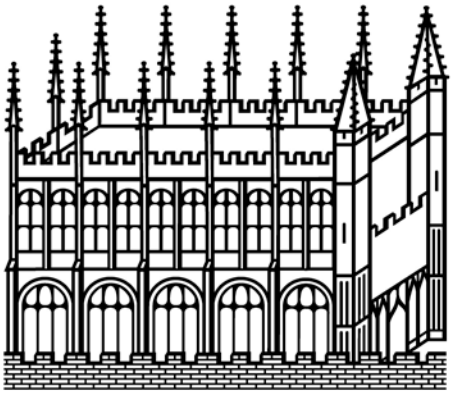

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TEMPTED OF THE DEVIL.

A Novel.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

By the Author of "A Fallen Angel."

"The ancient saying is no heresy,
Hanging and wiving go by destiny."
SHAKESPEARE.

VOL. II.

London:
REMINGTON AND CO.,
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1882.

TEMPTED OF THE DEVIL.

CHAPTER I.

My heart untravelled, fondly turns to thee.
GOLDSMITH.

THE musical evenings, that had been talked about so long ago, had been organized, and then dropped, but now they were resuscitated for the long winter evenings. It was on one of these planned Thursdays that St. Leger and Isabel met.

She had heard of his return accidentally, and not from either Hugh or Alice; so she held communion with herself, and would not call on her sister during the two intervening days. She certainly expected to meet him on this particular evening, and prepared herself for the ordeal, being firmly resolved to guard against the slightest betrayal of her secret,

and feeling that this was as much due to St. Leger as to herself.

Might it not after all be more than probable that he really only felt an admiration for her, such as he might feel for fifty other women ? This reflection aroused all the pride in her nature, and gave her the perfect self-control she coveted.

Alice, under the impression that Isabel was ignorant of St. Leger's return, looked forward with some anxiety to their meeting. Her sister arrived a little later than usual. St. Leger, however, was there, and had already appealed to Alice as to the certainty of her coming. He looked so crest-fallen when she said there was no certainty, that she instantly relented.

" She *never* forsakes me on my musical nights—she knows we depend upon her voice."

Almost immediately Isabel entered the room.

As he was then speaking to her sister he was almost, if not quite, the first person she greeted. Alice looked in the face of her tall,

splendid sister, to see whether she would give any sign of weakness; but Isabel met his eye freely, and welcomed him with very becoming and natural warmth.

She did not absolutely express surprise, but Alice felt quite satisfied there was surprise notwithstanding; for, although at her first glance, she had observed decided paleness in her sister, yet now there was a heightened colour which was indeed but natural under the circumstances.

"You did not expect to see an old friend?" said Alice.

"How could I do that?" returned Isabel, feeling the evasion was justified. "Mr. St. Leger, you are looking altogether like a foreigner," she said, looking into his face, and dropping her eyelids quickly.

If she had intended to say more she found it impossible.

"If I am changed outwardly, my heart is not," he replied, with just a dash of seriousness. "I am rejoiced to find myself on English ground once more. I—I do not see any change in you. I carried so vivid a

recollection that I should recognise the faintest shadow of alteration."

"I am a great deal older," laughed Isabel, who was beginning to feel quite herself.

Now he was not subtle enough to attribute this exquisite propriety of manner to that feminine hypocrisy which must, for honour's sake, conceal emotion; but he was subtle enough to know that this free artless friendship was not the thing he desired; still it was friendship, and she was kind to him—and was not this omen good?

His ardour became only the more inflamed at the thought that the uncertainty he had feared really existed. Win this girl he must! unless he meant to develop himself into one of the morose bachelor species, who are for ever regretting their past, present, and future.

As his eye ran over her graceful figure, he felt positively convinced that no other living woman could ever have a charm for him. He quite glorified himself over his past restraint.

"For," thought he, "she surely would have taken alarm, if I had been rash enough

to propose at what might have been a turning point in my fate."

He was reverting to the time of his appointment to Ceylon, when it had seemed so distressingly painful to leave her without revealing the state of his feelings.

There was very little hope of a private conversation to-night, among several people all engaged in the same occupation, and mostly grouped around the piano. However, he felt he was again in the field, and that was enough!

Philip Lorrimore and Helen Willoughby were present; St. Leger heard from Alice that their engagement was not near its termination.

"No change there, either!"

"As far as we can see," said Alice. "You know I am not very sanguine over that affair."

"No," said St. Leger, briefly.

"Speaking of changes," said she abruptly, "how do you think my husband looks?"

He sat down by her side, and looked into her earnest face, but he did not answer.

"I want your unprejudiced opinion," she asked, rather timidly, "because I am the only one who discovers any difference. You, who have been absent, may be able to see what I have already seen."

He found it difficult to reply to her anxious question; the dark hazel eyes wore so fixed and unconscious an expression, as she gazed on him.

"I *have* seen!"

The sentence broke from him involuntarily; his words startled himself by their emphasis.

She took alarm.

"What?"

"The—difference you mention," he answered, vaguely.

"And what is it?"

"I cannot define it—can you?"

Alice's downcast face was shadowed by its saddest expression. She did not reply to this question; she put another.

"Do you think it is illness?"

"Not of the body," replied St. Leger, curtly.

When bending nearer towards the delicate creature at his side, he whispered—

"You must get into his confidence. Depend upon it there is a little mental worry. Now men like to keep such things from their wives—but it is not wise."

Alice raised grateful eyes. This was a reasonable suggestion, and a kind one; though it did not quite accord with her own conviction.

"I think you have been one of his oldest friends," she said.

"Yes; with all his numerous and intimate acquaintances, Staveley and I stand about the nearest, and oldest."

"Mr. Staveley is coming to London next week. I hope you will meet here."

"That will depend on the length of his stay. But I share your hope, because I want to see him, and we are not likely to meet anywhere else."

She opened her eyes.

"What does that mean?"

"That I no longer feel an interest in our original haunts. Certain pleasures are past

with me, though I retain the same affection for my boyhood's friends. My year's absence *has* altered me in many respects," he added, thoughtfully.

"Or has confirmed your character," she remarked, cordially.

"I am bidden to interrupt this serious discussion," said Isabel, approaching. "Mr. St. Leger is in demand. He is so *very* bass, and we can't manage this glee without an occasional growl."

"Are you 'bidden against your will, sweet Beatrice?'"

"I will not be called by other people's names!"

"It is the most appropriate name I can think of for you, and I am afraid you would object to be designated by your own," he said, as he rose to accompany her.

Why is it that Alice always throws a sigh after these young people when she sees them happy?

"Hugh is not here. He was very fond of music once," remarked St. Leger, when the

glee was ended. "Is he usually out on your evenings now?"

"Usually," Isabel answered, with a little hardness in her tone, "but he has his card parties here regularly."

"Still? And while your sister is here!"

They were speaking in an undertone, and now stood alone at the piano, the group having disappeared. She made no response; she gave one quick look into his face, which was answered as quickly and as expressively. Both simultaneously blamed themselves for what seemed to be a breach of honour in thus mutually understanding their disapproval of the proceeding.

"I wish to heaven that Hugh were an easier man!" said St. Leger, impetuously; "you and I might put our heads together, and do a great deal of good here."

"I wish we could!" Isabel answered, in an impressive undertone, "for I'm sure an improvement would be desirable."

They spoke no more—there was no necessity.

The subject was one to which he could

avoid recurring, especially as Hugh did not appear until late in the evening. Isabel and St. Leger were looking over some music.

"I suppose you don't want my help?" said the host, as he passed near them.

He stayed only a moment, giving a familiar nod and smile of recognition to Isabel, and laying his hand on St. Leger's shoulder.

"I'm sorry I haven't been here to aid your efforts with my—applause."

"Well, that's all the aid we ever get from you!" replied Isabel.

"That's a side blow at you, Steve," said Hugh, moving off.

"No; you express satisfaction at my growl—and that's all I care about."

"I like it for its contrast," said Isabel. "All harmony requires an occasional discord."

"When I am to be discord to your harmony, and at your pleasure, I make no objection."

She laughed.

"I wonder what you are like when you

are out of temper? Something very terrible, I know! I can fancy how you can blaze up! I should never like to see the discord, except in melody."

"I have been sent to bring you to the piano, Miss Tennear," said a gentleman of rather severe aspect, who was evidently a devotee of music; "I am told you promised us a song half an hour ago."

"Indeed I did," said Isabel, candidly. "We have been looking over the music."

"So I perceive."

The table was scattered with loose pieces. St. Leger commenced to re-collect them, while he said—

"We *must* find what we are looking for eventually. I will bring Miss Tennear directly she has decided."

Isabel looked up and their eyes met. They understood each other too plainly—those eyes; there was a positive laugh in each pair, although the lips never stirred.

"Ah," said he, "here is a song I have not heard for years. I remember that my mother used to sing it when I was quite a

boy. I think we love music sometimes as much for its associations as for itself."

"I will sing that," she said, taking the piece from his hands, and walking across to the piano alone.

St. Leger did not frown at this and bite his lip; he just quietly sauntered over and leant his elbow on the instrument, that he might not lose the picture which was so refreshing to him.

If she had treated Fred with this carelessness, he would have shown a keen annoyance, which would have displeased her as much as his previous attention.

"I never saw anybody look so woebegone and wretched as Fred does," said Alice to her husband.

"Somebody ought to tell that young man that he is making a fool of himself," said Hugh. "If he were not your cousin I would do it myself. Is supper ready?"

"Yes; I'm only waiting for Mr. Elton's song to be over."

Isabel and St. Leger are again "looking over the music."

"That is twice to-night I have experienced the same sensation! Hearing your voice after eighteen months' silence was just like hearing the music of an old, well-loved song. I think there is a charm more distinctive in the voices of those we love than even in music."

Isabel had not one of her saucy answers ready, it appeared, for she did not lend the music of her voice in reply.

"When I used to walk under the citrons alone, and had nothing but the memory of those happy walks under the stars at Eastbourne to beguile me, I used to think"—

"Of Christmas pudding? Very naturally."

"Not at all," he replied, not in the least disconcerted. "I swear I never knew until this moment that citron formed a part of that uneatable complication! No; I thought of a far richer fruition of earth than all of her edible dainties put together."

"Oh, let me guess!" said she innocently. "Your thought was of the animal kingdom —like all men, you prefer real turtle to sweets."

"There's one 'sweet' I have never tasted"—

"*Is* it the pudding? I don't like to hear a slur cast on our national dish."

"I'll eat my share this year—if I perish in the attempt."

"Well, about the citrons? I suppose they look better in the freshness of nature than they do preserved in sugar"—

Miss Grove had made an opportunity to pass quite close to the two people who were carrying on so desperate a flirtation.

"It is astonishing how one *can* be deceived!" she said to her sister afterwards; "they were talking of preserving fruit!"

"Will you accept my escort home?" asked St. Leger of Isabel, as the last remaining few of the company stood in the hall, hooded, cloaked, and wrapped, and all talking about the inclemency of the weather.

"We usually find more cabs than we want; they loiter about in a quiet neighbourhood, and the men listen for sounds of revelry. Now here is only one vehicle—a very ghost

of London's gondola. Will you draw lots for it—or how?" asked Hugh.

"Will you accept my escort home?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. St. Leger! I was in difficulties with my shawl—I've just dropped the pin."

"What is it like?" asked he, stooping to search for the lost ornament.

"Oh, there it is! caught in the fringe of Miss Grove's hood. Do go and get it—I see they are going in the cab."

And while he went in pursuit, and laughingly accused Miss Grove of flagrant robbery, Frederick doggedly edged up to Isabel with determination in every line of his strong thick-set figure.

"Are you ready, Bell?"

"Oh, yes! I'm only waiting my turn."

"You were not waiting for me?"

"No; nor for anybody else!" she answered sharply, turning her head away from him. "I can command Hugh, if I want company."

"You have not answered my question,

Miss Tennear," said St. Leger, coming up to her with the lost shawl pin.

Isabel was sorely tempted—the one companion would be so pleasant, the other so disagreeable to her.

"I cannot afford to assert myself honestly," she thought.

She answered St. Leger in a low hesitating voice—

"My cousin always accompanies me—we have to go the same road, you see."

St. Leger, however, was not so easily put aside.

"Well, you will be better protected by two men than one!"

And then he thought: "It will teach that troublesome beggar what I mean."

"He has taken the position for granted," thought Isabel.

She could not say anything further, because Frederick was behind her; but she looked up at St. Leger and frowned, and shook her head ominously. These signs of disapproval he met with undisguised merriment.

"What an impudent creature he is!" thought she.

"Good-night, Mrs. Willoughby; I don't know how many times I have said it already. I suppose you frozen northerners like to stand in this cutting wind."

"Are you going with Bell?" asked Hugh, as he closed the gate after them. "Take care she doesn't fall!"

Isabel repudiated the possibility.

"I have hard work to take care of myself sometimes," said St. Leger. "You are lucky in being so sure-footed," he added, leaning towards Isabel, and offering his arm for support.

"No, no," she said, laughingly; "you have admitted that you find it hard work to take care of yourself. I am happy to say, I can depend upon my own feet."

"Then," said he appealingly, "would you object to assist me?"

"Yes—you are too big!"

But he disregarded this remark, and took possession of her hand, which he drew under his arm.

"Please don't!" she said, in an altered tone, and quite seriously; "because—because I never walk so with Frederick!"

"Ho, ho!" laughed St. Leger, releasing the hand again with a gentle pressure. "Well, you're very cruel! Here am I dependent on you for safety of life and limb, and you refuse help. Beside you would keep me warm—do you object to my taking a slide when I see one?"

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Isabel; "I should like it—especially if you suffer ignominious defeat, as you deserve. There's a beauty just beyond the lamp-post!—go on."

He went on, full of the spirit of boyish mirth, and slid along the pavement with admirable facility.

In returning he was just in time to catch her from an awkward slip on the ice-bound path.

"Ah! boasters are generally sufferers," he said.

"It was all through you! I was watching you, and forgot myself."

"Oh, do that just a little longer!" he

whispered. "*I* won't forget you, I promise."

And so they walked home; St. Leger sliding like a happy boy to keep his blood in circulation, and Isabel and he laughing and joking like children. As for Frederick, he never spoke a word; it was practically impossible for him to cut in anywhere.

"Why don't you slide, Fred?" Isabel asked wickedly.

"Because I don't choose to make a fool of myself," he answered gruffly.

And this was all the entertainment he vouchsafed.

In this Isabel saw a joke, although she flatly refused to tell St. Leger what she was laughing at.

"If you were laughing at me," he said ferociously, "I would do as my royal namesake did when Matilda first refused him—I would roll you in the snow until you begged my pardon. She accepted him afterwards, you know."

"You are right in the lady's name—but your historical knowledge is slightly at fault.

I do not think it was King Stephen who behaved in that ungallant manner, but the Norman Conqueror who imported my interesting ancestors whom I know nothing about."

"I'm so glad I made the error—because I have heard my name from your lips!—And of all delicious sounds including the 'music of the spheres.—'"

"You must not whisper! Don't you know that it is rude when there is a third person present?"

CHAPTER II.

In terms of choice I am not solely led,
By nice direction of a maiden's eyes.

SHAKESPEARE.

THE day after the musical *soirée*, while Mrs. Willoughby was sitting alone in the morning, Isabel came in.

"Well, what's the matter now?" asked Alice in a distinctive tone, which implied that she guessed all about it.

She judged at once, and rightly from her sister's cheeks, in which there burnt a rich glow of anger, and from the sparkling of her unusually soft eyes, that something was wrong.

"Take off your things, and come and put your feet on the fender—it's colder than ever to-day!"

"I'm too hot already, Alice! I'm in a positive rage! But it's only the old story—Fred has proposed to me *again*. It's nothing short of persecution! I am sorry to say I

lost my temper with mamma—afterwards. She contended that he had a perfect right to do it; and declared that this annoyance is no other than all girls have to put up with. But surely one flat refusal ought to be enough to satisfy any man!"

"I think it would generally be calculated to dissatisfy a man. Unfortunately, Fred holds a different position by virtue of his relationship"—

"Exactly. He takes advantages no other man could possibly take. Now you saw how he behaved last night—well, directly mamma left the breakfast-room this morning—he began. Now at *that* hour in the day!"

"There is a saying, I believe, to the effect that the man whom you dislike cannot even take his salt without offending you."

"Oh, but it was a most unreasonable time!" said Isabel, angrily.

"One would almost think you would have accepted him at any other hour. There was a man who had the hardihood to propose at 'five o'clock in the morning'—and he had not been up all night either!"

"But then *she* was a milk-maid, and, I've no doubt, preferred that time. I can't conceive *why* he did it."

"I know," said Alice emphatically; "it was because Mr. St. Leger has returned."

"I don't see what that has to do with it," retorted Isabel, getting a trifle more roseate, and a trifle more angry.

"I can," said Alice conclusively. "But it is not your discussion with Fred which has spoiled your beautiful temper, and made your complexion so many shades more brilliant."

"No. Of course, it was my dispute with mamma, which vexed me most! We never shall agree upon the point, I can see. She said it was unreasonable on my part to object to a man's persevering devotion. I told her my anger was at his tenacity. 'A man of spirit,' I said, 'would have given it up long ago! A man of spirit, mamma, would not have almost lived at our house under the circumstances!' Then *she* got warm. You know her arguments—first he is *only* son of papa's *only* sister—though what unique weight this should have in the matter, I can-

not discover. When he first came to London the case was different—he was young then, and knew no one. But for years past he could have done without mixing in the very heart of our society had he pleased. But no; he chose with the greatest selfishness to subject me to—to ridicule. If he had any true regard for me—do you suppose he would do this? You know the incessant allusions and intimations I have had to endure about Frederick. People are so idiotic—or so short-sighted—perhaps that is the most charitable word. The worst of this infliction has been that I cannot help fancying that people accuse me of giving him encouragement—when of all things, I detest the meanness and dishonesty of trifling"—

"I believe you Bell—and you are very hardly treated."

"In one condition of life, a woman may insultingly avoid a man, if she chooses—refuse to recognise him—cut him dead, as our cook did her young man. But I am bound to meet Fred as a lady should—every place I go, and under my own roof too"—

Isabel stopped abruptly, and tapped her foot in irritation.

"What people say, or what people think, is of little consequence to me, but they certainly must have strange ideas at times."

"But I don't think people are generally censorious," said Alice, sympathetically.

"When mamma urges his faithfulness, she drives me to desperation. His 'faithfulness' is just a dogged, obstinate perseverance, that refuses to be put down. If he had tried to overcome his folly, and behave in a sensible brotherly way, I should not object to him. Or, if mamma would only once admit that I have cause for vexation, I should be content. But instead of this, she magnifies all his virtues, till the whole affair becomes like a prosaic page of arithmetic. 'He has so much more stability than other men—he has so much less propensity for pleasure-seeking; so much more constancy—so much less extravagance; so much more temperance—and so much less'—'So much less able to excite an interest in himself,' I interpolated, just when she hesitated. And then—dear old

mother!—I shouldn't mind disagreeing with her, if I didn't love her so—then she explained to me that a woman's first view should not be to the social qualities a man might possess, but to those sober merits that go to make a comfortable home and a happy wife. Now this reckoning up of value reduces marriage to a mere question of self-seeking."

"There is a certain atom of self to be satisfied, Bell—you can't get over that!"

"Precisely. It is almost beyond human nature to undertake self-sacrifice without love. The fact of loving satisfies in itself. I would not marry a prince for my own aggrandizement—*that* I should call self-seeking. And if I were distractingly in love with him I certainly shouldn't marry him, unless I saw that his happiness as well as mine would be the result. There are mistakes enough made in matrimony, Heaven knows!"

"Yes," sighed Alice.

"Mothers need not urge their daughters into error. I don't mean to accuse mamma

of that. But she sees Frederick with her eyes, and cannot be brought to see him with mine. I think it possible I might choose a worse man than Frederick, and yet make a more suitable match."

"Perhaps, your eyes do too much duty, Bell," said Alice, meaningly.

"I can't help that!" replied her sister, severely. "My eyesight informs my other senses that Fred can have no charms for me. And unpleasant experience has proved it—no man with a nose like a door-knocker turned upside down can possess a degree of refinement. Where he got it I don't know. Dear papa's nose was splendid! and"—

"Oh, Bell, if you're going to pull poor Fred's face to pieces, and mount your favourite hobby-horse—physiognomy, I shall retire."

"No," said Isabel, laughing. "But believe me, notwithstanding my weakness for personal beauty, I can fairly say with Portia—

'In terms of choice I am not solely led,
By nice direction of a maiden's eyes.'"

"Well, now those fiery members are much

calmer, smoothe your ruffled feathers, have some lunch, and talk about the prospective party. We've not quite decided on the date; but it will be in about three weeks. Have you decided on a dress?"

"That's a secret! As I must have something entirely new, I mean to try an experiment of my own. It is what Hugh will call 'the artful simplicity dodge.' But I so detest the overweighted ornament of the present fashion, that I can't make up my mind to buy an expensive dress that does not in the least suit my taste. I don't feel comfortable decked in bewildering embellishments of rubbish, that will not allow two inches of natural line to one's skirts. By the bye, what a treat! just imagine—I shall be free—absolutely free of Fred's espionage for a time. I forgot to tell you he is going to Plymouth. He has his holidays, and his mother is not quite so well, I believe."

"He will be better in Plymouth than here," said Alice, parenthetically. "I daresay it's an excuse."

"I can't say he announced his inten-

tion of going home until I had offended him."

"What *did* you say?" inquired Alice, with some amusement.

"I'm not sure that it's fair to tell even you; but I did say I thought he took a mean advantage of his position—and of mamma's kindness. And when he put forth that stupid reiteration of 'time tries all,' I told him that if time tried me much longer, I would prefer to say farewell to time in this world"—

"Oh, oh!" laughed Alice. "The man has cause for offence."

"I have done with civility. But I have not got rid of my nightmare—he will come back as meek as a mouse, and be so excruciatingly humble that I shall be misled into believing that he intends to behave better for the future. I can so easily make myself believe that which I hope."

"That is one of woman's especial gifts. I have it!" exclaimed Alice, with sudden inspiration. "The best—the only certain way out of your difficulty, is to—marry somebody else."

"I will," said Isabel, with an air of quiet resignation, "I will accept the first enterprising man who offers himself."

"If I were to make that announcement public"—

"What a rush there would be! We should have the confectioner's assistant, who expresses his tenderness by furtive glances the whole of the time I am leaving orders; and I do think I should have a chance with the piano tuner—though that may be only cupboard love, because I offer him wine and cake."

"Things you never offered Fred, I would venture to affirm."

"Frederick helps himself," said Isabel, contemptuously.

"If I should see Mr. St. Leger between his and our party, I shall mention your hopeless condition, dear."

"What a desperate story-teller you are!"

"And if I am any judge of human nature, I can guess"—

"And so can I," said Isabel, impertinently. "Willoughby *versus* St. Leger!"

"Oh, you depraved girl! Here is lunch quite hot—but I've a great mind not to ask you to stay. I'd far rather have Mr. St. Leger, only he never comes to lunch. In the evening, when there is some chance of your"—

The door opened, and a servant entered; so Isabel could only stop her sister's mouth playfully, and they both went to the table laughing at their own folly.

CHAPTER III.

Two stars keep not their motion in one sphere.
SHAKESPEARE.

STEPHEN ST. LEGER experienced a troublesome sensation when he reflected upon the knowledge he had accidentally obtained. He thought it over now in cold blood. Unfortunately it was almost impossible that he could doubt the evidence of both eyes and ears; it was entirely beyond doubt, that the two people he had seen were Hugh Willoughby and Charlotte Gardner. There was also no doubt, that during his interview with Hugh the palpable falsehood he had uttered was in truth a betrayal.

He turned the matter over in his mind to decide upon what course he should take. To his simple code of honour, it seemed necessary to take action of some kind; but he was, of all men, the most unsuited for stratagem. He felt that he could more easily go straight to Hugh, tell him of that

accidental discovery, express his kindly interest, place the position in its unvarnished evil before him, and abide by the consequences, than attempt any clandestine means of diving into the mystery.

Yet after due deliberation, he abandoned the idea. One thing was certain—he was quite irresolute as to future action. And there was yet another thing which was just as certain—he knew it on the previous night, when he was sitting with Isabel, making a pretence at music hunting, and Hugh had taken the unusual familiarity of placing his hand upon his shoulder. It had been a most friendly token from the man who was usually so undemonstrative; but St. Leger knew, from the involuntary revulsion which had followed the touch, that Hugh could never hold the same position with him that he had once held. It is hard to believe in the man who has once looked you steadily in the face, and told an absolute lie. But yet we have it on high authority that "a lie may be nobler than the truth."

St. Leger, as we have seen, was not capa-

ble of this close moral analysis. He drew his conclusions from the whole, and not from the part. He could not look at that nice little woman, whom he admired so much, without a strange pity—"a sort of fatherly feeling," as he described it to himself.

"There is one thing I must do—keep out of Hugh's company as much as possible. I can't—and I don't see why I should—give up going to his house. It's no breach of honour to take an interest in his wife."

At this point of his meditations he became suddenly aware that he had missed his road. He had been so absorbed by his own reflections that he had wandered quite out of his way.

"Will you be good enough to tell me where I am?" he asked, facetiously, of the first pedestrian he met.

"Well, I think this is North Street, sir. What may you be looking for?"

"Any high road—then I shall be at home."

"First to the right then, sir, and there you are!"

St. Leger thanked his informant, and turned the corner.

Surely he recollected this long, uninteresting snow-buried street! What strange chance had drifted him here? And what strange chance was to follow?

Before he had got half-way down the street, whom should he see on the opposite side but the very woman who had occupied his mind so frequently for the past few days —Charlotte Gardner, in all the bravery of gorgeous apparel!

Of course she looked at him; a man of his style would be sure to catch her eye; equally, as a matter of course, she recognised him.

"Ah! I thought it was you," she said, with some excitement. "I knew your walk. My! how brown you've got. Do you know who I am?"

"Yes, I remember you," he replied, and scarcely knowing what he said. "Are you living in London now?"

"Oh, I live here," she said, pointing to a house opposite. "Do come in—I should so like you to!"

When a man has a good object in view, he may be excused if he goes somewhat out of his usual course to compass it. Still without a plan, or argument, he followed the girl, and in a few minutes found himself in her sitting-room.

She appeared somewhat fluttered, but was evidently greatly pleased with the visitor. She could not imagine any other cause for his interest but her own personal attractions.

"I knew you went away for a long time, she said, "*somebody* told me that. But who'd have thought we'd have found each other out!"

"Ah! we never know who's going to find us out!" said St. Leger, who was now beginning to feel a want of power within himself, "a kind of fish-out-of-water feeling," as he mentally expressed it.

He looked at the woman, who was sitting opposite to him, with manifest discomposure. She irritated him in a singular way. She was never still for an instant; she was either throwing back her curls, playing with her earrings or beads, adjusting her flounces,

or in some way betraying either vanity or nervousness, he could not tell which.

"So I suppose this has been a year of change," he said. "I suppose you're married?"

"Of course," she replied lightly, "I wasn't likely to remain single long!"

"Ah! you had many admirers, I remember. I don't suppose I know the object of your choice?"

Charlotte suddenly stopped twisting the thick gold chain she wore, and began tapping her foot impatiently upon the floor.

St. Leger felt ashamed of watching her, so his eyes went down to the foot. It was well exposed and covered by the sort of boot that women in her sphere of life would not be likely to wear, and certainly the kind of boot a lady would not wear, notwithstanding its elegant embellishments. From that he glanced to the edge of the showy dress, trimmed and over-decorated according to the approved fashion; from that his eye wandered to the furniture of the room, which was all shining and new, and seemed to have been

arranged as a complete match for its mistress.

He had no great natural discernment, but his mind did a little work for him quite unknown to himself; he got his impressions without struggling for them.

His wavering attention was brought back by a forced laugh from his companion.

"Do *you* know him? I should say just a little! But *that's* no business of yours!"

"I am very sorry," observed he vaguely.

"Why are you sorry?" she inquired flippantly.

Poor ignorant girl! her only desire was to impress him with the importance of her position.

"You needn't be sorry for me. I'm very well off—don't you think so."

St. Leger made another equally vague and incomprehensible remark.

"I am very glad. What is your name?"

"Oh," she said, archly, with a childish affectation which was quite pitiable, "if you feel so much interest in me—I am flattered!"

She had already persuaded herself that she

was an eminently attractive person, since such a man as this wished to be intimate with her.

"I am called Mrs. Taylor."

The interview was getting quite beyond St. Leger's management. His conscience rebelled against a plain question, the one that would suggest itself—was she really married? Was there really a Mr. Taylor? or was the whole thing an invention, and was she coquetting as of old?

He was beginning to wonder how he should best get away from an embarrassing position, when he experienced a most uncomfortable sensation of surprise at the sight of—what? A baby's shoe! A trivial and innocent thing in itself, and yet he found himself hoping most fervently against hope that Mr. Taylor did exist.

"I—I congratulate Mr.—Taylor," said he, haltingly. "I may be able to do something for him. What is his line?"

At this Mrs. Taylor broke into a loud, exaggerated laugh.

"It strikes me you can't do much for him!

but I'm very much obliged for your kindness all the same."

Then he rose and said good-bye, and, got out of the presence of the woman who oppressed him.

She accompanied him to the door, and hoped he would do her the pleasure of another visit. She could not resist giving the invitation, although she knew it was dangerous.

"I may forget the address," he said absently.

And after that foolish speech he was compelled to wait while she went back and wrote the number and name of the street upon an envelope.

Still as absently he folded it, and went away with a heavier heart than he had known for some time.

There was no Taylor! He felt convinced that he would never prove the identity of that man.

But where was the charm for Hugh Willoughby? Human nature was becoming a very mysterious thing to St. Leger. This woman, pretty as she was in mere colouring

and feature, could surely never justify an infatuation; surrounded as she was by an atmosphere of vulgar affectation, that was just slightly in advance of a coarser vulgarity, but not one whit preferable. This woman who jarred on him with every action and word, who talked with so much freedom, and aspirated her *h*'s with such painful force, and exasperated the hearer by their frequent omission—was this the creature to tempt a cool, deliberate, far-seeing man from his natural duty to society, and his religious oath to his virtuous wife?

If all that he could not help divining were true, what hope then for his bringing man and wife into a closer and truer companionship?

"Poor little woman, she doesn't deserve such treatment," thought he. "Now, what good could I do by accusing him point-blank of his infidelity? Why nothing!—except that we should quarrel on the spot. He couldn't deny the existing fact, as I know it! And —I should be of necessity excluded from going to his house."

Although he argued thus, there was a jarring, discordant feeling in all his relations with Hugh.

"Next time I have an opportunity I will probe him to the quick."

He had not long to wait. It happened the two men met that very day.

"Well, you are enjoying your idleness, I see," said Hugh. "Turn in with me, we are close home."

"So you are enjoying idleness too, I suppose!" said St. Leger, with a laugh.

"Nobody does anything at this time of the year, except shopkeepers. Come in." He turned the key of the office door. "What will you have to drink?"

"Nothing, thanks—I find the cold quite invigorating enough for me."

"You'll find it ten degrees colder in the north."

"Well, it will beautify my complexion!"

"What have you being doing with yourself all day?" asked Hugh with natural familiarity.

It was quite a commonplace question, but

St. Leger felt grateful to his brown skin for hiding the flush which rose to his face.

"Only strolling," he answered evasively; "looking about London—getting accustomed to its new highways and by-ways. What a lot of alterations in eighteen months! Yes, I am off to-morrow to the vast solitudes, far away from the buzz of cities. What swarms of people are out! I saw many familiar faces. I fancied I saw that girl Gardner to-day."

He had studied his part, and was indifference itself.

"Perhaps you did."

"You haven't any knowledge of her now, I think you said."

"What do *you* want to know of her?"

The tone told at once that their previous conversation was on Hugh's mind.

St. Leger wished he had the courage to say: but this move he thought might be a false one.

"Only because I am certain it was she. Didn't you say she had gone on the stage?"

"She's never been on the stage," replied Hugh abruptly.

St. Leger's eyes were not equal to the task

of looking into Hugh's face, or he would have seen the sudden contraction of the eyebrows and compression of the lips. It was unlike Hugh to be guilty of an error of inadvertence.

"Well, who *was* it who picked her up at Colchester?"

"She *was* a respectable girl, Steve, although she was there."

"Was she? More's the pity! Of course if *you* believe in her honesty she must be *à la* Cæsar's wife—only it isn't probable to me that she will ever be anybody's wife. I thought she had gone into the ballet line, seeing her here just now."

"I'm sure I don't care what has become of her—or what will," said Hugh with supreme indifference.

"There may be a good deal of truth in that," thought St. Leger.

At this moment Hugh was called away, and when he returned that subject was not resumed.

"Well," said St. Leger, "how will things be this time next year?"

"You must go to Dr. Slade for that information, if you can hope to find him. I don't pretend to read the future."

"I wish *I* could," said St. Leger, with a sigh. "I should like to be a nearer relation to your wife, if I could; I'm very hard hit, though I don't talk much about it. By George! I do think if I found my chance really hopeless I should"—

"Go to the devil straight! That's what you all say."

"Well," retorted St. Leger thoughtfully, "if a man goes there by himself it isn't of so much consequence. I should never drag anybody else with me—that would afflict my conscience."

"Ah, Steve, those who have reached that locality are seldom afflicted with a conscience."

"I wonder now," continued St. Leger reflectively, "if conscience ever does desert a man—till he's on the high road to hell?"

Hugh gave a slight, perceptible start.

"Why what's the matter with you, Steve?

I didn't think you knew what conscience meant."

"Perhaps I don't. I swear I don't want to learn. Of all the beastly sensations under heaven, the worst surely must be the tormenting, everlasting knowledge that you have injured somebody."

"Ah! men are not particularly conscientious," said Hugh languidly. "When they have their own ends in view they forget the intermediate machinery. Take your own case. You love a girl—or think you love her—it comes to the same thing; you marry her, if you can get the chance, without troubling yourself about who may be injured outside the matter, or what effect the injury may produce upon her."

"That's a different thing," said St. Leger warmly. He was always warm when he was well launched in a subject. "In marriage we agree to take each other for better or for worse. But no man dreams of the worse, except so far as Providence may bestow it upon him, and that makes a fair risk all round. But I think you are wrong

about the entirely selfish aims a man has. Now I do feel as if I should go mad to see another man take Isabel—yet I wouldn't have her against her own will, or with it if she didn't love me. I don't hold with selfish passion—it's irrational to me."

Hugh laughed in a forced, unnatural manner.

"I've touched him," thought St. Leger, "and I hope I've made him a little more miserable than he ought to be already. He may find it practicable to break the bonds yet."

"Have you got a light?" said he, producing a cigar case, "and will you take a weed?"

"There ought to be any amount of waste paper about the place. I seldom smoke here, so I have no lights."

"This is handy!" said St. Leger, stooping to the fender and picking up a piece of a torn letter.

Both men went out of the office smoking. By this mere accident St. Leger had been brought into contact with the fender, and

what he had seen there—the carelessly torn portions of a note in a woman's hand—had formed another link in the chain of evidence. The very word which had happened to catch his eye, the fragment of a sentence, had conveyed its meaning. He was more than prepared for what was to follow. He knew that the scrawling, angular, irregular letters, he had just seen, would bear a perfect similarity to the address he had in his pocket.

No sooner was he alone than he sought to satisfy himself with this further proof. He tore up the damning sign, and threw it away in disgust. Proof! he had enough in Hugh's own words, even if he had not seen him taking leave of Charlotte Gardner.

CHAPTER IV.

Unconscious that her image there
Held every sense in fast control.

BYRON.

No doubt Stephen St. Leger had had the intention of quitting London on Saturday, as he had told Hugh; but by some strange chance which he could best explain, he found himself on Sunday morning on the road to St. Jude's.

"It was a brilliant idea to find out the Sunday mail, I shall have plenty of time to make my few arrangements before then. I daresay I shall have postponed my journey in vain; it's such bitter weather that it is most improbable she will be there."

Fate, however, was in his favour; in the Tennears' family pew sat Isabel alone. This, according to his past experience, had never been the case; so he had abandoned St. Jude's in despair. He wondered greatly at the obnoxious cousin's absence.

"Of course he spends the whole Sunday at his aunt's house—and surely he is too malicious to miss an opportunity of getting in the way."

Utterly absorbed in his contemplation of an earthly idol, St. Leger felt something of a thrill of shame when he observed Isabel's devotional behaviour. If her mind wandered for an instant, it was quite certain that those sweet serious eyes never strayed; and he was quite near enough to admire them when they were raised from her book. In such repose, the pure beauty of her profile had a positively mesmeric effect on St. Leger; it soothed him into a happy trance.

"Why I feel as if I could actually become a good man with that girl by my side!"

Although he was near enough to hear her clear voice in the chant, she never once glanced in his direction; and during the whole of the service he knew that she was unaware of his presence.

When the congregation was dismissed, he skilfully managed to be beside her as they emerged from the portal. Even then an

accident nearly outwitted him. Two young ladies, having made their exit from another door, were making their way towards Isabel —he remembered seeing them at the *soirée*— and doubtless their intention now was to make her their companion for the homeward walk.

"I must play the wily serpent," thought he.

He saw the necessity of evading their eyes, and intercepting hers; so with a few rapid steps he turned and faced her, noting with eager pleasure the bright smile of surprise with which he was greeted.

"Are you substantial, or only a shadow? You ought to be in Cumberland. How am I to account for the mystery that brings you to St. Jude's for once only? Perhaps by your regular attendance elsewhere?"

"I am afraid there is an implied reproof in that speech, Miss Tennear. Now I assure you when I was in Ceylon I seldom missed an opportunity of going to church; it reminded me of the England I longed for. However I have been at St. Jude's in bygone

days, but I never had the luck to find you without a strong bodyguard."

"The Misses Grove have probably altered their course," thought he; so he turned and strolled on by Isabel's side.

"Where *can* your cousin be?"

Isabel became painfully conscious of her last interview with Frederick.

"My cousin is not my escort when he is here. He naturally accompanies our party to church." Then she felt irrationally annoyed by the slight allusion, and continued: "My aunt in Devonshire is ill, and he went to Plymouth yesterday morning because he was anxious"—

And then she hesitated, because she knew he went more in anger than anxiety.

"Since I have an unexpected opportunity, I am going to be confidential."

"That is nothing new! You always professed to be so with me."

"I wish I had the courage to be unreservedly so—but I'm just like a—what's the brute's name?—in your presence."

Isabel laughed.

"Is it a lion, or a butterfly?"

"Oh, not the first!—and not the last. Was there sarcasm in the contrast? Well, I suppose I ought rather to choose to be one of the latter species; for according to Homer the fly has an indomitable courage above all other living creatures."

"Still I fancy a butterfly is an emblem of something—if it be not timidity. I used it for contrast."

"I think the insect symbolizes fickleness. I should be an unfortunate fellow indeed, if you *had* known the comparison. Don't you see, Miss Tennear, it is you who confuse and confound me altogether."

"Then why, in the name of reason, do you not keep at a safe distance?" she inquired, with amusement.

"But seriously," said he, altering his tone, "I have to ask you a question—one I fear you may not think me justified in asking. My reasons however are strong enough to admit of my permitting you to accuse me of curiosity. After our conversations, you may remember at Eastbourne, you can imagine

that I have a strong interest in your sister. Interference between married people is not considered wise—but "—

"Mr. St. Leger," said Isabel resolutely, "I don't forget anything. I have often recalled those conversations, and indeed it seems to me almost like treachery to Alice to talk in this way."

"My honour would be satisfied with no breach. My intention is of a nature that defies the risk of being misunderstood. I used once to look upon the household at —— Place as quite an ideal one. When there I felt as if I stood on the sacred ground of pure domestic happiness, and now I have cause to fear"—

He hesitated, and Isabel looked up with a face full of anxious interest.

"Suppose now we conspire together," he went, on; "you, to gain your sister's confidence, and I, to pursue my own plans with Hugh. A little judicious assistance sometimes works wonders. Do you think that there is any impropriety in such conduct?"

"Not when regarded in that light. But it

is impracticable I am convinced, for with all her vivacity and good temper, Alice is unassailable in some things. Now I don't mean obstinate—far from that; she will frequently give way before arguments and decisions which are quite inferior to her own."

"That you may attribute entirely to her modesty; she has, to my mind, too low an estimate of her own value."

"Her pride and reliance in Hugh are beyond all belief. I am certain she would never, under any pressure, yield one word in disparagement of him. Since our confidence has gone so far, I may tell you that I have been occasioned much distress by Hugh's conduct. There can be but one excuse for systematic neglect—he may not see the harm he is doing. But surely years of indifference will estrange him from his wife entirely."

"I agree with you. But I am of opinion that if he could be but once convinced of his folly"—

"When was Hugh ever convinced by any one but himself?" broke out Isabel, with

rapid impetuosity. "He may be cleverer than most people, but he is no more perfect than the rest of us! Some of his opinions, I am sure, go to prove nothing but his own self-assurance."

"Things have gone worse, instead of better, during my absence," said he, thinking of Charlotte Gardner. "You told me, the other night, the card parties had been continued."

"Yes; and to my sister's disgust. She has never said so—she has never hinted that she objects to them—but Hugh made a remark in my presence which I do not think he gave me credit for understanding. But it is utter nonsense to suppose—as he pretends—that such entertainments can be a necessity! There can be no occasion for a man to play cards all night—but Alice indulges him to a fault. They are seldom together. She *has* made one stand against him—she never will go into society without him; so the result is, when etiquette demands they should accept an invitation, he cannot pass it over to her, and get out of it."

"They are surely on the best of terms?" said he inquiringly.

"I have never seen, or heard, anything to the contrary," replied Isabel, with emphasis.

"Won't you ask me to come in?" asked he, when they reached the door.

"You don't give me a chance of refusing."

"And I never will—if I can help it," he replied impressively.

"Here is Mr. St. Leger, mamma, who comes on his own invitation to see you."

"Mean! mean!" murmurs St. Leger between his teeth, as he follows Isabel into the drawing-room; and she hears and laughs.

Mrs. Tennear notices the whisper and the laugh too; and the suspicion so long deadened starts into life again. With her native dignity, which was by no means small, rather in excess of the occasion, she rose to meet him.

"I heard you had returned, Mr. St. Leger. One scarcely expects, in these days, to see young men return, they so often settle abroad. I hope you had a pleasant excursion."

"It was anything but an excursion," said he with dismal facetiousness; "it was a journey to an uninteresting place, and a weary residence there, which would have been insupportable if I had not had plenty of work. But I was blessed with an object, and managed to exist on my hopes for the future.''

"There must be a great novelty in foreign travel."

"Undoubtedly—when one is passing from place to place. But it is not all foreign ground that is interesting; I would not have lived there for fifty thousand a year! I assure you my thoughts were centered here. Nelson's war cry was always ringing in my ears—I looked for recompense in 'England, home, and beauty!' And though I may not do as much for England as our naval hero, I certainly hope to be more faithful to home and beauty."

"We are, you see, obliged to condone the errors of great men, because of their eminence."

"Would the faults of smaller men were as

charitably condoned! It would be but fair —or, in my estimation, equally unfair."

"I am with you, Mr. St. Leger," said Isabel quickly. "A man, if he be a hero, has a *noblesse qui l'oblige* to be consistently heroic. He cannot afford to have the faults of lower minds. He owes such a duty to *his* aristocracy as Royalty owes to its rank."

"And does not always pay! Do you know what Gibbon said of princes?"

"No. What was it?"

"'The generality of princes, if they were stripped of their purple and cast naked on the world, would immediately sink to the lowest rank of society, without a hope of emerging from their obscurity!' It was hard on princes—but I am inclined to think it is true."

"Indeed it is a bold assertion! I used to imagine that only poets, by virtue of their genius, their eccentricity, and their understood license, were permitted to say such things. But while you were quoting Gibbon, I was strongly reminded of Cobbett—and though he was not a poet, you know he hesi-

tated at nothing, *he* would say what he thought at any risk."

Now Mrs. Tennear, dear old lady, with all her grand manners, had not the faintest conception of the relative merits of Cobbett and Gibbon. She had an indistinct idea that the former was a soldier, and she was much surprised that her daughter should know anything about him. Had she quoted a bishop now—especially on Sunday—

By this time Isabel and St. Leger were talking rapidly, and laughing frequently. The mother could not help regarding the splendid couple with admiring eyes.

Certainly it would be a grand match, in point of suitability *one* way! If she could only be sure he was not—a good-for-nothing! Again, they showed such evident pleasure in each other's society. She could but sigh as she thought of her absent nephew, and his failing chance; though she was altogether wrong in that matter, for Frederick had never had the least chance, and certainly never would have.

"Mr. St. Leger has improved greatly,"

said Mrs. Tennear to her daughter, after he had gone; "his manner is so much less volatile."

"I never discovered any kind of levity about him. He is very fond of a joke, but he is anything but volatile."

"He has impressed you favourably it seems, Bell!"

"I always liked him," said Isabel, with a frank candour that refused to be abashed; "I find it much pleasanter to talk to him than to most men. But don't be afraid, mamma, I am not going to fall an easy victim to Mr. St. Leger's fascinations! If, according to account, he has found our sex too easy, he must learn that he is not irresistible to all."

But when Mrs. Tennear remembered how tenderly his frank laughing eyes had dwelt upon Isabel's face, and when she remembered her daughter's silent acceptance of some undertoned words of farewell, she began to think there was more danger than Isabel herself knew.

CHAPTER V.

In love, i' faith, to the very tip of the nose.
SHAKESPEARE.

ALTHOUGH Twelfth Day had passed, the cold had in no way abated. When St. Leger returned to London he found things just as he left them, but a little more demure of aspect —in fact, the festivities of the season were over. He had spent a very happy time, notwithstanding his absence from the most interesting object the world held for him. He had been placed on a pedestal, admired, and worshipped by his mother and sisters.

There was so much to talk about on all sides, so much to describe, so many pleasant reminiscences to recount, that the time seemed to slip away with unusual rapidity.

"I declare, Stephen, you will end in being a stranger to us, if this continues! We see you so seldom, that we shall forget the colour of your eyes. I'm sure I shouldn't

have known you, if we had met unexpectedly."

And then he had seriously proposed that they should sell the old place so far away from civilisation, and, now that he was permanently settled in London, go and live there. His proposal had not been met with denial, but it was a thing of too great importance to be decided without long consideration. Still the mere proposal had made their parting much less sad.

"For who knows, mother," he had said, "that we shall not be tired of each other by next Christmas?"

There was much affectionate disapprobation of this remark, but it was all pretence. Wherever he was, he was always first to provoke nonsensical mirth. And although they were on the eve of parting, they continued their playful talk to the last.

"How dull we shall be, when you're gone! Oh dear!"

"I can't promise the same thing, although you tell me that. You'd better come and live near me, and break up your illusions. One

would think you girls were parting with a sweetheart instead of a brother. By the bye, you don't seem to have one between you!"

"One between us would be worse than none! I suppose you have enough, however, to balance that matter. Confess now, Stephen, before you leave—did you fall in love with a mulatto—worth, of course, goodness knows how many millions?"

"Do you suppose I'm going to tell an impertinent girl like you when I fall in love?"

"Oh, but I know you are! so you may as well tell the rest."

"Indeed, you know more than you ought!"

"Not more than I ought—it is you who have not told us what you ought." His sister's lips were brought in proximity with his ear. "Do you think I couldn't read the secret in your eyes, when you spoke of Miss Isabel Tennear?"

Now strangely enough this trivial conversation was constantly occurring to him.

"Well, I do not want to blind anybody!" he thought. "I do not care who discovers

my secret! It shall not be a secret long if I can help it."

The first thing that met his eye, on his arrival at his office, was a note from Alice. Christmas with them was evidently not over. Here was an invitation, not by any means a formal one, to a carpet ball. "A regular conventional Christmas party, and you *must not* disappoint us. We are going to introduce all known country dances—so please get them up."

St. Leger put down the note with a strange tenderness. He seemed to have conceived a feeling for Alice which was wholly indescribable.

"I feel as if I should like to take the poor little thing up in my arms and run away with her."

But he answered the note without any expression of this desire, which might not have met with the kindness it deserved.

* * * * *

"I never saw you look so well, Bell, and

that is not saying a little!" exclaimed Alice, admiringly, on the evening of the dance.

Isabel was the first arrival. She came, in fact, to assist her sister in receiving her guests. Alice was still in her own room, and had not yet finished dressing.

"Why, who did your hair?"

"These," said Isabel, holding up her ungloved fingers, "and isn't it a work of art?"

"Oh, it's exquisite!" cried the artistic sister, tiptoeing to admire the soft folds so classically arranged. "It's too elaborate for any manipulation of mine. I shall never abandon my own style, I've got accustomed to it. Beside, I haven't your hair to elaborate, you know. I had no idea that dress would turn out such a success! When you refused me further clue than cream-colour and scarlet, I shuddered."

"Ah, you had a vision of preponderating scarlet, I suppose! That is a fault I should never be guilty of, considering that I can't wear red except in the minutest quantity."

"Well, Bell, you surpass yourself, as I have said, and if every other woman in the

room is jealous of your beauty, *I* shan't be surprised. But don't be too mischievous! Hugh has some nice men coming to-night—some of whom I don't know."

"Hugh's friends seem to be legion."

"They would be invaluable," said Alice, wickedly, "if they were all like Stephen St. Leger. But that, Bell, would be too much to expect!"

"Yes, it's a magnificent type of manhood."

She managed to say this quite seriously, and when Alice looked quickly up from the drawer in which she was searching for some feminine ornament, she met a face which was a picture of solemnity.

"Surely you are not going to wear those earrings!" cried Isabel.

"I think they're very suitable. I always reserve my turquoise suite for black."

"Are you going to wear black? Well, you always had peculiar ideas on dress! I am severely plain, but you are almost dowdy. Now, why black—and you so much younger than I?"

"The truth is, Bell, I feel bound to look

sombre—I like to give my visitors a chance of shining. There's thoughtful consideration, if you please! Beside, one of my notions is that when a woman is married, she need not lay herself out to please all the world, as well as her husband."

"She would be sure to please her husband, I should think, upon any condition."

Alice laughed.

"Do you remember the old rhyme—

> Lovers we satisfy with ease,
> 'Tis husbands who are hard to please.

However, that's what you have to find out!"

Although the remark was playfully made, there was a vein of sarcasm in it, which Isabel was not slow to discover.

"And yet how angry she would be, if she knew I guessed her dissatisfaction," thought Isabel.

"I have not seen Mr. St. Leger since he has returned from home," remarked Alice, as if from a natural sequence of thought.

"Do you think he *has* returned?" asked Isabel, carelessly.

"Certainly—or I believe I should have postponed the party."

"Indeed! You seem to be amazingly fond of the gentleman."

"I am," said Alice, gravely, "and *you* are not!"

"Ah, I know you! Haven't I admitted dozens of times that I think him—rather nice."

"Practically, I think him perfection," said Alice; "theoretically—I'm not sure."

"You are profoundly obscure, Alice," said Isabel, with an assumption of indifference to the matter, and giving the whole of her attention to the buttoning of her cream-tinted glove.

"Poor—poor Fred!" murmured Alice, in a compassionate tone. "It's almost like bringing him to the gallows to ask him to come here. I'm glad he is away, because I couldn't insult him by not sending him an invitation—could I?"

"Don't be a goose, there's a dear girl!" said Isabel, her face relaxing into a perfectly irresistible smile—"now don't!"

"I am afraid I shall not see Stephen St.

Leger so often, now his duties are more onerous," said Alice lachrymosely. "He used to come so frequently, and his interest in me is, I fear, not so absorbing"—

"How can you be so absurd! Are you ever going downstairs?"

"Yes; come along—oh, I have forgotten my handkerchief! Be careful, Bell! Don't give your heart before you know you have one in exchange."

"I shall take care of my own, even then!"

"That isn't fair!"

"Isn't it?" said Isabel, insolently. "Ah! you married people are all alike—you must give advice. Hugh hadn't been married half-an-hour, before he told me to beware of his friend."

"Dear me, how you remember things!" said Alice, as they went downstairs.

The party was altogether a success. The drawing-room was large and well lighted; there were not too many people to dance comfortably, and the company was well assorted. Not only did Isabel surpass herself, but everybody appeared to emulate her.

The Reverend Jonathan Staveley was in full force; indeed, he was so delightful that it became quite a question whether the military or the clerical profession was most in favour.

"Hugh's soldier friends look well, and walk well, but to my mind they are scarcely up to *some* of our civilians," said Alice. "How I wish Hugh would come!"

"They won't be up to the country dances, I can see. Here he is, Alice!"

"I am vexed you could not have managed to be here before," said Alice, aside to her husband.

"What matters?" he answered indifferently. "You and Bell are more than capable."

"But two of your friends have already arrived—and I'm sure I was awkward."

"Never!" he said, gallantly. "How pretty you look!"

"That's because I was just getting out of temper, and have a colour in consequence," she replied, saucily.

She was well content to be at peace with him on any terms. She was still passionately in love with her husband, and waited for,

longed for, and rejoiced in any word of approbation from him.

"Can you spare a dance for me?" asked St. Leger of Isabel.

"I think you are rather late," she said, passing him her card.

"I have been waiting my opportunity far from patiently. When I saw you surrounded by five or six applicants—with Staveley at their head, as if they were a deputation—I felt at what disadvantage a bashful man always is."

"Oh!" wailed Isabel, as if she felt a keen pang, though not a sympathetic one.

"I understand satire—I have to endure so much of it," replied St. Leger, meekly, with his eyes upon the card, pencilling. "Now I am an older friend, and yet I shouldn't have dared to put my initials where I see Staveley's, for the dance before supper, without special permission. Perhaps he had it? I wanted it myself."

"Really? Permission—or the dance?"

"Why both, of course! Though I should prefer permission if I missed the dance."

"Your friendship dates exactly three months before Mr. Stavely's. The difference of time is scarcely discernible to the naked eye! Haven't you finished yet?"

"I've been so forestalled," he said, ruefully. "There's only one waltz left!"

"And you're not grateful for that? Perhaps you have not observed that there are only two on the programme? Well, I am very sorry—but you should have been a little more courageous."

"You have spoilt your sorrow by your reproof. But I can take a lesson—numbers shall never appal me again. See," he said, in perplexity, leaning over her, and pointing to an empty space, "I don't know what to do by this. What is 'The Triumph?"

"Would you like to learn?"

"Most certainly! if you think my capacity equal to the task."

"It is not a question of capacity—but of courage, Mr. St. Leger. Do you think a man could possibly triumph without it? It's a very easy dance!"

"I understand it already!"

"*I* drew out the programme—isn't it original? I do *not* like those rapid whirls," said Isabel, *à propos* of waltzes.

"That's a strange taste for a young lady! May I ask your reason?"

"Reasons," she said, correcting him. "You may have them—though I don't know why we should always be both personal and confidential. In the first place, one can find no time for talking; and in the next, if one's partner has not the wit to stop just at the right moment, one gets out of breath"—

"And certainly," he put in oracularly, "certainly a lady shows to much greater advantage in a formal quadrille."

"Ah, yes! her dress shows better."

"And her dancing. Those fast waltzes are a whirligig, and give no scope for the poetry of motion. For my part, I wish the minuet days would revive."

"Then you don't regret the waltz? I had not the audacity, but I longed to put in a minuet somewhere."

"I couldn't have performed that!" said St. Leger with solemn decision.

"How wonderfully we agree!"

"What an admission!" said Alice, who had just approached them. "Excuse me, Mr. St. Leger, I want you not to forget Helen. You know Mr. Lorrimore doesn't dance, and—people seem to forget that she is free, in the matter of dancing. I am afraid I am obscure—but the fact is, she is short of partners."

"A thousand thanks for the hint, Mrs. Willoughby!"

Then he returned Isabel's card, and immediately sought Helen's side. He was gone before Isabel could glance at it, and see that every remaining space was filled. She smiled when she saw this.

"Here is a piece of insolence," she said, showing the card to her sister.

"An insolence that does not appear to have been intended as such—since it does not offend."

St. Leger, after chatting gaily with Helen, cannot, in the least, understand why this nice-looking, clever girl should throw herself away upon such a pompous prig as Lorrimore.

With malicious benevolence, he determined to provide her with partners for every dance. He gave her three himself, he introduced his military friends, assuring them of the perfection of her dancing and her "go," he pressed the matter upon Staveley "as a charity," and in about ten minutes managed to gratify both his kindness to the girl, and his contempt of her lover.

"He'll be in a deuce of a rage when he knows it!" thought St. Leger, who presently told the joke to Hugh.

"Lorrimore won't be able to see it—he couldn't make a joke to save his life."

"Nor would *I*—for *that* purpose," replied St. Leger.

The remark had provoked laughter between the two men; by which it may be inferred that Hugh was not infatuated with his future relative.

The waste of time was no great self-sacrifice to St. Leger, considering he could not spend it with the girl he preferred; and Helen, lively and genial by nature, was glad to be able to enjoy so agreeable an evening.

Even now, Phillip Lorrimore is designating him as "a conceited puppy." He hates to see St. Leger address his betrothed—much more to dance with her. He hates to see Helen respond to his gay speeches. He is suspicious by nature, or he would never dream of insecurity with such a girl as she, who is a very pattern of prudence. But the poor girl finds some difficulty in conforming to Phillip's extremely strict ideas. He has, however, gained an ascendency over her, which, he feels, has increased to an extent that might justify him in extracting from her a promise he has long desired—that she should give up dancing in deference to himself.

It had been his intention to press the question this very evening; but unlooked-for difficulties lay before him. He is an extremely jealous man, and although, he cannot but know he need have no fear of rivalry from St. Leger, he watches with anxiety for the moment when he shall leave her side. But with such natures trifles, light as air itself, are apt to make them wretched for hours—and even days—together.

Before, however, St. Leger had moved from her side, Lorrimore observed that his place was immediately filled by a moustached exquisite, whose principal peculiarities seemed to be that he could not look at a woman without bending very low over her, and using an eye glass.

Poor Lorrimore, self-involved, appears to be the only unhappy man present. He watches Helen's slender figure, wreathed with white transparent billowy skirts, whirling round in the waltz, her dark eyes sparkling with light, her cheeks flushed into almost absolute beauty, her lips positively smiling at her partner's words, her hand upon his shoulder, and his arm tenderly encircling her — ! For the moment he hates the man with an insane, unreasoning hatred—the only real passion he seems to possess—and blames the girl for what is really no fault at all.

Not for one moment would he dream of accusing himself of error; he is the last man to suppose that he can be spleenful without reason. Alice's quick observant eye notices his moody silence.

"It's a pity we could not have left him out altogether!"

And again she wondered, for the thousandth time, what Helen found in him to charm her. But this was a case that an irrational first fancy had much to answer for. If Helen were not quite blind to Lorrimore's defects, she attributed them entirely to the wrong cause—that of an unselfish, absorbing love for herself. If she had not so believed, if she had not been of a truthful unsuspicious nature, if she had not been woman-like—conscientiously prone to find excuse for his failing—there is little doubt the engagement would have been broken long ago.

St. Leger gloated over his success, as he saw Helen and her partner descend the staircase after the dance, and observed a dissatisfied being furtively watching them from the doorway.

Of course, it was not possible that men could be blind to the charm of Isabel's dark blue eyes—human nature, as St. Leger knew it, was not to be expected to fail—of course she was admired—and it was only proper

that she should be! He had observed her closely, heard the music of her light laugh, sometimes caught the sapphire light of her eyes, and yet when it came to his turn he went more cheerfully to her side than if she had been hiding her light under a bushel.

"How do you do?" he said, holding out his hand to Isabel.

She put out her hand, looking puzzled, and then half withdrew it.

"Upon my word, I think a fresh greeting is necessary, I have found the time insupportable"—

"Oh, I am so sorry for Alice!" said Isabel, clasping her hands. "She has just told me how merry everybody seemed to be—and here is one of her most favoured guests declaring that he finds the time insupportable. Oh, it's no use appealing! I shall tell her."

Indeed Alice's words were true; there was much merriment; and everybody was more than usually entertaining. The country dances caused unlimited fun, though there

was more talking than dancing—and more laughing than either.

"So you admit that I succeeded?" asked St. Leger, after the triumph.

"Well, yes—beyond my expectations," replied Isabel, with mock gravity; "but they were not great. However, it is gross flattery to say you never enjoyed a dance better."

"You never permit me to speak the truth. Some people like the dance for its own sake and take a pleasure in inspiriting music; while I have heard men declare they enjoy only the proximity to the partners they admire. Now I really do enjoy the dance pure and simple; I could even perform in what is known as a Spurgeon quadrille with a certain amount of satisfaction—although I can better enjoy a complication of good things. I've seen sailors dance together with unquestionable enjoyment. So after all these arguments, you may permit me to say that our dance—as a dance—could not easily be surpassed; I regard it as a triumph—if you do not."

"Some people," said Isabel looking up at

him maliciously, "have vanity enough for anything."

But as she looked she met that frank pair of eyes, filled with an expression that was not common admiration, and gravely tender in spite of their owner's light talk. She was silenced by his eyes, though she was proof against his tongue.

As for St. Leger, he was perfectly content to be near her, to listen to her sweet voice, and to look at her unreproved. She satisfied his eye so completely. The delicate tint of her dress—softly delicate with all its richness—was quite a fascination to him; its exquisite folds charmed him; the branch of scarlet geranium, fastened among the dark braids of hair, was perfectly ravishing to him. The lines of the old song—

Her lips outshine the scarlet flower,

kept on recurring to him. He supposed she had chosen the dress to match herself, for the arms were just the colour of the silk upon which they rested. The only bit of contrast was in the deep blue under the dark eye lashes, which he could so rarely see.

He had a happy thought. He gave a quick glance around, and discovered that they were quite unobserved. Mr. Elton was about to sing one of his famous buffo songs, and everybody was interested.

"I think your glove is unbuttoned—do let me fasten it," said St. Leger, carelessly.

"Hush!" said Isabel, "you really ought to listen to Mr. Elton—he is quite worth attention," and her eyes turned to the piano.

Without replying he took permission to button the glove, and made this the opportunity of slipping an elegant tortoiseshell bracelet upon her arm at the same time.

Attracted by the light touch, she looked down just as he was carefully clasping it.

"What have you done?" she exclaimed, hastily withdrawing her hand.

"Done! what may not a man do when his courage has been challenged? Now don't be angry—but just look at it."

"You don't deserve that I should. What a lovely colour!—and how light! What is it made of?"

She attempted to unfasten it, as she spoke.

Fortunately Mr. Elton's deep rolling notes were filling the room, so that their soft undertones could not be heard.

"Ah! I shall have to give you a lesson, I see. I'll wager now you cannot get it off."

Isabel quickly drew off her glove, and with the greatest ease slipped the bracelet over her hand.

"You should not challenge me—I can always do that."

"What universal power! Why you couldn't be tied up—you are like the Davenports."

"I think it is scarcely polite to compare me with a set of exploded swindlers. However"—

"Do put it on again—it just gives the finishing touch that was wanted, because it matches your hair. I brought many things home with me; but this trivial ornament was the only thing I dared offer you. As it is worth so little, you will not hesitate to accept it."

"I think you are remarkably clever in choosing something I could scarcely refuse."

"Oh, here's one of your partners!—how I should like to strangle him!"

Isabel rose, and left him with one severe glance, which had not the slightest effect in chilling his audacity.

"What *is* the matter, Phillip? It is no use your saying 'Nothing,' because I am not so foolish as you are pleased to think me."

Helen's tone was light, but there was a shade of annoyance on her face.

"If you will not take my word, I can satisfy you no other way," replied Lorrimore, with formal gravity.

He did not look at her, though her appealing eyes were fixed upon his face.

"Sit down, Phillip! I *know* there is something wrong, because you have not been near me once to-night. You have scarcely spoken to any one; and—I cannot run after you."

"No; you have been much better occupied."

"Well, I have been dancing—there is nothing else to do at a party like this. Have I—really vexed you?" she asked, gently.

"Your conscience is your own accuser," he replied, coldly.

"Can you really be annoyed because I have joined in the amusement, and you have not?"

"You have always a ready invention, Helen, to suit your purpose."

She did not reply; but she looked hurt, and made no further attempt at reconciliation.

It is very hard to dispossess people of their beliefs; Helen was in the habit of attributing all Lorrimore's eccentricities to an overwhelming excess of virtue she thought he possessed.

When supper was announced, and nearly all had paired off, St. Leger was seized upon by Hugh, with the words—

"Are you quite disengaged, Steve? If so, take my sister."

St. Leger, having no interest, had not troubled himself to procure a lady for supper; so seeing Helen sitting in quiet desolation, he instantly joined her.

"Where can Phillip be? I wonder if he has gone home."

This is what Helen thinks, as they go downstairs. She does not even hear her companion's gay speeches.

"Where can that brute be?" is St. Leger's emphatic mental remark. "He has been looking like Mephistopheles all night, and now he has left Helen in the cold, although he knew she would be expecting him."

The windows opened on a balcony, and here Phillip was found smoking a cigar. He told Hugh that his head ached, and that the confusion of dancing always upset him. Hugh was not conventionally polite; he merely said—

"I've had to excuse myself to Mrs. Forrester to come in search of you. You'd better come down to supper."

And then he left.

There was a vacant seat beside Helen, when Lorrimore entered the supper room, for she had been the last lady seated; but he was not the man to avail himself of that, or anything else that might be construed into concession; so he allowed another man

to establish himself beside her, and settled himself near Alice, who was not gratified at the sight of her neighbour.

"I think you are a delinquent," she said. "People have somehow been shuffled into the wrong places."

But it was vain to hope to entertain this man; he sat in gloomy silence. The lady on his right found ample amusement in her partner, and so Lorrimore was left to the enjoyment of his own spleen.

The party was very gay. There was so much talking and joking that Alice's faculties were entirely occupied; she soon forgot all about her unpleasant companion. She glanced down the table, and saw Staveley and Isabel looking both handsome and happy; and then her eye wandered directly from them to St. Leger. She meditated on the little talk with her sister.

"She is just as *I* remember to have felt once—afraid—quite afraid of what he will do next. She has been keeping him at arm's length all the evening, I can see."

Staveley was not dull to the advantage of

having secured the prettiest girl in the room; and the nicest too. He could not help enjoying Isabel's society, although he said deprecatingly—

"I did not know I was appropriating a place, which might have been better filled, or I should have hesitated before putting down that dance before supper."

"*You* were perfectly right, Mr. Staveley!" she said; "or—am I to understand that the compliment was an accident?"

"Not that," replied he, admiring her clever management. "When no arrangements are made, there is, I believe, a kind of tacit understanding that a man has the right to the lady with whom he dances last. Don't you see that I am trying to make an excuse?"

She looked into his smiling face for a moment, and said gravely—

"You are very impolite to imply your regret."

But she could not keep up her gravity—her lips laughed in spite of herself, for she could not misunderstand his allusion.

"Everybody can see it, I must admit—he seems quite determined that they shall," she thought. "What shall I do with him for the rest of the night?"

During the supper, she found time to reflect occasionally on her own behaviour. She did not wish to appear capricious, or light, in her manner, but she felt how difficult it was to avoid this without falling into the opposite extreme.

"Besides," thought she, "it will not do to let him win easily."

He was certainly very delightful to her; even now she could but observe how agreeable St. Leger was making himself to the rather uninteresting girl at his side. He seemed to provoke everybody's admiration. She overheard Mrs. Forrester remark to Hugh—

"Your friend is positively one of the most charming men I ever met! I don't wonder at the young ladies generally—they all seem equally smitten."

And on leaving the room Isabel heard Miss Elton give an opinion—

"As to Mr. St. Leger, he's killing—I can't talk to him for laughing."

The first opportunity brought him to Isabel. He plunged at once into confidential discourse.

"I've been so disappointed! I expected Christmas pudding, and I wanted to show you how much I could eat."

"I'm sorry! Now tell me—did you manage to get through a square inch on Christmas Day?"

"Yes; and it seemed to be *all* citron. It took me back to the lonely days when I used to roam about, and live upon the memory of those few delicious evenings we spent by the sea—when you *never* would look at me, scheme as I would—and the soft velvety west wind embraced us both"—

"What bad taste! One thing surely is sufficient to embrace at a time."

"One thing—would be sufficient for all time—to me. Tell me candidly—have you missed me since I have been home?" he went on, with a curious change of tone. "Have you ever thought of me? Are you glad to see me again?"

"If I say 'yes' to all your questions, will you abandon confidences for the night?"

"*I can't.* How do I know when we shall next converse? It seems to me so long"—

"Since last month?"

"Circumstances were not propitious then—we had no talk of our own. May I call and see you—to-morrow?"

"We allow our friends to please themselves in the matter of calling."

"But the question with me is—whether I can please *you.*"

This was said with unmistakable meaning; but Isabel would *not* be betrayed into sobriety.

"Your doubt of yourself surprises me! Any lack of self-assurance does not accord with your character."

"And yet you, yourself, have had to bid me be more courageous. Could you believe now that the world gives me credit for any amount of brazen impudence?"

The opportunity was irresistible.

"I am one of the world."

Then with a little formal bow, she turned

and left him, in obedience to a telegraphic message from her sister.

"Hugh says we had better put in a few extra dances. As every one is so jolly, it would be a sin to let the programme run out; and we must keep Sir Roger for the last. How well they've managed to get through the country dances! I expected the fun, but I didn't expect the success."

"People never mind making geese of themselves when they really are amused," said Isabel sententiously. "What does Hugh propose?"

"Something out of date, of course! I thought you might propose something."

"There's a very pretty Spanish dance—but that's not characteristic of England."

"Oh, that will do capitally! Can you organize it?"

"Yes; and I'm sure some of the girls know it."

"Phillip Lorrimore has gone!"

"I thought he'd be better in bed. He can just tolerate a very slow party—but he can't endure this nonsense."

Alice returned to her husband. There was no shadow on his face now ; the pleasure of society had chased it all away. His wife noticed every change in him with anxious solicitude. She could not understand the necessity for excitement to keep up one's natural tone.

"If it is not too great a monopoly, let me have this dance," asked St. Leger.

"Let me consider"—replied Isabel.

"Let me assist you. *I* shall appreciate the favour better than any one else"—

"I think you are asserting more than you can prove."

"I wish I could prove myself to be what I really am—your slave," said St. Leger, eagerly.

"How accustomed you must be to saying those pretty things ! You must have them always ready."

"They are quite spontaneous, I swear ! I never prepared anything in my life but I forgot it. So far my regrets have been entirely for the things I have omitted to do, and not of those I have done. I am the very

man to miss the tide in my affairs, which should lead on to fortune."

"That is an admission of imprudence. You ought to mend in that respect."

"Teach me how. I have no end of impulses. I commence them, and, from some hostile cause, desert my own colours."

"You will insist upon making yourself a coward of the deepest dye."

"You tempt me to a bold stroke," he said, and their eyes met for a moment.

There was a very warm impulse in his just then, and Isabel shrank trembling from it, and welcomed the necessity of the commencement of the dance with the most contradictory sensation—she was longing to hear his voice again.

The dance over, he determined to make another attack.

"Talking of bravery—can you find courage to tell me why you hint at my insincerity, and refuse to believe my protestations?"

"I have not half bravery enough for that. We should disagree—and I am afraid to quarrel with you."

"Then we shall never do for man and wife," said St. Leger.

"Oh, they are not bound to quarrel, surely!" said Isabel, not knowing what she said.

It was certainly unnecessary that he should be further emboldened.

"I believe that quarrelling is considered a necessity for even lovers, Miss Tennear."

"Then it *should* be because they may get it all over beforehand."

"What a delightful explanation! Suppose we commence immediately to get our quarrelling done. I wonder how long it will last!"

"Have I not told you that I have not bravery enough to begin? Are you not evading Mr. Oliver a little too palpably?"

With a slight effort she turned to meet the gentleman who was pursuing them.

"I've got into confusion with my engagements—will you tell me if I have any later dance with you?" he asked.

Isabel discovered that it was the next, upon which Mr. Oliver took her off in triumph.

St. Leger, with the most laudable motive,

went down into the dining-room and took a glass of champagne. He was resolved to persevere.

He was so much in earnest himself that it seemed almost marvellous he could not make her so.

"This is the first time I've seen you here to-night!" said Staveley. "Perhaps you've gone in for another kind of intoxication."

"Then I've come to be reintoxicated—or sobered."

"What a capital host Willoughby is!—this wine now is really splendid."

"Yes; you may indulge freely enough at his table. I should avoid champagne like poison at some houses. There I'm better now!" said St. Leger. "Farewell."

And he was off, bounding up the staircase two steps at a time.

Staveley smiled as he looked after him.

"Dear me! it's one of the saddest cases of human weakness I have ever witnessed."

"Oliver's vanished!" exclaimed St. Leger joyously.

"But he's coming back," said Isabel. "Somebody accused him of hiding cigars."

"Will you come into the card-room with me?"

"What take a lesson from you, and desert my colours!—that is a poetical allusion to Mr. Oliver."

"I cannot delay another moment—I want to talk to you privately; the card-room is empty."

"I couldn't trust myself," said Isabel. "Beside there's no such thing as card-room to-night—it's not in use."

"It is. I saw two fellows smoking there half an hour ago. Isn't it strange how many entertainments some men require to make them happy? Now I am satisfied with one thing—that which I like best."

"You are to be envied! To be easily satisfied is a great gift, as this world goes."

"But I am not so *easily* satisfied"—

"Ah! I must have misunderstood you."

"No; but you make me contradict myself. You irritate—you dazzle me. There is but

one thing which can satisfy me. The question is"—

"Then I'm not sure you ought to be congratulated, Mr. St. Leger."

This was not progress.

"You tantalize me into a bold stroke—and, if you will not come into the card-room, I must venture upon it here. Why will you pretend to misunderstand me? Now let me explain what you would not. You doubt me, because you have heard some rumour about my admiration of your sex—and you believe it."

"I should be very sorry to doubt it," said Isabel, gravely; "do you wish that I should?"

He checked the smile she had forced from him, and answered defiantly—

"I do. You know there is only one thing more difficult than to gain a reputation—to lose one! Some folly has got into circulation about me; but it is all nonsense. I have heard it myself, and have joked about it. I think Tom Moore can explain for me, in better words than I can choose."

And then he quoted "The Shrine."

My fates had destined me to rove,
A long, long pilgrimage of love;
And many an altar in my way,
Has lured my pious steps to stray;
For if the saint was young and fair,
I turned and sung my vespers there.
This from a youthful pilgrim's fire,
Is what your pretty saints require,
To pass nor tell a single bead,
With them would be profane indeed.
But trust me all this young devotion,
Was but to keep my zeal in motion,
And every humbler altar past,
I now have reached the shrine at last.

Isabel listened attentively and critically.

"Ah!" she said, "Tom Moore knew how to idealize indiscriminate flirtations, it seems. I thought you knew nothing of poetry?"

"But that went home. I read it in my sister's album the other day, and thought the application perfect. Now won't you, for once, give me credit for being in earnest?"

He paused, and looked directly at her. He felt as if the development of his love for the girl was quickened into passionate life by her resistance.

She did not give him one of her saucy glances, nor did she reply.

"I am perfectly happy now, because I have you by my side," he said, with low passionate intonation; "and I want to keep you always there."

Isabel caught her breath quickly.

"You want to tempt me to quarrel!" she said, with evident embarrassment, and with a glance around. "Now suppose any one had overheard that—what would he think?"

"Think I am in earnest—though you will not. Will you, for once, give me credit for meaning what I say—if on this occasion only?"

The confusion of her mind, and the eloquence of her heart made her words incoherent; yet they were lightly and defiantly delivered.

"I know too well that I have given you license for enjoying—your favourite pastime. It would be cruel to stop you in the midst of your pleasure to *pretend* I believe—besides it would spoil all our intercourse for the future."

"Then let it be play," he said, quickly, "and give me an answer in play."

"What's the question, Mr. St. Leger?" she said, with a tremendous effort to retain her composure.

"Will you marry me?"

"Certainly not!"

"And do you mind telling me your objection?"

"Since we are only in jest—no. You are not bold enough!"

This remark almost took St. Leger's breath away.

"I will make you retract your assertion, and your answer if that be all."

"Do not threaten!" she said, coaxingly. "Remember your impulses always cool before you carry them."

"Oh, you are cruel!" he said; "and I—I have been most injudicious in choosing a moment when I can have no resource but my tongue."

"I *knew* you would repent—but I did not think it would be so soon."

She was herself again. There is a positive delight, in all youthful creatures, in mere play, and she was carried away by the infection of the moment.

"Never mind," she said, soothingly, "don't look so grave, or—you will make me repent too."

"And give me another answer? If you repent of saying 'no,' the answer must be 'yes.'"

"And so sentence you to a lifelong repentance."

The charm of her antagonism stimulated him.

"The repentance would be only in jest, remember."

"Oh, married people always repent! Who was it who said that a man always repents—either because he marries, or because he does not? Here comes Alice!"

"You need not have introduced two extra dances for the purpose of sitting out, Bell!"

"Oh, have they finished?"

"Well, if you two have been oblivious of that terpsichorean extravagance—I will say no more."

"The world forgetting—by the world forgot," said St. Leger.

"Then I shall forget you if I can," said Alice, severely.

The very last dance had now arrived, and Isabel was expecting to be claimed by her partner. He came to her full of despair.

"My sister, Miss Tennear, is so completely used up, that she says she is incapable of putting one foot before another. I consider her conduct imbecile, because she says she never enjoyed herself so much in her life. My enjoyment means going on—doesn't yours, St. Leger? However, she has implored me to take her home"—

"And you'll be delighted to oblige her," said Isabel.

"Indeed I shan't—but I shall have to go all the same. I've been looking forward to this dance, and it goes to my heart to give it up."

"In one short half-hour we shall all have to give it up. You will have the pleasure of knowing, before you arrive home, that everybody has said good-night. There will be a general break-up after this dance. Good-night! I trust your sister will soon recover from her excessive exertions."

"Well, deeply as I sympathise with that

man, I cannot help rejoicing in his misfortune. Will you give me his chance, before any one else finds out?"

"But are you free?"

"My partner, that was to be, is as her brother has explained, done up—can't move one foot before the other, and my partner, that is to be, is as light as a fairy, and as brisk as a bee!"

"Oh, what selfish creatures men are! Well, yes, Mr. St. Leger, since I have remaining strength to animate me through the dance."

Sir Roger de Coverley was too frolicsome a performance to allow of any conversation, so St. Leger had no further opportunity of "improving the occasion."

When people were leaving, Isabel, inwardly fearing another attack, said—

"Now I think I will go and assist Alice; so I will say good-night as it is quite time for you to go."

"Is that your notion of assisting a hostess—telling me to go in that off-handed style? *You* will have to go first!"

"Shall I?" she said quietly. "I am going to stay."

"By Jove! if I could only rely on Hugh's friendship sufficiently, I'd ask him if I could stay too."

"I would not put friendship to such a test. I really must go."

But after this he had the pleasure of watching her exquisite movements, and hearing sometimes the sound of her exquisite voice —the dream was *all* delicious—all enchanting throughout. When he—positively the last to leave—shook hands with Isabel, in the presence of Hugh and Alice, he said—

"Am I to look forward to a reconsideration of my sentence?—and may I call to-morrow?"

Isabel blushed furiously at this unexpected assault.

"I shall not be at home," she said evasively.

"No; you will be here. Have I your permission, Mrs. Willoughby—will you be visible any time to-morrow for my sake?"

"I assure you I shall for my own," she

replied, laughing and wondering much at the publicity of his remark.

She caught sight of Hugh's face, and he was smiling with a sort of "superior knowledge" air.

St. Leger accepted this reply as decisive. And then he left.

"Oh, Bell, Bell!" said Alice, shaking her finger, "when will you become more discreet?"

They did as people often do when all their guests have departed—they sat down and talked the matter over.

"The party has been an immense success," said Isabel, who was anxious to get upon a general topic.

"Undoubtedly," said her sister, drily.

"I never knew an affair of the kind go off better," said Hugh, with satisfaction. "That notion of the country dances for Christmas time was a splendid one. Novelty always is—distraction."

"What did Mr. St. Leger mean, Bell?"

"He—tried to propose to me, I think," she said, with some diffidence.

"Bell! are you serious?"

"Well, no!—but I think he was."

"What do you mean?" asked Alice, who was by no means pleased with this flippancy.

Isabel smiled faintly, and blushed as she replied—

"Only that I did not wish to take him seriously."

"Oh, then you have taken him!" said Hugh.

"Nothing of the kind! It was very awkward for me—I could not permit him—to go on."

"And why did you not, Bell? You will have to answer another time."

"Oh, we don't know that!" said Isabel, audaciously. "When one is taken by surprise the only thing one can do is to jest!"

"Ah, he means to bring you to reason to-morrow! and that is why he made so free an announcement of his intended visit."

"If he doesn't, on the night's reflection, disapprove of my conduct in the matter."

"In point of fact, Bell," said Hugh, cynically, "you have given him the chance of

escape ; and having let the mouse slip, you'll be the more anxious to lure him back to destruction."

"To hear you speak in those measured tones, Hugh, one would almost think you mean what you say. I don't take to the mouse suggestion kindly," she added with some little warmth. "There will be no alluring—I prefer to let him escape !"

"Does that mean, Bell, that you prefer that to giving him the pain of refusal ? or that you wish him to struggle to be caught ?"

"No," said Hugh ; "it is as Milton has it—

> Her virtue and the conscience of her worth
> That would be wooed, and not unsought be won."

"How clever you are, Hugh !"

"Shall I be cleverer still ?" said he, looking down upon the sisters with half-closed eyes. "Good women are always troubled with an inordinate amount of pride "—

"We know exactly what you would insinuate," exclaimed Isabel, with her natural sprightliness. "But whether I wish to ac-

cept Mr. St. Leger or not, I assure you he shall never want a chance to escape."

"Until he loses himself finally in the net to which men are doomed."

"Doomed!" echoed Isabel, in a sepulchral tone. "After that I'll go—I don't want to have my feelings depressed."

"Stay a minute, dear," said Alice, "and talk to *me*."

"Well, Alice, since the thing has gone so far, and I have been pleased to make a joke of it, and almost compelled to take you into my confidence, let me beg you both to keep the matter a profound secret—for his sake. He is of a most impulsive disposition, and you have given me more than one intimation that he is rather—insincere—with women. Let it be understood that it is not his fault, but mine, if this termination should be—final."

"Terminations," said Hugh, raising his eyelids, "usually are final. You are scarcely so lucid as usual in your endeavours to defend my friend. I have no doubt he will keep his word."

"Nor I either!" exclaimed Alice. "But I see what Bell means—she has literally thrown away his offer, unless he chooses to renew it."

Isabel turned towards her sister gratefully, and repaid her with a glance. What a sweet friend is a woman who understands another! She forgave Hugh for his satire now, and addressing him said—

"Don't you remember the caution you gave me on your wedding day? You told me I was to beware of him—was it only nonsense?"

"He understood me well enough—and so did you."

"But I want to know what *you* understood by it."

"As you may be supposed to have strong reasons, I must be carefully accurate. Well, then, Steve has, ever since my knowledge of him, been wild about some woman's beauty—and men have chaffed him about it. Perhaps he hasn't meant more by his ravings than other men when they say, 'So-and-so isn't half a bad sort of girl.' These are the

differences in men—or rather in their mode of expressing themselves."

"Oh, that is but general admiration, which very possibly he can't help! He has never, I suppose, admitted himself to be in love?" asked Alice.

"Men don't do that, my dear—at least not very often. They keep that to themselves, until they are obliged to let the world know it."

"That is, of course, what you did!" said Isabel. "I remember how surprised everybody was when it was announced that you were going to be married. Now I think I'll say good-night."

They let her go.

"He *is* serious, of course," said Alice, "and"—

"She will accept him," said Hugh decisively.

"I think she will, Hugh, and I think they will make an admirable pair."

"As far as appearances go—yes," said Hugh, in his usual satirical vein.

"Have you a doubt?" said she, rather im-

patiently. "Has he a worse weakness than susceptibility?"

"Do not disturb yourself, my dear. I have said that he is not impervious to the charms of your sex; but these kind of men, when they have sown their wild oats, often make the best and most devoted husbands. If Steve marries Bell—let us hope that saying will stand good."

"That is a cold way to speak of my sister. I have but a vague idea of his shortcomings, even now."

"So much the better! Women never do have clear ideas about men; they have no idea what a man's life is, before he is, as Dryden poetically observes, 'fixed to one,' and 'safe at anchor rides.' Society is so formed that women can neither know—nor understand if they did know."

The gloomy shadow came across his face as he spoke, but his wife did not see it; she was wrapping her cloak around her. She shivered as she rose.

"I don't think women are such fools," she

said, with an effort to throw off a momentary oppression.

"How often am I to tell you," he said, with perfect good humour, "that men like to keep women fools!"

CHAPTER VI.

Oh, many a shaft at random sent
Finds mark the archer never meant.

SCOTT.

"ALICE, I want you to assist me, dear. You know I'm not going to let any man think that I am anxious to secure a husband. I will not stay here, as if I were waiting for him. What I want is to escape."

It was about noon; Hugh had just gone out. He had scarcely been in the breakfast room ten minutes; he had swallowed a cup of coffee, congratulated the girls on their unfailing energy in having breakfasted no later than their usual hour, had alluded carelessly to the fact that he should be later still to-night, and, with the injunction that Alice should get to bed early, he had left.

"I should like to understand you a little better," said Alice, in reply to her sister.

"You want to know too much," said Isabel, playfully.

"I should like to know what you really

mean—I fancy you want to shirk your responsibilities, my dear."

"No, I want to postpone them. Do you think I intend to chain myself up for good, and perpetrate matrimony? What is it likely to lead to? Endless bliss is all very well to talk about—perhaps it is all nonsense when it is not in a book—but I have an idea that is not far from it, and I won't risk losing my dream by taking a false step."

"Oh, Bell!" said her sister, with half a sigh, "you have a lesson to learn."

"Is there no contentment—no higher satisfaction in married life, then?"

Alice turned her face away and made no answer.

Isabel regretted her emphatic question, and went on hastily—

"I am happy as I am—but I could afford to be happier."

"That is every one's condition," said Alice gently, turning towards Isabel.

"Are not you happier, Alice, than before you were married?" said the girl, thoughtfully.

Alice hesitated. She would not have told a lie to save her life; she could not evade the point-blank question, and she felt that Isabel must be excused for asking it.

"Happier than I was before I knew Hugh, of course, but I think the days of courtship are not intended to last."

"The mere fact of loving increases happiness—that is admitted. But what do you mean when you imply that you would like the courtship time to last?"

There was a pause; and then Alice said, with a faint smile—"I am a woman; that is all!"

Then there was a longer pause, during which the thoughts of both women were sad. She, who had tasted love and found it sweet, regretting its loss—and she, who had the cup at her lips untasted—doubting.

"If I could think," said Isabel, drawing a long breath, "that love would fade away, and leave me with all my hope gone, and only the disappointment—why, if I could think so, I should never marry, Alice! I think I will go now. Let him think, if he will,

that I have avoided him. Do not make excuses in my favour! So good-bye, my darling! don't indulge in melancholy reflections about me."

After the lapse of a few minutes Alice was again alone—alone with her own thoughts, and they were disturbing—tormenting.

She had, fortunately, many household duties to-day, but her attention to these was never wholly undivided. She could spare time to feel the empty loneliness that pained her so. Only, in the moments when she was engaged with the baby, was she really beguiled from her depression.

Later in the day St. Leger called. Alice did not permit him to linger impatiently for her sister's entrance, she told him plainly that Isabel had gone home. It was almost difficult not to admit that she had done so especially to avoid him.

"Will you be my friend, Mrs. Willoughby," said he, "in the hope that one day we may be nearer? Did your sister tell you that I proposed to her last night?"

"She told us—something, because we

pressed her. I imagined from your remark that something serious had occurred, but Isabel insisted that it was all jest. She is predisposed to jest, even on the most serious subjects. What am I to believe?"

"That I was never half so serious in my life! I came here to-day with the intention of urging upon her the necessity of *believing* me—however she might decide. I do not know how to read her absence."

His manner was very winning, so warm and frank, that Alice found herself wondering at her sister's apparent indifference.

"I think, as a friend, I should advise you to wait a little while—for your own sake—and hers," said Alice, with much hesitation.

She was not desirous of meddling, but she was most anxious to do what was right.

"Remember you have but seen her once or twice since you returned; you have scarcely renewed your association. Just consider—she has had no reason to anticipate your intention. It may not be new to *you*, but it is to *her*. If I say she is the dearest, truest girl under the sun, I merely give you another

and a stronger reason than my relationship, why I wish to feel safe with regard to you."

She spoke very earnestly now; her hesitation was gone; she seemed to be talking unconscious of herself.

"You will know what I mean, Mr. St. Leger—a man may be very easily attracted by a girl like Bell, but I should like to be *sure* of the man who could remain faithful to her, and—to her alone."

"I assure you—" began St. Leger, eagerly.

"Of course you do!" she interrupted, with a smile. "But what can we take for a test?"

"Time!"

She was aware there had been no such test in her own case. Surely, St. Leger's prolonged absence from England had proved him in one way. But she was bound to doubt him, because she had heard insinuations concerning his imperfections.

"Of course, a man cannot hope to convince a woman of his sincerity by mere words—I must act if I want to win your sister."

"Act only consistently, and not in haste,

and I think you may have a hope of winning her."

"And you are on my side?" he said, with a persuasive smile.

Alice laughed.

"I think I am on hers—or I could scarcely be on yours! You are not to be foes, I hope? The best thing I can wish is that your hopes should be mutual."

"Mrs. Willoughby, I can see that you doubt me, but I assure you no man living could accuse me of inconstancy"—

"Exactly. But could the women do the same?" asked Alice, archly.

He laughed; and then for some occult reason stopped, and looked suddenly grave.

"I have never injured any woman by word or deed!"

"Now you are too serious—even for me."

"Light as my natural manners lead people to suppose me, I assure you I should consider myself guilty of a grievous wrong if, by dissimulation, I had engaged any girl's affection. The truth is—I have always admired your sex, and have perhaps spoken in

warmer terms of some than common admiration might warrant. But I never saw a woman whom I wished to marry until I knew your sister. Why, in spite of the advantages men have taken of my good-nature—that is to say my fondness for a joke—I declare that never, since my boyhood's days, have I even fancied myself in love. It is my unfortunate manner which is my enemy."

"If that is the only enemy you have, Mr. St. Leger, you are the most fortunate man I know; for your enemy will make you more friends than your friends can possibly make foes. If I am obscure, remember that a favourite has no friends, and you will understand me."

"Oh, I understand you thoroughly, Mrs. Willoughby, and your kind hint also. Perhaps I had better not urge the matter just now."

"And if, on further consideration, you should not wish to persevere—well then, you know, it will be fortunate you have not compromised yourself"—

St. Leger rose up quite excitedly.

"But I insist upon compromising myself! —that is what I mean to do. Please don't treat me as if I want to sneak out! I wish to let you know—and the world know, that it is my ambition to marry your sister; whether she refuses me or not, any one may know my intention."

What a daring ardent lover he was!—and what a handsome beguiling man he was!

"Surely," thought Alice, "Bell is in luck."

"I doubt that I shall have the strength of mind to take your advice—I shall feel like a fish out of water until this affair is settled. Indeed," he added inadvertently, "I refused to go to your husband's dinner to-night, because I should have been out of my element. How some people would laugh to hear me say that! But I really never am quite in my element at a bachelor's party; I'd infinitely rather spend an evening in the quietest home circle where there are ladies."

A dim perception crossed Alice's mind, that Isabel might gain a prize in the matrimonial lottery.

"I suspect it is the novelty that charms.

You would be found going back to the bachelor parties after you had secured the woman whose company you now desire above all others."

"Not I!" exclaimed St. Leger, hotly and forgetfully. "I should deem it an insult to my wife to leave her in loneliness—to take her from a happy home, and"—

There was a dead silence, when he stopped—it was too late! He had had no warning of dangerous ground, and the mischief was done.

He arose and went to the window. Alice stood quite still, where he had left her. There was a blank look in her eyes, plainly showing that her wandering thoughts were inexpressibly painful.

"I am afraid I have been detaining you," he said, conscious of his awkwardness. And then with a sudden outburst he turned to her, and said, holding out his hand—"Mrs. Willoughby, I believe you know that I spoke out of the warmth of my own feeling, and without the smallest consideration for any one else—but I cannot withdraw my words—I dare not."

He was looking straight at Alice, with a curious mixture of boldness, candour, and pity.

There was a wavering colour in her face now that made her look almost as pretty as Isabel. Drawing a deep breath, she looked up steadily into his eyes.

"I could not be so unjust as to pretend to misunderstand you. Accidentally you have betrayed your feeling in a matter which concerns only me and my husband. We do not regard—we never have regarded—other people's ideas, nor the conventional notions which are current in society. We please ourselves. And I must be most emphatic in saying that it pleases me personally, that my husband should find no restriction to his pleasures on my account—of whatever nature they may be. We both enjoy more freedom in some respects than most married people, but—that is not a rule for you to go by," she said, with a glimmering smile that was rather sad.

It was a strange and inconsistent ending to a sentence begun with a stately pride, that

seemed to threaten annihilation to any one who should dare to imply a want of respect in her husband.

St. Leger pressed her hand gratefully.

"You have convinced me that it is so," he replied vaguely, rejoicing inwardly that the incident had so easily passed over.

CHAPTER VII.

For better for worse, for richer for poorer.
MARRIAGE SERVICE.

On this night Alice was possessed with a strange desire to sit up and wait for her husband; she could not account for it, nor could she account for the nervous depression of her spirits. It was more than probable that Hugh would be angry when he did come; but still she sat brooding in thoughtful abstraction, until a pleasing thought of her sister for the time distracted her mind. She had Isabel's welfare so much at heart that she was beginning to feel as strong a partiality for Stephen St. Leger, as she had formerly felt a prejudice. She knew now, to a certainty, that he had been true to the memory of her sister, with the most perfect faith, during a long absence, and without a syllable which could have compromised either.

"Notwithstanding Bell's reserve," she

thought, "I am sure she is far from being indifferent to him."

And as she followed out this train of thought, she almost fell into a feeling of envy for the mutual happiness these two, who seemed so well to understand each other, might enjoy.

"How happy they will be! He is so entirely yielding, and yet so strong. Yielding is said by some to be a sign of superior strength."

Then she paused, and thought of herself and her entire submission, and smiled at the strange antithesis. *She* strong? With all her yielding, she had never gained a point. But had she not yielded, would she have occupied the position she now held? Would any one stand in close relation to Hugh, and not yield? He was master of every situation to her mind, and was born for dominion.

Poor Alice had never had the chance of knowing her husband thoroughly; and she blamed herself for having taken the only course that was really practicable. Hugh

could never have brooked interference from a woman; opposition of any kind would have been unendurable. And she found the error in her judgment this night. Even while she thought "I have been wrong to yield so much," a crisis was approaching her.

Two or three days had elapsed since St. Leger had called and had given her his confidence, and she had not, even, seen her husband for more than a few minutes since that time. There had been his dinner-party on that day, to which St. Leger had refused to go; Saturday was a day on which he was always engaged; and on Sunday he had requested that he should not be disturbed, as sleep was absolutely necessary for him. So she had not told him yet how matters stood, and of the advice she had given.

When her thoughts again recurred to Isabel, she positively shuddered. It could not be an envious feeling of the sweet companion of her youth, that caused the revulsion. No; Isabel and she were thoroughly united, warmly attached to each other, as sisters should be. There had been no bitter strife,

no jealous envying between them—such feelings were impossible to both.

It was true that there had been reservations in their confidences of late; but it had come to that time with both when there is—

> A dearer one
> Still, and a nearer one
> Yet, than all other.

But there was a truer, and a greater sympathy of feeling between them, because each had reached another phase of life.

It was now only eleven; the house was quite quiet, the servants had gone to bed, and the spacious rooms and passages were all empty. How dreary and melancholy they seemed to Alice! And she would have to sit and wait here many hours longer, if she would see her husband. But weary as it was, she would rather do this—sit night after night in utter loneliness—than go to sleep in the house when a gambling party held high revel until the hours of daylight.

When her husband came she would commence a cheerful conversation—she would not listen to reproof—she would playfully

protest that she had a strong motive in waiting for him on this night—she would tell him about St. Leger and Isabel—she would beguile him into an amicable talk—and if she could succeed in doing all these things, and could find strength, she would once more remonstrate with him gently and firmly on his "avoidance" of her, as she would term it.

So she sat musing until the neglected fire fell together with a ghostly crash, and awakened her with a start. So unconsciously nervous was she that she absolutely leaped out of her chair.

At the same time she heard the latch key turn in the door—and she listened. It was real alarm that showed itself in her face now. It was not Hugh! It could not be he! This was not his firm, rapid footstep—it was heavy and irregular.

Her heart beat violently—she was surely at the mercy of a burglar!

She flew to the window and flung it open, scarcely conscious of what she did, and turned her pale frightened face towards the door as he entered—her husband!

Was it he? What was the subtle difference she could not define? And with what painful violence her heart was beating!

Hugh sat down, and looked at her steadfastly without speaking.

She could find no words; a horrible fear, a sickening dread possessed her. How she knew it, she could not tell—but she was morally convinced that he was not sober.

There are stages of intoxication. There is one which is only just perceptible, and that to the eye of love practised and quickened into supernatural discernment. Hugh's stage was not that to cause a lagging footstep, nor a bloodshot eye; it was not that to cause him to be oblivious to his own state. He knew he had alarmed his wife; he knew she read the symptoms aright, and he accepted the position without denial.

"Don't be a fool, Alice! There's nothing the matter with me—except that I've just had a glass of brandy on an empty stomach. I've had nothing to drink to-day but that—and I wanted food."

Alice's face relaxed into comparative ease,

as she listened to these rational words ; for they were rational enough, although there were undoubted evidences that the brain was under some usurping power. The measured, mellow tones of his voice were lost ; he was always more natural under an exciting cause to the brain ; and he speaks now as rapidly as he walks and moves.

"Let me get something for you!" she said eagerly, still trembling from the effects of the shock upon her nervous system.

"No, no! Shut the window—and sit down. I can't eat—but don't be afraid, I shall get no worse than I am. . . . Alice, I'm a damned blackguard! I've brought suffering —unmeriting suffering upon you—for you have been a most exemplary wife. Hang it! I couldn't have come home at all without that glass of brandy. . . . I think you've got more stuff in you than most women"—

He paused, and leant forward, gazing on her with his abnormally brilliant eyes.

"Do you care much for your house—and your ornaments—and your dresses?"

"I care for *nothing*, Hugh—except for

you and the child!" she exclaimed, passionately.

"You will be tried! You'll have to know it before to-morrow somehow—and, I suppose, the blow had better come from me—than from any one else."

"What is it, Hugh?" she asked breathlessly.

"Ruin!" he answered, with a short, sharp, unnatural laugh.

There was dead silence—dead stillness. Neither moved—and neither looked at the other.

Ruin!

The word struck Alice like a violent blow. She staggered, and fell back into a chair.

It is impossible to recognise a great change at once; at first the effect is merely chaotic.

After a few minutes, her eyes began to wander round the room consciously—taking in every object. Ruin! She began to see what it involved.

At certain periods of our lives we are strangely prone to see things to which we

are accustomed under a totally different aspect—the surroundings under which we live are regarded in another light. It is possible to sit in a room, the comfortable well-worn furniture of which we have known from our childhood, when suddenly an emotional condition presents a new impression to our eyes, and these outward things affect us now as they never have done before.

Alice saw the costly trifles in the tastefully arranged room dissolve into thin air as she gazed—they were but shadows—and she had almost forgotten that she had possessed them. The very house itself faded into unsubstantiality, as though it were in verity "the baseless fabric of a vision."

And this very night she had been reminding herself that she had all the comforts—all the luxuries for which people live. But although she had been striving to believe that she *had* all the world could give her, she had in reality been comparing her own pleasures with those that others enjoyed; peering into depths she could not touch, because she had not known them.

After a few minutes, she asked in a hushed tone—

"Is it absolute ruin?"

"I scarcely know yet—to-morrow it will be decided. Under any circumstances, I shall have to find another roof to cover us."

Another silence—but it was not because Alice had nothing to say—it was because she *could* not speak.

There was not one grain of selfish consideration in this woman's heart as she looked at the half absent—half defiant face of her husband. A great wave of love and pity rushed with hot speed through her veins, and choked her utterance.

All truly great minds rise in misfortune—as, it is said, the rice plant rises to the floods—it is never submerged. Alice was not a wonderful woman by any means—she was only a true one. She believed in the superiority of men, and she had bowed herself to her lord with perfect feminine trust. But now she fell into another position quite as readily—she rose to it instinctively. It was a kind of maternal passion that seemed to

possess her now—the desire to comfort and lift up him she had hitherto obeyed.

For the first time for many months, she made a caressing movement; she came nearer to him, her whole face alight with sympathy, with tenderness, with a yearning love that defied repulsion.

"We *must* not—despair, my dear! It is a terrible—almost an overwhelming blow at first; but after all, reverses of this kind are not the—worst things that can happen."

It was a gentle, soothing voice which spoke the sympathetic words—and there was strength in it too. She did not deserve a harsh reply.

"Don't talk damned nonsense, Alice!"

It *was* a harsh reply. If it had been said lightly, and he had made a movement corresponding with her affection, she would have taken no offence. But as it was—

He looked up at his wife with surprise; for the first time in his life he saw that he had failed to subdue her. Her hazel eyes looked almost black in their sudden dilation; her lips took a strange sarcastic curve he

had never seen in them ; even her figure took a different aspect—it became taller, more commanding—so true it is, that our whole being will insist on displaying an intense inward change.

"I am able to talk nonsense without an oath!" she said, almost fiercely. Then in a keen, sarcastic tone she went on—"I cannot make myself wiser than I am—even to please you. You refuse my sympathy, but you may not, perhaps, be displeased by a prosaic business-like discussion. Will you permit me to ask, how this impending calamity came about?"

He could scarcely realize the change in her. Could it be possible that she was aggressive? She had so invariably acted and spoken with the one object of pleasing him, that he could not believe in her sarcasm.

He ignored it ; but he kept up the same key in default of a better.

"What can you understand of it? Women like to talk folly for hours over things they cannot comprehend!"

He discovered with her next words that her aggression was intentional.

"You reply as if I were a natural idiot," she said, steadily and calmly. "If you will condescend to weigh me in the balance of your intellect, you may not find me wanting. Cannot I understand that this failure—this ruin—is but an unlucky chance—is involved in something greater—or has been brought about by some personal villainy—or by an unforeseen accident to which all commercial affairs must be subject? I don't understand business—except in the abstract, and of that but little, therefore a great deal must be incomprehensible to me—but I really think I could be told the simple reasons, which will have to be told to the world."

He was too much surprised to answer this woman, who had scarcely dared to utter a reproach before.

"It must have been sudden—it could not have arisen by degrees?" she said, thoughtfully.

"Could it not? How do you know?"

"Be as satirical as you please, Hugh—I am in the vein! I *assume* that had this misfortune happened in any other way, it would imply neglect; and I know you have too

much foresight and prudence for that. I assume also—and in this assumption I may be wrong—but I *do* assume that you would not have kept me in ignorance of a matter that so nearly concerned me, if you had had but a suspicion of it. It does not appear to be just to have a secret of *that* kind from your wife."

He gave a quick, questioning glance at her as she spoke the last words; but he was satisfied they bore no double meaning.

"You would not have—kept it from me"—

Her voice had lingered back again, and had gradually sunk into its caressing cadence.

"I do not think that we need despair over that which is not irreparable. It *is* a misfortune—granted—but we can retrieve it. Surely, two people, with health and strength, and education, ought to be above fear of what misfortune can do!"

She paused; but again he did not speak. She thought he was becoming calmer, but she misinterpreted his silence. She thought

he was trying to bend his haughty spirit, and accept her conciliation. She knew how hard this change would be to him, and it was of him she thought entirely—and never once of herself. Again her overpowering emotion preponderated.

"Oh, Hugh!" she broke out, suddenly, "it breaks my heart to talk in this way to you. I am not in my proper place—I feel it! Let me be myself—let me be nearer in soul—in true sensation. Do not suppress all my love for you—it rises now superior to all earthly conditions. Cannot we comfort each other? Cannot you accept, even my inferior mind, as an aid to yours? Do speak to me, Hugh! I long to feel that you forgive me—and, indeed, I do not deserve your scorn!"

"How easily you women fall into heroics!"

The utterance of these words, with imperturbable calm, struck fire from the warm depths of her heart.

"*You women!*"

She literally flung the words out at him with supreme disdain. She arose from her

seat, and confronted him with a fierce fire burning in her cheeks, and as fierce a fire in her eyes.

"I—*your wife*—will not be generalized and classed among 'women!' I have hated that expression whenever it fell from your lips. Even if it were a joke, it would be in bad taste. If women are so foolish—so obstinate—so untruthful—you need not fling their faults incessantly in *my* face. If your opinions, and your experiences of women are so low—why, pray, did you descend so far from your high estate as to marry?"

"I am sorry to say, my dear," he replied, with the same imperturbable coolness, watching her keenly now as if she were a subject for a study, "I am sorry—but I must disobey you, and generalize again. Like all women, when your time comes, *you* can show your true colours. These reproaches are inopportune, for the mischief is done—and it is useless to lose your temper over it, as you will find. You naturally regret the loss of the soft luxuries that women love. . . . When a man's fortunes fall, he must expect

the gentler sex to turn upon him—since he is no longer of any value to them."

The concentrated bitterness of this speech was not called into being by his gentle wife —gentle still, though grand in her scorn. It was not mere sarcasm here; there lay beneath it true, unmitigated passion — a passion so intensified, and so entirely new to Alice, that its vehemence startled her.

But while he spoke, it was not of his wife he had thought; but of another, the remembrance of whom was far more distracting. The recollection seemed to transport him from the present scene, for his eyes suddenly became absent in their expression, and lines of irritation appeared upon his forehead and mouth.

This hour was destined to bring about a nearer understanding between husband and wife. She could not read his secret here, but she felt there was an impassable barrier, a wall between her and him. If she could only reach his side!

Moving mentally, like a creature groping in the dark, she made a natural correspond-

ing physical movement—she extended her arms to him, and the action was in itself an appeal.

"Come to me, Hugh, my husband! Do not be unjust! *I* never loved you for anything but yourself! You *know* I do not care about our fallen fortunes. Whatever happens to you, I shall not forsake you. As God is my witness," she exclaimed, solemnly, "I love you as dearly—as fondly as ever! In spite of all your systematic coldness—in spite of all suppression I *will* speak out now. The words are forced from me by a power that is not all my own. Give me one chance of reconciliation—one chance of being to you what a true wife should be, and I will bless this hour—whatever trials poverty has in store for us—for bringing me nearer to you."

She ceased. The pleading, impassioned tones died on the air like a wail.

"Let me alone, Alice!" he said hoarsely, burying his head in his hands. "I am a worthless wretch!"

Her heart gave a great leap—he was touched at last!

"You must not say so! I cannot allow it!" she said, with indescribable tenderness, and a defiant emphasis that was so peculiarly her own. She advanced a step, and placed a caressing hand upon his shoulder—it was all she dared.

"You have accused me yourself," he said, firmly.

"How, Hugh?"

"By telling me you could not doubt I had given you my confidence. What will you say when I tell you I knew things were going wrong a year ago? They have been going wrong ever since—but where was the use of tormenting you?"

"You knew it!" she withdrew the caressing hand, and said so hopelessly, so piteously "and we had that party a few days ago!"

"What is the use of cavilling on such a trivial point?"

"Trivial? Hugh, if we are ruined, it was more than indiscreet—more than thoughtless! You knew it—and—you gave a dinner last week. Oh!"—

She stopped abruptly, and clasped her

hands over her eyes, as if to shut out the hosts of similar recollections that came like ghosts—unbidden.

"Psha! mere detail lost in a great fact. Women never can grasp a subject; they always fix upon the unimportant"—

"Is *honesty* unimportant?"

This firm voice—this firm woman—can it be Alice who speaks?

Every fresh discovery she made in her husband's character seemed to make him more enigmatical to her; and, indeed, *she* was beginning to be as dark an enigma to *him*.

He reflected. She had made an accusation she should not have made; but he chose to pass over her remark with a laugh.

"Overstrained! You can't help being a woman, I see; you must take everything in excess, from your religion downwards."

"I cannot allow you to say that any of *my* excesses have troubled *you*," she replied, proudly, remembering how she had never even persuaded him to enter a church with her, or to renounce any of the many pleasures he chose to take without her companionship. "I

am willing to believe that it was consideration for me which prevented you from telling the truth. But it was mistaken kindness—besides that, it was morally wrong. If *I* had known how matters stood, we might have been saved this degradation. We could have retrenched, and saved, at least, one half the household expenses. I was under the impression we were living considerably below your means. How much better it would have been to take our fate in hand ourselves, than to drift onwards to destruction, as if one were a mere straw on the tide of circumstance. I am not afraid of poverty, but I do fear—I dread the name of dishonesty! Hugh, tell me—satisfy me so far—are you clear from any imputation?"

"Not from you—it is clear!"

"Worldly principles, I am aware, must be more lax than mine," said Alice, with proud humility. "I hold that, when prosperity is doubtful—only doubtful—people should take extreme care to live within their means. In my belief, the whole of this could have been prevented. Tell me candidly—could it not?"

"A worthless argument to enter upon now, certainly!"

"It has not been my fault that I could not enter upon it in time," she replied, quietly. "Are you going to answer my question?"

"Candidly—no. I made a venture about a month ago, which might have saved us—you would call it gambling, I suppose, because it was a stake of money against a much higher stake which I had a chance of winning. I lost. It does not matter—perhaps, I should have gone any way."

This explanation, which seemed to him so comprehensive, was hopelessly confusing to Alice.

"I am afraid I shall never reach any understanding as to the cause of the failure. Let it be enough—I *must* accept the position! But there is another thing which mystifies me—we have not increased our expenditure. It is certain we *were* living below your income, and accordingly our means must have rapidly decreased. There must be some explanation of this, I believe."

There was a sufficient reason, as Hugh

knew, but it was a relief to him to see she had no suspicion that the money had been squandered, or lost in illegitimate speculations.

Alice, seeing her husband apparently lost in thought, regretted her perseverance ; but her regret was wasted, he was not thinking of *her*. She, with her tender, loving spirit, and quick intelligence, was no difficulty to him, except so far as he had to mislead her confiding affection. He *had* a difficulty which was worthy of being called one, and it was this which preyed upon his mind and embittered his anticipations more than anything else.

His wife did not interrupt his meditations; she had enough of her own to occupy her mind. Had she not indirectly aided Hugh in his delinquencies ? Had she not seen that their lives were spent improperly—and apart ? But for her abnormal pride, she might have persuaded him by other courses than common entreaties that had no weight with him. Might she not have betrayed him into a nearer confidence ? And, no matter how he

had ignored her repeated attempts to gain a demonstration of affection from him, might she not still have kept him at least to the outward forms of love? But here her pride had intervened, and now there were no tender passages in their lives, no spontaneous caress, no mutual kiss. In this contingency, it would have been a supreme comfort to Alice if he had taken her in his arms and supported her frail, trembling frame. But she feared, absolutely feared, to throw herself upon his breast, and speak the natural words that rose to her lips.

Suddenly she observed his eyes watching her curiously.

"Well, have you satisfied yourself that I am a blacker scoundrel than you thought me?"

The tears sprang up into her eyes. It was a bitter pang to her to consider that, in any case, the world might hold her husband capable of aught but the strictest probity.

"It is my 'pride,' of which you complain, that is labouring now," she said, with a faint effort to smile. "I am striving to leave you blameless—you will not help me."

"You will not succeed! And when you

have reached the conclusion your reason will insist upon, your moral rectitude will ordain that I am too worthless an object for consideration. I *know* what you think of me! In your anger you betrayed your *real* feeling. Who is it mentions the woman who was too perfect to be loved? Byron, I think. You are too good for me, Alice! Other men have failed—and gone their way in all honour afterwards"—

"Yes, and quite satisfied with themselves, no doubt, after having ruined the lives of hundreds of their fellow-creatures! That occurs—does it not? I am not so unreasonable as you suppose; I *know* there is a possibility of a man failing honourably. But I also know what bankruptcy generally means. The bankrupt, who is not an honest man, is worse, ten thousand times, than an acknowledged thief. Against the one villain we can protect ourselves—against the other we cannot. We are warned and cautioned of the one—the other we are bound to trust."

Here her energy failed; and, with a complete change of voice and demeanour, she fixed her imploring, tearful eyes upon him, as

she said wistfully, "Do you think I could accuse you of being all that I despise? Ah! Hugh, it is you who are proud. You refuse to stoop even to justify yourself! I *will* be fair to you—I *will* believe—until it is proved you are wrong."

"And—then?" he inquired, deliberately.

"I will not anticipate the condition! There *must* be a satisfactory reason why you made no alteration in our mode of life. There must be an excuse, although you will not condescend to give it. You shall hear no further reproach from me. But until you can show me a more implicit confidence, until you desire my friendship or my advice, you may depend that I shall never venture on a nearer sympathy between us."

She turned, and walked steadily from the room without one backward glance.

"Come back, Alice!"

She answered from the open door where she stood—

"Not by your order—by your request!"

"Come—by what you like! I must know what you mean."

"I mean what I have said," she answered, quietly, closing the door, but taking no step towards him. "*You* have made it clear that I am of no value to you. Let it be understood I have not parted from you in anger, but in just self-assertion. You cannot so mistake me as to imagine I shrink from following you in your misfortune. . . . When you desire me to return"—

He gazed on her distractedly.

"Do you propose separation?"

"For a time," she answered, calmly, misunderstanding his meaning. "When you are prepared to treat me with respect I will come. Let it be to-morrow, I am ready—if you have but one garret as a habitation, I will come! I have not deserted you—but when I do come, Hugh, it must be on one condition only—that I shall be treated as a rational creature. Not only that—but as a loving wife, whose whole thought, end, aim, and existence are centred in you."

Hugh removed his hand from his eyes, but when he looked towards the door his wife was gone.

CHAPTER VIII.

I'll no say men are villains a':
The real, hardened wicked,
Wha hae nae check but human law,
Are to a few restricted.

BURNS.

NEXT morning the husband and wife met at breakfast. She attended upon him with a dignified, and calmly affectionate solicitude, and watched the heavy shade upon his face with deep concern. Neither made any allusion to the night before. Their eyes never once met.

* * * * *

Alice awaited, in intense anxiety, her husband's return. The hours seemed like days. She was tormented with a fear lest her mother, or sister, might come; and she felt a dread of meeting them until the whole matter was decisively settled, and she could freely absolve him from any actual dishonour. The resolve, that she would admit no error in him, was a necessary result of the principal

element of her character; *she* might be able to exonerate him, but that would not justify her in stating a direct lie in his defence. She was spared the interview, however, on this day.

Hugh returned in the afternoon. He came into her room with a reckless air, and flung himself down on a sofa.

"It is smash, Alice!—smash without a doubt! I knew things had been going to the very devil—but certainty is better than suspense. I am in an enviable position altogether—especially in my wife's desertion! Why are you here?"

"What do you mean, Hugh? I am here, because we have not yet made our arrangements. Pray do not use the word 'desertion,' however perplexed and disturbed you may be. I only relieve you from a weight of responsibility. I can be of no use—you will not permit me to know even the facts of what has happened. I will take the baby, and go home to my mother, and thus save you the expense and trouble of taking care of us for a time."

"Was *that* your notion?" he exclaimed in surprise; "I thought you had bidden me farewell for ever."

"Oh, no! you did not," she said, taking the words that were wildly incoherent to her, as though they were a jest. "I am sure, before you ask me to come back, you will make up your mind to let me be a real helpmate to you. Have you anything more to tell me?"

"Yes; I shall have to begin, where my grandfather began. But I have an advantage over him—I know my way. We must be away from here this week. I don't know what had better be done. Suppose we start fair, without any encumbering property, and go to some colony, where we may perhaps carve our way into a comfortable niche with greater ease than we can do here?"

His words, though still half in jest, were bitterly imbued with pain; he did not seem to be able to be serious.

"He is too proud to break down," she thought.

She took up his suggestion with admirable

energy. His repetition of the monosyllable "we" was singularly pleasing to her; she had been so accustomed to the egotistical "I."

"Whatever you think for the best, I shall be ready to do."

"What! would you sacrifice the pleasures of a civilised life—and undertake a miserable journey—and leave your family, to accompany a man without sixpence?"

"Don't sneer, Hugh!—you know I would!"

"You are a few shades better than the rest of your sex! However, there will be no cause to put you to such a test as that. The question is—what remains to be done? I have no objection to make," he went on lightly, "to your proposal. You'll be better off with your mother, than with me."

The careless indifference of this speech stung her. She would have preferred his wishing for her comforting presence. She would have preferred his refusal to her suggestion.

"He does not—he never can care for me as he ought," was the outcry of her heart.

"You need not be in a hurry—but before the end of the week this house must be vacated. I would advise you to see your mother to-day—she must know of our misfortune by this time. Do you think she will be ready to give you a harbour of refuge?"

"No!" said Alice, in her own playfully defiant voice, "I do not think—I am sure!"

"Can you give me something to eat? I am going away again now."

"Fortunately, yes; but you should have told me when you came in; I would have made different preparations for you."

"Oh, I must be glad to get what I can now!—my appetite must be my last consideration."

"No, indeed; you will lose health and strength if you don't eat. You did not swallow a morsel this morning!"

"Did you notice that? It may account for my being ravenous enough to eat a dry crust now."

"You shall have something better than that, although it is not a luxurious meal.

You will enjoy it, for hunger is the best sauce. If we do turn agriculturists, we shall find *anything* delicious after you have been digging potatoes—and I milking cows."

She chattered on during the whole of his meal, purposely beguiling him from thought.

"I'm sure people are equally happy in various stations of life. I'm positive that the balance of enjoyment is pretty equally kept. Really—truly the matter mostly depends on the people themselves. It is so true that—

> The mind in its own place, and in itself,
> Can make a heaven of hell, and hell of heaven."

It was well that Hugh's plate was empty, for he dropped his knife and fork suddenly at those words. It was not an impatient action—it was a fatal remembrance that awoke the torments of hell in his mind.

Poor Alice knew nothing of this, but she saw that some recollection had depressed him. She innocently reverted to it.

"Never mind! I've made you eat your dinner—have I not?"

He did not answer, he got up, and walked uneasily about the room, as if his mind were absorbed in the contemplation of his distress.

"Four o'clock!" he exclaimed, "then I must go!"

He was going hastily, when, for some undefined reason, he turned and came to her side. He looked searchingly and steadfastly in her face for a moment, and then said—

"Poor little woman! she does deserve a better husband!"

She met his eyes unflinchingly, although the tears started to her own.

"I wish to God, Alice, women were all like you!"

And with this seemingly uncalled-for exclamation, he stooped and kissed her forehead—not tenderly but gratefully, and apparently unconscious that this action was unexpected.

He left the room instantly; and when Alice heard the door close upon him, she awoke from the shock of the rare caress.

She fell down upon her knees, and buried her face in her hands.

"If I can only have strength," she cried, "if I can only have strength to help him—we may be one yet!"

She could have been compensated for all her past pain—for all the load of misery which had fallen upon them now, though the fulness of its desolation had not yet come—she could have been compensated by him even now—but it was not to be.

CHAPTER IX.

If earthly violence or ill
Suspicion, doubt—
Or custom, time or change
Or withered looks, or evil speech,
With all their stings and venom can impeach
Our love, we love not.

SHELLEY.

"Now that Hugh has set his affairs in order —now that we understand our position—I must go to him at once. It is necessary for his comfort. I can't tell you how kind I feel you are to me—I can't thank you enough for wishing me to stay—but I must go! You will take care of baby, I know, for a few days. She will only be in the way till I have swept and garnished our new house. I shall be dreadfully busy, and shall not ask for the benefit of your company for quite a week."

"I am determined to help," said Isabel, emphatically.

"I am equally determined you shall not! It is but one person's work to arrange such a

little—hem—bijou house, as ours will be. And then I have a strong, able young woman to assist me."

Mrs. Tennear sighed heavily in reply to her daughter's cheerful talk.

"It's a dreadful downfall! You haven't told me, Alice—of course you know—what arrangements have been made."

"Yes," answered Alice, with the same cheerfulness; "and they are not calculated to make me melancholy. Hugh told me last night when he was going—you know he would insist upon going to sleep in the empty house—well he told me then briefly what had occurred. He wished me to mention that he should have explained it to you and Bell, if it had not been for our visitor. You've heard the name of Marshall? It is not familiar to you, perhaps, but I know its reputation. Well, Mr. Frank Marshall has bought, or partially bought and taken over the business—of which practically he knows little; but Hugh is to be general manager, and if things prosper, as they hope, it is understood they will enter into partnership."

"Indeed, I am very glad to hear this! Perhaps we may hope for better days. I'm sure you deserve recompense altogether—though you seem to have passed over this trouble very easily."

"Now I don't object to take Bell to see the house, and leave orders. I can commence to-morrow. We shall be back to tea, mamma. How I do wish you were as hopeful as I!"

Then Alice kissed her mother with warmth, and the two girls went to dress for their walk.

An hour later Frederick Trimmer came in, and found his aunt alone. She told him where Alice and Isabel had gone.

"You ought to be out too," he said—"it's quite warm to-day! No one would believe the ice was three inches thick last week."

"I knew there was something wrong!" exclaimed the lady, as if she had made a discovery; "I have felt the oppression all day, I think I will put on my shawl and take a turn in the garden; the paths are quite dry enough." She rose, and went to the window as she spoke. "I'm sure it will do me good, and I can come in directly I feel chilly."

Then she threw the window wide open, and Frederick and she left the room.

It was remarkable how imposing the old lady looked beside her nephew, in her voluminous black silk dress, her thick crimson shawl wrapped across her shoulders, and her rich white lace cap.

Isabel was of precisely the same class of well-developed womanhood; she was just an inch taller than Frederick, and when she happened to be beside him he appeared to the very worst advantage; for the erect and stately movement, which was natural to her, made her appear even taller than she was.

Frederick was an essentially commonplace young man; almost incapable of description, because so commonplace; not at all the sort of man capable of charming Isabel's heart. There was little wonder that she had always resented his attentions, and it was strange how persistently he clung to the belief—that because they had been brought up together, or rather had known each other as children, she must in the end necessarily discover that she cared for him.

All new experiences influence our conduct in a silent, abstract, mysterious manner, which we do not understand. Certainly of late Isabel had shown an unwonted kindness to the devoted cousin she had formerly treated with unquestionable severity.

When Alice had once remonstrated with her upon her unkindness, she had declared, "It is my duty, Alice! It would be unkind in the extreme to mislead, or encourage him."

Now Alice was very shrewd, except in the case of the man in whom *her* heart was most concerned, so she had looked with some surprise at the gradual change in Isabel. A short time ago she used to flaunt him unmercifully; then she had grown less merciless; and at last quite kind—kindly cold as the moonlight or the starlight, and quite as distant. Alice discovered the cause in the girl's own heart—"As her own heart has softened, she has become unconsciously pitiful to her too persistent suitor."

And perhaps this was so; the influence of her new felicity affected her conduct to an extent of which she was not really aware.

But unfortunately this had fostered false hopes in Frederick. It was but a few days since he had returned from Plymouth, and already he was anticipating a return to the charge. He had even hailed with delight the calamity which had fallen on the Willoughby household, because it promised for the time being, to prevent the association of Isabel and St. Leger.

Mrs. Tennear and her nephew were evidently interested in their talk. They were still walking in the dull grey of the winter twilight, when Alice and Isabel returned.

"It has been all wrong from beginning to end," said Mrs. Tennear, emphatically. "To be sure, no girl ever married with better prospects—but all has gone wrong! Poor Alice has been much to blame! and so have I; for it was my duty to tell her what I thought. Women were meant to use their influence upon each other—who else can help a woman but a woman?—and at best a mother? Yet I, from a false sense of delicacy, forbore remark, except on some solitary occasion, when Alice always snapped me

up, as if—oh, she has plenty of spirit with other people—but none with him! I don't suppose he has the faintest idea of her strength of mind. No woman gains much by letting a man have everything his own way," pursued Mrs. Tennear, forgetful, it is to be hoped, of her companion. She was certainly carried away by her feeling, when she added —"Men don't value the thing that's no trouble to them! A woman, who lets a man see that he has thoroughly secured her, generally runs a risk of losing him. Your uncle was a great exception."

"And there are other exceptions, aunt," put in the young man slily.

"The whole thing seems unreal to me," continued Mrs. Tennear, ignoring his interpolation. "Alice knew no more of it than a baby. Their household expenses were nothing in comparison to Hugh's income. I wonder how it came about? Of course, there's no proof of anything—men can manage to keep everything dark by means of those convenient things called 'bills.' There's no knowing what he did with the money. Cer-

tainly if one considers his companions—fast theatrical people, and military men—nothing can be wondered at! It was gambling, I fear, that brought about his ruin."

"Women and wine—that's how his money's gone," said the young man, sententiously.

The window was still open; Isabel and Alice had seated themselves upon the sofa near it. As the two speakers passed, the latter part of their conversation was distinctly overheard.

Isabel felt confused, and pained for her sister's sake, and lost her presence of mind. Alice started up angrily, and moved towards the door, when she heard Frederick's positive assertion about "women and wine."

"Women!" exclaimed Mrs. Tennear; and then she thought—"That is not so bad as one woman after all!"

"You must be misinformed," she said, severely; "that would be too horrible! Why I would not allow Alice to receive the faintest hint of that"—

Isabel now arose hastily, but she did not

look at Alice; she went to the window, obeying an impulse to close it.

"It would be as well if she could," was Frederick's reply; "and better if we can prevent Isabel from falling into the same misfortunes."

The window went down with a crash.

As Isabel crossed the room, she looked once into her sister's face—but both were silent.

"Oh, Frederick, I am sure I wish you could prosper!"

"Not more sincerely than I do, aunt! That fellow St. Leger is as bad as any in the set! Birds of a feather, you know, will flock together."

"He will not ask her just now, depend upon it."

"Don't you think it would be as well to send Bell down to Plymouth for a while—it would be an immense favour to my mother," said Frederick, perfecting a scheme in his own mind meanwhile.

"I shall have no objection, if she will go," replied the old lady. "But I do not see how I can propose it."

"Oh, my mother was most anxious that Bell should pay her a visit!" said Frederick with praiseworthy invention. "But leaving her on the terms I did, I put off my mother's request. I have only to hint that there is a possibility of Bell's going, and the invitation will come direct from my mother."

"I should have no objection," repeated Mrs. Tennear, "but I will not interfere in any way."

Frederick accepted this permission gratefully. He was insanely jealous of St. Leger.

"He has every natural advantage over me," said Frederick to himself, grimly, thinking of his own short legs and thick figure.

CHAPTER X.

Most women have no character at all.

POPE.

HUGH and Alice have settled down. They are living in very humble style now. She does not disdain the work her hands find to do—in fact she is happier and more contented under their altered circumstances. Perhaps this is because Hugh shows more consideration for her, and is oftener with her. She, however, is more hopeful for the future than he.

A fitful despondency seems to possess him, except at such times when he is elevated by wine or company; and at these moments he appears to be lost to his own identity.

Alice has demanded confidence, and she certainly has attained a more thorough knowledge of her husband's circumstances—if not of himself. In these times she cannot fail to know the positive amount of their income; but so determined is she that Hugh shall find

as little difference as possible, that she refuses to appropriate more than two thirds of their reduced means for the household expenses, while he manages to get through the rest without knowing that he does so.

Of necessity, all set entertainments had been given up; but those friends, who braved the difference of position, still received the same thorough hospitality; so the young couple were not entirely deserted. St. Leger. Staveley, and the Tennear family came perhaps more frequently; and certainly Alice was never seen to so great an advantage. She had always been a favourite, on account of her vivacity, her sprightliness, and her natural kindness of heart. This innate gentleness of character, which, with or without training, must always be essentially polite, is beyond doubt the most lasting grace that either man or woman can possess.

There was no servile pretension in her; she scorned the paltry pride which scorns poverty. She had positively welcomed poverty, when she knew that it meant honesty. There was surely a pardonable

vanity in making all things as comfortable and agreeable as though no change had fallen upon Hugh's fortunes; but this vanity was hardly gratified at present, for the little house was very barren, and it was with difficulty she could even pretend not to feel the desolation.

Staveley had paid his first visit, with all reasonable haste, and expressly to show his sympathy. Speaking to Hugh afterwards he had said—

"You're a lucky fellow, notwithstanding the downfall you seem determined not to get over! You will soon stem the torrent—that's clearly evident—and sail in smooth waters again before you anticipate it. And you've proved to every one, besides yourself, that your wife is worth a hundred fortunes."

"She's a dear, good little woman, Jack."

"I'm half in love with her myself, I promise you—and the other half goes to her lovely sister. Only there, too, I am cut out—for it would be nothing short of insanity to enter the list against St. Leger."

One afternoon, after she had been quite

settled in their new abode about a week, St. Leger called and found Mrs. Willoughby alone.

"I've been expecting you," she said, greeting him with a smile, "and I'm very glad to see you. But really I am so hopelessly involved in needlework, that I hope you will not object to what is only seeming inattention." She sat down again, and commenced rearranging her work. "I shall be delighted if you will stay! Hugh comes home to a late tea now, and perhaps *you* can make that answer for dinner. That's right!" she said, accepting his quickly accorded acquiescence. "Is not this sewing machine a capital bit of machinery? It makes no noise, and travels through miles of work; and one can talk all the time—now that's a great advantage, isn't it?"

"Yes, certainly! It seems to be a little wonder—but where is the real little wonder?"

"Oh, 'Bell the Less' is out with my solitary maid, as the day is so fine. They are good friends already, and that is very

fortunate for me, because 'my lady' is very positive in her prejudices."

"And in her partialities, I think!"

"How strange it is to see you play so naturally with a child! I can't believe my baby is your first experience."

"I assure you she is. I don't think I ever touched a little child before."

"Well, she will not have the chance of monopolising you until her bed-time. I shall not permit her to join us this evening."

"You will not? Oh, you cannot be so cruel as to keep us apart! There's only just *one* other woman I would prefer to take into my arms—if she would come as gladly."

"Oh, what a poor compliment to my little daughter!" exclaimed Alice, evasively.

"No, we share a mutual passion of a certain nature, and no other can interfere with it. How is your sister?" he asked, boldly.

"Both well and happy if one may judge from her letter."

"Letter!"

"Oh, perhaps, you don't know! Dear me, how absent Hugh is at times! He told

me you knew it. Yes, Bell has gone to Plymouth; she went on Friday. The fact is mamma received a very pressing request from Frederick's mother. The old lady is ill; and she is quite alone. It was just like Bell to take compassion on her—because, I'm sure, she didn't wish to leave London."

"She is kind to all but me!" said he, despondently. "I daresay she can make gruel better than any one else—as she can do most things better than anybody else. But I think she's wasted in the capacity of nurse."

"Don't be angry, Mr. St. Leger!" laughed Alice. "She won't stay more than a week or two. And she is not there to make gruel—there are plenty to attend upon aunt—but to cheer an invalid by her society."

"Oh, I don't doubt the advantage to the aunt!" said he, impatiently; "I only envy her. Do you think if I got up an interesting complaint now, that your sister would take compassion on me?"

"*You* would never survive a long tedious illness at all," said Alice positively. "You are not blessed with patience enough!"

"Ah, you've no pity! But you'll give me her address—won't you?"

"Certainly not! You can't correspond except for *one* purpose, and—it really would not be wise to write at such a time—especially as she will soon return."

"And where is cousin Fred?" asked St. Leger, pointedly. "Of course *he* is there too!"

"He is here in London. Oh, surely you must be void of all vanity, if you fear Bell's old playfellow, seeing that she takes such exemplary pains to show her *sisterly* regard!"

"I admit of neither doubt, nor fear—only of impatience.

For as I am I live upon the rack."

"But you remember what Jove says for the comfort of lovers—

Whom best I love I cross; to make my gift,
The more delayed, delighted. Be content.

I will match you in Shakespeare any day! Here comes my husband."

Alice went to open the door herself; and,

after admitting him, she went to arrange the meal they called tea.

The men heard her melodious, playful song, as she had a minute's romp with the baby; sounds travel so easily over those little bandbox houses.

St. Leger had fallen into a different position in his friendship with Hugh. Since the painful discovery he had made, he regarded his clever friend as an enigmatical creature altogether beyond his solving; and had he followed his natural impulse, he would have withdrawn himself from Hugh's domestic circle, as a mute protest. But the knowledge had had to grow upon him, and there was a still stronger feeling which had grown to be stronger than any other. And this was one reason why he could not afford to drop Willoughby. Mrs. Tennear, it was clear, did not favour his suit, and therefore he could not push himself upon her. When the time came that he should have to do so, his position would be altogether different—he would be an accepted suitor. And there was another satisfactory reason in St. Leger's

mind why the intimacy with his friend could not be abandoned—for principle or no principle, Hugh was a friend in misfortune and could hardly be deserted now. And not for worlds would St. Leger have allowed Hugh's wife to think that he had been only a summer friend; so he determined to forget that unpleasant incident in connection with Charlotte Gardner as much as possible, and, come what would, to "stick to his friends like a brick."

On Alice's return, she brought little Bell. The child toddled with the eagerness of two years towards St. Leger; entirely omitting to notice her father.

"It isn't my fault she's introduced," said Alice, explanatorily to Hugh; "Mr. St. Leger will have her!"

It was really a charming sight to see the fine, stalwart, handsome Stephen stoop and take the child in his arms; and having her once there to go through a routine of amusements as a matter of duty. For Bell would not be put off with any deficiency in the entertainment; indeed the least deviation

occasioned a resentment, which could not but be provocative of mirth to a looker-on.

Hugh smiled drearily at the exhibition, and then showed a singular impatience, to which Alice and St. Leger were happily lost.

The tea-dinner was now set, and the child was handed over to the strong-armed woman, who seemed to appreciate that young beauty's favours equally as much as her admirer.

"Say what one will there is a wonderful charm in infancy! That baby, with all her pretended innocence, perfectly understands me. Observe, Mrs. Willoughby, she never, by any chance, treats me in any light but that of her most abject slave; it never occurs to her—she never could dream of my preferring any one else. And how she would tell me her mind of that, I guess! But fortunately she is above suspicion instinctively, being of the softer sex."

Hugh was now quite absent, but he was going on mechanically with the work of the moment, though evidently absorbed in thought.

"The preference of that young lady may be-

come tedious to you one day—she *is* a tyrant. You'll take some of this pie, Mr. St. Leger?"

"Certainly—a large piece, please!—my appetite imperatively demands satisfaction. No, the tyranny of a sweet, soft, delightful thing like little Bell is irresistibly attractive when it is dictated by affection."

"Leave off talking nonsense, Mr. St. Leger, and eat your pie."

"By your leave—the pie with nonsense sauce. Now, Mrs. Willoughby, isn't nonsense the best possible sauce?"

"Your sort of nonsense certainly is! I think it the greatest possible mistake to be melancholy when one is eating. Lady Macbeth says something I do not agree with. Becoming mirth and gaiety of conversation, I hold to be pleasant, but, 'ceremony' is an obnoxious sauce to me. Do not imagine that I dare to insinuate an error on the part of her ladyship, but rather a defect in my own character, which is quite incapable of judging what could have been pleasant to a woman of such abnormal strength of mind."

"The woman of the Lady Macbeth stamp

would be a great terror to me. Oh, have you seen Miss —— in the character? Milroy has revived his favourite tragedy, and has failed to find the heroine. He says there is no living exponent of the character, I believe; and perhaps he is right, though, heaven knows, that in her mediocrity, Miss —— awes *me* sufficiently. Now the Macbeth is understood to be perfect—can't say I appreciate it myself. What's your opinion, Willoughby?"

"I—I don't know!" said Hugh, rousing himself. "That is to say—I don't know how an artist like —— can make a study of so unthankful a part. It's bad enough for a fool to be pusillanimous—but a scoundrel is bound to be brave."

"What a weak argument!" exclaimed Alice. "Why I don't believe a bad man ever could be brave!"

"That's a false poetical notion! To my mind, Macbeth is not worth calling a man. When he had once done the deed, he might, at least, have had courage to abide by the results."

"His wife was masculine enough anyhow," struck in St. Leger; "she never appeared to know remorse, and betrayed herself only in her sleep; and one can't accuse her of losing her self-control there, because she was unconscious."

"Lady Macbeth is altogether an unnatural conception, created for the exigences of the play. No such woman could exist."

"You limit the character of women," said St. Leger, giving a scrutinizing glance at his friend.

"No; I am more of Pope's opinion—that most women have no character at all; they take their tone from men invariably."

"I think that occasionally they are more capable of giving tone. Woman is not the plastic thing you describe her."

"Woman is—precisely what man makes her," said Hugh, elevating his eyebrows, and speaking in his most oracular and cynical tone; "in fact *le style c'est l'homme.*"

"You are wrong sometimes!—say once in a thousand," said St. Leger, with his own pleasant airiness. "Now, let me see—you

were wrong once when you called me 'an ass' —but that was years ago, and I have forgiven you. Again, I remember, you were once strong in asserting that the author of —— could not by any possibility be a woman. Now the fact has come out, and, of course, you know it. It is acknowledged to be a woman's work, although it was published under a man's name."

"I should like to be authentically informed what other part a man had in it," observed Hugh quietly, as if he had put a most common-place question.

"What an ungenerous suggestion!" exclaimed St. Leger.

"I'm not quite sure," interrupted Alice. "For going by that measurement, we never know how much of a man's work may be written by his wife."

"*That* is a view in which I am inclined to coincide," chimed in St. Leger. "A woman's quickness of perception, a woman's delicacy of imagination must frequently enlighten the most highly gifted man."

"Oh, you've been taking lessons from

Staveley, I see! Well, since you are both against me—we'll adjourn. Not for a resumption of the argument, but for a cigar in the garden, if you are inclined, Steve."

CHAPTER XI.

When we have done with our sin we think it has done with us.

HUGH WILLOUGHBY is in his office alone. He does not seem to be heavily taxed by his occupation, though he constantly pauses in his work, and loses himself in thought. There are lines of care upon his forehead, and a settled ominous frown upon his face.

It was past the time for callers, and he was therefore surprised by the announcement—

"A lady, sir, to see you."

It was an inopportune time for such visit. However, upon rare occasions ladies had called for information, or by mistake. Hugh merely gave a sign, and the lady was admitted.

He started to his feet in amazement.

"You, Charlotte! Here? How dare you intrude upon me?"

Not one whit abashed by his angry surprise, the girl advanced boldly, and took a seat with some deliberation.

There was something intolerable to him in seeing her take up her position with the air of being quite at home. Pretty as she was, the effect of her girlish beauty was completely spoilt by her outrageously fashionable dress, her excess of jewellery, and her overwhelming hat.

"I've come," she said, "because you won't come to me—so there!"

The red flush died out of his cheek, his face became pale and rigid, the lips compressed, and his eyes emitted a strangely brilliant gleam.

He did not sit. He took a few sharp turns across the room with a footstep as firm as his own strong will could make it—and then he locked the door. He came close to her side.

"Be careful!" he said, in a hissing whisper, that caused a shudder in the now shrinking woman. "I have been uniformly kind—uniformly liberal to you. Beware of disgusting me—you are going near to it."

"I don't care," she commenced abruptly. "I want money! What is the use of sending me a pound or two now and then—and I

don't know when it's coming? I'm not going to stand it!"

"Can you, for once, listen to reason?" He spoke in a firm, subdued voice, with an evident resolution of self-control. "I'm a ruined man—as you know. I cannot be as generous to you as I have been—it is utterly impossible!"

"I don't believe it!" she exclaimed, with vulgar insolence. "Other men can smash—and be none the worse for it—and so can you. It's only an excuse!"

Hugh gave her a glance which was positively ferocious; but still subduing his rage, he continued calmly—

"I have done more for you than in strict justice I should have done. God knows, you've had enough! All your cry is one eternal 'give—give!' You say I am not a poor man—but whatever you may think, it is unfortunately true that I have not managed to provide for myself, as some men do. I *am* ruined—literally and absolutely. If I do make my way in the world again, it will be by sheer hard work. If you know

when you're best off, Charlotte, you will let me alone. Just attend—*look at me*, and you will know that I *mean* what I say. My conscience will urge your claim better than you can. For the child's sake, I shall do all that is necessary. Make no mistake—*for the child's sake.*"

Charlotte was evidently striving to maintain her consequential manner; it was her only notion of dignity. She had no strength of feeling, no passion herself; she could not understand those attributes in others. She was not afraid of Hugh, but for a moment; then her self-confidence reasserted itself. She was impressed with an idea that he wanted to frighten her; and she had resolved to let him see that he could not do it.

"Oh, that's as good as saying—*I*'m nothing!"

"Worse than nothing—if you don't behave reasonably. Your coming here is an impertinence, as well as a wild folly. I forgive the impertinence this time, because you knew no better. You must go now—and remember, if ever you repeat the insolence, I shall send

for a policeman, and have you forcibly, ejected."

"I don't believe it!" she again asserted, defiantly. "You're afraid! Suppose I'd let the cat out of the bag; that would be a nice thing—wouldn't it now?" she asked, jeeringly.

The man was irritated almost beyond control. At any moment some one might demand entrance, and his presence be required. He ground his teeth and hissed in her ear—

"You fool! Even this room is not mine—why *can't* you understand? If you choose to make inquiries you will find that I am earning less than I have been in the habit of allowing you. But I will be just, Charlotte—I will do for you what I can."

"What you can! that's a nice thing! Who brought me down to this? You call yourself a gentleman!"

Hugh Willoughby had become accustomed to senseless recriminations, and was almost callous to them. But Charlotte was a very cormorant for money, and her constant and

extravagant demands were never to be satisfied. Her craving restless avarice would have wrung money from a stone.

"I have done what I could," he went on fiercely; "most men would not have treated you so well. I shall continue to do so, unless you harass me past endurance—and then you may go to the devil straight—by the same road in which I found you! Pretence won't do for me—I know too much." Here he stopped, and turned impatiently away. "Now go!—there's a good girl. I can't expect you to understand honour, but I do expect you to trust in me after all I have done for you. I shall provide for your necessities, whatever my circumstances may be. And when my fortunes rise, yours shall rise too. I don't wish to be unkind. Upon my soul! for the last year I have given you more than I could afford. Now go, Charlotte! and don't come here again—or you may be my ruin!"

"Tit for tat!" she retorted, and then with a mock bow of submission, "Oh, thanks, I'm sure! But I didn't come here for nothing."

"But you'll get it—whatever your expectations were—as a lesson for the future!"

Charlotte had just sufficient cunning to discover the only hold she had upon Hugh. She could see plainly from the few emphatic words that her advantage lay in the child, and she determined to make the most of it.

"I'm not going without money," she said, with a dogged obstinacy. "If the child *is* to be took care of—how am I to do? I want ever so many things—I mean he does—and I must have a regular allowance again."

"Well get out quietly now at once, and—I'll send you something to-night. But I must have a promise—that you will act more consistently and rationally for a time. You know perfectly well, I have given you quite sufficient for your support—if you choose to spend recklessly, it is your own fault! Do make up your mind to be reasonable, and you will find me as considerate and as generous as man can be. But—as true as God's in heaven!—if you continue to annoy me—now you know the whole truth—if you succeed

in making yourself positively detestable, you will get nothing. Remember, there are persons who would gladly take charge of the child. I shall only caution you once more—if you persecute me, you shall pay the penalty."

His peremptory words, his authoritative voice, awed the woman into subjection.

Hugh saw his opportunity, and quickly opened the door ; and then he passed—half pushed—her out.

She looked round in astonishment, and for once was confounded by her position. There were two men in the outer office, and she dared not risk the gratification of retorting. The door was closed upon her ; she had not time to decide upon what she had better do ; so tossing her head, and adjusting her finery, she sailed through the office triumphantly conscious of three pairs of following eyes—and could it occur to Charlotte Gardner that they could be anything but admiring?

"Never admit that person again, under any circumstances, Elliot!" said Hugh, a few minutes afterwards, when the man entered

with a note. "She is one of those charitable nuisances, that go about the city expressly to waste a man's time and temper."

Before Hugh left the office, he enclosed a five-pound note to Charlotte, as a kind of peace offering; for he dreaded a recurrence of her attack.

CHAPTER XII.

O, me, the word "choose!" I may
Neither choose whom I would, nor
Refuse whom I dislike.

SHAKESPEARE.

"So, Bell, you let your sister get married before you?"

Mrs. Trimmer was reclining in an invalid's chair, enjoying the cool breezes from the open window; for here, in Devonshire, sometimes the air of April is as balmy as that of June.

The prospect, too, was delightful, and Isabel, with her intense love for the beautiful, was never tired of admiring it. The view from the Hoe, she had declared, was the most extensive and picturesque she had ever seen. She had been in Plymouth some weeks, and, even in her bright energetic youth, was beginning to find the difference in those Atlantic breezes and the smoky atmosphere she had left.

Although more than forty years older than

her niece, there was still a strong resemblance between the elder lady and the young one. All the beauteous curves of Isabel's mouth might be found in remnants upon her aunt's, and all the lines denoting firmness of character, so slightly discernible in the niece, were prominent in Mrs. Trimmer.

They had always been the best of friends. "You ought to have been my daughter, I'm sure," the old lady had often said; and, in her inmost heart, she hoped that one day it would be so.

Her whole affection was centred on her only child, and it was not strange she should hope to see Frederick one day united to this lovely, sensible, modest girl, who answered so entirely to her ideal.

"So, Bell, you let your sister get married before you!"

The girl laughed.

"It was not a race, aunt. Though if it had been, don't you think it was an act of grace on my part to give in?"

"Ah, girls do not know what is good for them!"

"That is equivalent to saying that marriage is the best thing. Don't you think that girls know better than any one else?"

"Certainly not, or they would know that marriage *is* the best thing," said Mrs. Trimmer, dictatorially.

"That is rather too oracular, I think."

"Not if girls had sense enough to discriminate. Marriage of *any* kind is not the best thing. But what do women look for now in a husband? They only look for the falsest foundations—money and good looks. Things were different in my day."

Bell laughed again; she was always so good-natured.

"Of what use is money," continued the old lady, "if a man has not the sense to keep it? And as for good looks—a handsome husband is always more trouble than an ugly one. Ah, my dear, things were *altogether* different in my day!"

Now Isabel remembered well that Mr. Trimmer had not been blessed with much beauty. There was an old joke in the family that he invariably frightened his own horses,

and that he never found one to suit him until the last accidentally went blind. All Frederick's redeeming points came from his mother's side.

"I suppose, aunt, we ought to have as much discrimination as our ancestors. It appears to me that no one but oneself is qualified to judge in so serious a matter as marriage."

"Judgment in that matter, my dear, does not consist in doing what one likes."

"Now, auntie, dear, that is irrational! Are we to persist in putting aside that which we like as if it were of necessity wrong? I should not like to take the risk of going against my inclination, nor against my judgment—I am certain they would correspond. I can read your half-pitying look, auntie," continued the girl, reddening with the thought that flashed across her mind, "but I know my judgment would not be blinded, even, by the passion of love itself. I think my fault is that I am really too cautious and non-impulsive."

"Nonsense, Bell! You are a most warm-hearted and affectionate girl."

"That is a very different thing. I am not affectionate without reason. I am in no danger of being misled by my affections; for I cannot even endure a person I do not respect. Besides, I have kept my eyes open, and I have had lessons—one close at home."

The old lady opened her eyes inquiringly.

"Yes, aunt. I see there must be added care, added responsibilities in married life. Now look at Alice—she has had troubles, cares which never could have approached her while single. And now there is this last adversity—the change of fortune. There was no fault whatever in her choice; her marriage altogether was a pattern of discretion—discretion could carry a woman no further. The match was considered an excellent one in every way. I remember Mr. Pearson saying on the wedding day that it was quite an ideal wedding, and one of the most propitious at which he had ever assisted. Yet see what it has come to!"

"Your sister knew her husband just six months before she married him"— com-

menced Mrs. Trimmer, in her favourite oracular tones.

"No, no, aunt," interrupted Isabel, gravely, "he wasn't her husband before she married him."

"You foolish girl," said the old lady, attempting to frown.

"I am positive she didn't marry him because she had known him only six months," pursued Isabel, in playful defence of her sister. "In my feeble estimation she married with the very best and purest motives—because she loved Hugh better than any other man, and because he loved her beyond all others. Both were completely disinterested, except so far as the happiness of each was concerned."

"Yet you have plainly implied, my dear, that there is a failure in their domestic life—to what do you attribute this?"

"I scarcely know how to answer that question," said Isabel, thoughtfully, "it is a thing which has often confused and puzzled me. I must admit that Alice has been unfortunate—I cannot think she has been at

fault. But we are different beings, even though we are the same flesh and blood. I must admit that I could not exist with a husband upon such terms, the system would be simply impossible to me."

"Oh?" inquired the old lady, warming, as women will, in expectation of confidence.

"Yes," said Isabel, reflectively, "I remember when Alice came home from her honeymoon, she told me, with great pride, that Hugh and she had resolved to be eccentric—to do as they liked, irrespective of conventionality—and so on. There was nothing I could disapprove in that sentence, for I am sure that custom's laws are often 'more honoured in the breach than in the observance.' In consequence of this arrangement I suppose they drifted into a wrong course. After a time they seemed to lead distinct lives; I have known them spend scarcely half an hour together in a week. They were on excellent terms, but Hugh seemed to take little or no account of her personal interests, and she is so fond of his popularity in society. Now, I—oh, *I*, so

treated, should have been in open revolt!—whereas Alice professes to be gratified. You see it would not do for *me* to judge for *her*. I think it is impossible for other people to judge for us."

"Nonsense, Bell! You do not give yourself credit for your own wisdom. You have judged for your sister in judging for yourself—and you have judged wisely. She *is* in revolt, or she is no woman. But it is not open revolt—and that makes all the difference."

"I believe it is possible to endure a great deal patiently for those we love."

"But why do women compel themselves to it? Why do they insist upon enduring? A woman is always tried sufficiently in that respect, under the best of circumstances; for when a real social difficulty comes in the way, she is always at a disadvantage."

"Is she?"

"Is not a man in authority over her?" was the interrogative reply, discharged as if it settled every argument under the sun.

"The exercise of a man's power then

makes a woman's disadvantage—that should not be," said Isabel, quietly. "It only shows how careful we should be before giving a man authority."

"That is true, Bell. A woman, who has known a man from childhood, and has tested his devotion to herself, is always safe," said Mrs. Trimmer, emphatically.

The allusion was too palpable to be mistaken.

"Not from herself, aunt," said Isabel, thoughtfully, her eyes rambling miles into the distance.

"Bell, I hope you are not serious."

"I am. A woman, who marries without the only one true and natural object—her love and the desire to make him she loves happy—runs a terrible risk. It is a fact you know that women *can* lose their hearts; and if they don't do that before marriage, there's no law that I know of, to prevent their doing so afterwards."

"I assure you, Bell," said Mrs. Trimmer, with indignant rapidity, "that no girl would have dared to utter such a sentiment in my day."

But the girl's perfect good-humour was unassailable.

"I do not think the harm is in the utterance—but in the act," she said, calmly.

"But, my dear, you mustn't talk as if a woman could not help falling in love."

"I am of opinion that she has little control over the matter."

Mrs. Trimmer's hands and eyes were raised in mute expostulation. After a pause she said—

"You contradict your own assertion—you admitted the control of reason."

"I did not say a woman could prevent herself from loving at all—no power could do that. She must love the best thing she has known—the best as she knows it. And indeed, aunt, I believe that nature has made us very susceptible of being charmed by some one man—though not by the many, Heaven knows! Surely a girl may go so far as to admit the existence of the sentiment called love, without being unwomanly." Yet the colour deepened on Isabel's face as she went on; "I want you to understand me, aunt—

in the instance I was imagining—which cannot be uncommon—it seems to me that if a woman found she had a heart left, when her hand had been given, the result could tend only to her unhappiness."

"Her honour protects her," Mrs. Trimmer announced grandly.

"Certainly," acquiesced Isabel, bowing her head in all humility; "but she must suffer. It is granted that having made one false step, there is no immediate occasion to take a second. Of course, 'her honour' must protect her. But I do not think a woman has much to spare, if she can marry a man she does not love—that is my code of honour! And he must be a poor weak thing who would take her without her entire affection. Yes," said Isabel, proudly; "all I can say for my code of honour is—that a woman ought to endure her position, however painful it may be. You see I do not attach more power to Cupid's arrows than you do."

Mrs. Trimmer was much mollified by this view of things; the calm certainty of this expression of her niece's rectitude pleased

her. She smiled; and then with half a sigh, she shook her head, and echoed—

"Cupid's arrows! They are sharp, child —sharp sometimes!"

But this reflection somehow did not seem to be intended for Isabel. The aunt went on hurriedly—

"However, you are right there—women ought not to give way to their feelings; they ought to weigh their own advancement in the world first. A woman should look to gain something by her marriage."

"Certainly she should. But there are different kinds of gain," replied Isabel, sharply. "You have mistaken my meaning, when I spoke of suppression of feeling. I meant only suppression of feeling when it might lead to impropriety. I cannot understand improprieties—by which I mean sins against all social and religious law—I cannot understand improprieties being committed, no matter under what temptation. At the same time, it seems to be in certain instances wrong to suppress one's sentiments; for it is mean hypocrisy and stupid vanity to deny

one's love for a man who has already admitted his for you."

"You are an honest girl—as open as the daylight, Bell! And I verily believe your extreme conscientiousness alone has induced you to refuse Fred."

A mingled expression of pain and vexation came across Isabel's face.

"I have never behaved unfairly to Fred," she said, meekly, in tender deference to his mother. "I respect him—and, dear aunt, I am really grieved that he should set his heart on me; because I feel that it is utterly impossible to have anything but a sisterly regard for him."

"I don't think you allow him to try his luck. You will not even extend the same privileges to him that you do to strangers."

"I—I do not understand you, aunt; I am never unkind to Fred."

"Perhaps not—but you avoid him. Ask yourself—is it fair not to give him an equal chance of winning you? You do not limit your walks and dances—so I am told—with other men"—

"But I should—I should immediately—if they were to propose to me!" cried Isabel, eagerly. She was perfectly serious when she spoke, but now, she felt an uncomfortably rapid circulation of the blood.

Propose to her! Had not St. Leger the irresistible, the fascinating, proposed to her? and had she not fled from him ignominiously —meanly, as she now thought?

A brave girl, loving, will stand by her colours, and be honest to the man she loves. And this she surely would have been, she told herself, save for that disturbing knowledge of his reputation for insincerity with her sex. If ever the time should come, when that fair-haired, exquisitely beautiful lover of hers—that happy, bold, frank fellow—should come to her again entreating, she would—yes, she would take him by surprise, let him speak without impertinent interruption, let him plead, and answer his pleading by a look —only one look. And then she could imagine strong, and tender arms encircling her, just as when she had danced that last delicious waltz with him – could imagine his true blue

eyes as they would look down into hers full of the warm passion she feared, and yet desired.

"You left off very abruptly, my dear—you would immediately desert any man who would propose to you. Then you suddenly stop and try to laugh as if you had meant it for a joke—then you blush, and your eyelids droop, and your lips part—and you draw your breath quick and short—and all this at the mere idea! You are too modest by half, Bell! You'll have to put up with, at least, one more proposal."

Isabel coloured more brilliantly under the knowledge that "one more proposal" had occupied her mind. She was conscience-stricken, and at once set aside the tempting subject of her contemplations. She hastened to dispel her aunt's suspicion.

"I suppose I am 'not called' to matrimony, as Dinah Morris said."

Then she hesitated, reflecting that Dinah had received the call, as soon as the right man asked her. But no such recollection

occurs to Mrs. Trimmer, who was not so well read as her niece.

"You see nature doubtless intended women to marry," Isabel continued, playfully; "but society, while inculcating that law very strongly, forgets that a certain number of poor, persecuted, besneered English women cannot marry. Let them who choose keep out of the struggle—or fall in love with—the impalpable."

"Ah, you can afford to joke, with your attractions, Bell."

"How can I joke without them, aunt?"

"But remember," said Mrs. Trimmer, taking no notice of the interruption, "the handsomest women are often old maids, because they rate themselves too highly."

"And however terrible the infliction of old maidenhood may be, it serves them right if they use their beauty as a picture, to be sold to the highest bidder. Now auntie, it's past your time for a doze; and I shall deem it my duty to inform Dr. Budd, if you do not abide by his instructions. Now what shall I read, to put you to sleep?"

"Why some of that obscure poetical rubbish you read the other day, and said you enjoyed so much, and I shall lose my consciousness in a general confusion of ideas about the fifth line."

CHAPTER XIII.

Now no discourse, except it be of love;
Now can I break my fast, dine, sup and sleep,
Upon the very naked name of love.

SHAKESPEARE.

IN spite of Alice Willoughby's persuasions, admissions, and convictions, St. Leger found himself becoming daily more irritated and impatient at the enforced delay of his fervent hope. The fact of Isabel's being in close attendance on a relative, who, it was admitted, derived great benefit from her presence, was plainly sufficient reason why this would be an injudicious period to press his suit. No; since it had come to this, he must wait. He did not believe that man had ever before been so tried! How much oftener was she to be torn from his side—or he from hers? He accused himself of procrastination, the result of which he now feared was subjecting him to an indefinite term of probation.

Now he had the firmest reliance on the

friendship of Alice, and he determined to make a well-premeditated attack on that lady, when next he saw her. He took the first opportunity of going to the little house, to which he had a general invitation. He found Alice, as usual, fully occupied, and also, as usual, most cordial in her greeting.

"I'm so glad you've come, because I'm expecting Hugh every minute, and it is not every evening he can spend at home."

St. Leger was not so glad, as Hugh's presence might prevent the conversation he had anticipated. However, the master of the house did not appear.

Alice betrayed no anxiety, except that of impressing upon her visitor the fact that it was impossible for Hugh to promise with any degree of certainty what time he would return.

"Ah, he's very like that fellow who had a certain phrenological organ which prompted him to make promises, but who was totally deficient of the organ which would assist him to keep them," said St. Leger, lightly, with a kind desire to pass over the subject.

He knew it was an utter fallacy in which this girl implicitly believed. There was absolutely no good reason why her husband should not come home whenever he pleased. After office hours he was certainly absent for his own pleasure, except the nights on which he gave public readings, and these might justifiably be presumed matters of business.

While they were having tea Hugh came in. He appeared to be in good spirits, but he had very little appetite.

"Ah, you have been regaling yourself on something better, I suppose," said his wife. "You'd better confess, or I shall begin to imagine that you are ill."

"You need not be alarmed. I've had a hard day, that's all! Give me a cup of strong tea, and after that I'll have a cigar. An hour later I may eat."

"What contradictory treatment, my dear! A stimulant immediately followed by a sedative! Pray what is your cure for being done up, Mr. St. Leger?"

"Sleep, Mrs. Willoughby. I always go to bed directly there's anything wrong with

me, and when I awake I find I have slept it off."

"That is a more rational cure," said Alice. "It reminds me of the authentic case of the gentleman who took to his bed on the occasion of his being crossed in love, and remained there for seven-and-thirty years; only I don't expect he cured himself, or he would have got up. There, Hugh, if that tea doesn't get into your head nothing will."

"Ah, Hugh knows of a beverage that would get there by a less circuitous route!" said St. Leger.

"But it wouldn't answer my purpose just now," replied his host.

When Hugh retired for the enjoyment of his cigar, St. Leger offered to remain with Mrs. Willoughby.

"I should distract and not soothe you, for I am an inveterate talker as you know to your cost."

Then after waiting until the servant had disappeared, he said—

"Now, Mrs. Willoughby is there any chance

of your sister's return between this and the next ten years ?"

"Good gracious;" she exclaimed, "it's like meeting the charge of the Six Hundred!"

"You have no feeling—you will not believe in me."

Alice gave him a reproachful glance as she said—"You begrudge her the power of doing good."

"That I deny!" said he, emphatically. "Nobody has any charity for me—nobody takes *me* into consideration. *I* may pine and wither, and the worm may feed upon my damask cheek in vain! I am not joking, Mrs. Willoughby—so your laugh doesn't come in. If I don't show my misery it is owing to the strength of my constitution—but it is doing internal damage I can tell you. It is quite a case of the worm in the bud."

"In all except the concealment. You are very fond of Shakespeare to prove your own case. Did you ever hear the quotation—

Oh, they love least that let men know their love."

"That again I deny—with submission. I

love, and am so proud of my choice, that I don't care who knows I have made it. *My* inclination is to

> Carve on every tree
> The fair, the chaste, and unexpressive she."

"Well, well," she replied, soothingly, "I wish you had been able to carry out the metaphor; I wish you could in justice have compared yourself to Patience on a monument."

"I shall never be patient till a monument is over me," said he, despondingly.

Alice laughed.

"I can't help it!" said she. "Now, if you will be neither ferocious, nor lugubrious, I will feed you sparingly with little dainty morsels of news. Isabel admits plainly that she is dull and homesick. Still she is not the girl to desert her post, and my aunt's illness has been a very tedious one. It is"—

"It has indeed," exclaimed St. Leger, earnestly. "It's that which troubles me most! How long *is* she going to make it last?"

"Now, who is unfeeling? Now, who is cruel?" asked Alice. "It really seems

wicked in me to laugh—but, after all, aunt is not dangerously ill, and I know that Bell is longing to get back to us all."

"Ah! but she can exist—and I can't. Sometimes a day seems to me as long as a month. I seem to be always wanting to come to you and talk about her."

Alice looked horrified, and put her hands to her ears to shut out his words.

"So you don't take any one else into your confidence?"

St. Leger tried to look severe, but his face was not intended for severity; he only succeeded in looking grotesque.

Alice laughed still more, laughed till he joined her.

"I think the office boy has shrewd suspicions of my state; I have often felt embarrassed when I have found his eye upon me. Often when I am building my castles I attract somebody's notice, and it seems as if my secret could be read. 'Isabel' might be carved all over me for the matter of that! I have no necessity to carve her name for the sake of remembrance."

"Now, what a treat you're having! And yet I don't doubt that with the basest ingratitude you will revile me"—

"I certainly shall if I don't get the address," said he, with evident sincerity.

"What have you been laughing at?" inquired Hugh, strolling in from the garden.

"I do wish you would take Mr. St. Leger off my hands—I can't put up with him!"

"You've missed a genuine Havannah, Steve. I knew when you disdained it you had lost a treat."

"Your wife is just trying to insist that I've had one," replied St. Leger.

"Don't leave me alone with him again," said Alice, imploringly. "It has been a regular peal of

Bells, bells, bells, bells."

"Well, I never object to your music, Mrs. Willoughby," said St. Leger, in an injured tone.

"But then I do not play unless you ask me."

"I wonder how long I should wait."

"I can't even guess at the period! I grant there is—

a consummation devoutly to be wished,

and these being the words of the Immortal Bard, I challenge you to contradict them."

"Fight it out," said Hugh, laconically. "Won't it be a constant battle between you and your wife—when you get one!"

"Only the best of friends can afford to fight, and if our battles are as short, and sharp, and agreeable as ours, Mrs. Willoughby, we shall enjoy the fighting as much as some people do their spooning."

"Oh, that—that's outrageous!" said Alice, running off.

CHAPTER XIV.

The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to scourge us.

SHAKESPE

HUGH WILLOUGHBY'S life was beginning to be intolerable to him. He found his self-reliance failing him, as he learnt what a hopeless embarrassment really was. When Charlotte Gardner had been amply provided for, she had been comparatively little trouble to him. It is true that scarcely a month had fled before the novelty of her charm began to fail; it is also true that he had regretted the entanglement as soon as he found himself inextricably involved in it; and he had felt inextricably involved when he knew that she was about to become a mother. Upon this he had resolved to do what his conscience demanded of him. And although he soon discovered the frivolity and shallowness of the pretty, childish creature, he never scrupled at the cost. There was no meanness in his nature, he had rather a desire to be liberal and

generous towards the girl. Only one condition did he strictly insist upon—the most perfect secrecy.

The time had long passed when he had taken any pleasure in her society; indeed, as their familiarity increased, he found that her coarseness, her greed, and her folly provoked his irritability, and made the rare half-hours spent with her a torture. Still he had never failed—he had never begrudged to provide her with every comfort and every necessity. He was a man of some taste, and he literally detested the loud and startling defects of her dress. Now that she was able to indulge in extravagance of this kind, her inconsistent fancies knew no limit.

While she was thus supported, her life was doubtless perfectly satisfactory. She did not importune Hugh in the manner that he most dreaded. If she occasionally expostulated with him upon his protracted absences, he could see quite clearly that this was done more as a point of duty than one of feeling. This was an undoubted relief to him; but at the same time there *were* mo-

ments when he bitterly regretted the position in which he stood.

But this last turn in events, this loss of the wealth which had enabled him to clear his path of the great impediment he had made, proved to be a three-fold misery to him. There was the constant drain of money, which was now a matter of great importance; there was the eternal torment of the girl herself, who was hunting him to the death; and last, but not least, there was the haunting fear which at times beset him, that his wife might discover the situation, now that Charlotte persisted in making herself so prominent.

"There is no knowing the littleness of women," he said to himself. "It is impossible to say to what that girl, in her pretentious ignorance, may aspire. I've been a damned fool, and—worse! Curse her! If it were not for that child—she knows how to put the screw on—I wish I hadn't been fool enough to send her that note! I shall have to make her agree to some settled arrangement, or she'll exasperate me to—God knows what!"

He was sitting in his office alone as he muttered these words. The atmosphere was heavy and murky this August evening in London.

"The sort of weather to take all the energy out of a man!"

He felt nerveless and faint; his hand trembled as he passed it over his moist forehead. "I'm deuced glad there's a chance of rest to-night, anyhow. What a fool I was to send that note! A sovereign would have lasted quite as long—and I'm precious hard up just now."

He knew that arguments were vain with Charlotte, and he knew too that, but for this difficulty, his hardships would not really be great; this, which had been as nothing, now proved the climax of his misery.

He sighed—and then thought—and then again his meditations were checked by a sigh. It was strange how frequently he sighed now.

"I'm getting into a queer state altogether—how my hand shakes! I must forswear drinking, or lose my steady nerve as well as

my steady hand. 'Money is the devil!'—it *is* the very devil to a man without it. But singularly enough it rather lends a grace to the possessor. But for the real unmitigated devil—commend me to the bad woman!"

He put on his hat and strolled out of the office; and just at this moment, sailing along the broad pavement, full upon him, Charlotte, the abstract point of his reflections, met his eye. As usual, she was in gaudy trim, her head gear exaggerating even the preposterous fashion.

Avoidance was impossible. Charlotte smiled with something of the natural saucy manner to which Hugh had not been accustomed of late, and shook back her tumbled ringlets as if they were far too heavy for her little head; and truly, with all its fearful belongings, there *was* an outrage on nature.

"Why, you are decked for war," he said, good-humouredly, although the cynicism of his eyes and mouth contradicted his tone.

"Well, I'm going to see an old friend, and I don't mean to let her know my bad luck.

Oh, I was going to write to you to-morrow! Can't you spare a minute now?"

"If you will turn aside out of this crowded thoroughfare," he replied, wearily; he was not in the vein for opposition. "Well, what is it?" he asked, when he found himself out of the crowd.

"Why, what can I want?" she answered, with an affected laugh, "why, money of course!"

"You've not spent that already?" said Hugh, sharply.

"I owed nearly all of it," she replied, with some hesitation. Then, misinterpreting his silence, she went on with flippant audacity, "And the long and the short of it is—I mean to have what I've been accustomed to."

The expression of the man's face changed magically—there was no trace of good-humour in it now. He was ready for war.

"Indeed!" he replied, sarcastically, eyeing her keenly the while. "I think now I could give a shrewd guess where that money went—where did you get those earrings?"

The tone of his voice was as keen as the light from his penetrating eyes. Charlotte was abashed, and suddenly confounded by the accusation contained in his words. She coloured to the forehead, the dull red showing curiously under the carefully trained yellow fringe of hair.

"Don't lie about it—it isn't worth while!" said he, grimly. "I see I've hit the truth! You're mad, Charlotte!"

"You're a villain!"

Retaliation he always expected; it was her only weapon. Truth she never regarded, but used the first abusive epithet that occurred to her.

Both were silent for a minute. He fixed a curiously blended gaze upon her, the expression of which defied analysis. It was as inscrutable as it was terrible. Then he turned away impatiently.

"She does not know," he muttered. "I wish I could terrify her as I do myself sometimes."

"I *am* a villain, that's granted—but I've done *you* no wrong, anyhow."

He spoke calmly and reflectively, indeed, somewhat absently, as though his mind had travelled from her altogether.

"Haven't you? Who knows where I might have been if it hadn't been for you?"

"In the gutter, most likely!" he replied, fiercely.

"Not at all likely! If I'd only known"—

"Do spare the reiteration," he interrupted, with impatience. "Of course, if you had dreamt of my becoming a poor man, you would have turned your valuable attentions to some other quarter. Who blames you? Not I!"

Here he paused, feeling hopelessly that his satire was not understood—feeling hopelessly at a loss for an argument that could be forced to enter that obstinate, stupid head. He had given her the money, which she had received only the day before, that he might escape persecution, and have peace for a time. He desired to be always kind to her, and invariably felt remorse for the harsh words she seemed to extort from him. He had some compunction, because he had been

compelled to put forth his strength to prevent her from repeating that obnoxious visit to the office. He had sent the note—the only one he possessed—as a flag of truce; and here was the result!

He had hoped she would have some conscience, now that she had undoubted proofs of his poverty, and here she was appealing and threatening as if she did not know anything of this. She had told him she could not take care of the baby without this money, and now she stood before him gaily bedizened, bent on pleasure, and the baby—Heaven knows where! She stood before him with all her irrepressible confidence—and the five pounds, in showy gold earrings dangling beside her throat until they rested upon the soiled voluminous lace ruffles.

It took but an instant for this reflection to pass through his mind. He could have forgiven the vanity which induced the purchase of the ornaments if they had possessed any novelty. But he knew that she had dozens of pairs of earrings, and it was mere reckless extravagance that she had

gratified. Still preserving his self-control, he spoke :—

"Now, Charlotte, I've no wish to be unkind—you must admit you have behaved very foolishly. And I must convince you that you must try to be more reasonable—not for my sake, but your own. I entreat you, Charlotte, for your own sake to try ! The money is gone, I know—so here's a sovereign—make it last as long as you can ; for if swearing will assist in convincing you, I'll take my oath it's my last ! And let me remind you that if you drive me to extreme measures, you will get not one farthing from me! As I have said, there are others who can take charge of the child—there are"—

He left the sentence unfinished, and left her, too, abruptly, without another word.

"She has all she wants," he muttered, bitterly, as he strode on in haste to drown his vexation in brandy. He could not afford to drink delicate wines now.

Before he reached home his frame of mind was sufficiently composed. He was freighted with false courage ; he had taken the stimulant necessary to make his life endurable.

CHAPTER XV.

All things act upon us, and we act upon all things, but nothing has so much influence as what we love.

LAVATER.

THE sun had fallen, and a slight breeze had arisen; it was still light, and Hugh was refreshed by his walk in the cool air.

Alice met him with even more than her customary gladness, with quite an unusual degree of excitement. There was a bright colour in her cheeks that was always so becoming when there, and was so soon to be produced when she was happy.

"I'm so glad you're home early to-night, Hugh! I've been so busy for weeks past—and so have you, I know. Well, now, you must not deny me the pleasure of showing off my own handiwork. I am literally thirsting for praise!"

Then she led him from room to room triumphantly, through the six small rooms that formed their homestead.

"You said it would be a 'poverty-stricken little hole'— now what is your opinion? I have kept my secret well, and I can see you are surprised. I actually took the trouble to get up last night to make sure this door was closed. For, in case it had been open, there was a chance that when you came in a gleam from your candle might reveal the 'drawing-room' in an unfinished state."

"What conceit!" exclaimed Hugh, glancing round upon the bright chintz coverings and muslin hangings. "Well, I'll confess that this is all very pretty—but what is it made of? What is underneath these verdant coverings?"

"That is just what nobody will ever know! The next visitor we have will be brought into this room after the banquet, and you will not be subject to the annoyance of seeing 'the things cleared away.' And now admit, sir, if you please, that your wife is, at least, fit for something, if it be only to make the best of everything."

"My wife is a clever little woman," said Hugh, kindly, laying a hand lightly on her shoulder.

Trifling as the caress was, it gratified her to an extent which would appear ridiculous to any but a woman who could love as Alice did. The same strange joyous thrill of her first love-dream lived in her still; he *was*—

her lord, her governor, her king.

All his coldness was forgotten at one affectionate word.

She turned towards him, and rested her soft pink cheek upon that hand of his as it rested there. He sighed. Alice answered the regret by still closer movement, kissing the hand with a lingering tenderness. Then doubting that this act might offend from its very childishness, she hurried into conversation.

"You have been guilty of a womanish failing for once; like Martha, you have been too 'careful and troubled' in this matter. Now, dear, are we less happy than we were before our misfortune? As far as I am concerned there is this difference—I have more interest in my life, because I am of more

use. I *know* you have suffered more than you need have suffered, because of the effects you feared. I think that apprehensions are worse than realizations. But you don't like long words—this is what you would say—we fear the shadow, not the thing."

"And it is beyond comparison better—don't you think so? No; I will admit that distance did not lend much enchantment to this view; and I give you the credit now for lightening the burden. You have been certainly bent on success."

"And, of ccurse, I have succeeded!" she went on, bravely. "We are both working to one end, thank God! and I am able to do my part. I never thought to be of any real use to you, but now I know I am. And, Hugh, when we work our way back again to the land we have lost, we shall find all our little luxuries so much more pleasant. We shall be so much more sympathetic, too; so much softer to all the world; for our adversity will have set us around with precious jewels, showing that we, who were so nearly perfect before, only needed a test to bring

out the hidden gems of our characters. Now, dear, I am talking nonsense—I even recognise it myself."

"Yes Alice, but it is much pleasanter than sense. Where did you pick up these pretty little sketches?"

Some half-dozen landscapes were gracefully displayed above the mantelpiece in lieu of reflecting plate glass. They were neatly mounted, and framed fancifully by means of some woman's handicraft.

"They are my own," said Alice, simply. "I used to murder time by painting in water-colours once."

"They are really too good to have been ignored. They are wonderfully soft and tender," said Hugh, using the curious anomaly of a glass to those brilliant eyes. "This is quite an ideal landscape—and I think I recognise—why yes!"

"Why yes, you remember Freshwater. Is it strange that one of the lovely spots we visited in our honeymoon days should have left an impression?"

He turned his eyes, without the aid of the glass now, full upon her.

"Is that from memory? And you did not think it worth showing—what a modest woman! Why you are like the man—whoever he was—who buried his talent."

"His *one* talent, you remember—he had but one."

She laughed, then turning her eyes seriously and trustfully upon him, "*Is* it a talent? I would not have proposed the exhibition of such works of art in our drawing-room in —— Place, but here I thought they would give a little life to the tea-green walls. Sage is an excellent colour when you've anything to hang upon it, but I do think that roses and lilies, and certain nondescript flowers which never had existence either in this world or any other, are to be forgiven for finding their way as decorations to 'poverty-stricken holes,' where there are no pictures. There is something dreadfully empty in a clear-toned room with bare walls. So you think my sketches are worth looking at? I have two larger ones we might put on this side of the room, but those I could not frame, for they are two feet long, without calculating the mounting."

"Worth about five guineas apiece in the market," announced Hugh, laconically, again leaning over the mantelpiece, and examining the pictures critically.

"How delightful!" she cried, clasping her hands energetically with the most perfect confidence in his judgment. "Let us sell them! and I'll go on painting in every spare moment."

"You would—no doubt." And he answered her enthusiasm by passing his arm around her waist. "But"—

He paused; and during the pause she heard a cry from little Bell, and knew that her imperious demands must receive attention.

"What were you going to say?" she asked, untwining his arm by a playful movement.

"Why—that I can support my wife still, I hope!"

"Pride, sir—paltry pride!" she whispered, and then she left him with a smile upon his face that made it handsomer, clever, and *better*.

But the expression suddenly faded out, and a gloomy brooding care usurped its place

without ceremony. Hugh Willoughby turned away from the pictures, and struck his forehead with his clenched hand.

"I had—forgotten!"

Yes; indeed he had. And now he remembered that it cost him much more to support the mistress than the wife. He had once been proud of his exemption from sentimentality, but now his sensibilities were quickened to a degree of acuteness he could not comprehend. He felt a strange mixture of shame and compunction in his relation to this true and faithful woman, who only asked permission to love, in return for all her tenderness. At such moments, when his better self predominated, Hugh shrank from the mere recollection of Charlotte.

Since he had found Alice capable of self-assertion, he had conceived a much greater respect for her; more especially as she was just as yielding—just as affectionately forgiving as ever. But there was also an additional feeling, which was scarcely so agreeable—it was a lurking fear of her character. She had proved her conscien-

tiousness, and it was beyond guessing, that if she ever knew the truth, the result would be a breach of a serious nature—a breach it might be difficult, if not impossible, to heal. Alice was his best friend—his only friend. He could not but admit it. Her whole interests were in him and his child.

It has been said that, "a man is seldom ashamed of feeling that he cannot love a woman so well when he sees a certain greatness in her—nature having intended greatness for men." Whether this be true or not, it speaks well for a man's self-conceit.

Hugh could not help loving his wife better—but—alas for the contradictions of human nature—although the reason of the man accepted her superiority, the feeling of the man rebelled against it. And it rebelled against the mere inward acknowledgment, for he had eyes and ears, and could but know that she did not recognise the fact of superiority. He knew that, notwithstanding the desire she had so emphatically shown for his entire confidence, and her insistance on the recognition of a certain equality between them, her unwavering loyalty made him still a hero in her

eyes. He could not be blind to this knowledge, and he was anxiously desirous to keep up the delusion. He was, in reality, more influenced by her, more attracted to her than he had ever been. He seemed to have rest in her presence—to have peace only when with her.

The sharp contrast between Alice and Charlotte had, perhaps, produced this effect. Only an hour ago he had had decisive proof that he could expect nothing but extortion from the girl who had professed to be enamoured of himself alone; who had by her protestations and flatteries degraded the man far below his own level. He cursed his fate, and his vanity, now that the latter had cured itself; for he knew that by that very vanity he had been betrayed into this pitfall, by a woman whose only charm was beauty—beauty of the commonest and most fleeting order.

It was with a sickening revulsion his mind incessantly dwelt upon this incubus of his life, the weight of which he had actually drawn upon himself.

CHAPTER XVI.

What are faults, what are the outward details of a life; if the inner secret of it, the remorse, temptation, true, often-baffled, never-ended struggle of it be forgotten?

CARLYLE.

Where is the noble, finely formed, easily irritated man, who has not his devilish moments, in which, were not opportunity happily wanting, he might, in one hour, be guilty of some two or three vices which would exhibit him, apparently, at least, as the most detestable of men?

STURTZ.

"ARE you sure there was a noise in the loft last night?"

"Well, sir, I didn't hear anything myself,—I was dead asleep when the dog woke me. And I was downright frightened; because you see, sir, I've been ill for weeks, and had next to no sleep. And now knowin' that the thieves has been as close as Smith's warehouse I shall be that frightened I shall never get any sleep again. I'm sure, somebody must have been trying to get in! Snarl ain't the dog to make a row for nothing. I thought it was my duty to tell you, sir,

because Mr. Marshall bein' away for his holiday it leaves more responsibility upon you—don't it?"

"Exactly," replied Hugh. "I suppose you don't relish the idea of a personal encounter with burglars? You were quite right to tell me, for it is quite probable the vagabonds are on the scent!" Hugh regarded the old man with some compassion. "Why didn't you mention your illness? While business is slack, and so many are holiday-making, I might manage to give you a week or two. Why didn't you tell me you were ill?"

"Well, sir," replied Elliot, rubbing his head seriously, "I'm an old man, and if I complain, Mr. Marshall might think I'm not fit to take care of the place."

"Never mind Mr. Marshall—I'm your master still, Elliot. One man—let him be ever so young and active—is not a match for a gang of desperate ruffians. The safety of having a guard consists in his being able to give the alarm."

"Aye—I could do that, sir!" exclaimed

Elliot, with such evident veracity, that Hugh laughed.

"You've got a good revolver—haven't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where is it?"

The old man took it from a drawer beneath the desk, and gave it into his master's hands.

"It's in splendid condition!" he said, examining it carefully. "By Jove! the excitement of a struggle with the vagabonds would just suit me. It's not unlikely they may make an attempt to-night. Suppose now, Elliot, you put the things in order—arrange everything as usual—and go home? I'll take your place—a broken night won't hurt me. And between ourselves, you're not up to a pitched battle. Are the men all gone?"

"Yes, sir—everybody's gone. But I don't like the notion of going off like a coward—though it's very kind of you"—

"Oh—no thanks! Clear up, and be off."

Coincidence may be—destiny; destiny may be—chance; and chance may be—fate.

It chanced—eternal God that chance did guide.

It is evident that Spenser decides in favour of destiny. Pope considers—

> All chance, direction, which thou canst not see.

Carlyle tells us to "glance from the near moving cause to its far-distant Mover. The stroke that came transmitted through a whole galaxy of elastic balls, was it less a stroke than if the last ball only had been struck and sent flying? Oh, could I transport thee direct from Beginnings to Endings!"

It seems utterly impossible to determine

> How our fates from unmomentous things
> May rise like rivers out of little springs.

Just as Elliot was about to depart, and was expressing his lingering doubt that all was in order, there was a ring at the outside door, now closed for the night.

"You are sure that every one is gone?" called out Hugh from the inner room. "Make haste now—you needn't wait."

"I'll just answer the bell, sir. I'm going now."

"Is Mr. Willoughby gone? Oh, I *am* lucky! I didn't know what time you closed."

"Charlotte's voice!—inquiring for me? Confound it! That man will imagine all kinds of mischief; he may remember her. What, in the name of Satan, can she want at this hour?"

Hugh went out hastily, assuming a careless air, and meeting a glance of curiosity from Elliot.

"H'm—it's rather late for business, Mrs. Taylor, but no doubt I can dispose of your question in a moment. You needn't wait, Elliot. I hope you'll find me alive in the morning. Good-night! I won't ask you to come inside, Mrs. Taylor."

"Oh, yes you will!" she whispered, when the old man had touched his hat, and shuffled past.

She lost no time, but, while he was yet in sight, took her opportunity, and slipped into the office.

Hugh was powerless, for he could not possibly detain her by violence, under the circumstances. He closed the heavy door, and went back. He found Charlotte in the inner room, almost in darkness; for the

evening was dull, and the twilight had set in.

He closed the shutters, and turned up the gas without a word. The light fell with its yellow glare full upon her. He stood still for a minute, and measured her with one comprehensive gaze.

There she sat—a woman, young and still pretty, but to him nothing else but a torturing reproach. The "golden mesh to entrap the hearts of men," no longer spreading its brilliant luxuriance in cultivated curls and locks, but roughly tumbled together, and so carelessly fastened that a drabbish bit of frizette was plainly visible beneath the faded hat.

There could have been no greater contrast than between this woman and the one he had left at home, in her sweet, loving, trusting purity; her, whose love he had betrayed, and whom he had neglected, and left to a lonely existence that he might revel in the false smiles of the creature who now only wearied and disgusted him.

As he stood there, looking at Charlotte, he

was thinking of her whom he had slighted until there had been so little of the outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual grace of love, that he had been startled at the demonstration of a touch of lips upon his hand a few days ago. Under all his wife's coldness, which he had, as it were, enforced upon her, her heart was as warm and true as ever. *She* was ready to work with him—for him; ready to sacrifice the comforts, even the necessities, of life for his sake; ready to do all these things without murmur or complaint. And here before him was the woman for whom he had sacrificed that perfect wife—a flaunting, mindless, avaricious, extravagant, vain girl, whose love—Heaven save the mark!—could not stand the test of adversity; who hampered and harassed the man she still pretended to regard, although she knew it was not possible he could satisfy her demands. This was the girl who had just spent his last five-pound-note on a pair of earrings, while, according to her own account, her child wanted clothes.

"Well, I've found you out at a nice convenient time, it seems," she said, taking off her hat, and flinging it on the table. "How hot it is! You're not very cheerful. Ain't you well? . . . I'd take something to drink if I was in your place. What's up now—that you're here all by yourself?"

"I cannot see how it concerns you. I am here because poor Elliot isn't fit to be here, and I could fix upon no one to do his duty," Hugh answered coldly. "Now, Charlotte, account for your conduct, please. You have wilfully disobeyed my commands. Did you think I was playing with you when I prohibited your visits here?"

"I haven't thought anything about it. But we've got a little account to settle—I've had no money this fortnight."

"That's false! I gave you five pounds a fortnight ago, I gave you a sovereign two days afterwards, and I sent you two pounds on Monday. It is of no use denying you received it, Charlotte. I can see that you're preparing to equivocate, and shuffle out of a falsehood. You told me you owed the

money with which you bought your earrings; no doubt you thought the cunning lie was clever. I have no doubt you do owe the money—but I know how you spent it."

"I'm like most people—when I've got money I like to spend it. And I ain't the only one that owes money and don't pay it."

This was evidently intended as a home-thrust.

"That's the way with people; they blame us for doing what they're doing theirselves. If I've done anything wrong, so have you, and yet you keep bullying me as if I was a pickpocket. I haven't come to you for anything but my rights. I know you don't want me; you could come to me if you did—like you used to once often enough."

"Stop that clatter!" said Hugh, moving for the first time from his statuesque position, and coming nearer to her. "I'll speak to you once for all," he said, calmly and impressively, "once for all. I'll let you know the ground you're standing on, Charlotte."

She interrupted with a grimace; and he

regarded her steadily, and with the utmost gravity, until she had finished, and then he continued with the same impressiveness, taking no notice whatever of her aggression.

"You make a great deal of fuss about your demands on me; do you know what they are legally—that is in reality? Let me tell you; they are just what I have called them—*your demands*—nothing more. And if *I* please they may remain so. My obligation to you consists in this—I have a merely sentimental feeling about the child. *You* are no better perhaps, and no worse certainly, than when you professed your preference so openly. No; do not interrupt, but listen. I insist upon being heard. I have said, I will do my best, and I will do so to the best of my ability, and, in accordance with my means, will maintain you and the child. This I will swear. Further than this, *you* must swear to discharge your duty to the child. I make no other claim on you. But if I discover that he is neglected, I intend, at all risks, to withdraw my support from you, and to entrust him to the care of some honest

old woman, who would not have the heart to deprive a child of that which was needful, in order to deck herself with gaudy unnecessary jewellery."

Hugh had caught sight of the glittering baubles in Charlotte's ears, and his resentment had overcome his discretion.

Her anger blazed forth on the instant; she burst out with loud vehemence—

"Why did I care for you? Because I thought you wanted to make a lady of me. Of course, your fine lady of a wife has got earrings that would weigh down mine—and she's got no more right to them than me. What one has the other ought to have."

No words the woman could have uttered could have incensed Hugh so mercilessly against her. His wife—his enduring unselfish Alice—wearing nothing but her plain, modest clothing, made now by her own hands; his own unsuspecting, faithful wife, who had never cared for luxury, who gave up every comfort to him and their child, who pressed upon him, even now, a great portion of their reduced means that *he* might not

suffer from the change—oh, the profanity of the woman's tongue!

His blood ran literally at fever heat; he spoke in a hard, dry voice—

"I have warned you before to-day to beware of mentioning my wife."

"I shall say what I like. *She's* got all she wants, I'll be bound to say. And it ain't fair to me"—

"Fair!" he exclaimed, in ungovernable rage; and then he ceased speaking, and turned aside to gain the composure he had momentarily lost. "You take strange liberties—you have no idea what risk you run when you allude to my wife."

"What risk?" she inquired sarcastically. "Who's afraid?"

He ground his teeth.

"The risk of being cast off altogether—do you understand that?"

"You always could bounce, I know. Now, look here—I've got myself to look to, and if you don't promise to give me a fiver a-week regular, and that's a come down—I shall just let your lady know what a right sort of husband she's got."

Hugh sprang upon her like a tiger the instant her shrill voice ceased. His supple nervous hand clenched her wrist like a vice. Then, as suddenly as he had grasped it, he dropped it.

"Take care!" he hissed with savage force, "take care how you threaten! Once more I warn you, Charlotte, you have got your master. I'll let no damned ignorant, lying woman hold herself equal to me! . . . If you know when you're well off, you'll get out of this place at once."

The man seemed suddenly to develop an impatient irritability which partook strangely of fear. It could not be fear of her? Of what then—of himself? "You know that I could turn you out this instant, but I don't want to use violence. I don't want an uproar in the neighbourhood—and you haven't sense enough to see how far you can go," he exclaimed in a savage parenthesis. "I know how I have most erred with you—by being too kind! Don't drive me to extremes! I have borne enough in all conscience from you—and paid enough every way, God knows!

Now do try and be a reasonable woman, and go home in peace. Can't you see that I wish to be kind to you? Can't you see that I might have kicked you off like a dog, if I had chosen? I am anxious to give you every opportunity of doing the best for yourself."

He spoke now soothingly, and almost appealingly. He did not look at her; he kept his eyes persistently away.

"Do, Charlotte—do go! You may congratulate yourself on having secured an annuity sufficient for your support, at least—that surely is something to have gained. And for the rest—your future is in your own hands."

"And that's as good as saying you don't want any more to do with me after to-night. I suppose you think I'm to be took in without a regular promise. What's saying you'll maintain me? Settle the five pound a week and have done with it—or I'll never give you nor her no peace!"

As she uttered the last word the girl caught the gleam of his dark eyes—it was demoniacal! She shuddered.

Truly those eyes were terrible in their impenetrable meaning, though the meaning was utterly vague to her.

He never spoke; his threatening eyes roved from her to the desk. There was a momentary start, and then a gradual instinctive movement, as though a something unreal, untangible, drew him towards the private drawer where he had placed the revolver. His mind was a tablet of unutterable thoughts. If he could succeed in alarming her—

"I told you when you began to throw me over, you should suffer for it—and so you shall. I'm not afraid of you, Willoughby, or her—and so you'll precious soon find out if you don't promise what I want. I'll write to her myself, and expose your vile conduct to me—which won't assist you in making yourself agreeable to her."

Poor silly angered Charlotte! she had but one idea—that of gaining her point; and she had no doubt that obstinacy would carry the day. She was hopelessly incapable of understanding his character, and so she was

completely unaware of her danger. The desperate man, with the fixed impenetrable face, who cautiously, and half unconsciously, backed step by step, as if he actually feared contact with her, was utterly unknown to her. Blind to her fate, she taunted him still, somewhat as though she enjoyed it, and laughed with a harsh shriek that sounded wild and unearthly.

"If you don't promise—I'll worry you both. I'll torment you—so help me"—

The devilish gleam that shot from his eyes stopped the angry blasphemous words upon her tongue. She saw a quick determined movement—heard the sharp click of a key—saw him rapidly twist that iron wrist inside the drawer without once removing those glittering eyes—glittering with the unconquerable ferocity of malignant rage—saw a deadly weapon levelled at her—

She turned and fled.

A woman's shriek—a sharp ringing report—a pistol-shot in the still, oppressive, threatening night—

CHAPTER XVII.

> As the tread
> Of coming footsteps cheats the midnight watcher
> Who holds her heart and waits to hear them pause,
> And hears them never pause, but pass and die.
>
> GEORGE ELIOT.

TWELVE—one—two o'clock.

"No Hugh to-night!" sighed Alice, "and he left with such fair promises this morning."

She could not bear to abandon her hope for her husband's complete reformation. The time had passed when she could see no fault in him, but now she found ample excuse for his errors in the severe trial he had lately suffered.

"His insobriety has been entirely caused by his trouble, and he drinks when he receives any extra annoyance merely to drown his care."

She dated this bad habit, into which he had fallen, from the night when he had told her of the disaster which had rendered him a

poor, if not a dishonourable man. She felt for the suffering of his proud unbroken spirit with every throb of her warm heart. She was gentler, kinder, more forbearing than ever because of this.

Another sigh—then tears; not such tears as lie near the eyes—tears that custom renders common. There was no distortion of the fair white face, but only a tremulous movement of the compressed lips, and large drops fall from the uplifted eyes. It is not sudden, hot, impulsive grief, that weeps like this; it is only the half-broken heart that weeps in silence.

Three o'clock!

Somehow to-night she could not even attempt to sleep. Accustomed as she was to his absence, there was something of which she was strangely apprehensive. She was restless and impatient.

"I shall wait for him if I wait all night! I will see *how* he comes home; and I will say nothing then, but appeal to his reason when he is sober. He is never so late as this now —unless he has been drinking. He might—

I thought he would have kept his word to-night."

The words were uttered in a low moaning voice.

"I will appeal to his reason! He has been so much more homely lately—and in spite of the dreadful habit which has grown upon him —and in spite of the trouble he cannot throw over—he may yet be cured of his melancholy. All might be well—but for so little."

But the words sadly belied their hope. Alice had had so much to strive against, to hope for, in vain, that it was little wonder indeed that she should be disheartened.

At such times as these she was always despondent; it was perhaps only natural. How often had she sat thus, and listened for the well-known sound of his footstep! Now she wondered again and again what were the amusements that ran so far into the hours of the night? She could understand his having frequent engagements that it would not be wise in him to forego; but here she was entirely puzzled. Yes! she certainly would make an effort to prove to him the danger,

the folly of his present course—at the risk of his displeasure she would do this.

The dawn—and such a dawn!

In August, the morning should break bright and glorious with the unrevealed splendours of the day, but now it was past five o'clock, and no gleam of sunshine had shed a ray upon the sultry, slumberous earth. There was a weight over all things, and the still, heavy masses of coppery clouds seemed to add to the intense heat.

Yes! this is his footstep—swift—hurried—irregular—she almost expects to hear another step in pursuit!

Her heart yearns to him! He has broken away from those unholy revellers at last! Was it for her sake? She begins to think she has some influence with him—and what may she not achieve with this? May she not break the old bonds entirely? How gently, how carefully, how tenderly she will act with him!

She draws her white dressing gown closely around her, and hastens to the door to admit her husband. He, however, opened the door

with his latch-key and passed her in the dim narrow passage without a backward glance.

She closes and bolts the street door before returning. It is quite an unnecessary act, but she is acting half unconsciously. Then she goes into the room, and draws aside the curtain to admit more of the strange unusual light of the morning.

Then she sees him—and is startled by an unknown fear.

Is he ill? What causes that awful pallor which covers his face as with a mask? She has seen him intoxicated—but surely the worst stage of drunkenness is not like this! His eyes are glittering, and bent, as it were, upon something she cannot find in vacancy. Her heart ceases beating, and an involuntary shudder runs through her. Her worst anticipations were not realized—how she wishes that they were! She is convinced that he is sober!

Neither speaks a word. He gives a rapid, startled glance at the door—another at his wife's dilated eyes—and becomes conscious of her presence. He passes his hand roughly

across his brow, as if to clear away the confusion of his brain. There is dead silence as those two people stand there, but for the ceaseless monotonous tick-tack of the clock—they stand there gazing at each other as if they were strangers.

A sharp, rattling sound of wheels broke the spell; both started at once into reality.

"What—ails you—Alice?"

Hugh jerks out the words spasmodically; his wife cannot dream what the effort is to him.

"I? Oh, Hugh!—what has happened to you?"

"To me?"

Another dead silence, during which he draws his breath with deep, laborious gasps.

"Oh, what is the matter?" she exclaimed, in alarm. "You are exhausted—you cannot speak!"

With an attempt at his natural, quiet ease, he moved quickly to her side.

"Why, I've come back to my wife! I didn't keep my word—and she is offended! Well, it was really unavoidable. I took

Elliot's place to-night—the poor old fellow's ill. The policeman has the watch now—so you see I lost no time in getting back to you."

"Oh, my darling!" she cried, impulsively, "I am not offended! It—it was not that. I—I cannot understand you—you look—so unlike yourself!"

She lifted her slender hand and tremblingly placed it in his; her thin white sleeve resting upon his coat. She lifted her questioning eyes to his, those dark hazel lights that would never have led him astray.

How could he answer those faithful eyes? and yet how plainly they asked for confidence!

He moved uneasily—he could not bear that look.

"How you tremble! How your eyes shine!"

He shook her off excitedly, but not roughly.

"What is this? Oh, Hugh! your coat is wet! Look here!" She held up her arm, and there was a large red stain upon her white sleeve. "And—there is blood upon your wrist!"

"Where?" he cried, as excitedly as she had spoken. "I did not know it."

"Let me see! What a horrible gash! What *has* happened? For heaven's sake, tell me, Hugh! Let me bind it up—it should have been strapped, Oh, my dear, what have you been doing?"

She spoke in a frightened, tearful voice.

He made a powerful effort, and answered carelessly—

"Nothing! Women are such cowards at the sight of blood! You ought to have been in bed."

"I'm glad I was not!" she said, boldly. "Oh, I am not to be put off! You have been injured, and I must know all about it."

She took a handkerchief from her work-basket, and bound the wrist carefully; he could not prevent her from doing this, and he strove with all his might, to keep his nerves steady.

But she knows that he is strangely moved—her sympathy wells up in her inmost heart, and she dares to do what her strong emotion prompts. She leans towards him with a

familiar movement, and turns her face full of pleading love, as if to ask a caress.

He kiss *her!*

Instead, he turns away his head, and utters a groan.

Her arms are tremblingly thrown around him, and are as tremblingly repulsed.

"Oh, my wife! I am not worthy of your care."

Again the unknown terror came upon his face—again he strove for control, and gained it.

"What a persistent creature! Will nothing but the truth satisfy you? Well, promise me, if I ease your mind, that you will say no more about it, and go away and sleep off your fright for two or three hours. And, Alice—you shall never have to wait another hour for me! I told you I took Elliot's place. The fact is he suspected thieves"—

"Oh!" shrieked Alice, "you might have been killed!"

A spasmodic tremor overtook him.

"It is nothing, Alice—nothing! You are

too apprehensive. They never came—but that beastly dog and I had a scrimmage."

"What, Snarl, who is so clever? and knows you so well?"

"Oh, it was an accident, of course!"

"But—he could not cut—that must have been done with a knife!"

"Exactly, perspicacious creature! I had one in my hand"—

He stopped abruptly, and caught his breath with a choking gasp.

"There is—pain—I'm sure you're hurt!"

"Well, well, it shall have proper attention to-morrow—that is to-day—but not unless you go to bed."

"And what will you do?"

"I could not sleep—at least I think not. I will throw myself down on the sofa for an hour, and then perhaps I shall rest."

"But you will not have to go away early?"

"I—I think so—I don't know. I'll do as you like when the time comes. Go, Alice—go now."

END OF VOL. II.

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