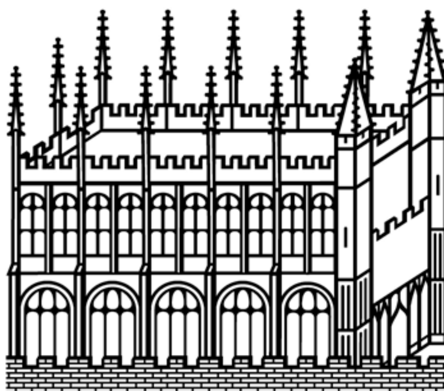

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TALES FROM MANY SOURCES

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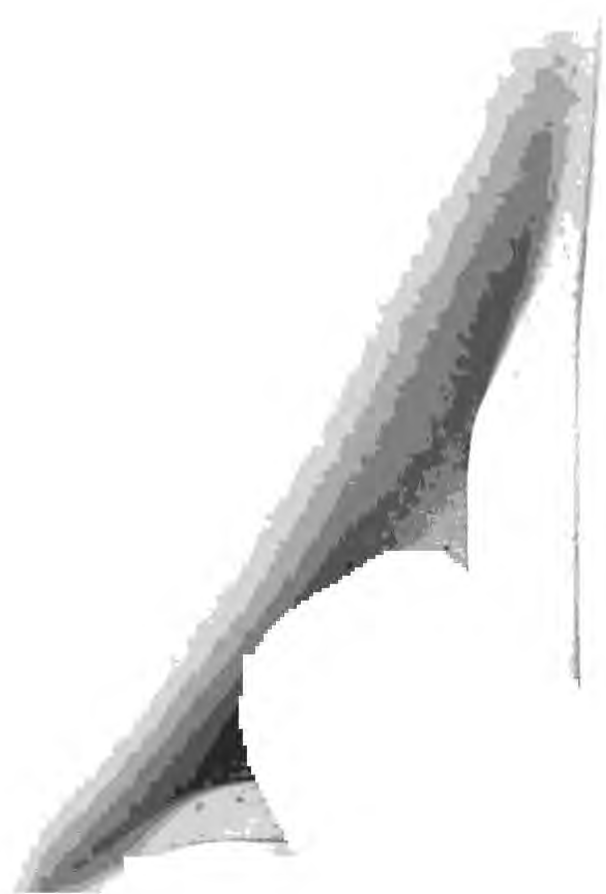

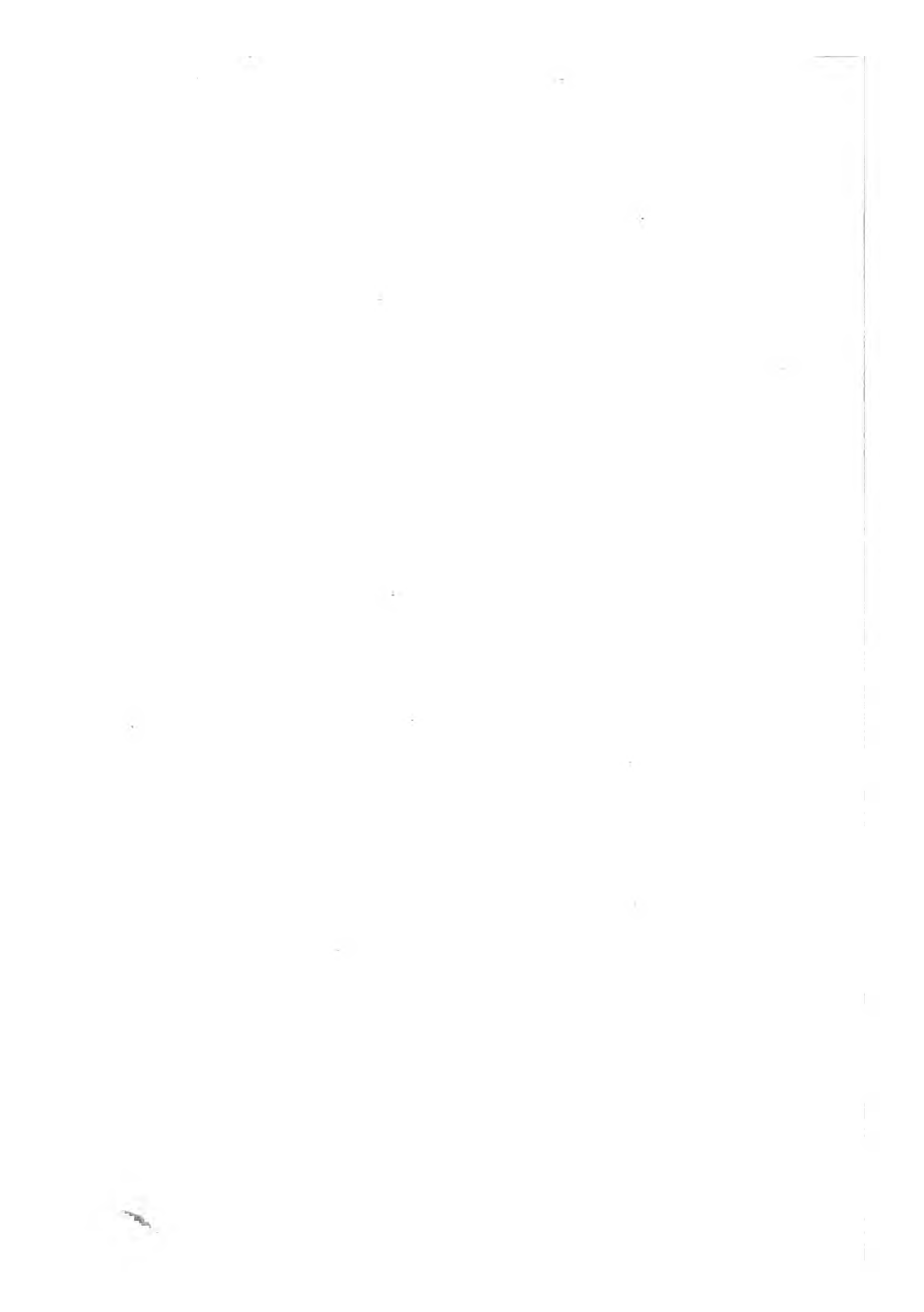

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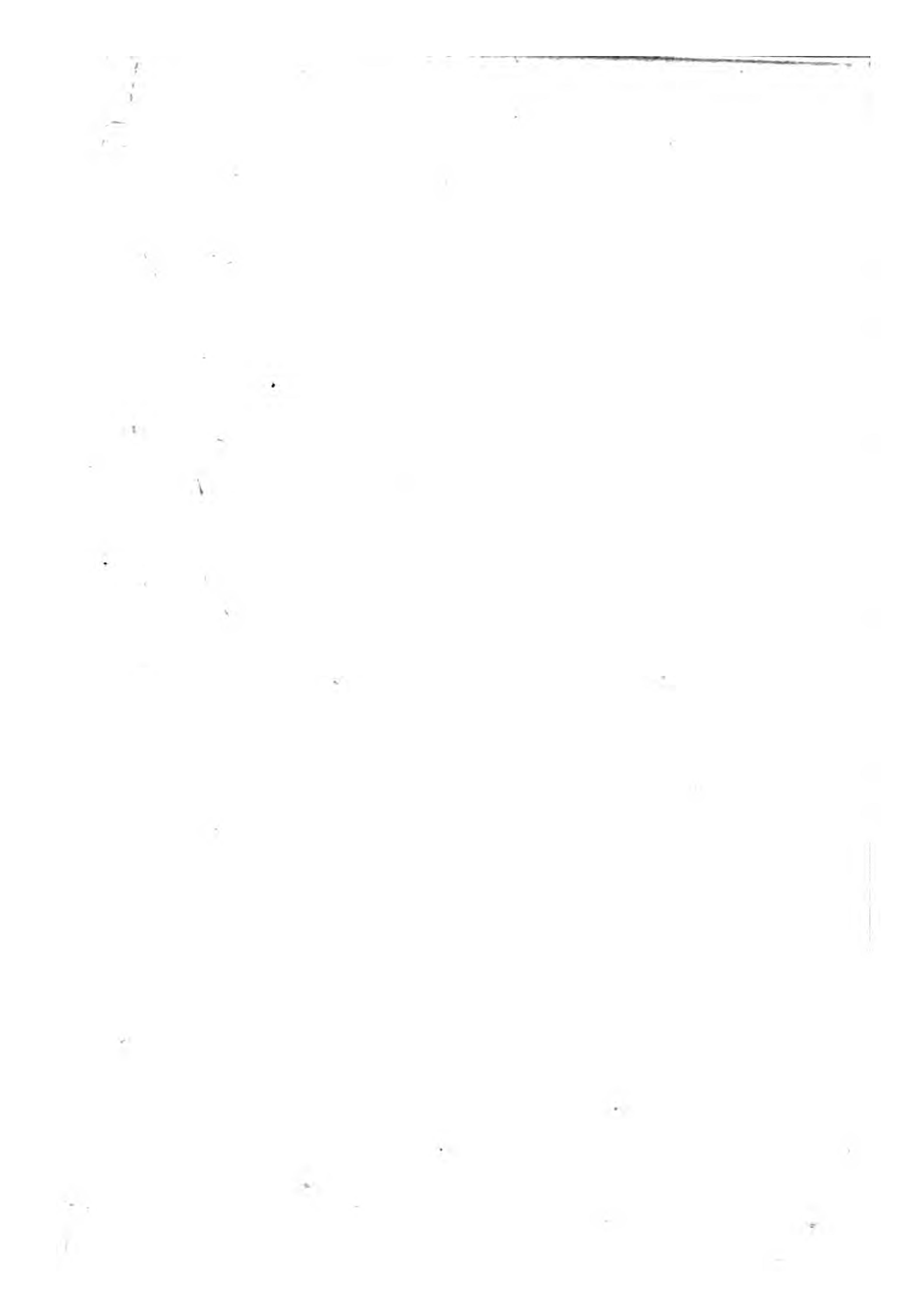

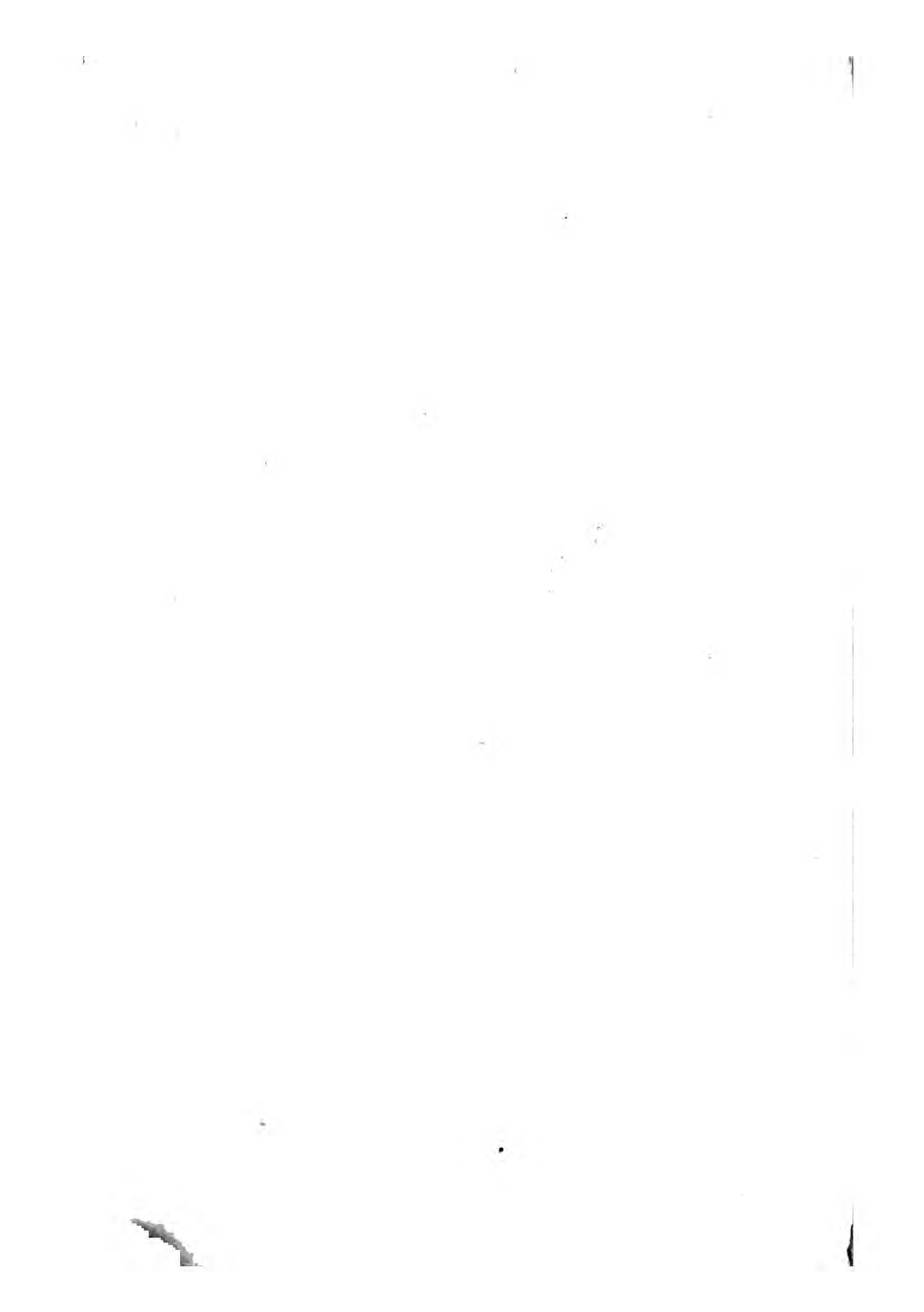

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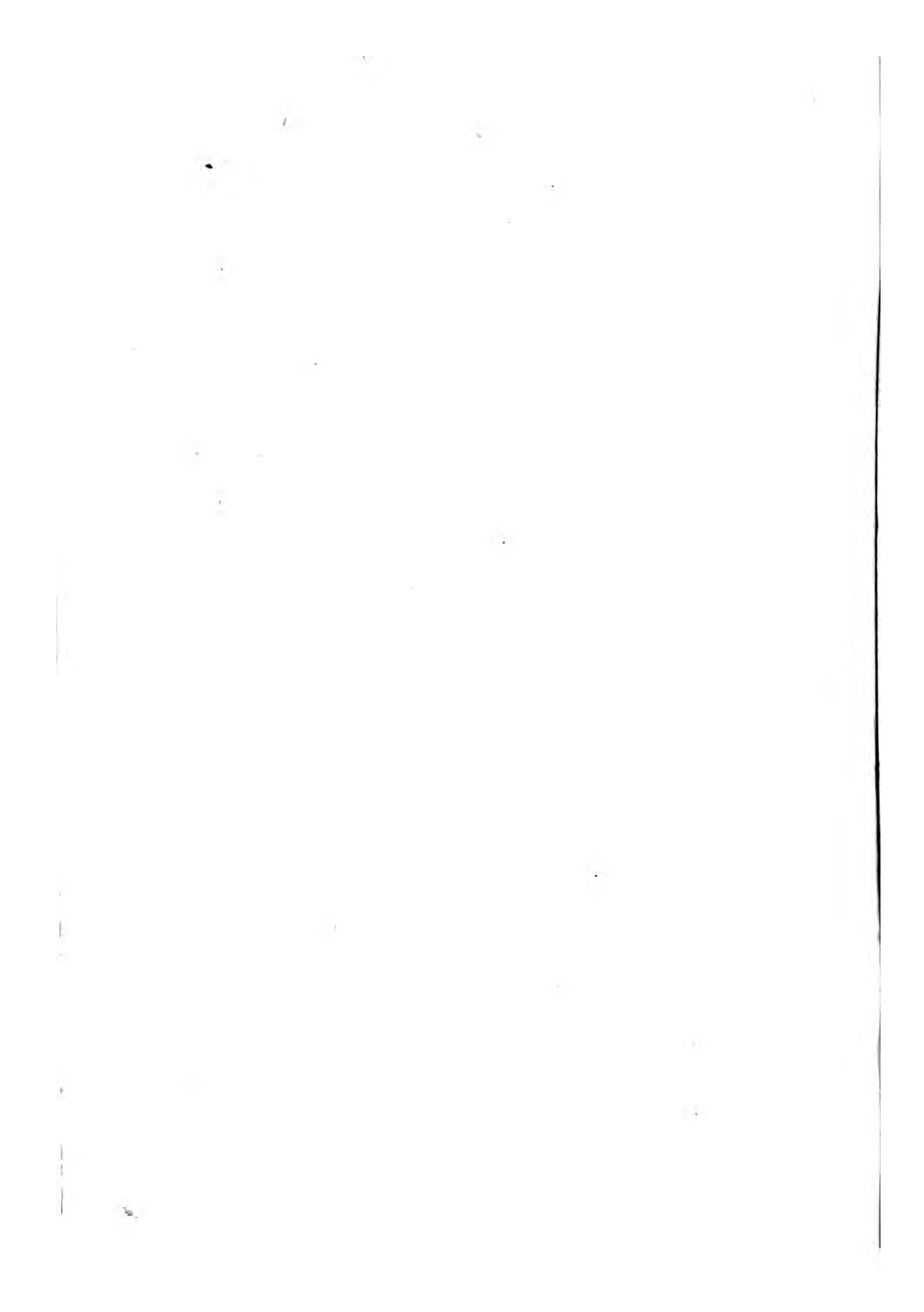

UNCLE GEORGE'S WILL.

CHAPTER I.

"BUT, mamma, it is impossible!"

"But, Mollie, it is not only possible, but it is a fact!"

"Mamma, I don't believe it!"

"Very well, then look at your uncle's letter yourself," and Lady Mary Houghton tossed a closely-written letter across the breakfast-table to her daughter.

Mollie picked up the letter gingerly with the tips of her fingers.

"It won't bite," said her mother irritably.

"I don't feel at all sure about that, mamma. If it was Uncle Edward himself, it would."

"Nonsense!"

Mollie, with a deep frown upon her pretty white forehead, began to read.

"I am glad poor Uncle George has left something to Meta and Agnes," she said. "At least there is some good in his will."

"Five thousand to each of my married daughters," said Lady Mary complacently. "Yes, it will

gratify your brothers-in-law; and I am sure Meta will want it, if she goes on having two babies regularly every year."

"If they are all as pretty as the last four, I wish she might have three a year," said Mollie lightly. "I never saw such a set of little ducks!"

"Of course you like them, who have none of the trouble and responsibility, you little goose."

"Not to speak of the natural affinity between ducks and geese," said Mollie gravely—her poor little face becoming more and more disconsolate. "And five thousand to you, mamma, that is nice! and I see nothing about me. You were hoaxing after all, mamma dear, I am so thankful."

"Mollie, when you have a little more experience, you will know that the residue is always at the end."

"Oh, but if it is only the residue——" she cried hopefully.

"Only the residue! but that is the bulk!"

"Oh dear!" cried Mollie. "I thought the residue meant the fag end, and the bulk the capacious middle, and——"

"You are incorrigible!" said Lady Mary, drawing her chair from the breakfast-table, and warming her feet by the fire. "Come and sit by the fire, and if I can, I will explain it all to you. The residue of your uncle's fortune amounts to two hundred thousand pounds, and this is left to you absolutely, but on one condition——"

"And that condition is the impossible thing that I can't believe."

"And that condition is," went on Lady Mary, without taking the smallest notice of the interruption, "that you marry your cousin Stephen Charles Algernon Houghton."

"Was there ever such a name!" cried Mollie.

"And if you refuse to marry him, or marry any one else, then all this money is to go to a nasty hospital. I never heard of such a thing!" cried Lady Mary in a burst of indignation.

"It is the most abominable, dreadful, wicked, and intolerable will that ever was made," said Mollie. "And oh! to think that poor, dear, good Uncle George should have imagined such iniquity."

"Granted that it is all you say, Mollie!" said her mother severely, "remember that you have got to do it."

"Mamma!" cried Mollie, in a tone of such amazed horror that Lady Mary in spite of herself could not help laughing.

"Oh Mollie, Mollie, of course you must—don't you see it? You can't ruin this poor young man's prospects—you can't condemn him to beggary. I must appeal to your better side."

"No, no, no!" cried Mollie, shutting her ears with her fingers. "I won't have my better side appealed to! Yes, I will though," very suddenly. "Of course my better side is all for the hospital—of course I could not think of thwarting Uncle George's philanthropic intentions, certainly not! I am not so bad as that, mamma."

"You are silly this morning," said Lady Mary,

"and are taken by surprise also, so I will make allowances for your silliness. Hospital indeed! I never did approve of pauperising the people and——"

"Good morning, mamma," cried two bright young voices, and the two married daughters came in together.

"Aggie wanted to go to Marshall and Snelgrove's, and I wanted to take her, so I picked her up in Brook Street, and we have come in on the way to hear if you have heard from Uncle Edward."

"Yes," said her mother. "I have. Ring the bell, Mollie, for more coffee. What will you have, dear?"

"I should like something—I am awfully hungry," said Meta, undoing her fur hat. "I breakfasted at half-past seven with Tom, who has gone into Hertfordshire for a shoot. Is that muffin? quick, Mollie. But how late you are! What time did you go to bed?"

"Nine o'clock," said Molly absently. "There is nowhere to go now, so we went to bed. Mamma and I are always late in the morning when we go to bed early."

"Oh, do be quiet," said Agnes. "You do chatter so; and I am dying to know about the will."

"He has left each of you girls——"

"What? Quick, mamma!"

"Five thousand."

"Oh!" Meta jumped up, and executed an animated *pas seul* in the middle of the room.

"He is an intense old brick!" she cried.

"He isn't," said Molly mournfully.

"He is, you minx. I shall send Tom a telegram, I think, very carefully worded."

"It is very nice," said Aggie, more sedately. Go on, mamma."

"He leaves the big silver dinner-service, and all the Houghtonleigh plate to your brother Charles. It will be very useful to him at Marchlands. Five thousand to me."

"And nothing to the Indian cousin?" asked Meta. "Every one said that he was sure to have the bulk."

Lady Mary glanced at Mollie, who gave a little bound in her chair.

"You talk about what you do not understand, Meta," she said, flushing scarlet. "A will is like a merino sheep—all its value is in its tail."

"What does the child mean? Go on, mamma."

"The residue of the property is left to Mollie on one condition."

"Oh!" cried both again, "my dear Mollie! how magnificent! How much?"

"Two hundred thousand."

"And Mollie is to have it all?"

"Not a sixpence," said Mollie dolefully. "It is a snare and a delusion, a mirage which no earthly traveller can reach, an apple of Sodom which turns to ashes at our lips. It is all left to found a hospital!"

"Mollie," said her mother indignantly, "I did not bring you up to tell positive black fibs."

"'A lie that is half a truth, is ever the worst of lies,'" said Mollie, unable to resist the quotation.

"Oh, how you chatter!" said Agnes. "Do tell us the whole thing, mamma, and don't let Mollie interrupt every moment."

"Be quiet, Mollie! The money is left to her on condition that she marries the Indian cousin, Stephen Houghton, and if she does not marry him it is all to go to found a hospital."

"So Mollie is provided with a fortune and a husband without the trouble of waiting for either," said Meta, pouring out some coffee. "I congratulate you, Poll."

"I won't be congratulated! There is nothing to congratulate me about."

"My dear little child," said Aggie, soothingly.

"Don't say things now that you will be sorry for afterwards. You would not do such an immoral thing as deprive Stephen of his patrimony."

"I should do worse if I were to consent to marry the creature without—without—"

"Without what?" said her mother coldly.

"She means love, mamma," said Meta. "With an utter disregard for the fact that love is an exploded idea, and that nothing is of the smallest consequence except an adequate settlement."

"And a virtuous esteem," put in Aggie. "Don't be childish, Mollie; you have that already for the worthy Stephen, and there is always a chance that

such a beginning may ripen into a warmer sentiment."

"Certainly, Mollie," said Meta, whose young husband had fallen in love with her at first sight, and stoutly maintained that she had done likewise. Their love affairs had been highly satisfactory.

"Well, what is to be done?" said Agnes. "There is always a next move to everything, what is it to be?"

"I really have not had a moment in which to think," said Lady Mary ruefully. "What with Molly's high-flown nonsense, and your talk, my dear girls, I have not been able to collect my thoughts; and there is a letter from your Aunt Jane I have not even opened yet."

"Ah, that is sure to contain some suggestion of value," cried Meta. "Open it at once, mamma, and let us hear it. Aunt Jennie is always the cleverest of the whole lot."

Lady Mary opened the letter, and her three daughters gathered all round to read it over her shoulder, Meta holding a corner of it to bring it more within the vision of her rather short-sighted eyes. They read as follows:

"MY DEAR MARY,

"Now there must be no nonsense about this matter. I cannot hear two words about it. Of course I can't have poor dear Johnnie's son denuded of his own lawful property for the sake of any romantic trash a silly chit may take into her head."

"How you catch it, Poll!" said Meta.

"Sh—go on."

"Please to impress this at once upon Mollie. I expect her cousin here on Tuesday, the eighteenth of next month; he will spend some time with me, and matters shall then be finally arranged as to fitting times and seasons."

"I dare say!" said Mollie indignantly.

"Hush—sh!"

"So dear Mary, pack up Miss Mollie at once, without any unnecessary delay. You can go and stay with Charles at Marchlands, it will do you all good; and I will undertake Mollie's affairs. She does not leave this house until she has made up her mind to be a reasonable woman. As to love, I do not think any daughter of yours could be so irrational as for one moment to consider it worthy of consideration when a plain duty is involved."

"Oh yes, I see my duty," said Mollie with a gasp. "There is such a want of hospitals, and this one—"

"My dear Mollie, what on earth do you mean?"

"I won't go to Aunt Jennie's."

"Yes, you will," said her mother.

"Oh yes, darling, of course you will," said her sisters.

"But I am not going."

"Mamma," said Meta, "we are going to Marshall and Snelgrove's. Do you want anything for Mollie for this visit? has she got anything in the world to wear?"

"I have got all my season gowns."

"All Londony, and smelling of smoke. Oh, please, mamma," cried Meta, "let me get her one or two really killing gets-up. Nothing is worn now but tailor-made, and she has got such a nice round, soft little figure."

"Very well, only you must let me have some little choice in the matter. I should like her to look her best."

"Naturally," said Aggie significantly.

"But I won't look my best, if you mean that—that——"

"Yes, that—that!—— Come, Poll, be reasonable, and I will make you a real duck."

"Turkey twill quilted eider-down, so fitted for an æsthetic figure like mine," said Mollie, hysterically.

"The brougham is at the door, my lady."

"There, I must not keep the horses waiting. Quick, Mollie, get your hat."

Mollie ran upstairs.

Lady Mary began giving hurried directions, and had not finished before she reappeared.

"Cloth, Meta, mind, and made to fit thoroughly, and moderate buttons—yours were too large ; and patterns for the evening."

"All right, mamma. Come, Aggie, Marshall is selling off, and I mean to buy half the shop at half price."

CHAPTER II.

> "Prit-ty, prit-ty Polly Ho-opkins,
> How do you do-o?—How do you do-o?"

"READY, Poll? How much longer do you mean to keep a fellow waiting?"

"Mamma," said Mollie, "there is Tom downstairs shrieking for me already, and I wanted to say so many things about——"

"Mol-lie!" from below.

"You must not keep him waiting, dear, when he is ready to take you to the station. I really think you have said all that there can be to say. If you only knew how tired I am of hearing you say the same thing over and over again."

"But, mamma," cried Mollie, trying very hard to suppress her tears, "I won't do it, mamma, you know."

"Mol-lie!"

She stamped her little foot.

"My dear little girl, you will lose the train. Give my best love to Aunt Jane, and tell her to write to me at Marchlands."

"Oh, mamma, I——"

"Nonsense, child, you have got three weeks to enjoy Aunt Jennie before Stephen comes, so think no more about it."

"I shall come back on the seventeenth, mamma; that is quite decided."

"Mol-lie! ten-forty!"

"My dear, do go."

"Good-bye, mamma, till the seventeenth. I shall go to Marchlands if you are not here."

But Tom would wait no longer, he dashed up the stairs five steps at a time.

"You'll be late for the train, you perverse young person, you! Now do come."

With one more hasty kiss Mollie ran downstairs.

Meta was waiting to take her to the station with the four children in the carriage. Tom jumped into a hansom and they were off.

"You look charming, my dear, quite charming!" said her sister. "If only Stephen——"

"Oh, Mettie," cried Mollie in an agony. "If you knew how like pins and needles, and mustard and peppercorns, his horrid name is to me, you would forbear."

"I forbear," she answered, laughing. "Here we are at Paddington, and Tom gesticulating frantically."

"Bell rung! quick, quick!"

They had to run up the platform, as fast as it was possible to run, to the carriage where Mollie's anxious maid was leaning out of the window, white with suspense.

The train was just starting. Mollie put out her pretty head.

"Good-bye, Tom; tell Meta I won't—won't——"

"Refuse?" shouted Tom. "That is right, dear! that's right!" waving his hand—and Mollie was borne off with a horrible doubt in her mind as to

whether he had only pretended to hear wrong or not.

However, she settled down in her corner of the carriage with one of the immortal "Chronicles of Carlingford" to read, and was very comfortable.

At one o'clock hunger overpowered prudence, which would have suggested a later hour for luncheon, and Mollie ate all her sandwiches.

She regretted this when five o'clock tea-time came and passed—but regrets were useless. Not until seven o'clock did she reach her destination, and even then there were twenty minutes of warm brougham and fur rug between her and Lady Jane's house, Holliwell.

All things come to an end. Just as they were arriving her maid suddenly exclaimed :

"Oh, I beg your pardon, miss, but Sir Thomas gave me this for you, and I quite forgot it."

"This" was an ornamental box of French bon-bons. Mollie was touched, and said "Dear old Tom!" under her breath, and wished she had had them sooner—they might have helped to fill up the gap at five o'clock, and now it was nearly dinner-time.

The carriage drew up, a hospitable light streamed from the hall-door, and in two seconds Mollie found herself in the arms of her aunt in front of a fire large enough to roast an ox whole.

"My dear child," said Aunt Jane, kissing her again and again. "I am so glad to see you, and you are looking so pretty!"

It was a very proper boudoir in which they met, the paper Morris's darkest sage-green, the chimneypiece painted to match ; the whole room full of screens, many embroidered sun-flowers, many scanty-leaved irises.

A large sofa was drawn up near the fire, on which lay Lady Jane's only daughter, Gwendoline, the owner of the boudoir, and alas ! an invalid. Had she been bright with health she would have been a very pretty woman ; as she was, there was something very sweet in the delicate face.

"How are you, Cousin Gwendoline," said Mollie, stooping to kiss her cousin affectionately. "I do so hope that you are better."

"I am very well for me," was the cheery answer. "Are you cold, Mollie ? Mamma, bring her close to the fire.

"Oh no, thank you," said Mollie, who, coming in from the frosty air, was stifling. "I am as warm as a toast indeed."

"How nice to be quite warm in such weather !" said Gwendoline, with a little shiver.

It was too late for tea, so Mollie was taken up to her room to dress and rest before dinner, and there Aunt Jane could say nothing to her, because her maid was getting out her things as quickly as she could, so Mollie felt thankful that the evil moment was put off.

"Did you hear whether anybody was staying here, Burton ?" she asked, as soon as the door had closed upon her aunt.

"Yes, miss; your grandmamma is here—no ladies but her ladyship—and Captain Houghton."

"Oh!" said Mollie. She wondered who Captain Houghton was, then suddenly remembered with a horrible qualm that some one had once said that Stephen was a captain.

"Impossible," she said to herself, half-rising from her chair. Her aunt would never be guilty of such a piece of treachery as that! Her cheeks burned so much at the very idea that she wondered how she should ever get them cool for dinner.

Meanwhile an odd conversation was going on in the drawing-room downstairs. Gwendoline in her long, pale gown, her wraps of elaborate crewel-work, had been carried upstairs; and Lady Jane in a most comfortable and becoming *peignoir* of crimson plush, had taken her place on the sofa. In front of her, standing with his back to the fire, stood a very tall and very handsome specimen of the Houghton family. Lady Jane found herself in a somewhat embarrassing position. It had never even entered her head that the most natural thing in the world would occur, namely, that her favourite nephew, on hearing of his uncle's will, would immediately run down to Holliwell to talk it over with her. He had arrived without warning that afternoon.

"Oh Charlie, Charlie," she said, "I little thought that you were so utterly destitute of common sense."

"My dear aunt, I can't for the life of me see

what common sense has got to do with it. I am not going to sell myself for money."

"But you see, there is the poor child to consider; one must not be selfish, my dear boy."

"I understand that she has already some small fortune," he said, hastily. "And if, as you say, she is so pretty, she is quite sure to marry."

"Two hundred a year," said his aunt. "It has sufficed hitherto for her clothes. Oh yes, I dare say she will marry, because she is more than pretty, she is quite lovely. I think she is far the prettiest of my sister's daughters, and they are all handsome. Meta and Agnes both married the very moment they came out, and extremely well, too."

"How many are there?"

"Five altogether, Charles—Agnes, Meta, Amelia, Mollie and Algy."

"That makes six," said he, suspiciously.

"I dare say, my dear," said Lady Jane, who was thinking of something else. But the words had hardly passed her lips before a sudden idea came into her head. Why not make use of this mistake? Was it not an especial dispensation of Providence? It was just possible that by a very little dexterity a meeting without prejudice might be managed between the two perverse cousins. She kept her presence of mind wonderfully.

"Are they dark or fair? I can't endure dark girls."

"I am very sorry to hear that," said she.

"Ah, yes, of course, then Amelia is dark?—I was

sure of that. I never heard you rave about any one fair yet."

"You are more perverse than anybody I ever met," said his aunt. "Well, my dear, on the eighteenth of next month you will meet each other here, and will be able to judge for yourselves. I hope to find you in a better frame of mind. You ought to be ashamed of yourself for even thinking of absolutely cheating this poor little girl out of the fortune your poor Uncle George most certainly meant for her."

"My conscience is clear," he said, laughing. "If she had been perfectly hideous, this Amelia Houghton, then indeed I might have felt bound, but as it is——"

"My dear, money is a very nice and comfortable thing, not at all to be despised."

"No, I quite agree with you, nobody has a keener appreciation of that than myself," said the young man, with a laugh and a sigh; "I wish it came into one's pockets more easily."

"I did not tell you that little Mollie Houghton came to-day," said Lady Jane, rising and poking the fire. Charlie Houghton started violently.

"What? but you said the eighteenth? You do not mean to say that——"

"Mollie, Mollie," said his aunt, a little impatiently. "Never mind the eighteenth. This is Mollie the little fair one. You see, you have been away so long that you know nothing about your cousins—this is the youngest, she came out last season."

"Lawful name Mary I presume. Pretty?"

"Hum. But you must judge for yourself. She is a good little thing, and very clever and quick. Now remember, I must have no flirting, it would not be fair before the eighteenth."

"I ought to have told you, Aunt Jennie," said Captain Houghton, twisting his moustache, "that I am afraid my leave will be up by that time, and that I shall have to rejoin."

"Nonsense," said Aunt Jennie as she left the room. Lady Jane went upstairs to bring Mollie down when the gong sounded. She put her arm round her waist, and said:

"My dear, I shall have a great deal to say to you, but we will put it off until nearer the eighteenth, and meanwhile you must make yourself as happy as you can. There is no one here but your cousin Charlie Houghton, whom you do not know—one of the Indian Houghtons, you know—and grand-mamma."

Mollie's heart gave a great throb of delight. It was all right then, and the dreaded Captain Houghton was a Charlie, not a Stephen.

CHAPTER III.

It was all very well for Lady Jane to wear comfortable crimson plush in the delicious hour before dinner, when the severest etiquette relaxes, and the comfortable reigns supreme. The next morning all

appeared in the rigorous mourning necessitated by the death of the old bachelor great-uncle who had made so extraordinary a will.

Mollie's little black gown fitted her like a riding habit, was short and business-like, her pretty white frills fastened by a pearl stud. "Nothing is worn in the country that is not tailor-made," Meta had declared, and certainly the result was very pretty and natty. Mollie's hair was a mass of golden puffiness on the top of her well-shaped head, and a great golden knot behind; her skin was like cream and roses, her blue eyes dancing with light and fun.

Tom Grey called her "stunning;" her brother Algy pronounced her "A 1;" and her more severe brother-in-law, Colonel Stewart, said that "she was very like Aggie."

Breakfast was a very cosy meal at Holliwell. The papers and letters were always on a big buhl table in the window, and these were opened without ceremony during the process of eating. Moreover, the room was full of steaming machinery—a machine made coffee, a silver saucepan kept on boiling milk, the eggs had a machine to themselves, another slowly turned hot toast before the fire. Aunt Jane had a passion for comfortable machinery.

Three letters and two packets were waiting for Mollie.

"My dear," said Lady Jane holding up her hands, "if you are a good correspondent I wash my hands of you."

"Oh no, auntie," answered Mollie. "If on this earth there is an occupation that is abhorrent to my very soul, it is letter-writing. These are from mamma, and Meta, and Aggie."

"All of whom you left yesterday."

"Yes, but they must have had an object in writing; they never write without, they hate it as much as I do. Yes! they had an object and a very jolly one," she exclaimed, glancing through her letters. "Meta has sent me a set of Danish silver ornaments, and Aggie an old silver belt. Oh what ducks they are!"

"Open them quickly," said Aunt Jennie, who loved pretty things.

"Will you give me those packets, Charlie?" said Mollie.

Both Captain Houghton and Lady Jane gave a little jump. Mollie saw it and grew crimson to the roots of her hair. "We are cousins," she said a little defiantly. "And I always call my cousins by their Christian names."

"Of course, of course," said Charlie hastily. "It is very nice of you, Mollie."

"Ah, but that is quite a different thing," said Mollie. "You are only a man, and I am a woman."

"I always call my cousins by their Christian names," said Charlie, cutting open the strings of Mollie's parcels.

"Hoist with your own petard!" said Lady Jane, laughing. "Quick, Mollie, let me see! It seems

to me that Meta and Aggie are sisters worth having."

"We all think there is nobody like each other in the whole world," said Mollie.

"An excellent sentiment for home use," said Captain Houghton, laughing.

"How pretty they are! how charming!" cried Mollie. "Oh, you dears, how I wish I could kiss you!" and she blew two kisses away from her finger-tips.

"Please don't put them on," said her cousin, hastily.

"Why not? Of course I shall put them on."

"No, don't! you will only spoil the effect."

"What effect? Auntie, fasten them for me."

"Charlie is right, Mollie, they will look best in the evening; your gown is too severe for such trifling: those delicate little silver chains are out of character."

"Please keep them for the evening."

Mollie was very reluctant to obey, but was just going to yield, when she uttered a little cry of dismay.

"Oh auntie, what is happening? Good gracious! what is it?"

Something awful was happening to the coffee machine: it was puffing excitedly, heaving itself up, while convulsive movements shook its frame.

"Heavens! Charlie, do something! What is the matter? Take off the lid. Something is fatally wrong."

But the lid was only a detail, and too late to give relief Captain Houghton rushed round to the other side.

"It burns so awfully," he said, shaking his fingers, and dancing with pain.

"It is no moment for amateurs," cried Mollie. "Immediate professional advice is absolutely essential," and she pulled the bell frantically.

"Why can't you do something, Charlie? Anything!" cried Lady Jane with a frenzied stamp.

The noises increased in violence every moment. In desperation Captain Houghton caught up a table-napkin, threw it round the gasping machine, and carrying it out into the passage, deposited it on the floor.

He had scarcely returned when a loud explosion took place outside, followed by an ominous rushing sound.

"It is all over," said he in a funereal voice.

Mollie sat down and laughed till the tears rolled down her face.

"It is no laughing matter," cried Aunt Jennie. "I wonder what was wrong with the thing. What was it, Peters?" she asked of the butler when he had reached the scene of action. She was of course informed that it was nothing but the accidental shutting of an all-important though minute safety-valve.

"I knew it could be nothing wrong with the thing itself, and you really might have known," looking wrathfully at Charlie, who was occupied looking pitifully at the burnt tips of his fingers.

"I am very sorry, Aunt Jennie," he began, but started nervously and stopped, for a strange bubbling began on the sideboard.

Lady Jane whisked the lid off the silver saucepan. "There is nothing like presence of mind," she said complacently. "And now bring some fresh coffee, and let us go on with our breakfasts."

Mollie had to stop laughing as best she might.

"It is a good thing Gwendo did not come down to breakfast," said Lady Jane presently.

"Has she a headache this morning?"

"Not much; you may go and have a chat on her bed if you like, Mollie, after breakfast. As for you, Charlie, you have got to earn your bread to-day, if you please."

"What am I to do? From breaking stones on the road upward, I am at your service."

"Shoot for the cook," said Lady Jane. "It is essential, especially as I am going to have a number of people here next week."

"What do you want?"

"Anything you can get, biped, feathered, and quadruped; there are some very wild birds still to be had. Give your own orders. I told Peters you would want the keepers this morning."

"I hope you won't be out the very whole day," said Mollie.

"Nonsense, Mollie, I won't have him come home till it is too dark to see to shoot—the kitchen is desperately hard up."

"That is the reason we had that *salmi*," said Charlie. "I never tasted such ancient old bones in all my life."

"Ungrateful! Well, it rests with yourself whether you are fed well or not."

Mollie went up to Gwendoline's room, and met with a warm welcome from her gentle cousin.

When it grew too dark to shoot, Charlie Houghton felt that he had done his duty like a man, and came home.

Now the post went out at six o'clock at Holliwell—a very awkward time—and Lady Jane always put off her letters to the very last, so that five o'clock was not the uninterrupted hour that by all rights it should be.

Lady Jane was writing hard at the far end of the room when Captain Houghton came in, and Mollie was sitting on a low stool by her cousin's sofa learning to make Chinese knots on a piece of embroidery.

"We will have tea without waiting for mamma," said Gwendoline. "And you shall pour it out, Mollie."

"What luck have you had, Charlie? asked Mollie.

"Half a brace," he answered.

"In common English, one. What was the one? animal, vegetable, mineral? how many legs? how many wings? only one head, it is self-evident."

"What do you say you have shot?" cried Lady Jane from her writing-table.

"Four and a half brace, two hares, and a cat, Aunt Jennie," answered Captain Houghton.

"Why did you kill the cat?" cried Mollie indignantly.

"Care killed the cat," he answered quickly.

"Yes, but why did you shoot it? I hate poor innocent cats being shot for nothing."

"Sorry I mentioned it," answered Charlie. "It was not at all a nice puss, a regular vicious old tom—just the sort of grimalkin that a witch would have."

"Perhaps some poor old witch is now breaking her heart for the want of it."

"It is bad enough that a young witch should be doing so," said Charlie.

"After that, Mollie, you may as well give me my tea," said Gwendoline.

"Any message to your mother, Mollie?" asked Lady Jane.

"Please say I have half written a long letter, auntie, and that I got here safely."

"Any comment on her letter, little woman?"

"No, auntie," answered Mollie, her cheeks becoming pink, "certainly no comment. Gwendo, buttered toast, or cake, or bread-and-butter?"

"Bread-and-butter, please. No, not that bit, that bit underneath is the chosen of my heart."

"I was always brought up to take the first that came, and no choice," said Mollie demurely.

Aunt Jennie came towards the table, and hearing Mollie's last words, said with meaning :

"Your mother is a wise woman."

Gwendoline went up to her room after tea, whither Lady Jane followed her. There was always some anxiety in her heart about this one beloved daughter, who was constantly suffering more or less, and yet was so brave, and good and cheerful, that her sofa was a very centre of comfort and content.

Mollie ensconced herself in a very large low chair with a book. Charlie lazily lay back in another. It was very pleasant and warm, and the lamps wore green shades, which gave a delicious, subdued light.

"It is an odd thing," said Captain Houghton, slowly, "how extraordinarily fast one becomes friends with one's cousins—in fact one gets to know them directly as if one had been intimate for years."

"I don't think I do," answered Mollie, her thoughts wandering to her own troubles. "To tell the honest truth, I have a rooted antipathy to my cousins just now."

"A what?" he exclaimed, incredulously.

"A rooted antipathy."

"How very unkind!"

"Oh, I was not thinking of you at all, but of unknown cousins. I have lots."

"Most of them my nearest relations, I presume," he said, rather stiffly.

"I have not the least idea who your relations are," she answered. "Aunt Jennie is vague, she

only described you as one of the Indian Houghtons."

"I thought you knew Stephen at all events."

"No, I don't; which is Stephen?" asked Mollie, her face once more growing crimson. "Stephen is an awful name!"

"He is the dearest old fellow in the world," very indignantly. "There never was such an old brick."

"I feel a repugnance to his very name," she answered. "Who is he? your brother, your cousin, your what?"

"My uncle, of course, but he is only ten years older than I am, and he has been so much in England that I made sure that you knew him."

"I do not, and I do not wish to know him," said Mollie very distinctly. "I am quite certain that we should not get on, or understand each other in the very least."

"I don't think he would understand you, certainly," said Captain Houghton, huffily; "he is the most just, straightforward, best tempered fellow out."

"I can't endure the very idea of him."

"At all events, you are not likely to have to put up with him, Miss Houghton, for he is not in England now."

"You are offended with me," said Mollie, suddenly aware of the enormity of her tirade.

"Not in the least, thank you," he answered, coolly, "I am not Stephen."

"No, thank Heaven, you are not!"

"I never heard such prejudice in my life," said Charlie, excitedly, rising to his feet. "Here is a fellow you never heard of or saw, one of the best going, the dearest old chap, and you sit there and abuse him like a pickpocket for nothing at all."

"I am accountable to no one for my likes and dislikes," said Mollie, perversely.

"Then you are horribly uncharitable."

"Charlie," and Mollie sat with her breath panting with indignation, "nobody ever said such a thing to me in my life."

"Oh, Mollie," he said suddenly, "you are angry; I wish I had not said it."

"I should not mind if it were not true," she answered despondently, "and I won't say it any more."

"That's right, dear, and now we'll be comfortable again. Why, we have had a regular shindy."

"I am afraid I was cross," said Mollie, penitently.

"Never mind," said Charlie superbly. "We will forget it, and you know he really is the best old fellow."

"He is not," cried Mollie, with a little stamp.

Captain Houghton threw himself down into his chair, took up his newspaper, and buried himself in its contents. Mollie returned to her book, and silence reigned.

The dressing-bell rang. Mollie rose and lit a candle.

Just as she was leaving the room, Captain Houghton followed her hastily to the door, but whatever he was going to say was nipped in the bud, for an influx of servants poured in to arrange the rooms before dinner, and he was obliged to go up and dress.

CHAPTER IV.

SEVERAL days passed, and the cousins became great friends, every day more inseparable.

Lady Jane watched the progress of their friendship with much amusement, and at the same time some slight trepidation.

A hard frost set in, so hard as to promise skating at no distant period, and at least once an hour Charlie and Mollie, one or both, went off to try the ice.

"I wonder you are not bored here," said Mollie on one of these occasions, when they stood by the lake together, cautiously trying it. "There is nothing for you to do ; you must be dull enough, and you could not have hoped reasonably for this very premature frost. I suppose you will be going soon."

"I am going on the seventeenth," he answered. "Not a day later," with uncalled-for force.

"I am also going on the seventeenth," she answered. "I engaged to stay here till then, and then I shall join mamma, whether she will or no. But

you have not answered my question ; are you not bored ? "

" Not in the least," he answered fervently. " Being with you turns everything into a pleasure. I can't tell you how I like it. I only wish I could think," he went on tenderly, " that you had half as much pleasure in being with me as I have in even thinking of you."

The colour rushed into Mollie's pretty cheeks, but she said nothing. Captain Houghton went on, speaking rather fast, and whisking the heads off the thistles.

" Everything that is delightful passes away so awfully fast, the days seem to fly on wings, and if there is anything disagreeable or painful coming, it seems to rush to meet you in the most unfair manner."

" It does indeed," said Mollie, with a little shiver.

Captain Houghton had reached that stage in which a man feels a great wish to speak about himself.

" I am sure you would sympathise with me, Mollie," he said, " if I were able to tell you any of my anxieties. I am so weighted, so beset."

" I am very sorry," said Mollie gently, laying a little gloved hand on his arm. He took it, and held it in his, and went on, " I dare not even allow myself to be happy now, in the present moment, because I am tied hand and foot by a—a bother I cannot tell you about."

" I wish I could help you," said Mollie sweetly.

" There, don't let us talk any more about it. I can't say what you are, Mollie ! The ice won't bear, there is not a chance of it to-day."

They walked home very silently. Just as they reached the door, Mollie glanced up at him very shyly, but her eyes fell again immediately, abashed by a look in his they had never met before, telling a new story. Mollie ran upstairs with her heart beating fast.

" Aunt Jennie," said Mollie, one day when they were alone together, " has Charlie any money ? "

" Not a sixpence, my dear."

" Oh ! "

That was all. Mollie thought rather ruefully that two hundred thousand pounds would build a magnificent hospital.

On the tenth, Holliwell's hospitable walls were filled with guests.

" It is unlucky our being in mourning," sad Lady Jane. " We can't have a regular ball, but I do not see that there could be the smallest objection to the young people dancing in the evening after dinner in the morning-room. The parquet is excellent, and I can have over a man to play the piano."

" Better fun than a regular ball," said Gwendoline from her sofa. " Mollie, did mamma tell you that Tom and Meta are coming ? "

" No ; how delightful ! that is nice ! What fun Meta will have, she does so like dancing. Dear auntie, you always think of everything that is most delightful ! "

"Tom and Meta are going to stay a good long time, Mollie, to help me to look after you," said Lady Jane, smiling.

"I need not go before the seventeenth," said Mollie with forced calmness. "Then I am obliged to join mamma."

"I dare say!" said her aunt. "No, no, Miss Mollie, it is all very well to enjoy yourself, and have as much fun and flirtation as you like, but the real business in hand must not be overlooked."

"Auntie, I am not going to do it."

"Now, no nonsense, darling! Life is made up of reality, not romance."

But Mollie had put her fingers into her ears, and nestled her head into her aunt's neck; she wanted also to hide her hot cheeks.

Poor child! if it had seemed impossible before she came to Holliwell, it seemed a thousand times more so now.

Meta and her husband arrived about tea-time, at the same time as other fresh guests. Mollie was enchanted to see her sister, and to pour out to her all the events of her visit. But Lady Jane was determined that there should be no private conferences before she had "coached" her niece. So she took her upstairs, and would not leave the room till she had found her opportunity. "All is going on prosperously, Meta," she said. "But Mollie might fly off at a tangent any moment, and so might he; we must keep up a wholesome fear of the eighteenth before their eyes, without a moment's intermission."

"Nobody but you could have done it so cleverly, auntie. I never was so amused in my life. What a play it would make!"

"If only the *dénoûment* is satisfactory," said Lady Jane with a sigh. "But I never knew such a pair of spitfires as they are! I must positively go and let you dress. Are you tired?"

"Oh no, as fresh as paint, and prepared to dance all night. Oh! Aunt Jennie," she exclaimed in a tone of agony, "Mollie went downstairs again, and if Tom says anything——"

"I will never forgive him," cried Lady Jane, running downstairs. But it was all right. Mollie and Gwendoline were together, and several men were grouped round the fire, among whom stood Sir Thomas Grey, who, in spite of his wife and children, looked one of the youngest of them.

"Oh, how I do like dancing!" exclaimed Mollie some hours later, as she paused in the midst of a waltz with her cousin, Captain Houghton.

"Dancing for dancing's sake?" he asked.

"Yes, indeed, for what else's sake? The partner is only a detail. Besides, they so often want to stand still. Shall we go on?"

"But perhaps I am tired," he said without moving. "I want to go and sit down in the conservatory."

"Do you really?"

"Really."

"Very well, I am sorry you are tired so soon."

"I like the smell of the flowers."

"There is nothing much worth speaking of just now. Do you like sensitive plants?"

"Why?"

"It is such fun to touch them, and see their utter disgust, the repugnance they feel for one is so admirably expressed! There is a whole row of them in here."

"I don't like to see them teased," said Charlie as Mollie left his arm, and went up to them. "It is a barbarous amusement, and there is that nice red ottoman that looks so inviting."

"I don't like the effect of the Chinese lantern hanging over it."

"Nonsense, Mollie, nothing is unbecoming to you. Do leave those miserable plants alone. I did not know that you were born with such a cruel disposition.

"Yes, I like to torment things; do look."

Her light touch caused a large branch of one of the unhappy plants to faint away.

"You should not be such a little bully," said Charlie. "Do come here; I do so want to talk to you."

"There is Meta," said Mollie gaily. "Do you know her?"

"I took her in to dinner," he answered a little sulkily.

"Don't you think she is quite charming? Are you not sure that you should like all my sisters?"

"Not at all," he said quickly, then pulled himself up; "but I think Lady Grey quite charming!"

"I think you would like all of them quite immensely."

"I am sure I shouldn't!"

Mollie's blue eyes opened very wide. She had not time to answer before the entrance of Meta and her husband.

"Hullo, Polly Hopkins! idle here? A thousand pardons," as his eye fell on Captain Houghton. "I thought my sister-in-law was alone."

"I am not idle," said Mollie. "See what I have been doing," pointing to the row of disconsolate half-dead-looking plants.

"You horrid, unkind little thing! I did not think it was in you," said Tom. "Cannot you remedy the evil!"

"Humpty Dumpty," said Meta sadly, "not all the king's horses, and all the king's men——"

"Oh! Tom," said Mollie eagerly, "do let us have one turn—Captain Houghton is tired," turning her pretty eyes upon him with a look of compassion, "and my toes will dance about."

"Will you have compassion on me, Captain Houghton, and let our respective partners go off together!" said Meta, smiling. "You were exceedingly comfortable here."

And she seated herself on the red ottoman.

"I am not in the least tired," said Charlie. "I don't know what Mollie meant by saying so."

"She has had only one season," said her sister apologetically, "and dancing to her is unlimited bliss."

"Lady Grey," said he suddenly, "your sister Amelia, is she—is she——"

"She is a pretty girl," answered Meta, pretending to examine her fan carefully. "A nice, pretty little girl."

"Is she at all—at all like you, for instance?"

"Not the least in the world: our colouring is different, our dispositions totally different. She is romantic, I am exceedingly commonplace, she is very wrong-headed, and so on. But what is the use of my describing her! You will meet on the eighteenth."

He gave a little jump, as if from an electric shock.

"I am sorry to say," he said stiffly, "that I shall not be able to have that honour. I am unfortunately obliged to rejoin on the seventeenth."

"Oh, indeed, that is unlucky," said Meta, biting her lips. "I hoped that you would be staying on here some little time. It is such a pleasure to make friends with one's cousins," she added, looking up at him with something of Mollie's irresistible charm.

"It is awfully good of you to say so," he said. "I was only thinking to myself the other day how quickly cousins get to know each other, in a sort of way that strangers could not do in three times the time. Don't you think so?"

"I do, indeed. I am sorry you can't stay over the eighteenth."

Charlie pulled himself together, with the abrupt-

ness of a snail whose finger-tips have touched something unwonted.

Lady Grey rose to her feet ; she coughed, and fanned herself ; in another moment she would perhaps have betrayed herself, so insurmountable was the wish to laugh, but the last dying bars of the waltz promised relief.

" Shall we go back ? " she said. " The dance is over."

They met Sir Thomas and Mollie on the threshold. " We are going to have some tea, Meta," said the former, drawing his wife's little hand through his arm, and humming as they walked off,

> " Pollie put the kettle on,
> And we'll all have tea."

" May I have the pleasure of taking you to have some tea, Mollie ? " said her cousin.

" Thanks, I shall be very glad."

" All right ? " said Tom in a low whisper. Meta nodded.

" Make a joke, Tom ; oh, for pity's sake, make a joke, or I shall die for want of a decent excuse to laugh."

CHAPTER V.

All the hope of ice had long vanished, to the sorrow of some, but the unmitigated satisfaction of the hunting men.

Lady Jane kept only two or three riding-horses,

but her friends, Sir Thomas Grey among others, were in the habit of sending their hunters to her stables.

In former days Holliwell had been a great hunting-house, and poor patient Gwendoline owed her sad invalid life to a hunting accident.

Most of the men appeared at breakfast in pink. Mollie thought her cousin far the best looking among them, even though he did not go in for that becoming colour.

Lady Jane offered Meta a mount, but in spite of the brilliant look of delight in her eyes, Sir Tom took it upon himself at once to refuse.

"She does not ride to hounds now, Aunt Jane," he said. "I think it is not really safe for women, and they are always awfully in the way."

"Tom has never got over the fact that he lost the run of the season, the day he proposed to me in a very muddy lane. It is ungenerous—not that I complain," she said, laughing and following her aunt upstairs to dress for the meet. "When one has such an enormous family as I have, one must not risk one's precious life."

"Good child!" said Aunt Jennie approvingly.

"I wish Tom would have let you, only for once," said Mollie. "Aunt Jennie won't let me ride without a chaperone."

"Little girls must do as they are told," said Meta.

"What are you going to wear?"

"A gown, a shawl, and a bonnet."

"What gown, what shawl, what bonnet?"

"You shall see."

Lady Grey was quite satisfied when Mollie made her appearance in a very pretty costume.

"Tailor-made, that's right," she said approvingly, adding quickly: "How do I look?"

"Delicious!"

"So Tom says when I wear all this fur. Give me a kiss, Mollie. Ah! you must wear that on the 18th."

"I can't indeed," said Mollie. "I am not going to waste my very best on Charles; he never knows what we have got on our backs."

"How odd! and yet to judge by the trouble Mr. Poole must have taken with the exquisite fit of his garments to-day, I should have thought he had a good eye."

"I was alluding to our brother Charles, Mettie, you know perfectly well. I shall be in the home of our forefathers. Oh, dear! how stuffy it will be."

"It is stuffy," said Meta. "I don't know why, but the moral atmosphere is stuffy. Charles himself is stuffy, and as for the children, they are the stuffiest of all."

"And yet to think how mamma is pining to get rid of me, and go and live there, and take charge of Charles and his bereaved ones."

"Mollie," said Meta in a whisper, "some bereavements are blessings in disguise."

"I used to think so," said Mollie mournfully.

"But I don't now, when I see how mamma longs to shunt me on to a siding! I believe she would be glad to marry me to—to—whom shall I say?"

"Stephen."

"Meta, I hate you!"

"Make haste, girls!" cried a voice from below. "The ponies hate standing."

And they ran downstairs.

The gentlemen came home late; they had had a good day, and betook themselves to the warmth and ease of the smoking-room.

Meta, Mollie and the other ladies sat in Gwendoline's boudoir, where some took novels, and some fell asleep.

"Mollie," said Lady Grey presently, "are you in a good humour?"

"Not in the least," answered Mollie. "What can I do for you?"

"You can fetch me the third volume of this book; it is in the drawing-room, on the green table by the fire."

"It is not much use," said Mollie. "The dressing-bell will ring in half a quarter of a second."

"You lazy child, when you know I need not begin to dress for ten minutes after the bell. My heroine is insensible in the arms of her father, with a slow stream of blood oozing rapidly from her parted lips; my hero has gone off with homicidal intentions; the bad woman reigns supreme, and in short, Mollie, if you won't go, I must, and that last, decency forbids."

For Lady Grey had her hair down, and her little white fur slippers on, without stockings.

"After that," said Mollie, "I dare not refuse," and she rose slowly out of her very snug low chair, and went downstairs.

The drawing-room was empty, the fire burning low. Molly could not find the third volume of her sister's book; it certainly was not on the green table by the fire, nor on the red table, nor anywhere else in the room. Mollie wandered on, looking for it among all the scattered Mudie books in vain. Suddenly she bethought her of continuing her search in the library. She crossed the morning-room, and opened one of the big library doors.

It was dark, no light whatever except from the fire, which, though a large one, was black and fitful.

Mollie made her way up to it, and was just taking a cedar match from the chimneypiece with which to light a candle, when she suddenly perceived that she was not alone in the room.

Deep in a low chair by the fire sat, or rather lay Captain Houghton enjoying a well-earned doze. Mollie was about to retire very softly—but it was too late—he opened his eyes. A piece of coal fell in with a little crash, and in the brilliant blaze that burst out in consequence, Mollie stood revealed. He jumped to his feet.

"I came for a book," said she demurely. "I am so sorry to have disturbed you."

"You are not going away again this very mo-

ment, I hope," he said entreatingly. He took hold of one of her hands as if to urge his request.

"How very cold your poor little hands are!" forgetting to give it up again. "Here, positively you must warm them before you go. Nobody ever comes in here before dinner, we shall be quite snug."

He drew forward the big chair in which he had been so comfortable, gave her a hand-screen to shade her face from the fire, and fetched a little cane chair for himself.

"You know, Mollie," he went on, in rather an aggrieved voice, "since the people came I have seen next to nothing of you. It is unbearable."

"It was quite time that you should have a little variety," she answered quickly. "We have had nobody but each other to amuse ourselves with, for ever so long."

"I am sorry you were tired of it."

"I was not in the least tired of it," she answered.

"Oh!"

There was a moment's pause.

"I must go upstairs," said Mollie, quite aware that he wanted to say something that did not come easily.

"No, no, please don't. Surely you need not always run away whenever I get you to myself."

"Be quick then," said Mollie frivolously, to hide that her heart was beating so fast.

"Mollie, did any one ever ask you to marry them?"

"Yes."

"I thought so," he said bitterly. "Of course, dozens have."

"No, only two, indeed Charlie."

"Were they rich?"

"One was, very."

"Why did you not have him? Don't you know that money is the magnum bonum of life?"

"Is it? I dare say. I never tried."

"There is nothing so desirable," he said hastily. "I should have married that rich man if I had been you."

"But mercifully, all things considered, I am myself and not you. I really must go, they will be wondering what I am doing."

"No, no, don't go. I do so want to speak to you. Mollie, are you fond of money?"

"I am fond of the things money buys," answered she, laughing. "I like nice, pretty, comfortable things—I like nice gowns and all that sort of thing; but one can do a great deal now-a-days with very little money, for the big shops are all in a chronic state of selling off——"

"Oh, Mollie," in a tone of despair. "You would never do for a poor man's wife."

"I cannot cook, and I cannot scrub, but I am clean and tidy, and I dare say I could make him comfortable enough to keep him out of the public-house," she said solemnly.

"You always turn everything into fun! and as for me, I never was further from fun in all my life—I don't mean that sort of poor."

"You mean genteel poverty," said Mollie, laughing a little wildly. "In novels it is always said to be the worse of the two, but I never can see it—instead of being ashamed of making the pudding myself, I should glory in it, if I did it well. But unluckily, all those I ever made collapsed at the critical moment. I make toffee splendidly!"

"Don't laugh at me, Mollie; if you only knew how unhappy I am."

"Are you unhappy, Charlie?" and she looked up at him with her large blue eyes suddenly grown soft and tender. "Why did you not tell me? I am sorry. Is there anything I can do for you?"

He went down on one knee before her, taking her two hands in his.

"Is there anything you could not do for me? My darling, my own darling, if only——"

The door burst open, and a housemaid came in with a rush. There was a terrified exclamation of "Lor!"

But Captain Houghton and Mollie were far apart. The housemaid thought that she could not believe the sight her own eyes had beheld, when she heard the perfectly calm voice in which Captain Houghton said:

"I believe this was the book for which you came in search, Miss Houghton."

Mollie's quiet answer as she took it was:

"Oh yes, thank you," and she sailed away upstairs to dress, with dignity.

Gwendoline's boudoir was deserted by all but its mistress, who exclaimed:

"My dear child, how late you will be! What have you been doing! Dinner will ring in two minutes."

"I have brought Meta's book," said Mollie, throwing it down by her cousin and darting away. "Oh, defend me from being late!"

"Meta's book indeed!" said Gwendoline taking up the volume with a smile. "I did not know that Meta was reading Carey's Dante's 'Inferno'!"

CHAPTER VI.

The next morning at breakfast Meta received a letter from Lady Mary announcing the dismal fact that all "dear Charles's" poor children had got the measles. She handed the letter to Mollie in silence, who bit her lips and grew very rosy, her heart dying within her.

Marchlands unavailable, where could she go on the seventeenth, which day was approaching with giant strides?

"Mettie," she said, putting her arm round her sister's waist, and drawing her into the morning-room after breakfast, "I don't believe one catches measles after one is grown up; do you?"

"I don't think it advisable to try, my dear, especially as you have never had them before; mamma would not hear of it."

"Then I suppose she will come back to London for me."

"And leave Charles's bereaved darlings! Mollie, what an inhuman suggestion!"

"But I am a bereaved darling too."

"I dare say; but you are one to six, and you are in the most robust health."

"But seriously, Mettie," lowering her voice, and looking up piteously at her sister, "what is to become of me? You know I can't stay here."

"I know nothing of the kind, Poll! Pray what is to prevent you from staying here? I am going to stay."

"Oh Mettie, how horrid of you! I thought you would be sure to go, and let me go with you to the Moat."

"Nothing I should have liked better, but you see, dear, I have promised to stay, and one can't do a rude thing."

"Not even for once, Mettie?"

"No; life would not be long enough to atone."

"Do you know Aggie's plans?"

"They are engaged for the hunt-ball at Woodlands on the nineteenth—constituents, you know."

"What is to become of me?" said Mollie with a sigh that touched her sister.

"Aunt Jennie," she said, seeing her aunt pass through the open door, "here is a poor little mortal who wants a little comforting."

"What is the matter, Princess Goldenlocks?" said Lady Jane coming in, and fondly kissing the sweet little wistful face turned up to hers.

"Charles's horrid children have got the measles" —in a very dolorous voice.

"Oh, is that all? I daresay they will have them very favourably, and it will be an excellent thing over."

"But you see, auntie," went on Mollie, busily fastening and unfastening the tiny pearl horse-shoe brooch at Lady Jane's throat, "I can't go to Marchlands because I have not had it. Don't you think it would be a good thing over with me too?" she said suddenly brightening up, but her face fell at the emphatic answer:

"Certainly not—not to be thought of. Besides, what is it all about? The children will be quite well, and running about, long before you leave me. Now I have got you, I don't mean you to leave me in a hurry, my pet."

"I don't want to leave you, auntie, only you see —you see—I must go before the eighteenth," and Mollie's voice was tearful.

"No, no," said Aunt Jennie severely, though she gave an odd little significant look at Lady Grey over Mollie's head. "My dear child, we must not have any of that nonsense. You know your cousin is a most especial pet of mine—he is a good, honourable, upright young fellow, very handsome too. I cannot say that I think you are to be pitied."

"But, dear auntie, it is so wicked to run counter to Uncle George's wishes—that hospital——"

"Mollie," said her aunt gravely, "don't be a hypocrite; you must look the thing fairly in the

face. It would be almost dishonest if, for a mere caprice on your part, you deprived a man, in every way a noble fellow, of the fortune actually meant for him."

"Don't you see it, Mollie?" said Lady Grey kissing her warmly.

Lady Jane went on: "You are not old enough, my dear, to appreciate the value of wealth, especially to a man. To yourself it would probably not signify so much, as I daresay you would some time or other marry some one; but to your cousin it is life or death—his whole future lies in your hands, whether he is to remain all his life a poor soldier (probably be killed in the next Indian campaign), or be a really happy rich man enabled to make full use of the very considerable talents he possesses. I am as fond of him as if he were my own son, and I hope, Mollie, that you are not going to disappoint me so bitterly."

"But, auntie," said poor Mollie very eagerly, "it would be a cruel kindness, indeed, to marry a man whom one hated."

"How can you hate him? You know nothing whatever about him. You may very quickly learn to feel quite differently about him; he is charming, and you silly little Mollie, what do you know about love?" Poor Mollie, what would she not have given to prevent the colour rushing into her cheeks as it did, so painfully that it brought the tears into her eyes.

"But, auntie," she said, bending her head very

low indeed, "I might know some day, and I am only just eighteen, and I don't, don't, don't want to marry any one at all."

"It is all self, self, and nothing else," said Lady Jane, and turning away, she spoke to Meta over Mollie's head:

"You know, Meta," she said, "how your cousin has been like my own child. When he was quite a boy, he always spent his holidays here; he was the finest, most generous-hearted little fellow in the world. You heard how he distinguished himself in the Afghan war, of course? All his life he has been told to look upon himself as Uncle George's heir, but in spite of that, he behaved as not another man in ten thousand would have done, working hard, never calculating on it for one moment—though, poor fellow, I know he had built castles in the air, for he used to confide them to me, and they were always such good ones: he meant to be such a useful, active man, full of good schemes."

"What made Uncle George alter his will?" said Meta quickly.

"Don't you know? He did it after your mother and Mollie stayed with him last year, just before she came out."

"The time when he gave her the pearl necklace?"

"Yes; he took a great fancy to her, which is not to be wondered at, considering all things," fondly patting Mollie's golden head. "And he took the foolish notion into his head to marry his two

favourites, and ensure both their future fortunes. He little knew!" she said with a sigh.

"I wish we had never gone there," said Mollie dolefully.

"I wish with all my heart that you had not," said Lady Jane fervently. "Then my poor boy would have had his own."

"Come along, Polyanthus! you are wanted," exclaimed Sir Thomas Grey, coming in.

Mollie, terrified lest her tearful eyes should be seen, dashed past him upstairs.

"Hullo!" he said with astonishment, looking from his wife to her aunt.

"Yes," said Meta, answering his look. "We have been pitching into Mollie."

"Don't bully her too much, poor little girl," he said, being very soft-hearted on the subject of his young sister-in-law.

"Don't be afraid," said Lady Jane, laughing; "I am sure that it is the only way to bring it all right in the end."

Tom walked away with a "Humph!"

Mollie did not come down again all the rest of the morning. She spent it walking up and down her room in a fever of misery.

Lady Jane and Meta, both knowing that all must and would come right in the end, had not at all realised the extent of their poor little victim's present suffering, which was really considerable.

Charlie's words, Charlie's touch as he held her hands, the look of his loving, earnest eyes, all

were present with her ; and now that the struggle between her heart and obedience had begun, she found out that there was nobody in the whole wide world to compare to Charlie. What was to be done ?

She paced up and down, she prayed to be guided aright, she cried so bitterly, and struggled so much against her feelings, that when luncheon-time came, and Lady Grey came up to look for her, she pronounced her not fit to be seen, and pleading the excuse of a headache, sent up her luncheon to Gwendoline's boudoir, from whence it was taken away untasted.

All the afternoon, carefully following out a little programme arranged between Meta and Lady Jane, Mollie was left alone. She had worn herself out with crying, and felt weak for want of the luncheon, and altogether very low and miserable.

Just before tea Gwendoline was carried upstairs to her boudoir. As soon as she found herself alone with her cousin, Mollie ran to her and buried her face in her lap.

"I have made up my mind, Gwendo," she sobbed. "I will do it. I won't take away his horrid money. He shall have it. I will marry him, and always hate—hate—hate him."

A sob between each word.

"My darling, my dear good child, I am so pleased. You darling, you don't know how happy you will be. There is nobody so charming as he is, Mollie, so dry your eyes, and give me a kiss. She

is going to be good, mamma," as Lady Jane came in. "She is going to be the happiest little wife in Christendom, and she is quite worn out."

A regular shower of kisses and petting followed. Mollie, who thought that she must be very ill, so new to her were the sensations of headache, faintness and the exhaustion of long crying, was thankful to be petted and made much of, and much revived by tea, and also by the praises and commendations she received. She sat comfortably by the fire with her feet wrapped up, and ate more toast and bread-and-butter than she could have believed possible.

"Shall you feel able to come down to dinner, my child?" asked Lady Jane.

Mollie answered, "Oh yes," with a little gasp. She wished to get it over so much, meeting Charlie again, and beginning her new *rôle* in his presence. She must altogether avoid him, be unkind to him if she could, anyhow avoid meeting those looks out of his honest, loving eyes—all must be at an end. "He will never, never call me his darling again," she thought, and at that thought she must have cried again, had not the dressing-bell rung sharply.

Mollie went down to dinner close to her sister, hoping to slip unperceived into the room, but fate was not so kind.

Captain Houghton was anxiously looking out for her, and advanced very eagerly.

"I do so hope that your head is better," he said.

"Was it very bad, Mollie? I am afraid it must have been."

"Not very, thank you," answered Mollie, and she wondered whether the odd, set little answer was in her own voice or not—she saw Charlie give a little start, and then she deliberately turned away from him, and began talking to some one else.

"Come along, Mollie, I am to take you in," said Tom Grey, coming for her. He patted the little hand on his arm very kindly as they crossed the hall, and said in a whisper:

"Meta has been telling me that——"

"Oh, please Tom," cried Mollie, in an agony, quite breathless with horror. Tom only laughed, and turned the subject.

After dinner Mollie seated herself quite out of reach among the ladies, and once when Captain Houghton managed to come up to her she opened a book on the table, so that he turned and went away abruptly.

"There, my task is almost done," she said to herself, as her eyes followed his retreat quite away along the big rooms towards the billiard-room. "And my heart is quite broken."

CHAPTER VII.

CAPTAIN HOUGHTON could not at all understand what had happened to cause this estrangement between himself and his lovely little cousin.

The next day he several times sought her out, only to become more certain that she deliberately avoided him. He racked his brains to make out in what way he could have offended her, and finally came to the conclusion that his words, almost tantamount to a declaration of love that evening in the library, had displeased her, and that she was taking this method of showing him that she did not care for him.

"She need fear no persecution from me," he said to himself hotly, and determined to give up all attempt at explanation. But one day, as he stood rather moodily looking out of the window, bored by everything, by the plans for the day, by the fine weather, by life in general, he happened to turn and catch a glimpse of Mollie's face. She was sitting on a low stool by Gwendoline's sofa with some work in her hands; all the other ladies were busily talking, but Mollie's needle was not drawn through, and her eyes were turned on the window where he stood half hidden by the curtain.

Those blue eyes looked larger than they used to do, they were shining with a sad, wistful, deprecating look in them; she looked so white, and young and forlorn, that a great pang shot through Charlie's heart.

"My darling, my darling," he said to himself, and could not repress a little forward movement. Mollie saw, and with the rapidity of lightning resumed her work.

Captain Houghton determined that, do what she

might, she should not escape an explanation. He would make her listen to him for once.

The next day was the sixteenth. Only one more day, it was now or never.

But the opportunity did not present itself, or rather was so carefully evaded by Mollie that it could not be grasped.

At bed-time, Captain Houghton lit Mollie's candle; this she could not avoid, nor could she help putting her cold little hand into his, to say good-night.

He held it fast, saying in a low voice:

"Mollie, I am going away to-morrow, and I must, and will, see you alone first."

She would not look up; she felt, though she did not see, the passionate pleading in his eyes.

"Oh no, no," she panted.

"Very well, I suppose it must be as you wish," he said sadly, dropping her hand, and turning away.

Poor little Mollie! Could she let him go like this? She followed him with a little quick run, and took hold of his coat-sleeve.

"Charlie," she said, then stopped.

"Well?" still icily cold.

"It would be of no use. I would come. Oh! don't you believe me? But it would be of no use."

All the ladies had gone upstairs; the men had dispersed to their rooms or to smoke. Nobody was on the staircase but themselves.

"Oh, Mollie," he said suddenly. "What do you

mean? Am I to go away then without one word? without one good-bye?"

Mollie held out her hands.

"Oh, don't, don't!" she cried. "Please, I—I can't bear it."

Both his arms were round her in a moment.

"Mollie, my darling, my darling," he cried, "I love you, my darling. Mollie, Mollie, don't turn away like that; you must not, you shall not."

"Charlie, let me go! Oh what shall I do?"

"Say you love me! look at me, my own; let me see your sweet eyes."

"I can't—I can't! Don't you understand, Charlie? I am going to marry—to marry another man."

He let her go then, he started back and Mollie fled away like a lapwing, and never stopped or drew breath till she reached her own room, and had thrown herself on her bed, sobbing as if her very heart would break.

That evening, Lady Jane had taken Meta into her own dressing-room before going to bed, and they sat together before the fire. Lady Jane was anxious and rather unhappy about her plan.

"I have a great many misgivings, Meta," she said, "and I want you to be hopeful and encourage me. I had a long talk with Charlie this afternoon when we were out, and he told me that no power on earth should induce him to marry her, 'selling himself for money,' as he called it. Such nonsense! I am afraid it is an awkward business just now.

He is going away to-norrow, and declares that he will not return, and will take the greatest possible pains to avoid Amelia Houghton. I did not think such haughty determination was in him. Oh Mettie, do you think he is sufficiently in love with Mollie to forgive me ?"

"I do indeed," said Meta hopefully. "I never saw any man more so, especially since Mollie has been treating him so badly. Has she not behaved beautifully ?"

"Yes, but oh, Meta, I am terrified to death. I hope it will all come right."

"I have not the least doubt in the world," said Lady Grey. "And the marriage will be all the happier for the fact that true love did not at all run smoothly."

Meta went away to bed, and Lady Jane was still sitting rather sadly before the fire, when she was startled by a quick, sharp knock at the door.

"Come in," she said, and her nephew came into the room.

Captain Houghton was as white as a sheet, and he had a stern frown on his brow, his lips tightly compressed.

"I am glad you are not gone to bed, Aunt Jane," he said: "I have something to say to you."

"My dear boy, you are as cold as ice. Is anything the matter ?"

"No, no, nothing. I wish to say good-bye. I am going up to London by the eight o'clock train to-

morrow, but I will come back the day after, on the eighteenth, and I will marry the woman after all."

"Oh, Charlie!"

"Yes," he said bitterly. "After all, there is nothing like money. Send the dog-cart to meet the five o'clock train, please; good-night."

He did not kiss her, or do anything but walk out of the room as quickly as he had entered it, and Lady Jane sat thunderstruck.

"He must have had some scene with my poor little Mollie," she said to herself.

Before finally going to bed, she went very softly to Mollie's room and went in.

The curtains and shutters were open, and the moonlight streaming in. Mollie lay fast asleep in its rays with one arm thrown over her head like a tired child. There were tears on her cheeks, and a little catch in her breathing now and then, which showed that she had sobbed herself to sleep. She looked so very pretty, so young and sweet, that Aunt Jennie could not help crying a little as she bent over and prayed that God would bless her.

The next morning Lady Jane came to Mollie's room. "Charlie Houghton has gone away," she said in a tone of studied indifference. "He went by the eight o'clock train up to London. He always was uncertain in his movements—here to-day, gone to-morrow. By-the-bye, Mollie, did he think you were going to-day?"

"Yes," answered Mollie very low. "I always said I was."

"Come down to breakfast, dear. This morning I am going to send you out riding with Tom; it will bring back some colour into those white cheeks of yours."

The ride did Mollie a great deal of good. Tom was so kind to her and considerate—all subjects bearing on the awful morrow were carefully and successfully avoided.

The afternoon brought an amusing letter from Woodlands, where Aggie had enjoyed herself much, and also a few lines from Lady Mary giving a satisfactory account of the children, who were taking to their beds at slow intervals one after the other, promising to prolong the quarantine most unnecessarily.

So the weary day ended and the eighteenth dawned at last.

CHAPTER VIII.

It rained the whole day, one unceasing uncompromising downpour.

The ladies spent the morning in Gwendoline's room; the men were all out with the hounds. The hours rolled slowly on to most of them, to Mollie they seemed to go with preternatural rapidity. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes were brilliant. Nobody spoke to her about the dreaded arrival, but at luncheon she heard her aunt's order:

"The dog-cart to meet Captain Houghton by the five-five train."

Her heart died within her. She had been right then: Stephen, also, was a captain; the very familiarity of the name gave her a fresh pang.

After luncheon Meta, seeing how feverish the poor child looked, invited her to put on an ulster and accompany her for a walk in defiance of the rain.

Mollie was delighted. It was wet, muddy and splashy, but the sisters enjoyed it, and came home looking all the better for it.

Five o'clock struck; tea was brought into the drawing-room. Lady Jane, who, for a wonder, had no letters to write, had arrayed herself in the delicious folds of crimson plush, and had ordered, in addition to the usual fare, scones and tea-cakes; all looked extremely comfortable.

She spoke in a low tone to one of the servants. Mollie distinctly heard the words:

"When Captain Houghton comes, show him into the library."

Her heart beat fast, she felt as if she could not swallow a mouthful. Meta charitably drew forward her own chair, so as to throw Mollie and her pale little face quite into the shade, and she talked and laughed and made fun with a vivacity that was somewhat forced.

"Captain Houghton has arrived, my lady, and is in the library," was announced.

"He is very punctual," said Lady Jane, rising, with an anxious smile, and she left the room.

Meta kept up the conversation bravely, though she felt that her poor little sister, sitting down by her, was trembling from head to foot.

A quarter of an hour passed, and then Lady Jane came back; her face was quite radiant now, and she telegraphed something to Meta which no one else saw. Aunt Jennie called Mollie, who jumped up with a great start, and raised her woe-begone little face questioningly. Aunt Jennie looked at her smiling, with a heartless want of compassion.

"Come with me, darling, if you have finished your tea," she said.

There was no escape. Mollie rose and did as she was told. Lady Jane led her away to the library door.

"Your cousin is anxious to see you, my child," she said.

"Oh, auntie, you will come too?"

"No, no, don't be silly, Mollie. Go in dearest, indeed trust me, there is nothing to be afraid of."

And Lady Jane opened the library door, and left Mollie on the threshold, going away quite quickly herself.

Mollie went forward; her heart beat so fast that she felt quite suffocated; she hardly knew how she managed to get all the length of that long, dark room, for there was only a green-shaded reading-lamp close to the fire.

Her terror made her almost blind, she could only

see a tall, dark figure coming towards her, and she put out her hand to meet it, gasping :

"How do you do ?"

The little hand was not released, but was held tighter and tighter.

"Mollie," said a voice, oh, how strangely familiar !

"Mollie," once again.

Then she was gathered into Charlie's arms, and his words came fast on her ears :

"Mollie, my darling, my own, it is all right ! Aunt Jennie has told me all about it. You are Amelia, and I am Stephen ; my darling, my beloved, don't you see ?"

But Mollie neither saw nor understood anything, only that she was sobbing on his breast, and that he said it was all right. The reaction had been too strong.

"Well, Mollie," said Aunt Jennie, when she came back half an hour later, "have you forgiven me ?"

Mollie could only kiss her again and again.

"I don't see how it ever could have been managed otherwise," she said, in a sort of odd, apologetic tone to her nephew. "You see you were both so extraordinarily wrong-headed and perverse, and hated each other with such a deadly hatred."

The glance that passed between Charlie and Mollie was good to see, and Mollie immediately hid her face again on her aunt's shoulder.

"And how about the philanthropic intentions, Mollie?" asked Tom, when he was told all about it.

"I don't know what you mean," said Mollie, indignantly.

"Oh, Mollie, Mollie! You who were so anxious to fulfil the real intention of Uncle George's Will!"

FLEUR DE LYS:

A STORY OF THE FRANCO-GERMAN WAR.

CHAPTER I.

ONE morning in October, 1870, the town of O——, one of the oldest and most illustrious in France, underwent the humiliation of seeing a foreign army march in triumph through its streets. The event had been foreseen as inevitable more than a month beforehand; but the town was so proud and patriotic, its 'scutcheon was so bright, the roll of its achievements so teemed with great deeds, that honest burghers, who ignored strategy, had been pleased to doubt to the end, half-thinking that some miracle would interpose to save them from such crushing degradation. But O—— was not defensible, as all military men well knew. The fortifications, behind which, four centuries ago, it had stood one of the most memorable sieges in history, had long been demolished; and as no others had been built in their place, nothing could have come of resistance but bombardment and total ruin. To spare the population these needless

sufferings, the French garrison had retreated—not, indeed, without fighting, for appearance' sake and against double odds, a battle which was hopeless from the first.

And so the Prussians were tramping, with bayonets fixed and helmets glistening, through the narrow streets of the venerable city. The morning was grey and a little misty ; a cold, drizzling rain had been falling during the night ; and this, taken in connection with the sombre uniforms and travel-stained appearance of the invading troops, the silent throngs of spectators that bordered either side of the roadway, and the mournful notes of the cathedral bell (which happened to be tolling that morning for a funeral service), gave the solemnity much more the character of a burial procession than of a triumphal entry of conquerors. And yet there they were, conquerors notwithstanding, and with all the pride of conquest stamped on their brows. There was no mistaking the dogged but exulting looks, the heavy, resolute tread, and that peculiar grasp of the rifle-stock which speaks of being on the watch and ready to fight again at a moment's notice ; nor *did* the spectators mistake it. Singularly enough, however, the predominant feeling amongst them was evidently rather one of curiosity than of anger. The day before, the mayor had, in great trouble of mind, covered the walls of the town with placards, beseeching the inhabitants to be calm, and not to insult their victors ; but his fears on this ground proved unfounded. The crowds stared, but did not seem

particularly shocked by what they saw. Perhaps during the first five minutes, whilst the vanguard of Uhlans were filing past, and a band that came behind them played the martial strains of the *Wacht am Rhein*, a murmur or two might have been heard, and a few French countenances might have been seen to turn pale ; but soon this wore off. As regiment after regiment went by, and the crowd grew familiar with the faces of their foes, sensitiveness became blunted. By the end of an hour's time it had almost vanished ; and curiosity being then cloyed, the crowd lapsed into that state when it needs but a ludicrous incident to break the ice and revive that natural propensity to be jocular which lurks within all great concourses of men ; and it so chanced that the needed incident occurred.

At a spot where four roads met was a plug-hole, which, having been somehow widened, formed an insidious and dangerous foot-trap. Most of the soldiers, with Teutonic prudence, avoided it ; but one less wary set his foot in it without looking, and before he could extricate himself was bumped by the man behind him, and this second man by a third ; so that they all three tripped up and fell with a crash, letting go their rifles, and plunging their entire company into confusion ; upon which a delighted titter broke out along the whole line of spectators. Somebody made a joke (rather feeble) about conquerors biting the dust, and the rest laughed at it. This encouraged a second wag, and then another ; and from that moment all these

Frenchmen stood consoled for the capture of their town, for the requisitions, and for everything else that might happen to them that day, by the thought that three of their vanquishers had made themselves ridiculous. Happy the nation whom such episodes can cheer ! The remainder of the marching past went off gaily enough. The onlookers criticised with much satisfaction, though in whispers, the cut of their enemies' coats, the poker-like rectitude of their backbones, the absence of pipe-clay on their belts, and, of course, their military tactics, which were generally voted absurd.

There was at least one person, however, among the throng whose sentiments did not undergo the same variations of cloud and sunshine as those which have just been noticed, and this was a young and fair-haired girl of twenty. In the morning—some two hours before the Prussian entry—there had driven into O—— a well-appointed carriage, drawn by two horses, and bearing an old gentleman and his daughter. This carriage stopped at a chemist's shop, then at a surgical bandage maker's, and lastly at one of those depôts where the appurtenances of a private ambulance might be bought—lint, linen, camp-beds, &c.; and at all these places the old man and the young girl were received with marks of particular respect. It is true that the carriage displayed a coronet on its panels, which may account, in some way for this deference ; but it is also certain that the young girl was divinely beautiful, and that had she been anybody else but a

duke's daughter, it would have made little difference in the amount or in the quality of the homage which men would have strewed upon her path. There are faces towards which all men feel drawn, and whose claims to absolute worship nobody calls in question. Hers was one of them. It was a face that would have made a craven feel chivalrous, and would have spurred a naturally honourable man to deeds of valour or sacrifice such as those of which legends tell. On the other hand, heaven help the man who should fall in love with such a face and not have his love requited! His life would become a torment, for he could never forget those features, with their sweet, grave expression—never.

The duke—a slight, thin-visaged man of about sixty, who walked with a stiff knee and leaned for support on a stick—was essentially a French nobleman of that school who have sent the present age to Coventry. A Legitimist he was; not cynical or morose, but one of those who can feel no sort of sympathy for modern ideas; are intimately persuaded that they will all break down; and, pending this consummation, hold aloof, washing their hands of politics and of everything else which may bring them into active contact with a world which they neither understand nor esteem. One could read his character, his prejudices, his proclivities on his face as in an open book. He was dignified, but cold; his manners were marked by the most perfect courtesy, but—except when he was talking to persons of his own rank—there was in them just

the slightest tincture of sarcasm, as if he were constantly expecting that his interlocutor was going to commit himself to some outrageous proposition, and as if his not doing so were a matter of surprise to him. It is superfluous to mention that although in the month of October, 1870, France was already in the enjoyment of Republican institutions, nobody would have ventured to address the duke otherwise than by his title. Thrones might fall and constitutions vanish, kings or emperors might be deposed and Frenchmen citizenise one another to their hearts' content ; but throughout all changes and chances this nobleman was Duc de Bressac, and meant to remain so.

" Then I will have all those articles sent up to the castle, Monsieur le duc," said the shopman of the ambulance depôt ohsequiously, as he escorted the noble customer and his daughter back to their carriage, after they had remained more than an hour making purchases.

" If you please, M. Galuche," said the duke, hoisting himself into the carriage by the aid of his stick and his footman's arm.

" And you will try to let us have them as early as possible, M. Galuche," added Mademoiselle de Bressac, in a pleading voice.

" They shall be at the castle as soon as ever the roads are clear, mademoiselle," answered florid M. Galuche, bowing low ; and so saying, he drew out his watch. " It is now close upon twelve, mademoiselle—as the troops are to enter in another half-

hour, it would scarcely be safe to send now; the roads must be already blocked."

"But I thought the entry was not to commence till two," exclaimed the duke, in surprise. "I had timed our coming so that we might get all our shopping done, and be back before they came in."

"There was a countermand last night, M. le duc," replied the shopkeeper, renewing his bows. "The troops were not to have come in till the afternoon. Yesterday we were enjoined to be in readiness to receive them at twelve o'clock."

M. Galuche had no very cogent reasons for detesting the war, for it had developed his particular branch of commerce in a way that was most satisfactory, and commerce was what M. Galuche naturally regarded as the *ne plus ultra* of man's aims and thoughts here below. Nevertheless, finding himself in the presence of M. de Bressac, whose views were probably not commercial, he felt it binding upon him to show that the ancient patriotism of the citizens of O—— had not degenerated in his person, so he pursued with sudden lugubriousness: "Yes, twelve o'clock—a terrible event this for our good town of O——, M. le duc. I, for my part, have to lodge six of these brigands in my house—I received the billet-order this morning. Six of them!" and he drew, or pretended to draw, a sigh, very miserably.

"What are we to do now?" asks M. de Bressac, perplexedly, of his daughter. "We shall have to remain here half the day."

"If M. le duc will so far honour me," broke in M. Galuche, with alacrity, "I have a drawing-room above my shop where mademoiselle could sit whilst the army was marching by. There is a capital view from the window."

"God forbid!" cried the duke, biting his lips as if he had had a spasm; and to the unspeakable chagrin of M. Galuche, he saw a look of pain flit over the nobleman's features, and indignation flash from the eyes of Mdlle. de Bressac.

"I—a—of course did not mean that mademoiselle should look at the march past; that I know—a—would be too—too—distressing," blundered he, in a reckless endeavour to rectify his mistake. "I only intended to pray that mademoiselle would do me the honour of accepting a shelter in my house, and partaking of such humble refreshment as it is in my power to offer."

But M. Galuche was saved the trouble of further apology by a loud flourish of trumpets which resounded at the end of the street. This, he explained, had been announced the day before as a signal that the thoroughfares through which the army was to pass were instantaneously to be cleared of all their vehicles; and in effect, a minute or two later a squad of Uhlans—part of the garrison that had been holding the town for a few days past—debouched at the upper end of the street, rode down it at an amble, and directed the duke's coachman to draw up his carriage in a by-lane. The coachman, being English, obeyed without a

word; but the footman, being French, and old, could not submit to this order without having recourse to the solace of numerous shrugs, muttered oaths, and argumentative pleas, to all of which demonstrations the silent, armed Uhlans paid as much attention as if he had said nothing. Under their directions the carriage was stationed in a small street that led out of the main one, and it was from this point that the duke and his daughter became the unwilling spectators of the saddest scene which can be given to loyal and patriot eyes.

At first M. de Bressac threw himself back in his seat without glancing either to the right or left of him, and his daughter did the same, neither speaking. But soon a kind of fascination drew the young girl's face to the window. She looked fixedly, yearningly, and with a sickening expression of sorrow; and insensibly hot tears began to course each other down her cheeks, whilst her frame trembled as if from cold.

Nobody who has not felt it can realise the sensation of seeing one's country invaded. As Mdlle. de Bressac looked, it seemed to her as if she were draining a cup of humiliation bitter enough and deep enough for a life-time. No private sorrow could ever touch her like this. Her mother's death, which had been the one great grief of her young life, had moved her less; the loss of her father, if she lived to suffer it, could not, she thought, cause her pangs more acute and lasting. The soldiers tramped by, the guns jolted over the paving-stones,

the hoofs of the horses struck the ground with almost rhythmical cadence; and these sounds, so stirring when it is a friendly cavalcade that produces them, shot throes of positive physical pain through her heart. At last she could bear it no longer, and, shivering all over, drew her head in. As she did so, she involuntarily glanced up, and her eyes encountered those of a Prussian officer, who had been gazing at her as if spellbound for more than half-an-hour.

He was a young man of about six-and twenty, of strikingly handsome features, and eyes remarkably intelligent and mild. The tasteful light-blue uniform with white facings which he was wearing set off to advantage his strong, well-knit figure and he bestrode a powerful charger with ease and grace. Probably he was acting in some sort as marshal, for though Mdlle. de Bressac had not noticed him, he had early taken up his position in the street where the carriage stood, and, in company with six mounted soldiers, seemed to be there to keep the crowd back. No doubt, his first glance at the beautiful occupant of the brougham had been of the kind which most men throw at pretty women; but if so, it had quickly changed. The light look of levity in his eye faded from them, and gave place to an air of generous and manly sympathy as he watched the lovely face bathed in tears, and marked the keen traces of anguish on the young girl's features.

He threw a glance behind him to see if it would not be possible to take the carriage out of its posi-

tion, and spare its owners the rest of the sight; but the alley was a blind one, and its single issue was now closed. Perceiving this, the young officer turned his eyes again with increasing pity on the weeping face, and did not take them off. He gazed at the girl with an admiration that slowly grew every minute, and which at least became so trance-like that when, towards the end, Mdlle. de Bressac withdrew her face from the carriage window and caught his eye, he started as if from a dream, and, without appearing conscious of what he was doing, raised his white-gloved hand to his helmet, and bowed as if he were saluting a queen.

Mdlle. de Bressac did not return this salute. Coming from such a quarter, and under such circumstances, it seemed to her an insult, and caused her to flush up to the eyes. The officer had time to perceive that flush, and to guess the meaning of it, and he slightly changed colour. In a few minutes more the triumphal procession was over, and the carriage was enabled to move away. The young Prussian followed it with his eyes until it vanished round the corner of the street.

Then—no longer the same man as he had been an hour before, for what transformations may not be compassed in an hour?—he slowly rode off with his men in search of the quartermaster, to ascertain where his billet was. On his way he was far too much absorbed to notice, what he certainly would have, and *had* remarked that same morning, that more than one Frenchwoman turned round to look at him

as he rode past, and to remark, "Qu'il n'avait pas mauvaise tournure pour un Prussien."

The quartermaster was standing in front of the townhouse with lists in his hand, and a very mob of officers pressing round him. With more respect for the new applicant than his military rank actually warranted, for the young man was but a captain, the high functionary said to him, "Herr Hauptmann, your quarters will be good ones. You are one of a party of twenty who will lodge at the Château de Bressac." Then, in a whisper, "Fine house and capital cellar, Herr Graf. The duke is one of the richest men in this country, and his daughter, they say, is "——

But the arrival of more officers cut the remark short, and the captain had to turn his horse again. When out of the throng, he called to a workman who was leaning against a post, looking very much as if he had been consoling himself for his country's misfortunes with absinthe, and asked him for information as to where the château was.

"The Château de Bressac is not quite a league off," hiccoughed the Frenchman, with a praiseworthy attempt to look dignified and sober. "You have only to follow the road straight, and, with that horse of yours, you ought to catch up the duke's carriage, which was here ten minutes ago. Ay, a carriage with soft cushions like mattresses," added he, drawlingly. "A pretty thing for aristos like that to be dragged about under a Republic when good fellows like myself go on foot."

"Was it a carriage drawn by a pair of bays, and with a lady inside?" asked the Prussian.

"Ay, that's it—two bays that are fed better than many a good Republican, I'll be bound; and the lady inside was Mdlle. Fleur de Lys, the duke's daughter."

The officer put his hand into his pocket, and threw the man a napoleon.

CHAPTER II.

MDLLE. FLEUR DE LYS, or Mdlle. Lili, as people more affectionately called her, was the only child of the Duke de Bressac. She had had a brother, but he died in boyhood, and since then she had been the object upon whom all her father's affection, pride, and ambition centred. A love such as that which her father bore her would have been enough to spoil most children, but it had not spoiled her. Though she reigned supreme at Bressac, where her least whim was law, she exercised her sovereignty sensibly, and was not renowned anywhere about the country for capriciousness or eccentricity. The only thing people said about her was that she was proud—"kind-hearted, but proud," was their term; and this estimate of her character was no bad one, if by pride was meant that she had a shrinking horror of everything that was mean or commonplace, and set up for herself an ideal of human nature that was as much above the real thing as

heaven is above the earth. This was, indeed, the rock upon which a good deal of Mdlle. Lili's future peace was likely to split; for ideals are dangerous things in the navigation of life. Mdlle. Lili could not understand that the purest of human natures, like the purest of coins, contain some small particle of alloy. Having passed all the leisure hours of her girlhood reading the books of chivalry with which the old library of the castle was stored, and having ever present before her eyes the example of her own father, whose scrupulousness was so nice that it almost amounted to the pedantry of honour, she would have had every man be wholly brave, generous, courteous, and disinterested. And the worst of it was, that she gave every man credit for these qualities before knowing him, whence it would happen that as few men—or, to speak more correctly, none—ever did full honour to the list of virtues with which she had debited them, she generally relegated them, after a few days' acquaintance, to the obscurest background of her thoughts, amongst things tried and found wanting. This was the reason why, at twenty, Mdlle. Fleur de Lys was not yet married. Suitors had wooed her in plenty; but one had seemed not quite brave; a second was too fond of money; a third's manners were bad; a fourth was brave and disinterested enough, but was prone to tattle; and so on. It must be said that, in dismissing her suitors, Mdlle. de Bressac never did so in a way that could shock them, or make them guess that

they had displeased her. She was not only too well bred, but too kind and compassionate, to cause anybody wilful pain. Only when a lover failed to come up to her standard of perfection, he simply found that he made no progress in his wooing—that was all.

On coming back to Bressac from the town of O——, Mdlle. Fleur de Lys was in a state of feverish agitation, such as her father had never known her in before. What most shocked her in the cruel spectacle of the morning was the attitude of the inhabitants. "To think," cried she, clasping her hands in an intensity of bitterness—"to think that there were young men in those crowds, men of twenty and thirty, who were not ashamed to come out on the pavements to stare at our enemies and jeer at them! To jeer, when they had not the courage to fight! Oh, cowardice, treble cowardice of men! Where has all the chivalry of France flown? Why, in a war like this, every house ought to have become a fortress, every village a citadel. Battlements? What need had we of them if our men had been fearless and resolved to face death, as the women and children of Saragossa did in fighting against us? France outdone in valour by a small Spanish town! We are not only beaten, we are dishonoured. No woman will ever be able to look at Frenchmen and feel proud of them. We have fallen so low in spirit, that fifty years hence men will ask of what clay their fathers were made to have patiently stood all this." Here she broke

out into sobs, and her father tried to appease her; but it was not much of an effort, for the duke was too painfully disgusted himself with the tameness shown by his countrymen to be able to find many excuses for them. Those degrading hauls, as he called them, of a hundred thousand armed prisoners at a time, those meek surrenders of large cities, those incredible acts of subservience on the part of corporate bodies, and, worse than all, the rampant bragging of press and public orators, which added ridicule to what was already contemptible enough, filled him with dismay. All that he could find as a palliation for so much shame was the argument that France had become crazed, and was no longer herself. "The people have gone speech-mad," he would say resignedly. "When we see a country like this being governed by a dozen cracked barristers, it means that the age of action is past. Government, nowadays, signifies quibbling. The first time a nation of fighting men turns round on us, we must obviously go to the wall, as we are doing now. And it is useless organizing armies," added he. "Why should peasants or workmen go out to fight? The barristers who govern us have taught them that there is no such thing as God, no religion, no family, no property; that all men are equal, and owe no respect to one another; that all nations are one, and that the idea of a separate allegiance to a mother country is an antiquated barbarism. Good—then why risk one's life? If there is nothing in one's country worth defending,

if a man is to worship only himself, then the soundness of his own skin must evidently be his paramount object, and he had better see to it." Nevertheless, the duke had subscribed largely to the organisation of the armies in which he did not believe ; and he would certainly have enlisted himself, had it not been for his lameness (due to a wound in a duel twenty years before), which precluded his being of any use. As it was, he would have been quite ready to defend his own castle ; but he and his daughter would have had to defend it alone, for at the first hint of barricading the castle, the servants had with one voice declared their intention of being no participators, in such rashness. To be sure, there was one dissentient—the English coachman. Judging the thing from a cool and phlegmatic point of view, the functionary expressed his readiness to fight if his Grace pleased, but " didn't see the use of it."

Happily Mdlle. de Bressac had domestic details to attend to on her return from O——, which obliged her to rouse herself from the state of prostration to which the morning's events had reduced her. Declining to join in the popular cry as to Prussian brigands, clock-robbers, and the rest of it, the Duc de Bressac had decided that the officers billetted upon him should be received with all the regard due to valiant opponents. It was only a lawyers' government, he said, which could seek to traduce courageous enemies by accusing them of filching. So Mdlle. Fleur de Lys had to see that

the twenty best bed-rooms in the castle and all the state apartments were prepared as though to receive honoured guests, the duke merely reserving for himself and his daughter a small suite of rooms in the most retired part of the house. Then, when this was done, Mdlle. Fleur de Lys donned a white apron and went into a wing of the castle which had been converted into an ambulance, and where half-a-dozen French officers and soldiers, wounded in the battle near O——, were being tended. Amongst the private soldiers was a cousin of Mdlle. de Bressac's, the Marquis de Criquetot.

He was fairly rich, this pale marquis of eight-and-twenty, and during the halcyon period of the Second Empire had devoted his mind to horse-racing. He was generally to be met with either at Chantilly or Newmarket, with an eyeglass screwed carefully into his left eye, a dust-coat thrown over his arm, and the gilt clasp of a betting-book peeping out of his breast-pocket. There were few races run without a horse of his appearing at the post, and few horses of his appeared at the post without being beaten. This, however, did not seem to interfere much with his enjoyment of the sport, and he continued a fervent follower of it, until one summer being on a visit to Bressac, he was so smitten with his cousin's charms, that he forthwith sold his stud, discarded his eye-glass, threw his betting-book into the fire, and begged permission of the duke to sue for his daughter's hand. He was in the very midst of

his courtship when the war broke out. Thinking the army would swallow up the Prussians easily enough without him, he did not in the first instance stir ; but after Woerth, when Government appealed to all the men of goodwill in France, Mdlle. Fleur de Lys sent him to enlist as a private soldier, and away he went just as he would have gone and thrust his head into a cannon's mouth had she bidden him. He fought at Sedan and was taken prisoner, but escaped. Then he joined an army in course of formation in the provinces, and conducted himself with such gallantry, that M. Gambetta offered him a colonelcy, which he declined, and the cross of honour, which he accepted. At the battle of O——, a bullet discharged from a Bavarian rifle fractured his collar-bone, and for the moment cut his military career short.

Had the young soldier been in any other ambulance, there is no doubt he might have repined over this mishap, but as things were he managed to bear up. His wound was not dangerous, only troublesome and requiring rest, and this rest he gave it by lounging on a sofa with his right arm in a sling, smoking a good deal, and when his cousin or his uncle were not there to talk with him, reading novels. He was engaged in this way when Fleur de Lys de Bressac glided into his room with one of the potions which doctors prescribed for him, and which he drank with faith because she mixed them. Dressed in black merino, with neat white collar and cuffs, and her rich masses of auburn hair

sheltered by a small white crape cap, she looked as sweet a personification of an ambulance nurse as it was possible to conceive. Moving across the room with noiseless steps, she came to her cousin's side and laid down her tray on the table near him ; then in the gentle voice that always made him thrill, she said : " Do you feel better, mon cousin ?"

He had thrown away his cigarette and laid down his book on her entrance.

" I always feel better when you are here, and relapse when you are out of sight," he answered, half-seriously, half-gaily. " But tell me, cousin, your eyes are red ; you have been crying ? "

"Yes," she said, with a faint sigh, and began to stir his potion in its teacup. " Cousin, you must drink this. It is a little bitter, but the doctor says it will make you sleep."

He quaffed the drug as if it had been the divinest nectar, taking several draughts to make the pleasure last longer. Then he wiped his lips and exclaimed : " It is better than burgundy, cousin."

Whilst he was drinking, Fleur de Lys had mechanically taken up the book he had been reading. It was one of M. Théophile Gautier's popular productions. On seeing the title she laid it down again aud turned a silent but eloquent glance of surprise and sorrow at him : " Novelettes ! " she said at length, " I did not think you could have the heart to read such things as this now."

He did not seem to understand, and held the handkerchief he had been carrying to his lips mid-

way in the air, astonished : " Why, it's a volume of Gautier's, cousin."

" Gautier's tales, whilst the Prussians are flaunting their standard in our town of O——, whilst they are on their way to take up their quarters in this very house ! " she rejoined. " I can see, cousin, that the modern doctrines of internationalism must have struck very deep if a man of your birth feels so lightly for his country's ruin."

He turned red, and answered, a little abashed : " Don't be hard on me, cousin. Time hangs so heavy on my hands when you are not here, that I must needs find a way of killing it. Besides, I have not read much : see, here is the book-marker in the third page. I always think of something else whilst I am reading now."

" And there is only one thing of which you should think," she replied coldly : " the preparing yourself for the day when we shall avenge these outrages that have been put upon us. Who is to set the example of regenerating our country if not our class ? You refused a colonelcy on the field because you said you were not fit for it, and if you thought so you acted honourably. But why do you not fit yourself ? If I were a man I would not rest until I had learned military tactics and the language of our enemies, so as to be ready for the day when we shall re-invade *their* country."

There was a pause. The young soldier looked dejectedly at his bandaged arm, and stroked his forehead thoughtfully with his free hand.

"I am afraid I belong to a poor generation, cousin," he said, in a low voice. "But you must guide me. I can do what I am told to do, and I will obey you. This is the last time I shall open a novel until I have learned German and the drill-book."

"If every gentleman in France did the same, you would be revenged in less than five years," she exclaimed, with vehemence.

"Perhaps every gentleman in France would, if he had you to command him, cousin," was his smiling answer; and as Fleur de Lys's hand still rested on the table, he raised it to his lips and kissed it.

"Yes, but you will not have discharged all your duty, cousin," she continued, gently disengaging herself, "even when you have repaid our enemies, blow for blow, all they have done to us. A gentleman should devote himself to exterminating those blasphemous and disloyal theories that have brought us so low. What they call universal suffrage is an impiety. It is handing over a great nation, with traditions and a name, to the custody of all who are ignorant, debased, and corrupt. The people are like children. They should be ruled and protected against themselves by the classes who have education and religion."

This time the marquis's face assumed a rather rueful expression. "I make no doubt of our soon turning the tables upon the Prussians," he remarked; "but to wage a war against universal suffrage is—is"——

"Is what?" she asked, proudly.

But he was spared the unpleasantness of explaining what he meant; for at that moment there was a knock at the door, and a servant entered. It was the same footman who had driven into O—— with the carriage in the morning; one of those old French servants dressed in impossible liveries that never fit them, and with a grumbling, patronisingly familiar tone, that always makes one doubt whether they are not going to sit down by your side after handing the dishes round. On the strength of his having been an incalculable number of years in the family, this footman felt himself privileged to act chorus, as it were, to all the conversations, carried on within his hearing. Before the war, he had been generally regarded as a successful copy of Caleb Balderstone, whose virtues would prove to be shining gold on the day of trial; but when the day of trial came, in the shape of the duke's proposal to entrench himself in his castle, and defend it to the last drop of his own and his servants' blood, Jean-Baptiste Barbecruche revealed unmistakably that, if he liked the duke, there was somebody he loved still better, and that was himself. Nevertheless, he was not aware that his candid display of egotism had disappointed anybody, or cooled in the smallest degree his employer's faith in his perfections; so that it was in much his usual tone of having pondered the orders he had been commissioned with, and being unable to vouchsafe them his approval, that, addressing his young mistress, he said:—"Made-

moiselle, M. le duc has sent me to say that he begs you to come down stairs and assist him in receiving those Prussians. To receive those people in state, can you understand that? For my part, it disgusts me; and I said to M. le duc, 'Rather than face a Prussian, monseigneur, I would shut myself up in the kitchen, and live there six weeks.' But monseigneur purposes to hand over all his keys to them, and to beg their permission to live in retirement during their presence. Beg their permission, forsooth! just as if they were masters, and we, the owners of the castle, were nobodies! Said I to Monsieur le duc, 'Truly things have come to a pretty pass, monseigneur, when I, an old servant, receive such orders as that!' But monseigneur told me to mind my own business; and he begs, mademoiselle, that you will not delay, as a detachment of officers were already riding up the avenue. Yes, and I saw them myself through a window coming up—a jolter-headed lot, with cannibal faces; scoundrels that'll be getting drunk off our wines, and sprawling with their muddy boots on our best beds. Ah, the scamps, the cut-throats, the"—

"I think that is enough," cried Mdlle. de Bressac, stopping him with a wave of the hand, and turning on him a glance of cool contempt. "You will have earned the right to insult those soldiers, Jean-Baptiste, when you have had the spirit to defy them. Meanwhile, you will have to learn this lesson, that those who have not the heart to fight, must have the courage to slave. During all

the time that the Prussian officers remain in this house, you will wait upon them every day, and do it respectfully. If you prefer shutting yourself up in a kitchen, you are free to follow your choice, but you will select some other kitchen than that of Bressac."

A lashing with a whip could not have more completely disconcerted and cowed the unfortunate Jean-Baptiste. He opened his lips to speak ; but meeting the eyes of his mistress fixed on him implacably, as if awaiting an answer, he judged it prudent to say nothing. It was only when Mdlle. de Bressac had swept out of the room, after nodding slightly to her cousin, that he summed up his impressions by lifting his hands ceiling-wards and exclaiming, "Bandits de Prussiens ! It's they who are the cause of all this. If our poltroon army had only fought like men ! But soldiers are hares, nowadays. In my time it was very different ! " And forgetting the wounded Marquis de Criquetot, who had enjoyed the benefit of this remark, and was smiling at it, he repeated, " Ay, ay, very different ! " and shuffled, mumbling, downstairs.

Half an hour later the entrance-hall of Bressac was the scene of a gathering such as the old walls of the castle, and the pictures of mailed knights that hung upon them, must have witnessed with a stupefaction unparalleled in the course of their inanimate existence. The Duke de Bressac, attired in black, and with his daughter by his side, was standing at a table on which lay a few large keys.

Behind him, in a half circle, were ranged his household; and facing this group thronged a showy cluster of Prussian officers, whose steel spurs and heavy scabbards clanked on the marble of the tesselated flooring. There had been a little uneasiness on the faces of these officers as they neared the castle. They were not sure what kind of reception would be given them; and though quite able and ready to over-ride sulkiness, or any other form of active or passive antagonism, they naturally preferred that their relations with such a man as the Duke de Bressac should be exempt from disagreeable incidents. And in this they were not disappointed. The duke bowed to them with courtesy, and was answered by that peculiarly formal yet not ungraceful salute which is in usage in the Prussian army. Then, speaking to them in his own tongue and with a voice that quavered but little, all things considered, he said,—

"Gentlemen, the hazards of war have brought you as masters into a house where, under other circumstances, I should have been glad to receive you as guests. I shall not importune you much with my presence whilst you are here, for my daughter and I will beg your permission to keep to our own apartments; but the rest of the house will be yours. My steward has orders to take your pleasure, and will deliver you these keys. This particular key (and he drew one from his pocket) is that of a gallery of heirlooms. You will allow me, general, to remit it to you in person." And, stepping forward, he

tendered it to the chief officer present, who turned it over once or twice in his hands, reddened—but eventually pocketed it.

A pin might have been heard to drop whilst this scene was being enacted. Then the duke gave his arm to his daughter and made for the door, the officers parting in two rows to the right and left of them, and raising their hands to their helmets. But just as the party were on the threshold an officer darted out of the throng, picked up a glove which had been left on the table, and, hurrying after Mdlle. de Bressac, said in French, "You have forgotten your glove, mademoiselle."

She bent her head to thank him, and recognised the same officer whom she had seen that morning. He also wore the same expression on his face which had displeased her then. But somehow it did not displease her now, for, stopping to take the glove from his hand, she noticed that that hand shook, and that there were tears in his eyes.

CHAPTER III.

"I CANNOT make out what has come over Leoneizen," exclaimed fat Hauptmann Maximilian Koch, some six weeks after this, one evening at mess in the castle dining-room.

"Very singular," protested another fat Hauptmann, Ferdinand von Schweippe, cutting up a plump and tender quail; "he doesn't eat."

"Nor drink," ejaculated a third Hauptmann, rosy and tall, raising to his lips a glass of the Duke de Bressac's rubiest claret.

"The fact is," laughed handsome, slim-waisted Lieutenant von Wespe, with a glance round him to see that there were none but his brother officers present,—"the fact is, Leoneizen is in love. I am sure of it."

"A man who is in love should eat and drink twice more than a man who isn't, for love wastes," remarked tremendously corpulent Colonel Herr Graf von Wurstspatzen ; and as he was the presiding officer that evening, and had laughed whilst uttering his joke, all the other officers laughed with him in concert. This, by the way, is the rule. A colonel laughs, every body laughs. Discipline could not exist without it.

"But whom does he love?" inquired Hauptmann Koch, between two mouthfuls of game.

"Yes, let's have the name ! " gobbled the second fat Hauptmann, much relishing his plump bird.

"Ah, that's *his* secret," laughed the slim lieutenant. "One mustn't betray."

"A love-secret is no secret," exclaimed the tall and rosy Hauptmann, helping himself to more claret. "Those things always transpire."

"And if they don't, the parties best pleased are not always the lovers themselves," observed the corpulent colonel, with a new laugh. At which the whole table guffawed again like one man.

"Since the Herr colonel is of that opinion, I

may as well say that one need not have many pairs of eyes to guess who is the beauty that has turned our friend's head," sniggered the slim lieutenant.

"I have guessed already," said, with a broad smile, Hauptmann Otto Nädelaugen, a penetrating round-faced Hauptmann, with spectacles. "It is"——

"Hush!" whispered all the officers together; for the door had opened, and the footman, Jean-Baptiste Barbecruche, was sailing in with a tray covered with sweet dishes. By this time J. B. Barbecruche had thought better of his resolution. of never facing the Prussians. Between his patriotism and the prospect of losing his place at Bressac the worthy man had not long hesitated. His sentiments had even flown with rapidity from one extreme to the other, and he now got on capitally with cannibal-visaged foemen whom his French soul had execrated. He was garrulous, civil, and confidential, and was good enough to patronise his new masters as he had done his old ones.

"*Charlotte Russe*, or *Plom-pouding au rhom*, Monsieur le comte?" he asked, pausing on the colonel's left; "let me advise Monsieur le comte to try the *plom-pouding;* our *chef* has excelled himself."

"You don't happen to have seen M. le Capitaine de Leoneizen, have you, M. Jean Baptiste?" asked the penetrating Hauptmann with the spectacles. "He is missing at our board."

"Pardon me, mon capitaine, M. le Comte de

Leoneizen was seated in the Pagoda Garden, drawing, almost all the afternoon. It is true that at dusk I lost sight of him. Perhaps he is gone to the town."

"Perhaps," echoed Hauptmann Nädelaugen. But when M. Jean-Baptiste had retired, after disposing of his dainties and uncorking more bottles of Pomard, Chambertin, and Château Lafitte, the same Hauptmann re-exclaimed, with his spectacles beaming, "The Pagoda Garden! This is the twentieth time I have seen or heard of Leoneizen in the Pagoda Garden. It is that which adjoins the private orchard, where the snow-like Fräulein Fleur de Lys takes her walks; also there is a footpath skirting it, which leads to the village of Bressac, where the fräulein goes often to tend the sick."

"Ha! ha!" laughed the officers.

"Heh! heh!" winked the colonel. "Nädelaugen talks as if he had been reconnoitring the enemy's citadel on his own account, and found it already invested." At which pleasantry, as usual, there was an immense deal of merriment. "However," continued the Herr Colonel von Wurstspatzen, filling his glass, "if one of the king's officers can carry back to Germany as his bride the Fräulein Fleur de Lys, he will have made his Majesty present of as fair a subject as any in all beautydom. It will be a conquest like Metz. Here's to the health of the conqueror!" and the good-humoured corpulent Count von Wurstspatzen drained his glass dry and smacked his lips after it.

Of course, everybody followed suit in the toast, for, as in laughing, so in drinking; when the colonel drinks everybody drinks, this being a necessity of discipline. But when the penetrating Hauptmann with the spectacles had set back his glass on the tablecloth, after exclaiming, "To the conqueror!" he turned his shining spectacles on his superior, and said, grinning: "I have drunk, Herr colonel, but I do not think it is one of us who will carry away the fair fräulein. That wounded marquis, who is our prisoner on parole, the Herr von Criquetot, seems to think and dream only of her—yet, to be sure, she does not appear to think only of him. They are cousins, and go as brother and sister together."

"I saw them walking in the garden the other day, he with his right arm in a sling, she leaning on the other arm," remarked the tall, rosy Hauptmann, who had become more rosy still from the claret. "There is that in a woman's mere way of walking with a man," added he, pensively, "which soon whispers to the observer whether she is in love or not—and the Fräulein Fleur de Lys is not in love with the Herr Criquetot."

"The Herr Criquetot is learning German and drilling," observed the slim Lieutenant von Wespe, as if he thought the thing a good joke. "He stammers German with everybody he can find, and it has got about through these French servants, who spy their masters so well, that he is doing this to please the fräulein his cousin, and in view of the

'*jour de la revanche!*'" And the slim lieutenant struck what he conceived to be a French attitude of "*revanche!*" by waving one hand above his head and making his eye-balls flame.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed all the officers together, greatly amused.

"We are to hear, then, of the Field-Marshal Criquetot crossing the Rhine and besieging Mayence"——

"To take a ham," interrupted the colonel. And this joke was thought so transcendent that it provoked peal upon peal, and appropriately closed the banquet.

The officers were still laughing over the Field-Marshal Criquetot and his ham, when, with their caps jauntily perched on the side of their heads, and the middle buttons of their tight tunics unfastened, they sauntered into the conservatory, which led out of the dining-room, to take coffee and to smoke.

CHAPTER IV.

MEANWHILE, the several persons who had been made the subjects of the mess-room conversation were engaged in their respective occupations, and for reasons best known to themselves were not so happy as their critics. The young Count Leoneizen, to begin with. Leaning against a tree, through the dry branches of which whistled a keen December

wind, this young officer—for whom more than one female heart had beaten, and was, perhaps, beating then, unrequited, at Berlin or Cologne—was straining his eyes to see as far as possible in the night down a dark road, at the end of which twinkled, like one small lamp, the lights of the village of Bressac. Every night the Count Leoneizen came to this tree and gazed down the dark road, for every afternoon Mdlle. de Bressac, attended by her maid, went to the village to carry help and comfort to the sick or wounded, who were being tended in the cottages, and it was seldom that she returned before dusk. So every day the young officer, wrapped in his cloak, leaned against the tree to watch. It pleased him to think that he was in some way guarding over the safety of the woman he loved—that no one could harm her whilst he was there ; that, unknown to her, a stout heart and a strong arm were surveying her footsteps, and waiting to shield her at the cost of life from the slightest insult or danger. He had never spoken to her, and never tried to do so. He knew that his love was a hopeless one. Without exchanging a word with Fleur de Lys, he had convinced himself that, even if she were to love him above everything else on earth, she would never give him her hand. Three months before, Friedrich von Leoneizen had started upon the war flushed and eager with hopes of promotion and dignities : what were these to him now? What would he not have given could France and Germany have remained at peace—ay, even if he had never won an

honour in his life, so that he should only have been free to woo Fleur de Lys as his wife? But it was no use wishing. The greatest happiness he could expect now was to come and watch for Fleur de Lys' going and coming every day. By these means he saw her five minutes in every twenty-four hours —and it was enough.

And yet there were days when his slight happiness was cruelly marred for him; and on the evening when his brother officers were making merry at his expense, he was leaning against his tree with all the pangs of jealousy gnawing at his heart. He could bear to think of Fleur de Lys never being his, but that she should become another's was a thought that maddened him. On this afternoon he had seen her for the third or fourth time go by, not with her maid, but with M. de Criquetot, who was now well enough to take short walks; and the handsome, strong, and amorous German did not easily imagine that Fleur de Lys could love such a dandified, insignificant person as this French marquis appeared to him to be; yet he knew enough of French marriages to be aware that M. de Criquetot might very well win Mdlle. de Bressac without her being more fond of him than of a pet lap-dog. So he clenched his fists till the nails almost ran into the flesh; and the wind seemed to him more bleak and moanful that night than ever; and the country around, enshrouded in its stillness, looked inexpressibly desolate and sepulchral.

But if Count Leoneizen was depressed, things

fared little better with his French rival. In fact, they fared worse, for the German had at least the consolation of knowing that if his passion was hopeless, the fault was not his, but that of events; whereas the marquis, who perceived that he was making no advance in his suit, was fain to adopt as the reason that he had not the qualities in him which make a man loved. Fleur de Lys was always kind to him. Her manner was gentle and sisterly; and he felt little doubt that if he asked her to be his wife, she would consent, to reward him for having gone so obediently and risked his life at her bidding. But he was too generous to require of her anything in the nature of a sacrifice. He wished to be loved, and, failing that, he had strength and chivalry enough to support his disappointment nobly. It is only little hearts that can bear a grudge against a woman for not loving them; generous minds have ever such a sense of their own inferiority beside the woman they worship, that they are prepared for indifference as almost their due. Yet Louis de Criquetot would have been glad to ascertain whether his cousin's indifference towards him was of a kind which might be dispelled by patience on his part, or whether her heart was engaged to anybody else. All he knew was, that of late a change seemed to have come over her. She was quieter, more absorbed. Sometimes, sitting with work in her lap, she would pause five minutes between two stitches; and during those five minutes, a vague, desponding expression would steal

into her eyes, and she would gaze before her as if unconscious of anybody's presence. Then some movement would startle her, and make her resume her sewing, with a blush mantling on her cheek.

All these symptoms could be perceptible only to a lover's eyes. To others, Mdlle. de Bressac was what she had always been ; though perhaps there were some of the more observant amongst the others who did notice that Mdlle. de Bressac was not quite the same in her remarks upon the war as a month or two ago. The news of lost battles still made her turn pale ; at the recital of horrors suffered by the inhabitants of ruined villages she still shed tears of compassion ; but in talking with her cousin about the future of France, she no longer spoke of the necessity of Frenchmen being prepared to resist invasions, and seldom of the necessity of their invading others ; which change was naturally attributed to a prudent wish not to compromise herself in the hearing of any of those ubiquitous spies which Count Bismarck was supposed to hold in his service.

The marquis had escorted his cousin to the village at her own request, because she thought that the walk might do him good ; otherwise he would not have intruded himself, for he was growing sensitive lest she might think he meant to importune her with his attentions. But the invitation, being the third or fourth in succession, had touched and pleased him ; and whilst Fleur de Lys was helping to dress the wound of a stalwart young cottager,

whom a fragment of shell had laid low, he sat by a spluttering wood-fire, that was wreathing clouds of cheerless yellow smoke, and watched her.

Watched her as only lovers can watch, and with an aching heart to think that so much grace and beauty could never be his. The cottage was a wretchedly mean one—one of those hovels common in the centre and west of France, where a whole family are lodged in a single room, which has a stall in the corner of it for a cow. And yet Fleur de Lys' presence lit up this sty as if it were a palace chamber.

As she stood leaning over the sick man's bed, and applying bandages with the light touch and womanly care of one whose soul is in her work, she looked beautiful and lovable beyond what she had ever seemed to her cousin when dressed in silks and pearls. What jewels, indeed, can rival the lustre of a woman's eyes when performing an office of charity? M. de Criquetot, as he sat with his elbow resting on his knee and his head buried in his hand, thought with bitterness of his wasted life, which had sown in him the germ of no single great quality that could charm and win a noble woman. Whilst he was thus immersed in his reflections, the dressing of the wound came to an end, and the patient blurted out, in grateful but energetic *patois*, "You cannot think what good you are doing me, mademoiselle!"

"May the Virgin bless you, my good young lady," took up the man's wife in a brogue quite as

strong. " I sometimes think, though, you must be the blessed Virgin in person."

M. de Criquetot rose, and was assisting Fleur de Lys to put on her grey hood and cloak.

" You have everything you want now, Mère Marchelat?" she asked, buttoning the cloak, which covered her completely, like a nun's dress.

" Everything, mademoiselle, thanks to Heaven and you. Monsieur Galuche, of the ambulance depôt at O——, sent us more linen yesterday; and M. Jean-Baptiste came down from the castle with wine this morning. Then, as to tobacco "——But here the woman stopped short, and bit her lips as if she had committed a blunder.

" What about tobacco?" asked Mdlle. de Bressac; " Marchelat must smoke his pipe." And, drawing out her purse, she went up to an earthenware tobacco-jar that stood on a shelf, " This is to buy you tobacco; but mind, you must not smoke too much, mon ami." And saying this, she raised the lid of the jar, to drop her coin in; but the jar was already full to the brim, and sticking out of the fresh tobacco was the bowl of a new, handsomely carved brier-root pipe.

The woman was biting the corner of her apron, the man in the bed looked sheepish.

" What a fine pipe!" exclaimed Mdlle. de Bressac, taking it out and examining it. " The carving of these figures on it is admirable; but it is not a French pipe. I have seen things like it—let me see, where? Yes, it was in the Hartz mountains of Germany." . . . .

The woman, who had grown distressfully red, sprang forward, clasping her hands.

"Oh, forgive us, mademoiselle. We know we did wrong; but we won't accept anything of them again!"

"Forgive you for what?" asked Fleur de Lys.

"I mean, mademoiselle, you had made us all promise in the village, two months ago, when the Prussians were coming, that we would accept nothing whatever of them, but that when we had need of anything we should come to the castle for it; and believe me, mademoiselle, we would never have taken anything from the others—no, we would sooner have died—but this one is not like the others; believe me, he is not."

"No," groaned the man in the bed; "he is not like the others."

Fleur de Lys restored the pipe to its place.

"Whom do you mean by 'this one'?" she inquired; and somehow it seemed to the marquis that her voice trembled a little.

"We do not know his name," whimpered the woman, still distressed; "but he wears a light-blue coat, and has such a handsome face, and such mild eyes, that you would never take him for a Prussian. The other day, young Michel, the hump-backed son of our neighbor Ribot, fell down the sand-pit half-a-league off here, and his mother was almost beside herself after nightfall, when he didn't come back, and she couldn't learn what had become of him. Well, towards eleven, when the whole village were

already talking about it, and running right and left to make inquiries, this Prussian arrived, carrying the hunchback in his arms, as if he had been a child. There was nothing but a sprained ankle; only Michel might have remained in the pit a week if the Prussian hadn't heard him shout, and scrambled down all amongst the mud and gravel to help him out. After that he took to coming every day to see the Ribots and to talk with Michel; and that's how he got to hear of us. It's a sort of angel dressed up as a brigand, that Prussian is, mademoiselle. He has all the gentleness of a woman with the strength of a lion; and when he talks to Marchelat, he says just the things that pick him up and prevent him from feeling down-hearted. Then he knows everything. He told us how to plant our vegetables in the garden there, so that they might get more of the sun and be bigger; then he showed us that by hanging that sheet of tin slantwise under the mantel-shelf there, the chimney would leave off smoking; and he got up himself on a ladder, and nailed that bit of board over the hole in the ceiling, where the rain used to come in. And for all that, he has that about him, mademoiselle, that you never feel tempted to call him anything but monsieur or mon capitaine. Ah, if Marchelat and his comrades had had officers like that, they would have been eating their soup in Berlin by this time."

Mdlle. de Bressac said nothing. There was only—her cousin remarked—a slight nervous shaking

of her fingers as she fastened the last button of her cloak.

The woman Marchelat looked for a reply, and doubtless misinterpreting the expression of Fleur de Lys' face and the passing quiver of the lips, ejaculated, with sudden fire in her eyes, "But what is that Prussian to us, mademoiselle, if we are to offend you by seeing him? Say but the word, and I fling this tobacco and pipe into the road-way, and never let the man cross our threshold again," and with a spring she snatched the jar off the shelf, and dashed the casement open ready to throw——

But Fleur de Lys quickly stopped her. "No," she faltered; "keep the things, Mère Marchelat, and —and—continue to see this officer. I think we are a little late, mon cousin," added she hurriedly; and bidding the cottagers a hasty good-night, she took her cousin's arm and hastened out.

There was no moon or stars; the night was black, and seemed to threaten snow. Recent frosts had rendered the ground so hard that it was like treading on solid granite. For a few minutes, M. de Criquetot and Fleur de Lys walked along in silence. Why the marquis kept silent he would have found it hard to explain; but there is an instinct in these things which warns us when to speak and when to restrain ourselves. On her side, Fleur de Lys could not have spoken, if she would. The faculty of speech seemed for the moment to have forsaken her. So they proceeded together until M. de Criquetot abruptly paused, and said, as though

remembering something, " By the way, cousin, we were to have gone to four cottages, and we have only been to three."

" Dear me! we have forgotten the Merciers," she murmured, starting from her reverie. " I had promised to bring them a hundred francs for their cottage repairs, and they will be expecting me. But it is almost a kilomètre distant, I think."

" Yes," he answered, " and you are tired enough as it is, cousin. Cannot these people wait?"

" They will be disappointed," she replied, shaking her head, " and perhaps be unhappy all the night."

" Well, if that is to be the case, I had better go and carry them the money myself. You can go back to Marchelat's cottage, and rest there half-an-hour, and I will take you up on my return."

" But it is already seven," she exclaimed, opening her cloak to consult her watch, " and papa will be waiting dinner for us; he will feel alarmed." She hesitated some moments, and then added, " I think the best way, cousin, will be for you to carry the money, as you suggest, and I will walk on to the castle alone. The distance is not great, and the roads are safe. Nobody would hurt me."

" Hurt you, no," he rejoined, half to himself. " A man would be more than a fiend who could do that."

Still, safe as he believed the roads to be, he was naturally loth to abandon his cousin alone, and after dark; and began pondering whether there were no

alternative between this and disappointing the Merciers. But he could hit upon nothing ; so that, after reiterated assurances on the part of Fleur de Lys that she really was not afraid, but would go anywhere and at any hour confident in the chivalry of the neighbourhood, he received from her a small parcel she had made of her hundred francs, and set off with it, running.

Then she pursued her way alone.

And yet not alone; for how was it that on this particular road she felt secure, as she did on no other ? How was it that though Friedrich Leoneizen had never been seen by her standing on his silent night-vigils, she was as conscious of his presence as though it had been revealed to her day after day by some visible token ?

There had been no love-letters ; no words exchanged. His love had been voiceless, respectful, concealed. How was it that its least impulses were as well known to her as though they had been breathed into her ear by the tenderest language of passion ? how was it that his inmost thoughts had echoed within her heart as if they had been whispered utterances ?

Fleur de Lys walked along with her eyes cast on the ground and a quickening step. She felt the tutelary presence near her, following her, guarding her. She blushed and her heart throbbed ; yet she must make no sign that she knew or felt anything. She must never let it be seen that the strong secret love that had twined itself round her being was known or suspected as it was.

So she walked, drawing her cloak close round her, and shivering a little, perhaps from the cold. And when she had gone some five hundred yards between the two stiff hedgerows that bordered the narrow way, she arrived at a turning. Here the road grew more narrow and more dark ; but she continued bravely, and was not alarmed by the sight of two men who came tramping towards her with sticks and bundles over their shoulders, and pipes in their mouths. The men parted, one to either side of her, fingered the képis they were wearing, and wished her a rather queer good-night. Then they stopped, turned round to look after her, as if they were surprised to see a well-dressed woman out so late, removed the pipes from their mouths, and began to confer.

Evidently it was not an honest conference ; one had only to look at the men to see that. The repeated defeats of the provincial armies had flooded the war-country with hordes of individuals, who, having been burned out of house or home, and feeling little inclination to continue fighting for a hopeless cause, under generals in whom they had no faith, had given themselves up entirely to marauding. A much more dangerous class than the fiercest bands of Uhlans, were these gentry. They broke into deserted houses, attacked defenceless wayfarers, poached, plundered hen-roosts, and when booty was scarce, destroyed all they could lay hands on, fences, abandoned furniture, cottages, all apparently for the simple pleasure of the thing. It

was easy to recognise these patriots by their bragging voices and their tattered military clothes ; for the better part of them were Mobiles, and the worst scum of the routed armies. The two men who met Fleur de Lys were of this category. They must have been taken to serve against their will, and have seized the first convenient occasion for levanting; for both were young men, only weak striplings, blear-eyed and pale faced, like the lowest types of workmen in great cities.

Their conference did not last long. They shook the ashes out of their pipes, slipped their pipes into their pockets, and stealthily retraced their footsteps. Then Friedrich Leoneizen, whose watch-tree was precisely at the corner where the two roads joined, and whose eyes had from the first moment riveted themselves on the two vagabonds, crept noiselessly along under cover of the hedge and followed them. A great thrill of joy had gone through him as soon as the designs of these men had become evident. Fleur de Lys was alone ; he would protect her. Glancing at his supposed antagonists, and then on his own powerful limbs, he could not help laughing a short grim laugh, saying to himself : " If you venture to touch a hair of her head, if you so much as speak an uncivil word to her, I pity you." And with this he unfastened the clasp of his cloak, so as to be unhampered

The two tramps accosted Fleur de Lys and whined : " Have pity on two poor soldiers who are wounded and have not got enough to carry them home, madame."

"Two soldiers who have fought in all the battles of this war, madame," took up the scraggiest of the two.

Without a trace of fear on her countenance, Fleur de Lys turned round, drew out her purse, and was in the act of opening it, when the man who had last spoken made a grab at it and snatched it out of her hand; whilst the second raised his fist to strike the young girl and push her back. But this second performer had reckoned without his host, for before his hand had had time to descend, or even to move an inch, Friedrich Leoneizen had sprung through the hedge, and with a terrific back-hand blow with the pommel of his sword, which he had disdained to unsheath, caused the man to measure his full length on the ground. Then catching the other fellow by the throat, he gripped him so tight between his lithe hands that the unhappy wretch's tongue protruded from his mouth and his eyes from their sockets. At the third tough grip he was lying beside his compeer, doubled up like an empty sack, and senseless. All this was done in less than half a minute; and then the Prussian, passing in one instant from the extreme of rage to the extreme of calm, stood deferentially uncovered and holding out her purse to Fleur de Lys.

"Here is your purse, mademoiselle. You have not been over-frightened, I trust?"

"Thank you, monsieur," she said in a low voice, and pressing her hand to her side; but she did not answer the latter part of his question.

"Will you do me the honour to accept my arm for the rest of the way?" he continued, or rather faltered, for emotion was beginning to gain on him.

With a slight inclination of the head she signed to him that she would. He was then stooping over the bodies of his foes, to see how much injury he had done them.

"There is no vital harm," he remarked, after a moment's inspection. But he drew out his handkerchief and began bandaging one of the men's heads. Then he fetched his cloak to make them both a sort of bed under the hedge, where they could lie until relief was sent them. All this was done with a quiet spirit of humanity that had no ostentation in it, but for that reason was the more striking. Fleur de Lys was very pale, and watched all his movements with an expression which would have strangely cleared his brow and made his heart leap could he have seen it. But he saw nothing. Intent on his work, he loosened the men's collars, bathed their foreheads with water from the ditch; and it was only when he had done everything that could be of any use that he rose, with an apology for having detained her so long, and offered her his arm.

She was going to take it; but, looking into his face before doing so, she held out her hand and said simply, "You have a noble heart."

It was too dark to see whether Friedrich Leoneizen turned pale, or coloured, but he sank on one

knee and pressed Mdlle. de Bressac's hand to his lips. When he rose his eyes were glistening, and there was a modest yet proud smile on his features, which spoke more gratefully than the deepest tribute of spoken thanks.

"Yes," continued Fleur de Lys, in frank, firm accents, "why should I scruple to say what I feel? There is war between our countries, and for long years we must be enemies. But when you return home, monsieur, it may be gladness to you to reflect that you at least have not left only ruins and tears behind you."

His voice was sad as he replied: "Enemies, mademoiselle—must we always be enemies? Will there not be a time when the events of this unhappy year will be forgotten?"

They were then passing near a cottage which had been destroyed by shells. Its roof was gone, large holes were in its walls; the place where the garden had stood was a heap of charred bricks. Mdlle. de Bressac silently pointed to this. The Prussian sighed.

"I have been told that sixty-five years ago the village near my own home was like that," he said, and at these words he felt Mdlle. de Bressac start. "My mother has often related to me how, being a child, she was carried out at night from a burning house, where her father and mother had both been killed. This was during the Jena campaign. After that battle my father's father, with a few other Prussian noblemen, organised a secret league which

was to stir up the peasants to resistance, and save our country from being dismembered. The league was betrayed; my grandfather was seized and tried by a French court-martial; and for the crime of being a patriot was condemned to death."

Fleur de Lys's arm trembled, and her breathing grew quicker.

"I should tell you, mademoiselle, that there was a Frenchman who tried to save my grandfather," continued the Prussian, in a quiet voice. "Our ancestral home was then filled with French officers, and one of them, who had sat on the court-martial and voted for an acquittal, went personally to the emperor to obtain a pardon. It was refused, and Napoleon, to punish the officer for what he called his temerity, ordered that he should command the platoon who were to perform the execution. Upon this, the officer broke his sword and threw up his commission. He did more, for resignation being unlawful in time of war, he underwent military degradation, and served through the rest of the campaign as a private soldier. This officer was——"

"Your name, monsieur?" cried Fleur de Lys, laying both hands on his arm.

"I prefer to give you that of our benefactor, mademoiselle," answered the Prussian. "It was the Marquis de Bressac, your grandfather."

CHAPTER V.

Less than a fortnight after the above scene, a great change had come over the country round Bressac. Surprised and outnumbered by the clever move of a French general, who performed the one brilliant feat of arms (on his side) during the war, the German army occupying O—— had been compelled to retreat, to avoid being taken prisoners *en masse*. Great was the rejoicing at O—— for three or four days, when it was thought that the cruel tide of defeat was at last going to turn. But at the end of that time people knew that the Germans would not allow their first failure to go unretrieved, and O—— prepared for another battle. Who then so elated as the Duc de Bressac? The French general had informed him that the castle might offer a useful point of resistance in the coming operations, and had sent a thousand men to encamp in the park and erect barricades there by felling down trees and demolishing outhouses. There were few things of which the duke was prouder than his trees; but it was with a radiant countenance that he limped about amongst the soldiers, encouraging them as they were hewing down the biggest, and pointing out to them that they might greatly strengthen their barricades by taking all the pedestals of the statues that adorned his garden. The soldiers were amazed, and the general could not forbear expressing his admiration.

"If you only knew, Monsieur le duc, what resistance I have had to encounter in demolishing some other country houses—houses, too, that would have fitted into a single courtyard of this noble place," added he, glancing, not without regret, at the stately building.

"Our family have enjoyed the possession of this house four centuries, so that we can afford to lose it, mon general," answered the duke with a smile; and the same afternoon, as he saw an officer of engineers hesitate before ordering the destruction of an exquisite pavilion that stood in the way of the defence works, he took a pickaxe out of a sapper's hands and struck the first blow into it himself.

Fleur de Lys, meanwhile, followed the example of her father. Wherever a woman's voice and presence could nerve the arm or raise the spirit of a French soldier, there was she, calm, beautiful, and with stirring words of hope on her lips. The soldiers, reviving the title that was given to Mademoiselle de Montpensier under the wars of the "Fronde," called her "La Grande Mademoiselle;" and such was the enthusiasm she excited, that the more superstitious amongst the soldiers—those who came from Languedoc or Brittany—would try and touch some portion of her dress with their amulets as she walked amongst them, under the belief that it would charm their lives. But the devotion towards her rose to fever-heat when she declared that she had no intention of leaving the castle when the fighting began, but that she would remain in it to the end, *whatever*

happened. Even the prudent M. Jean-Baptiste grew valiant then. To be sure, he reflected that, even if it came to the worst, there would always be the cellar to hide in ; and, strengthened by this thought, he gave the reins to his imagination in recounting all that he would do when at length he should have those "gueux de Prussiens" opposite him. "Figure to yourself, Monsieur le marquis," he cried, with the most feeling gestures, to M. de Criquetot—"figure to yourself that one of those unhung thieves wanted to give me a hundred-franc note when he went away. It was that hobbedoy of a Count Leoneizen. You know that lout who used to go mooning about the garden. Said I to him, 'If I were a few years younger, I would teach you what it is to offer money to a Frenchman, you blue whipping-post, you. Hurry out of my sight!' and I threw the note into his face."

"Taking care to pick it up again as it fell, to put it into your pocket," continued the marquis, with a laugh ; which speech naturally a little disconcerted M. Jean-Baptiste, whose true reply to the count had been, "Monsieur le comte, it is only in Prussia that so much generosity is allied to so much valour. I will keep this note for ever as a souvenir, and wish you not 'Adieu,' but 'Au revoir.'"

But if M. Jean-Baptiste found a sceptical hearer in the marquis, has tales were listened to with credence enough elsewhere, and the story of how extremely quick the Prussians had vanished from the castle at the news that O—— was going to be

attacked, lent not a little impetus to the preparations for defence. The general, however, though he felt how valuable an auxiliary Fleur de Lys would be to him, tried to dissuade her from thus exposing her life: but his eloquence was wasted. "My place is here, general," she said, gravely, once and for all; and from that moment this soldier perceived it would be useless to recur to the matter.

It was only M. de Criquetot who was aware how much heroism it needed on his cousin's part to take this resolution. *He* knew, or, at all events, guessed, that Fleur de Lys's heart would no longer be wholly with the combatants around her, as it would have been some weeks before. She had told him cursorily and vaguely how she had been protected by a Prussian officer on that night when she had returned alone from the village; but though the details were few, his lover's instinct had supplied the rest; and putting this and that together, recalling many a stray symptom and incident the true significance of which had escaped him at the time of its occurrence, but the real meaning of which now stood revealed, he had not long remained doubtful as to who his rival was. But of course he had not breathed a word of his suspicions to Fleur de Lys. This was a thing too sacred to be hinted at by a third person. Only the young Frenchman, recognising in the Prussian officer a man more great, generous, and worthy of Fleur de Lys than he felt himself to be, had vowed that if he could bring this man and his cousin together, he would do so.

And so time flew by until the day of battle.

. . . .

It dawned and closed as many other days of battle had done for France during that year. Ill-clad, ill-organised, ill-armed mobs of recruits pitted against science, generalship, and discipline, there could be but one result. By the end of four hours' fighting the French soldiers had been routed. The battle was hopelessly lost, and there was but one point where resistance still continued to be offered —the Castle of Bressac.

It had not been much attacked during the day, for it was rather beyond the range of the field where the heat of the day's combat had raged. But in the afternoon, when the enemy were masters of all the positions which the French had occupied, and it was found that the Castle of Bressac still fired shells furiously from a battery of four guns established in the park, a parliamentarian was despatched to explain how bootless further resistance was, and to demand a surrender.

The answer was a refusal.

The duke had said to the commanding officer, "Let us not yield, so long as there is a cartridge amongst us, monsieur;" and as the officer almost looked upon the duke as the true commander of the place, he had conveyed this reply to the enemy.

An hour later the battery in the park had been dismounted, a whole wing of the castle had been

blown into fragments, and the foremost barricade in the park no longer existed.

Another half-hour, and the second barricade was abandoned.

Then the third had to be relinquished.

Then the fourth.

The soldiers continued to fire bravely and desperately. They could see nothing either before or behind them. The park and grounds were steeped in a fog of smoke, amidst which resounded the groans of wounded men and the bang of shells exploding every moment.

At length the park became thoroughly untenable. The retreat sounded, and the last barricade was deserted.

"We can still defend the castle!" shouted the duke, who, grimy with powder and blood-stained, had been firing from the barricades side by side with the soldiers.

"To the castle!" cried the commanding officer, obediently echoing, and waving his sword above his head. He was on foot. His horse had been shot under him.

In a very few minutes more the park was filled with Prussians. The artillery duel had now ceased. It could only be a question of defending the castle man to man and hand to hand. The defenders fired out of the windows; the invaders fired back, but also charged forward with bayonets, to try and carry the place by storm.

The carnage was becoming frightful. Eleven

assaults were repulsed one after the other. The marble terrace, bordering on the ground-floor windows, was strewn with great mounds of dead, and blood trickled down the white steps, as if from an open fountain. Every moment a crash could be heard, as a bullet shivered a wainscot or smashed a mirror into a thousand atoms. There was not a pane of glass unbroken in the whole house. Two or three bullets, striking the great crystal chandelier in the state drawing-room together, cut the chains by which it hung, as though with a scythe, and the mighty fabric of glass splintered on to the floor like a shower of diamonds, carrying away crumbling masses of plaster from the ceiling with it. But nobody talked of yielding, until at length the cry arose that ammunition was beginning to fail.

"If we could only knock over that officer who is commanding them!" shouted a bare-armed, bare-throated soldier, who had thrown off his coat to fight better, and was streaming with perspiration, "it might discourage them."

M. de Criquetot and Fleur de Lys were near him. Fleu de Lys had been loading for the soldiers, her cousin taking care to stand—without her perceiving it—in such a position that a bullet must strike him before hitting her. The soldier had pointed out of the window in uttering his cry. M. de Criquetot and Fleur de Lys both glanced over his shoulder. The officer he was designating was Friedrich Leoneizen.

The man levelled his rifle. He was a deadly

marksman; but just as he was drawing the trigger, the marquis brushed by him with his elbow. The shot missed. Fleur de Lys, who had been holding her breath, and was leaning against a wall for support, looked towards her cousin, and their eyes met. The man was reloading a second time. He aimed; but M. de Criquetot was saved the trouble of spoiling the shot again, for, while the finger was on the trigger, the rifle slipped out of the man's hand, and he fell forward himself, with a bullet in the head.

The shout now seemed to rise from everybody at once:—"The officer!—fire at him!"

"He seems bewitched: the bullets won't touch him."

"This is at his head."

"Bang!"

"Bang!"

But the officer advanced, his men following him. Lead whistled around, above, on all sides, but never harmed him.

"If somebody does not bring him down, he and his men will be in the castle in another minute," thundered an officer, and he discharged three barrels of a revolver in quick succession.

At this moment, the Duke de Bressac, who had been kneeling behind the window-sill to fire the better, sprang up, with his hand to his head, staggered forward, and rolled at his daughter's feet. A revolver escaped from his hands, which Fleur de Lys picked up.

"The officer! at the officer!" the cry now started from a hundred parched throats at once.

Pale, but with her lips set, Fleur de Lys stepped forward. She hesitated a moment: then she aimed with her weapon. Friedrich Leoneizen was scarcely at thirty yards' distance from her. Her face was flushed, but grave and sad. She pressed the trigger.

He reeled in his saddle, looked, saw who had shot him; then fell.

Before her cousin could stop her, or guess her intention, Fleur de Lys had sprung on to the window-sill, where she knelt on one knee, her hair streaming, her breast daring the shower of lead. There was the remnant of a tricolour flag trailing over the ledge; she seized it and waved it, crying, "Viva la France! They are falling back!"

The Prussian bugles were sounding the retreat. The French girl heard them as she dropped, and she breathed her last amid the triumphant cheers of her countrymen, shouting "Victory?"

EMILIA: AN EPISODE.

CHAPTER I.

THE scene is a little mountain inn, backed by dark forest-clothed peaks, about which sullen clouds were gathering. Before the inn-door stood three horses with ladies' saddles, held by a guide; apart from these, a little farther off, was a light open carriage into which a horse was being harnessed. On a paved terrace adjoining the inn, and raised a few feet above the road, stood a gentleman in a grey travelling suit, with an open letter in his hand. He was a man of about thirty, with a thoughtful, sensitive, rather worn face, and a brown moustache, which he smoothed slowly as he read. His was the carriage that was being made ready for departure; awaiting it, he stood leaning against the low parapet that ran round the terrace and overhung the valley, absorbed in the perusal of his letter. Its contents were not new to him; the handwriting, clear and decided, without needless flourishes, was his own; the letter had been written hardly an hour ago in the little inn-room, whilst some trout was being fried for his midday

meal, and he was reading it through once more now, before enclosing it finally in its envelope.

—"Let us take it for granted once for all, Emilia,"—so the words ran—"that our marriage was a mistake; that, circumstanced as we were, neither of us with a heart free, we did wrong in allowing ourselves to be influenced by others, interested perhaps—let us take all this for granted, I say—what then? Are we to allow that mistake to ruin our lives? When you left me, six months after our marriage, did you solve the problem? It is not so, in my experience, not by such precipitate action, that the problems of life are solved. Ours, I grant, was a hard one; but I think that faith, patience and friendship, might have helped its solution more than a rash step which I resented bitterly at the time, but which I have long since forgiven, knowing under what misapprehension it was you laboured. Knowing that you thought I had deceived you, I wonder the less that you should have acted as you did. But you have long since known that you were mistaken, and I think you must sometimes have been sorry that you would listen to no explanation, that you refused to see me, that you left my letters unopened. I should have been more urgent, if I had not fancied—forgive me, Emilia, if I am wrong—that you were not altogether sorry for the pretext; that refusing to be happy under my roof, you were glad rather, of any reasonable excuse for returning to your own friends. But after three years, are you still in the

same mind? Is your life so happy, is the thought of me so intolerable, that you absolutely refuse to face a future in which I should have a part? For myself, I confess that I see no reason why two honest people should not make up their minds to what is irreparable, and, patient to bear with each other, should not agree to share the burthen of life, which with the weight of the past upon it, I, for my part, own I sometimes find very heavy——"

A clap of thunder and some large drops of rain startled the reader; he looked up at the sky; the rolling clouds had gathered overhead; a storm was imminent. His eye glanced rapidly to the signature of the letter: "Henry Lawrence;" and folding the paper, he replaced it in the envelope, which he closed. For a moment he considered the address—"Mrs. Lawrence, Hôtel de Paris, Bagnères de Luchon;" then placing the letter in his breast-pocket, with another glance at the sky, he crossed the terrace with leisurely steps, and re-entered the inn.

He turned into a little room on one side of the passage which ran through the house, that he might pay for the trout and red wine off which he had lunched half an hour before. There was a minute's delay whilst the innkeeper was counting out some change, and through an open door, English voices and English speech were plainly audible from the dining-room on the opposite side of the passage.

"I think it always rains in the mountains," said

a sweet, rather plaintive young voice : " I remember last year in Switzerland, don't you, Sophy? how it went on day after day—and it is just the same here. I don't mind for myself, but for you, Emmy, with your delicate throat, it is very bad."

An inaudible reply from a speaker further within the room apparently ; and then another voice was heard with decision in its tones :

" But you ought to mind, Emmy. Really your attacks are no trifle, either for yourself or for any one else. I wish we had taken a carriage for the excursion to-day, instead of riding. I see no chance of this rain ceasing, and we shall be perfectly drenched before we get home."

Lawrence had got his change by this time ; he stepped back into the passage. Through the open door of the dining-room he had a glimpse of three ladies in riding-habits ; two of them, both young and handsome, were standing by the window ; the third was seated at the table with her back towards Lawrence. He could see nothing but some twists of chestnut hair beneath the drooping feather of her hat, the curve of one ear, one slender ungloved hand supporting her head, whilst the other played with her riding-whip. But the colour of the hair, the turn of the head, the shape of the hand, the attitude at once listless and graceful, seemed not unfamiliar to Lawrence. He half-made a step forward, but paused, hesitating, before he crossed the threshold ; then abruptly turning, passed again to the outer door. The thunder was rolling away

across the mountains, but the clouds were settling into grey, impenetrable mist overhead and around; it was raining heavily now, no thunder shower, but a steady downpour that left no hope of immediate change.

"It will pour the whole afternoon," said the same sweet, half-plaintive voice that had spoken before.

Lawrence looked round. The two ladies who had been standing at the window, had followed him to the door to look at the sky, and consider the chances of the weather clearing. Lawrence hesitated no longer.

"I beg your pardon," he said, taking off his hat, "I have a carriage here with a hood, and it would give me pleasure if I could be of the slightest use to you. Unfortunately I am driving myself, or the carriage should be entirely at your disposal; but if you would care to occupy the vacant seat——"

He had addressed himself more directly to the younger of the two ladies, the one who had just spoken; and she it was who replied.

"Thank you very much, but my sister and I do not mind the rain at all," she said; "it does not matter to us, does it, Sophy? It is our cousin we are thinking of. She is so delicate, and she has only just recovered from an illness. Sophy, shall we go and persuade her? If it would really not inconvenience you"—she said, turning again to Lawrence.

"My carriage is at the door," he said, "I drove

over from the Eaux-Chaudes this morning, and I am this moment about to return there."

"You are very good, and what you propose would be a real boon to my cousin," said the elder sister after a moment's hesitation. "I will speak to her. She is not easy to persuade, but I should be glad if she would consent to take advantage of your kindness. It was such a day as this that brought on her illness before."

They re-entered the inn, and Lawrence waited outside in the shelter of the doorway. Five, ten minutes perhaps, passed, then footsteps and voices approached once more, and the third lady whom he had seen seated at the table appeared.

She came out, holding up her habit, a tall and slender young woman of four or five-and-twenty, moving with grace and certainty, with an air of ease and distinction proper to a beautiful woman accustomed to good society. Her features were clear-cut and refined, her complexion delicate; she had brown eyes with dark lashes and rather marked eyebrows slightly raised, giving character to her whole face in an expression half-weary, half-indifferent. She had yielded, it would seem, to the importunities of her companions, and came forward with the air of one in truth habitually indifferent to life and life's possible incidents. But she no sooner saw Lawrence than she drew back, flushing deeply.

"You are very kind," she said coldly, answering words he had not spoken, "but my cousins are mistaken. I much prefer to ride."

Lawrence bowed and turned as if to go, but changed his mind. "You will not come?" he said. His voice and manner were so odd, that Clarice, the younger of the two sisters, who stood behind in the passage, opened her eyes wide and looked at him.

"Nonsense, Emilia," interposed the elder lady in her decided voice, "you must *not* risk catching another of your colds. What will mamma say if she is detained here as she was at Luchon? And since Mr.——"

"I will go," said Emilia suddenly. She gathered up her skirt and walked quickly down the steps of the terrace to the road where the carriage was standing. Lawrence tarried for one moment before following her. "My name is Henry Lawrence," he said to the sisters. "I should perhaps have mentioned it before. I am staying for a day or two at the Eaux-Chaudes." He raised his hat and hurried after Emilia. The carriage was a small, light vehicle with a seat for the driver and one other. Lawrence helped Emilia in, raised the hood, got in himself, and they drove off.

There was a moment's silence. "This has been done on purpose," said Emilia then, in a tone of indignant haughtiness.

"No," Lawrence answered: "I was aware that you were in the Pyrenees, but I thought you were still at Luchon. I only arrived at the Eaux-Chaudes last evening. Our meeting to-day was quite unlooked-for by me."

There was another silence, broken this time by Lawrence. "It seems hard, Emilia," he said with emotion in his voice, "that when I would willingly see you again under my roof, you should resent the offer of half an hour's shelter from the rain."

"I do not resent it," she said more gently, "but this meeting was—unexpected. I thought it had been pre-arranged, and I have known—there has been too much of arrangement between you and me."

"Too much indeed," he answered absently. Then suddenly—"Emilia, you do not still believe those absurd accusations you once brought against me?"

"No," she said, "I do not believe them now. I sent you word once, did I not? that the past was cancelled. Oh, let it rest! Why renew the discussion now? We have met—and are friends. In half an hour we part again, and go each our own way. Let the past rest."

"It shall be as you wish," said Lawrence, after a moment's consideration. "Believe me, I have no wish to take advantage of an accidental meeting to force on you a painful discussion. We meet as friends, you say, and those words are welcome from you to me, Emilia. For the moment, at any rate, they content me."

"That is well," she said, smiling a little, "and I am glad to be sheltered from the rain. So for the moment, as you say, we are quits."

They drove on in silence; Emilia content indeed to be sheltered from the pelting rain, content to

rest and say nothing, leaned back with an unexpected feeling of repose after her short moment of indignant resistance and repulsion. A sense of *bien-être*, of personal comfort after discomfort, has power to blunt even a strong emotion for a time; and Emelia, to her own surprise, found no present strangeness in this unlooked-for hour, which had brought about a meeting with her husband. A few minutes went by, and then her cousins passed her at a swift canter, the guide leading her own horse. They waved a salute as they swept past.

"Those are your cousins?" said Lawrence.

"Yes," said Emelia, rousing himself, "I thought you knew them."

"No," he said, "we never met before. They were not at our wedding, you may remember. Your Cousin Sophy was still in India; your Cousin Clarice was—I forgot where—at school perhaps."

"Probably," said Emilia with indifference; "no, I remember now, you cannot have met them before."

She leaned back again in the little vehicle, looking straight before her at the rain-obscured, mist-blotted mountain cliffs and forests. That cloud-wrapped scene in which all landmarks were confused or effaced, gave a sense of isolation, of separation from the world which she found inspiring. Yes, it was strange to be driving through this strange, shrouded land with her husband, unseen for three years; but it was a strangeness that exhilarated her. The consciousness of his pres-

ence did not oppress Emilia; she would have thought beforehand that it would—that it would be a moment of painful embarrassment. On the contrary, she had a sense of freedom, of adventure, of exultation even. Emelia was a woman of conventionalities, as Englishwomen brought up in a certain class of society can hardly fail to be. She lived a life that was before all things conventional, a life of social exactions, of kindly monotonous affection; but she was not conventional by nature, and she found some glamour of enchantment in this one half-hour in which she had escaped into a new atmosphere. It was only for one-half hour, a brief space of thirty minutes, of which nearly half were already gone; it pledged her, it bound her to nothing. But it revived her; it sent the blood to her cheeks, and life to her eyes. Her first mood changed; she sat up and pushed back her hat, welcoming the rain-laden gusts of wind that swept through the mountain-gorge. But Lawrence wrapped the carriage rug closer around her.

"You must be careful," he said, "your cousins will not forgive me if I let you catch cold."

Emilia sank back passively within the hood. She did not in truth want to catch cold; her colds were events remembered and discussed for months afterwards. Lawrence's next words, kept carefully at a level of commonplace, followed not unnaturally on his last; they were prompted by a recollection of what had passed at the little inn.

"You spent some time at Luchon, did you not?"

he said, "and you will soon be leaving the Eaux-Chaudes. Your aunt seems to travel a great deal."

"Yes, we travel a good deal," said Emilia. "All the winter we are at Cannes; all the spring and autumn we spend in Italy; all the summer—I don't know where—in the Pyrenees, at German baths, in Switzerland—what does it matter? it is all the same."

"You are a good deal in Italy," said Lawrence; "well, that must please you. You used to long to go to Italy, I remember. You used to speak of it with an enthusiasm which——" he checked himself in whatever he was about to say. "I remember that you had a great enthusiasm for Italy," he concluded in a matter-of-fact voice.

Emilia did not at once answer.

"Italy!" she said at last, "yes, you recall to me some old dreams. I too remember my enthusiasm for Italy—the Italy I loved before I went there."

"You do not love it now?" said Lawrence.

"Do you not understand," she answered, "in thinking beforehand of a country like Italy, it is as a disembodied spirit that one imagines oneself there, a spirit at one with all the loveliness that one pictures—not oneself with one's life to drag one down and tinge everything to a sad monotonous colouring. Oh! I love Italy still, and in memory it always takes again some of that ideal charm—but it is not the Italy of vines and statues and sunset-skies I dreamt of as a girl. I have looked at too many sunsets since then."

She sat silent for a minute; then, rousing herself, looked at her companion with a sort of surprise.

"How strange that I should say all this to you," she said, smiling with an air of polite apology, as at an immeasurable distance from him. "I never talk so, I never think so, I believe; but now I rave like a sentimental school-girl."

"Not at all," said Lawrence; "you speak what I also have felt in moments of depression."

"But I am not a depressed person," said Emilia, still smiling; "far from it. My life is a happy one —ideally happy, some people might call it. I have a home, friends, ample leisure, no cares, no responsibilities. It is responsibility, you know, that weighs a life down, that makes it really depressing."

Lawrence did not answer; there was a false ring in Emilia's voice that forbade response; but as the horse slackened its pace up an ascent, he glanced round at his wife, and his eyes rested for a moment on her profile, clear and pale beneath her plume-shadowed hat. Emilia blushed, conscious of his gaze, though her eyes were downcast; and angry with herself for this involuntary blush, she bit her lip in vexed embarrassment, and coloured more deeply. Lawrence instantly turned away his eyes, and shook the horse's reins to quicken its pace.

"I am afraid you will hardly escape a wetting, after all," he said: "these little hired horses have no idea of hurrying themselves."

"But I am not at all wet," said Emilia, "and I am glad to have been sheltered from the drenching I should certainly have had on horseback."

She spoke cordially. Her mood changed from moment to moment. This half-hour was in truth strange to her, and each minute seemed to mark an epoch. To herself it was as though some familiar habit of mind, some long-worn mask was slipping from her, and she must continually strive to grasp and fit it on again. Lawrence, who was not a man of moods, and wore no mask, was comparatively at ease, and drove on in unembarrassed silence. They were nearing the hotel by this time; the gorge narrowed, the first houses of the village were in sight through the streaming mists. Lawrence loosened the reins that the horses might walk up the last ascent, and drew the letter he had been writing at the inn from his pocket.

"I had written you a letter"—he said; "I have been unfortunate hitherto in my letters. In the somewhat wandering life you lead they seem constantly to miss you."

Emilia blushed. "I have received them," she said.

"But you would not answer them?"

"No, I would not," she replied coldly; "I burnt them unread."

Lawrence considered for a moment. "Why?" he said then.

The question was a simple one, but it disconcerted Emilia.

"I—I did not wish to read them," she said; "the past is past. Why return upon it?"

"I suppose because we have still a future which it cannot but modify," said Lawrence. "You will do me a favour, Emilia, by reading this letter—and by answering it. Next month I am going to the East; I have a three years' appointment in Constantinople. It shall rest with you to decide whether all communications between us shall cease for those years or not. To-morrow you shall give me your answer, and I will abide by your decision."

He put the letter in her hand. They had reached the hotel, and he helped her to alight from the carriage.

"You look tired," he said, with concern, as she hesitated before entering the house. "You have not been well lately, your cousins told me. You do not look strong."

"Oh, I am well now," said Emilia, carelessly. She turned to go, then turned again. "Thank you," she said, "you have been kind and generous in this last hour, when you had it in your power to be otherwise; you have insisted on no point that could give me pain. It might have been a painful moment: your consideration has made it otherwise. On one half-hour at least in our lives I shall look back with pleasure."

She smiled slightly as she spoke the last words. Lawrence did not smile; he simply bowed without speaking, and Emilia passed on into the house.

As she went along the upper corridor, the door of her cousin Clarice's room half opened and she looked out.

"It is you, Emmy?" she said; "you are better off than Sophy and I are. We are drenched, absolutely drenched. Emmy, *who* is that Mr. Lawrence? Surely it is not——"

"Yes, it is my husband," said Emilia, coldly, and passed on to her own room.

CHAPTER II.

EMILIA went down to dinner that evening, feeling shaken, excited with an excitement that was assuredly not pleasure, and yet was not pain; an exaltation rather, lifting her above the usual dead level of her existence. She had thought for a moment of excusing herself, of remaining upstairs with some ordinary pretext of a headache; she accused herself of stupidity, in at once admitting to her cousin that it was her husband she had met; she was sure that she would now have to undergo inquiring looks, even perhaps sympathetic words—and Emilia, like most of us, hated a sympathy that insisted on what was abnormal in her lot. Decidedly, she had thought, she would remain upstairs. But her aunt, Lady Meriton, a confirmed invalid, was apt to resent all illness but her own as a personal affront; or at any rate, illness that came at

mal à propos moments when she was not in the mood for petting it. With a gentle interest in many things, in her daughters, in society, in select gossip, in afternoon tea, in Emilia's unhappy marriage, she had only one very ardent interest in life outside her own health, and that was the health of her three dogs—Reine, Duchesse and Marquise. One or other of these was seldom absent from her side or her thoughts ; they habitually travelled with her, they were the present representatives of a long line of favourites, whose biographies, advent, life and death she faithfully held in sacred memory. "When my girls were little they used to be quite jealous of the dogs," she had been known to say plaintively, "but that was absurd. Of course the children *couldn't* be to me what the dogs were ; they couldn't lie in my arms all day and never leave me at night, like Fifine. It nearly broke my heart when she died ; *nothing* could make up for her loss. I have never really got over it."

For the rest, Lady Meriton was a gentle, kindly woman enough, and as far as possible kept her dogs to herself and her maid—a virtue rare indeed in your true dog-lover, and one appreciated at its full worth by her family and friends. But Emilia at once abandoned her half-formed project of a headache, knowing that her absence from the table d'hôte might create a commotion worse than anything else to bear. Besides, she wanted—she thought she wanted to see her husband again. She had not the remotest intention of changing her present mode of

life. It suited her, she said to herself now, as she had often said before, whilst her maid removed her damp riding-habit and began to arrange her dress for dinner. As for the mutual duties of husband and wife, their just relations to each other and to society, she held no account with them at all ; they had nothing to do, she had long since told herself, in a marriage into which she had been persuaded against her will, in which there had been no pretence of love on either side. That episode in her life she had closed and never meant to re-open. She did not read her husband's letter ; she had not even made up her mind whether she would read it ; it lay on her writing-table for consideration later on. But she thought she would like to see him again, to readjust her ideas concerning him. For years she had felt hard, bitter, resentful ; but after this afternoon she could retain those long-cherished feelings no longer. He was not quite what she remembered him ; no, he was certainly different from what she had thought. Those first months of her married life had left impressions on her mind that she had held to be righteous as they were indelible ; and now a time had come when she must doubt their justice and recognise that others, due to a calmer moment, might well replace these, connected with a disastrous past. Emilia was ignorant as to whether Lawrence were staying in the hotel or no ; but, nevertheless, she made her toilette with more care than usual this evening. As a rule, beyond a preference for certain stuffs and colours, she showed

an absolute indifference in the matter of dress, resigning herself entirely to the hands of her maid ; but this evening a new sentiment made her rouse herself, select herself the gown she wished to wear, and give an unusual attention to the arrangement of her hair. If Emilia had not been too proud and too reticent, even to herself, to analyse this sentiment, she might have discovered that it was an awakening of feminine coquetry which had been stifled for years—the desire to look well in the eyes of a man who was interested in her. But Emilia was not given to self-introspection ; she acted now simply on the impulse of the moment, and went downstairs to the dining-room.

Her husband was not at the table d'hôte. She ascertained it at a glance, as she looked down a row of familiar faces. She was late, her cousins and her aunt were already seated—her aunt with her two dogs, Reine and Duchesse, one on either side. They were charming dogs, silky, well-kept, well-behaved ; but there were people in the hotel unfeeling enough to rejoice that the third dog, Marquise, had been left at a Pau hotel in charge of Lady Meriton's man. She and her maid had agreed between them that they could not manage more than Reine and Duchesse on their few days' excursion into the mountains ; and though there had been a moment of grave deliberation as to whether it might not be worth while to bring the man servant also to attend upon Marquise, it had been decided finally to leave them both behind. But Lady Mer-

iton was not at ease ; she had constant words and thoughts to give to her absent favourite, and she was talking about her now when Emilia came in.

"Poor Marquise will be so lonely," she was saying to Clarice, who sat next to her, and who was more sympathetic than Sophy, "I wish we could have brought her. Stevens is careful, I know, but I am not quite certain that he understands Marquise. It might have been better to leave Duchesse—only Duchesse cannot stand the heat, and Stevens could never have been trusted with Reine. On the whole, perhaps, we did what was best. Ah, Emilia, poor child, there you are—and the soup has just been taken away. But we can have it brought back."

Emilia, seated between her two cousins, found herself obliged to submit to all the attentions proper to the nervous headache she had thought of as a pretext for absence. Not that they supposed she had a headache ; it was their way of showing sympathy—the sympathy she deprecated—for the mental discomfort they imagined her to be undergoing. Her aunt spoke to her softly, in carefully lowered tones ; her Cousin Sophy filled her glass with wine, her Cousin Clarice offered her the use of her fan and smelling-bottle. Emilia half-amused, half-exasperated, sat helpless through dinner : but as soon as they had gone upstairs afterwards to their little salon, she took the matter into her own hands.

"I met my husband to-day, Aunt Clarice," she said, "he is staying here."

"So Clary told me, my dear," said her aunt in a tone of gentle compassion. "Well?"

"That is all," said Emilia, indifferently; and taking up a review, she checked all comment by setting herself to read.

But she could not read. An unopened letter came continually between her and the page, a letter that lay awaiting her on her table upstairs. She presently rose and, wishing her aunt and cousins good-night, went up to her own room. She dismissed her maid at once, and wrapping herself in her long white dressing-gown, she began to pace her room with unquiet steps; she began to do what for three years she had shrunk from doing—she began to review her life.

Emilia was not a woman to live alone; the whole course of her education had tended otherwise. She was cultivated without being learned, accomplished as girls with French nurses and German governesses and London masters, learn to be accomplished; she played and drew well, she spoke several languages fluently, she read all the new books and a good many old ones; but she was not self-sufficing, she had no independent ways; she was out of harmony with the ever-increasing rush of womankind along lonely, deviating paths. To travel about the world a solitary woman, or even accompanied by a maid, would have been wholly repugnant to her. She had no advanced views; a

London house with social science lectures, with philanthropic schemes, with coffee taverns and school board meetings to fill her days, would have suited her hardly better than a life of lonely wandering. She was essentially a woman to be moulded to anything by the will of one for whom she greatly cared, to turn politician, secretary, diplomatist, nurse, camp-follower, to meet the needs of a husband whom she loved. Or to reverse the picture, in an atmosphere of praise and affection, as an adored and cherished wife, she would again have been in her element, and a hundred charms of tenderness and gracious ways would have blossomed in the friendly air. Left to herself, half of life would always be wanting. She had done what she thought best, when she left her husband six months after their marriage day. On a married brother, older than herself, and on his wife, she laid the blame of a marriage arranged for her and insisted on at a moment when her spirit was weakened, nearly broken by the desertion of a man she had loved. She had come to live with her aunt and cousins, for whom she had a sincere affection, and who had taken her part throughout in her disagreement with her husband. She could live with them without feeling that she was a burthen ; on the contrary, her ample means were of practical use in the wandering life which modern ideas and ill-health combined, induced her sickly aunt to lead ; carriages could be had, expeditions could be planned when

Emilia was there, unthought of at other times. With her aunt, for many years a widow; with her elder cousin Sophy, also a widow, young, handsome and childless and expected to marry again some day; with her younger cousin Clarice, a charming young woman, too full of sentiment to care about marrying just yet, Emilia in her somewhat dubious position, felt safe. They lived an exclusive life, with a select circle of friends, who gathered round them in the winter, whom they met at different tarrying-places in the summer; and in this limited world every one *understood*. For outsiders, and mere acquaintance, for their opinions and conjectures, Emilia cared but little. She went out not at all; she saw only the society she met at her aunt's house at Cannes, with which she mixed unaffectedly, but with reserve. She avoided all complications. Always gentle and intelligent, with a certain dignity and gracious kindliness to those about her, she was liked and admired by all who knew her; but nothing more. Some people wondered whether Mrs. Lawrence had a heart at all—Emilia wondered herself sometimes; there was little to remind her of its existence, and she did not want to be reminded of it. This quiet round of days, varied by books, by travelling, by acquaintance, by the small family interests she shared with her aunt and cousins, just suited her, she had the habit of saying to herself. She had made a mistake; that was past and irremediable. Given the mistake, she had done the best she could with her life. And yet what a life it was!—

The thought came into her mind, as, pausing in her walk, she glanced round her apartment. It was an ordinary hotel room, but in the few days she had occupied it, it had already become transformed by the hundred trifles with which a woman of ample means and cultivated tastes creates an unvarying atmosphere around her. Books and magazines and papers scattered on the table, a heap of silks and a square of fine embroidery, a glass with wild flowers, a water-colour block, told of Emilia's varied occupations, but they told too of a life unfettered by active duties, unclaimed by others—a life to be longed for by some self-sufficing spirit, some devoted worshipper of self-culture—but one which filled Emilia now with a sudden sense of indescribable weariness, of heart-sickening monotony. She went up to the table ; she opened one or two of the books ; she took up a water-colour sketch and laid it down again. A deadly sameness, a fatal mediocrity seemed to her eyes to be written on every page, to deaden everything she touched. What was to be the end of it all ? To what could she look forward ? What aim or hope did the future hold ?

She sat down by the table and thought. For three years she had been answering the question in her own fashion ; she had answered it in every letter she had burnt unopened, in every appeal from her husband she had left without response. Emilia had been less generous than her husband ; she knew that she had been at least partly in the wrong ; but she had

not wanted to own it—not yet. She felt a dull shrinking from explanations, from a return upon a past which had been so filled with pain. She said to herself that she wanted peace, not change. What could change bring her but fresh trouble? She had spoken truly when she told her husband she did not want to read his letters. The past was dead. Oh, let it rest.

But to-night another letter lay before her, a letter which she might leave unread indeed, but which she could not ignore. Should she leave it unread? Should she burn it as she had burnt the others and refuse to see Lawrence to-morrow? Should she burn it? For a moment she held it towards the flame of the candle. A moment and all would be ended; to-morrow he would go away, and she would return to her old dead peace, to the old indifferent life with her aunt and cousins, the aimless travelling, the purposeless sight-seeing—a darkness seemed to settle down upon Emilia at the thought. No, that could never be again; anything, any change, any pain even as a relief from that. The meeting with her husband had shaken her to her very soul; she felt it now, she felt herself torn away from the old life with its unexpectant dulness, to take part in a drama of vital interest. With a quick movement she drew the letter away from the candle, she laid her hand upon the envelope to open it——

A knock at the door startled her. "Come in," she cried. She glanced at the timepiece on her

table ; it was not late. She had come early to her room, and it was little past ten o'clock.

It was her Cousin Clarice who entered, pale and with dilated eyes.

"Oh Emmy," she said, "we have had such a scene ! Poor mamma——"

"Aunt Clarice is not ill ?" said Emilia hastily.

"Not now—no. She was a little hysterical at first, but that is over with now. No, it is not that ; but we have had a letter from Stevens. It came up by a messenger from Pau ; poor little Marquise is taken ill, and from what Stevens says, mamma is convinced that it is one of the attacks she had before we left Cannes, and that Stevens will not know how to treat it. Mamma is frantic ; you know what it is, dear Emmy—she wanted to go off at once, only of course there is no possibility of getting a carriage to-night, and so I came to tell you that she wants us all to start at eight o'clock to-morrow morning. Hardman will stay behind to do the packing, and follow in the evening. You won't mind, will you, Emmy ?"

"I shall mind immensely," said Emilia, with an energy that surprised herself, "I cannot possibly go to-morrow."

Her cousin looked aghast. Never since Emilia had lived with them had she asserted herself in this way ; never had she shown anything but a half-indifferent acquiescence in whatever was proposed.

"Why, Emilia," she said in her plaintive voice, "I don't see what we are to do. I tell you, mam-

ma is frantic about Marquise, and after all, it is only starting a day or two earlier than we proposed."

"You can go without me," said Emilia, "why not? I will follow with Hardman when the packing is done; or I will keep Maria, and then Hardman can go with you. Aunt Clarice might prefer that."

Clarice stood speechless with dismay for a moment. "Why, Emilia," she said again, "you know mamma cannot bear that we should separate, and just now when she is so nervous too—and then if poor little Marquise were really to die, she would be miserable. You know how she adores her——"

Emilia nearly laughed. She thought of her husband awaiting her reply to-morrow, while she should already have started on her way to Pau to help nurse a sick dog. But her cousin's widening eyes and look of dismay checked her. Evidently Clarice thought some strange spirit had entered into her cousin, changing the gentle, indifferent Emilia she knew, into a singular being, possessed of a will and energy of her own. And suddenly Emilia's mood changed. Why should she not go? If life must ever be a bondage, had she not chosen this one in preference to that other bondage against which she had revolted, from which she had fled? Had she not borne it for three years, and held herself content?

"I will go, Clarice," she said, smiling a little at her cousin. "Don't look so miserable, child. I believe we shall find Marquise perfectly well, and

that is only a device of Stevens' to get away from Pau, where he is tired of being left alone. But I will go, and if you will kindly send Maria to me at once, she can pack up all that I want for to-morrow; the rest can come in the evening with Hardman."

But when her maid had once more left her and all was quiet for the night, Emilia again paced the room from hour to hour with unquiet steps. She could not sleep; she could not even rest; for unresting thought possessed her, and her past and future held each other in ceaseless strife, the past with its remembered pain, the future with its uncertain promise. She had thought to end the conflict, and it had hardly begun; she had thought to put a seal on her decision, and already the seal was broken, her purpose rent. She paused presently, and taking up Lawrence's letter again, stood looking at it in a strange hesitation and uncertainty. Suddenly, with a brusque movement, she tore open the envelope, and sinking back in her armchair, she took out the letter and read.

She read with mixed feelings of pride, of remorse, of struggling pain; but she read the letter through twice, thrice; then throwing it down, she rose, and resumed her restless pacing of the room. All at once, moved by sudden thought, she took a candle from her writing table, and approached the looking glass. She set down the light, and twisting back her loosened hair with one hand, stood gazing at the reflection of her own face. For years she had

hardly cared to glance at the pallid, indifferent countenance that had met her view in the mirror ; but to-night that same face, flushed, excited, startled from its mask of coldness into new warmth and colour, arrested her. She recognised that she was young, that she was beautiful, that life after all was only beginning for her. "Would to God that I were free!" she cried in a passionate outburst, clasping her hands above her head. Her hair, loosened from her grasp, fell in long untwisting coils below her waist. Emilia took up one of the wavy chestnut locks, and looked at it, half smiling, passing it to and fro between her white fingers. Then, with a sudden shiver, she gathered it all together again and coiled it into a tight twist at the back of her head.

"Oh God!" she cried again, "why was I sacrificed? Why am I not free?"

And yet Lawrence's letter worked upon her. Against her will, as it were, she took it up and read it through once more ; in spite of herself, the kind words, the kinder for their implied reproach, touched her heart. Here was a generous nature, she could not doubt, a good and kindly heart. She had behaved hardly, ungenerously to him, and he had no words of harsh reproach to give her ; still less a strain of misplaced sentimentality that would have repelled her. He advanced no claim ; he made no demands ; he only appealed to her more generous nature, and that appeal she was free to accept or to reject. Free—for these three years past she had

been free to shape her life as she pleased ; and what had she made of it ? What poor, empty, shattered thing was it that time had left on her hands ? Nay, if she were quite and altogether free, if her husband were to die to-morrow——A thrill ran through Emilia ; she did not want him to die, she said to herself hastily and pitifully, as though some one had reproached her with the involuntary thought. He had been kind to her that afternoon ; she had not thought him kind years ago, when they both hated an indissoluble bond—but he had been kind and patient, and thoughtful this afternoon. It was long since any one had been kind to her in that way—Yes, she must see him to-morrow, if it were only to bid him a friendly farewell. They would part friends this time——

She went to the window and looked out. The night was nearly over, spent in these restless communings, the dawn was at hand ; but Emilia felt no fatigue. The unwonted excitement was to her as the strength given by wine ; it was like new blood coursing through her veins. She threw the casement wide open and leaned out. The rain had ceased ; the clouds were clinging low, in long, faintly gleaming masses against the dark mountain side ; some setting stars crowned the mountain peaks ; below stretched the black and motionless forests. There was no wind, no sound but the rushing of the torrent ; the earth rested dark and dim and undefined under the dark sky, and in that mighty peace, that silent pause before the awaken-

ing day, earth and sky seemed in harmony apart from humanity, apart from struggling souls that cannot grasp their meaning and feel only an alien pain in presence of that immense concord. Emilia leaned from the window ; her vision pierced those mountain cliffs, that rocky barrier ; it sought the ruddy dawn, the sunrise land, the far East that beckoned her, where already domes and minarets and golden waters were shining in the early morning sun. She lifted her face, she stretched out her arms in the chill air that precedes the dawn. "Not peace," she cried, "but life!"

CHAPTER III.

LAWRENCE also passed a sleepless night.

Lawrence, somewhat strangely, perhaps, was more sensitive to the world's gossip, more irritated by the false position in which he and his wife stood towards each other, than Emilia. Probably more of that gossip reached his ears. Emilia, conscious that her conduct was irreproachable, knowing that at the time she left her husband she had thought to have excellent reasons for taking that step, wrapped herself in an impervious cloak of pale virtue, a cloak that gave no warmth to her heart, but kept off the chill of the censorious world ; and safe within the shelter of a circle of sympathising friends, heard nothing, and held that she cared

nothing, for comments on her life. But Lawrence chafed in his position of deserted husband, at the odious breach in his domestic life that allowed a flood of light to fall on his private affairs and permitted them to be matters of public discussion. His wife was above suspicion of reproach ; he had no uneasiness on that point ; but it was impossible for him not to feel that the very fact that was his consolation, shifted the entire responsibility on to his own shoulders. Was he looked upon as a tyrant or a libertine? he sometimes wondered bitterly. And then it angered him that a young and lovely woman whom he had the right to call his wife, should be less to him than the last pretty girl he took down to dinner ; that the circumstances of a loveless marriage forbade him in all generosity from pressing his claims in a bond which she hated and had done her best to sever. It angered him, and it grieved him, for his was in truth a generous nature. He did not believe that Emilia was happy ; how could she be happy in this chill and anomalous position in which she had placed herself ? She did not look happy.—Lawrence knew far more of Emilia than she had known of him during these three years. He had taken the habit lately of tracking his wife's footsteps when it was possible for him to do so, of spending a day or two in the town which was her abode for the time being, and disappearing before she could be aware that he was there. There were few promenades in Southern cities with which he had not

become familiar, where at one time or another he had not recognised his wife's graceful head and indifferent glance as she sat driving at her aunt's side. The Cascine, the Chiaja, the Pincian Hill, the Promenades des Anglais, knew his presence as well as hers; for in the crowds of much-frequented places he had little difficulty in eluding her, in escaping the reproach of pursuing one to whom his presence, as he had been made to believe, was odious. It was in fact by the merest chance that they had met now. Some attraction had indeed drawn him to the Pyrenees when he knew that she was there; but he had avoided seeking her at Luchon. And yet to-night he reproached himself for a weak-minded fool, in not having sooner dared a meeting, in not having insisted on being heard, and breaking down the barrier his wife had raised between them. And yet would it have availed anything—would it avail anything now?

When Clarice came to seek Emilia early the next morning, she found her room empty, save for the lady's-maid, who was engaged in locking her mistress's travelling-bag. Clarice inquired for Mrs. Lawrence.

"She had gone out," the maid replied; and further stated that she had found her mistress already dressed when she took her in her early cup of tea, and that she had gone out immediately after, saying that she should have time for a walk before they started.

"But the carriage is there," said Clarice in dis-

tress, "and mamma will be ready immediately." She went to the window and looked out. "They are putting the things into the carriage already," she said, "and mamma cannot bear to be kept waiting. You don't know which way Mrs. Lawrence went, Maria? Do go and inquire downstairs; some one will perhaps have seen her pass, and I can go and look for her."

Lawrence, who had also risen early, was standing on the hotel steps, a dismayed spectator of the packing of the travelling-carriage. It was for Lady Meriton's party, he was told by a waiter standing by; they were leaving unexpectedly. What, were they all going, all the ladies? Yes, all; all the rooms were given up; only one of the lady's-maids remained behind to do the packing, and she was to follow in the evening.

Lawrence felt hurt and indignant as he had never felt before. That Emilia should elude him now, wounded him inexpressibly. Something more than this, he said to himself, he had a right to expect from his wife. He had counted—all night he had counted upon seeing her to-day; she had no right to refuse him another interview, to deny him the answer he had asked for. She was no slave to her aunt, she was independent, she could assert herself. At this moment, Maria appeared to inquire if anything had been seen of Mrs. Lawrence. Lawrence heard the question and the answer; he saw the man point in the direction Emilia had taken when she passed him half-an-hour before.

Without a moment's hesitation he started to follow her. This time he would have an answer; she should not escape him this time——

Emilia had not gone very far, and she was at that moment hardly a hundred yards from the house. A turn of the road hid her from sight; but only a few steps afforded her a view of the hotel door, and assured her that she was not lingering too long. She herself could hardly have told why she had come out. Some childish impulse to escape and hide herself, some half-formed hope that being missed they might start without her, one chance she gave herself in a hundred that she might yet see Lawrence.—For a thousand uncertainties, a thousand varying emotions held her still. Now she determined to remain behind, now the thought of her aunt's nervous worry determined her to go; now she would see her husband, and now again, she would not see him. But when she indeed saw Lawrence coming towards her, she knew it was the hope of meeting him once more that had brought her there.

He came towards her quickly with long strides. She was leaning on a low stone parapet that overhung the torrent, the fresh morning sunshine was upon her, and her face, shadowed by her dark hat, showed no trace of last night's vigil. Rather, a more vivid carnation tinged her cheeks, a clearer light shone in her eyes; for Emilia was young, and excitement lent its hue more readily than weariness. Lawrence forgot his brief indignation

as he came up to her. She turned and accosted him gently.

"I am glad to see you," she said; "we are leaving suddenly for Pau; but I wanted to see you, I wanted—" she hesitated for half-a-second—"I to wish you good-bye."

He was silent for a minute. "Well," he said after that pause, "good-bye is a hard word; but what you say I can but echo. Good be with you, Emilia."

Neither of them moved. There was again a silence, broken by Lawrence.

"The time is short," he said, looking not at her, but at the rushing waters below, "and I have to say some words which, were I only your suitor would come from me with grace, which as your lover I might utter with a passion you could not despise, that I might urge upon you with a warmth that you could not resent; but which being your husband, I must speak with reserve and command myself to pronounce without too much emotion. When we married, I did not love you, as you know; I loved another woman, of whom we need not speak. But now, Emilia, I love *you*."

His voice changed involuntarily. He uttered the last words in dry and husky tones, and turning, leaned his arms upon the parapet, and awaited her reply. It did not come; only a warm flush dyed her cheeks and deepened as he moved at last and his glance met hers. In a minute he went on, speaking in his usual voice:

"Such words between you and me are folly, no

doubt, for as in the past, so in the future, I make no claim on you, Emilia. So far as I can set you free, you are free——" He broke off.

"Would to God," he cried with gathering passion and energy, "that you were in truth altogether free, so that you and I might meet on equal terms; that I might woo you, as I believe, before Heaven, I might win you yet."

He walked away a step or two, then came back to where Emilia stood, silent and motionless.

"Farewell," he said, holding out his hand, "since farewell it is to be. You cannot love me, and that is my misfortune, but not your fault. We part friends, and that is well. I wish you well in your life, and you, I think, will give me a kindly wish to carry away with me into mine. I leave you with friends, to the life you have chosen, where you are happy——"

"Emilia!" cried Clarice's plaintive voice at a little distance among the trees, "where *have* you gone? We are all ready, and mamma is waiting."

Emilia started. Lawrence loosened his grasp of her hand, but unconsciously her own grasp tightened.

"Oh!" she said, "my life is not happy—is not happy—is not happy——"

She dropped his hand and put her handkerchief to her eyes, a strange betrayal of emotion in Emilia. In a moment she recovered herself.

"Good-bye," she said, holding out her hand to Lawrence, but with an averted face. He took the

hand, but it was he who now firmly held it clasped in his, as she tried to pass him by.

"We cannot now part like this," he said. "Not happy—you say that your life is not happy? Is it possible—good God!—is it possible, Emilia, that you could trust it again to me——"

She did not answer; pride struggled, and reserve and doubt. Oh! to end this uncertainty! And there stood the travelling-carriage; she could see it through the trees from the bend of the road where they stood; her place was prepared; her old life awaited her—how much simpler, how much safer to return to it. She tried to free her hand from Lawrence's, but he held it firmly. The moment was his at last.

"Be generous, Emilia," he said, "give me a frank answer. So much at least I have a right to claim."

There came another cry of "Emilia." Lady Meriton had appeared on the steps of the hotel, accompanied by the bowing landlord; Reine and Duchesse were being settled on their cushions; a familiar bark and yelp reached Emilia's ear. Then she turned and answered Lawrence. She spoke quickly, yet with gentleness and dignity.

"You have a right," she said, "a right that I have neglected too long. Because you have been generous, I have been ungenerous; I see it now. Claiming nothing from you, I shut my eyes to a claim you would not urge. No, my life is not happy. It has become an inexpressible weariness

to me. I cannot return to it—I speak frankly, as you tell me to do—I think—" her voice faltered a little, her speech became nervous and more hurried—" I think that with you my life might be better, worthier. We are friends; do not ask me to say more—not yet. But my place is at your side—" her breath came and went, she freed her hands from his clasp. "You told me to be frank," she said, turning away. "Oh, be generous still——"

"Emilia—oh, there you are at last!" cried Clarice, running towards them, "you must come, please. Mamma is ready—you know she cannot bear to be kept waiting, and she is so nervous this morning."

"You must go?" said Lawrence, "then I come too."

She put her hand into his once more. "Come," she said, with gentle decision. Then turning to her cousin,

"Clarice," she said, "this is my husband. I want you to know him."

E. F. POYNTER.

HOW QUEDGLINGTON WAS SENT DOWN.

CHARLEY QUEDGLINGTON was in a thoughtful mood. This was an unusual thing with him. As a general rule he didn't think; but the most rackety and mischievous of debt-incurring, don-baiting undergraduates have their moments of thought, though they may studiously conceal them. And Charley's thoughts, this sunny May morning, as he glanced into the blazing hot quadrangle, waiting until it should be time to partake of Gordon's luncheon, were not very pleasant. "If your name comes before us again," the dean had said grimly, with his sternest aspect—and the old gentleman, the jolliest of talkative hosts at dinner, could be very grim and stern about twelve o'clock in the day—"if your name comes before us again, Mr. Quedglington, we shall have no alternative but to send you down for a considerable period. You are never out of trouble, either in college or in the city. This is the last time you will be warned, sir. Consider yourself gated after six for the rest of the term."

"And, by Jove, I believe the old gentleman means it!" ruminated Charley, stretching his legs upon the window-seat, and puffing his cigarette smoke into the recesses of the sheltering sun-blind. "As sure as Fate, I shall get into a row before the end of the term, though it is only a fortnight off. There is Cummings's wine to-night; and they'll go and draw the bursar afterwards, and then the fat will be in the fire; for whether I am there or safe in bed, the porters will swear to Mr. Quedglington—small blame to them!" And he laughed with a keen appreciation of his own bad eminence. "Umph! it's all very well; but if it comes to rustication, won't the governor be savage? He's a jolly old boy, and he'll swallow the bills with hardly a grimace; but this affair wouldn't be quite a coating of sugar to help them on their way."

Charley's forebodings were not without a more than usual share of probability. There was not much chance of the most popular and reckless of St. Aldate's men keeping out of a row for the remaining weeks of the summer term. The dons had been very long-suffering with him. There was so much good in him at bottom, the great luminary said in confidence after dinner, and the lesser lights agreed with him. He looked so young; a dark-complexioned handsome fellow, hardly as old as his years, and with but the faintest symptoms of a moustache, to which only his scout knew how much care and time were devoted. He appeared quiet enough, and not very strong. Appearances, how-

ever, are deceitful ; and Charley was not long in impressing his set with his utterly thoughtless, reckless gaiety, which yet had not a grain of real evil at the bottom of it. His father, the Archdeacon of Loamford, was a rich man, and a famous pillar of the Church. Charley would be well enough off some day ; so that the mere getting into debt would hurt no one very much. But the archdeacon had passed through his college career without a reproach, and was a great preacher, of note elsewhere than in ecclesiastical circles. It would be a terrible thing if the son of such a man should be put to open shame, and sent down like the sun of any godless earl or weak-minded bishop.

"Hullo, Charley!" cried a jovial young voice from the quad below, at this point of his meditations ; "you'll breakfast with me to-morrow? The best train for Watlingbury is at 12:30."

"I'm not coming," answered Charley rather shortly.

"You're not coming?" cried his interrogator. "What is up now? But wait a moment, and I'll be with you."

And up the echoing wooden staircase, so shady and cool in comparison with the blaze and sunshine outside, came Cummings, three steps at a time, and dashed into Charley's room.

"What is up now?" he repeated.

"The dean has sent for me, and says he'll send me down if my name goes up again this term."

"Pheugh! that is bad. It would not suit your

book with the governor, would it, Charley? But he has said the same often before."

"He means it this time; and he has gated me after six for a fortnight."

"Gordon, what do you think is the latest?" cried Cummings, leaning out of the window, and accosting a man in a many-coloured coat who was leaning out of a ground-floor window not far off. "Quedglington has been sent for, and gated until the end of term. He says he won't come to Watlingbury to-morrow."

"Gammon! I'll come up and draw the badger. What is a gating?"

Gordon should have known, for, Charley excepted, no one at St. Aldate's had more experience of it. Watlingbury races were strictly forbidden to the undergraduates of the University; and even the somewhat lax rules of St. Aldate's were upon this point strict as those of more learned colleges. The arrival of the trains from Watlingbury, at any rate of those late in the day, was attended by a proctor and bulldog, to see if any of his flock had been astray; while a watch was also kept upon the roads which led from the city in that direction.

"Look here!" cried the tempter, clad for the occasion in the flame-coloured blazon of the Honourable Richard Gordon, "if we get back by the four o'clock train we shall see all the best of the fun, escape the proctors, who will not be on the look-out until the six o'clock train, and save Charley's gate."

"It's all very well for you fellows to risk it, but I can't afford to be sent down."

"Pooh! not a chance of your being sent down! It ain't like you to funk. What a capital time we had there last year! And my cousin has a horse running, and we can get the tip from him."

"Are you sure that there is a four o'clock train?"

"Certain. Come, that is a good fellow."

"Then, by Jove, I will!" cried Charley.

And as no promises are so well kept as those which please ourselves, he kept his word to the letter. He was too young to find the pleasure turn to dust and ashes. He thoroughly enjoyed his afternoon on Watlingbury race-course; and for once the tip, wonderful to relate, was the straight one, and the affair went off capitally.

"My boy," said Gordon, taking him a little aside about a quarter to four, "you have just time to catch your train. We'll risk it; but if you are not a fool you'll be off."

"I'm not going!" cried Charley recklessly.

"Then you *are* a fool," answered the other; "take my advice, and go."

It was such a rare thing for Gordon to give advice of this kind, that our hero took it as that of a good angel, who, instead of the suggestive flame-coloured blazon of yesterday, had assumed, with much appropriateness, a fashionable frock-coat of Quaker-like gray. Quedglington reached the station just in time to tumble into a first-class

carriage already pretty full. Many of its occupants looked as if the tickets in their pockets might be of any hue save white, which was, and is, the colour of first-class tickets upon the Watlingbury branch line. Charley looked them over with the superciliousness of St. Aldate's, and came to the conclusion that, if undergraduates at all, they hailed from some college more than a Sabbath-day's journey from the centre of university life.

They had lunched well, and were loud and noisy, as was Charley sometimes; but, somehow, their loudness and noisiness were not like the same things at St. Aldate's, and Quedglington regarded them with much the same disapproval that filled the Dean of St. Aldate's, when brought face to face with his, Charley's, vagaries.

His gaze settled at last on a face in the far corner which, under the circumstances, caused him some surprise. It was so decidedly out of place. It was that of a rather pretty girl, with a fair-haired graceful little head, set off by a small gray hat. It was a face formed to be either gravely sweet or coquettishly smiling; but it was a frightened piteous little face. The sudden irruption of the noisy and excited crew into her carriage was evidently not to her liking; but as she was sitting at the end farthest from the platform, it was no easy matter to extricate herself. "She's a governess, and a very pretty one," thought Charley. "Certainly she is travelling first-class, so she must be a Newnham or Girton girl. They get a lot of money. She is

too plainly dressed to be a swell. I wish I had some sisters who wanted a governess."

It was not Quedglington only whose attention she attracted. The young men, their bets settled, turned towards her more of their regards than was polite or pleasant. From this they advanced to making eulogistic remarks upon her appearance to one another, and generally to talking at her in a way that made Quedglington's face hot with anger. By the time the train stopped at the junction, Charley was on the point of interfering. The young lady rose, however, and, taking up her cloak, stood prepared to leave the carriage. Her tormentors made way for her not an inch, but sat with their knees meeting across the passage.

"Would you be kind enough to let me pass?" she said bravely, in quite a steady voice. But they were heated with excitement and the wine they had taken at luncheon. Charley had come to the conclusion by this time that they were not 'Varsity men at all, and we will hope and trust that he was right. At any rate, they sat still.

"I think," said one, with mock politeness, "that the ticket you showed at Watlingbury was for our destination. We do not change here."

"And we really cannot spare so pretty a face. We are hoping to have the pleasure of seeing you home."

So the girl was in fact a prisoner: the noise upon the platform made it impossible for her to get help from thence. Her eyes wandered round the

flushed faces, and rested upon Charley's, flushed too, but from a different cause. She saw that he was not of the others.

"Don't let us have any of this rot!" he said quietly. "Let this lady pass, if you please."

They all turned upon him, as he rose and with some roughness pushed two or three of them aside. The girl just touched his hand, stepped lightly past them, and was out of the carriage in a moment before they could recover from their surprise.

"Confound you! What business is it of yours?" cried one, standing up and catching hold of his collar. Charley did not answer him in words; his blood was up, and, as the other maintained his hold, he struck him between the eyes with all his strength and some little science. The man fell back among his fellows, and all rose up and hit out at Charley rather wildly, who warded off a blow or two, and then stepped lightly backwards on to the platform to avoid others. He was only just in time: before they could follow him the train began to move; a porter, who, in the hubbub of the station, had seen nothing of it, slammed the door; and the last that Charley, standing upon the platform, saw of his opponents, was a group of angry faces framed in the quickly-moving window.

He turned round with a little laugh of triumph, and saw his damsel, so lately in distress, standing at his elbow. She was much the more self-possessed of the two now.

"Thank you so much," she said prettily; "it was foolish of me to be afraid; but they really were rude, were they not? I am afraid now that I have caused you to be left behind; it does not matter much to me, but it may to you."

"Not a bit," answered he, with a vivacious mendacity which impressed her greatly. Yet he was not unmindful that now he could not get back to college until after six o'clock, and would certainly be reported for breaking his gate, even if his visit to Watlingbury escaped detection, and he did not, upon his arrival at the station, fall into the hands of the proctor, as was most probable. "They were awful brutes, were they not? I am very glad I was there to be of some assistance to you."

"And I cordially share in that feeling," she said, with a laugh of pleasure at the thought of the blow he had struck. "I am going to see some friends who live here; but I hope I may have some further opportunity of thanking you. I am greatly obliged to your bravery." She looked brightly up into Charley's face, held out a little gloved hand, and was gone; quite conscious, however, that the young fellow's eyes were fixed upon her as she passed out of the station, and, probably, not ill-pleased by the fact.

She was gone, and he was left to kick his heels for a couple of hours in a dreary station, and get what amusement he could out of the refreshment-room and the bookstall. In time the next train came, and he rejoined his astonished party.

"Your name and college, sir, if you please!"

"Quedglington, St. Aldate's." The proctor had known quite well both his name and college, but preferred to go through the old formula. So a fine was the least to be expected as the result of the Watlingbury trip, in addition to the penalty to be paid for the broken gate, of the nature of which there could be little doubt, after the dean's solemn warning. And, therefore, when his scout, on calling him next morning, said that the dean requested the pleasure of his company at twelve o'clock, Charley felt that he might as well tell Bunn to begin packing his things. A breakfast with Gordon, however, cheered him up a little, but the momentary gaiety sank down again at the door of the dean's house. "What will the governor say?" he groaned. When he was ushered in, he saw no sign of relenting in the dean's face.

"You were not in college yesterday, Mr. Quedglington, by the time at which, for you, the gate closes. I am also informed that you returned from Watlingbury by a train arriving after that time. The doings at Watlingbury were disgraceful, sir, as I have good reason to know. I cannot imagine you have anything to urge." Charley regarded the third button of the diaconal waistcoat with a stoical calmness. "After the solemn warning we gave you only two days ago, I think I am exercising some leniency in merely sending you down until the end of this term. You will go down to-day. Good-morning."

Quedglington of St. Aldate's was not the man to plead, even if he could think of anything to say, in mitigation of sentence. He turned to leave with a silent bow, when the further door of the library was opened, and a voice he knew exclaimed,

"I beg your pardon, uncle; I thought you were alone."

Charley looked up in astonishment. It was his friend of the train.

"Good gracious!" said she, recognizing him at once, and coming in; "I am so glad you are a St. Aldate's man. Uncle, this is the gentleman who interfered on my behalf yesterday, and missed his train through his kindness. Perhaps you will thank him for me."

"It was not anything at all?" murmured Charley.

"This is very remarkable," said the dean, in the accents of Dominie Sampson. "If this is so, I have to thank you for doing, not only my niece, but myself, a great service."

"It is so!" cried Miss Gertrude pettishly.

"Indeed, indeed! Then it is very remarkable. This is my niece Gertrude, Mr. Quedglington; I am greatly obliged to you, greatly. Will you be kind enough to run away, Gertrude, and we will talk about it again?"

In a few minutes they were alone again.

"So that was how you missed your train?" asked the Head.

Charley nodded.

"Well, I am greatly obliged to you. You are an

honour to the college—in some respects. But of course I can make no alteration upon this account. You had no business going to Watlingbury, or returning from it. So I must say good-morning."

Even Charley thought the dean was treating him a little cavalierly, but he was not one to make much of his services. He made for the door.

"Ah, yes," said the dean, when his hand was already upon it; "do you know my brother Sir Richard? No, I think not. He has asked me to send him a rod or two, to make up his party. My wife and niece are going to his place in the North to-night. Perhaps, Mr. Quedglington, you would escort them, and stay until the end of the term, when your home engagements fall in. Would it suit you?"

"I shall be delighted, sir," stammered Charley, the vision of Miss Gertrude pettishly stamping the floor with the smallest foot the male imagination can conceive before his eyes.

"Very well; you had better dine here early, as they go by the eight o'clock train. Your letters could be forwarded from here," added the dean, with a slight cough, "and then, perhaps, you need not trouble your people with your change of places? You go down to-night, then. Good-morning."

That was how Charley Quedglington was sent down. Some people are inclined to insinuate that it was all a plan of Mrs. Dean's, and a very successful plan too. But that, we know, is all nonsense. One thing about it is certain—that, to this

day, the venerable archdeacon is totally ignorant, and so are his intimate friends, that his son ever incurred the disgrace of being sent down from St. Aldate's.

J. STANLEY.

AU PAIR.

CHAPTER I.

A LITTLE one-horse carriage, very rickety, very steep to climb into, was jingling its way along the road from Orthez to Sauveterre. There was much fuss in its progress, the bells on the horse's collar shook, the wheels rattled, the drag was loose and made a discordant noise, but for all that the pace was not very great.

There were two occupants of this uncomfortable vehicle, a young lady and a gentlemen, and a small trunk was strapped on behind, betraying the fact that they were travellers.

"It seems a very long way, Dick," said the girl restlessly; "I had no idea that it was so far. And the country is very disappointing," she added with a little sigh.

"There is not much to be seen yet, dear," he answered; "but from Sauveterre we are to see the Pyrenees. Always impatient, Nellie!"

"I am not exactly impatient, Dick," she answered; "I am tormented with fancies. If I have not done right after all! if this governess's

place turns out a failure, and it is a very long way from you and Aunt Mary," with a little sob.

"Oh, my dear little cousin," cried Dick taking her hand in both his," you make me too miserable ; is it not your own doing ? have not I implored you almost on my knees to give it up ? Has my mother left anything unsaid to persuade you to make Holmedale your home ? and you did nothing but go on with all that pretty nonsense of yours about being independent. How can a beautiful child like you, ever be independent ? You must be looked after, and taken care of, wherever you go, and yet you preferred throwing yourself on the kindness of utter strangers, to remaining with your nearest of kin and leading the life of a princess with all of us for your slaves."

"Dick, dear, I am almost sorry now."

"Sorry ? well, then, not a step farther will we go ! you shall go back with me ! Oh Nellie, Nellie, only say the word and back we go at once."

"Impossible ! " she said. Then, suddenly shaking her head, and smiling through irrepressible tears, she went on, "They would sue me for breach of contract ! besides, being sorry that I came, does not make me wish to go back."

"Does it not ? " said Dick, releasing her hand, and turning away his face to conceal his disappointment.

"No, no, Dick, you poor dear old boy," said Nellie with that kind of patronising, affectionate kindness very young ladies are apt to use toward

their cousins ; "all my reasons for accepting this situation were so admirable that it would be very highly unreasonable to discard them now."

"It would be the first reasonable thing you ever did in your life," said Dick bitterly. He was a tall strapping fellow about thirty, with somewhat irregular features, his want of beauty redeemed by the honest frank expression of a well-shaped mouth, and wonderfully kindly eyes. He wasted the strong love of his heart on this bright fanciful girl who, being extremely romantic and with a gilded imagination, had yet all the want of sympathy of extreme youth.

Poor Dick ! how fain would he have taken her away with him, back to the safe shelter of his own lovely old Berkshire farm, where, as he fondly imagined, everything existed to make the life of his young wife a Paradise ; he was wealthy enough to make farming (to her at least) Arcadian, asking nothing more of her than to share his love for his magnificent Clydesdales, his grand shorthorns, not even aspiring to the smallest sympathy for the black Berkshire pigs, so precious as to be numbered as kings only expect to be. Sally the Fourteenth and Betty the Twelfth were unique ! Dick Gordon had not been brought up to do without sympathy ; his mother, who lived with him, had one of those large loving natures that influence everything and every one with whom they come in contact. A very clever woman also, capable, managing, full of tact. She also was very fond of Nellie Grey, the only

child of her brother, and when at seventeen the little orphan was left all alone in her dingy London home, Mrs. Gordon hastened to bring her to Holmedale and be to her as loving and a thousand times more motherly than her own dead mother had been.

Nellie had been brought up in London; her father had been a fashionable London doctor, and had at one time made much money, but with affluence came imprudence; he speculated, hoping to treble what he possessed, and failed: when he died, nothing was left for Nellie, not even enough to pay for her black gowns.

The girl's life had been a very happy, if somewhat neglected one; she had had masters for all the usual accomplishments, spoke French and German with facility, played the piano rather incorrectly, and sang charmingly; no one superintended her reading, and she read every novel that she could get hold of—fortunately those that her father's house contained were not harmful, but of a very romantic order, and Nellie's mind was full of castles in the air, wonderful ideal heroes, and strange adventures.

Her first experience of real love in real life was her Cousin Dick's attachment, which he concealed for a time so effectively that had she not been enlightened by her friend, the vicar's pretty daughter, she would never have found it out.

Could anything be less romantic, more odiously common-place than to marry such a man as Dick—

a man with such a close-cropped head, such a thick rough moustache, and who was not in the least fond of poetry?

Nellie hated Holmedale; she was horribly afraid of the horses and cows, always thought that Dick would be thrown when he went out hunting, and could not be got to like walks in the fields or ploughed land; she was a born cockney, and country life had no charms for her. When Mrs. Gordon realised that her son had really given away his heart's love to Nellie Grey, she felt as if her own heart would break; no sorrow that she had endured herself seemed to her heavier than that of foreseeing the inevitable pain that must come to her boy; yet she said to him no word of remonstrance, she knew too well the utter uselessness of such a course; but she set herself to study Nellie's character, to try and develop her really excellent qualities, and to bring them to the surface. But poor little Nellie did not want to be taken *au sérieux* as yet—she wanted to wait and enjoy herself and dream of an ideal future, and escape from the deadly monotony of beautiful Holmedale. She found the opportunity at last. A friend of her early days, a Miss Graham, was a strong-minded woman; she wrote to her frequently, urging her not to allow herself to become a dependant on her aunt's kindness, but to strike out a line for herself, gain her own bread, see something of the world. These letters, combined with her extreme longing for variety, made Nellie search the advertisements

sheets of the *Times* daily, with a hope of finding something which would exactly meet with her wishes. It came at last, a rather unusual advertisement, but which took her fancy—

> "On demande une Institutrice anglaise, munie de bons renseignements, au pair; s'adresser à Madame la Harpe, Sauveterre."

Nellie did what was not right: she answered the advertisement, obtained recommendations from old friends in London, and not till the whole thing was arranged did she tell her aunt.

Mrs. Gordon was much disturbed, grieved and displeased with what she had done, but unable to resist the coaxing, pleading ways and kisses of the culprit. She consented to let her go, after satisfying herself by very careful inquiries that the French lady who advertised was all that could be wished, and she was not without a secret hope that Nellie might learn in the house of strangers to appreciate the happy home she was so ready to sacrifice.

Dick Gordon accompanied her on her journey, much to his own inconvenience, in the busy springtide of the year, but to the last he cherished a hope that she might repent and let him take her back again.

The little carriage jingled on, crossing, one after another, long vine-covered low hills, always rising and falling with about the same unvaried view—now they passed through a village, now again dipped into a valley and up once more; vine-clad hills are more profitable than picturesque, the straight

monotonous lines destroy the beauty of the landscape.

Nellie grew paler and paler, and by-and-by she put out a cold little hand for Dick to take and hold; she felt great comfort and strength in his warm, strong clasp, and she wanted comfort like a child, and sought for it without a thought of the cruel pain she was inflicting, for Dick, with the intuitive perception of his sympathetic nature, understood the silent appeal and took it for what it was worth.

As the road rose over the last hill, and reached the end of the series, the hills stopped, and, as it were, rolled back to right and left, and they stood on a kind of high plateau, while a glorious view broke upon them.

Nestled on the hill-side lay Sauveterre, bounded in by a terrace-wall; far below, a deep valley fringed with trees, at the bottom of which, amid stones and rocks and boulders of granite, rushed the river Gave; behind, the low vine-covered hills; in front, all middle distance swept away, and a wondrous vision standing out in the clear air—the grand range of the Pyrenees, while framed in by the branches of an old chestnut-tree which hung over the road, seeming almost like a cloud in the air, rose the snow-clad Pic du Midi.

Neither of the travellers spoke for a moment—then Nellie turned and said breathlessly:

"Oh! Dick, is it not beautiful?"

But Dick did not answer; his eyes were fixed on the far distance, and there was a strange yearning

look in them, solemn, intensely sad. Had an intuition come to him, all indefinite as yet, that for him also there was no middle distance in life, only a rushing torrent beating itself on the stones, and far away a vision of distant heavenly hills?

But there was no time for thought; with a tremendous crack of his long-lashed whip, the driver urged his little horse to dash into the stone-paved streets of Sauveterre at full gallop.

CHAPTER II.

"WHERE do monsieur and mademoiselle wish to descend?"

"At the Maison de Mabendie, Madame la Harpe," answered Dick.

"Here we are, monsieur," and the little carriage drew up suddenly before a narrow little street. "Monsieur and mademoiselle must get out here, go along the little street, turn to the left, and before them they will see the Maison de Mabendie. Does monsieur propose to return to Orthez to-night?"

Mr. Gordon looked at his watch. "I must be at Orthez in time to catch the nine o'clock train," he said. "How long will it take you to take me down?"

"Monsieur must not start later than half-past six. See, an hour to rest my horses, and monsieur must start."

"Oh, Dick, only an hour," said Nellie, piteously:

she had got out of the carriage and stood beside him trembling.

"An hour is a good long time, Nell," he said, smiling encouragement—he would help her now as much as he could.

The coachman remounted his seat and drove off to the little inn, promising to send round a man with the boxes and small packages in a few moments, and anxious to lose none of the precious moments in which he wished to make himself acquainted as much as possible with his cousin's future home, Dick drew her quickly with him down the ill-paved, dirty little street. The approach was unpromising, but ended in a small open court. The old house which was their destination stood in a beautiful situation on the walls, with a narrow terrace round it, bounded by a low parapet, actually overhanging the valley and the river. The valley was half-spanned by a very ancient bridge, the middle arches of which had long been swept away, the rest remained, all clothed with ivy and other luxuriant vegetation. In the far distance the wonderful mountains. It would be difficult to find a more lovely situation.

The old house was large and picturesque, carrying on each end the *tourelles*, indispensable attributes of *noblesse*. It was washed all over with yellow-wash of a warm colour, concealing the thick stone walls, in many places from three to four feet thick. The narrow terrace was bright with flowers in great earthen jars.

"It is very pretty, Nellie! Come, dear! don't be so frightened!" said Dick, patting her hand, as he rang the bell.

The door flew open, and with a kind of rush, it seemed as if the whole family of La Harpe poured into the courtyard.

Outstretched hands greeted the newcomers, and a torrent of welcoming words.

It seemed as if every face there photographed itself on Dick Gordon's brain, so great was the tension.

Monsieur and Madame la Harpe were both short, both perfectly round. Madame seemed to roll rather than walk, bound rather than turn; very active, very voluble, and in a black gown flashing with jet beads.

Mademoiselle la Harpe, Amélie, was just what her mother must have been at her age, short, plump, rather pretty, with a profusion of frizzy black hair, and too large a face, all *épanouie* with good nature.

Monsieur Jean, the eldest son, and his wife, were of a somewhat different type. Monsieur Jean, *avocat*, thin, pale, bald, and studious. As for Madame Jean, her face was as the face of a pitying saint—so sweet, so sad, and so worn. Behind stood two *bonnes*, with rosy faces and bright coloured handkerchiefs, picturesquely tying up their black hair.

It seemed as if they could not make enough of Nellie. They pressed her cousin to stay, but he was obliged to refuse, his presence was urgently

wanted at home. They then, all of them, dispatched the *bonnes* to prepare some refreshment for him before his departure, and conducted them into the large, cool *salon.* Time was going, flying very fast. Dick at last boldly determined that no more must be lost. He advanced to Monsieur la Harpe, and asked to speak to him in private.

But Madame la Harpe had no intention of being excluded from the interview, and she solemnly led the way into another room, followed meekly by her lord and the tall Englishman, who seemed to them almost colossal.

"I have but a very short time," said Dick, in his frank, open way, "but I am most anxious to commend my little cousin to your care—she has no nearer relation than my mother and myself."

Madame la Harpe gave a little wave of her hand. "You may depend upon us," she said. "Her situation with us, *au pair*, makes her in all respects one of ourselves; the advantages my Amélie derives from her, she also will derive from my Amélie, and——"

"Yes, madame," said Dick earnestly, "but I venture to ask even more. She is only seventeen and an orphan. I ask for her your tenderness, your care, your consideration."

Monsieur la Harpe gave his chest such a resounding thump that Dick quite started.

"Faith of a *père de famille!*" he exclaimed. "She shall be as our own child, and with your concurrence, my good sir, I will marry her myself."

Dick started again. Madame la Harpe nodded approvingly.

"But, my friend," she said, "perhaps monsieur intends to marry her himself; it is his right, and as her only male relative, his bounden duty; of course, if he should desire it, I also will do my best."

A confused sense came flitting over Dick's bewildered mind that, like Boaz, as nearest of kin, he had a solemn duty to perform in espousing his cousin; then the absurdity of the notion crossed him, and he could hardly help smiling.

"In England," he said, "it is our habit to let young ladies please themselves about marrying."

"That is a very strange and reprehensible custom," said Madame la Harpe severely.

"*Madame est servie*," said a maid at the door.

"Ah, and there is so little time, and farewells to be said and all!" cried the good father. "Monsieur," with another portentous slap on the breast, "you may rest contented, we will take every care of our sacred trust. You may put every confidence in me."

"I am sure I can!" said Dick heartily. He read something straightforward and honest in the little man's black, bead-like eyes.

Monsieur la Harpe rose and bowed profoundly, Dick returned the bow; Madame la Harpe courtesied, and Dick repeated his salutation. It was like the seal of some solemn compact. Then she led the way to the dining-room.

If Dick Gordon's healthy English appetite had looked for cold beef, it looked it vain. The repast consisted of a vast omelette salad, bread and fruit, and excellent *vin ordinaire*. Nellie could not eat a mouthful : her eyes were fixed on her cousin as if she would never take them off. The time was going so fast.

Dick Gordon looked again at his watch. "I ought to start for the inn in five minutes," he said. He gave a quick look round at the whole assembled family : his look ended imploringly on Madame Jean. A flash of sympathy passed between them. She rose.

"Let us go, my friends," she said. "Our friends would wish to say their adieux in private ; and little demoiselle Nellie must have many messages to send."

"You are quite right," cried all the kind-hearted family, who would never have thought about it themselves, and they all bustled out.

Nellie waited till they were all gone, then she ran up to her cousin and hid her face on his shoulder.

"Oh, Dick, dear Dick," she said. "I have been so wicked, so ungrateful. I have never been half good enough to you, and now you are going away. Oh, Dick ! say you forgive me ; and give my dear, dear, dearest love to Aunt Mary."

"Forgive you, Nellie ? Child, there is nothing to forgive. Nellie, I have never told you—I did not want you to know ; but, darling, you are my own heart's love ! Hush, hush ; I only tell you

that you may know that whenever you want a home or—or a friend, a brother or protector, I shall be waiting for you—to welcome you, my little love, and ask nothing—nothing in return."

She was sobbing on his breast.

There came a low knock at the door, and Madame Jean's soft voice:

"The *voiturier* begs that monsieur will come."

"Dick, Dick! kiss me," cried Nellie almost frantically, for her cousin had wrung her hands and was turning away.

"Good-bye, darling, good-bye."

"Dick, won't you kiss me?" she cried, putting her arms round his neck like a child.

Then he stooped and kissed her passionately.

"God bless you and help you, Nellie! Good-bye."

He went out. They were all waiting for him outside. How he got through all the salutations, bows, and farewells he could not tell. But it was over at last, and he was once more rapidly driving down the road to Orthez.

Meanwhile Madame Jean stole quietly back to Nellie, and allowed her to sob out her grief and loneliness in her kind arms.

CHAPTER III.

In a very few days Nellie Grey was quite at home in the Maison de Mabendie, and now the spring

days were lengthening, and the sudden summer of the South burst upon them in all its hot splendour.

At first Amélie and Nellie, still somewhat shy of each other, worked well together, alternately at English and French, but by degrees their ardour for study somewhat waned, and as it grew hotter they grew more desultory.

The life was very different from anything to which Nellie had been accustomed, but the facility with which she adapted herself to it was quite astonishing. Sometimes she wondered with a little start of dismay, what her Aunt Mary would have said if she had seen her in the mornings going about the house in a loose dressing-gown of Pompadour print, with her hair not done, only rolled up over a comb. At first she felt very untidy, but all the others were the same, so she soon began to think it impossible to take the trouble of dressing herself before it was time for the twelve o'clock breakfast. The food at first seemed a little strange: meat was only to be had once a week at Sauveterre. Nobody expected it oftener—not the La Harpes, the wealthiest people in the little town; not the marquis and his Parisienne wife, who came from Paris to spend the summer in their pretty, old château—nobody thought it necessary. The town was full of hens and chickens; eggs abounded, and formed the *pièce de résistance* at every meal. Then Jeannette, the cook, was so clever at all kinds of soups, and would go along the roads pulling little tufts of foliage out of the banks, from which she would

produce a delicious *maigre* or a fresh salad that was quite astonishing.

Nellie Grey was a Roman Catholic, as her mother had been before her. The church stood outside the town, and was not in any way remarkable, except for the beauty of the view. Indeed it was impossible to stir out of the streets without coming into sight of the distant Pyrenees, from early morning to late evening constantly varying in the colour of their splendour.

One of the prettiest spots was the little cemetery, lying on the side of the hill. Thither the two girls would walk every Sunday evening before the hour of the last service, the *Salut.* They accompanied Madame Jean, for in the little cemetery lay one of the secrets of her sadness—two baby graves side by side, their little mounds railed in with white railings like the sides of a child's crib, and within a bright, wild bush of flowers, varying with the season of the year, always sweet-smelling and luxuriant.

Madame Jean would often kneel on the wooden step at the foot of the tiny graves and hide her face, and become so absorbed in prayer that she would hear nothing—not even the chnrch bells—and the two girls would rouse her tenderly, and glance at each other with awe at the sight of her far-away look. There was another secret in her sad life: Monsieur Jean believed nothing. He was tolerant; he did not scoff, but for all that, he had no faith.

"Nellie," said Madame Jean, very softly, one day, "the Holy Innocents must have a peculiar power in prayer, for their prayers must be so pure, and unbiassed by even natural earthly love. Do you not think so?"

"I do, indeed, dear madame," said Nellie, and Madame Jean said no more.

One day Madame la Harpe came into the *salon*, where all the younger ladies were busy at their different occupations.

"My children," she said, "I have a good deed to propose to you for the improvement of your souls. Are you willing?"

"Assuredly!" said Amélie, looking up with a smile; "*Fi donc!* mamma; do you doubt it?"

"It is old Benoîte come up again. A hundred more francs are wanted. Your papa will give five; perhaps among us we can make up a few more."

"Who is old Benoîte? What is it for?"

"You shall go to the kitchen and hear the story, *mignonne*," said Madame Jean.

"What do you say to a *quête*, mamma? A begging expedition?"

"Just what I was about to propose, Françoise. You and Amélie can take half the town, and I myself with Nellie, can do the rest."

"Oh, no!" cried Nellie, shrinking, "I do not think I could go begging. I never did such a thing, I should not like it at all."

"Then, how very good for your soul!" said Madame Jean, quickly, and smiling.

"You will not mind, Nellie," said Amélie, encouragingly. "Mamma will do all the talking. She is the best *quêteuse* in Sauveterre."

"Go to the kitchen, *ma fille*," said Madame la Harpe, "and take Amélie with you, and hear Benoîte's story; she talks French, not Basque."

The two girls went down to the kitchen. A strong, handsome-looking old peasant woman was seated in the place of honour by the window.

Jeannette was peeling onions in a big wooden bowl; Célestine, the other *bonne*, balancing herself backwards or forwards on her pointed *sabots*, doing nothing. "Mademoiselle has not seen Benoîte," she said, pointing out the peasant with admiration.

"Ah! so this is the young foreign lady," said Benoîte, not rising, but lifting up her head, and looking at Nellie with a pair of fine, dark eyes strangely brilliant and clear. "And I hear that she is charitable and never omits to give her *sous* at the church-door. I may surely depend upon help from her."

"Surely," murmured the two *bonnes*, together.

"But then, Benoîte," said Amélie, playfully, "this young lady sees you in a beautiful dark, cotton gown, with a crimson handkerchief and a silk one on your head. She must say to herself, why does this rich person beg—*hein?*"

"So she knows nothing, my little demoiselle? Sit down, sit down, you shall hear," and with the gesture of a hostess rather than a guest, she made the two girls sit down on the bench before her.

"I was young once, *mes filles*," she began, "and I had a young husband; he was very bad, very wicked. Most husbands are; be advised, my children, do not be so foolish as to marry; the single are happier, it is better so—*Va!*"

They listened with all submission.

"My husband was so bad that I often wished myself dead; he beat me, he turned me out on the hill-side twice on winter nights, he drank—at last he was never sober. We had two children; the eldest was a girl, her name was Aline. I called her Aline after Mdlle. Aline de Mabendie, the last of the old family. Aline was three years old when, in a drunken fit, her father killed her."

Nellie gave a start of horror and dismay, then looked with astonishment at Benoîte. She had told the story so often that it had become a merely mechanical narration; in fact, there was a little triumphant complacency in her voice, but no trace of emotion.

"Yes," she said. "But that was going too far; Monsieur le curé would not absolve him for that; the drink-fever came on, and he died without the blessing of the Church; he was very bad, my children. Heaven rest his soul! Well."

Her dark eyes lit up, she was evidently coming to the interest of her story. "My second child was Jean Marie; he was an infant at the time; emotion had tried me, I could not nourish him. I had a goat at the time with a kid. I sold the kid, and gave Jean Marie to the goat; she suckled him as

her own kid, and at the sound of his cry, would come bounding in to stand over his cradle and feed him, and he throve well. Now I knew that my bad husband could only be saved by a very great effort on my part, and I vowed that I would make my boy into a priest, and that his first mass should be for his father's soul. I laboured, *mes filles*, I worked night and day ; my hands are not weak yet, do you see ? but once they were stronger than two women's. God helped me. Monsieur le curé saw my purpose and educated my boy, caused him to pass into the college ; he learns a great deal, my little Jean Marie. See ! here are his certificates," and she drew a little bundle of papers from her pocket. "Five is the highest mark, see ! Mesdemoiselles, all of you, come close. Divinity five, philosophy five, good conduct four, and so on and so on. Monsieur le curé says they are excellent, and now he will be ordained in three months ; a hundred francs are required for his fees, and these are wanting."

And with a fine dramatic gesture Benoîte rose to her feet, drew her cloak round her, and prepared to leave the kitchen.

"I commend the matter to *ces demoiselles*," she said. "*Au revoir.*"

"She has confidence," said Jeannette with admiration.

"She is quite right," said Amélie. "Come, courage, every one. You Jeannette and Célestine must also do your best. Fancy if, after all, Jean Marie should not be ordained."

"It must not be thought of," said the stout Jeannette, putting her arms a-kimbo—"if I have to resign all my economies."

"You will not refuse to undertake the *quête* now, Nelline?" said Amélie, taking the arm of her friend. "Indeed, you need have no fear. Mamma, as I said, is an accomplished *quêteuse.*"

Half an hour later, Madame la Harpe in a splendid toilette covered with black fringe, and a bonnet with ostrich feathers, started on her pious mission with Nellie by her side, looking very fair and shy in her white gown.

They went to all the principal houses in the little town, and Nellie, at first painfully shy, became more and more amused.

"It is impossible that you can refuse me, madame," Madame la Harpe would say in one house. "You have such beautiful and amiable children, who are so especially blest in your interior!—such a good object!—ah! monsieur, your face is the very type of the benevolent. You have never refused me before, and never, no, never have I asked for a more worthy object."

Sous, half-francs, even five-franc pieces rained upon her.

"Nellie," said Madame la Harpe. "I am dead with fatigue, I believe my bonnet to be on one side, my face streams. Truly, when one is as fat as I am, one should limit one's piety. Stop; there is Monsieur le marquis himself. She gave me ten francs, but he does not know that, and he might give us a trifle."

A gentleman was strolling up the street with two fat mottled pointers at his heels.

Monsieur le marquis *en province* did not take the trouble to shave; his appearance was not improved by a three weeks' growth of irregular whiskers, his white linen dress and panama hat with a broad black ribbon spoke of the ease and comfort of elegance relaxed.

"Ah monsieur," cried Madame la Harpe, rapidly crossing the road with the bounding motion peculiar to her, "you are just the one whom I have been hoping to meet!"

"At your service, madame," with a low bow, and the gentleman removed his cigarette from between his teeth.

"Monsieur, it is for a work of charity," she began.

"Ah bah! I leave all these matters to my wife," said Monsieur le marquis somewhat abruptly.

"We all know the charity of madame your wife, but see, monsieur, I should like to give you also the opportunity of doing a little something for your soul."

"Which wants it badly, *hein*, madame?" said the marquis, laughing.

"Of that I can be no judge until you have either refused me or given me a little donation."

"An excellent answer, madame. So you will not accept my wife's alms as mine?"

"Come, come, though you are married fifteen years, you have not lost your individuality."

" And this young lady. Is she on the same quest?

Madame la Harpe gave a rapid glance at Nellie, which she interpreted rightly as an entreaty for help. Monsieur le marquis stood looking at her with his head on one side and a pair of bright little eyes glancing like jet beads. She looked up merrily.

" Monsieur, it is my first *quête*," she said. "And if I did chance to take home a gold napoleon I should——"

" Well, what would you do?"

" I should jump for joy," said Nellie demurely.

Madame la Harpe looked shocked, she evidently thought that Nellie's demand was excessive.

" How is one to refuse," said Monsieur le marquis, throwing out his hands, "when wit and beauty beg?"

" And conscience enjoins," said Nellie.

" Ah, for that!" and he gave a little shrug of the shoulders. Then opening his purse he took out a shining napoleon, and handed it to Nellie with a profound bow.

" Now jump! jump for joy, mademoiselle," he said.

But Nellie had become suddenly shy, and blushed rosily.

" Experience is not so charming as anticipation," he said sharply.

" You are mistaken," answered Nellie. " I shall jump when I get home."

" I am delighted to hear it!" And with another

salute Monsieur le marquis resumed his cigarette and strolled on.

"That is beyond my dreams," said Madame la Harpe. "I wonder how Amélie and my daughter-in-law have fared?"

"No one could refuse Madame Jean," said Nellie. "It would be like refusing St. Catherine herself."

"Yes, she is a very saint, my daughter-in-law," said Madame la Harpe with a sigh. "Her vocation was always the cloister."

"Indeed?" said Nellie eagerly. "Then why did she marry?"

"It was the will of her parents. She had a good portion, and was a very suitable *parti* for our Jean. We had no idea that her inclination was so strong a one when we arranged the marriage."

"And Monsieur Jean?"

"He never saw her till all was arranged; then he was quite satisfied; he looked upon her vocation as a childish folly that she would soon shake off, but she never will."

"Never!" said Nellie emphatically.

At this moment the sound of *sabots* cloppeting after them in full pursuit arrested their attention, and Toinnette, the fat *bonne* from the inn, came up with them.

"Stop, stop, madame!" she cried in Basque. "Let me tell you something. The omnibus from Orthez has just come in, and three gentlemen have descended at the inn. I do not know whether

they are to stop or to go on when Jean Marie's horses have rested, but they are rich and beautiful —officers! and in uniform; they are now seated on the terrace each with a cigar, a *demi-tasse*, and cognac. I am convinced that they would give largely. It was madame's Jeannette who sent me flying after you, ladies."

Madame la Harpe set her fringes to rights with a shake, righted her bonnet and turned round.

"Courage, my child," she said to Nellie. "This task shall be performed by you."

"But, madame, surely—will it be really right?"

"Your duty—and not the smallest impropriety in it! Heavens! My dear child, should *I*—*I* of all people—advise an indiscretion? Anybody may speak or converse to anybody on a *quête*, and no one ever takes advantage of it. You may meet the same individual ten minutes after, no one ventures to bow, there is no acquaintance. It is strange that you should be ignorant of this etiquette. But here we are! Why, you are quite pale, Nelline!"

"I do not like it at all, madame," said Nellie, nervously.

They approached the narrow strip of garden bordered by terrace, belonging to the inn. At a small iron table, in the midst of a kind of arbour of untidy greenery, sat three officers, whose epaulettes and gleaming sword-belts caught the light of the now setting sun.

"Now, my child, courage."

Nellie went forward desperately—went quite

forward till she stood before the three men, who all rose to their feet simultaneously.

"Messieurs," she began tremulously and clasping her hands nervously together with a little gesture of entreaty, "if you had a little money, just a few francs, to bestow on charity!"

"*Tiens!*" exclaimed one of the gentlemen in a tone of such unmixed astonishment that Nellie was seized with an irresistible inclination to laugh.

"It is not for myself," she said. "Indeed it is for Benoîte."

"And who is Benoîte?" said the oldest of the party—a stout gentleman with a magnificent white moustache pointed with mastic—with great severity.

"Benoîte has a son and——"

"Ah, Benoîte has a son! then why, mademoiselle, may I ask, does not Benoîte's son support his mother?"

"The young lady is an inexperienced *quêteuse, mon général*," said one of the officers in a low voice.

Nellie caught the words, and looked gratefully at the speaker. He was tall for a Frenchman, with a dark face and bright observing eyes, a moustache of the kind called coquettish in France, short, well trimmed, and turned upwards at the corners with a twist, cheeks and chin of the blue tint of a dark man closely shaved.

When his eyes met hers there was a look of unbounded admiration, mixed with some pity in them.

"Old Benoîte's son cannot help her, *Monsieur le général*," she said with some spirit. "He is in a seminary, and is to be ordained if, amongst us, who are the friends of his mother, enough money can be raised to pay his fees."

"*Peste!*" said the general. "I am sorry, mademoiselle, but I can give you nothing; if I had my will, the conscription should extend to the priesthood, and every man-jack among them should serve his time. We shall not have long to wait before it is so."

Nellie made a little haughty bow and turned away, when she was again arrested by the young officer who had spoken before.

"If mademoiselle will accept of my small contribution," he said, handing her a couple of francs, "I shall feel honoured."

Nellie took the money, saying the formal words used on each occasion by Madame la Harpe: "The good God will reward you, monsieur"—and she was going on her way when she was startled by a shrill little cry and a rush past her.

"Étienne!"

"Mamma!"

And the young officer was in Madame la Harpe's arms, rapid kisses from each side to the other, showering between them.

"You here, my son; and not come at once to me! but what does it mean?"

"Hush," and he walked away with them out of earshot of the other officers. "I am with the

general, mamma, and cannot leave him till he departs by the diligence in half an hour. Then, at once I join you! I have news for you too, but I must not stay now. *A tantôt.*"

And he returned to his duty.

The general was smoking and saying blasphemous things, launching bad words, and worse insinuations against the priests, his aide-de-camp listening with profound indifference, when Étienne la Harpe came back.

"You are of this town, *docteur*," said the general. "Who is the lovely *quêteuse?*"

"She is a young Englishwoman, *mon général*, staying with my mother."

"*Peste!* I envy your luck—she is beautiful as a houri."

CHAPTER IV.

"BUT who is he, madame?" said Nellie when her breath came back, and she and Madame la Harpe were hurrying rapidly home to prepare for the new arrival.

"Who is he? He is my Étienne, my beautiful, good youngest son. What will they all say! We did not expect to see him for another three months."

"But I had understood that your youngest son was a doctor, madame?"

"So he is a doctor—military doctor, you know. He must have got promotion! nothing else could have brought him back so soon! oh la! la! how

my bones do ache! To think that Étienne should be come back so soon!"

"Well mamma! and what success have you had?" cried Amélie, meeting them at the door.

"He is come, Amélie! He has arrived with the general and is seeing him off by the diligence at this very moment." Amélie looked bewildered.

"Come!" she said. "But is it then too late? has he missed his chance for lack of the fees?"

"Missed his chance! for shame, Amélie, it means promotion, on the contrary. Oh the joy of seeing him again!"

Amélie's hands went up in the air, her eyes opened.

"Heavens, mamma! is this delirium? And you look so hot and exhausted! What is she speaking about?" she added, leading her mother in, and appealing to Nellie, but before Nellie could reply, Jeannette came flying up to the door, the ends of her handkerchief streaming behind her head.

"But hear, mesdames! Monsieur le docteur has come. He is here in person! Oh, the happy day!"

"Étienne?" cried Amélie.

"Étienne! Who speaks of Étienne?" and out of his room came Monsieur la Harpe in his shirt sleeves.

"Etienne is here! he but sends off the general and joins us!" said Madame la Harpe, sinking into a chair.

"Hark! the horn! the diligence goes!" cried Jeannette.

The distant note of the diligence sounded on the air, and it had hardly died away before Monsieur Étienne came clanking into view in all the splendour of full uniform. Nellie stood by watching the lavish kisses, from the first ones bestowed heartily on both the plump cheeks of "papa" to those finally given to Jeannette the foster-sister of Monsieur le docteur.

The warm greetings were over at last. The evening was very hot, and after dinner the whole party were glad to descend to the terrace. That evening was never effaced from Nellie's memory. They all sat grouped, the ladies with their work, the gentlemen leaning back luxuriously. Madame Jean with her calm pale face and long black gown flitted about making glasses of syrup for Monsieur Jean and Étienne, the latter took the hand which presented the glass to him and pressed it to his lips.

"Always a ministering angel, *ma sœur*," he said, and she smiled her sweet sad smile.

Nellie was too shy to look much at the young officer, but his quick bright glances followed her every movement. She sat leaning her head on her hand, her elbow on the low parapet; the fair soft masses of her golden hair were a little disordered by the soft wind; her large blue eyes were cast down and veiled often by their thick dark lashes; the bright pink colour came and went in her cheeks. Darkness stole softly down over the mountains, and deepened the shadows in the valley; the noisy

dash of the river below made a sweet monotonous music.

There came a certain hush upon all the party; they felt the calm of the hour. Monsieur Jean broke the silence first; he was, as he flattered himself, too much a man of the world to be romantic.

"You have never told us what brought you back so much sooner than we expected, Étienne," he said.

"I told my mother," answered the young doctor, bending forward and patting the little fat hand of Madame la Harpe. "I have promotion. I have been offered the post of medecin-en-chef de l'hôpital militaire of . . . Algiers!"

"*Sapristi!*" cried Monsieur Jean; "but that is a good position! a first-rate position!"

"It is!" said Étienne, leaning back and twisting the point of his moustache.

"I always said that he would go far!" said Monsieur la Harpe, rubbing his hands with a chuckle.

"Merit, skill and perseverance always succeed," said Monsieur Jean.

"With the blessing of the good God," said Madame Jean softly. "Étienne, receive my congratulations."

"And mine, and mine," came the chorus. Nellie felt that she must add her little offering, and she said timidly, "Let me also congratulate you, monsieur." He turned sharply round at her words with a sudden movement of *empressment*.

"You are too good, mademoiselle," he said. He

looked at her, hoping for some further speech, but she said no more.

"Yes, it is a good position, Étienne," repeated Monsieur Jean, leaning back and sipping his syrup. "But Algiers is far from home ; you will be lonely. What do you say, my father—shall we occupy ourselves with making a marriage for this famous medecin-en-chef ?"

"I have thought much of it," said Madame la Harpe gravely.

A sudden flush came over the young doctor's dark face.

"Come," he said, with a little laugh, "if you are so indiscreet as to begin such a subject before all the world, I must vanish."

"All the world !" said Monsieur la Harpe. "Why, you are in the bosom of your family !"

"And as for Nelline," said Amélie affectionately, "she is one of us."

"A dear little sister," said Madame Jean impulsively. Madame la Harpe added a sounding kiss.

Nellie laughed a little, and blushed still more, but she was touched. A contrast flashed into her mind : all this caressing, this vivacity and demonstrative words, the pretty flattery, the petting, and idle sunny life, how pleasant it was ! She remembered how different it was at Holmedale, where every one was busy, where her Aunt Mary always expected her to be drawing, or singing, or working in the house, where her kiss in the morning was so

calm and gentle. And Dick, how well she remembered his bitter words : "To go back would be the first reasonable thing you ever did in your life." The words had not struck her at the time, but now they came back in contrast with all the petting in the new life. Then came a little pang of self-reproach, and a vision of Dick's kind, sorrowful eyes looking down upon her with that haunting look of intense love.

"Mademoiselle, you are cold, you shiver ; allow me to put this round you."

It was Étienne offering her a little shawl ; in his manner the devotion of a Frenchman.

Down below, the fire-flies came out and danced their wild starry dance in the valley. Nellie had shivered, but not with cold—a strange sad feeling stole over her. Dick, faithful, noble Dick, was far away, with his young vigorous life blighted by the cold touch of disappointment. She knew now that it must be so, and she took the shawl from Étienne la Harpe with a smile, and a little profusion of pretty French words.

Madame Jean that night came up to the bedroom occupied by Nellie and Amélie, and sat down on the window-seat while they loosened their hair. Nellie's was very long, and flowed all round her down to the knees when unbound.

"You are like a fair Magdalen, my child," said Madame Jean admiringly.

Nellie came and knelt beside her, putting her arms round her waist, "And you are lovely as Our

Lady of Sorrows," she said. "Ah! why is there sorrow to hurt this beautiful, happy world?"

"Happiness is not everything, Nelline: live for anything! for love, for duty, for charity if you will, but not for happiness."

"There is nothing else for which I care to live," said Nellie, throwing back her long hair and looking up at her friend, "without it I should wish to die!"

"God help you, poor little sparkling fire-fly," said Madame Jean tenderly, "and God help the good, noble Englishman who loves you so!"

"How do you know that?" cried Nellie, starting and blushing crimson. "I do not believe it; he does not know what love is."

"Nelline! Nelline! and do you?" cried Amélia, laughing.

"I can imagine," said Nellie, hotly. "My cousin finds fault with me—true love would think me perfection!"

Madame Jean patted her cheek. "Well, well, *mignonne*," she said, "your good friends will take care of you, you need not worry your little self about such matters. Go to bed and sleep."

CHAPTER V.

THE sunny days passed on.

"How changed is Monsieur le docteur," said Jeannette to her fellow-*bonne*. "Formerly he was

out all day, now he spends all his time at home, and he is absorbed—*distrait*. He smokes less, he uses double the perfumes. What is it ?"

"*Dame !* it is not difficult to see !" said Célestine, shrugging her shoulders.

"My wife," said Monsieur la Harpe, very gravely, "I have something of importance to say to you."

Madame la Harpe looked startled ; it was not often that her husband originated an idea, but when he did, it was very often a good one.

"I listen, my friend," she said.

"We need go no further in our correspondence with Monsieur and Madame Lagrange. Étienne will never marry their daughter."

"What ! never marry her ! a young lady with 65,000 francs ! Madame Lagrange would never have given a thought to Étienne but for this excellent position he has acquired."

"No matter," said Monsieur la Harpe, "he will never marry her."

"But why, my friend ?" said his wife, with suppressed ire, and a lurking dread that her own suspicions might be confirmed by his answer.

"Because he has lost his heart, and set his whole affections on the little Englishwoman."

"Good Heavens !" she exclaimed, sinking heavily into a chair.

Monsieur la Harpe rubbed his hands. "I have been reflecting *ma femme*," he said.

She looked up with a ray of hope—his rare reflections were apt to be good.

"I propose to say nothing to Étienne," he said, "but to write to that good Englishman myself, to see whether an arrangement could be arrived at. These Englishmen are rich; he is her nearest relative; it is for him to settle her in life; at all events we shall hear what he has to propose. If the affair fails, it will be time enough to thwart Étienne, but I am not without hope. Hist! not a word! let us keep this little affair between ourselves."

Madame la Harpe smiled and sighed. "*Mon ami*," she said, "*finesse* is required. What do you say? Shall we not break off finally the Lagrange affair, but leave both open for the time? Étienne may be in love, but he is too much a man of the world to let that interfere with a business arrangement such as marriage."

"It is possible!" said Monsieur la Harpe, "but God forbid that we should have another child with eyes like those of Jean's wife!"

"Bah! men are made of quite another paste," said Madame la Harpe.

Monsieur la Harpe went to the window, and by a jerk at the string of the *persiennes* enabled himself to see out.

"Look, *ma bonne*," he said. "Judge for yourself."

The young people were all on the terrace, Amélie and Madame Jean seated and both embroidering, Nellie filling a large earthenware pot with a huge, wild bouquet of sweet roses; by her side stood Doctor Étienne, in his attitude, the turn of head,

pose, everything, the look of *empressement* almost peculiar to a Frenchman. He seemed to be speaking very earnestly, for they saw Nellie suddenly pause and look up at him, her eyes met his, and suddenly the bright pink colour flushed her fair little face ; she seemed to hesitate, then shyly took up a little rose and handed it to him. He pressed it to his lips with passion, and Nellie, gathering up all that remained of her flowers into her gown, went hastily over to Madame Jean and knelt down beside her.

"Oh la ! la !" exclaimed Madama la Harpe.

"Am I, or am I not a man of penetration ?" said her husband, smiting his breast. "I go in, I write."

Far away in sunny Berkshire, one sweet, fresh evening of the English summer, Dick Gordon and his mother sat in the garden under rustling linden-trees, when a large and important-looking letter with a foreign post-mark was put into his hand.

"From Nellie, Dick ?" said Mrs. Gordon.

"No ! but from Sauveterre all the same." He glanced at the signature.

"From the old father ; how odd ! What can he have to say ?"

"Nellie has not written for some time," said Mrs. Gordon, looking rather wistfully at her son.

He did not answer ; he was reading the letter, and though a fair French scholar, the small neat handwriting seemed not quite easy to decipher.

Dick read it quite through, then without a word of comment he handed it to his mother.

"Mother, the evening is fine, I am going for a long walk," he said. She thought that there was something a little odd in his voice, but before she could speak, he was gone, she heard his footsteps crunching the gravel, then a hollow sound as he crossed the rustic bridge over the little river, and he was gone.

The tears rose to Mrs. Gordon's eyes, but she brushed them quickly away, put on her spectacles and read the letter:

"My dear Monsieur,

"You may recollect that at the time of the interview I had the honour to have with you, I undertook to watch over and take care of your charming young cousin as a child of my own: at that time neither I nor my wife could foresee how much her amiable character, her beauty, her freshness and her piety would endear her to us all. You have doubtless heard from Mademoiselle Nellie of the arrival at Sauveterre of my second son Étienne, medecin-en-chef de l'hôpital militaire de . . . en Alger. This grade he has recently attained: it is a fine position, especially when acquired at so young an age; my son is twenty-four years of age. His mother and myself before consigning him to so distant a station are anxious to marry him, and already a very desirable alliance has presented itself. But youth will be youth. My son has become madly in love with mademoiselle your cousin. It is with

difficulty I write, terrified lest you should perceive in me the smallest absence of delicacy when I venture to say that Mademoiselle Nellie, with every discretion, yet appears favourably inclined towards him. You are aware, my dear monsieur, that these things are affairs of business. I therefore venture to ask whether any arrangements could be made, so as to avoid the sacrifice of these youthful and interesting sentiments. My son, with an income from his appointment of 12,500 francs a year, enjoys also the interest of the sum that he will inherit at my death, namely, 100,000 francs. You will naturally understand that when a man has a competence so comfortable to offer, that his parents hope for some reciprocity in choosing a wife for him. With the assurance of my profoundly distinguished sentiments, I am,

JEAN MARIE ÉTIENNE LA HARPE."

Mrs. Gordon laid down the letter with a little gasp. "My poor boy," she said to herself.

The air blew chilly through the trees. She drew her shawl round her, shivered, and went indoors.

She could not go to bed or rest. She waited in her room, as the slow hours struck one after another, till she heard Dick's step on the stairs—a slow, heavy step, as of a tired man. She slipped out into the passage, and met him at the door of his room.

"Good-night, mother," he said, kissing her very affectionately. "Good-night, dear mother."

That was all that was ever said between them to betray poor Dick's buried hopes.

CHAPTER VI.

MONSIEUR and Madame la Harpe awaited with ill-concealed impatience the answer to his letter. Things were not quite easy to manage. The Lagrange family were beginning to dislike the procrastination and indecision of the La Harpes' proceedings. It was even intimated that before the week was over, Madame Lagrange would arrive in Sauveterre, and this idea was by no means agreeable to the La Harpes.

But on the first day that an answer from England could have been reasonably expected, it came.

Monsieur la Harpe and his wife, both quite tremulous with excitement, had a little mild contention as to who should break the seal, in which the lady prevailed.

"Heavens! what writing!" she exclaimed.

"Colossal, but legible," said Monsieur la Harpe, and he slowly read as follows:

"MY DEAR SIR,

"My cousin will have a fortune of 125,000 francs. But before finally consenting to such a marriage, as you do me the honour to propose, I should prefer making the acquaintance of Docteur

la Harpe. I propose, therefore, to arrive in Sauveterre the day after your receipt of this letter.

"Yours, &c."

"Most satisfactory," said Monsieur la Harpe complacently. "It more than doubles Étienne's fortune."

"Yes," said Madame la Harpe gloomily. "It is delightful, but oh, *mon ami*, if he should not arrive before Madame Lagrange!"

Monsieur la Harpe shrugged his shoulders.

"Let us not anticipate misfortunes," he said. "And now to tell Étienne."

He opened the door and called his son. The young doctor came in twirling his moustaches, with defiance in his face.

Monsieur la Harpe was seated pompously, his hands spread on his ample tartan waistcoat.

"My son," he began, "on the subject of your marriage."

"Papa," said the young man firmly, "my affections are engaged. It is with infinite pain, but without hesitation, that I am obliged to refuse the proffered alliance."

"Sir! Your affections are engaged!" cried Monsieur la Harpe, indignation in his tone, a twinkle in his eye.

"Irrevocably," was the answer, in a voice of despondency.

"And may I ask the name of the young lady?"

"Need you ask?" said Étienne, throwing out both his hands. "When you yourself have pre-

sented me to her under your own roof. *Sapristi!* one has eyes."

"Is it Nellie Grey?"

"Ah, papa!"

"My son; I bestow her upon you!"

A little cry of astonishment, then Étienne threw himself into his father's arms and kissed him on both cheeks, immediately repeating the little scene with his mother.

They showed him Dick Gordon's letter, of which he approved highly, and he readily agreed to his parents' suggestion—that not a word should be said to Nellie until after her cousin's arrival.

The next day Madame la Harpe, having quite forgotten that Nellie Grey was still ignorant of her cousin's proposed visit, spoke of it in the middle of the twelve o'clock breakfast.

"Nellie," she said, "we shall hear the horn of the diligence about five o'clock, and monsieur, your cousin, is sure to come by it."

"My cousin coming?" cried Nellie, very much startled. "Indeed, madame?"

"Ah! I ought to have told you, *mignonne*. Yes; he has consented to come at last and pay us a little visit."

"We shall be delighted to see him," said Madame Jean kindly.

Nellie did not quite know what to say. Her cheeks burned, her head throbbed, so various and conflicting were the feelings the news-awakened in her.

Docteur la Harpe, seeing her confusion, was seized with a fit of jealousy, and went away for the whole afternoon fishing in the Gave.

"One would imagine you were not altogether pleased to see your cousin, Nellie," said Madame Jean, a little sadly.

"I don't know," said Nellie, pushing her hair away from her temples with rather a bewildered look. "I cannot tell whether I am or not."

"But why, *mignonne?* He is so good and kind, and so fond of his little cousin! Why, what is it, child?"

For Nellie had suddenly put her arms round her, and burst into tears.

"It is nothing," she said, drying her tears, but with a catch in her voice. "Only I am angry with myself. We were so happy and peaceful, every day succeeded each other with so much that was delightful. I am sorry that any change should come."

"And you think that your good, loving cousin's arrival will interrupt this happy state of things?" said Madame Jean, a little severely.

"No, no! I don't know what I mean. Do not think badly of me! But Dick finds fault with me."

"He loves you dearly."

"Yes, yes! Don't you understand? A great deal too much. I am not good enough! It oppresses me."

There was petulance in her voice. Madame Jean understood all. She wiped away the tears with her handkerchief.

"Well, don't cry any more, *mignonne*, or he will think we do not make you happy."

"Oh! he can never think that," cried Nellie startled.

"I don't see how he can think otherwise, my child, if you meet him with red eyes and a little red nose."

"I will run up for some rose-water."

Madame Jean looked after her as she ran away, with a smile and a little sigh.

"I hope the poor, brave, good Englishman will not take it too much to heart," she said to herself.

Dick Gordon arrived duly by the diligence. He went first to the inn to make some improvement in his appearance, as he had travelled day and night, but before seven o'clock he arrived at the Maison de Mabendie, and found the whole party just rising from table.

It was exceedingly hot. The gentlemen were clad in white linen from head to foot.

Nellie put out a very cold little hand to meet her cousin, and hardly ventured to look up at him; but when she did so, she gave a little start.

"Oh, Dick! Dick! Have you been ill?"

"No, Nellie; certainly not. What makes you think so?"

"You are so changed."

Dick's face had grown very thin, which made his eyes look much larger, and a great deal of his brown, ruddy colour was gone, and his expression was much graver, firmer and older.

"I do not think I can be more changed than you are, Nellie."

"Am I changed?" she said a little coquettishly, conscious of trained curls on her brow instead of the old natural silky waviness, and of considerable alterations in dress.

"Yes, very much; you look older and more sedate, and you have become quite a little Frenchwoman."

Nellie had half expected a compliment, and missed it. She gave a little shrug of the shoulders.

In the evening Dick Gordon and the two parents had an interview; it was almost, but not quite satisfactory. If Nellie should consent to this marriage, her cousin would settle five thousand pounds on her, but the money was to remain in England, in securities chosen by himself, and in the hands of trustees. Monsieur la Harpe would have preferred that his son should have the sole command of the money, but Dick was inexorable, and after all, as the old gentleman said, "Nowhere could it be in safer hands than in those of this most amiable of cousins."

It was proposed that Dick should speak to Nellie the following morning. He shrunk from the duty, and even proposed that the young doctor should be permitted to plead his cause, but this idea was received with such horror that Dick perceived himself to have been guilty of an indiscretion of some enormity and, inwardly chafing against all this nonsense as he deemed it, he consented. The

opportunity came immediately after breakfast. Dick stopped Nellie as she was following Amélie out of the room.

"Nellie dear, I want to speak to you," he said gently. She became rather pale, but came obediently back into the dining-room.

"They will be coming to take away the things," said Dick nervously. "Can't we go somewhere where we shall not be disturbed?"

Nellie did not speak, but led the way into a small unused *salon.* Dick walked to the window, and began to speak with his back to her.

"Nellie," he said, "I have something very important to say to you, and I don't know how to begin. You see, in England a man proposes for himself, but here it is different. Monsieur and Madame la Harpe have asked me to speak to you about Doctor Étienne."

"Ah!"

Dick turned round abruptly. Nellie was standing with her hands straight down before her, clasped tightly, her face raised, her fresh lips parted, and a glowing tender light in the blue eyes upraised and fixed on vacancy, that he had never seen before.

His head sank on his breast.

"I think I need not ask," he said gently, "what your answer will be. Will you marry him, Nellie?"

"Yes."

The word was hardly breathed.

Dick turned away for a moment, passed his hand quickly over his face, then came forward abruptly and took her hand.

"Nellie," he said, his lips quivering in spite of every effort, "you are very young; I stand in the position of brother or even of father to you. Let me ask you to consider. Étienne la Harpe is a good, honest, well-conducted man."

The words seemed to jar upon Nellie. She drew her hand away.

"No, hear me, dear," he said gravely. "To marry him you must resign your country, your home, all the habits of your youth, indeed even your old friends."

"All this is nothing," she said.

Dick turned away, this time bitterly wounded, but he would not show it. He smiled bravely and said, "I have certainly said enough, Nellie, and Doctor Étienne may now plead his own cause. I will go and tell him."

She put her hands on his arm and looked up at him.

"Before you go, Dick," she said, "say, 'God bless you, Nellie.'"

"God bless you, my own little sister."

"And you—you don't mind, do you? You know," falteringly, "you always found fault with me."

"Well, Nellie, never again! I have resigned all my right to do so. But did I? I don't think I did; but let me go."

Dick went downstairs. He said two words to Doctor Étienne, who dashed upstairs three steps at a time; then he took his hat and went out.

Madame Jean passed him, and caught a glimpse of his white set face. "Ah, *mon Dieu*," she sighed, "the world is very sad."

But there were two upstairs who did not think so.

CHAPTER VII.

DURING the few weeks of preparation before the wedding, Dick Gordon went away, travelling to Pau and Biarritz, then over the mountains into Spain. He stayed away till the very day before the marriage.

The ladies had often bewailed the shortness of the time, but Étienne must go to Algiers to begin his new duties, and *modistes* and *lingères* must be hastened accordingly.

Dick Gordon gave his cousin two hundred pounds for her trousseau, and the result was charming.

On the very day on which Étienne and Nellie were married, old Benoîte's son was ordained.

"A good omen!" said Madame Jean.

The last moment came, all must separate: bride and bridegroom bound to their far-distant home; Dick back to England with a weary weight of chill disappointment on his young heart; Madame Jean, strong to suffer and strong to pray, left at Sauveterre.

There were tears and sobs and kisses.

Doctor Étienne twisted his moustaches and looked on.

"Take care of her," said Dick, his warm grasp hurting the young Frenchman's delicate hand.

"That is the affair as much of my honour as of my heart," he answered, and embraced Dick on both cheeks.

Nellie leant forward in the carriage as they drove away, watching till the very last. A little tiny pang stole across her even then. Dick was nearly a head taller than Étienne or any man there. "It is all very well," she said to herself a little impatiently, "but poor dear Dick puts every one out of proportion."

Dick Gordon went home. He found his mother waiting for him at the door.

"Well, mother dear," he said, "I have married her."

"My dear Dick, what?"

He gave an odd little laugh.

"I have become so used to French ways," he said; "I have married her to Dr. la Harpe."

"I hope she will live to repent it," said Mrs. Gordon, a hot, burning feeling rising in her breast against the girl who had brought the shadow on her son's life.

"God forbid," said Dick hastily.

MY FIRST CLIENT.

(A SOLICITOR'S TALE.)

CHAPTER I.

"MR. BROWNLOW, sir," said my small clerk, opening my office door.

"Show him in," I said, covering with a bulky draft the novel which I was reading.

Then my first client stood before me.

My first client! In spite of the bundles of documents, docketed, indorsed and arranged in due order; in spite of the litter of papers in front of me; in spite of other clever devices which I hoped gave my office the look and odor of good substantial legal business, until now I was clientless.

It is true I had not long been practicing on my own account. Ten days, if I remember rightly; but those ten days, during which I waited for business to come to me, were the dullest and dreariest in my life. I was beginning to despair. I did not even know from which quarter to expect business. Far away in the dim future I saw a possibility of being employed to draw up a marriage settlement. The landlord of the house in which I lodged was in hot

dispute with his neighbors about the right of using a pump, and had sounded me as to the probable cost of legal proceedings. With these exceptions, I had nothing to look forward to when my first client made his appearance.

An elderly, delicate-looking man ; his eyes blue, with a kind, mild expression in them ; his hair light and thin. Evidently a timid, halting, irresolute man, of no strength of character. Born, not to command, but to be bullied by wife, son, daughter, or any body with whom he came in contact. Stooping somewhat, as if accustomed to yield to storms, not to resist them. Speaking hesitatingly and respectfully, with a plaintive inflection in his voice. Clothes good, but old fashioned.

Such was my first client.

I begged him to be seated, then waited to hear why he came.

" I want a little matter attended to," he said. " Mr. Johnson, of High Street, advised me to come to you."

Johnson was my bootmaker—I registered a vow of gratitude, to be discharged by future orders ; then, bowing in acknowledgment, asked my client what he required.

It was, as he said, a small matter. An agreement for a lease of a house which he was about letting. His name I found was James Brownlow ; his address, Vine Cottage, North Road ; his description, retired builder—in legal phraseology, gentleman.

So far as the grave and learned air which I was bound to assume permitted, I made myself very pleasant and affable to him. He listened to my words with deference, agreed to all my suggestions, wished me a respectful good-morning, and went his way.

Of course I told him my hands were so full of business that it was impossible for me to get the agreement prepared under two days. At the time appointed he called with his tenant, paid me my modest costs, and disappeared for the space of several months.

When next I saw him, he brought me something well worth having. He had sold some houses, and wished to invest the proceeds by way of mortgage, so that my second bill of costs was of respectable length and of a comforting amount. From what he told me I found that he possessed, one way and another, a good deal of property. How he could have made his money was to me a mystery. Judging from his timid and yielding disposition, I should have thought him the last man in the world to get on. I suppose our fathers made money much more easily than their sons do, in these days of cut-throat competition and mortgage-broking—But let that pass. I, for one, must not complain—now.

One evening I passed Vine Cottage. My client was at the gate, and begged me to enter. His house was a pretty one, built by himself, and surrounded by a large well-kept garden. I found that whatever energy he did possess was devoted to

horticulture. Plants being gentle, unresisting organizations, no doubt he was able to cope with them successfully. He was proud of his flowers, but even more so of his grapes, one variety of which, he told me, had become famous under the name of "Brownlow's seedling."

As I am fond of gardening, and know something about it, the old man seemed to find a kindred spirit in mine, so much so that, after our inspection of the garden and the greenhouses, he urged me to stay to supper with him. I had another engagement, but, as my new friend seemed likely to be such a good client, I felt I ought not to neglect the opportunity, so I accepted the offer, and entered the house.

At the supper-table I found two middle-aged women, his daughters. The elder, I learned, was a widow; the younger, unmarried. I already knew that my client's wife had been dead many years, and from the conversation at the table I gathered that the widowed daughter had two or three children. Afterward, I ascertained that she and her family lived with Mr. Brownlow, who supported them all.

As I inspected my new acquaintances, I decided that in appearance and disposition they must take after their deceased mother, and argued that, if my supposition was correct, the late Mrs. Brownlow was not the pleasantest of her sex. Father and daughters were never less alike. The latter were two tall, bony, hard-faced women, and as I noticed

that when Mr. Brownlow spoke to them his manner was more timid, his speech more hesitating than ever, I felt sure that I had not missed my mark when I summed him up as a man much bullied by his nearest relatives. It was easy to see that the poor old fellow's womankind ruled him with a rod of iron—a domestic sceptre no doubt handed down together with traditions of home tyranny from mother to daughters. He seemed to smoke his pipe surreptitiously ; to drink his whiskey and water apologetically ; to laugh guardedly ; in fact, in his daughters' presence, to do all things with the hope approval, or the fear of correction before his amiable eyes.

To me, the ladies, although patronizing, as became our respective positions, were civil enough. When I said good-night, they were good enough to hope to see me again at Vine Cottage. "When we trust," added the widow, "to entertain you better —but having expected no one," etc. In spite of fair words, I did not like them. They were too severely moulded to suit me, and I felt sure that the moment my back was turned poor old Brownlow would be taken to task for having invited a guest without notice to his joint sovereigns.

After this visit to Vine Cottage, I saw my old client frequently, both at my office and out of doors. If I passed his house of an evening I generally found him at the gate, anxious that I should enter and admire some new floral triumph. Through the kindness of a friend I had been able

to present him with some choice varieties of several of his pet plants. He was absurdly grateful. Perhaps even a trifling act of spontaneous kindness was a new experience to him. Sometimes, not often, I spent the evening with him, and each time I did so, and saw him in the company of his sour-looking daughters, I was more confirmed in my opinion that he was very unkindly treated at home. At last I grew to dislike the oppressors as much as I pitied and liked the oppressed, whom I found so gentle, kind, and hospitable, that, leaving all mercenary considerations out of the question, I began to entertain a sincere regard for him.

One morning, to my surprise, his widowed daughter, Mrs. Wrench, paid me a visit. If either of my client's daughters was sourer, harder-looking—in fact, more objectionable than the other—it was Mrs. Wrench. She was a hungry-looking woman, with long teeth and high cheek-bones. She was dressed in black, but her garments looked old and rusty. Out of doors she wore black thread gloves, the touch of which set my teeth on edge. She entered my office, and after giving me her rasping, rigid hand, seated herself.

"My father would have called himself, Mr. Carr," she began, "but did not feel equal to the walk."

"I hope he is not ill," I said politely.

"No, not exactly ill; but upset by an unpleasant family matter."

"Can I be of any service to him?"

"Yes. He wishes you to write a letter—at once; so he asked me to call and give you instructions."

I bowed, and waited the instructions.

"You will please write to-day," she said, in her incisive, metallic voice, her ill-favoured face growing harder as she spoke. "You will write to Mrs. Richard Brownlow, 18 Silver Street, and say that no further application she makes to Mr. Brownlow will be noticed. Say also," she added, "that Mr. Brownlow, in justice to others, is seriously thinking of reducing the amount he has for some years been in the habit of sending her."

Whoever Mrs. Richard Brownlow might be—whether her claim on my client were just or unjust—such a peremptory refusal, written by a solicitor, admitting of no appeal and ending with a threat, was so much at variance with my old friend's easy and vacillating nature, that I hesitated.

"Am I clearly to understand, Mrs. Wrench, that these are Mr. Brownlow's expressed wishes?"

She snapped her thin lips, and looked at me in a manner far from pleasant.

"Undoubtedly, Mr. Carr—moreover, he wishes you to write at once. Let there be no delay, if you please."

"If you please" is an innocent-looking phrase, but the expression Mrs. Wrench threw into those words was most significant. Considering it had settled the matter, the hard-faced widow rose, gathered up her rusty skirts, and bade me a severe good-day.

"Now, who may Mrs. Richard Brownlow be?" I said, as her angular, ungracious form vanished through the green baize door. "Some poor relation asking for help, I suppose. I doubt very much whether the old man knows anything about the appeal, and I daresay my instructions emanate only from the charming Mrs. Wrench."

Nevertheless, I wrote the letter; my not doing so would, I felt sure, make a bitter enemy of Mrs. Wrench, and enemies were luxuries which I could not yet afford. If I did wrong in following her instructions, I could throw all the blame on her shoulders. So the next post took my letter to the address she gave me—a poor street in a poor part of the town.

CHAPTER II.

At the end of the week Mr. Brownlow called, looking more timid and nervous than ever. He said nothing about the letter, but having finished discussing the business which I was conducting for him, fidgeted about and seemed very ill at ease. He made contradictory remarks about the harvest and the crops, and could not, apparently, make up his mind whether to go or to stay. Presently he reseated himself, and dropping his voice to a whisper, said:

"Will you do me a kindness, Mr. Carr?"

I begged him to command me in any way.

"I feel it is not quite the right thing to ask," he said, with a feeble attempt at a laugh, "but will you allow your clerk to take a cab and go with a letter for me? He will bring some one back. It will only be a little girl. Perhaps you would not mind my seeing her here for a few minutes?"

"He shall go at once," I said; "but where is the letter?"

"I must write it."

Therewith, after spoiling several sheets of my paper, he completed to his satisfaction a short note. It was addressed Mrs. Richard Brownlow, 18 Silver Street.

"You know I wrote to this lady a few days ago, by your request?" I asked.

"Yes, yes—I know it," he replied sadly. "My daughters insisted. No doubt they are right, for they are good daughters, Mr. Carr, and have never yet given me a moment's trouble. Oh yes, my daughters are always right; but I want to see the little girl."

I gave my clerk the letter and instructions. When I returned, Mr. Brownlow was saying to himself:

"Yes, I must see the little girl. Richard's little girl."

"Your expected visitor is a relation of yours?" I asked.

"My granddaughter. My poor son Dick's child. Dick went wrong, Mr. Carr. I can't think why he

should have gone wrong," he added plaintively ; "he never had a harsh or unkind word from me."

This I quite believed ; but I wondered if a few harsh words at the proper season might not have prevented his son from going wrong.

"Yes, he disgraced us all," continued the old man. "Then he married and made matters worse. His wife was not the wife for such as Dick. Then he quarreled with me, and said such things that I was obliged to alter my will and leave him nothing—but that was only to try and break his spirit, Mr. Carr. Then he left me in anger and went abroad. I never saw him again. He took to drinking, they told me, and soon died. He was a terrible disgrace and trouble, but he was my only son, and I should like to see the little girl."

"Have you never seen her?"

"Never. Dick's widow has only just returned to the town. Since Dick's death I have been allowing her something, although my daughters say she has no claim on me ; but I could not let her starve. Now she has written for more money, to give the child a proper education, she says. But I can not be expected to do that, can I, Mr. Carr?"

He spoke timidly, as though my decision was a matter of great moment.

I knew it was not what he could do, but what my friend Mrs. Wrench and her sister would allow him to do.

"Better wait and see what your grandchild is like," I suggested.

"Yes, yes, so I will," he said, brightening up. "But, Mr. Carr, you will say nothing about this at home?"

I reassured him, while marvelling at his weakness. Soon the door opened, and my clerk led in a girl of about twelve years of age.

A pretty, winning child, with bright eyes, long soft hair, and an intelligent face. Her dress, although of poor material, neat and well fitting. I was able to trace in her young features a certain likeness to my client. Perhaps her natural timidity and shyness at entering a strange room and finding strangers awaiting her made the resemblance more apparent.

Mr. Brownlow held out his hand. The little maid went up to him, and after dropping an old-fashioned courtesy, put her small fingers into his.

"And what is your name, my dear?" he asked kindly.

"I am Miss Lilian Brownlow, sir."

"Lilian—Lilian," repeated the old man. "A very pretty name, too; and do you know who I am?"

"You are my poor papa's papa," she replied. "Mamma said I should see you if I went with the young gentleman."

"What else did your mamma tell you?" asked Mr. Brownlow, rather unfairly.

"She said I was to be very good, and then, perhaps you would give her the money to send me to a beautiful school."

Old Brownlow looked very foolish as he heard this candid avowal. He twisted in his chair, and his eyes appealed to me for assistance.

"She is very like you," I said, to create a diversion.

He seemed pleased at my remark, and placing his hands on her shoulders, looked at her attentively and kindly.

"Like me, is she? Well, she is like Dick. She has his eyes, and people always said Dick was like his father."

"Suppose I can't send you to school," he asked the child, "will you give me a kiss all the same, my pretty one?"

"Yes, I will give you a kiss," she said, looking half inclined to cry.

She held up her little red mouth: the old man kissed it many times, then placed her on his knee and put his arms round her. They made quite an affecting group. In the child's interests, and feeling sure that I should put a spoke in Mrs. Wrench's wheel, I thought it better to leave them, so I quitted my office for awhile.

In an hour's time I returned and found them the best of friends. With many kisses Mr. Brownlow once more gave Lilian in charge of the young gentleman, my clerk. He saw them safely off, then returned to me. For once he spoke like a man whose mind is made up. It was clear that his pretty granddaughter had found a short cut to his heart. Memories of his dead son, loving and

pleasant ones, had arisen and erased his faults. The child bore his name, and, Mrs. Wrench notwithstanding, he felt that something must be done for her.

"Mr. Carr," he said, "kindly write to Mrs. Brownlow and tell her to send the child to Miss H—'s school. The bills can be sent to you, if you don't mind the trouble of settling them. Also tell Mrs. Brownlow that you are instructed to pay her ten pounds every quarter in addition to what she now receives from me. Perhaps," he added, with a return of his old manner, "it would be well to make some inquiries as to what kind of woman she is—my daughters say such strange things about her."

I promised to carry out his wishes, and expressed my pleasure that the child had found such favor in his eyes.

"A sweet little thing!" he said. "A good, clever little child! I only wish I could take her home to live with me—but there are obstacles—and very likely she would not be happy," he added, as if thinking aloud.

I did not put my thoughts into words, but I agreed with him. There were obstacles, and, even if Mr. Brownlow could attack and surmount them, they must impede the march of the little interloper's happiness.

Although he dared not take the child home—although he never went near Silver Street—Mr. Brownlow continued to see Lilian frequently. He

made my office quite a conveniency. He usually called there on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons, the girl's half-holidays, and, with many apologies for the liberty he was taking, despatched my clerk in search of her. Then they sallied forth together. It was his custom to take a cab, drive some distance into the country, alight, and ramble about the fields until it was time to return home. I laughed as I drew mental pictures of the state in which the amiable Mrs. Wrench and her sister would be if they should chance to learn how their father employed so much of his time. As yet they had discovered nothing, although years had gone by, and the girl was growing tall, and bidding fair to become an attractive and accomplished young lady.

My client had several times spoken to me about making a fresh will and providing for Lilian, but as yet nothing had been done. Although I had tried to do so, I had not been able to get any definite instructions from him. I believe he was deterred by that absurd superstition which influences more men than one would think, that a will should not lightly be meddled with—making a new one or altering an old one being often the precursor of a quick decease. It was to be made—it should be made—yet it was not made. The friendly relations now existing between us allowed me to hint to him that in case of his death Lilian and her mother would be penniless. He quite saw the force of my remarks, yet he still hesitated and postponed. How

many men have done the same thing, and the ones whom they loved best in life have suffered from the foolish delay !

CHAPTER III.

Some two years after Lilian made her first appearance, three half-holidays in succession passed without my client paying me his usual visit. My clerk —the original young gentleman, for I had more than one clerk now—looked out for him wistfully. Probably certain half-crowns which from time to time changed hands were a welcome addition to his weekly stipend, or it may be that, in his secret heart, the youth nourished tender feelings toward his little charge. Such a protracted absence being unprecedented, I called at Vine Cottage to learn what was the cause of it. One of the daughters received me, and informed me her father was ill. He had been in bed several days. Was he seriously ill ? They feared so. Was he conscious ? Yes, but very weak. Could I see him ? Utterly out of the question—he was too ill to see any one.

The woman's manner made me dread the worst. I thought of that graceful child, who had grown so dear to the old man, thrust back into poverty. Her mother and herself, at the best, kept from sheer starvation by what small pittance might be wrung from the stony sisters. I pitied the mother almost as much as the child, for the result of the

inquiries which I had instituted by Mr. Brownlow's request showed her to be of undoubted respectability. A factory girl originally, whose pretty face had caught Richard Brownlow's fancy; but a girl, evidently, with thoughts and ideas above her class. Poor woman, she had suffered much! Her husband had ill-used her, and during Lilian's early years her life had been one hard struggle. The two last years must have been the happiest since her marriage; they were at least free from anxiety and semi-starvation. And now, if old James Brownlow died, all her misery must begin again.

So I begged as his friend and legal adviser to be allowed to see him, if only for a moment. While I urged my request, the second daughter entered the room and joined her sister in an absolute refusal. So rigid and unbending was their attitude, that I feared they must suspect something of the truth. I tried them every way I could think of, but without getting them to yield an inch. The doctor, they said, had utterly forbidden it.

"Will you allow me," I said, "to wait until the doctor comes? I can show him how necessary it is that I should see Mr. Brownlow."

"Certainly not," replied Mrs. Wrench, with a face of adamant. "Not with my consent shall my poor father's last hours, it may be, be disturbed by matters of business."

"Certainly not," echoed her sister.

Entreaty failing, I turned to craft. Taking my hat, I rose, shrugging my shoulders like one who

had cleared his conscience by trying to do his duty.

" As you like, my dear ladies ; but I must not be blamed by-and-by. I can only say that, unless I speak to him to-day, it may make a great pecuniary difference to yourselves."

This was true enough, but not exactly as I meant them to understand it.

The shaft went home. I had touched the key-note—avarice. They glanced at each other, and held a whispered consultation. I hoped I had out-witted them ; but two such women are more than a match for the sharpest lawyer on the rolls.

" Mr. Carr," said the widow, " if you choose to tell us the exact facts of the case, we will decide if they justify our running the risk."

She snapped up her thin lips and gave me a searching glance.

" No, I cannot do that. The business is of a private nature. Many interests are involved. You must take my word for its vital importance."

The sisters exchanged a look which plainly said, " I told you so." Mrs. Wrench folded her huge bony hands on her sombre lap.

" Then, sir," she said, " you will not see him. What secrets can a father wish to keep from his daughters ? "

" We don't believe a word of your tale," added the other most offensively.

" If there is any secret," continued Mrs. Wrench venomously, " perhaps this letter, found by us a few days ago, has something to do with it."

She handed me a letter. It was in a girlish handwriting, and ran thus :

"DARLING GRANDPA,—

"I have a bad cold and cannot come to-day.

"With love and kisses, your

"LILIAN."

Then they knew or guessed everything. Poor little Lilian !

"Answer me, sir !" cried Mrs. Wrench, stamping her heavy foot. "Who is Lilian ? That shameful woman's child, I suppose ? Is it on her account you want to see my father ? Is she your important business ? Answer me !"

I was spared the task. The door opened suddenly, and in staggered a feeble, wasted figure, clothed in an old dressing-gown. It was my client. He sank into the nearest chair, and panted for breath.

I needed no doctor to tell me that my poor old friend's hours were numbered. He had, in the course of some ten days, wasted away almost to nothing. Death was written legibly on his white and ghastly face. He seemed so exhausted that the fear came over me that, then and there, his eyes would close forever.

His daughters, spell-bound by the turn events had taken, gazed at each other in blank astonishment. Even in that moment I was able to exult in their discomfiture. I ran to the side-board, where luckily stood a spirit-case and glasses. I

poured out a glass of brandy. The dying man drank a little and revived.

"Go," he said hoarsely, waving his thin hand toward his daughters. "Go—at once."

Frightened as the women were, they kept their seats in sullen defiance.

"Go," he said again. "Go; or, by heaven! Mr. Carr shall make a will and leave everything to the hospital."

His voice was low, and he spoke with difficulty; but words and accent were so stern and fierce that I could scarcely believe I was listening to my timid, hesitating old friend.

His daughters, doubtless even more surprised than I was, left the room, muttering their dissatisfaction. My client sank back in his chair.

"Lock the door," he whispered. I did so. Then he laid one wasted hand on mine.

"Thank God, you have come at last. I expected you every moment for days past."

"I had no idea you were ill, Mr. Brownlow."

"They told me they had sent and written. They said you were from home."

"I have had no letter, and have not been out of town for weeks."

"Then they lied. They let me see no one. Until three days ago I did not know I must die. Even that they kept from me. I heard your voice, and just managed to creep down stairs. I was bound to see you before it was too late."

The moisture rose to his brown. He looked so faint that I made him swallow more brandy.

"Make a codicil," he said. "Leave my pretty girl all—leave her all."

"Not all, surely!" I said, surprised.

He relapsed into his familiar hesitation and uncertainty of purpose.

"No—no," he said, "not all. They have been good daughters. No; leave my darling girl, my poor Dick's child, six thousand pounds."

"I will draw up a codicil at once," I said, looking round for pen and paper. His procrastinating habit still clung to him.

"No, not now," he said. "I am better. Perhaps I shall get well. But bring it to-morrow morning, that I may sign it and make sure."

I had no intention of letting death forestall me, so, without heeding his words, I began to write. Before I had finished two lines I saw that my old client had fainted.

I tried, without success, to revive him. With a heavy heart I went for help. Mrs. Wrench was in the passage. Her ear, I felt sure, had that moment left the keyhole. Her sister stood just behind her. The looks they gave me showed what they thought of my proceedings.

We carried Mr. Brownlow to his bed. The servant ran for the doctor, and I left to prepare the codicil, praying the while that Mr. Brownlow might find strength of mind and body enough to insist upon seeing me in the morning.

At nine o'clock the next morning I was at Vine Cottage, and was not at all surprised when I was

curtly refused admittance. I waited until the doctor paid his visit, accosted him before he entered, and begged him to aid me, or at least to let his patient know that I was outside. He would promise nothing, and his manner told me that the account he had received of last evening's events prejudiced me in his eyes. No doubt more lies were told him on this visit, for when he came out of the house he was good enough to inform me that he thought such unprofessional conduct as mine must damage any young solicitor. I kept my temper, and endeavored to make him understand the facts of the case. He refused to listen to me.

"At least you will tell me how you find Mr. Brownlow this morning," I said.

"As bad as can be. He has but a few hours to live."

"Then," I said, "by refusing to aid me you doom the one he loved best in the world to utter poverty."

"I have nothing to do with family disputes," he said coldly, as he closed the door of his brougham and drove away.

I left the house, but returned there several times during the day. Each time I was denied entrance. I was at my wits' end. Bribery and corruption of servants was out of the question, as the door was always opened by Mrs. Wrench or her sister. No legal process would enable me to enter; and a forcible invasion for such a purpose as mine would, I felt certain, ruin us if the matter came to litigation.

At last I grew sick and weary of the whole thing. I went home determined to try again to-morrow, although I knew it would be useless unless Mr. Brownlow rallied in some unexpected manner, and grew strong enough to insist upon my being sent to him.

CHAPTER IV.

I LIVED at some distance from Vine Cottage. There were other lodgers in the house: the rooms over mine being occupied by a man with whom I was on very friendly terms. I had finished my tea and settled down to read, when Robinson came to my door, and asked me to join some friends of his in a rubber. I was not in the mood for society. I felt melancholy and upset. The faces of a dying man and a bright, happy child haunted me. I declined my friend's invitation, preferring to spend the evening with my book and my pipe. I read for a long, long time, undisturbed by the laughter which, at intervals of the game, I heard overhead. But read as hard as I would, I could not get Mr. Brownlow out of my thoughts. Perhaps at that very moment he was dying, and calling for me to carry out his wishes. I shuddered as I pictured the two hard-hearted mercenary women keeping watch over his bed, waiting for him to die. I saw them heeding his cries no more than stone

figures might. Then through my smoke-wreaths, rose Lilian's glad young face. How changed, I thought, it will look in six months' time, when privation and sorrow fell upon it. I blamed my old client bitterly for his folly. I blamed myself for not having urged him again and again until he made proper provision for the girl. Altogether, I knew the business had been badly managed, and felt miserable at my share in it.

The clock struck half-past eleven. I closed my book, and debated whether to go to bed or fill another pipe. At that moment I heard a knock at the street door. " One of Robinson's friends come late," I said. " They mean to make a night of it." I heard my landlady answer the summons ; then my door opened, and to my amazement—even horror—in walked Mr. Brownlow.

I thought I must be dreaming—the thing seemed impossible. Mr. Brownlow, the man yesterday evening scarcely able to totter down stairs—whose dying look had haunted me ever since—here, in my room—dressed as when last I saw him about ! He looked as ill and ghastly as when I saw him in his own dining-room, but his step was not so feeble. The unexpected sight deprived me of speech and motion ; the only sensation I was capable of feeling was wonder—wonder as to how he managed to reach my house. A man so enfeebled that only yesterday he fainted after walking a few steps and speaking a few words. It was inexplicable, but it was not impossible, for here he was !

I recovered my senses, and placed a chair for him. He seated himself wearily.

"My dear sir!" I said; "surely this is most imprudent!"

He turned his head and looked at me.

What was it in that look that froze my blood—that made my hair rustle—that sent wild thoughts rushing through my brain? To this day I dare not answer the question; but something nameless was there—something which changed astonishment into sheer terror—such terror that for a moment my impulse was to rush out of the room and hide myself.

"I must sign that codicil to-night," he said.

Although his voice sounded strange, it recalled me to myself.

It should be no fault of mine if the opportunity was lost. I took the document from my pocket and spread it out before him.

"Wait one minute," I said: "I must fetch witnesses."

"You must be quick," he answered, and his eyes again met mine. I shunned them, but as I left the room I felt that I was trembling in every limb.

Outside the door I could laugh at my fears. Robinson's card party was a lucky incident. I would go up and ask two of the players to act as witnesses. First let me get that codicil signed and attested; after that I could learn how Mr. Brownlow managed to reach my house.

Robinson and his friends raised a shout of welcome when I entered the room. I knew nearly every man

there, and among the party were two solicitors of my acquaintance.

"I am sorry to disturb you," I said apologetically, "but would two of you come down and witness a will. Perhaps Thomas and Hicks"—my legal friends—"will spare me a minute."

Thomas and Hicks laid down their cards and followed me to the door. Then a sudden thought occurred to me. The circumstances of the case were so unparalleled; a man leaving what was said to be his death-bed late at night to make a serious alteration in his will. If he died to-morrow, or in the course of a few days, this codicil would most certainly be disputed. Here were nine men. Let them all witness it. Such testimony might defy anything. So I turned and said:

"On second thoughts, as litigation is sure to come out of this, may I ask all of you to come down?"

"Can't be too careful," said Hicks approvingly, as the whole party rose and trooped after me.

"It's old Brownlow!" I heard Thomas whisper as we entered the room.

"So it is," replied Hicks. "They told me the poor old boy was dying."

I handed my client a pen. As I did so our hands met. His touch sent an icy-cold shiver through me. He signed his name pretty firmly. His signature was duly attested by Thomas and Hicks, while the other men looked over their shoulders with great curiosity.

Mr. Brownlow bowed to them politely, while I thanked them for their services and apologized for the trouble I had given them. After wishing us good-night they went back to their game. I locked up the codicil and then turned to question my client.

But the words died on my lips as I met his eyes, and once more saw in them the same mysterious, indescribable look which had before so strangely affected me. Again I trembled from head to foot.

"I must go back," he said, rising like one wearied by some great exertion.

"Let me fetch a cab," I said, recovering as before when I heard his voice.

He shook his head, walked to the door, opened it and passed through. I followed him. On the threshold he turned, and for the last time his eyes met mine. I sank on a chair powerless, and, save for the throbbing of my heart, motionless. The clock struck twelve.

In a few seconds, by a great effort, I forced myself to rise and go in pursnit of him. One way only led to his house. I ran along the road as fast as I could, but saw no sign of him. Thinking I must have passed him, I retraced my steps. He was nowhere in sight. I turned once more and ran on and on until I reached Vine Cottage. I rang the bell. The door was soon opened—it was evident that the inmates no longer feared assault. A maid with her apron before her eyes stood at the door.

" Has Mr. Brownlow come in ?" I asked.

The girl stared at me stupidly. I repeated my question, adding that he had just left my house.

She did not seem to understand me.

" Master died at half-past eleven," she said, again applying her apron to her tearful eyes.

He died at half-past eleven ? Then I must be mad or dreaming. I went home. Robinson's card party was still in full swing. I unlocked my secretaire. There, safe and sound, was the codicil signed just before twelve o'clock ! What could I think ?

* * * * * *

The outcry raised by my notice of the existence of the codicil beggars description. The amiable sisters forced their way to my presence, and assured me nothing would satisfy them until I stood in the dock charged with forgery, conspiracy and a few other crimes—their last penny should be spent to bring this about. Fortunately, the executors were men of business, and their solicitors men of honor who would not allow clients to go to law when they must lose. I had nothing to conceal, as it was soon ascertained that James Brownlow had signed the codicil in the presence of ten disinterested witnesses, leaving my landlady, who opened the door to him, out of the question. Every man who witnessed that signature was a respectable citizen whose word would carry weight with judge and jury. Let the others swear that it was physically impossible for James Brownlow to leave his bed that night, we had overwhelming evidence that he did so—that

he came to my house—that he signed the document. Moreover, our evidence was unbiased: theirs was tainted by animus and self-interest. I laughed as I thought whose shoulders eventually must bear the charge of conspiracy.

The law courts were never troubled with the matter. It was too simple. So, after some attempts at a compromise, which were sternly rejected, the legacy was paid, and the popular theory was that my client managed to slip from his bed unnoticed, and found strength enough to reach my house and insure that his last wishes should be carried out.

It was years before I would exchange a word with the doctor who had lent so ready an ear to my calumniators. But he made me ample amends, and at last, I forgave him. He told me a strange thing.

To all appearance his patient died at half-past eleven that night. The doctor went downstairs and talked to and comforted the women the best he could. Before leaving the house he went back to the chamber of death to look once more on the dead man. While gazing on the peaceful face, the eyes suddenly opened, and the man he had pronounced dead gave a deep drawn sigh—a sigh, it seemed, of relief—then the lids fell again, and this time all was over.

"But," said the doctor, "I would swear in any court of law that it was a simple impossibility for him to have moved hand or foot. Thank heaven I was not obliged to do so. Your evidence was so

overpowering that I should have been ruined professionally. If one believed in the supernatural, now——"

Just so. But, like the doctor, I didn't believe in it. Any way, it is not as yet recognized by law. Nevertheless, the circumstances connected with my first client are strange—very strange !

GRACIE.

CHAPTER I.

It was a very long, dreary street in which Mrs. Marmaduke Wyvern and her two daughters resided. Of all ugly London streets, in those silent semi-aristocratic regions where there are no shops but only rows and rows of tall two-windowed houses, this street was one of the very ugliest. It consisted for the most part of dingy, colourless houses, though here and there a spasmodic attempt had been made by some enterprising persons to embellish their abodes, or, perhaps it should rather be said, to distinguish them as much as possible from each other. Thus, one house was painted deep chocolate from basement to attic ; another, the tint of pale coffee ; Mrs. Roderick Jones insisted on venetian red, relieved by black lines, whilst old Major Noddy (who had travelled a great deal in the East), personally superintended the decoration of his front door after the most approved Assyrian style. Little idle boys frequented Major Noddy's

door, and whiled away their leisure by following with dirty fingers the queer green and yellow patterns that encircled the columns of the portico, the major frowning at them from his dining-room window, (which, by-the-bye, was Assyrian also,) and frowning all in vain.

And yet the dreary street, fading at its extreme end into the haze of a gentle autumn evening, was not altogether unpoetical, according to Amelia Wyvern. Amelia had artistic tendencies, and she occasionally made statements that startled her uneducated hearers. Amelia was studying perspective, and, possibly for that very reason, the vanishing point of the long thoroughfare became interesting to her ; possibly, also, because in the square immediately beyond the vanishing-point lived Douglas McHuish, a young man who was a city clerk, and who sometimes accidentally walked up the street on his return from his office at the very hour that Amelia walked down on her way home from the School of Art.

Mrs. Wyvern's residence was one of the unobtrusive houses. Mrs. Wyvern was a lady in reduced circumstances, and consequently she put off the expense of doing up her house as long as possible, just as she postponed many other expensive pleasures. Economy was her one thought, night and day ; poor Mrs. Wyvern, there were so few ways left untried in which she could economize ! She had sometimes thought of taking in a lodger ; but, on reflection, the plan seemed scarcely feasible.

She might let her house for a while, certainly ; other ladies let their houses, to spend the winter at Cannes, or the summer at Homburg ; but travelling or moving of any sort would, after all, involve much additional expense. On the other hand, to remain and admit a lodger—to keep apartments, in fact—the whole thing sounded too terribly degrading. Mrs. Wyvern felt convinced that, for her girls' sake, she could not entertain such unpractical notions.

It is true that the girls themselves were unused to luxuries. Amelia possessed a black silk gown, the bodice of which could be made to look absolutely like that of an evening dress, by the aid of a white lace *fichu* and a bunch of artificial geraniums, and she was even now preparing to stitch up for herself a tulle ball-gown in preparation of Christmas festivities. But, after all, Amelia cared little for these vanities, and found it no hardship to exist without them ; verily, a few tubes of colours and a perfectly new and well-stretched canvas were sights to make her brilliant brown eyes glisten with far more delight than they evinced for the smartest frock that a dressmaker's cunning could devise.

As for Gracie, she, of course, needed no fine clothes.

With regard to food, the Wyverns lived upon so little that it is positively saddening to think how often these poor ladies went to bed hungry. Amelia, whose appetite was, by nature, a healthy one, used sometimes to steal downstairs, barefoot and

noiseless, after the others had retired for the night, in order to ransack the dining-room cupboard, and solace herself with a big hunch of dry bread. Then, she crept upstairs again, and softly, on tiptoe, re-entered the room which was hers and her sister's, and where Gracie lay, already fast asleep, her thin face delicately outlined against the white pillow. Occasionally, Gracie made believe to sleep ; she knew perfectly well why Amelia had gone downstairs, for indeed Gracie discovered most things, but it pleased her somehow that her sister should not know that she knew. And it was often long hours after Amelia had curled herself up in the sound sleep of youth and a good conscience, before Gracie managed to sigh herself away into a fitful slumber.

Mrs. Wyvern had married somewhat late in life, and when, after four years of happiness, her husband died suddenly, he left her alone in the world, with her two little girls, a London house of tolerable size, and a hand-to-hand fight with fortune before her, the greater part of his income (being a pension for military services) having ceased at his death.

The widow tried hard to make some addition to her narrow means, but she had been brought up, like most women, to do but little for herself. Until her marriage, she had lived with a rich uncle and aunt, who counted on her perpetual companionship, and who were therefore so annoyed at their prospective loss that they disowned her when she

insisted on marrying Colonel Wyvern. The bridegroom's advanced age, the absence of his right arm, and his well-known hasty temper, were, according to their views, insurmountable obstacles. But the niece, woman-like, pitied and tended her husband, loved him all the more for his infirmities, reverencing him because of that valiant arm hewn down on the field of battle, and suffering nothing from a temper that always melted before the sunshine of her own gentleness.

Shortly after her wilful marriage, however, both uncle and aunt died, so that, at her husband's death, Mrs. Wyvern found no relations to turn to. Nor, on her husband's side was there any help forthcoming: the few distant connections she possessed being scattered far and wide over the world, and none of them to be considered rich or powerful.

Mrs. Wyvern endeavoured to turn authoress, but she had scant literary talent. It caused her a week of intense labour and anxiety to indite an article of feeble interest, for which a country journal rewarded her with a few shillings. She then gave her attention to embroidery, and worked a few elaborate cushions and table covers for a friend, receiving some private remuneration, but by-and-bye her eyesight grew weak, and besides, there seemed few advantageous openings for the sale of ladies' work.

She might have sold her house, and retired into a country cottage, but she considered London the best place to live in, both for her own happiness,

and for her children's education. Above all, she clung to the house itself; dull and dreary as it might appear, it had been her husband's. Therein, still unaltered, was his morning-room, full of his old-fashioned things, as his dear hand had placed them—the table at which he sat, the chair in which he loved to read. Mrs. Wyvern came to the conclusion that, by dint of scrupulous economy, she might continue to live in her house, and present to the outer world the same appearance as before. That is the chief thing, after all, for which we each of us plan and struggle; the appearance we present to the world.

The two little girls, partly from the fact that the difference of age between themselves and their mother was greater than is often the case, partly because that mother lived so much mentally in a past that was everything to her, yet meant nothing to them, relied on one another for companionship, and had grown into girlhood passionately attached to each other. They made but few friends. Their childish friendship had ever been: for Grace, completely bounded by Amelia; for Amelia, almost entirely circled by Grace.

Amelia was strong, Grace was clinging. Amelia was tall and straight and beautiful, Grace was delicate and weakly; indeed, a cripple. At five years old she had met with an accident that injured her for life. Ever after that accident she lay on her back, poor little Grace, and, from her lowly and recumbent position, she viewed life through a

lovely spiritual lens of her very own making. There was no envy, no malice, no uncharitableness in her heart ; the few figures that moved and had their being in her narrow world were all beautiful and all good, to her thinking ; she alone was not sufficiently good. But she meant to try to be. She did not struggle much for this end, however ; she loved peacefully, and was loved in return. There was no uneasiness about her nature ; being herself the incarnation of tenderness and trust, she confidently took for granted the kindness of every one else.

She was, besides, a delightful companion, full of fun and gentle teasing ; a very Philistine, said her sister, but that was because, when Amelia was smitten with her first craze of æstheticism, Gracie flatly refused to have her dressing-gown and bed-quilt trimmed with drab and sage-green instead of the old familiar pink or sky-blue that her childish soul had always loved.

" Why, what would happen to poor mamma if we both of us became artists, Amy ? " asked Grace.

" You don't disapprove of my following art as a career, surely, Grace, do you ? " entreated Amelia, who was one of those earnest and serious-minded people who ride their hobbies at all times, both in and out of season.

" If you have thought out any theory about the matter, dear, pray tell me," she added.

" But I have thought out nothing," replied Grace, laughing, " and I never have theories about any-

thing at all. Don't you know me well enough to know that ?"

"It is a very responsible thing to be an artist," said Amelia gravely ; "one owes a kind of duty to the great and beautiful in everything."

"Perhaps," said Grace.

"I feel," continued Amelia—"I feel as though I had dedicated myself to some unknown deity, put on a robe, registered a vow, bound myself for life, in fact."

"To your profession ?"

"Yes, to my profession ; you understand, don't you, Gracie ?"

"I think so, dear."

"It seems a selemn thing, a privilege to be almost frightened of, to belong to the same profession as Raphael and Titian—a far-off, humble disciple as I am, but still one of the same band. Do you see, Grace ?"

"I see. You are a darling, Amy."

Grace stretched out her thin little hand, on which the blue veins made a clear tracery, and took Amelia's firm ruddy fingers within hers.

"I am *so* glad you are strong, Amy !"

"Strength is necessary for a woman who seeks to make her way in any career," said Amelia, with decision. "And you know, dear, I want to work, both for mother and for you. Only think of all the pretty things I shall be able to get for you, by-and-bye ! Talking of women, though, there are all sorts of drawbacks put in our way, spokes in the

wheel of our advancement. What I should like to prove is that women are certainly far superior to men if they succeed in merely rivalling them, handicapped as the poor females are by so many extra difficulties."

"To whom do you want to prove it, Amy?"

"To the men, of course. They are the ones who need convincing."

"But perhaps they are the very ones who don't wish to be convinced."

"All the more need to convince them against their will. Well, never mind, a time is coming when they *must* be convinced. Deeds, not words, you know. And yet, on second thoughts, I am in doubt whether it is not the women themselves who need to be convinced."

"What, really?"

"They are such limp creatures, Gracie."

"You are not limp, darling, anyway," said the little sister, smiling,

She was lying back on the pillows of her bed, and at the foot sat Amelia, erect and determined, her head thrown up, her eyes flashing, looking like a young war-horse ready for the fray.

Amelia was twenty, but appeared younger: her bright beauty was so thoroughly the beauty of youth and rosy freshness, and there were such abundant life and spirits in her most trifling actions.

"Does Mr. McHuish need convincing?" asked Grace, after a pause.

"I don't know," said Amelia, hurriedly slipping

from the bed, and going over to the other side of the room, where she began closely to examine an unfinished sketch of the day before, and to scrub it up and down with a big paint-brush.

Douglas McHuish was a tall, lank young man, with hair that the Miss Wyverns would doubtless have described as "tawny," with light eyelashes closing over his keen eyes, and as many freckles as the stars of heaven showered upon his face and hands. He was much given to reading Carlyle; he seldom smiled; he nodded his head and murmured "Ay," in a deep bass tone, and said but little else. Only, he adored Amelia with the persistency of ten ordinary men.

There was one subject, however, on which the young Scotchman could grow loquacious, and that, as might be expected, was genealogy. To Mrs. Wyvern the subject was as distasteful as it was dull; it denoted a misplaced affection, she argued, on the part of their descendant to go groping around the tombs of the McHuishes, who had left him nothing but an outlandish name and a few thousand freckles a year. Amelia herself was conscious that her thoughts wandered when Douglas held forth on his noble progenitors, her own mind being very strongly set in the direction of modern progress, and thoroughly attuned to the most radical, nay, communistic tendencies of the present day. Grace alone sympathised with the young Scot. She considered his monologues on genealogical topics as a kind of harmless lunacy, and treated him with as

much gentleness as any amiable Christian would show to a bear with a sore head.

Mrs. Wyvern was, however, often uneasy with regard to the young man's poverty; that she had been romantically disposed at the time of her own marriage argued nothing in favour of any folly on the part of her daughters : the most consistent people do not think it necessary to carry on till fifty the feelings they boasted of at thirty. Mrs. Wyvern would doubtless have turned a thoroughly cold shoulder on Amelia's unfortunate swain, had it not been that he softened her maternal heart by the sympathetic, almost feminine tenderness he evinced for Grace. His visits helped much to brighten the poor girl's life, and, whilst she undoubtedly liked him, he loved her dearly, this little seventeen-year-old Grace, a budding flower that might never bloom into the fulness of perfection, a sensitive plant that opened out in an instant to the sunshine of kind words.

When McHuish came to spend the evening, as for Grace's express benefit he was occasionally permitted to do, she bade him carry her to the drawing-room window, where she loved to watch the moonlit sky, and the twinkling lamps up and down the street. There, as she lay, a mere feather in his stalwart arms, her thin little neck stretched itself out, and the hectic face leant forward, her eager gaze sweeping the dreary horizon.

Then, finally, as his best reward, she had a way of drooping her head, and looking up with dreamy blue eyes whilst she murmured very softly :

"My brother! my own brother!" and, at these words, the young man's very brow grew red with blushes, and a sweet hopefulness filled his soul.

That was Gracie's way.

Yet this mutual understanding was unavowed; through force of habit, Douglas McHuish had certainly come to be looked upon as Amelia's recognized admirer, but nothing more. Mrs. Wyvern had not the heart to prevent his coming to the house, but she could not encourage him. "Of course he is too poor to dream of marrying," Mrs. Wyvern often said.

"Of course," returned Gracie. "And Amy never wants to marry, you know, mother."

"All the better," replied Mrs Wyvern; "I don't wish to lose her. But wait till the right man comes."

"And then?" asked Gracie.

"Well, then things will be settled," said Mrs. Wyvern. "You always ask so much, child."

But Gracie pondered whether things were not settled already. She loved Amelia; she loved Douglas. There was that question of money, money, money; always money, thought the girl, sadly. Yet, if Douglas by-and-bye became a great lawyer, and Amy a distinguished painter, these money problems must all be easily solved. If only Amelia could earn money *now*, as she was sure to do sooner or later, and as her talent undoubtedly deserved!

CHAPTER II.

MR. SIMPKINS' academy of art was by no means planned upon any new or elaborate method. Mr. and Mrs. Simpkins prided themselves rather upon their conservative policy, and spoke patronisingly, if not slightingly, of all more modern institutions than their own. When Mr. Simpkins (the professor, as he was called) held forth on the subject of art, clad in his velvet dressing-gown and tasselled smoking-cap, one hand firmly planted upon his hip, the other vaguely tracing designs in the empty air, he said a good word or two for Reynolds, Lawrence, or Gainsborough, and even blandly commented upon Wilkie and a few of his contemporaries, but between these and the painters of the present was a wide gulf fixed. Even Continental artists were rigorously ignored. Sadly, almost tearfully, with an ominous shake of the head, Mr. Simpkins would say :

" Let us go back, my dear friends, let us go back for art."

And yet, for the so-called "old masters" he had little enthusiasm ; Raphael was perhaps the only person whose talent he admitted, but this with such reluctance that it is to be feared the professor's judgments were somewhat narrow. With great decision he opposed any new-fangled arrangements (even for ventilation) in his class-rooms. There was a class for ladies, another for gentlemen ; these were held in two dirty little rooms, the smaller and

dirtier being granted for the weaker sex. Here it was that Amelia Wyvern plodded and dreamed, her exterior aspect that of a quiet, industrious pupil, her inner soul aflame with eager ecstatic longings for future fame and success.

Poor Amelia was sometimes a little uncertain of the professor's ability ; in this she differed from the rest of the pupils, who worshipped, unquestioningly, at the shrine of his intellect ; but there was in Amelia's character an absolute want of reverence. She was, indeed, desperately anxious to attend a school in Gower Street, of which she had heard much, where the teaching was first-rate, and where young men and women worked side by side in a great hall, thereby advancing that great and noble cause of "women's rights" which lay so near to Amelia's heart. But Mrs. Wyvern willed it otherwise, and, therefore, her daughter continued to be one of the professor's pupils. Punctually every morning Amelia made her appearance in the little dark class-room ; daily she stumbled over the skeleton near the door, a poor battered skeleton whereon the students hung their cloaks and hats, and concerning which and the adjacent cupboard many feeble jokes were made. Every morning little Mrs. Simpkins confided to Amelia with renewed zest what care and trouble she (Mrs. Simpkins) had found it necessary to bestow on the costume of next week's elaborately-draped model, and every morning the professor, rubbing his hands, would reiterate :

"Art, Miss Wyvern, nothing like Art, my dear lady, *nothing like Art!*"

And every morning Amelia smiled and nodded in silent reply.

The professor shone, somehow, more in theory than in practice. He possessed a purple eye, that is, of course, metaphorically. Everything he painted, from a sunset to a snowdrop, was equally plum-colour, and he naturally insisted that his pupils should scrupulously imitate his method.

In the class were many degrees of excellence. One poor lady never ceased to reproduce in black chalk a huge plaster nose about five inches in length. There was the show pupil, of course, who, it was whispered, had once exhibited at the Dudley Gallery. Sometimes, when Amelia, biting her pencil peacefully as she gazed round the room, first at the tired sultana on her green baize "throne," then at the plum-coloured representations of the said sultana on the boards or canvasses of the students—Amelia, with a long sigh, acknowledged that life is short, and art distressingly, almost absurdly, long.

Yet she worked cheerfully till nearly dusk, then, gathered up her painting materials, she bade farewell to kindly Mrs. Simpkins, sent "all manner of loves" to the baby, and shook hands with the professor, who, whilst he praised her work, was pretty certain to recommend "a *leetle* more cobalt mixed with crimson lake." And then, dreaming dreams of future glory, her pretty fresh face aglow, Amelia ran downstairs and walked quickly home,

only to take out her paintbox once more, and study candlelight effects, with her mother and Gracie for models instead of the weary sultana from Leather Lane.

One late afternoon in November, Mrs. Wyvern and her younger daughter were sitting, as usual, in their somewhat dreary drawing-room, which had been furnished upwards of forty years ago and was consequently as unpicturesque as most apartments of that date. Amelia called this an "impossible" room, and, in her moments of hopefulness as to a happy pecuniary future, was apt to imagine herself pulling down the ugly glazed chintz curtains, tearing up the worn crimson and black carpet, and giving free scope to her advanced æsthetic tendencies! That was a dream, however, destined, like so many of our castles in the air, to adorn the future only, for albeit other folks' tastes might come and go, Mrs. Wyvern's solid but inartistic drawing-room furniture "went on for ever."

Gracie was lying on a sofa, which was distressingly made up of false lines and wrong curves. She was staring at the fire in the highly ornamented steel grate, whilst, opposite to her, sat Mrs. Wyvern, knitting, and conversing, or rather soliloquising, on the inexhaustible subject of butchers' and bakers' bills.

Suddenly, the door opened, and Douglas McHuish was shown in.

"I ventured to bring a few violets for Miss Gracie," quoth the shy young man, proceeding with

laborious awkwardness to untie a little blue paper parcel he held. "How are ye to-day, Miss Gracie?"

Miss Gracie was much delighted with the violets, and sat up on her sofa, as she held them in her thin little hands, stroking them, and finally arranging them carefully one by one upon their green leaves in a saucerful of water.

"Is not Miss Amelia home yet?" asked Douglas after a pause.

No, Amelia was not home yet; but Mrs. Wyvern was looking for her speedy return, for the afternoon had already grown both dark and misty.

"But only let that child settle herself comfortably down at her painting," added the mother, half in pride, half in annoyance, "and there's no getting her away again till doomsday."

"She went off to the school at nine this morning," said Grace.

"She'll be a fine painter some day," remarked McHuish, with conviction.

He was sitting in the semi-darkness a few yards from Grace; she could see the outline of his gaunt figure, and his plain, earnest features irradiated now and then by fitful gleams of firelight; he, on the other hand, could watch the slender white form stretched out in stillness upon the couch.

"Will I wait to see Miss Amelia?" asked the visitor, with subdued eagerness.

"Oh yes, pray stay and talk to us," replied Mrs. Wyvern; "this has been rather a bad day of

neuralgia for Grace. You won't mind the dark, Mr. McHuish ; it scarcely seems worth while having the lights as yet."

Thereupon, McHuish contentedly stayed and talked ; darkness is an incentive to the conversation of shy folk. Besides, strange to say, he could always talk more freely to Grace and her mother than to his lady-love, bitterly though he lamented his deficiency in that respect.

Presently, Amelia came in.

"Don't you want a lamp ?" she asked, laughing, bringing in with her an atmosphere of energy and gaiety, and yet an amount of fresh air that made Grace shiver.

"Oh mother, I can't see a bit !" continued Amelia ; "do let us have lights. Why, is that you, Mr. McHuish ?"

"Mr. McHuish has been telling us all about the Aurora," said Grace. "It must be so beautiful in the far north, Amy ! Please tell Amy about it, Mr. McHuish, won't you ?"

"Only how I rode home one night, one winter night," began the Scotchman, confusedly. He had risen from his chair at Amelia's entrance, and now stood twirling his hat slowly round and round in his big bony hands.

"It was across the lonely moors," said Grace.

"And the Aurora was shooting up into the heavens," said McHuish.

"More beautiful than daylight," added Grace enthusiastically. "Only fancy, Amy, what the great

rays must be, white, and silver, and rose colour, giving one an idea of some wonderful weird world out far, far beyond the distant hills. I can fancy being lured away and away, towards that magical horizon ! "

" Here comes the lamp," said Mrs. Wyvern. " Dear me, how they have spilt the oil again, all over the handle ! Doesn't your mother, Mr. McHuish, find that her servants——"

" 'Light, light !' I feel like Goethe," interrupted Amelia irrelevantly. " Mamma, I want to show you something. Do look. The professor says there is an exhibition going to open immediately, somewhere he knows, and he thinks I might really, truly, send this head."

Out from under Amy's cloak came a square brown paper parcel, and then the young artist, with a little air of modest though conscious merit, held up to view a small oil painting representing the head of an Italian bandit.

" What, really ? " asked Mrs. Wyvern, in admiration.

" Oh Amy, not really ? " echoed Grace.

" Yes," answered Amelia quietly.

He was a fierce bandit, a very fierce bandit. His head was slightly turned away ; still, his eagle glance was fixed threateningly on the beholder ; his glance evidently meant much. He was arrayed in a gorgeous costume, worn, probably, by bandits of his province only, and his background was the well-known blue and cloudless sky of the south.

"Well, I must say," remarked Mrs. Wyvern impressively, as she looked around her for the sake of argument—"I must say, Amelia, that you have made very great progress."

"It's a beautiful head," said Grace sympathetically; "oh, you dear, clever Amy, I must give you a kiss; I never saw such a fierce-looking bandit!"

"I should think not," returned Amy. "The professor wanted us particularly to catch that expression, as the model actually did commit a murder once long ago in Corsica."

"Of course one must not praise one's own child," said Mrs. Wyvern, "but I cannot help thinking there are very few young artists who could beat that head. And I don't know about 'young' either."

"There is one little thing that troubles me," said Amelia in a hesitating voice, "that is, you see, mamma, the high light on the bandit's nose. What do *you* think of the high light, Mr. McHuish?"

"I'm no much of a painter mysel," replied the person interrogated, who lapsed into a northern dialect whenever he became nervous. "The nose is no that bad, to my thinking; it's the lad's complexion that's terrible blue, surely."

"Why, the professor said it was not blue enough!" exclaimed Amelia.

"Oh, Mr. McHuish, you don't really think it blue?" asked Grace reproachfully.

"I—I——" stammered the young man.

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Wyvern, with some severity,

"perhaps that Mr. McHuish has not sufficiently considered the reflections from the southern sky."

Amelia said no more. Possibly, she inwardly felt that, like the Archbishop in 'Gil Blas,' she desired for her critic "toutes sortes de prospérités, avec un peu plus de goût," whilst the unhappy offender, stumbling over his sentences, sought, by the most indiscriminating praise, to reinstate himself in his former position of trust.

Days passed; the bandit, carefully framed and labelled, was sent to the exhibition, and in due time, as Amelia received no notice to the contrary, she became tremblingly, hopefully, delightedly aware that her picture was accepted and hung.

During these anxious days, she was eagerly expectant, and yet afraid, to hear the postman's knock; she knew not what news he might bring. No news is good news, doubtless, as Grace oftentimes asserted, and yet such silence was trying to bear.

Amelia worked somewhat fitfully at the professor's. She found herself in high favour with her fellow-students; they evidently viewed her with much increased respect. On one occasion the poor lady who was struggling with the large chalk nose actually went on all-fours to look for a piece of india-rubber which Amelia had dropped! Mrs. Simpkins addressed her as "dear child;" the professor talked lengthily to her of the possible regeneration of art, a subject he reserved for a very choice few amongst his pupils, deeming,

doubtless, that there were but few of them destined to take a really active part in such regeneration.

But Amelia could not work as of yore; she painted out to-day what she had painted in yesterday; she was certainly demoralised. Her small capabilities of the present jarred in her mind with the wide destinies she contemplated for the future. Of course the brigand was the doorway through which she was to wend her steps towards these destinies, and yet, as she worked, she was conscious of some uneasiness concerning the finite nature of her own art. Certainly, at home, as she sat beside Gracie's couch, at rest from palette or canvas, she held forth garrulously as to her future aims and present success, without any disturbing emotion. Somehow, it was always so easy to talk to Gracie! Nothing seemed too great, nothing too small, for her facile comprehension and universal sympathy.

"Why can't women become Royal Academicians!" Amelia would exclaim wrathfully, whilst her sister listened sorrowfully. "What an unjust, miserable nineteenth century we live in, to be sure," continued Amelia, forgetful of her doctrines of progress; "only think of Mary Moser and Angelica Kauffmann!"

"Were they Academicians?" asked Grace, who was still strangely ignorant on the subject.

"Why, of course."

And thereupon Gracie from her full loving heart protested that Amelia was surely intended to become the female art-pioneer of this present gen-

eration, and that the most obtuse public could not possibly remain blind to her remarkable merit.

It may be held that such indiscriminate praise was unwholesome for Amelia, but Grace did not reason thereon; she was not going to set up as a moral blister or scourge for the chastening of her sister. If Grace Wyvern loved the universe generally, how much more must she not idolise those objects of affection which were encircled by the narrow boundary of home?

Perchance she was not altogether wrong. For, surely, when, tired and grey-headed, we pause in the journey of life, and look back upon those sweet foolish fondnesses with which in early days our dear ones encouraged our unripe efforts, we smile to recall the efforts, and sigh to remember the fond words, conscious that since then the outer world's more truthful judgment (together with our own painful conviction) has sufficiently well settled that little matter of our youthful vanity. There are not many boys at school, I imagine, who condemn the mother's tenderness which scarcely prepared them for a life of hardship.

Haply, even whilst Gracie encouraged her sister by extreme adulation, Amelia grew humble, and felt her own faults all the more keenly.

"Don't, dear, don't," she entreated. "You see me as I want to be, not as I am."

"It is because I know you so well," returned Gracie simply. "I see you now already as you are going to be. It is all in you, Amy, though other

people may not see it yet as I do, and I suppose it has been in you ever since you were born. You need to learn what is technical, perhaps, but an artist is an artist always."

"I sometimes think it is you who are the real artist," sighed Amelia; "you feel so much."

"Oh yes, I feel," said Gracie, somewhat vaguely, gazing at Amelia with lustrous eyes.

As for Grace's own prospects, they never troubled her. Even Mrs. Wyvern, who doted on her invalid child, never alluded to the child's future. Perchance she dreaded the future—or perchance to her it seemed that the little white form must needs continue to lie stretched before her eyes on the couch by the fireside, though years rolled on, though Amelia should go forth into the world to her triumph, and whilst she herself sat knitting with the deepening shadows of age gathering about her. Yes, Gracie was to be there, always; Gracie, who was tended and petted, carried from room to room and propped up on pillows; Gracie, for whom the cook's slender knowledge was daily heavily taxed; Gracie, for whom new books and pretty needlework were constantly provided—Gracie, the pivot on which the household really turned, the homely beacon by which they all directed their way. All, Douglas McHuish last, not least.

Because he was not constantly present in the house, however, Douglas noticed more readily than the others how shrunken the slender figure had

become, how wan and white the delicate features had grown. It filled his heart with pain to mark the change, a gradual, steady change, he thought. How he should miss little Gracie! He had never had a sister; it was a tender joy to him to think of Gracie as such. It was no disloyalty to Amelia that he loved Gracie so deeply, for indeed Amelia possessed an additional attraction in his eyes in that Gracie was her sister, and therefore, thought Douglas, one day. . .

However, argued he, Grace was his sister already; there was really no need to look for more. She understood him as none surely but a sister could understand. When he was earnest, she was serious; when he was perturbed, she grew sympathetic; when he was shy and ill at ease, she renewed his confidence. By some inexplicable reticence, he had never actually talked to her of his matrimonial intentions; he guessed nevertheless that Grace would stand him in good stead with her sister, and speak well of him, nay, plead his cause, if need there were. He had even occasionally wished, big, brave man though he was, that he might propose to Amelia whilst Gracie lay close by. She would doubtless, without speaking, give him that courage of words which he so strangely lacked; he could augur from the look in her eyes whether he spoke well or ill and what effect he was likely to have on Amelia.

Douglas was able to read Gracie's countenance better than that of his lady-love; in many ways the younger girl appeared to him the elder of the

two. Because Amelia was so joyous, so full of life, so taken up with art and theories of all sorts, so busy, so energetic, he was a little uncertain how to break the ice, how to demand her attention, and bid her listen to what was tumultuously throbbing and aching within his heart—tumultuously throbbing, yet softly murmuring also. For, if a man's heart be ever softer than a woman's, Douglas McHuish, rough and ungainly though he appeared, possessed a more gentle organ than did Amelia Wyvern.

Once he had tried to begin upon the dreaded subject.

"Don't keep me too long just now," said Amelia, smiling, and looking him through and through with her wide-open brown eyes. "You know, Mr. McHuish, men never expect women to have any *real* business, do they?"

"But this," stammered McHuish,—"this is a question of vital importance. . . A poor fellow——"

"Oh, here are two shillings," cried Amelia cordially; "why should you mind asking me? *Of course* I should like to help any one you are interested in! And I daresay mamma will help, too. But I really must go now; you won't mind, for my brushes will certainly spoil if I don't go and clean them this very minute!"

CHAPTER III.

Amelia Wyvern on "varnishing day" was a sight for the gods to see. Stepping out, daintily attired, her bright face positively brilliant with excitement, she carried in her well-gloved hands the neatest of colour-boxes, and the newest of paint-brushes, as well as a tenderly-treasured printed document which invited her to come and view her own picture in the —— Street Exhibition.

She crossed the threshold of that sacred spot somewhat nervously, afraid of being stopped or turned away, yet trying to appear as self-possessed as though the best part of her twenty years had consisted of "varnishing days."

When she entered the gallery, which was not a large one, she looked eagerly round, but could not for some time discover the bandit. There were about a dozen people in the room, women as well as men, strolling or standing about, mostly in knots of twos and threes, and all with a more or less chilled and dejected aspect. A couple of kindly workmen were bringing a long ladder for an unfortunate youth who wished to touch up his picture, hung as it was so high that nothing of it could be seen but the lower portion of a pair of highly-glazed wellington boots. Following the direction of the artist's upturned eyes, however, Amelia suddenly discerned her picture, hung on the top line, where it seemed so small as to resemble a richly-coloured postage-stamp.

Alas, poor bandit! Alas, poor Amelia! The bandit frowned and glared in puny effort from his altitude, whilst Amelia turned positively faint from disappointment, and two big tears forced themselves into her eyes.

She bit her lip hard, to prevent the tears from running down her cheeks, and stole her hand furtively into her pocket to find her handkerchief. The painter of the boots had meanwhile commenced to climb his ladder, and, looking round somewhat suddenly, he encountered the pretty sorrowful face beneath him.

"Is your picture up here also?" he asked kindly. "Shall I varnish it for you?"

"Oh, thank you, thank you," stammered Amelia. Alas! The words of sympathy made the tremulous tears overflow.

"You'll get used to it," said the painter gently; "anyhow, you've got your name in the catalogue. And at a little distance the picture looks uncommonly well, doesn't it, now? Besides, it's often those at the top that sell the soonest, you know."

Poor Amelia, gazing from afar at the well-known bluish features of her bandit, wondered if her new friend's pictures were always hung so high that he had grown used to speak on the subject with happy confidence; then after thanking him, she wended her way slowly and sadly home.

She felt bound to appear as cheerful as possible, however, in her sister's presence, for Grace was waiting, in a perfect fever of anxiety, to hear the

details of so eventful a morning. Therefore, it came to pass that, a few days later, when Amelia and her mother sallied forth together to see the pictures, even Mrs. Wyvern was scarcely prepared for the shock of seeing the bandit so unduly elevated. There were no very well-known names among the painters represented in the catalogue ; consequently Mrs. Wyvern took a high stand, and was more angry than aggrieved.

" We must be prepared for a little jealousy, my child," she added consolingly, after a burst of wrathful words ; " I dare say it is well known that you are young and pretty."

In which speech it may be thought that Mrs. Wyvern was somewhat hard upon the hangers, who were not, after all, of the feminine sex !

But whether her comparative success (or comparative failure) had been good for Amelia or not, it is certain that she went back to her work at the professor's with improved industry. She worked early and late ; she never seemed to tire. Her eager enthusiasm had mellowed and given place to a patient, even-tempered love of her profession ; once, when Grace spoke to her of the future, she answered gently :

" O, Gracie, I seem hateful to myself for having been so silly as to think I should ever do anything great."

" But you will, you must, Amy."

" Must I ? I don't know, I scarcely dare to hope. Oh, it is all as far off as that Aurora that you and

Douglas were talking of, one afternoon; do you remember, Gracie?"

"*Douglas?* Did you call him Douglas?" asked Grace in a whisper.

"Yes—no," answered Amelia, reddening. "I think of him as Douglas, sometimes."

"Amy!"

"Well?"

"Come and sit beside me, will you, dear? There, give me your blessed old head close, and let me stroke it. Listen. If ever you think about me, by-and-bye, later on——"

"Oh Gracie, don't."

"When you think of me," repeated Grace, firmly, "think dear, how glad I was that you thought of him as Douglas, your Douglas. Will you, Amy?"

"Yes," answered Amelia, who was crying. And thereupon she caught hold of her little sister's hand, and squeezed it violently, and then, without a word, she got up and ran out of the room.

A few days later, Grace called her mother to come and sit beside her.

The two were alone in the room. It was twilight, the hour the sick girl loved:

> "Between the dark and the daylight,
> When the night is beginning to lower."

Grace thought it should not only be "the children's hour," as Longfellow meant it to be, but an hour of healing balm for all the sick and sorry, a time when our spirits loose themselves from their

trammels and grow more spiritual—an hour, above all, when we seem nearer to those we love, and more able to say what at other times it is hard to say.

Outside in the dreary fog-laden street, the gas lamps were being lighted, one by one, and occasionally the rolling sound of carriage wheels grew, and passed, and died away upon the ear.

"Mother, come and speak to me," said Grace; "I want you to do something for me."

There was a rising sob in Mrs. Wyvern's throat as she obeyed the summons, for she had been wrapt in sorrowful meditation; nevertheless, sitting down silently, she took within her own the fragile fingers of Grace's outstretched hand.

They were very fragile fingers. Mrs. Wyvern could not but recollect with a fresh pain at her heart what Douglas McHuish had told her yesterday, after he had held the child for awhile in his arms at the window. Yes, he said that the light weight had grown yet lighter; he thought it his duty to tell that, he said, and ever since he had spoken thus a sense of helpless misery had gathered tightly round Mrs. Wyvern's heart. For she knew, alas! of how little use to Grace were the medicines prescribed for her; she knew that hers was not any special malady . . .

"Will you do something for me, mamma?"

"What is it, Gracie?"

"Something that I want, very, very much. Will you promise to do it, mamma?"

"Without knowing what it is?"

Mrs. Wyvern gazed at the eager little face, visibly eager even in the twilight shadows; tears came into her eyes; somehow she could not keep them back.

"Oh, promise, mother, promise!"

"Very well, I promise, child."

"And you will never, never tell."

"No, I will not tell; not if you do not wish it."

"I have saved four pounds of my own," said Grace hurriedly—"my very own—my pocket-money. And Amy has put five guineas on the bandit."

"Well?"

"I want you to buy the bandit. Do you understand, mother?"

"You—want—me—to—buy—the—bandit?" repeated Mrs. Wyvern slowly.

"Yes, yes! Oh! you said you would do it! You must; you promised. And you promised that you would never tell."

"I will not tell," said Mrs. Wyvern, gently. But, Gracie, I scarcely see——"

"Don't you see," asked the girl feverishly—"don't you see that if Amy sells this picture, her first picture, she will be quite tremendously encouraged? The picture will have a red star on it—she told me that—and all the world will know that it is sold, and what a great painter she is going to be, and everybody will want to buy her pictures." Grace stopped, exhausted, and drew a long breath.

"My little Grace," said Mrs. Wyvern huskily.

"I know so exactly how it will be," went on the child; "I have been thinking it all over, oh for so long! It is the first picture that makes the whole difference, and, when once anybody has got a start, success follows easily enough. Poor Amy! she has nobody to help her on, only you and me, mother dear. But, above all, you will not tell; promise again, promise."

"Yes, I promise."

"I am afraid you must advance me the one pound, five shillings. I will pay you back regularly all my pocket-money, week by week."

"Will you, dear?"

Mrs. Wyvern spoke in a strange voice; fortunately, the room was growing so dark that Gracie could not see her face, nor see the tears that rained and rained down so quickly that Mrs. Wyvern did not even attempt to dry them.

"I would have waited till I had saved all the money," said Gracie, after a pause, "but I thought it was better not to wait."

"Why not?"

"Oh, because—— Well, the exhibition might shut soon, perhaps. But you will go to-morrow, mamma?"

"To-morrow?" repeated poor Mrs. Wyvern vaguely.

"You must go and arrange with the secretary, and have the bandit sent by-and-bye to some other address, to another name, not yours, of course. We will think it all out together, won't we, dear?"

There was a long pause, and then Gracie spoke again, very softly.

"Mother!"

"Well, my child."

"If—if, well, suppose if I were to die, Amy would be just a very little bit richer, wouldn't she?"

"Just a little, darling."

Grace answered nothing; she only raised her mother's hand to her own loving lips, and kissed it, with a long, long kiss. Presently she whispered:

"That would help Amy—and Douglas." But she whispered the words so softly it is doubtful whether Mrs. Wyvern heard them; at all events, she kept silence.

It happened that one day soon after this conversation Amelia received a letter containing the announcement of the sale of her first picture. Her joy was unbounded; she jumped up, and danced, and ran about the room like a child in high delight. Douglas McHuish who was present, (he had looked in for a moment only, of course,) sat open-mouthed and amazed, watching his lady-love's evident symptoms of lunacy, and wondering whether any effort on his part might ever succeed in calling forth such expressions of joy from her.

Mrs. Wyvern was somewhat silent and constrained, but Gracie, the little traitress, gave vent to many exclamations of pleasure and astonishment.

"Hurrah, Amy!" she cried; "who would have thought it? And yet did we not all of us

prophesy this long ago? Why don't you come and shake hands with her, Mr. McHuish, and tell her now awfully glad you are?"

But Amelia dragged her mother into the next room.

"Shut the door," she whispered excitedly; "oh, now listen, listen, mamma. I never had so much money of my own before. It *is* my very own, isn't it? I earned it, you know, and now you must tell me what I can get for Gracie; I want to spend it on her. Poor little Gracie! She has so few pleasures! And she has been so good and kind, if you only knew! She has never ceased to be encouraging about my work, and I don't think she ever remembers one little bit that she—that she isn't as strong as we are."

Mrs. Wyvern, bound by her promises, could only nod her head and say constrainedly, "Yes, my dear, yes," but the next morning she accompanied Amy on a long and fatiguing quest in search of something undefined—a present for Gracie.

Up and down Piccadilly, past Regent Street, beyond Oxford Street, back into Bond Street, walked that weary pair; then into unknown streets and places, where, finally, a tame and beautiful piping bulfinch, a marvellously trained and trilling bird, a very Mario amongst bulfinches, was fixed upon, housed in a new cage, and carried home in Amelia's arms, as she and her mother jolted homewards in a four-wheeled cab.

The professor saw nothing of his pupil that day;

bulfinch-worship occupied the whole of the afternoon. And from henceforth, Bully's cage was placed close beside the sick girl's couch, and Bully became her inseparable companion. She knew, though Amy did not know, whose savings had gone to purchase him ; but she knew also whose affection had brought him thither. Her heart was full of love and gratitude as she lay, her blue eyes more lovely than ever in their tenderness, watching the tiny songster, who bent his shiny black head on one side, and trilled forth the melody of the sweet Thuringian folk-song, telling of "Treue Liebe":

> " Ach, wie ist 's möglich dann,
> Dass ich dich lassen kann ?
> Hab' dich von Herzen lieb, das glaube mir !
> Du hast die Seele mein
> So ganz genommen ein,
> Dass ich kein' andre lieb'
> Als dich allein ! "

But Grace herself was about to leave him. Neither "true love," nor care, nor songs of birds could keep her. She was on her way to a land of heavenly sweetness and song, beyond the light of moon and stars, beyond the rays of the Aurora Borealis, the poetry of which had taken such strange hold of her youthful imagination.

She spoke of it to Douglas McHuish once, when she happened to be alone with him.

"You and Amy must go north some day," she said, "and be happy, quite happy together, and when you journey across the moors, and you see before you, far away, those beautiful shining rays,

you will think of me somehow with the Aurora, won't you, Douglas?"

"My little sister," answered Douglas tremulously, as he clasped her hand in his, and kissed it reverentially.

* * * * * *

It was her beloved hour of twilight when she died; she passed away with scarce a sigh. There was no more sorrow nor sadness in her death than there had been in her bright and unselfish life. She bade Douglas lift her in his arms, and carry her to the window. It was during a heavy snow-storm; large flakes of snow were falling rapidly; the street, the passers-by, the roofs of the houses, the very world seemed white, spite of the deepening darkness.

"Amy," called the child, "come and see the snow. It must be beautiful in the north. Mother, are you there? Ah, listen to Bully! Mother," and she drew her mother down, close to her own little chill face. "Mother, remember—you will never tell."

Then she dropped back in the arms of her brother Douglas. That was the end.

* * * * * *

By-and-by, after several months had gone past, Grace's words came true. Amelia married Douglas McHuish, and, travelling with him to the far north, visited the home of his fathers and wandered with him, hand in hand, across the purple moors. Later on, they returned to London, to settle down,

each to work and bring grist to the mill, for Amelia gradually learnt to make her bandits less fierce in aspect, and less blue in complexion.

Meanwhile, during the young folks' absence, in her house in the dreary London street Mrs. Wyvern lived her lonely life. And when her pet bulfinch piped to her his plaintive Thuringian love-song :

> "Ach, wie ist 's möglich dann,
> Dass ich dich lassen kann?"

Mrs. Wyvern laid aside her knitting, and folded her hands, and listened, whilst burning tears coursed slowly down her cheeks. But never, at any time, did she reveal that tender little secret of Gracie's, that she had promised not to tell.