England, when he knew the chestnuts would be in flower and the roses putting forth their sweetest buds. But prior to that event others

occurred that were of considerable interest to him.

On a night in the end of November, during the rainy season, a night Vere never forgot—when the streets of Kingston were flooded by streams rushing down from the mountains, and around the barracks at Up Park Camp the floods were foaming and frothing in the highways and byways, eddying deep in hollows, and sweeping away stones, palings, and even trees, inducing people, as Desborough said, to put their faith in St. Swithin, the patron of golosh and umbrella makers—the mail from England was delivered at head-quarters, and therewith came a letter of importance to Herbert Vere, who, in his haste—news from home is ever dear to those so far away—tore it open without looking at the address.

'From Messrs. Wolfe, Fox, & Graball, of Gray's Inn!' he exclaimed; 'now what on earth do these reptiles write to me about?'

'Something nasty, you may be sure,' replied Kyrle Desborough; 'the sight of a lawyer's letter always gives me a turn. But renew your priming before you look at it,'

added Kyrle, pushing the decanter towards his friend, whose startled expression of face, as his eyes ran over the epistle, speedily attracted his attention and roused his curiosity, for he could remember the disappointment and disgust the last communication from these legal gentlemen occasioned to Vere.

'We have the honour and the pleasure of acquainting you of your sudden accession to the baronetcy of your late cousin, Sir John—successor of Sir Joseph de Quincey Vere, of whose lamented decease at Mentone we had to inform you when quartered at Aldershot. We have now to congratulate you most warmly on your succession to the family title. Your cousin, who, you are aware, was unmarried, perished suddenly in the manner described in the accompanying newspaper cutting, which we beg to enclose.

'We have the additional pleasure of informing you that we have discovered there is another will of the late Sir Joseph de Quincey Vere, dated at Mentone, and subsequent to that which had the unfortunate codicil in favour of the old housekeeper, by which the entire estates are devised to you.

We always thought something of this kind would come to pass; and with the hope of being still continued as agents of the family, we have the honour to be, dear Sir Herbert,' &c.

'I congratulate you, my boy, from the bottom of my heart I do!' exclaimed the hearty voice of Kyrle, as his strong hand grasped that of his friend.

Quincey Hall, a baronetcy, and a magnificent fortune! It was a sudden change to find oneself possessed of all these and all that was comprehended therein, and within the space of a few minutes; but Vere took the matter quietly.

He remembered how his hopes with Gertrude Templeton had been so sorely crushed on the last occasion he saw the legal caligraphy of Messrs. Wolfe, Fox, & Graball, and the thought of that tempered even his satisfaction now. The baronetcy would no doubt appear but small promotion to the Viscountess Derinzy, but on that subject he never reflected. He had but one idea—the joy it would have given to the generous and impulsive girl who had loved him with all her heart when he was

but a mere regimental officer, with only a few hundreds per annum in addition to his pay.

'A title—a baronetcy—it is a pleasant thing, by Jove!'

'So certain was I that John Vere would marry and have a brood of little ones, that I never gave it a thought.'

'And the dirty acres?'

'Worth some twelve thousand per annum.'

'I congratulate you on both!'

'Both what, Kyrle?' asked Vere absently.

'Title and money.'

'Too late, in one way,' said Vere, with a bitter laugh.

'Don't say so, if it is Lady Derinzy you are thinking of.'

'I was not thinking of her, far from it; but speaking of her reminds me that I once heard her mother remark contemptuously, "that there were no such sticklers for precedence and place as your little knights and baronets."'

'You will be sending in your papers, quitting the old corps now, I suppose?'

'Far from it; I have the greater incentive to remain. Quit the Eighth or King's! The

last act in the world I should think of doing, yet awhile at least; and only think of the thousand things this money will enable me to do for the men, their wives and children. Egad, they shall have a feast on Christmas-day that will form part of the regimental history.'

'Well, we will begin the festivities by having a deep drink of the sparkling at mess to-night.'

'That we will; but I am forgetting poor John Vere's accident; by Jove, drowned in the hunting-field!'

It would seem that after a few hours' run with the county pack, during which the stag had twice crossed a swollen stream, causing the entire field to scatter on the wrong side of it, he made for a deep pool, into which he was pursued by some of the dogs, while others loudly gave tongue by the margin of it.

When Sir John Vere came up at a rasping pace he saw that two of the best hounds in the pack—animals that were unequalled for their union of fine scent, speed, and perseverance—were hanging on to the beast, one by an ear, the other by the flank, surrounded by

blood and foam, in the deepest part of the pool—an old quarry—when it was certain that all three would drown, as the hounds would never relax their grip.

Throwing off his hunting-coat, amid the cheers of the field, he plunged boldly into the flood, though it was icy cold, and strove to disengage the dogs by striking at them with the shank of his whip; but it is well known that a stag is most dangerous when in the water, and the one in question—a full-grown animal, four feet in height, the strongest and captain of a herd—gave Sir John a butt so furious with his horns that the young baronet sank, stunned, and never came to the surface again alive; the body had to be dragged for; and in this singular manner the owner of Quincey Hall perished.

A rash wild fellow at all times, he had been expelled from one of the upper forms at Eton for some mad prank, of which the head-master failed to see the fun or propriety.

Interested, like all young Britons, in field sports (after Vere's round of congratulations), the mess found a staple subject for conversation in this singular and tragic anecdote of

the hunting-field; but as the night wore on and the wine circulated, on the suggestion of Toby Finch, the youngsters proposed to give Vere, who was their prime favourite, a marked ovation after the colonel and some of the 'oldsters' had retired; so true it is that it is often 'the dashing young captain rather than the middle-aged colonel who gives the tone to the youngsters of a mess.'

Reviving for the time a good though old-fashioned custom, each who was present pledged Vere in a bumper of champagne, which he drained to show the satisfaction felt at his good fortune; and all about the poor fellow drowned in the pool was no more remembered than the last year's snow, unless by Vere himself; and the chief event of the evening was of course when Kyrle, with a heart as full as his glass, rose to propose his health, and every voice was hushed as he did so.

Kyrle Desborough spoke of twelve years he had spent in the regiment himself—twelve years, during which it had been to him a happy, if peripatetic, home; he spoke of the many good fellows he had seen come into it and leave it—some for homes that were nar-

row and bloody ones in Central India, some expiring on the bed of sickness, and buried in the jungles by the Jumna and the Indus or elsewhere; but *never* had he met with one who was more beloved for all gentleness and so many good qualities as Herbert Vere, whom he deemed the soul of the corps, a tiptop fellow, who had led the van in every regimental undertaking, from the cricket-field to the battle-field, from riding across country to pulling an oar; for there was devilish little he hadn't done and hadn't done well, from keeping his wicket at Rugby to planting a scaling-ladder against the walls of Delhi, and from tooling a drag round the Serpentine to climbing the Matterhorn; so, in the name of the Eighth or King's, he begged to propose his health, with long life and prosperity, &c.

It was just the kind of speech suited to the hour, his hearers, and their present mood; they applauded it to the echo, got on the table, to the serious damage of much crystal, to drink the toast, with 'Highland honours,' at the suggestion of the Scotch doctor, little Capsicum; and, not content with singing the inevitable

'For he's a jolly good fellow,
And so say all of us,'

some were for having the band hooked out of their beds, to the end that they might carry him round the barrack square (though the last bugle had pealed its farewell blast four hours before) to the notes of the regimental quick-step, though the rain was yet pouring as it only pours in the Antilles.

After Vere had replied in a few well-chosen sentences the youngsters began the clamour again, with 'One cheer more,' and another, till the noise was heard over all Up Park barracks, and the soldiers lay muttering in their beds, wondering 'what the deuce it was all about;' but the mess were in a cheering mania, and after one 'cheeky' sub had — 'happy thought!' — proposed and obtained 'Three cheers for the future Lady Vere!' the noise only subsided when the subject thereof withdrew to his solitary quarters, and to think and ponder alone over all that was now and all that might have been; for it was evident that so long as he was in Jamaica, and under local influences, Vere would be a man of one thought, and that a sad one.

CHAPTER XX.

'ALL IS NOT FALSE THAT SEEMS AT FIRST A LIE.'

At the mess-table Vere had smiled sardonically at the lusty cheer young 'cheeky' had evoked for Lady Vere.

Lady Vere!

There should be none, he thought. If he left the Eighth—and he did not see his way to that step as yet—he would settle down into a quiet covert-shooting, fox-hunting, cow-breeding, old country squire—a delightful contrast to the present lotus-eating life in the Antilles—a thorough old bachelor.

But then he remembered his uncle, Sir Joseph, was a thorough one, whose life was a burden to himself and every one else he came in contact with—a man with whom petty household annoyances became events of vast importance; who was always suspicious that his flannels were not properly aired; that his

port, however fine the vintage, was cloudy, or that he only got liquors to drink that were too bad for the servants' hall; that when the time came for clean sheets he was ever in terror of damp and ague, rheumatism and the devil himself!

No—no—*no:* he could never be the miserable, complaining old creature uncle Joe had been—uncle Joe, who ended by marrying his housekeeper.

Vere, anyway, was fast learning that the best *rôle* in life is to take everything coolly; hence he felt no elation. Recent events—the affair of Gertrude Templeton, and the bitter affront she had put upon him; the later grief caused by the tragedy at Mango Garden—had rather taken the spirit out of Herbert Vere; thus he accepted the advent of rank and fortune quietly—so much so, and with so little thought of the future, that he was surprised at himself.

Now the same mail which had brought Vere his important missive from the harpies at Gray's Inn had a letter for Toby Finch from his sister—a letter some passages in which referred to Vere, and though they puz-

zled the young subaltern much, threw a light on a matter that had hitherto been obscure to the former, to whose quarters he at once betook himself.

'I have some news for you, Vere,' said he.

'What! an accession to a peerage—called to the Upper House, eh, Toby?'

'Well—neither; but something concerning you, from Sophy.'

'And who on earth *is* Sophy?'

'My sister, who was one of Lady Aldwinkle's bridesmaids.'

'And she writes concerning me?' asked Vere, becoming a little interested.

'Yes, and her sister Gertrude, and that solemn tall fellow on the staff at Aldershot, Derinzy.'

'Well,' said Vere coldly and rather grimly.

'She seems to explain something that had happened—something that was unknown to you; but here is her letter—read for yourself.'

Vere took the girl's letter; its caligraphy was pleasing, clear, bold, yet neat and ladylike, with a dash and character all its own,

and larger than one would have thought a hand so tiny as Sophy's could have produced.

After telling about where she had been and whom she had seen and so forth incidentally, when mentioning the family at Ringwood Hall, she briefly narrated in a gossipy way the whole affair of Derinzy, and the *mistake* concerning the letter he had dropped —the letter of Phœbe Bagshaw, written under the belief that the gallant colonel was *Vere*, and how hence it was that the Templetons so studiously ignored the presence of the latter on that morning when the troops left Farnborough. The cold haughty stare, the cut direct were thus explained; but, thought Vere, what does it all matter now?

Not a jot!

'She knew afterwards that I was innocent, Toby,' said he, 'and yet she married him, the man who was guilty of a doubly dishonourable action.'

'But he is a viscount; such is life!'

'It is curious—this matter, Toby; I mean that your sister should write about it.'

'Not at all, knowing that you and I are such friends. No doubt the girls have had

the affair talked over among themselves, and hence Sophy's explanation, meant, no doubt, for your ears.'

'It is kind of her; but it matters now little to me.'

'A despicable game that was of Derinzy's.'

'By Jove, Toby, I had quite forgotten all about it,' said Vere, 'and never thought of connecting it with the manner in which I was treated by Gertrude Templeton. By the way, your sister does not mention her as Lady Derinzy.'

'Then you have not read Sophy's letter attentively. Don't you see by the postscript that her ladyship has been fully occupied of late?'

'In what way?'

'In producing an heir to the title,' said Finch, laughing; 'I know now, Vere, that it will neither grieve nor astonish you.'

'I have seen so much of life, Toby,' replied Vere, 'that I do not think anything would astonish me. I am certainly gratified to learn that Gertrude has been undeceived concerning me; but wonder how such a girl

could be brought to accept such a husband.'

And as he spoke, perhaps without apparent pique, jealousy, or irritation, Vere's memory recalled the *insouciance*, the general bearing of Derinzy—his cultivated indolence and listlessness, as if it was too much trouble to think or breathe; his fishy blue eyes, the repellent expression of which was suggestive of the *mal occhio;* and he remembered, too, the calm defiant insolence of the colonel when he taxed him with his ungentlemanly conduct on that morning in his quarters at Aldershot.

'And it is of such fellows as this our *hereditary* legislators are made,' thought Vere; 'and Gertrude is married to him. Well,' he added mentally for the hundredth time, 'to me it is nothing; there are as good fish in the sea—and so forth.'

The love he had won at Mango Garden, and the awful sequel to that love, had made Vere a sadder and a wiser man, and had obliterated nearly all memory of the treatment to which Lady Templeton and her daughter had subjected him; yet he could

not help wishing the latter a better fate than being the wife of Jocelyn Derinzy.

'Why should I waste a thought on her?' said he to Kyrle Desborough.

'Ah, why indeed? unless it be that you are yet weak in that quarter, and can't help it, and are trying to think, as Southey has it,

"All is not false that seems at first a lie."'

'I only hope that she may be happy, and that Derinzy will make her a good husband. I don't believe the fellow possibly can, though.'

'And then she will be sure to tire of him in a season or so.'

'Well, we are going home soon.'

'No association of ideas, I hope?'

'Kyrle, do you want your head punched?'

'Thanks, no; but what were you about to say?'

'That, as we are going home soon, I may as well get used to thinking of her as Lady Derinzy, as a married woman—for we may meet, are pretty sure to do so—as one belonging to another; one on whom my thoughts, if such occur, may never more rest. So, *vive la*

bagatelle! whether we meet or not. What are the odds?'

'So long as you are happy. It is the right spirit in which to take the whole situation,' said Kyrle Desborough cheerily.

'And while on this subject, to me it seems a marvel that you never think with regret of little Rosamund. You might have married her, you know.'

'If she would have had me,' laughed Kyrle, twirling his heavy moustache.

'Had you? The girl was undisguisedly fond of you.'

'I daresay I should have made a good average husband.'

'You can't be that to her now.'

'No, thank Heaven; for matrimony, Sir Herbert Vere, is not my *rôle*.'

'Nor mine now,' said Vere.

'So you say, and perhaps think; but concerning your future, it is impossible to foresee what is in store for you.'

'True; Fate is as common to all as that the future is hidden from all,' said Vere thoughtfully.

So it was to be England once again. The

farewell sermon to the departing troops had been preached at Up Park Camp; the farewell ball had been given at Admiral's Pen—a ball by the governor, whose entertainments, as the representative of majesty, answer to the Drawing-rooms of royalty, and cause a fever of anxiety, emulation, and excitement in the island; the farewell dinner at the mess had passed away; the transport Bannockburn again lay within the palisades of Kingston Harbour with the blue-peter fluttering at the fore, and the morning of departure came.

CHAPTER XXI.

HOMEWARD BOUND.

THE sound of the morning drum woke Herbert Vere from a dream, which he found to have been of Gertrude Templeton, and their meeting by the stile—a dream born doubtless of association of ideas; for was he not going home—home to old England once more?

He sprang up to dress, and could hear the merry voices of the soldiers already gathering, accoutred and in marching order, in the barrack square; and so lately had he retired to bed that he scarcely seemed to have closed his eyes at all, and memories of many a departure and embarkation came mingling to memory.

It seemed but yesterday when he was quitting Bengal; and he remembered the farewell sermon in the cantonment church, the punkahs swaying to and fro overhead, al-

ternately showing and concealing the preacher, while the birds in scores twittered about in the roof and at the open windows.

During the small hours of the morning he had been sensible of the 'row' made by certain subs, who, after the ball, had never been to bed nor taken off their uniforms, but had filled up the intervening time by making a 'booby trap' for one of their number, and teasing Toby Finch: for Toby was a good-natured fellow, who, at Aldershot and elsewhere, had permitted his brother youngsters to 'draw' him in his hut at night; to sentry-box him—a pitiful joke, which consists in placing the box close to the victim's door, and shouting 'Fire!' or so forth, that he may rush into it as into a trap; by 'making hay' in his room—which consists in pulling everything to pieces; till even Toby at last turned on them, cudgelled some one, and fairly cut down another with his sword, after which he had peace.

So, amid the adjacent disturbances and shouts of laughter, no wonder it was that Vere's short nap should have been a species of trance, in which, between sleeping and

waking, his mind wandered away to other scenes and other forms and faces.

The garrison adjutant and other officials came galloping on the ground, and the parade was speedily formed. Home was the word in every heart and on every lip, and all Kyrle Desborough's men looked bright and cheerful, as the staff remarked.

'Oh, it is nothing to us,' said Kyrle Desborough; 'we of the Eighth are just the kind of fellows who can dance or sit up to any hour of the night, and be up as fresh as daisies at any hour the drum may beat in the morning.'

All the officers seemed very jolly—the effects of the governor's ball, champagne, round-dancing, and unlimited flirtation were still rather apparent in the hazy bearing of some, especially in Tom Prior, who tried laboriously to wheel his company into line by the pivot-flank.

'What the deuce are you about, Prior?' asked Desborough angrily.

'Excuse me,' said Prior, rapidly rectifying his mistake; 'I am not such a fool as I seem.'

'I confess appearances are against you;

and you, Finch, look sharp, please, in proving your company, and try to forget all about her.'

'Her—who?'

'Why, the Creole girl you were so maudlin about at two this morning—

"To visit far Jamaica's shore,
Had no kind angel deigned to move you,
These laughing eyes had laughed no more,
Nor Yarra lived to thank and love you."'

It was a merry parade, and a merrier march, when, preceded by the band of a West Indian regiment, the companies of the Eighth, followed by a ringing cheer from the troops in garrison, quitted Up Park Camp, and took their downward way towards Kingston Harbour, accompanied by crowds of capering darkies, performing around them a species of *mazourka d'extase*, either inspired by the crashing music and the drums, or pleasure to get rid of some of the 'buckra soldiers' by any means.

All were soon on board, and already the Bannockburn was getting up her steam.

It seemed but as yesterday since Vere had stood upon her deck, and seen the white

houses of Kingston and the mighty ranges of the Blue Mountains rise, as it were, like a scenic picture from the calm sheet of water that lies within the long and sheltering stretch of the Palisades—but yesterday; and how much had happened since then!

He had loved and lost Virginia; there had been the revolt, with its attendant atrocities and subsequent punishments; there had been the marriage of Gertrude Templeton, and the birth of an heir to Viscount Derinzy; there had been his own most unexpected succession to rank and fortune, that made his recent promotion to a company seem a mere bagatelle; now all the past seemed a dream, a panorama, that had rolled away, and he was once more going home!

On board the transport were two or three ripe garrison belles—belles that had bloomed fast in the Antilles, gay, pretty, and attractive, with their younger sisters, also going home and in high spirits.

All these were quite ready to console Vere —a handsome young baronet—with whom they had flirted and danced at the governor's balls, and those at the Admiral's Pen. But

their blandishments were exerted in vain; for something of the relations between Vere and the heiress of Mango Garden had been whispered abroad, and gave him an interest in their eyes which, perhaps, he might not have otherwise possessed.

As the transport headed round the coast beyond Morant Point and the Red Cliffs, he saw the inlet of the sea and the fatal precipice that overhung it; the place where— But he shuddered, turned his eyes away; and when he looked again the scene of the tragedy was blended with, or lost among, the other features of the coast.

'Well, Vere,' said Kyrle Desborough, who had been observing him; 'it is a received maxim that everything in this world comes to an end sooner or later. Our sojourn in the Antilles has done so; and to-morrow we shall hear her Majesty's morning drum beaten on the high road to old England. We have had our last breakfast in Jamaica—breakfast with the butter—ugh!—in a state of liquefaction and thickened with dead flies!'

'We have fared worse in our time than we have done here in Kingston.'

'I believe you, my boy. Do you remember that morning in Lucknow, when, among other Indian luxuries, we had a cat curried and served up in rice and green chillies by your rascally kitmutghar; and the bow-wow pie we shared with old Sir Hope Grant after the capture of Pekin?'

'And now we go to Shorncliffe, thank Heaven, not Aldershot.'

'Luckily for us,' said Finch, joining them; 'the new drill in the Long Valley, amid whirlwinds of dust, and over the Fox Hills, would be too much for the brain after the West Indies.'

'I feel myself getting lazy for that sort of thing now,' said Desborough; 'my mother was a Brady, Toby, and you know what the song says:

"Oh, I never was fitted for work,
It was never a gift of the Bradys;
But I'd make a most elegant Turk,
As I'm fond of tobacco and ladies."'

'Or rather, you were fond of them,' said Toby, feebly trying to smile, and looking rather pale and uncomfortable, for it was beginning to blow; there was a heavy sea on

and the time was coming when he and other young subs who, for months past, had been shaving assiduously to have a moustache, forgot all about the performance.

As the transport bore on, Vere's field-glass enabled him to see, diminished to specs in the distance, the giant cabbage-trees that indicated the locality of Mango Garden; after a time, they seemed to melt away into the general greenery of the Guava Savannah, and with nightfall the ranges of the Blue Mountains were but a fading stripe upon the sea.

Vere sometimes reflected, had the catastrophe—the black and cruel tragedy that shed such a blight upon him—not occurred; had old Mr. Bellingham bestowed Virginia upon him, and all had been happiness and joy, would she *now* have been going home with him to England; or must he have quitted the service and remained with her in the Antilles?

Under his new and changed circumstances, with other interests to consider, the latter seemed an improbability; yet it was in vain that Vere strove *not* to think of what might have been—to reflect and indulge in casuistry

whenever he was alone, which in the crowded transport was an event that seldom occurred.

'But only think, Vere,' said his particular chum Desborough, in reply to some such confidence, 'only think, old fellow—England, after broiling at Up Park Camp—England, with a baronetcy and twelve thousand pounds per annum in landed property! By the gods of the Greeks, it is not a bad prospect.'

'And she with whom I should have shared it all?'

'She?' asked Kyrle, as he took the cigar from his lips and eyed Vere with a comical air of perplexity.

'Yes.'

'Which?'

Vere crossed to the other side of the poop angrily, while Desborough laughed a little cynical laugh to himself, and followed him.

'Don't be angry with me, Vere,' said he, laughing again.

'You laugh, Kyrle,' said the other; 'but somehow there are times when, with all your *bonhomie* and general flow of spirits, your laugh is not indicative of happiness.'

'A laugh is generally supposed to be so.'

'But with you it seems to indicate some bitter memory.'

'Perhaps,' said Kyrle, not in the least annoyed by the tone of retort adopted by his friend.

'I would give a good round sum to see you thoroughly in love, Kyrle.'

'*Again?*'

'Yes, again, if you will.'

'And you call yourself my *friend?* Well, you would only waste your money; and I hope your friendly desires may never be gratified.'

'You are an enigma.'

'What headland is that?' asked Desborough, to change a subject that always seemed distasteful to him; 'hand me the binocular—thanks.'

It proved to be the Great Inagua or Heneaga Grande, the largest and most southerly of the Bahama archipelago, that rose like a streak upon the transport's port-bow—its dangerous coasts surrounded by a perilous wilderness of reefs—a solitary isle, the sole produce of which is salt from a vast pond in its interior.

The cluster named the Caycos were passed next, and as they faded into the evening sea, all in the transport knew that the next land their eyes should see would be Europe; and then all seemed to settle themselves down into their places for the homeward voyage.

In rough weather the watch alone were on deck—the military watch, composed of one-third of the troops in their gray greatcoats—or a few of the cabin passengers, who, tired of seclusion in their cabins, ventured upon the poop, or under the shelter of the break thereof, braving the wind and the foam or spoondrift from the waves, and tumbling hither and thither, amid the laughter of the seamen if they failed to clutch a rope or a belaying-pin.

In fine weather sometimes the guns would be housed, drawn aside, and a part of the lower deck cleared for a quadrille; or the band played on the poop when the setting sun was shining on the sea; and the merry voices of the ladies would be heard as they expressed their astonishment or pleasure, as a drove of shining dolphins went surging past, issuing from the bank of one wave, to plunge headlong into the bank of another; or it might be a

flight of flying-fish, perhaps to the number of hundreds, springing from the water, to drop into it again with the sound as of a shower of little stones falling on its surface.

And times there were when, for the amusement of those in the cabin, the boatswain would pipe 'All hands to skylark,' and every sailor amused himself for a brief space as he thought best.

Then 'slinging the monkey' and 'high kokolorum' would ensue, with all their rough accompaniments of blows and bruises; but this, of course, was only in fine weather latitudes, as the great ship steamed steadily onward and homeward, and nightly the constellations of the tropics passed out of sight astern, and others ahead began to be hailed as old and familiar friends.

'To the girls at home—God bless them!' said Kyrle Desborough, tossing off his wine, on the first Saturday night when the toast of 'Sweethearts and wives' was drunk in the mess-cabin; 'after all I have read of, seen of, heard of, and known of them, there is not a man in the Queen's service—on earth perhaps—who loves them more than I do!'

'By Jove, is that Kyrle Desborough or the wine that speaks?' exclaimed Toby Finch.

'And I agree with Sterne, "that the man who has not a sort of affection for the whole sex is incapable of loving a single one as he ought to do."'

'Bravo, Kyrle!' said Vere; 'we shall begin to have hopes of you after all!'

And after a time, when Desborough saw his friend whirling in a waltz with one of the garrison belles aforesaid, to the music of one of Strauss's measures, as discoursed by the band on the poop one fine summer evening, he began to think,

'I shall also have hopes of *you;* a rude shock, if not too violent, is, as some one says, good for the mental and physical system. "It stirs us up, dissipates lethargic tendencies, and sets us thinking in fresh directions, or striking out with renewed energies;" so certainly the row with the niggers, and its contingent *shock*, have not been without an effect upon Vere of Ours.'

END OF VOL. II.

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