

THE
ADVENTURES
OF A
BEAUTY.



BY

MRS CROWE.

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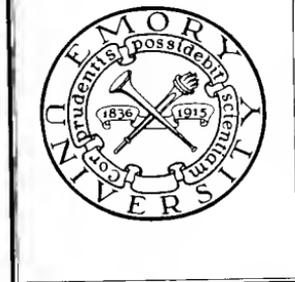
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ADVENTURES OF A BEAUTY.

THE
ADVENTURES OF A BEAUTY.

BY

CATHERINE CROWE,

AUTHOR OF "SUSAN HOPEY," "THE NIGHT SIDE OF NATURE,"
"LILLY DAWSON," ETC. ETC.

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THE
ADVENTURES OF A BEAUTY.

CHAPTER I.

"You had better let me harness the mare and drive you up to the park gate, Miss Agnes; you had indeed. You'll be over your shoes afore you get across the fallow."

The person who offered this advice was a ruddy-faced young rustic, with an exceedingly honest, open countenance, who appeared to be prepared for some particular occasion, being evidently attired in his Sunday clothes; namely, a black velvet jacket, striped waistcoat, fustian trowsers, and laced boots, all looking new and fresh; and a yellow handkerchief round his throat, sustaining a shirt-collar, the points of which extended halfway up his cheeks. As he spoke, he issued from the door of a farmhouse, followed by two women, with their bonnets and cloaks on.

"Do, Agnes," said the shortest of the females; "you'll get your death of cold, I'm sure you will."

"No, Gibby, I'd rather walk, thank ye," answered Agnes; adding in a lower tone to her sister, "You know, Martha, I couldn't go in the cart!"

"Be only as far as the park gate, dear," urged Martha.

"I wouldn't for the world, Martha; so don't ask me. How do you know where he may meet us?"

"I'm afeard it's a coming on to snow again," said the young man whom she had addressed as Gibby. "It's a coming up from over the abbey as black as my hat."

"Never mind," said Agnes; "if we walk quick we may be there before it comes down. Are you ready, Martha?"

"Yes, dear," answered Martha, diving her hand into a long pocket, from which she extracted a large key. "You lock the door after us, Gibby," said she. "But stay a moment. I think

I had better put another log on the parlour fire before we go. You're sure you fastened the back door, Gibby?"

"It's all fast," said Gibby, "and the windows too. Please let me hold the humberheller over you, Miss Agnes," he added, deploying a large cotton umbrella, and placing himself by the side of the person he addressed, whilst with the other hand he drew after him the house door and locked it.

The party, which consisted only of these three persons, then stepped forward, passed through a wicket-gate at the bottom of a small garden separating the house from the road, which they crossed, and having surmounted a stile, they set off at a brisk pace across the fields. Light flakes of snow, which had been falling all day at intervals, were floating in the air, and the ground, white in the less exposed spots, was black and sloppy in the paths they had to tread. The bleak wind whistled and moaned through the trees, and the night was very cold, for it was the month of December, and the abbey clock had struck ten. Few words were spoken, for the wind and the cold, and the thoughts of the errand they were on, kept them silent, till after about at an hour's walk they reached a high wall; then Agnes, handing Gibby a key, bade him open a small private door which led into the grounds of Ravenscliffe. As soon as they were inside, Agnes looked about, as far as the faint moonlight which now and then broke through the clouds permitted, as if seeking some one; but there was nobody visible.

"It's the bad night that's kept him from coming," said Martha. "He'll be waiting us at the chapel, may be."

"I'd run on and see, if it wasn't for leaving you here in the cold," said Gibby.

"I have a mind to go back," said Agnes.

"Oh, Agnes, don't," said Martha.

"I see a light in the chapel," said Gibby, who had swung himself up to the branch of a tree.

"Then we had better go on," said Martha, taking hold of her sister's arm. But at that moment, whilst Agnes appeared irresolute whether to go forward or retreat, a foot was heard approaching, and her name was pronounced by a young man wrapped in a blue cloth riding-cloak, and sheltering himself with an umbrella, who approached them by a side path.

"What a night!" he exclaimed, as he drew Agnes's arm within his, and led her by the way he had come, without taking any notice of the two who walked side by side behind them. "I am afraid you must be very cold and wet."

"Not cold at all, we have walked so fast;" replied Agnes, "and not much wet."

"My poor Agnes!" he said, tenderly pressing her arm. "I hope you'll not get cold."

"No fear of that," she said; "but I feel so much about seeing the clergyman. How strange it must appear to him. What will he think of me?"

"What do his thoughts signify?" returned the other. "He has his own reasons for complying with my wishes and keeping my secrets, depend on it. By the bye, I hope you are quite sure of that lad behind us?"

"As sure as of myself," replied Agnes.

"Warn him of the consequences of tattling about our affairs, because an imprudent word might play the devil with us."

"He'll speak no imprudent words, I'll answer for him," said Agnes; "you little know poor Gibby. He'd cut his tongue out rather than harm either of us:—I mean, me or Martha."

"By which you intend to imply that *I* do not fill such a distinguished place in Gibby's affections. Eh?"

"He'll love you for my sake now," said Agnes.

"I shall be proud of the honour of his esteem," said the young man.

"You may," returned Agnes, gravely.

The black cloud Gibby had desieried having passed over to the west without discharging its contents, the moon shone forth again, shedding its pale light on the large pile of buildings they were approaching, with its turrets and towers, broad stone terraces, and well-clipped lawns.

This was Ravenscliffe Castle, or Abbey as it was sometimes styled, and to the left of it was a small chapel with lancet windows and carved gables, which gave evidence, both within and without, to the former creed of the family.

It was towards this chapel that the party we have desieried directed their steps. The faint light which Gibby had desieried still gleamed through the stained glass of the oriel window, but those of the castle were all dark. When they reached the chapel they found the door open, and by the light of a lantern which stood on the floor by the altar, they perceived that no one was there.

"Stay here a moment," said the young man to his companion; "I'll see if he's in the vestry."

As the vestry door opened, Agnes observed a light there, and presently afterwards her lover came out again, accompanied by a tall, thin, pale young man with a book in his hand, who without saying a syllable, having placed himself before the altar and opened his volume, began to read the introductory words of the marriage ceremony, or rather to gabble them in

a manner so hurried, purposeless, and indistinct, that it was impossible for his hearers to follow out a single sentence from beginning to end. The effect of this mode of proceeding on the female chiefly concerned was to throw her into a state of confusion and fright, that rendered her actually incapable of answering, when the customary interrogation was addressed to her. However, this omission occasioned no pause or hesitation in the fluency of the reader, who ran on for a short time longer, and then suddenly closed the book, and bowing slightly as he passed, retired to the vestry. Amazed and stupified, and wondering whether she was married or not, Agnes involuntarily followed him with her eyes till he reached the door, which she then for the first time perceived was partly open; and she even fancied that she saw another head withdrawn as the clergyman entered.

“Wait a moment,” said the young man, to whom after this fashion she had been just united in the holy bonds of matrimony, “I’ll be back directly;” and he vanished into the vestry also.

“You’ll not wish it registered, of course; it would never do to register,” said the clergyman.

“But there should be a certificate,” observed a third person, whose head it probably was that Agnes had caught a glimpse of. “It need never be produced, you know, unless it should be desirable—but it *might* be desirable. Nobody can foresee what card may turn up.”

“Certainly, if we are not registered there should be a certificate by all means,” said the newly-married man. “Who should sign it?”

“We should all sign,” said the last speaker, “you and she, and the witnesses. I’ll step aside whilst you call them in. Here’s a corner that will do for me;” and so saying, he retreated behind an old oak press in which the minister’s gown and books, and various other articles belonging to the chapel, were formerly deposited.

In the meantime, the clergyman, having drawn up a certificate in the usual form, the three persons in the chapel were summoned to sign it. There being two wax-candles lighted on the table, the light shone full upon them as they came in. First walked Agnes, dressed in deep mourning, except a pair of white kid-gloves, which she had brought in her pocket, and put on when she first entered the chapel. Pale as death, but with features so beautiful that they would have made death itself lovely, and with a countenance expressing amazement, uncertainty, and dissatisfaction, she advanced to the table, conducted by her husband.

"We must sign our names," said he, taking up a pen and writing 'Lionel Grosvenor.' "Write yours underneath."

"Which name?" she inquired.

"Which?" asked Lionel, looking at the clergyman.

"Her own—Agnes Crawford," answered the latter; and with a hand that shook with agitation, the name was inscribed; and then, overcome by confusion, she retired from the table.

"Now, Martha Crawford, yours," said Lionel; and Martha, also in deep mourning, but with features and complexion that formed a curious contrast with her sister's (for the agitation and surprise that had driven the blood from Agnes's delicate cheeks, had crimsoned those of the ruddy Martha), signed next.

"Now, you," said Lionel.

"I can't write," said Gibby; "I can make my mark."

"Very well—that'll do," and "John Gibson, his mark," was next inscribed.

The minister then having, at the desire of Lionel, but evidently not with very good will, signed also, the bridegroom wished him good night; and taking his bride under his arm, walked away, followed by Martha and Gibby. As soon as they were gone, the person who had concealed himself behind the press advanced, and observing to the clergyman that Agnes was "a devilish pretty creature!" he also attached his name to the certificate; and folding up the paper, placed it in his pocket. They then quitted the chapel, arm-in-arm, closing the door after them; whilst the bride and bridegroom made their way across the fields to the farmhouse from which she had started, preceded by Gibby and Martha, who hastened forward to open the door, light the candles, and stir the fire.

A frugal repast of bread and butter, cake, eggs, and cream was soon spread upon the little table in the parlour by the neat-handed Martha; and there the young couple ate their wedding supper; whilst the only other two members of the household, Martha and Gibby, commented, by the kitchen fire, upon what had passed.

On the following morning, Lionel returned to the castle, whilst Agnes stayed at the farm, awaiting the visit of her young husband at supper-time; and since, in order to comprehend the events that followed this union, so inauspiciously consecrated, it is necessary to know some that preceded it, we must beg our readers to return with us to the period when the young bride and bridegroom were children,—the one residing at Ravenscliffe Castle, as the cherished heir of the Grosvenors; and the other at the Holmes Farm, tenanted by her father, Daniel Crawford.

CHAPTER II.

ON a bright sunny morning, in the month of June, two little girls were playing on a small grass plot, in the front of a farmhouse, in one of the most romantic parts of England. They were dressed in dark cotton frocks and brown pinafores of the commonest description; but their clothes and their faces were clean, and their hands no otherwise discoloured than by the wholesome soil of the garden.

"Agnes, Agnes," said a pale, sickly woman, putting her head out of one of the upper windows, "why will you go out without your bonnet on? You will be burnt as brown as a berry, child."

But Agnes was by this time running full tilt after a ball that she had thrown over the paling into an adjoining field, and paid no attention to her mother's warning.

"Martha, come in, and fetch your sister's bonnet, and take it to her," said the mother.

Whereupon, Martha laid down the little wooden rake, with which she was smoothing a corner of the garden which she called her own, and obeyed her mother's behest. By the time she returned with the bonnet, however, Agnes had re-entered the gate, and had taken possession of Martha's rake.

"Where's my ball?" inquired the latter, as she placed the bonnet on her sister's head, whilst her own remained uncovered.

"That's not my bonnet," said Agnes.

"No, it's mine; I can't find yours," answered Martha. "But where's my ball?"

"I threw it into the field, and I don't know where it's gone to," replied Agnes.

"Then I want my rake," said Martha.

But Agnes was endeavouring to dig up a large stone with the teeth of the rake, and in her efforts the stick snapped in two.

The colour rose into Martha's cheeks, and the tears into her eyes, as she exclaimed,—

"There now, Agnes; you have broke my rake."

"I could not help it," returned Agnes, carelessly; but when she saw Martha take up her pinafore to wipe away the tears that were coursing each other down her chubby, good-natured face, the little heart was touched; and saying, "Never mind, Martha; I'll lend you mine," she ran to the passage where her own rake was hanging against the wall, and handed it to her

sister; a proceeding to which Martha was so sensible, that, before she began to use the utensil, she flung her fat arms round Agnes's neck, and kissed her.

But Agnes was now thrown out of employment; her own ball she had mislaid, Martha's she had flung into the field, and, in a momentary fit of remorse, she had parted with her rake—a combination of misfortunes altogether too great for her philosophy; so, after watching her sister at work for a few moments, she went and seated herself upon the doorstep, with the air and attitude of a disconsolate princess.

She had sat in this position for about ten minutes; and feeling herself, somehow or other, extremely ill-used by fortune, was on the eve of giving vent to her vexation in tears, when there appeared at the garden-gate a boy in a labourer's dress, with an empty sack hanging over his shoulder.

"Ha! Gibby!" exclaimed Agnes, jumping up and running towards him, "have you seen my ball?"

"No, I hain't," said Gibby, "have you lost it?"

"I had it yesterday playing in the orchard," answered Agnes; "but I can't think where it went to; and I have thrown Martha's over the paling into the field, and I can't find it."

"I'll look for it by and by, when I have done my work," said Gibby. "I've got a message from the abbey, for misses," added he. "I've been up with a sack of taters, and I saw Mrs. Meadows, and they're going to have strawberries and cream up there to-morrow; and she's asked you and your sister to go."

Agnes waited to hear no more, but with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, away she flew to tell her mother the good news, whilst Gibby proceeded to impart his intelligence to Martha, who apparently listened to it with more surprise than pleasure; at all events, she made no remark, but having stood for a few moments in silence, as if meditating on what she had heard, she resumed her work, and recommenced raking her garden as assiduously as before the interruption.

In the meantime, Gibby proceeded to the house, where he found Mrs. Crawford already in the passage, enticed downstairs by Agnes to hear what he had to say.

"Ain't we to go to the castle, Gibby?" cried Agnes eagerly.

"Mrs. Meadows sends her compliments," said Gibby, "and says as how there's to be strawberries and cream to-morrow for all the servants; and there's to be a dance afterwards on the lawn; and she wants the misses to go!"

"Shall I wear my white froek, mother?" inquired Agnes.

"I'm afraid it's too short," said Mrs. Crawford ; "you've grown a great deal since you wore it."

Agnes looked rather grave at this intimation ; but her mother, proposing to decide the momentous question by an immediate reference to the article itself, it was happily discovered that there was a tuck to be let down, which removed all anxiety with regard to the toilet. The threads were drawn out on the spot, the frock was damped and spread in the sun, and on the following day a hot iron, carefully administered by the mother's experienced hand, brought the dress into a wearable condition.

Whilst Agnes was watching these processes with very considerable interest, Martha had never expressed the slightest curiosity with respect to her attire at all. Nor did she evince any mortification when, on the following evening, she and her sister started for the castle, under the protection of John Gibson, to see herself dressed in a spotted cotton frock, whilst Agnes was attired in white muslin. John walked between them, holding a hand of each, tending them with the care rather of a brother than a servant, helping Martha to mount the stiles, lifting Agnes over them, and setting her down upon her two tiny feet with a glad playfulness, as if he revelled in the comparison betwixt his own robust frame and the light fragile form that he swung in the air as easily as if it had been stuffed with eider down.

Whilst Agnes chatted away in a flutter of excitement at the prospect of the gaiety that awaited her, and elated by the agreeable consciousness of her white frock, Martha walked steadily on the other side, divided betwixt pleasure and timidity ; not that she was morally timid, or even shy, but she was humble.

The servants at the great house, specimens of whom occasionally visited the farm for one purpose or another, were enveloped in a sort of mysterious grandeur to both of them, but whilst Agnes felt no misgivings with respect to her introduction to these sublime people, Martha had somewhat the sensations of a young lady going to her first drawing-room. But by no means thrown off her equilibrium, she remained calm and quiet ; nor was she in the least embarrassed when, being delivered by John Gibson into the care and guidance of the dairy-maid, they were conducted into the awful presenee of Mrs. Meadows, in her own partiueular sanctum.

"Farmer Crawford's children, ma'am," said Lizzy, as she opened the door.

"Come in, my dears," said Mrs. Meadows, who, assisted by the still-room maid, was filling sundry vessels with strawberries,

cream, and sugar, preparatory to the coming feast. "Sit down, there's good children," said she, scarcely looking at them, and continuing her occupation, whilst she warned Esther not to fill the bowls so full, and bade Lizzy bring more milk with less cream in it. The two little girls seated themselves on the edge of the same chair, Martha looking about the room and observing what was in it; Agnes more occupied with herself, wondering rather that she and her white frock excited no more attention; but for some time both remained utterly unnoticed. When the bowls were filled, the maids carried them out on trays to the servants' hall, and it was not until they had nearly all disappeared that Mrs. Meadows bethought herself of asking her little visitors if they liked strawberries, and such like easy questions for beginners.

The next stage in the proceedings, Lizzy having announced that all was ready, was to adjourn to the servants' hall, where the whole establishment was assembled. Mrs. Meadows placed herself at the head of the table, Mr. Wighting, the butler, seated himself at the foot, and the feast commenced. There was not much conversation; strawberries are very pleasant things to eat, but they do not make people merry; a stray observation from a smart footman, or a giggle from one of the maids, was all that was heard, and even these manifestations were a good deal restrained by the dignified presence of the upper-servants, who were quite *blasés* with regard to strawberries and cream, and who had too nice a sense of their own importance to be lively. The only person to whom Agnes found herself an object of any interest was an æsthetic lady's-maid, who, struck by the child's beauty and innate grace, paid her considerable attention. When the feast was over, the whole party adjourned to the lawn in front of the house, where the village band was already performing for the entertainment of the young people of the family, who, with several visitors of their own age, were assembled in the verandah. Whilst the servants danced, Martha and Agnes sat upon the grass watching the scene with considerable interest; Agnes's curiosity, in the meanwhile, being not a little awakened by the glimpses that reached her through the festoons of scarlet and white creepers that partly shaded them from her view, of sundry flounced white frocks, adorned by pink and blue sashes, and sleeves looped up with ribbons to match.

Presently this young party was joined by some elder persons, and after a short conference, it was announced that the young ladies and gentlemen were going to make up a dancing party of their own, whereupon they descended the steps and ranged

themselves on one side of the lawn, whilst the servants occupied the other.

"Oh!" said Louisa Grosvenor, "Lionel has no partner. What shall we do for a partner for him?"

"I dare say he does not care about dancing, do you, Lyley?" said Frances.

"Yes he does," answered Louisa; "why should he not dance as well as we? besides, we want another couple for a *vis-à-vis*;" and after looking about, she added, "I wonder if mamma would let that little girl dance with us? May she, mamma?" she continued, as she bounded up to the verandah. "She looks a very nice little girl. I mean the little girl in the white frock."

"I dare say she cannot dance, my dear," replied Lady Grosvenor. "Meadows," said she, addressing the housekeeper, "whose children are those?" and as she spoke she took up her glass to survey them.

"They are Farmer Crawford's children, my lady," answered Meadows; "I just asked them to eat a few strawberries, poor things."

"Very right," said Lady Grosvenor; "bring them here, Meadows." But before the housekeeper had time to obey, Louisa had dragged the now somewhat abashed but not unwilling Agnes to the verandah.

"Look, mamma, isn't she a pretty little girl? And only think, she's called Agnes. Isn't it a pretty name?"

"A pretty creature, indeed!" remarked the Hon. Mrs. Leslie.

"What fairy feet," exclaimed Lady Minevar.

"And can you dance, Agnes?" inquired Lady Grosvenor.

"I don't know," answered Agnes, hanging down her head, and biting the tips of her rosy fingers.

"I'm certain she could, mamma," said Louisa; "we could teach her the figure, and Lionel can't dance without a partner."

"Well, you can try if you like," said Lady Grosvenor; whereupon Louisa conducted Agnes to the spot where the other children were awaiting this decision, and putting her hand into that of her brother Lionel, she told her that he was her partner, and that they would instruct her what to do; and then the music struck up, and the quadrille commenced: of course Agnes had to be pushed about from place to place, and it was not easy at first to steer her through a *demie queue de chat*, or *chaîne des dames*; but when Lionel took her two hands and whirled her round, and when they danced the *ronde* of the *finale*, Agnes, directed by her good ear, yielding joyously to the excitement of

the music, made her first essay in stepping to time, and galloped along as lightly as the others.

"You see, mamma, she'll very soon dance, when we have given her a little instruction," said Louisa.

"I dare say she will," said Lady Grosvenor.

"Have you never had any dancing lessons?" inquired Lionel, as he gave Agnes his arm, and walked across the lawn with her.

"No," answered she.

"Oh! you should have M. Le Mesurier, that teaches us," said he. "He is a capital master. I suppose you don't know how to waltz?"

"No!" answered Agnes, who had never even heard the word.

"It's such fun!" said Lionel, "going round and round; and at first it made us so giddy, that we all fell down on the top of one another!"—this striking Agnes as eminently comical, she burst into a merry laugh. "I think you're a very nice little girl!" said he; "and I like you better than Georgina Minevar;—do you know her?"

"No," answered Agnes.

"She's so cross and affected!" he continued; "we none of us like her much. But it is a pity you can't dance! What's your name?"

"Agnes Crawford."

"Don't you think Agnes Crawford should have lessons of M. Le Mesurier?" asked Lionel of Louisa, who now called upon the young party to form another quadrille. Louisa did think so; and whilst she arranged the set, she determined to ask her mamma to allow Agnes to be present at the dancing lessons. "You know, mamma," said she, "we are always wanting somebody in Georgina's place, because she has so often got a pain somewhere; and then we have more boys than girls, and Agnes would do to fill up."

Lady Grosvenor said she would think about it, and hear what Madame Charpentier, the governess, said on the subject. In the meanwhile, Agnes was improving rapidly in the art of steering her way through the mazes of the dance, whilst she was, at the same time, making considerable progress in the estimation of her new companions, who took her into the house to show her their playthings, and give her a ride on the rocking-horse. Louisa presented her with a somewhat faded beauty of a wax doll, Lionel gave her the surviving members of an old Noah's Ark; and even Frances, who cared less about her, contributed a pair of doll's shoes. Then they led her into the drawing-room, where they gave her cakes, and asked everybody

if she was not *a nice little girl*, till, with her cheeks flushed with pleasure, she was committed to the care of John the footman, who received orders to conduct her to Mrs. Meadows's sanctum again.



CHAPTER III.

DURING the progress of these little events, Martha had remained where she was first placed, very much overlooked and forgotten, till Mrs. Meadows, fancying the dew was beginning to fall, thought it advisable to re-enter the house. Then she took the child by the hand and led her away.

"Your sister is gone in with the young ladies," said she; "you shall go with me, and wait till they send her down."

So, when Agnes arrived, she found Martha sitting on the edge of a chair, and munching a piece of cake. Although Agnes had a good deal overcome her awe of the flounced frocks and broad sashes above stairs, and before they parted had become tolerably familiarized with the young people, there was something in the cold rigid atmosphere of Mrs. Meadows and her apartment that suppressed her natural confidence; so that, after being complimented on her new acquisitions, and interrogated as to whether she had had a ride on the rocking-horse, she edged herself on a corner of Martha's chair, stealthily exhibiting her toys, and heartily wishing for Gibby to take her home.

As the period had arrived at which Mrs. Meadows was wont to take her early bit of supper, her wishes were so far in unison with those of Agnes, that she rang for Lizzy to inquire if nobody was coming from the farm to fetch the children; since, if not, she (Lizzy) would have to escort them thither herself; whereupon it appeared that John Gibson had been waiting some time, and was now, at these presents, taking a glass of beer in the hall. So the children were dismissed with a good-bye, and a slice of cake to carry home with them; and Agnes was soon liting and skipping across the fields, as she hung on Gibby's hand, and eagerly narrating her new experiences. The rocking-horse and the toys, and the treasures of the nursery, were, however, uppermost in her mind, which was not yet awakened to any other ambition than that of wearing a broad sash and a flounced frock, like the young ladies she had seen; but as these were unattainable luxuries, and she saw nothing at home to quicken the desire, it died away as the recollection of the evening

at the great house faded; and Agnes was as happy as ever with her rake and her spade, and her brown pinafore, and Gibby for a confidant and ally, when an unexpected invitation to join the dancing lesson at the castle threw her again into a flutter of childish vanity.

As good or ill luck would have it, Georgina Minevar, who, as Louisa Grosvenor had observed, always had a pain somewhere, having failed to attend the dancing lesson and thereby spoil the quadrille on two consecutive Thursdays, whilst the image of the pretty little girl at the farm was fresh in the minds of the children, they renewed their request that she might be permitted to join the class. So, Madame Charpentier making no objection, Agnes received notice to appear on the following morning at twelve o'clock. The white frock was again in requisition, and the desire for the flounce and sash revived in more than its original intensity, insomuch that the mortification of not possessing them, not only considerably abated the excitement of her expectations, but even diminished her confidence, and subdued her gaiety among the other young people. Then they all danced in gloves, and it was discovered she had none; a deficiency, however, which was easily supplied from the nursery wardrobe. As she had not forgotten what she learnt the first evening, she got through the figures better than might be expected; and as dancing-masters are apt to have a quick eye for juvenile beauty and grace, M. Le Mesurier took a great fancy to her; and lamenting that she should not know the rudiments of his art, without which, he observed, in spite of her good ear, she never would dance well, he offered, if it would be agreeable to Lady Grosvenor, to let her join, free of expense, a class he held weekly in the neighbouring town; and Mrs. Crawford, being recommended to take advantage of this desirable opportunity, consented from a double motive; first, because she did not think it becoming or prudent or grateful in her, to decline the proposal; and next, because it fell in with and flattered her besetting weakness, which was an extravagant admiration of, and a pride in, the beauty of her youngest daughter; sentiments which, though a good woman and a loving mother in the main, caused her almost unconsciously to treat the children in many minor matters with a condemnable inequality. For Agnes was reserved the single white frock extant in the family wardrobe; for her bonnet the bit of pink ribbon, extracted from the odds and ends hoarded in the corner drawer. As, though poor, the faint halo of better circumstances lingered around Mrs. Crawford, she always endeavoured to keep both her children clean and tidy, yet it was with a difference. Martha's

hair was combed, but Agnes's was curled. It is true, her mother said, that Martha's locks were very untractable; but perhaps, if they had had the early training that had been bestowed on Agnes's, they would have been less so. Then Agnes's complexion was so delicate that it was necessary to shield it carefully from the sun; whilst Martha's, having been neglected in the beginning, was not thought worth attending to afterwards. Being as brown as a berry already, it was of no consequence whether she played in the garden with a bonnet or without one; and thus Agnes had the benefit of two bonnets, Martha's and her own; so that if one was not to be found when she ran out of doors, the chances were that the other was. And this unconscious favouritism running through everything, of course produced its effects; not *creating* probably—for had their characters been reversed, no system could have made them individually what they were in mind, any more than in person—but *aiding* nature; and whilst the effects of exercise and air on Agnes, to whom that universal mother (whom we have tampered with and corrupted till her partialities and caprices re-act on us to our perplexity and destruction) had given a silky skin and sylph-like form, only added roses to her lilies, and grace and pliancy to her limbs, Martha, who came into the world clothed with an ordinary work-a-day integument, and a frame rather remarkable for solidity than symmetry, grew browner and sturdier every day; and whilst the seeds of ambition, the love of refinement, and a tendency to be discontent with her humble condition, which that same erring mother had implanted in that pretty casket, grew and flourished on the food that was liberally supplied them, so grew and flourished the self-abnegation, the patience, humility, and forbearance of Martha, nourished and strengthened by constant exercise. She was not ill-treated—ill-treatment can seldom if ever produce good fruits—nor did it ever occur to her that there was any difference intended betwixt her and her sister; and she was right—none *was* intended, and it was therefore that the series of small partialities and favouritisms, which would have made up a pretty considerable sum of injustice when all added together, appearing to be only the natural result of circumstances, awakened no bad passions and did her no harm.

Mrs. Crawford often remarked as she looked at them what a strange difference there was betwixt the children; but it was chiefly the external variety that struck her; she was not capable of penetrating deeply into the nature of either of them. Accustomed as she was, however, to think things fit and necessary for her youngest girl which it did not occur to

her to bestow on the elder, yet when these dancing-lessons were proposed, her maternal affection prompted her to ask herself, wherefore if Agnes had lessons, Martha should have none; and as no legitimate objection presented itself, except the expense, she proposed to her husband that the latter should, at all events, have the benefit of a quarter's teaching at M. Le Mesurier's class; and the fee to be paid being small, and both feeling the incongruity of one child receiving this sort of instruction when it was withheld from the other, the decision was in Martha's favour.

And perhaps, had she been taught *con amore*, as her sister was, she might have made something of it; but her cotton frock and stumpy figure inspiring M. Le Mesurier with immeasurable contempt, he delivered his instructions with a sort of *de-haut-en-bas* jecring insolence, that would have been sufficient to repress the genius of Taglioni herself; the natural result of which procedure was, that Martha detested both him and his art, and not only learned very little, but made all the haste in the world, when the quarter was expired, to forget whatever she had acquired.

In the same space of time, Agnes had made so much progress that she could now take her part in the quadrille as well as her new acquaintance at the castle; whilst M. Le Mesurier did not fail, when he commended her quickness and aptitude, to expatiate on the stupidity and *gaucherie* of her sister, whom the young people barely recollected as the fat little girl in a spotted frock, but who held no place in their minds as Agnes's sister, and whom they remorselessly dropped out of their memories. Partly from good-natured liberality, and partly for the sake of the uniformity of the quadrille, Agnes was next presented with a broad dark-blue sash and sleeve-ribbons, and next with a flounced frock and a pair of dancing-shoes; and thus, in a very short time, she was so completely transformed into one of themselves, as far as appearance went, that visitors, who were occasionally admitted into the dancing-room, were heard to inquire if that pretty elegant creature, with the dark-blue ribbons, was not Lady Harriet Harrowby's youngest daughter?

Then she was an enormous favourite with Lionel, her first partner, who always sulked when he was obliged to dance with anybody else; and but for the authority of M. Le Mesurier and Madame Charpentier, Georgina Minevar would have been quite thrown out of the quadrille, when she happened to be present, which at first was seldom; but when she saw the consequence of her staying away, she changed her tactics, laid aside

her pains and her indolence, and attended pretty regularly ; and then there arose an open and unconcealed enmity on her part towards Agnes, and a less demonstrative one on the part of Agnes towards her. Georgina was the eldest of the party, though backward from a morbid inertness of temperament ; and she would never have troubled herself to bestow a thought on the little plebeian, if the little plebeian had not been, as she considered, lifted out of her place, and raised into a sort of competition with herself. As it was, she treated her with all the insolence of a fine lady of thirteen, which Agnes was acute enough to see, but which, child as she was, she was at first indifferent to ; but as she grew older, and more familiar with the other young people, her confidence increased, and her sensibilities were quickened, till it was not easy to suppress her sentiments, or conceal the feelings of aversion with which she reciprocated Georgina's dislike, especially as she had all the young dancers on her side. Accordingly, she began to show fight, rendered affront for affront, and scorn for scorn.

Georgina had originally opened the campaign, by refusing to give her hand to Agnes in the dance, or to recognise her as a *vis-à-vis* ; Agnes now returned the compliment. Then Georgina had a habit of flopping herself down on a form, where there was not space enough, for the purpose of pushing Agnes out of her seat. Formerly, Agnes rose, and sought another ; now she sat fast.

"Why don't you get up and make room ?" said Georgina, sharply.

"There's plenty more seats," said Agnes, whose speech had still a certain rustic cadence, which was maintained by her constant intercourse with John Gibson.

"Get up and go to the other side," said Georgina, waxing angry.

Agnes made no answer, but by fixing herself more firmly in her place, whilst the roses in her cheeks grew deeper ; but Georgina was the biggest, and, strong in her impudence, she wedged herself in, till she pushed Agnes off the end of the form. Perhaps Agnes need not have fallen to the ground, but she did.

"Que faites-vous là donc, mesdemoiselles ?" inquired Madame Charpentier, looking up from her embroidery-frame.

"Cette petite fille ne veut pas faire place, madame," said Georgina.

"Comment donc, mademoiselle ?" said Madame Charpentier to Agnes, who was standing at the end of the form and crying, not because she was hurt, but to make her case, and because she was conquered.

The attention of the other children being now called to the squabble, it was easy to see to which side their sympathies inclined; but Madame Charpentier took another view of the matter; for, having first gently reproved Georgina in French, for endeavouring to force herself into a seat where there was no vacancy, adding a hint that it was beneath her to enter into contention with *cette pauvre petite fille*, she next called up Agnes, and gave her what she considered a necessary and profitable lecture on the duties of not forgetting her station, or permitting herself to imagine, that because Lady Grosvenor was so kind as to allow her to associate with her daughters, that she was therefore their equal. On the contrary, she endeavoured to impress on her that it was her part to give way on every occasion, and that any endeavour to assert what she might consider her rights was black ingratitude.

"I am surprised you do not know your place better," said she.

"It was my place, ma'am," answered Agnes.

"Ce n'est pas ça, mademoiselle," said Madame Charpentier, who though she had been married to a Frenchman, was by birth English; "you should recollect that you have no place here, but through the extreme kindness and indulgence of Lady Grosvenor and these young ladies; and if I see a repetition of this behaviour, I shall be under the necessity of requesting her ladyship to withdraw that indulgence."

"What a shame!" murmured Louisa; "it was entirely Georgina's fault."

When Madame Charpentier commenced her objurgation, Agnes was crying; but by the time it was ended, her tears were dried, and she continued to stand before the governess as hard as a rock, making no movement to return to her seat, but rather as who should say, "Go on; if you have anything more to say, I am ready to hear it."

"You may sit down now," said Madame Charpentier, getting irritated at the demeanour of the child, and the consciousness that her little pupils were against her. "Perhaps Miss Minevar will allow you to sit at the end of that form."

"Come here," whispered Louisa, "and sit between me and Lyley!"

"Never mind her, nasty old toad!" said Lyley himself. "I hate her!"

The effect of this injudicious style of reproof on the young person it was addressed to may be imagined. Together with a sense of injury, there was awakened in her mind a painful consciousness of her position in regard to her companions; and the

germ of a desire to rise out of it was now first stirred in her breast. Evil passions, though innate, may slumber; and it is ill-treatment, injustice, or bad management, that, like the hot sun to the serpent's egg, first awakens them to life and motion. When the reign of charity and goodwill shall arrive, these germs of ill will languish and shrink like seeds sown in an impervious shade; and men may live and die without discovering that under due provocation they could be malignant, envious, and ambitious; till, in course of time, as where there is no motion there is no life, the kind will die out, the species will become extinct, and then will be the triumph of perfect love on earth.

In the meantime, Agnes Crawford was a sufferer from being born at a period considerably antecedent to that blessed one which none of us, however we may pray for it and believe in it, shall live to see; and from having no care to disturb her more weighty than what concerned her little personal vanities, as frocks and flounces, sashes and shoes, she began to be susceptible, uneasy, and anxious to avoid being seen in what she now felt as degrading circumstances, and unduly mortified when such little exposures, either inevitably or through her own over-solicitude to avoid them, happened to occur. So acute sometimes were these pangs, that the memory of them, in after life, survived that of many deeper wounds; as when Lionel once met her carrying a tin can with her father's dinner to the hayfield; or when Georgina Minevar passed in her mother's pony-phacton, as she was enjoying the delight of a ride with Gibby in the cart. One of the most vexatious of her childish trials arose out of this accident.

M. Le Mesurier, desirous of extending his fame, proposed to give a *matinée dansante*, to which all his pupils in the neighbourhood, with their relations and friends, were invited. The hour appointed for the meeting was noon, and the place, the assembly-room of the neighbouring town; but, unfortunately, when the morning came, the rain poured down in torrents. The distance was so short, that Agnes had formerly gone there to receive M. Le Mesurier's gratuitous lessons on foot when the weather was fine, and had been very glad to avail herself of the cart and John Gibson's services when it was wet; but her eyes were opened now, and she could not bear the thoughts of being seen by her aristocratic acquaintance in so plebeian a conveyance. Still there was no choice but to go in it or stay at home, and relinquish the successes that awaited her—certain successes, for she was not only the best dancer and the prettiest girl of the party, but she was the favourite of the dancing-master, who,

looking upon her as the work of his own hands and the triumph of his art, lost no opportunity of putting her forward and exhibiting her in the most advantageous situations.

"I don't like to go in the cart, mother," she said, colouring at the disclosure of her secret feelings. "I wish it didn't rain so."

"Perhaps it may clear yet," said Mrs. Crawford. "See how nice your frock looks; I hope you won't tumble it."

And it did look very nice, being a new one sent her for the occasion by Lady Grosvenor, together with shoes and ribands.

"I could change my shoes and stockings in the cloak-room, if I could keep my frock dry," said Agnes.

"It is impossible for you to walk; you would be wet through and through before you get there," answered her mother.

"You must go in the cart or stay at home, child," said Mr. Crawford, without raising his eyes from Moore's Almanack, from which he was endeavouring to ascertain on or about what period fine weather might be expected.

It was very mortifying to go in the cart, but as it was still more mortifying not to go at all, John Gibson was summoned to harness the mare; and packed up in her mother's cloak and a tarpaulin, Agnes started for Ellerton, fortified with a little scheme of her own for eluding the worst part of the exposure.

"Gibby," said she, "you're not to drive up to the Eagle, but to set me down opposite the Wright's, and then I'll walk the rest."

"What! in all this here rain?" said John. "Why, you'll be soaking before you gets to the Eagle; na, na! I'll not do that."

"But you must, Gibby; I am determined to get out," said Agnes.

"What for?" said he, "when we can drive smack up to the door."

"Because I hate the cart," said Agnes, pettishly.

"Hate the cart!" echoed he, astonished. "Why, what's the matter with her? We never carries nought in her but wood, and gardeu-stuff, and such like."

"I don't care; I won't drive up to the Eagle in it, and I will get out."

"Oh! well, if you will, you must," said John; and accordingly, at the entrance of the town, Agnes descended and started on her way, wrapped in her mother's cloak, and armed with an umbrella. It still rained hard, but as she hadn't far to go, she might have succeeded in reaching the inn with no more damage than a splash or two, had she not, as ill luck would have it,

fallen into the mud in her haste to get out of the way of a gig that came suddenly round the corner as she was crossing the street. The cloak being too long, tripped her up, and down she came, exactly opposite the windows of the assembly-room, where many of the young people were already congregated. The laugh that almost invariably greets any unlucky Christian who thus involuntarily salutes his mother-earth, echoed from the merry group, till Louisa Grosvenor exclaimed—

“Oh! it’s our poor Agnes, I declare! What a pity! She will not be able to dance!”

“Only look at her. How very provoking!” said Frances. “We should have brought her with us. It will certainly spoil our quadrille.”

“Can’t the dirt be brushed off?” inquired Lionel.

That, however, was impossible; she was bedaubed from top to toe; but in the meantime, mine host of the Eagle, who had witnessed the accident, had not only assisted Agnes to rise, but having committed her to the care of his wife, that worthy woman was busily engaged in stripping off her wet clothes, and washing the mud from her face.

Agnes’s heart was bursting with vexation, but she had caught a glimpse of the laughing faces at the window as she arose from the ground, and her pride restrained her tears.

“Oh, Agnes, what a pity!” cried Louisa, who, with her governess and sister, had made her way to the scene of these operations.

“How came you to be on foot in all this rain?” inquired Madame Charpentier. “Why didn’t your father send you in the cart?”

“How vexed M. Le Mesurier will be?” said Frances; “for there’s nobody can do the new figure but you, so we shan’t be able to dance it at all.”

“If you think it would do, ma’am, I could lend her a frock of my little girl’s,” said the hostess. “Perhaps it may be a little short, but I’m sure she might wear it.”

Which offer being eagerly accepted by the young ladies, and the face and hands restored to their original hue, the wardrobe of Miss Simmons was turned out, and the most promising articles selected to supply the place of the flounced frock, and blue shoes, and thread stockings, which had been the pride of the owner. But, alas! with them went the confidence, and consequently the good dancing and the graceful demeanour. Where is the daughter of Eve that could hold up her head, firmly point her toe, or gracefully throw back her shoulders, knowing herself to be ill-dressed? Agnes could not. She not

only made no sensation, but she failed entirely in her part of the pageant, and had to suffer, besides her own mortification, the additional pain of seeing it reflected in the face of her indulgent and partial teacher.

CHAPTER IV.

THE evening sun shone faintly into an upper window of the Holmes Farm, casting a pale glow upon the wan cheek of a dying woman.

"Leave it! leave it!" she said to one who would have drawn the curtain across the window. "I shall never see the sun set again!"

Then having prayed for some time, she called her two daughters to her bedside, and calmly saying she was going to leave them, she proceeded to give them her instructions for their future guidance.

"Above all things, love one another, and make your poor father as comfortable as you can. You, Martha, are the eldest, and you must take charge of the household affairs. You are young, my poor child, to have so much care cast on your shoulders; but God's will be done! It is a care, and a heavy one, to provide for a family out of such small means, but with strict economy it may be managed; we have always contrived to keep want—actual want—from our door. A joint twice a week—you must not go beyond that; the other days you must make up with dumplings and vegetables. Sometimes you may get a bit of fish cheap, especially in summer, when Dawkins is anxious to get it off his hands; but never appear eager to have it, for he is apt to overcharge, if he can. Remember, your father likes a plain plum dumpling on Sundays—that's in winter, I mean. In summer, of course you'll give him fresh fruit; make it a good size, that it may help out the joint; and on Thursdays, when you've your second joint, make a good large suet pudding. If you manage well in this way, you'll get a bit of meat for your dinner four or five days in the week. As for broth, I don't know that it's very good economy, for your father don't like it unless it's pretty good, and then it takes a large bit of meat. However, as he's fond of it, you must have it now and then. You'll get the hock half price to make the stock, and sometimes I used to put in a few bones of the neck to give it a flavour, but that makes it more expensive; a bit of

bacon flavours it very well ; and be sure to thicken it well with barley, and put in some suet dumplings. Of course you'll bake twice a week ; and take care not to cut the bread too soon ; nothing makes so much waste as cutting new bread. When fruit's in season, you can sometimes give your father a pie on baking-days—a raspberry-and-currant pie, with a little sweet milk, was always a great treat to him, poor man ! And that puts me in mind of the cow : take the greatest care of her, Martha ; you know how much of your comfort will depend on her. If sugar wasn't so dear, you might boil down fruit enough to last you all the winter ; but you mustn't attempt that, unless it should come down in price. The thing I am most uneasy about is the cider ; your father's so fond of his glass of cider ; and I'm afraid, when I'm gone, you'll never be able to manage it."

"Can't Gibby do it?" inquired the distressed and bewildered Martha.

"Gibby has always made it under my directions," replied the mother ; "but when I am not here to look after him, I don't know that you can depend upon his doing it right. Then there's the house-linen——"

"I'm sure, mother, you're talking too much," said Martha ; "you know the doctor said you were not to talk."

"It doesn't signify whether I talk or not," replied the mother ; "it won't make three hours' difference, and your poor father's comforts must be thought of. Some of the sheets want turning. I was in hopes I should have been able to do it before I was called away ; but it's not to be ; God's will be done ! But you'll look over the linen, Martha, and see what wants turning, as soon as I am laid in the earth, and out of the way."

"Yes, mother," sobbed Martha, overcome by this sad image.

"There's your father's shirts, too ; they'll go very well another year without wanting much, if they're well looked to ; but by that time they'll require new collars and wristbands ;—mind you always look over them carefully before you put them in the drawer ; nothing vexes him so much as finding the buttons off."

"I will, indeed, mother ; and now I'm sure you shouldn't talk any more, but lie back and rest yourself. Your voice is getting quite weak, and you look so pale, you can't think !"

"I do feel rather weak—but these things must be thought of—and I've a great deal more to say :—there's the—the tea—four shillings a pound—you mustn't give more—white sugar's too dear, except for your father ; he must have a little—and—and—don't forget, when the mulberries are ripe, to give him mulberry pie as long as they last—there's nothing he's so fond of as—as—mulberry——"

"Mother! mother! what's the matter? Oh, Agnes, fetch father! Shall Gibby fetch the doctor, father? Mother's worse. Oh, see! see! what's that?"

"The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away!" cried Mr. Crawford, falling on his knees by the bedside, whilst Agnes and Martha, who had not been aware their mother was so near her end, and scarcely comprehended what had occurred, imitated the action. For some minutes no word was spoken; the anxious wife, eased of her cares, lay still and calm; the children, frightened and awed, scarce breathed, and nothing was heard but the deep sobs that convulsed the big heart of the man. Presently he arose, and flinging a last look at the faithful partner of many joys and sorrows, he took his two daughters by the hand, and led them from the room. A neighbour was then summoned to perform the last sad offices for the departed wife; and having thus recorded how Mrs. Agnes Crawford died, we will proceed to give some account of how she had lived.

She had been a beauty, and it was from her that Agnes had inherited the fluent form, the well-turned limbs, and the lovely features. To a poor but virtuous girl, who earned her livelihood by making straw bonnets, Mr. Crawford, the linendraper, with a well-frequented shop, was a great match; and for a few years after her marriage her life would have been very prosperous and very happy, had she not suffered from continual ill health, and the loss of every child that was born to her; till the doctors pronounced that her only chance of recovery was a total change in her way of life. She must go to the country, live in the open air, and drink milk. Whenever this experiment was tried, she got better; but she could not endure living away from her home and her husband; and as soon as she returned, she relapsed. So at length Mr. Crawford, declaring that "this would not do any longer," resolved to part with his shop, and invest his savings in a farm. This happened a good many years ago, when people did not know that farming was a science, and by no means an easy one. Not having been taught this important truth, they thought that, like reading and writing, farming "came by nature;" and amongst the hundreds of persons ruined by this mistake, was poor Daniel Crawford.

He started gallantly, with his sheep and his oxen, his ploughs and his harrows, and his men-servants and his maid-servants; had his fancy cows and pretty dairy, and a team that any farmer might have been proud of. They all lived on the fat of the land; Mrs. Crawford recovered her health and her beauty, and, for the first two or three years, everything looked bright. But then the want of experience and of the knowing eye to

supervise the underlings, began to tell against the master. The seasons, of course, were bad, and prices ruinous; and Mr. Crawford began to sing the farmer's *Jérémade* to the old tune. Their two little girls, too, were born by this time, to add to their anxieties; and as matters grew worse and worse, Mr. Crawford, unequal to cope with the difficulties that were gathering around him, took to studying Moore's Almanack, and fell into despondency. At the same time, whether from inquietude of mind, or because there was some original flaw in her constitution, Mrs. Crawford's ill-health returned; and after languishing on for a few years, she finally sank without any evident cause, but rather appearing to die because she could not be troubled to live any longer.

This event, however, did not occur till Martha was sixteen years of age, and her sister one year younger; each continuing to retain the peculiarities by which Nature had first distinguished them: Martha, who had taken after her father, with her sunburnt complexion, stumpy figure, and round good-natured face; Agnes, inheriting more than the beauty of her mother, with the addition of a gait and carriage that might have adorned a coronet. Previous to this period the dancing lessons, and with them the intimacy at the castle, had been discontinued; but the effects of both survived. With no more education than the dame school of the village could afford, Agnes had something of the habits and demeanour, and much of the tastes, of a gentlewoman.

Her hair was always nicely dressed; her hands, and arms, and teeth were well cared for; and she wore her clothes, homely as they might be, with an indescribable grace. No one ever passed her without turning to look after her. All the lads in the village were in love with her, and all hopelessly; and when she was at church on a Sunday, more than one aristocratic young head would be seen peeping between the red silk curtains of a well-lined pew, at the farmer's lovely daughter. Now and then, some further manifestation was attempted from those quarters; but as Agnes gave no encouragement to her admirers, by either look or word, and as on the whole it was a moral and well-conducted little neighbourhood, those advances rarely amounted to anything offensive. The only attentions Agnes countenanced, were those of her old friend and ally, John Gibson, commonly called Gibby, who was utterly devoted to her, and indeed in love with her, after his own manner; but although she had never checked their early familiarity, her beauty and refinement, and his natural reverence, raised an invisible barrier betwixt them, sacred to him as *the divinity which loth hedge a queen*.

The key to Agnes's conduct, however, as regarded her admirers, aristocratic or otherwise, was not so much to be sought for in her prudence as her pride. She really had an affection for her early friend and ever-devoted slave, who in her infancy spent all his leisure in carving her rude toys with the clasp-knife with which he cut his bread and cheese, and now, in her girlish womanhood, would gladly, in default of a cloak, not only have spread his jerkin, but himself in the gutter, to enable her to cross it dryshod. She was grateful to him, and she liked him both from habit and because he was really a likeable creature; and as he was quite out of the category of lovers, she never placed any restraint on the natural manifestations of her goodwill. But the pride and ambition which had been fostered by her early associations defended her both from the addresses of her equals or the designs of her superiors.

Of the perils of the latter, her mother, who in her own youthful days had had some experience, had carefully warned her; against the former she was self-armed. She had too much pride and too little passion to be in danger of exposing herself to the world's obloquy for the sake of any man; whilst the thoughts of a marriage which did not promise to raise her out of her present condition, and to her its inevitable mortifications, would have been odious; and thus the beautiful and almost unprotected Agnes appeared to be secure from two of the dangers that beset the path of youth so situated and so endowed—namely, that of making a bad marriage, or falling into the snares of a profligate. Even her love of pleasure was, if not extinguished, entirely subdued by the stronger passion of ambition; and she lived at the farm with her parents and sister, forming no acquaintances nor seeking any amusements, because she had access to none but low ones.

The fastidiousness of her taste recoiled from the merriment of a fair, or the jollities of a hop, amongst what appeared to her but hinds and elodhoppers; and the humour and fun which might have diverted her aristocratic friends, who were raised above the perils of pollution, she felt herself too near to enjoy.

CHAPTER V

WHEN Mrs. Crawford died, the attention of the family at Ravenscliffe was recalled to Agnes.

"I wonder what poor Agnes will do, mamma?" said Louisa.

"What she has done hitherto, I suppose, my dear," answered Lady Grosvenor, who was reading the last new novel, and cared very little about Agnes.

"But her mother was very fond of her, and I'm afraid it will make a great difference to Agnes, now that she will have nobody but that stupid sister of hers."

"Is the sister very stupid?" inquired her ladyship.

"I never heard Agnes say she was, but she looks so," replied Louisa; "and she told me herself that her father was quite melancholy, and scarcely ever opened his lips to anybody; so that it must be dreadfully dull for her. I wonder what Agnes would be fit for?"

"She would make a good lady's-maid," said Frances; "she has taste, and would soon acquire style."

"So she would," said Louisa; "and besides, she has such good manners, and she dresses her own hair beautifully already; but then she should have lessons from Florimel, and be placed with somebody to learn dressmaking and millinery; and perhaps her father couldn't pay for her teaching. I wonder if Bennett would give her a little instruction. Do you think she would, mamma?"

"I dare say she would," said Lady Grosvenor, without raising her eyes from her book.

"May we ask her, mamma?" continued Louisa.

"Yes, yes, my dear," answered her ladyship, somewhat impatiently; "but don't trouble me about it now."

And, in pursuance of this plan of Louisa's, before many days had elapsed, Agnes was installed at Ravenscliffe as the pupil and assistant of Mrs. Bennett; a situation on which she entered with mingled feelings of pleasure and mortification. She was fond of the young people, who had always been so kind to her; and she liked to live in a fine house, and see fine things and fine people, and to be busying her fingers with ribbons, and gauzes, and artificial flowers, instead of her father's worsted socks and dairy-pans; but, on the other hand, she felt, that although she was *amongst* these fine people, she was *not of* them; and that

from having been, in a manner, the companion and playmate of the young ladies and their friends, she had now descended to her true position as their servant, and the companion of servants. This galled her pride, and inspired a disposition to keep herself apart, and, what is called, give herself airs. She tried, in short, to establish a distinction by her manners that did not exist in fact. But there was nobody with whom her relations gave her so much annoyance as those with Madame Charpentier, who was still an inmate of the family, engaged in superintending the finishings of Louisa and Frances, and conducting the education of a younger sister called Isabel. Much of these vexations was, however, mitigated by the kindness and easy familiarity of the young ladies, especially of Louisa, who had not forgotten their former childish intimacy, and who were neither able to treat her as a menial, nor desirous of doing so. On the contrary, they were very fond of a chat with Agnes over the dressing-room fire. She became the confidante of all their likings and dislikings; and grew acquainted with the ridicules and absurdities of all their visitors who were so unfortunate as to have any sufficiently prominent to attract notice. On the other hand, there was a disposition on the part of the servants (that is, the women) to treat the new-comer with their full measure of equality; they spared her the less, that the men spared her so much. To the latter, her beauty was her state; she took rank upon it, and it stood her instead of any other. Even Mrs. Meadows, her first patroness, and the unforeseeing originator of her present fortunes, called her "a proud minx;" but Mr. Wighting professed his opinion, that being so handsome, it was all the better; adding, sententiously, that "her pride might keep her from a fall."

"Well, Agnes, I have got a bit of news for you," said Louisa, one day; "your old playfellow, Lyley, is coming home to-morrow. I don't think you've seen him since he went to Eton,—have you?"

"No, ma'am," replied Agnes, who at the commencement of these confabulations always answered with a degree of respect and reserve, which was apt to wear off as the conversation advanced. "Mr. Grosvenor was not here last year, was he?"

"He hasn't been here these two years. We never happened to be here ourselves at the vacation time, you know. You can't think how he is grown, and how handsome he is."

"He was very handsome before he went away," returned Agnes.

"Only papa and mamma were so dreadfully afraid he was to have a snub nose. Think of the representative of all the glories

of all the Grosvenors with a snub nose! I'm sure it would have broken papa's heart. He hates every man that has a snub nose."

"I think that is the chief source of his dislike to Lewis Watson," said Frances.

"It augments it, I have no doubt," returned Louisa; "but he would have hated Lewis Watson if he had had a nose like an eagle."

"Is Mr. Watson so disagreeable?" inquired Agnes.

"We know nothing about him," answered Louisa. "He is never permitted to come here. It is not because he is disagreeable that papa hates him, but because he is the next heir to the estate."

"I thought Mr. Lionel was heir?" said Agnes, with surprise.

"Of course he is; but I mean he would be the heir if there were no Lionel in the case. You know his mother is papa's niece."

"I've often heard my father say what rejoicings there were when Mr. Lionel was born," said Agnes.

"Rejoicings, indeed!" said Louisa. "But before that, and just at the moment that papa was distracted at having two girls instead of a boy, what did the foolish woman do, but write to him and say that since he was now getting into years, and to all appearance it was not the will of God that an heir should be born to him, she hoped he would join her in endeavouring to obtain a grant that the title should accompany the estate even though it were to pass out of the right line, and proposing that her son should take the name of Watson-Grosvenor; an offence papa has never forgiven, nor ever will."

"Then she must have been greatly disappointed when Mr. Lionel was born, I suppose?" said Agnes.

"Disappointed! I believe she was! Who is that letter from?" continued Louisa, turning towards her sister, to whom a letter had just been delivered.

"From Georgy Minevar," answered Frances.

"Where are they?"

"At Laughton. Lord Minevar is ill there, and they can't get back to Redlands, which is annoying them all very much."

"What's the matter with him?" inquired Louisa.

"They don't seem to know very well what it is; but she says her mamma is very much alarmed."

"He was always a poor sickly boy," said Louisa. "What a fortune his sister will have if he dies."

"Georgina sends her love to all, and she wants to know where mamma gets her drops."

"What drops? The pearl ones she bought in London last spring?"

"Pearl drops! No, nervous drops, to be sure!" said Frances, laughing.

"How absurd!" said Louisa. "I cannot conceive how Lady Minevar can allow her to dose herself as she does. Don't you recollect her eternal bottle of salts, Agnes; and how she burnt the tip of your pretty little nose with her aromatic vinegar?"

"Indeed I do," answered Agnes; "and I remember Mr. Lionel could not bear to dance with her because, he said, she smelt like a pill-box."

"He always hated her," said Frances.

"Besides, he was in love with Agnes," said Louisa. "You were certainly Lionel's first love, Agnes. I remember his cutting a piece out of Madame Charpentier's ruby velvet dress in order to revenge your wrongs, one day, when she took Georgina's part against you. I wonder if you have forgotten your dancing, Agnes?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," returned Agnes. "I have never danced since."

"But don't people ever dance amongst you? At the farmers' houses, I mean?"

"I believe they do, sometimes; but I never saw them," returned Agnes.

"Why, did you never go to any of their balls?"

"Never," answered Agnes.

"I greatly doubt whether your living so much with us when we were all children was a good thing for you, Agnes. Don't you think it has made you less fit for your own station in life?" said Frances.

"I don't think so at all!" said Louisa. "In the first place, we don't know what Agnes's station in life may be. She may marry very well."

"What do you call *very well*?" asked Frances.

"Why, I mean she may not always be a servant. She may marry some respectable tradesman—he may be even rich, perhaps; and then whatever she has acquired by associating with us will be of use to her."

"I suspect people are much happier that have no tastes above their stations," said Frances.

"I don't know that," returned Louisa; "but, as I said before, we do not know what Agnes's station is to be."

"Nothing very exalted, I should think, at all events," said Frances.

"Very exalted! no, of course. But suppose she marries a

rich tradesman, would not a taste for the elegancies of life be very desirable?"

"Very; but I'm afraid rich tradesmen are not so abundant at Ellerton that Agnes can reckon on securing one of them. Who is there there that is rich, for example?"

"Why, there's Simmons, at the Eagle——"

"But the man has a wife and five grown-up children already."

"Of course, I'm not thinking of him for Agnes. I only quoted him to show that there *are* rich tradesmen at Ellerton."

"How would you like to be the second Mrs. Simmons, Agnes?" asked Frances.

"Not at all, ma'am," said Agnes, with a toss of her pretty head.

"Then, Meadows says that Walters, the grocer, is making a fortune," says Louisa.

"And I do not think he has a wife," said Frances. "Come, there's a husband Louisa has found for you, Agnes. How would you like the portly Mr. Walters?"

"I do not intend to marry at all," said Agnes, drily, as, under pretence of carrying away the bonnets and shawls that had been thrown off, she quitted the room.

"There you see," said Frances, "she's offended at the very idea of a match that another person in her situation would jump at."

"Upon my word, Frances, I differ with you altogether," said Louisa. "You speak as if people in her situation had not their likings and dislikings, as well as we have."

"I don't know whether they have or not," answered Frances; "but at all events they cannot afford to indulge them."

"They can remain single, as Agnes proposes to do."

"No doubt; but how many are the maids who would rather remain single than accept the offer of a man who could give them a comfortable home and a secure maintenance?"

"Why, as many as the mistresses that would rather remain single than accept a coronet, I dare say."

"Oh, very likely; but that is not very many, you must admit."

"The best are never the many, Frances. I confess I like Agnes all the better for her pride; and I shan't despair of her making a good marriage yet. She's so pretty, and has such a natural air of refinement, that I should not be a bit surprised if somebody above her own condition was to take a fancy to her."

"I wish somebody may, I'm sure," said Frances.

On the following day, Lionel arrived from Eton. He had done with school now, and was in high glee. He was a fine,

handsome lad; but he thought learning a bore, and that as he was heir to a baronetcy and a pretty good estate, there was no necessity for troubling himself with much of it. All he had to do henceforth, was to keep a few terms at Oxford, and then go abroad.

"Well, Louisa, and how's mamma? and how's the governor?" asked he.

"They are both very well," answered she. "Papa's gone to a meeting of magistrates at B——, and mamma drove there with him to do some shopping."

"Well, and what's going on here?"

"Nothing. You heard that Jemima Mansell has married Colonel Fenton at last, and that Sir Abraham Towers is paying his addresses to her sister?"

"By Jove! that will be a famous match for her. They say when old Towers, the banker, dies he'll leave him everything he has."

"Papa says that altogether he will not have less than thirty thousand a year. Well, let me see, what else is there new? Oh! the Wentworths are going to sell Elm Park, and take a place near London."

"What for?"

"*They* say, to educate their children; but some people say, it's because they're done up."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Lionel. "I know Wentworth has been going it hard upon the Turf. And is that all the news you have? Is there nobody staying here now?"

"Nobody. The Mastermans were here last week for a couple of days; and oh, by the bye, Lyley, we've got your old flame, Agnes Crawford, here."

"Poor little Agnes—I remember Agnes. Is she as pretty as ever?"

"I think she is prettier. Her mother died, and so we took her to be under Bennett; and I want to persuade mamma to keep her to wait on us. We must have a second lady's-maid, and I had much rather have Agnes than anybody."

"And is Minevar at Redlands?"

"No—ill at Loughton; and Lady Minevar and Georgina are with him. I don't think there is any chance of their returning to Redlands at present, from a letter Frances received yesterday. I am sure you will be grieved at not seeing your dear Georgina."

"Oh, hang her! I detest her. But I like Charles Minevar, poor fellow. It is a pity he has such bad health."

Shortly after this, Sir Francis Grosvenor returned to give a

stately but affectionate reception to this rising star of his house, who was adored by both father and mother; by the former especially, because he looked upon the boy as sent into the world to carry forward the annals of and bear on to posterity that name, which to him was dearer and more sacred than life, and which, but for the birth of this promising scion, would soon have been extinct; for Sir Francis's younger brother, Colonel Grosvenor, had no son, and his only daughter, Letitia, had made a marriage hateful to all her connections, and was the mother of the much-detested Lewis Watson alluded to by Louisa, to whom not the title but the estate, if for want of an heir it passed out of the right line, would ultimately descend.

CHAPTER VI

IN a large country-house, with two flights of back stairs, it was easy for Lionel and Agnes to live under the same roof for weeks without meeting directly face to face. She often saw *him*, because a certain degree of curiosity about a handsome youth, who had formerly been her friend and playfellow, carried her to the window, when his voice reached her from the terrace below, and induced her to peep through the rails of the gallery where the young ladies' chambers were, when she heard him whistling an opera air as he descended the great staircase. Louisa had lost no time in ascertaining if she had seen her brother, and what she thought of him; and Agnes having commended his appearance to her heart's content, there was no more question on the subject of their meeting, till one day Lionel said to his sister, "By Jove! Loney, what a pretty girl Agnes Crawford is!"

"Have you only made that discovery now?" answered his sister.

"I never saw her till to-day," he replied; "I met her in the avenue, and she dropped me such a charming courtesy! I recognized her directly."

"She's lovely, *I* think," said Louisa; "I always did think so."

"By Jove! she *is* a beautiful girl, to be sure!" exclaimed he. "I wonder you never told me more about her."

"I told you she was here, and that I wished mamma to keep her to wait on us."

"And will she?"

"I don't know yet, but I hope so. It would be a pity to send such a pretty creature as that unprotected into the world to earn her bread."

"It would be a confounded shame!" said Lionel.

"Besides," continued Louisa, "I have a regard for Agnes, for old acquaintance sake!"

"So have I," said he.

"Do you remember how jealous Georgy Minevar was of her."

"Ugly devil!—to be sure I do."

"And how you avenged her wrongs by cutting a piece out of Madame Charpentier's velvet dress?"

"Serve her right, old toady! She was always unjust to Agnes."

"And is still when she can!"

"But she has nothing to do with her now, has she?"

"Agnes dresses her; mamma desired her to do it!"

"What a shame!" said Lionel. "Charpentier's much more fit to dress Agnes: nasty old cat!"

"I wish, when Agnes is a little older, we could get her well married!" said Louisa; "but here, at Ravenscliffe, nobody that would be a fit match for her is likely to see her."

"I'll tell you who would be a very good match for her," said Lionel; "Marsden, the new curate."

"I wish he heard you," said his sister, laughing; "he looks a little higher than a lady's-maid, I can tell you."

"Well, but you can hardly call Agnes a lady's-maid; at least, she's not a common lady's-maid; and I am sure she looks more like a lady than any woman I have seen since I came to Ravenscliffe."

"Present company excepted, I hope," returned Louisa. "But with regard to Marsden, the first day he dined here he made such *doux yeux* at little Isabel, that papa, who you know hates curates for Aunt Watson's sake, was very near kicking him out of the house. He has only been invited once since, and then she was not permitted to come to table."

From this period, Lionel set up a little flirtation with Agnes, partly in earnest and partly in jest; which, however, remained altogether on his own side, for she took no part in it; nor made any response, but strictly kept to her place and station, receiving his half-boyish, playful advances to intimacy and equality, not with shyness, not with humility, but with self-possessed, maidenly reserve. Had she studied how most to *agaacer* him, which she did not, she could not have done it better. The reserve gave him something to think of, and offered a little diffi-

culty to be overcome, which, though without any ultimate object or design whatever, was sufficient to interest him for its own sake. Agnes had a place in his thoughts—perhaps a larger place than any other individual object, except a new gun, with which his father presented him; and when he went to Oxford, many a bumper of claret was drunk by himself and his companions to the health of Agnes Crawford. At his next visit to Ravenscliffe, he was disappointed to find Agnes absent. “Where is she gone?” he inquired.

“Home to her father,” answered Louisa, “because she would not wait on Charpentier!”

“Quite right,” said he.

“I don’t think so,” returned Louisa. “She has lost an excellent opportunity of getting on under Bennett’s instructions, and as Isabel is nearly finished, Charpentier will be soon away; but the truth is—although I believe she would have stayed with us, because we never treated her as a servant, nor considered her as one—that she disliked the situation. Poor Agnes is too proud for her fortunes, and I really do not see what she is to do.”

“I’ll go and see her,” said he,

“Do,” said Louisa, “and I will go with you.”

It was pleasant to Lionel to see Agnes, as he saw her now in her first beautiful womanhood, and under her father’s roof. She was working at her needle when they arrived, neatly dressed as she always was, and sitting in a parlour which yet retained some vestiges of earlier days. An old China vase, filled with fresh-cut flowers, stood on the table beside her, perfuming the air of the room; and some exotics, which she had raised from cuttings given her by the gardener at Ravenscliffe, filled the window-seat. It was a humble home, but there was nothing coarse or vulgar about it—nothing to shock the taste of the young Oxonian; on the contrary, there was a modest propriety, a decent grace, that lent the cue to fancy, and opened the door to romance.

No servant now, but a lady of God’s own making, in adversity, or one whom blindest fortune had misplaced; and these environments gave a new tone to his feelings. It was not merely the presence of his sister that altered his demeanour—it was an involuntary respect, mingled with something approaching to tenderness, that repressed his former gay badinage, and tuned his voice to another key. He did not say much, nor Agnes neither; but she felt the change, and was pleased at it; whilst Louisa, who was a great talker, and generally more alive than her neighbours, had all the discourse to herself.

"And what do you mean to do, Agnes?" she inquired.

"I don't know," said Agnes, blushing.

She would have liked to add, "Not be a servant, certainly;" but she feared it might appear ungrateful, and forbore; whilst Lionel almost blushed at so indelicate a question, and felt displeased with his sister for putting it. What *should* she do, but braid her hair and feed upon flowers?

When they rose to depart, there was a tone of tender melancholy in the "Good bye, Agnes," and the gentlest possible pressure of the hand—so gentle, that it was rather the heart than the hand that felt it; and all the way home he was eloquent on the strange dispensations of fate, and the mysterious ways of Providence, being privately of opinion that he could have managed matters a greater deal better, if he had had the arranging of them.

"Agnes's misfortune is her pride," said Lousia; "and I really do not see what is to become of her now, unless some man takes a fancy to her; and I suspect it's not everybody she'd have, even though a man had money to keep her in independence."

"And who can blame her?" said Lionel. "What misery it would be to a girl like that, to be obliged to live with a fellow of low habits and vulgar manners! I can tell you, Louey, you may think as you please, but I should find it difficult to name a girl amongst our acquaintance, that could compare to Agnes Crawford."

"For beauty, I agree with you, certainly."

"Ay, and not for beauty only, but for dignity of carriage and lady-like self-possession. If Agnes was dressed as she should be, and brought out in London, I'll bet you anything you please she would be the acknowledged belle of the season."

"Well, it would be a safe bet, at all events," returned his sister, "for I fear the book of Agnes's fortunes contains no such page; but I do heartily wish she were well provided for."

Lionel was silent, for he felt he could scarcely echo the wish. Being provided for, implied a husband or a something, he did not know what; but he could not think of any mode in which he could like her to be provided for at present; besides, she was so interesting as she was!

From this period, there was not a day of his life, during his stay at Ravenscliffe, that his steps were not turned in the direction of Crawford's farm, in the hope of meeting her; and when he could make an excuse for calling there, he did. Sometimes he saw Agnes, but not always: she never presented herself, unless he asked to see her; and, without some reasonable motive to allege for doing so, he felt that he should alarm her pride.

At length he bethought himself of carrying her flowers in the name of his sisters, and this stratagem procured him many interviews; but as she never invited him to sit down, nor seated herself, they were very short ones.

"Be pleased to give my duty to Miss Grosvenor, sir, and say I am very much obliged to her."

"And are you not a little obliged to me for bringing them, Agnes?"

"Very, sir; I am quite sorry you should take so much trouble."

"Did you ever read Shakspeare, Agnes?"

"A little, sir."

"Do you remember what Maebeth answers, when the king bids him go forward to his castle, and prepare to receive him?"

"No, sir."

"Read it, then, will you?"

"Yes, sir," answered Agnes, but quite gravely; no smile implying that she understood a compliment was intended.

"Oh, Agnes, you are a hard-hearted girl," said the young man, urged to an involuntary burst of impatience, as Mr. Crawford approached and lifted his hat to him, whilst Agnes retired into the house.

"I am afraid you are not well, Mr. Crawford."

"Not very well, sir; my health has been breaking for some time."

"I am sorry to hear that, Mr. Crawford. I hope you have good medical advice."

"Why, sir, doctors cost a good deal of money, and I feel no certainty whatever that they will do me any good."

"It is right to try, however; and I really see no reason for despairing. The famous Dr. Hipsley is coming down to Ravenscliffe for a couple of days next week, you must let me bring him over to see you!"

"I am sure, sir, you are very good."

When Dr. Hipsley came, he had little to say that was encouraging to Mr. Crawford; but whilst the physician was shut up with the father in his bedroom, Agnes could do no less than invite Lionel into the parlour.

"Well, Agnes, did you look for that passage in Shakspeare?"

"Yes, sir," said Agnes, whilst a faint blush suffused her cheek; but her pride and integrity forbade her to deny that she had done so.

"And what do you think of the answer?" asked he significantly.

"I think Macbeth must have had a black heart to speak so falsely."

"That's true, Agnes; a man who professes a devotion he does not feel is a scoundrel. But all men are not Macbeths."

"It is to be hoped not, sir."

"I hope you have not a bad opinion of men, Agnes."

"I have no particular opinion, sir; I have known very few."

"And amongst those few, Agnes, have you found none to interest you?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Indeed! And pray, may I inquire the name of this fortunate person?"

"I am interested in my poor father, sir, of course."

"Oh, certainly. And is he the only one, Agnes?"

"I am very much interested in our poor hind Gibby; he's a faithful good creature as ever lived."

"And are these really the only persons of my sex that have engaged your attention?"

"They are, sir."

"And have you never felt, Agnes, that a time would come that—that a dearer feeling might be awakened in your heart?"

"No, sir."

"What, Agnes!" continued the young man, urged to impatience by this cold self-possession, "what! is it possible that so much beauty can exist without a heart?"

"I think I hear my father calling, sir; please to excuse me;" but Lionel was sitting betwixt her and the door, and instead of allowing her to pass, he seized her by the hand. In an instant the pride of a queen was on her brow, and with all the haughtiness of a sovereign she said, "I beg, sir, you will let me pass."

"Never, Agnes, never, till you have heard me! I know that if I miss my opportunity now, you will not give me another!"

"Opportunity for what, sir? You can have nothing to say to me that you ought to say."

"Yes I have, Agnes; I love you!"

"I should be very sorry if I thought it was true, sir; but I am sure it is not. So I will thank you to let me go to my father."

"Your father is with Dr. Hipsley; and I am determined you shall hear me. I repeat, Agnes, I love you; look in my face, Agnes, whilst I tell you so."

"It would be neither for your credit nor mine, sir, that I should call my father to protect me; and yet I certainly shall if you will not let me pass."

"I will not let you pass till you give me some hope ; say that you will try to love me in return."

"I could never love anybody that had insulted me, sir," said Agnes, with a haughty and indignant curl of the lip.

"Insult you ! By Heavens ! there never was anything farther from my thoughts. Insult you ! Is it an insult to love you ? To fling myself at your feet and swear I adore you ?" But there was no relenting on the part of Agnes ; pale and cold, she stood like a beautiful statue. "Am I so hateful to you, Agnes ?—or is the name of Grosvenor so contemptible, that you would scorn to bear it ?" A sudden flush here suffused the before marble checks, but she shook her head ; and with an incredulous and still scornful expression of the lip, repeated her request that he would let her pass.

"Agnes, I will not let you pass till you answer me ! Can you love me ?—will you be my wife ?"

"You know, sir, as well as I, that the second can never be, and, therefore, it would be quite useless to answer the first."

"Indeed, Agnes I know no such thing ! Do you suppose I am always to be in leading-strings—never my own master ? You are very much mistaken, I assure you. I am not a man to be led by the nose. I'll marry the woman I like, depend upon it—that is, Agnes, if the woman I like will have me. Speak, Agnes, speak, I entreat ! I hear them coming down-stairs—say, will you love me ?"

"It is impossible !" and, as she uttered these words, the door opened to admit Dr. Hipsley and her father. It was all over, therefore, for that day ; and Lionel walked away with the physician, with his head in a whirl that quite disabled him from comprehending a statement of Mr. Crawford's case, which that learned gentlemen favoured him with.

Making an offer of his hand to Agnes, was a thing that had never entered his head when he commenced the above conversation ; and had she conducted herself differently, it would not have happened ; but without any expectation whatever of such a result, nor the most remote design of compassing what she would have thought an impossibility, Agnes had played a winning game. The pride, the purity, the dignity, the self-possession, wrought on his imagination and his passions, whilst the difficulty acted as a challenge to his pride and a spur to his inclinations. He was in it over head and ears before he knew what he was about ; and now that the immediate excitement was over, he felt in a state of amazement and confusion that rendered it difficult to arrange his thoughts. He was depressed too, as people are who feel they have said or done a rash or

foolish thing, and he wished he had not committed himself so far.

This state of feeling continued for some hours—indeed, till he had ate his dinner; then the elevation consequent on a few glasses of champagne and claret mellowed his view of the case; Agnes was a bewitching creature, whom he did not feel at all disposed to relinquish the thoughts of; and as for the proposal it would pass for a jest, and bound him to nothing. These reflections made his mind easy, and he went to bed and slept very comfortably upon them. On the following day an engagement took him in quite another direction, and he thought less of Agnes than he had lately been in the habit of doing; and then he allowed two days more to pass without going to the farm, although his curiosity began to be stirred as to what she would do if he did go. On the fourth day, he provided himself with some flowers and strolled in that direction, without any definite plan, sparing himself the trouble of debating what he should say when he saw her, by leaving the issue to be decided by circumstances. Hitherto, Agnes, who seldom left home, and was generally in the garden or in the parlour (the window of which looked straight upon the garden gate), was the first person visible; but seeing nothing of her now, he tapped with his cane upon the open door; whereupon, a fat, chubby-faced girl, with her sleeves tucked up, as if she was washing, came from behind the house, saying:

“Did you please to want anything, sir?”

“I wish to see Miss Crawford—Agnes Crawford,” he added, as the idea struck him that she had a sister.

“Agnes is out, sir,” said the girl. “She’s gone with father, to Ellerton, to fetch the doctor’s stuff.”

“Oh,” said Lionel, “it’s of no consequence;” and he walked away with his flowers in his hand. “That’s her sister, of course,” thought he; and then he figured to himself how he would like such a sister-in-law. “Devilish pleasant it would be, certainly!” and he felt it was fortunate that Agnes had been out, and thus rescued him from the danger of committing himself further. There was no harm done, and it was lucky he had pulled up in time.

This state of mind, with slight variations, continued for several days; and then there was a reaction, and he felt a rising desire to see Agnes again.

“D—n that sister of hers!” said he, one day, unconsciously giving utterance to his thoughts, as he was lying on the sofa after breakfast.

“Who is that you are anathematising so heartily?” inquired

Louisa, who had heard the first emphatic word of the sentence, but missed the rest.

"Oh, nobody. I say, Louey, by the bye, hasn't Agnes Crawford a sister?"

"Yes, she has; why do you ask?"

"I believe I saw her one day, when I was in that direction—a fat, chubby-faced, vulgar-looking girl?"

"Yes, such a contrast to Agnes!"

"It is a great pity!"

"What is a pity?"

"That she should be that sort of person; it is such a disadvantage to Agnes."

"I don't see that at all. She never puts herself in the way, and she idolizes Agnes."

"No. Does she though?"

"So much so, that she insists upon doing everything herself, and won't let Agnes soil her fingers."

"Come, that's not so bad."

"The truth is, I believe she is an excellent, worthy girl, as ever lived. When the mother was dying she committed Agnes to her care; and although she's only a year older, she's been more like a mother to her than a sister. By the bye, I want to speak to Agnes. Suppose we walk there before luncheon."

Lionel willingly consented. In his sister's company he was safe, and he had the interest of the visit without the peril. When they reached the farm they walked up to the window of the parlour, and looked in, but Agnes was not there; neither was her work-basket on the table, nor was there anything to denote that she inhabited the room. Immediately afterwards, however, they saw her descending the stairs. Louisa gave her her hand, as she always did, saying: "I haven't seen you this long time, Agnes; why don't you come up sometimes, as I told you to do, at dressing time?" Lionel held out his hand, too, but Agnes was turning to open the parlour-door, and took no notice of it. When they entered the room, they all three sat down. At Ravenscliffe she always stood till they bade her sit; but in her father's house, never.

"We have some new dresses to be made before we go to town, Agnes," said Louisa, "and Bennett wants you to help her."

"I shall be very happy, ma'am," said Agnes, colouring slightly.

"And we want you to do them at Ravenscliffe; you know you will sit in Bennett's room, and have nothing to do with Charpentier, whatever." During this speech Agnes's colour became a great deal deeper.

"I would rather work at home, ma'am, if you please," she answered, but in a tone indicating pretty plainly that she would not work anywhere else.

"Well, Agnes, I think you're wrong," said Louisa.

"I think she is quite right," said Lionel; but Agnes's eyes had never turned towards him, and even this timely support did not purchase him a look.

"You know nothing about it, Lionel," said his sister, who, having entered into some details regarding the work to be done, and promised that Bennett should despatch a basket-full on the following day, rose to depart. As Lionel was now determined to shake hands with her, he held out his so immediately under his sister's eye that Agnes could not refuse to give him hers; but it was done with so much reserve and coldness, that Louisa remarked it.

"I don't think Agnes likes your going there," said she; "though I cannot see what objection she can have when I am with you; but she is a very strange girl, and I am beginning to think Frances was not so far wrong when she said that her acquaintance with us has been a great misfortune to her."

Lionel did not enlighten his sister with respect to the cause of Agnes's coldness, nor did he see her again before his departure for Oxford, which shortly ensued; but whilst there, he thought more of her than he had ever done before. Since that last interview she had taken a stronger hold of his heart, or of his fancy. He composed several copies of verses in honour of her beauty; some of which he inclosed to her by post without any signature. He walked for hours along the banks of the Isis, with his hands in his pockets, thinking of her vaguely; and although he formed no definite scheme for making her his own wife, he was quite clear in his objection to her being anybody else's.

CHAPTER VII.

THE little incidents I have related will serve to give some idea of Agnes's character, and of how accidental circumstances seconding nature she grew up to be what she was. Not unamiable, she had a calm and self-contented temper and manner. Not wanting in affection to those about or belonging to her, she was dutiful and attentive to her father and fond of her sister; and though it is true that she allowed Martha to be the drudge of the house, whilst she, as Louisa said, never soiled her fingers, which might be construed against her, yet it is to be considered that the two girls had always been brought up upon that footing by the mother, and that Martha not only insisted on the arrangement continuing, but would not have been happy under any other. Martha liked work as much as Agnes liked to be a lady, and had a double pleasure in it—a moral and a physical one. By nature active, industrious, and locomotive, she delighted in bustling about, rubbing, scrubbing, sweeping, and washing; these occupations did her good, and kept her well and lively; and the sauce that heightened the pleasure was the thought that she was preserving Agnes free from the contaminations of labour, and doing all she could to make a fine lady of her, as her mother had done before her; feelings which may be thought to do more credit to poor Martha's heart than her head; but the fact was, that having imbibed Mrs. Crawford's intense appreciation of Agnes's beauty and perfections, she believed firmly that her sister was destined to rise into another sphere of life; a persuasion which the intimacy and familiarity of the young people at Ravenscliffe tended to encourage and confirm. In short, Agnes was the pet and the spoilt child of everybody about her; and it was somewhat to her credit, since no pains whatever had been bestowed in educating or training her, that no worse faults were developed than those we have indicated. She knew she was handsome, as all handsome women do; but she was not vain, and she was fond of being becomingly dressed, as all women should be, handsome or ugly; but she had the good taste to feel that any abortive attempts at finery or ornament are the worst of disfigurements, and that a well-chosen cotton gown, at sixpence a yard, if it be neatly made and nicely fitted, is in reality (though it may not be

equally consistent with all fortunes and conditions to wear it) quite as becoming as a silk at six shillings. It is the colour, make, and putting on of a dress that constitute its becomingness; the material has little to do with the question, except in the case of three skirts of white tarlatane worn over white silk, for which I confess to a weakness.

Proud people are seldom vain, and it was pride that was Agnes's besetting sin. Had she been born in a higher sphere it is not clear that she would have had more than became her, for she was certainly above that vulgar pride which is exhibited to inferiors; but partly from nature and partly from her early associations, she had tastes and feelings that were inconsistent with her situation, and which inspired her with an unhealthy sensitiveness in regard to it.

Until all the virtue in the world is analyzed, it remains difficult to say how much of it is pride and how much purity; how much frigidity and how much fear; in the mean time, as we cannot penetrate these deep arcana of human nature, we can only pronounce upon conduct; and it is certain that Agnes's was unexceptionable—she encouraged no suitors or danglers, high or low.

Many a young tradesman who saw her at church, or on her rare visits to Ellerton with her father, sought in vain to gain her attention; but she had neither eyes nor ears for them. With her feelings, however, there was little power of resistance needed here; but not to mention Lionel, there were not a few youths of high degree who had, at one time or another, caught sight of her, whom it required but a glance to bring to her feet; but they never got it. She was too proud and too single-minded to lay schemes for entrapping them into marrying her, even had she thought success probable, which she was well aware it was not; and the only sentiment awakened by the semblance of a courtship from those quarters, was indignation. And there *was* merit here; because these curled darlings brought the most irresistible weapons into the field, namely, the habits, manners, and appearance of high birth and high breeding; but she felt that any manifestations of admiration could have but one meaning, and were consequently insults which her condition laid her open to; and instead of being flattered and seduced, she resented them accordingly. And this it was that enabled her to withstand the blandishments of Lionel Grosvenor.

That one of so proud a race would marry her, she considered impossible; and although, for one moment, her heart leapt with surprise and pleasure when he asked her to say she would be his wife, it *was* but for a moment;—she saw that he had

spoken under the influence of passion, and not from deliberate design; she saw that he repented, and she felt the drawing back a greater insult, as indeed it was, than if the advance had never been made. It was this resentment that enabled her to fulfil her part so well, in despite of her really liking Lionel better than any man she had seen; but there was no wavering nor weakness, no shadowy hope beguiling her; and when he returned to Ravenscliffe, he found the same silent, haughty, uncompromising rejection of his advances that had preceded his departure. His safety would have been to turn and fly, and never look behind him; but there are few men who do not fall before this sort of resistance, where the besieged starves the besieger, and cuts off his retreat; or at least, reduces him to such a state of weakness, that he has no longer strength to fly.

The more Agnes seemed determined to have nothing to say to Lionel, the more Lionel felt he could not live without Agnes; till at last the passion took such possession of his soul, that his whole thoughts were occupied with the struggle; and as, when a man's mind, and especially a *young* man's, is brimfull of a subject, it is difficult not to let it overflow upon somebody else, Lionel sought relief by imparting his troubles to his cousin Lewis Watson, who was also at Oxford, under pretence of preparing for the Church. It was not exactly a premeditated confidence either, but it happened one day when they had been dining together, *apropos* of Watson's saying that a poor fellow like himself, who had nothing but a curacy to expect, had no business to fall in love.

"On the contrary," said Lionel, "you have a better chance of marrying a girl you love than I have;—who'd interfere to prevent you?"

"Her father and mother would, of course; not to mention her brother, if she had one. I think we have seen enough of that in our family. Did not her relations set themselves as much against my mother's marriage, as if my father had been a pick-pocket, or kept a public-house?"

"Very true; but she did marry your father for all that!"

"Yes, she did; but she has paid pretty dear for her whistle, let me tell you."

"Her relations have never forgiven her, certainly."

"Oh, d—n their forgiveness! I should care very little for their forgiveness, if their resentment did not keep us all poor. Now, a fellow like you can marry who you like, or do anything you please;—rob a church, if you take a fancy to it; nobody can disinherit you."

"Disinherit me! No, certainly, they can't do that; but

then there are so many other cursed considerations," said Lionel.

"What considerations?" inquired Watson, who perceived that there was a secret, and had his own reasons for wishing to find it out.

"Why, birth, for example," answered Lionel, with affected carelessness.

"Humph!" said Watson, who wished to feel his way; "birth is certainly a consideration to some people; I should not, however, have thought you were one of them."

"Neither am I," answered Lionel. "It's not so much my own prejudice as other people's I am thinking of."

"So, so," thought Watson. "Some pretty governess, no doubt. Prejudices do exist on that head, it's not to be denied," he continued aloud; "but of course it depends on circumstances or the amount of temptation, how far it may be wise to throw them over."

"Temptation enough," said Lionel, with an expressive nod of the head.

"Besides," hinted Watson, "marriage in these cases is not always necessary."

"You don't know who you are talking of," said the other, impatiently.

"Not knowing the particulars, of course it is impossible to give an opinion," said Watson, rising and taking up his cap. "I think I shall go and have a ride. Perhaps I shall meet you at Fitzgibbon's to-morrow," and he moved towards the door.

"What makes you in such a devilish hurry?" said Lionel. "Can't you sit still for half an hour?"

"Well, I suppose I could, if you make a point of it," returned the other, laughing; "but I began to see I was treading on dangerous ground; and as I never ask questions, or press myself into anybody's confidence, I thought it was time to cut."

"Pooh! pooh!" returned the other; "sit down and let's have a chat," and Watson did sit down; and then by degrees, without apparently seeking it, he obtained possession of the whole story; but being appealed to for advice, he declined giving any.

"It was too great a responsibility," he said, "to advise any man on such a subject, especially a man younger than himself; what he himself should do under similar circumstances it was difficult to say until those circumstances arose; at the same time he felt a deep interest in the case, and since Lionel had placed so much confidence in him, a confidence that should never be abused, he could not help saying that he should feel

anxious to know the sequel. This was very safe and very sympathetic; and Lionel having thus opened the sluices, the stream of his confidence flowed on thenceforth without obstruction into this ready receptacle. He was a pleasant confidant, this Lewis Watson. He listened with so much patience and sympathy; viewed the thing on this side, viewed it on t'other; and abstained from bothering one with advice. Lionel grew more and more intimate with him, and it was a benediction to see the interest this poor young man, who had the reputation of reading hard, was feeling in the boyish loves of his rich cousin. This intimacy, however, was carefully concealed from everybody at Ravenscliffe, where the name of Watson was *tabooed* by the seniors of the family.

When Sir Francis presented Mr. Watson, the father, with a living, because he did not choose that his niece should descend from the rank of a gentlewoman, he, as he himself declared, "washed his hands of them;" and never had she or any of her family been permitted to approach the patrimonial domain, nor had any written communications passed, except that one untimely letter which had been put under a cover, and insultingly returned to the writer, without a word of answer or comment.



CHAPTER VIII.

IN the meantime, whilst the heir of Ravenscliffe was sojourning in this "Debateable Land," Ravenscliffe itself was a perfect nest of lovers. Henry Langham, the eldest son of a baronet with a good estate, was the accepted lover of Louisa Grosvenor, and William Damer, a gentleman of good family and fortune, with a very remote chance of an earldom, stood in the same relation with Frances; both arrangements being in perfect accordance with the wishes of the father, who was consequently in high good-humour. Not that he had any sympathy with the love-making; but he wished to see his daughters satisfactorily married before his own death, lest after it they should be tempted to make some alliance less consistent with the dignity of his race. He was already an old man, had been twice married, and had suffered much in his mind on the subject of posterity. By his first wife he had no children. and after several years of ill-

health she died; and when he married again, two daughters were born to him before he had a son. Meanwhile, his brother, Colonel Grosvenor, on whom the estate and title devolved if the elder died without a male heir, had also married; but neither had he a son. The sole fruit of the union was that daughter, who added to the family vexation by marrying a penniless curate of no family, whom all her relations detested. Thus, had Lionel not come into the world in the timely manner he did, this planet would have been afflicted with the entire extinction of the *Grosvenors*.

With Sir Francis's brother, the title would have died out, and the whole of the property, except certain sums set apart for the daughters, would, according to the wording of the last Baronet's will, have fallen to Lewis Watson; the testator seeming never to have contemplated the possibility of neither of his sons having a male heir (especially as he left three, the youngest of whom, however, did not long survive himself), male heirs being desiderata that had not been wanting in the family for several hundred years. There had been a narrow escape this time, however, and Sir Francis treasured his son accordingly. At the period which we have now reached, Mr. Watson, the father, was dead; his son, who was some years older than Lionel, was reading for orders at college; and Colonel Grosvenor, the grandfather of Lewis, was alive, and apparently in good bodily health.

The time appointed for the marriage of the two elder daughters, Louisa and Frances, was now fast approaching; and the young ladies were so much occupied with their own love affairs, that they had well-nigh forgotten Agnes, when their attention was recalled to her by the death of her father. What she was to do now they could not see, unless she would consent to enter their service as waiting-maid; but on the proposition being made, she announced her intention of endeavouring with her sister, to establish herself as a dressmaker at Ellerton. So, after a friendly leave-taking, and warm promises of support in her undertaking, they parted; she to prepare for her new enterprise, and the young ladies to proceed to London with their parents.

How people are married at St. George's Church by the Bishop of ———, and how, after a splendid *déjeûner*, the happy couple start in a carriage and four for Dover, on their way to the continent, &c., may be read any day in the *Morning Post*, and I will therefore not pause to describe. Of course, Lionel was present on the occasion; and the brother and sisters parted

with a half promise, that he would join them shortly in Paris, or wherever they might be.

“And what are you going to do now, Lionel?” said Louisa.

“I am going to take a run down to Ravenscliffe for a little hunting. I don't feel at all well, and I think the exercise will do me good.”

And this project he fulfilled; having, two days before his departure, dispatched by post the following epistle, addressed to “Miss Agnes Crawford, at the Holmes, Ellerton, Devonshire:”—

“Do not, Agnes, I conjure you, when you look at the signature that terminates this letter, fling the offending paper away from you. Read it—read it calmly, Agnes. Give me a fair hearing. Do not let your pride or your resentment, or both united, make you guilty of injustice. Even the worst criminals are not condemned unheard; and remember, Agnes, though firmness in a good cause is highly commendable, we not unfrequently indulge our pride and prejudice under the disguise of that virtue.

“You see I do not flatter you, and you should be the more disposed to credit what I am going to say. I know you are offended with me, and—you see how candid I am—I admit that I gave you cause. I will own, what very few men will avow, I was a coward, Agnes; as much a coward as a man that, against the will of his better self, is carried by his terrors from the battle-field; knowing that nothing but a degree of wretchedness, to which death is millions of times preferable, can result from his weakness. But, Agnes, judge me indulgently; at least, judge me fairly. Educated in prejudice, and surrounded by it, I could not at once, alone and unassisted, throw off its trammels: *unassisted*, I say emphatically; for she, who should have held out her hand to aid me, refused to cheer me on, even by a word or a look.

“Agnes Crawford, I have long loved you. Why should I write these words? You know I have, and you have coldly witnessed my pangs and my struggles—struggles that I do not deny. Had I stood alone in the world, it would have been different; there would have been no hesitation then; I should have flung myself at your feet, crying, ‘Agnes, will you be mine?’ and never have risen from the earth till you answered in the affirmative. I almost did this once: you remember the day when I brought Dr. Hipsley to see your poor father, who is now dead. But how did you meet my ardour? How did you requite my affection? Was it not with a cold and haughty

disdain?—perhaps even with suspicion? You chilled me, Agnes; you flung back my proffered heart, and then I said, ‘Why should I make sacrifices for this heartless beauty? Let me rather cling to those family ties, which are a man’s last resource when the cold world has chilled and disappointed him. I will forget her; I will seek elsewhere a home for my heart, and learn to be happy without her.’

“It is now nearly three years since the day that I walked beside Dr. Hipsley from the Holmes to Ravenscliffe, with these thoughts and feelings seething my heart and brain; and I tried—for I will not deceive you, Agnes—I tried to execute my resolution; I tried to forget you and to love elsewhere, and many a fair girl I have led to the dance with a determination to see in her the charms of Agnes Crawford. But have I succeeded? Alas! no, no, no! I love *you*, and only *you*. I see no beauty but in your eyes, hear no music but in your voice. You are my loadstar—the light that lights the world to me—whereby I see all things glorious and beautiful, and without which darkness, despair, and death, must ensnare my footsteps!

“If I believed that the coldness with which you have received my advances proceeded from aversion, I should have forborne to make an appeal that must have proved vain; but—it may be that my hopes deceive me—I think it is rather in resentment, wounded pride, and a doubt of my intentions, than dislike to your old friend and playfellow, that I must seek the key to your reserve. If I am right, away with them, Agnes; away with doubt, away with reserve! Trust me—rely on the heart that is yours, and can never be another’s.

“In two days, I shall be at Ravenscliffe. I have a packet from Louisa to deliver to you with my own hands; I conclude you will not refuse to receive it; and I shall walk over to the Holmes, where I hear you still are, immediately after breakfast. Till then, farewell; and believe I am, and ever shall be,

“Your own, “LIONEL GROSVENOR.”

Perhaps there was nothing very satisfactory or explicit in this letter, and it is not impossible that a person more experienced in the ways of the world, and in poor human nature, than Agnes was, might have found some reason to suspect that Lionel was not perfect in the heroic mood that he assumed; that there was still some wavering and struggling with prejudice, and that, like the poor cat in the adage, he was letting “I dare not wait upon I would.” But this was a depth of insight beyond her. She was exceedingly surprised—could scarcely, indeed, believe her eyes—reading the letter again and again, to make sure that her

senses were not deceiving her; but having assured herself that the words were there, she saw but one interpretation to put upon them—the obvious one, as it appeared to her—that Lionel Grosvenor was coming down into the country with the intention of offering her his hand; and as Martha, her only confidante, saw everything in the letter that Agnes saw, little remained to discuss but her own feelings, and how the proposal should be received.”

“I always expected something of the sort,” said Martha; “and I do not see anything to be so much surprised at. What should have brought him here so often, if he had not come after you?”

“I never doubted that either,” said Agnes, “but I could not believe that he was sincere; that is, that he meant honourably by me; and perhaps he did not always.”

“I don’t think it is fair to say that of him,” answered Martha. “You could not expect him to speak out all at once, especially when you were so cold and distant to him, that he might suppose you did not like him.”

“He knew why I was distant,” said Agnes. “His letter shows that.”

“Well, Agnes, I think by-gones should be by-gones now that he *has* spoke out so handsome. I wonder what Sir Francis and her ladyship will say! Perhaps Miss Louisa will write about it in the *pareel*!”

Agnes sat looking thoughtfully into the fire, remembering what the young ladies had told her regarding their aunt’s marriage and the enduring resentment of the family, till she was roused by observing that Martha was weeping. “What’s the matter, dear?” she said.

“It’s very selfish,” answered Martha; “but though I’m very glad—very glad, indeed—I’m thinking I shall never see you. It would never do for me, you know, to be coming up to the castle.”

Agnes saw the difficulty very well. She knew by experience how insolent the servants in great houses can be; and she knew that Martha, excellent as she was in her way, could never be polished into a lady. She anticipated the sneers of the *vale-taille* and the raised eyebrows of the haughty aristocrats; and yet her pride as well as her affection revolted at the alternative. She saw clearly, that although this proposal of Lionel’s fulfilled in many respects her dearest wishes, that still there was many a sting in reserve for her; and she saw these the more clearly, that her sight was not obscured by passion, for she was not what is called *in love* with him. To say that it was not within the

compass of her character to fall in love would be rash ; she had never been fairly tried.

It is true that many a girl with less pride and more passion would have been enamoured of Lionel, to whom he had given half the motive and the cue for passion he had given her ; but hers was not an emotional nature easily moved to love. Doubtless, the man existed somewhere on the earth, who, had he *come*, would have *seen* and *conquered* ; but in the lottery of life the great proportion of women are never vanquished, for they never meet their victor.

How few women have ever been in love ! How few even marry from election ! They marry because they are asked, and because the marriage is suitable. It is their vocation to be married ; parents approve, and they have no other attachment. Any observant person living in society, where there is a continual marrying and giving in marriage, must be struck with this fact. Cupid's quiver must be exhausted, or his arrows blunt—he pierces few hearts now. I incline to think that a girl really in love—one who bore the evident symptoms of the malady—would be thought very improper ; yet I have often fancied that there must be a man born into the world for every woman ; one whom to see would be to love, to reverence, to adore ; one with whom her sympathies would so entirely blend, that she would recognize him at once as her true lord. Now and then these pairs come together, and woe to her who meets this other self too late !

Women would be more humble and more merciful, if they did not, through ignorance and thoughtlessness, measure the temptations of others by their own experiences.

With regard to the young couple who have given rise to these reflections, Agnes had been fond of Lionel as a child ; and the most we can say of her is, that she liked him better than anybody in the world, and quite as well as half the women in like like the men they marry ; and she was so little capable of disguise or subserviency, that had she disliked him, in spite of all the apparent advantages of the match, she would assuredly have declined it. As it was, although, from his past hesitation, her pride was not unscathed ; and although, during her sojourn at the castle, she had seen too much of high life, both below stairs and above, not to have considerable misgivings with respect to her future position, it did not occur to her for a moment to refuse him. To Martha this proposal of Lionel's seemed to promise everything that was desirable for her sister ; whilst to Agnes, more experienced and less sanguine, it appeared, at all events, the best thing that could happen to her.

CHAPTER IX.

LIONEL arrived at Ravenscliffe, and at the appointed time paid his visit at the Holmes; and it was about three weeks after that visit, that the marriage, described in the first chapter, took place. Perhaps his mind was not very clearly made up on the subject, when he started on his journey, nor even when he was walking across the fields to the farm.

It occasionally glanced through his mind that Agnes had now no father, no home, no means of support. The girls had hitherto been living as before Daniel Crawford's death; but the farm was already let, the new tenant was coming to take possession, and they must seek shelter elsewhere. It now and then occurred to him that he had said too much in his letter—gone too far—implied more than was necessary; however, it was but implication—there was nothing direct or binding. He should see, and would be guided by circumstances, and by what he should observe in Agnes; and the result has been related.

Agnes had put the plain interpretation on his letter, received him with calm dignity; avowing to him at once that she *had* doubted his intentions, and that, until those doubts had been removed, she would never have relaxed in her reserve. Farmer's daughter as she was, and well born as he was, she awed him by the force of her will, and the singleness of her purpose. There was no double meaning, no wavering or uncertainty, no *arrière pensée*. Her thought and her feeling were perhaps not very exalted, not at all romantic, nor indeed mingled with much sentiment; but it was clear, steady, entire, and avowed without reserve; whereas Lionel was hampered and trammelled by the want of a firm resolution and perfect sincerity. He was too much *épris* with Agnes to endure the thought of losing her, but he saw the inconveniences of the marriage too clearly to proceed in it without painful misgivings; nevertheless, there was nothing else for it now, but to go forward in that direction, or break off altogether. His passion would not allow him to do the latter, so he must needs proceed in the affair, as she understood it.

Sometimes he was willing enough too, especially when he was with her; but at other times his resolution wavered. No doubt

the sacrifice was considerable, especially the sacrifice of a prejudice so long established and universal.

The fact was, that Agnes was very much his superior in all things but birth, education, and fortune. Nature had been more liberal to her than to him, in every respect: not only was she the handsomer of the two, but, in spite of her faults, she had a much more solid character—more firmness and straightforwardness; and if she had not a better understanding than he had, the above-named qualities gave her the full advantage of all she possessed. And Lionel was not insensible to the influence of this superiority; he felt certain, that with a very little practice, she would discharge her duties as his wife, and play her part in the world extremely well; and he therefore resolved to take a lodging for her in London, and give her the education she needed, being sure that if he could produce her in society, her beauty would justify his choice; but how to overcome the prejudices of his family—of Sir Francis and his mother, especially—he could not imagine. But when he reached this passage in his reflections, they became so disagreeable that he generally turned his thoughts into some pleasanter channel.

At other times, he took a more favourable view of the case, deciding that there was no necessity whatever for telling his father anything about the matter. He could manage very well to conceal the whole affair till the old gentleman's death. Agnes would not require to live at a great expense, and if anybody became aware that a connection subsisted between them, it would never be supposed to be of the nature it really was. Nobody would suspect she was his wife, whilst her mind and feelings would be appeased by knowing that she was so; and hereafter he could avow her, and so forth. Such reflections did not bespeak a very high tone of morality certainly, neither did they argue the existence of a very exalted sentiment for Agnes; *mais il était fait comme ça*; and we must not expect fine pearls from mussels.

However important secrecy was, it soon appeared that the marriage could not be satisfactorily carried through without taking several persons into their confidence. Martha, of course, was one; and John Gibson, who was the only inmate of the family, and though a servant, as much attached to them as if he were their brother, could scarcely be left out; Agnes indeed insisting that both he and her sister should be present at her wedding; but they were both so sure and safe that there was nothing to be feared from that quarter. The necessity for a private marriage, and subsequent concealment, was much less a subject of surprise to Agnes than to Martha; the former having

always anticipated a difficulty which the other, in her ignorance and innocence, had not foreseen. But there was another person inevitably associated with the secret, and that was the clergyman that was to marry them.

Lionel had first thought of applying to Mr. Marsden, whom he fancied he might win over, by the promise of future preferment; but he did not feel very sure whether the curate, preferring a present certainty to a future contingency, might not choose to win favour with Sir Francis, by betraying his secret, and marring his project.

There was another person who would answer his turn, provided he were willing to do it; and that was a younger brother of Lewis Watson's, named Gerald, who had also been at Oxford with him, and had just taken orders. He was a person Lionel had never liked, and with whom he had associated very little; but he knew him to be much under the influence of his elder brother, Lewis, who was already in possession of the important secret—at least, up to a certain point—and whom he did not think capable of betraying him; on the contrary, Lewis had earnestly cautioned him to be on his guard, lest his father should discover his attachment to Agnes; particularly advising him, when the old man pressed him to lose no time in selecting a wife—which he often did—not to refuse, but to temporise.

"Appear always willing, but fastidious," said he. "That is the way to gain time, and preserve your liberty; and, by and by, when the governor drops off, you can do as you like."

Watson had not believed that Lionel possessed sufficient independence of spirit, or sufficient love for Agnes, to brave all the inconveniences of marrying her during his father's lifetime, and he was taken quite by surprise when his cousin broached the subject to him; but, as usual, he ventured no direct opinion, only he bade Lionel consider well before he bound himself irrevocably to a woman whom he might not continue to love.

"Why," said Lionel, "I have certainly a better chance of loving Agnes, who is the only woman I ever had a fancy for, than Lady Julia Darnley, or Elizabeth Bellingham; one or the other of whom, I suppose, I shall be obliged to marry at last, if I do not marry Agnes."

"But why not wait? Temporise, temporise. Do nothing rashly," said Watson.

"That advice was very good before," answered Lionel, "but it will unfortunately not do now. Old Crawford, her father, is dead; and as Agnes has nobody belonging to her but one sister, the two girls must leave the farm, and do something to support themselves; for she will accept no assistance from me,

nor anybody else. Now, this won't do; I can't let her go out into the world in some menial capacity, unless I were to give her up altogether."

"And that you cannot do, I suppose?" said Watson, smiling.

"I am afraid not," answered Lionel, shaking his head.

"Well, if you are resolved to marry her, let me know," said the other, "and I'll come to your wedding."

"I do not know who to ask to marry us," said Lionel. "I was thinking of asking the curate of our parish, Marsden, to do it; but I am not sure that he's safe."

"He'll keep the secret for his own sake," suggested Watson.

"No doubt, if I could get him to perform the ceremony; but if, on the other hand, he refuses, I suspect he'd make a merit of the refusal, and tell my father."

"Nothing more likely, I think," returned Lewis. "'A bird in the hand's worth two in the bush' any day, you know."

"Do you think your brother Gerald would do it?" asked Lionel. "Could he be trusted?"

"Why, I think I could ensure his silence," answered Watson, "but whether his compliance, I cannot say; but should you determine on the step, I'll put the question to him, if you like."

"You see," said Lewis to his brother, when he broached the subject to him, "it would not be a bad game, after all. He has little character, and will be easily pushed into a marriage with some girl of rank and fortune by his father, who, the older he is, will be the more eager about it. Then we're done, you know."

"You're done whilst he lives, married or single," said Gerald; "and he's as young as you. Why should you reckon on his death?"

"I don't reckon on it, but it's on the cards, you know. He's devilish fond of boating and horses, and he had one or two pretty squeaks for it whilst he was at Oxford. You see, if he marries this girl he'll be tired of her in a month, and will be ready to marry anybody else his father recommends."

"But he can't do it."

"Oh no, of course he can't do it," said Lewis; "however, that is a matter we have nothing to do with. The question is—are you disposed to make friends with him by performing the ceremony? If the old fellow dies, he'll give you a living in acknowledgment of the service, I've no doubt."

"I think Sir Francis himself may perhaps give me a living," said Gerald; "but if he finds out that I have privately married his son to a milkmaid, he certainly never will."

"But you see it is everybody's interest, as well as yours, to keep that secret as long as the old man lives; and therefore it won't prevent his giving you preferment if anything falls in. Meantime, he's old; we don't know how soon Lionel may step into his shoes, and then you've nobody to look to but him."

"If I consent," said Gerald, "it must be on condition of the most absolute secrecy."

"Of course, that is understood."

"I must not be seen by anybody except the girl herself."

"I'll tell Lionel so, but there is no fear of a wedding party, you may be sure."

"And, moreover, I shall make it a condition that she shall not know who I am. I am a clergyman—that is enough for her."

"I think you are right," said Lewis. "Then I'll tell Lionel that on these conditions you agree."

"Yes, on these conditions I'll marry them, since you say it's to take place in their own chapel."

In consequence of this arrangement, Lionel invited the two young men to visit Ravenscliffe for a few days during the absence of the family in London; and Lewis, who had a good deal of curiosity to see a place which his sanguine and scheming temper led him to hope would one day be his own, gladly accepted the invitation; whilst Gerald, more cold and cautious, and with less interest in an inheritance from which he felt himself so remote, declined it, departing immediately after the ceremony was performed, leaving no traces of his exploit behind him except indeed the certificate, on the propriety of which Lionel, and even Lewis, had insisted, but which Gerald had very unwillingly signed.

As Lionel's apartments, consisting of a bed and breakfast chamber, a dressing-closet, and a small ante-room, which he called his armoury, were situated in a tower which had an entrance of its own, whercin nobody else slept but his trusty valet, Leighton, his nightly absences were unknown to anybody but this official, who, whatever he might see, was far too well trained to open his lips about his master's affairs; and as two women and a deaf old gardener were the only servants remaining in the castle, except his own groom, Mr. Grosvenor considered his movements secure from observation, and his secret, which everybody who knew it had a strong motive for concealing, as safe as any mortal secret could well be.

And so perhaps it was; and, for the moment, flinging care behind him, and leaving the future to take care of itself,

the young husband threw himself into the present, and was as romantic and happy as it became him to be under the circumstances.



CHAPTER X.

ONE week had passed in sweet endearment; the little restraints and difficulties of meeting that beset the young couple, rendering more precious the hours they spent together at the farm. Agnes felt happy and proud, and Lionel loved her as his wife better than he had done before she became so. Content to wait, and anxious for concealment, she did not dislike the obscurity in which she was destined to pass the early years of her marriage; she was conscious of her deficiencies, in regard to manners and accomplishments, aware that she had much to do before she could rise to the level of her new rank in these particulars, and she was glad of the retirement and leisure that awaited her in London, where no mortal would know who she was. She resolved to work hard at those studies which she had seen formed the occupation and ornament of her husband's sisters; music, drawing, languages, &c.; any higher sort of cultivation she knew nothing of, none such being in vogue at Ravenscliffe.

Almost the only trouble she had regarding the future, was the prospect of a separation from her sister. Glad she would have been to take her to London with her, and there, whilst unobserved in that large city, have prepared her too for another sphere of life; but she saw that Lionel could not share her feelings there. He had no interest in Martha, was little capable of estimating her valuable qualities, and only felt shocked and pained by the plebeianism of her manners and appearance.

Allowing her to be the companion of Agnes, and an inmate of the *recherché* little establishment he had projected in Park Lane, was not to be thought of. It was a harsh sentence, but there was no alternative; the sisters must separate. Martha, in her honest humility, saw the inconvenience of their remaining together; and she persuaded Agnes to submit with a good grace to what was inevitable. She said, that even if Lionel had not objected to the experiment Agnes desired, she herself was certain that it would have failed; she never could

be polished into a lady ; besides which, an idle life would not suit her, neither could she submit to live upon other people ; she must work for her living. There was a prospect that the new tenants who were coming to the farm, would keep her to manage the dairy, and the bakehouse, and the poultry-yard, in all of which departments she was a first-rate hand ; if this hope failed, she must look for something else ; she knew she could earn her bread well.

In spite of all this sound sense and cheering consolation, Martha felt the parting much more deeply than Agnes did, and it was natural that it should be so ; for though but eighteen months older, yet from the manner in which they had been brought up, besides a fanatical admiration of her beauty, Martha had a sort of maternal tenderness for Agnes, mingled with her sisterly affection.

Agnes was heartily sorry too, but she also felt that if Martha was past polishing, it would be impossible to make her the companion of Lionel, or thereafter produce her to the world. She knew in her secret heart, how ashamed she herself would be of her, for she had had many a pang on that score ere now, and she believed it was better as it had been arranged. Still they formed projects for occasional meetings ; and Lionel, not to be too hard in the first quarter of his honeymoon, countenanced their schemes.

Poor John Gibson too was, as he said of himself, "sadly down in the mouth." An orphan child from the workhouse, he had come to Mr. Crawford, when he was scarcely big enough to lift the little misses, as he called them, who were then mere infants. Having been half starved, and harshly treated in his infancy, he thought himself in Paradise when he got to the Holmes, where he was well used, and had as much homely food as he needed ; and as he had a good large sound heart in his bosom, and a considerable fund of affection in his nature, which he had never been able to place at any interest, he soon settled it all on these two girls ; and although Agnes was the queen of his affections, he was very fond of Martha too. The breaking up of the little establishment, in consequence of the death of the father, was a sad blow to Gibby's feelings, and Agnes's marriage, which must terminate for ever the familiar intercourse which early habit had begun, and esteem maintained, completed the calamity. But it was vain to wrestle against fate, and John finding that separation was inevitable, procured himself a situation as boots at a small inn called "The Horse and Hound," lately established on the London Road, by a man with whom he had some acquaintance.

As the day appointed for the arrival of the new tenant at the farm now drew nigh, it was arranged that Agnes should proceed to London by the night coach in order to avoid observation, and that, John Gibson should start at the same time and escort her so far on her journey, the place he was destined to, lying on the way. On the morning of that day, Lionel having directed her how to proceed on her arrival in London, bade her farewell, promising to see her in Park Lane in a week or less. He was engaged to spend a few days with Sir Abraham Towers, and was to leave Ravenscliffe that morning; his visitor, Lewis Watson, having departed on the preceding one. Not without anxiety, certainly, but with more hope than fear, Agnes now set herself to prepare for her journey, whilst Martha was busy making ready for the new tenants. It was as much her pride and her pleasure as it was her interest, to have everything clean and neat for them, and the occupation these necessary operations furnished, kept her from thinking too much of the impending separation. Still it lay at her heart, and every now and then, in the midst of her scrubblings and her rubbings, she was obliged to take up the corner of her apron to wipe her eyes. Gibby, in the mean time, was gone to the castle, by the desire of Lionel, who had forgotten to provide Agnes with money for her journey, the little that the farm, stock, and utensils brought being, of course, appropriated to Martha—it was but little, for they had run very low, and were in bad condition, Daniel Crawford's poverty not being able to afford the necessary refittings and repairs.

When John returned, he brought a note, but no money; the note being to the effect, that on reaching the castle, Lionel had found a message from Sir Abraham Towers, requesting him to defer his visit till the following day; Sir A. being unexpectedly called from home, and fearing he should not be back that night.

"This being the case," continued Lionel, "you must come over to me this evening, since your new people will prevent my going to you as usual. Do not be alarmed! I will meet you at the little back door, and nobody shall see you, depend on it. Be there at seven o'clock; it will be dark then; and no one will come to my apartments as I shall say I am going to bed early. I will give you the money this evening. Yours affectionately,

L. G.

"P.S. You had better let John Gibson be at the corner of the road, when the coach passes, with your luggage, as you can stay with me till then; and it is better, on all accounts, than being taken up at Ellerton."

The plan was, of course, acceded to. Agnes had but one moderately-sized trunk, for the additions to her wardrobe, which her new condition demanded, were to be made in London; and Gibby's whole possessions being easily transported in a stout cotton handkerchief, there was no difficulty about the baggage. He engaged to be at the appointed spot a quarter of an hour before the coach would be up, recommending her to be early too, for that Bob, the new driver, kept his time sharp. Towards evening the strangers arrived to take possession. Agnes kept out of their way as much as possible, Martha bustling about and doing all the honours. Fortunately they brought no servant, and being tired with their day's exertions, they were glad to sit down in the parlour, where Martha had got a good fire, and served them with tea. Thus the girls had the kitchen to themselves, and Agnes, having done all she had to do, sat silently by the hearth, thinking of the past and the future, and watching Martha as she went to and fro with the loaf, and the kettle, and the cream-jug—a handmaiden in her father's house. Agnes thought of that, and a pang shot through her heart; but it was a view of the subject which gave Martha no pain—it never indeed occurred to her. All the mind she had to spare from what she was about, was with Agnes, from whom she was going to part.

John Gibson, the while, had plenty to do, putting up and feeding the new tenants' horse, and uncording and lifting in their luggage, a good deal of which they had brought in the cart which conveyed the heads of the family; the others were to arrive on the following day.

At length there came a pause in the business of providing for the cold and hungry travellers, and then Martha seated herself on the other side of the hearth, opposite her sister, and began looking into the fire with unconscious eyes, till presently a tear stole slowly down each cheek.

"I wonder if there'll be any Ellerton people in the coach," said she, breaking silence at last.

"I hope not, answered Agnes; "it would be very unpleasant, for they'll be sure to ask questions about where I'm going, and I shan't know what to say."

"What can you say?" inquired Martha.

"I'm sure I can't think," returned the other.

"Will there be anybody to meet you when you get to London?"

"Yes, there's to be somebody there in a coach, to take me to the lodging. How I wish you were going with me. I shall feel so awkward amongst strangers till Lionel comes."

"I wonder if you will see Sir Francis and my lady in London?"

"I hope not. Lionel says it's such a large place, there is no danger whatever."

"I shall be longing for a letter, to know about everything, and what sort of journey you had, and if you're comfortable. You'll get in to-morrow evening. Be sure you look after your box; they say the place is full of thieves. I read in a paper once about a girl having her box stole by a man that offered to carry it for her."

"Are the people in the parlour still?" asked Agnes, after a pause.

"Yes; I must go and see if they've done tea; perhaps they'll want more water."

"I should like to go up and take another look at poor father's room; I shall never see it again," said Agnes.

When she came down again John Gibson was in the kitchen.

"It's getting on to be time to go," he said, drawing out a huge silver watch; "it's nigh on for six. Can I fetch down the box now?"

Being informed that it was ready, he ascended the stairs and entered the best bed-chamber, which had been for the last week tenanted by Agnes and her husband, but he saw no box. The bed was made, and everything prepared for the new tenants; so he looked into another, in which, previous to the marriage, the two girls had slept together. The box was there, and beside it lay on the ground a small black and white spotted silk handkerchief, which he had seen Agnes wearing round her throat that morning, before she dressed herself for her journey. It appeared to be flung away as useless. John stooped down and picked it up, pressed it to his lips once, then again and again, almost convulsively; then he laid it respectfully down on a chair, half lifted the trunk, dropped it again, took up the handkerchief, folded it in a very awkward fashion, and hastily thrust it into his bosom. Then he raised the trunk again, but with considerably more alertness than before, and descended the stairs with a feeling of exultation, only dashed a little with an awkward consciousness of what he had done. He felt shy of looking Agnes in the face, and after hinting that it was time to go, and bidding farewell to Martha, he left the kitchen and stood at the door waiting till Agnes came out.

She had risen from her chair and was pinning her shawl and tying on her bonnet, and Martha stood beside her weeping now outright.

"My dear old pudding," sobbed Agnes, throwing her arms

around her sister's neck, and calling her by the familiar appellation that Martha's fat, round figure, had won for her in the family, "good-bye, dear; good-bye."

And so, betwixt tears and kisses and good-byes, they made their way, with their arms twined round each other, to the door where John was standing, whereupon he stepped out and walked forward. Then there was another embrace, several more good-byes, "Be sure you write," from Martha, and the sisters were parted.

The night was clear and dry, and Agnes walked on in silence, this separation sitting heavy on her heart; and John, both from his own feelings and respect for hers, no more inclined to talk than she was.

"I'm afraid that trunk's heavy for you, Gibby," said she, at length breaking silence.

"Na, na," said John, "it's not heavy for me; if it warn't for the way it's going it 'ud be light enough."

"I hope you will be comfortable in your new situation," she said, not wishing to pursue the strain he had touched.

"New's new, and old's old," said John; "and some likes one, and some likes t'other. It's just as a man is, you know."

"You'll be able to do better for yourself than you could here. I've heard of people saving money in that situation to go into business for themselves."

"There's plenty of money goin' for them as has the wit to get it, no doubt," said John. "I doubt much an it'll ever come my way. Howsoever, I'm not agoin' to grumble. I never wanted nothen, thank God; but I've been at the Holmes ever sin' I were ten years old, when you and your sister could scarce keep your legs, and it ain't to be supposed I'm very blithe to go."

"No, Gibby, one can't be blithe to leave the home of one's childhood, even though one's prospects are ever so bright. I wish with all my heart the new tenant would have hired you, that you might have stayed near Martha; it would have been pleasanter for both of you."

"I should have been glad to stay," answered John; "but, by and by, when you're coming down to the castle in your coach and four, I shall get a sight of you sometimes as you go by."

"It will be a good while before that happens, Gibby; and, meanwhile, be sure you never hint to anybody in the world about my marriage. It might do great harm to my husband. You must never mention it till I give you leave."

"In course, I won't; I'd cut my tongue out first. You needn't be afraid of me."

"I'm not afraid of you, Gibby; only I know it would gratify you to be able to say I was married to Mr. Grosvenor."

"Humph!" said John; "I'll not say it whether or no."

"When they reached the little park door, she found Lionel wrapped in his cloak, waiting for her; and having reminded John Gibson where he was to meet her, she proceeded with her husband to his apartments, whilst the faithful John repaired to the cottage of an acquaintance, there to wait till the hour approached for the arrival of the London coach.

The conversations of lovers and newly-married pairs being amusing to nobody but themselves, it would be needless to transcribe that of the young couple in question. They had a long chat, and a very cosy supper, which Lionel had previously had laid in his room by the trusty Mr. Leighton, and Agnes enjoyed the evening especially. This taste of her new condition was of a kind she had not before experienced, and Lionel was particularly agreeable. The apartments were so elegantly fitted up, the little supper-service of blue and gold was so beautiful, and they were so snug, changing their own plates, and waiting on themselves. Then he showed her many pretty trifles and trinkets—seals, pins, rings, and a magnificent dressing-case, promising to give her one like it, with certain alterations to fit it for a lady. Then the treasures of the ante-room were displayed; and, besides all these, he had a portfolio of fine engravings that delighted her. In short, the evening passed so quickly away, that it was time to part before they thought it was half over.

"Lionel, look at the clock!" she said, pointing to a small ormolu timepiece that stood on the chimney-piece. "I must go, or I shall miss the coach."

"You've half an hour to the good yet," he said, "and then I'll put on my cloak and go with you."

"Hush!" said Agnes, "didn't you hear the door?"

"It's only the wind; it shakes sometimes when the wind sets in this direction."

"I hope there will be nobody in the coach," said Agnes, "especially no Ellerton people. Listen! I'm sure I hear somebody, Lionel."

"There's nobody, I assure you, unless it's Leighton; there's nobody else sleeps in this tower, and he has been gone to bed some time." And as he spoke, he opened the door into the ante-room where his hat and cloak hung, and they saw that there was no one there. "I'll walk with you and deliver you safe

into the hands of Mr. John Gibson," he added, whilst he drew on his boots, and she put on her bonnet and shawl. They were both ready to depart, and were standing up taking a last embrace, when a noise, as if somebody had run against the basin-stand in the dressing-room, was so distinct that they hastily separated; and whilst Lionel turned to open the door that led into that apartment, Agnes, terrified at the thoughts of being discovered, rushed through the ante-room and out at the front door, which she left open. She was scarcely off the steps, when she was hastily followed by another person—a man whose features she could not discern, but he had on a great coat, and was considerably taller and larger than Lionel. In an instant, the thought darted across her mind that she was watched, and that if she could not escape, betrayal and exposure awaited her, and her feet winged with this apprehension, she took to her heels, flying across the lawn like a hare pursued by the hounds. She had been so familiar with the place from her childhood, that the feeble light of the stars was quite sufficient to guide her to the little door which opened from within by a spring catch with which she was well acquainted. It was not above two hundred yards thence to the place where John Gibson was to meet her, and thither she pursued her way, alternately running and walking, till she reached the spot.

"Oh Gibby!" she exclaimed, out of breath, "I'm so glad you're here! I was so afraid you wouldn't."

"Afraid I wouldn't!" said John, astonished, "What did you think I'd be doing that I wouldn't be here?"

"Nothing," said Agnes, recollecting herself, for her pride would not allow her to mention the alarm she had had; "but I was afraid you might mistake the hour."

"Not I," said he, "I kept my watch in my hand."

"Hush!" she said, interrupting and retreating behind him, "I hear a foot;" and she had scarcely uttered the words when the same person passed that she had seen issue from the door of the tower. He came along the same road she had done, and must have issued from the park by the same outlet. Betwixt the obscure light and the hat, and the handkerchief round the throat, the features were still undiscernible, but she felt sure it was the same person. He was walking very fast, and either did not observe, or took no notice of them; she indeed being so far concealed by Gibby that she was not visible.

"Do you know who that is?" she whispered when the figure had passed.

"No," said he, "I didn't see his face; but I don't think it's anybody belonging hereabouts."

"Don't speak so loud," she said, trembling with some undefined apprehension. "How I wish the coach would come."

"It will be a quarter of an hour or more yet, I expect," said John; "perhaps you'd better walk up and down, you'll get cold standing." Agnes, dreading every instant that the mysterious figure would return in search of her, would not stir a step from his side.



CHAPTER XI.

THE alarm and her consequent rapid flight had, however, brought Agnes to the rendezvous considerably before the necessary time, as John's fidelity and devotion had done by him; and full half an hour—which appeared to her at least double that time—elapsed before they heard the wheels.

"I'm sure it's passed! I'm certain we've missed it; it could never be so late!" she had insisted half a dozen times over; John vainly assuring her that she was mistaken. However, it came at last, and the two pale lamps—not such lamps as coaches are furnished with in these days—showed dimly through the gloom.

"Heaven be praised!" said Agnes. John cried *Hoigh!* and in a few words explained to the guard, who jumped down, that they were the two passengers, one in and one out, that were to have been taken up at Ellerton; whereupon the door was opened and Agnes handed in; John, as soon as he saw her safely seated, mounting the roof.

There was only one person in the coach, a gentleman who sat in a corner, apparently asleep. Her entrance did not appear to disturb him, for he neither spoke nor stirred; and they soon reached Ellerton, where the coach changed horses, and where, by the light of a lantern, carried by a maid-servant who was escorting her mistress home from a tea-party, she saw that her companion had a handkerchief over his face. This was the only place Agnes dreaded, for it was the only one where she was known; but here, almost any one who saw would have recognized her, her singular beauty having ren-

dered her an object of general observation. The host of the Eagle, the worthy Mr. Simmons, especially was her intimate acquaintance; and as he would probably come to the door when the coach stopped, she ran a considerable risk of detection. So, taking a hint from her somniferous fellow-traveller, she threw a handkerchief over her own face and feigned sleep also. As the passengers supped at the next stage but one, no stay was made at Ellerton; the coach was soon in motion again, and no Ellertonian getting in to augment her anxiety she began to feel at her ease, and the slumber she had feigned ere long overtook her in reality. Roused for a moment by the horses stopping at the next stage, she lifted the handkerchief from her face, and took a peep at her companion, but, apparently undisturbed, he was exactly in the same position as before.

The next place they were to stop at was "The Horse and Hound," where they were to sup, and where John Gibson was to leave the coach. As the man who kept this inn had previously lived at Ellerton, Agnes had charged John to be very cautious not to betray her. Accordingly, when they stopped, and the landlord opened the door saying, "Twenty minutes allowed for supper here, ladies; supper, gentlemen," she sat still with her face covered, and her companion seemed disposed to do the same; at least, he remained till all the passengers and the coachman had entered the house, and then he let himself out, saying to John, who just then came to the door to speak to Agnes, after having made his arrival known to his new master,—

"Do you belong to the house?"

"Yes, sir," answered John, who felt himself called upon to assume his duties at once if required.

"Then I'll thank you to get this note changed, and pay the coachman my fare to R——, he knows where he took me up." Whereupon John disappeared with the note whilst the gentleman walked backwards and forwards near the house; but, either by chance or design, never in a position that enabled Agnes to see his face.

Presently John came out, saying the coachman would bring the change; and then approaching the window he put in his head and asked Agnes how she was.

"Pretty well," she answered, in a low voice. "I've got a very quiet fellow-traveller, and I've been asleep."

"They'll soon be out," he said, "and I shall have no more time to say good-bye; but remember, when you go to live at the castle, if you can get me on to work in the lowest compacity, I shall be grateful."

"It will be long before I shall live there, Gibby!" she answered; "but be sure I shall never forget you!"

"They're coming out now," he said. "Good-bye! Good-bye!" and turned away to hide his rough face just as the stranger advanced and opening the coach door, let himself in; whilst Agnes, still on her guard, lest the landlord should recognize her, resumed her former attitude.

In the mean time, the outside passengers, in their drab coats, cloaks, and comforters, were flocking out and ascending to the roof, followed by the coachman, who, coming to the door, said, "Here's your change, sir!" The gentleman stretched out his arm and took it uncounted, the coachman mounted his box, and away they went. The stranger settled himself to sleep again, and so did Agnes, giving a sigh to the faithful friend she was leaving behind her as she dropped into a slumber, from which she was by-and-by awakened by her companion's letting down the glass and putting his head out of the window.

"Hoigh!" cried he to the coachman, who thereupon drew up, whilst the guard descended from the roof and opened the door.

"I told you to set me down here," said the traveller.

"Any luggage, sir?"

"No!" replied the other, who immediately disappeared, whither Agnes did not see; but as there were lights indicating a town not far off, she concluded that to be his destination.

And what was poor John Gibson doing the while? He stood looking after the coach, listening to the rumble of the wheels as long as the air conveyed the sound to his ears; and then, with a heavy sigh, he turned to re-enter the house, stooping, as he did so, to pick up a piece of white paper which lay by the steps. Into this, as neatly as he could, when he reached his room, he folded the treasure concealed in his bosom—the spotted handkerchief—hallowed to his faithful heart, because it had been worn by Agnes.

Poor fellow! he was far the most unhappy of the three! Agnes had her new hopes and interests to cheer her; Martha her old home, habits, and associations; but poor John Gibson was rooted up from his native soil, parted from all that had been dear and familiar, to be planted amongst strangers, without the most remote hope of ever regaining what he had lost—namely, the relation in which he had stood to the two girls, which for so many years had made up the sum of his existence; for though but a plough-boy, John had the heart of a hero in his bosom—a woman's hero, I mean.

At the last stage but one, when the coach stopped to change horses, a hat-case was handed in by the guard, and presently afterwards followed the owner, who, to Agnes's great annoyance, proved to be Mr. Marsden, the curate, who of course recognized her immediately, and lost no time in inquiring her destination and the object of her journey. Had she left the service of the ladies at the castle, or was she going to join them in London, or had she got another situation? All which inquiries eliciting no satisfactory information, he next took upon himself to warn her of "the dangers that awaited young females so highly favoured by nature as herself," with a mixture of sententious dulness and pitiful gallantry that utterly disgusted her.

Agnes had quite dignity and self-possession enough to silence a puppy any day; but despise him as she would, the consciousness of his presence embarrassed her exceedingly, when, on the arrival of the coach at the White Horse Cellar, a smart lad, in a plum-coloured livery, stepped forward, and, touching his hat, inquired if she was Mrs. Dacres. She had half a mind not to acknowledge herself, and sat for a moment silent, in hopes of seeing Mr. Marsden get out before her; but unfortunately he was going forward to the city, and there was nothing for it but to say *yes*, and accept the services of the lad, who thereupon helped her to descend, took possession of her luggage, and placed her and it in a coach with all the *aplomb* and alertness that distinguishes young gentlemen of that class in London and Paris.

A small but elegantly-furnished house in Park Lane was ready to receive her, and two maid-servants, in addition to the footboy, formed her establishment. There was no splendour; but, for the seal of the thing, it was *parfaitement bien monté*. Agnes felt that she could be very happy there with Lionel, and the new studies that were to occupy her.

On the following morning after breakfast, enticed by the view of the park in front of her windows, she put on her bonnet and went across the road for a walk; but so much beauty and freshness, combined with a little air of provincialism that bespoke inexperience in the wickered ways of the metropolis, could not long remain unobserved, and she was soon glad to take refuge in her own house, where she amused herself with looking out of the window; whence, in the course of the afternoon, she descried Lady Grosvenor's carriage, and Isabel's eyes turned in the direction of her house. At least, so she fancied, and the fancy was quite enough to alarm her and make her determine

not to show herself outside of the door till Lionel arrived, which she expected would be on the fourth day at farthest.

This first taste of her new state was dull enough, but she was sustained by hope ; and, whilst she is anticipating her husband's arrival, we must return to Ravenscliffe, and see what happened there after she left it.



CHAPTER XII.

At the moment that Agnes, winged with the apprehension of exposure, rushed through the ante-rooms into the park, Lionel, furious at the impertinence of the interruption, rushed as hastily into the dressing-room and collared the intruder, whose person, there was just light enough reflected from the lamp in the bedchamber to discern, though not enough to enable him to distinguish who it was. Jumping, however, to the conclusion, that it must be Leighton, whom an unpardonable curiosity had induced to conceal himself there for the purpose of watching his proceedings, he assailed him with a volley of vituperation, accompanied by certain vigorous kicks on the shins, which the other struggled hard to elude. But, Lionel, never doubting that it was his own servant he was engaged with, held on pertinaciously, till feeling himself suddenly stabbed in the breast with some sharp instrument, he let go his hold ; and as he sunk to the ground, the intruder fled through the opposite door and, all this being but the work of a few moments, overtook Agnes on the lawn.

In the meanwhile, Leighton, who lay overhead, either not being asleep, or awakened by the loud tones of his master's voice, and imagining that some furious quarrel had occurred betwixt him and his expected visitor, jumped out of bed and opened his door, in order to ascertain what was going on. A few words that reached his ears, and the sound of a man's foot hastily making way through the outer door, satisfying him there was some more serious matter than he had anticipated, he hastily threw on his clothes and descended the stairs to Lionel's apartments, where he found all the doors open, and his master lying insensible on the floor. Not suspecting him to be wounded, he first lifted him up and threw water in his face, and it was not until he fetched the lamp from the adjoining

room, that he perceived the blood extending over the bosom of the shirt. Upon this he summoned assistance from the other servants to lift the body to the bed, and then hastily dispatched the groom to Ellerton for Mr. Parkinson, the surgeon. Lionel having fainted, after the first gush the blood ceased to flow; but whilst the servants stood by the bed with amazed faces, whispering their fears, he lay with his eyes shut, or at least when he opened them, appeared to take no notice of those around him. When the surgeon arrived, and had heard from Leighton, in a few words, what he knew of the circumstance, he proceeded to an examination, which resulted in an opinion that the wound was not absolutely mortal but that it might become so without extreme precaution. The patient was to be kept quite still; not to be allowed to speak; and whilst he declared his intention of remaining by him all night, he desired Leighton to dispatch immediate intelligence to the family of what had occurred.

These measures being taken, and the wound dressed, Mr. Parkinson took Leighton into the adjoining room, for the purpose of inquiring more particularly into the origin of the catastrophe; but Leighton had nothing more to tell him than has been already mentioned.

"Who has been supping here?" inquired the surgeon; "this table has been laid for two."

"I don't know," answered Leighton; "I was desired to lay the cloth, and order supper; but I was not told who it was for."

"Your hands are stained with blood," observed the surgeon, looking him hard in the face.

"Very likely," replied the valet; "so were yours till you washed them. I lifted Mr. Grosvenor from the ground before I knew he was wounded; and the wristband of my shirt is stained, too, I see."

He said this with so much unconcern, that it in a great degree sufficed to disperse Mr. Parkinson's rising suspicions, who, however, now observed that the doors of the bookcase were open, and several papers, some of which appeared to be bills and other letters, were strewn upon the floor.

"There has been a robbery, I suspect," said he.

"I don't see anything like it," answered Leighton, looking round the room. "Master was at the bookcase himself this afternoon, and I dare say he left it open."

"Then who do you think has committed this attack?" asked the surgeon.

"I have no idea," replied the servant; "only I am quite certain I heard a man's foot just as I opened my door."

"It may have been Mr. Grosvenor's."

"No, it was the foot of a stranger, heavier than my master's; besides, the person, whoever it was, went out of the front door."

"Here is a lantern, too," said the surgeon. "Have you any poachers or bad characters hereabouts?"

"None that I know of; but the gamekeeper may know of some."

"It is an extraordinary thing that you should not know who supped here."

"It is not the first time master has had a private supper here and has bid me go to bed. Gentlemen have their own ways, and it's not the business of servants to interfere with them. If I had asked Mr. Grosvenor who his company was, I suppose he'd have kicked me out of the room."

Who shall describe the amazement and dismay, the grief and agitation, that pervaded the establishment in Brook Street, on the arrival of the groom with his black budget of news! It was not only the beloved son, but the family name and honours also, that were threatened with extinction; or, what was worse, to be carried down to posterity alloyed by the base blood of the Watsons. With all the speed that four horses and well-paid postilions could attain, the father and mother hurried down to Ravenscliffe, carrying with them the then eminent surgeon, Sir A—— C——, who was received by Mr. Parkinson on the steps of the castle, and immediately conducted to the patient. All that Sir Francis said was, as they turned towards the tower,—

"Let us know our fate as soon as you can. You'll find us in the library."

It was about a quarter of an hour afterwards, that Leighton opened the library door, and announced Sir A—— C——. Sir Francis and his wife were sitting side by side on a sofa, much in the attitude of two strangers who had been shown into an unknown room, and were expecting an unknown host; only that their wan cheeks and haggard features told of unrest and eating anguish; whilst their figures erect, their ears on the alert, their eyes fixed on the door, denoted their state of fearful expectation; but they spoke no word—there was no need to speak, for each knew the thoughts of the other. They did not even stir when the surgeon entered the room and advanced towards them; they only looked, and waited for their doom.

"It is certainly a very serious wound—very serious indeed," said he with a grave countenance; "but, at the same time, I don't see any absolute reason to despair. Great care will be necessary——"

"Oh, Sir A——, he shall have every care that the world can afford," cried Lady Grosvenor; "only preserve him to us."

And the surgeon having given his directions, and promised to return in a few days, during which interval he assured the anxious pair, that Mr. Parkinson would be fully equal to the charge of the patient, for whom indeed unbroken repose was the chief and best remedy, they fell to discussing the origin of the disaster; whereupon Mr. Parkinson related what he had observed, and the suspicions that he had at first entertained respecting the valet, but which had been considerably dissipated by his unembarrassed manner.

"That is not quite an infallible sign of innocence, any more than the reverse is an infallible sign of guilt," observed the London surgeon. "Take my advice, and send for one of the metropolitan police; and if the criminal is in the house, he'll detect him, be assured."

And this advice being followed, Townsend shortly arrived to investigate this mysterious affair; the result of which investigation fell like a thunderbolt on Leighton, who found himself accused of an intent to rob his master, and of having stabbed him to avoid detection.

This unexpected issue naturally changed his own tactics. It was quite true that he did not absolutely know who was to sup with his master, but he had a very shrewd guess. Cautious as the young couple had been, it was impossible altogether to escape the observations of a person so well acquainted with the ways of the world as Leighton was; and although he had not the most remote suspicion of the marriage, he was pretty well aware of the intimacy betwixt his master and Farmer Crawford's beautiful daughter. But, both in accordance with what he knew to be Mr. Grosvenor's wishes, and his own unwillingness to expose the girl, he had hitherto refrained from betraying them. Now, however, Agnes might become a very important witness in his favour; and having, therefore, disclosed his persuasion that she had been Lionel's guest on the evening in question, the officer, guided by the groom, started for the farm in search of her.

"You've a young woman here, called Agnes Crawford," said he; "is she at home?"

"She's not here," answered Mrs. Terry, the new tenant.

"She went away from this the same night we came in; and her sister, as had engaged to live with us, went away three days ago, leaving us with not so much as a girl to milk the cows."

"Where's she gone?" inquired the officer.

"To Lunnun, to her sister, I fancy," answered the woman; but to what part of London she could not tell.

This sudden departure of Martha's following the disappearance of Agnes, seemed to involve the former in this tangled affair; and Leighton being taken into custody on suspicion, the next step was to discover the two young women; but this was not so easy. Nobody knew where Agnes had gone to but Lionel, and at present it was not thought proper to interrogate him on the subject; the probability being, besides, that he could not have told, if they had. The only questions put to him were, whether he knew who had wounded him, to which he signified that he did not; and whether he thought it was Leighton, which last inquiry he answered by shaking his head doubtfully, raising his eyebrows, and making gestures that implied that he could not say anything positive on the subject.

As for Leighton himself, he thoroughly acquitted Agnes in his own mind, and accounted for her going to London by suggesting that it was probably to meet Mr. Grosvenor, who had intended proceeding thither immediately; whilst Martha's sudden departure he attributed to the news of what had happened at the castle reaching the farm; indeed, when the hint was given her, Mrs. Terry herself confirmed this notion.

"No doubt that was it," she said. "The young woman seemed in a terrible way about it, and had gone off as soon as she could afterwards."

CHAPTER XIII.

EVERYBODY knows the impossibility of ascertaining the truth about anything that happens in one's own neighbourhood; and it will, therefore, occasion no surprise that the news that reached Martha was to the effect that Mr. Grosvenor was dead; assassinated and robbed by nobody knew who. Devoted to her sister with a love almost maternal, she felt that this was not intelligence to be communicated by a letter; besides, Martha was no great scribe, her accomplishments lay in another direction; and conscious of the need that Agnes would have of her, and of her own incapacity to offer her either advice or consolation on paper, she resolved to start without delay for London.

I am afraid that Agnes's first feeling on seeing Martha step out of the coach was one of displeasure. "What can have induced my sister to follow me here?" she thought, as she looked round at her elegant apartment, and compared it with poor Martha's linsey-woolsey cloak and irretrievably plebeian air. "What will Lionel say?—What shall I do with her?" But the face that presently appeared at the drawing-room door, with the usually ruddy cheeks pale and disfigured by tears, changed the current of her feelings in a moment. She read in it bad news.

"Oh, Martha! what has happened? what has brought you up?"

"Wait, dear, a minute." said Martha, looking towards the door where the boy still stood.

"Shall I discharge the coach, ma'am?" said he.

"Yes, yes; here's money—pay the man, and send him away!" said Agnes; "and now, what is it, Martha? For God's sake tell me! Is it anything about Lionel?"

"Well, it is, dear; but try and keep up, for you must know it, and it is better I should tell you than anybody else."

"They've found out that we're married?" said Agnes. "I thought so from Miss Isabel's face as the carriage passed yesterday!"

"Oh, no, dear, and they'll never know it; and it don't much signify if they do, for poor Mr. Grosvenor has no cause to fear

his father, now; and, perhaps, Sir Francis would rather see him married to you or to anybody else than as he is."

"Than as he is? How is he? Oh, Martha, speak! Don't keep me in this suspense!"

"I don't know how to tell you, dear. But after you left that night a dreadful thing happened. Some thieves broke into the castle, and I suppose Mr. Grosvenor heard them, and got up to drive them away; but when Mr. Leighton came down stairs, he found all the drawers and boxes opened and his master bleeding!"

"Bleeding! where?" said Agnes, sinking into a chair.

"Here!" said Martha, placing her hand upon her heart.

"Martha, you don't mean to say that Lionel——?"

"Yes, dear, they say he bled to death for want of help."

Agnes uttered no sound; her arms fell powerless by her side, and she sat motionless, transfixed with amazement and dismay. Martha called for a glass of water for her, but she put it aside impatiently.

"My God! my God!" she exclaimed, at length. "Poor Lionel!—my poor husband!"

"Sir Francis and my lady were sent for, and the carriage passed us this morning, with the four horses galloping as hard as they could go. I just got a sight of Sir Francis sitting in the corner, looking as if he'd got his death. Oh, what a shocking thing it is!" cried she, weeping.

"Dreadful! dreadful!" responded Agnes, in an under-tone.

"I thought it better to come than write," said Martha, "for I couldn't tell what you would do."

"What, indeed!" said Agnes.

"I didn't know whether you would like to come back to Ellerton."

Agnes made no answer. Most women would have either fainted or have exhibited violent demonstrations of grief on receiving such an unexpected piece of ill news, but she did neither. She was assailed by a complication of feelings that left no room for the prominent manifestation of any one of them. She was very sorry for Lionel; but since her love for him had not been of an absorbing nature, neither was her grief sufficiently so to exclude all other considerations—the downfall of her hopes and the drear futurity that awaited her, as well as the perplexity about what she should do or ought to do, divided her thoughts with her regrets. Like the very poor, who have too many other and urgent cares, to indulge in the luxury of woe, Agnes, prompted especially by Martha, whose

eyes naturally turned in that direction, found herself ever and anon wondering what was to become of her ; and when at length tears had relieved her from the physical effects of the blow, the important question of what was to be done next fell under discussion.

"I had rather never see Ellerton again," said she ; "nor Ravenscliffe, nor any of the family. I wonder what Lionel did with the marriage certificate. Suppose Sir Francis should find it ?"

"He'd be obliged to own you for his daughter," said Martha.

"Never !" answered Agnes. "He'd burn it. And I dare say they *will* find it."

"Do you know what was done with it ?"

"No ; Lionel told me he had it safe, but where, I don't know."

"If you went to Ellerton, and set up as a dressmaker, you'd get plenty of work," said Martha ; "and I could do the cleaning and cooking, and run seams, and such like."

"I wonder if we could get any work here in London," said Agnes. "If we knew anybody, may be we might."

"That reminds me of what Gibby said."

"Did you see him as you came up ?"

"Yes : he came to the coach door, and I spoke to him, and you may guess how surprised he was. And he told me that he had heard that Kitty, as used to live servant with us when we were children, had married a man that was waiter at the Horse and Hound, and that they were settled in the public line, at a place called Kensington, not far from London."

"I remember Kitty very well," said Agnes ; "but she wouldn't remember us. We've outgrown her knowledge."

"But she'd remember us when we told her who we were," said Martha ; "and she might tell us if there would be any chance of your getting work in London—that is, if you don't like Ellerton."

"I couldn't bear going there now, and running the chance of seeing her ladyship and the family ;" said Agnes. "I had rather do anything than go to Ellerton."

"I wonder where Kensington is. Perhaps your boy could tell ?" and Philip being summoned, and the distance and means of reaching it ascertained, it was arranged that Martha should go there on the following day ; but in the meanwhile, a new subject of embarrassment occurred to Agnes. What was she to do with her house and her establishment ?

"I haven't money enough to pay the servants nor the rent, nor do I know what agreements were made about them. Lionel

said that Mr. Conyers, his lawyer, had settled it all; but I don't know where he lives."

It appeared on inquiry, however, that the servants were acquainted with the solicitor's address, they having been engaged by him.

There was a long, mournful talk, and many tears shed betwixt the two sisters that evening; and on the following morning, Philip conducted Martha to the end of the street, and handed her into one of the Kensington coaches. Kitty being, as Gibby said, in the "public line," there was no difficulty in discovering her honest, good-natured countenance, behind the bar of the George inn, where she was serving gin and bitters to a red-faced hackney-coachman. Martha recognized her immediately, although the formerly slight figure had become rotund, and the smooth pink and white satin skin had changed into a coarser texture, variegated with different shades of crimson.

"You don't remember me, Mrs. Bullock?" said Martha.

"I can't say as I do" returned the hostess.

"Don't you remember Martha Crawford, at the Holmes?" asked the other.

"Don't I? To be sure I do! But you don't mean to say you be she?"

"Yes, I am; you know you used to call me *Pudding*, because I was so fat and round."

"Lord o'mighty! Come in!" said Mrs. Bullock, hospitably throwing wide the door of the bar. "Who'd ha' thought of seeing of you? And how did you leave all friends? How's the master, and—but maybe there's been trouble?" she added, suddenly remarking that Martha was in mourning.

"Father and mother's both dead!" returned the latter, sadly, "and the farm's let to the Terrys, as used to live at Greenhills, and everything's changed since you left."

"And where be you living then, and your sister? She was a pretty creatur if ever there was 'un! Is she grown up as handsome as she were?"

"She's handsomer than ever, *I* think," said Martha.

"And how did you find me out? Did you hear I was married?"

"Not till yesterday. It was John Gibson told me—you remember John?"

"Don't I!" responded Mrs. Bullock, laughing; "I shan't never forget him the longest day I live, when he com'd from the work'us, first to see how he swallowed the broth. I thought

he'd ha' swallowed spoon and all. They'd ha' kept him pretty sharp there, I fancy. And where's John living now?"

"He's at the Horse and Hound, where your husband used to be? and that's the way he told me of you. I saw him as I came up in the coach."

"My stars! what changes there be; and everything in the world turned topsy-turvy like! But what are you going to do now you've left the farm? Is Miss Agnes up with you?"

"Yes, she's in London, too; and we want to get some employment?"

"Well, I'm sorry to hear it. I was in hopes Mr. Crawford might have left you comfortable."

"My poor father had next to nothing when he died," returned Martha. "Times have been so bad, and the farm required so much to be laid out upon it, that he could scarce pay his rent from year to year. I sometimes think it was a mercy God Almighty took him away afore he came to want."

"It's a sad thing to want!" answered Mrs. Bullock; "partickler for them as has seen better days. Bullock and I had a hard struggle to get along at first. Hows'ever, thanks be to God, we're doing pretty well now. And where be you stopping in Lunnun?"

This was a question Martha had not prepared herself for; and not liking the prospect of a visit from Mrs. Bullock in Park Lane, since her sister's real situation could not be explained, she answered, on the spur of the moment, that they were with a friend, adding that she had come to Kensington with the view of taking a lodging and seeking work.

"My sister's a first-rate dressmaker and milliner," answered Martha. "She lived maid at the castle under Mrs. Bennett for two years, and I could do the plain sewing and the house-work, if you think we could get to be employed."

"There's so many of every trade," replied Mrs. Bullock, "that it's hard for them as is out to get in. Hows'ever, it so happens that Miss Wright as worked for me has gone into a decline, and the doctor's advised her to go home to her friends as lives at Dawlish, so that there's a sort of vacancy, as a body may say, and you might take her lodging, which is just two doors off from here."

"Will it be cheap?" inquired Martha, anxiously.

"As cheap as anything you can get," returned Mrs. Bullock; "and I'll give you a new silk I've got to make up for a hansel. I bought it in the city the last time I was there; but poor Miss Wright was so bad that she was never able to put a hand to it."

Martha said she would not settle anything without consulting her sister ; and after inspecting the lodging, which consisted of two rooms, she took her leave, Mrs. Bullock herself placing her in the coach, and desiring the driver to set her down at the end of Park Lane.

To break off all connection with the neighbourhood of Ravenscliffe, to vanish for ever from the eyes of her husband's family, were now the most ardent wishes of Agnes's heart ; the next was to escape from the house she was in and the servants that had been engaged, leaving no traces behind her.

"Of course, if I go away and don't return, they will go to Mr. Conyer," said she, "and he will pay them ; and as they do not know anything about me, nor even my real name, nobody will be able to find out what has become of me."

In pursuance of this plan, Martha returned to Kensington on the following morning and took the lodging ; and in the evening, having packed up their small possessions, they ordered a coach to the door and stepped into it.

"Where shall I tell him to drive ?" inquired Philip.

"To where the Exeter mail goes from," answered Agnes ; "and you need not go with us, Philip."

When they reached Piccadilly they stopped the coach, and directed the man to Kensington. Two small rooms on a third floor, in a shabby house, formed a disagreeable contrast to the elegant lodging in Park Lane ; and yet Agnes felt relieved that she had got away from it and the equivocal position that the death of her husband had placed her in. Here she could weep his fate and her own disappointed hopes in privacy. However humble her condition, her feelings would not be abraded by aristocratic contact, and nobody would have a right to trouble her with questions which she could not answer, nor counsel that she did not choose to follow.

CHAPTER XIV

AGNES made up the silk dress to perfection, and was not long in obtaining further custom amongst the *clientelle* of her predecessor; so that with the little money Lionel had given her for her immediate use, together with what Martha had derived from the sale of her father's farming implements, they were in no danger of want; indeed, they very soon found that they should be able to supply their daily necessities out of the fruits of their labour; and except the confinement and the loss of the fresh country air they had been accustomed to, they had no material cause of complaint. Accordingly, Martha was as busy and contented as ever. Agnes had more reasons for dissatisfaction; but setting apart her grief for the loss of her husband, she had rather to regret the extinction of her hopes than the absence of any real enjoyments connected with the position her marriage gave her, or should have given her; whilst the independence of her present situation and her dislike to service made her much better pleased to be a dressmaker in Kensington than a domestic at Ravenscliffe. In short, Agnes being much more proud and fastidious than ambitious, was, on the whole, somewhat relieved by escaping the mortifications and contrasts that had attended her intercourse with the castle; whilst the loss of rank and fortune entailed by the death of Lionel, was almost compensated by her escape from all the contempt and obloquy she knew would be flung upon her, if the connection should be discovered during the lifetime of Sir Francis.

The pride that would have rejoiced in the honours and privileges of ladyhood shrunk from the apparent meanness of attaining them surreptitiously; and though by no means unusually timid, she would have infinitely preferred living in poverty and obscurity to braving unprotected the storm that, under present circumstances, would have greeted her presentation as Mrs. Lionel Grosvenor. It may also be added, that either the instinctive penetration of her sex, or the knowledge of the world she had acquired through her intercourse at the castle, had not left her altogether ignorant of Lionel's real character. She was aware that it wanted solidity and self-

dependence; and she had not that entire reliance on the strength of his attachment that might have enabled her to encounter the future without misgivings. It was this combination of feelings and reflections that armed her with fortitude to endure the reverse that had befallen her; but what she endured with considerably less patience were the civilities of her patroness Kitty, and those of her other customers. She was reconciled to live by toil, and pass her days in obscurity; but to be forced into the company of these coarse and uncongenial women was a severe trial; and to escape the annoyance, she confined herself almost wholly to the house, whilst her sister performed all the outdoor duties of their little *ménage*.

Martha was one evening abroad on some of these errands, and Agnes at home fabricating a ruby satin bonnet for Mrs. Bullock, when she heard the door-bell ring, and presently afterwards the voice of the woman of the house directing some one to "the right-hand third floor," followed by a heavy step upon the stairs. Always pervaded by a vague fear that her secret might be discovered, and she exposed to the indignation and resentment of her husband's family, she waited with some anxiety to see who was her visitor, and her satisfaction was considerable when, on opening the door, she perceived it was no other than her old friend John Gibson.

"Oh, Gibby, how glad I am to see you! Come in. Martha will be home directly."

"I was afeard I shouldn't find you in this here big place," said John, wiping his brow as he laid aside his cap. "But I thought Kitty might know whereabouts you was."

"And what has brought you to London, Gibby?"

"Oh, that be a long story," answered John; "but it wer' mainly to seek you."

"Well, I'm heartily glad to see you," said Agnes, sighing. "Little we thought what had happened at Ravenscliffe when we parted that night. Poor Lionel; what a dreadful thing it was! Who could have done it?"

"They say it was Mr. Leighton, the valet, as wanted to rob the house," answered John.

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Agnes. "And does he own to it?"

"No," answered John. "He says he heard a noise below, and a man's foot going out at the front door; and that when he came down to see what was the matter, he found his master lying a bleeding on the floor."

"What time of the night was it?" asked Agnes, recollecting the person that had followed her out.

"It must ha' been just after you left," said John.

"I thought they had not known it till the morning," said she; "but if it was then it happened, the person that went by whilst we were waiting at the milestone may have been one of them; for I think it was he that passed me as I crossed the broad walk, just as I left the castle."

"I remember somebody passing us, but I couldn't say I saw much on him," said John. "How's'ever, you're wanted to see if you knows anything about it."

"I'm wanted! what do you mean? who wants me?"

"Why, Mr. Leighton and the lawyers. You see, Mr. Grosvenor said it was a man; but it warn't light enough for he to see what man; and he can't say whether it be Mr. Leighton or whether not."

"But stay, Gibby," said Agnes, gasping for breath, and laying her hand on her bosom—"stay! Martha told me Mr. Grosvenor was dead."

"Well, he be very bad, and the doctors don't know whether he'll get well or not," answered John; "and as nobody know'd where you was, I thought maybe Martha might ha' been to see Kitty, as I told her where she lived, and sure enough that was the way I found you out."

According to John's information, advertisements in the newspapers and various other methods had been used to discover Agnes and her sister, and amongst the rest, application had been made to him; but in the first place, he was ignorant of Agnes's address in London, and in the second, had he known it, he would not have thought himself at liberty to disclose the secret; till at length his own desire to see her, and the apprehensions he entertained that this affair might result in something fatal to her interests, induced him to seek her himself.

"Then Sir Francis and my lady have no suspicion that we are married?" said Agnes, when she had listened to all that John Gibson could tell her.

"None that I know, nor Mr. Leightou either," answered John. "All he could tell war' that he believed it war' you that supped there that night."

"Good heavens! what will they think of me!" cried Agnes, clasping her hands in dismay; and for some minutes her mind was so engrossed by this momentous question, that she forgot the various other ligaments that entangled her in the affair. That her husband still lived was certainly cheering intelligence,

but his precarious condition forbade much rejoicing on that head; whilst as regarded her own situation, the circumstances rendered it infinitely more difficult and perplexing than when she supposed him dead. The step she had taken in flying from Park Lane, and the means she had adopted to support herself, however justifiable under the latter supposition, would no doubt be very displeasing to Lionel; though she did not see how she could repair the error now, nor indeed what else she could have done, unless she had taken refuge at Ellerton, where, if Mr. Grosvenor recovered, the dressmaking would have been much more ineligible than where she was. It was altogether a perplexing situation, and the probable necessity of appearing as a witness in the approaching trial of the valet did not render it less so. And yet, to conceal herself and withhold her evidence, would be so manifestly unjust, that, painful as it was, she made known to Leighton, that if her presence was absolutely necessary, she was willing to come forward. A few days after this, a stranger waited upon her, saying his name was Evans, and that he wished to take her evidence with respect to what she had observed on a certain night at Ravenscliffe Castle; and after some preliminary conversation, he proceeded to put such questions as he thought necessary.

When he had elicited all the information she could give, and informed her what more would be required of her, Mr. Evans took his departure, leaving her overcome with annoyance and mortification. It is true, he had said nothing offensive, but she was conscious that he could put but one construction on her visit to the castle; and although during the interview she had endeavoured to maintain as much calmness and dignity as possible, she felt that her burning cheeks and unsteady eye must confirm the ill-impression. Martha found her in tears.

"Troubles are thickening upon me," said she; "and if Lionel does not get soon well, I don't know what is to become of us."

"Why?" asked Martha, who judged from her manner that she was alluding to some new source of embarrassment.

"I couldn't bear to tell you," she answered; "I have hoped I might be mistaken. Heaven grant I may be! But suppose I am not? Suppose I should be——"

"Be what?" asked Martha. "No," she continued, as the truth suddenly occurred to her, "you don't say so!" and instead of looking alarmed, her countenance brightened. "How glad Mr. Grosvenor will be, if he recovers."

"Ay, but if he does not?"

"Well, dear, we must hope for the best, and do as well as we

can; and sure, if that's the case, you'll say you're married to him. Why should you bear the shame, when you don't deserve it?"

"I was thinking so, too," returned Agnes; "but how can I disobey Lionel? he'd never forgive me. And if he died, how could I prove that I was married?"

It was not easy, certainly, ignorant as she was of who had performed the ceremony, and with no witnesses but her sister and Gibson, both of whose testimony on such a subject she feared might be reasonably doubted.

As there seemed to be no prospect of Lionel's being able to appear in court, his evidence was taken privately, as far as he had any to give, or was able to give it. It amounted, indeed, to very little, being merely to the effect, that hearing a noise in the dressing-room, he had gone thither to ascertain what occasioned it; and by the imperfect light had discovered the figure of a man, who was at the moment hastening out of the opposite door. That having seized him, a struggle had ensued, which terminated by his finding himself struck by some sharp instrument in the breast. He did not believe the man intended to injure him, but thought he had done it to avoid being taken. As to who it was, the light was so faint, and the whole encounter so sudden and rapid, that he was unable to form any opinion on the subject.

Nevertheless, he had one, which he privately avowed, but which he did not wish should be produced in evidence; and this was, that the intruder was Leighton, who, aware that he had some one supping with him, had concealed himself to ascertain who it was, and to listen to the conversation. He, moreover, suspected what he did *not* avow; namely, that his servant had somehow or other got wind of the marriage, and had been desirous of ascertaining the fact for himself. This supposed intrusion on his privacy, and the peril in which it had placed his secret, annoyed him exceedingly. His love for Agnes—if the sentiment he entertained for her merited the name—was not of a nature to withstand difficulties; and although for the first few days, when he thought he was going to die, he had resolved to confess the secret to his father before he quitted the world, he no sooner found himself likely to live, than he was as desirous of keeping it as ever. To say the truth, he felt that at present he cared very little about Agnes; and as he lay in bed, condemned to almost unbroken silence by the physician, with no diversion but his own retrospections, he almost wondered what had possessed him to marry her. Still, there were momentary

yearnings, and in one of these he sent for Wighting, the butler, and bade him write to Mr. Conyers, requesting that gentleman to call in Park Lane, and furnish whatever was necessary, till further directions. No answer being made he concluded that his wishes had been obeyed, and discharged from his mind all anxiety respecting his wife's situation. What could he do more under present circumstances? He was confined to a sofa; since Leighton's departure, he had no confidential person about him; and his father and mother never quitted the castle. As soon as he was able it was recommended to remove him to a warm climate, and in the meantime he was condemned to the silence and solitude of his own apartment.

As it was understood that there was no robbery, and that the wounded gentleman was not likely to die, the interest excited by the trial of Leighton was less than might have been expected. He, of course, pleaded *not guilty*, but as he had no witness of any importance to produce but Agnes, the presumption was so strong against him, that he was convicted, and condemned to two years' imprisonment, and of course irretrievable loss of character. To his witness the consequences of the trial were not much less disastrous; every ignominious insinuation and open insult that her questionable position laid her open to being lavished on her by the prosecutor's counsel, who not only arraigned her character as a woman, but impeached the truth of her evidence, accusing her of connivance with the criminal, whose object he assumed to have been robbery; in short, availing himself to its fullest extent of that horrible and infamous license of tongue that occasionally disgraces the profession.

Unable to vindicate herself without betraying the secret that trembled on her lips, Agnes stood aghast with amazement and indignation, till, with her head throbbing and the blood boiling in her veins, she was led from the court and placed in a coach by John Gibson and her sister. When they reached Kensington, she was put to bed; a severe illness ensued, and the first thing she learned on her recovery was, that Lionel had been carried abroad for his health by his father and mother. John Gibson it was that had heard the news from an acquaintance of his, who had brought up some of Mr. Grosvenor's horses to be sold at Tattersall's.

CHAPTER XV

INEXPERIENCED people in perplexing situations, and experienced ones too, sometimes are apt to remember too late what they ought to have done; and when Agnes was convalescent, and she and Martha able to discuss their affairs, it occurred to them that they should have despatched John Gibson to Ravenscliffe as soon as they heard that Lionel was alive. John might have obtained an interview, delivered a letter, and brought Mr. Grosvenor's directions for the conduct of his wife. But this plan had not occurred to them; Agnes did not dare to send a letter by the post, lest it should fall into hands it was not designed for, and concluding that if the injury did not prove fatal, her husband would shortly recover, and be able to communicate with her without restraint, she had missed the opportunity that could not now be easily regained.

"Gibby must get his address in Brook Street, and I must write directly. I wish now I had never left that house he took for me."

"It was all my fault," said Martha. "If I hadn't been in such a hurry, I should have heard the truth."

"Is there any work in the house? I think I could do a little."

"There isn't any," answered Martha. "I suppose people knew you were ill, for there has been none come in since you was laid up."

"But there's Mrs. Green's Irish poplin; where is it?"

"She sent for it away," said Martha; "I suppose she couldn't wait."

"You had better call and say I am well, and able to work now," said Agnes; "for I'm sure, if I don't soon hear from Lionel, we shall be badly off."

"I have still money enough to go on with," said Martha.

"I shall have to get baby clothes soon," said Agnes, with a sigh.

Martha said she could make them, whilst Agnes did more important work; but no work came in, and they began to fear that somebody had seduced away their customers; but when

Martha called on Kitty, she learned the real reason of the deficiency, namely, the disclosures that had been made at the trial—they could not employ a person of Miss Crawford's character.

Mrs. Bullock was very sorry, and disposed to defend her *protégées*; but the distance and reserve with which Agnes had treated the women that employed her, had embittered their virtue, and rendered it inexorable. Moreover, the woman of the house they lodged in gave them warning, and it became a grave question where they should go.

Ellerton, which would have been a certain refuge, because certain to supply them with employment, was now out of the question; and they were at their wits' ends for the means to live through the impending event. At length, it occurred to Agnes that if she could obtain the address of that Mr. Conyers, who had been employed by her husband to take the house for her, that he might provide her with funds, and also write to Lionel about her himself; and John Gibson, who, not to be separated from them, had procured a situation in London, undertook to discover him. In the meantime, Kitty showed them many kindnesses, and she even gave Agnes some little articles that had been provided for a similar event, in her own case.

"Her beauty had been a snare to her," she said, "and it was very wrong of her ladyship to be having her so much at the castle, where there was always harum-scarum young gentlemen rampaging up and down; and anybody might have expected things to turn out as they'd done."

Many a time Agnes felt disposed to confide in her, but she was as much deterred by the impossibility of establishing the fact of her marriage, as by the apprehension of irrevocably offending Lionel. She fancied the whole story would appear so improbable, that she could not expect it to be believed; and to be supposed capable of inventing it, would be more grievous and mortifying than to lay under the odium that now oppressed her.

After a short interval, John Gibson brought Mr. Conyers' address; and Agnes, urged by the necessities of her situation, overcame her reluctance, and taking Martha with her, drove to his house in a hackney-coach. Mr. Conyers was engaged at the moment, but hearing that a lady, attended by her maid, desired to see him, he sent word he would wait upon her in a few minutes. Accordingly, he shortly presented himself, with his best bow and smoothest apologies for the delay; he was quite oppressed with business; he had just come from the

Marquis of Harcourt, and was going to Lord Glengrove; but he had hastened to her the moment he could, and begged to know what he could do to serve her.

"I believe, sir, you know Mr. Lionel Grosvenor?"

"Extremely well. I have had the pleasure of knowing the family for many years, and have done a good deal of business for Sir Francis."

"I believe, sir, it was you who engaged a house for Mr. Grosvenor, in Park Lane?"

"Hem! Yes, I believe I did," answered Mr. Conyers, with a scarcely perceptible change of manner. "He wrote to me to say, that, finding it inconvenient to reside always with his family in Brook Street, he wished to have a separate establishment."

"Then he has probably not mentioned me at all," thought Agnes; "and how am I to explain the truth? And if I do, would he believe me?"

She felt quite discouraged; her heart sunk within her, and she wished she had not come; but Mr. Conyers waited in silence to hear what she had next to say.

"Perhaps you were not aware, sir, that it was for me that house was taken," she continued, with a desperate effort. "Mr. Grosvenor was to have joined me there in a few days, but the accident that happened prevented him; and having been erroneously informed that he was dead, I left it, and now I am at a loss what to do, since I hear Mr. Grosvenor is gone abroad."

It was certainly an awkward story, wanting that cohesion which the omitted incident of the marriage could alone give it. It was evident that Mr. Conyers thought so.

"And what do you wish me to do, madam?" he asked.

Agnes would have liked to say, "Protect me, till my husband comes to my aid;" but she felt that the appeal would be in vain, so she limited herself to a request that he would write to Mr. Grosvenor, telling him where she was; "And, indeed, sir, if you would inclose a letter from me, I should be much obliged."

Mr. Conyers said, or seemed to say, that he would; at least, so Agnes understood him; and, depressed by the cold, dry manner of the lawyer, she took her leave, promising to send him her letter, which she did; but it travelled no farther than to his desk.

"A beautiful creature, certainly! But why lead the young man into further expenses?" He had had a good deal to pay

for the establishment in Park Lane already, when the servants informed him that the gentleman had never arrived, and the lady had gone away. It is true, he had received Mr. Wighting's letter, containing Lionel's request; but Agnes's disappearance, according to his conception of the case, had abrogated any claim she might have on him. Mr. Grosvenor was now abroad, with no prospect of an early return, and to break off the connection was the best thing that could be done, and no doubt what he himself would desire; and with the views Mr. Conyers entertained of the affair, it was natural that he should think so.

Agnes went home more than ever dispirited. If no answer came, what was she to do? She had nobody to advise her; there was not a person in the world she could reckon on as a friend except John Gibson and her sister, both more ignorant of the world than herself. They were obliged to quit their lodgings, and the period of her confinement was approaching. Considering the extremity of the case, she thought that if she heard nothing from Lionel, she should be justified in disclosing the secret of the marriage to Mr. Conyers. For her own sake merely she would not have done it; she would prefer to have endured hardship and want; but she was beginning to feel the tender yearnings of maternal love. Her child must not suffer from her poverty; it must be gently nurtured, acknowledged, and provided for; so, when a reasonable interval had elapsed, she resolved to repeat her visit to Savile Row.

The servant said his master was at home, and she was shown into the same room as before. When he made his appearance, however, and saw who was waiting for him, she judged, from his altered countenance and distant salutation, that had he known who he was to see, she would not have been admitted. He said he was very busy, and had just come from the Marquis of Harcourt, and was going to Lord Glengrove, and begged to know her commands. She asked if he had any news of Mr. Grosvenor.

"None whatever."

"No answer to my letter?"

"Not any. Indeed, I think you had better not place any reliance in that quarter. Mr. Grosvenor is in a very precarious state of health in consequence of the wound he received, and I question if he is likely to be in a condition to trouble himself about anything for a long time to come. You had better, I think, divest your mind of any expectation of hearing further from him."

"But Mr. Grosvenor is my husband, sir; I am married to him," said Agnes, surprised into a confession by alarm and indignation.

"I beg your pardon, madam," said he; "I was not aware —"

"Mr. Grosvenor wished me to keep our marriage secret, sir, and that was why I didn't mention it the last time I was here; but it is absolutely necessary he should know where I am, and how I am situated."

Mr. Conyers could not tell whether to believe her or not; the thing was so improbable, that on the whole he inclined to suppose she was deceiving him. He expressed his surprise that Mr. Grosvenor should not have mentioned the fact to him, and inquired when and where the ceremony had taken place. When he had heard all she could tell him, he made up his mind that she had been hoaxed—deceived by a false marriage; and the tone of the letter dictated to Mr. Wighting confirmed the suspicion. "You'll find a person calling herself Mrs. Dacres, and so supply her with any money she may want till you hear further from me, &c., &c." That can't be the way he'd write if she were really his wife! However, he did not think it prudent to tell Agnes his opinion, lest he should be mistaken; but, under all the circumstances, he felt he could not be wrong in acting on the letter now, which he could not do when he received it, she having already quitted the house. So he said, with more deference than he had hitherto spoken, that he should certainly write to Mr. Grosvenor, and that, in the meantime, if she was in want of money, he would advance her twenty pounds.

Agnes accepted the offer, and went away rejoiced that she had avowed the marriage, Mr. Conyers promising to let her know as soon as he received an answer from Paris.

They now removed to a lodging in Craven Street, taken for them by John Gibson, who himself filled a subordinate situation in the Adelphi Hotel, and here Agnes prepared for her approaching confinement.

In the meantime, Mr. Conyers felt a good deal perplexed as to what he ought to do, or at least as to what it would be prudent to do. Sir Francis was a valuable client *in esse*, and Lionel an equally valuable one *in posse*. He did not wish to offend either. Such a marriage as this in question, supposing it to be a *bonâ-fide* one, would drive the father mad; whilst, as regarded the son, there seemed to be no manifestations of affection or devotion to excuse or account for it. If he were well

enough to travel to Paris, he must have been well enough to write, and to take such measures as were necessary for his wife's safety and convenience. Besides, was it likely he would have allowed her to come forward and give her evidence in a public court, exposed to all the misconstructions and insolence such an appearance was sure to entail?

When he thought of this last circumstance, he was confirmed in his persuasion that there was no legal marriage in the case. Agnes was either deceiving him or herself deceived. It was probable that she did not really believe in the validity of the ceremony, but had accepted the semblance of a marriage as a salve to her pride or her conscience; and it was equally probable that Mr. Grosvenor was glad of the opportunity that his illness and subsequent departure furnished for shaking off the incumbrance. He knew him to be weak and vacillating, without energy to hold firmly to a principle or a purpose, easily led, and unequal to resisting a stronger will than his own. It was very unlikely, therefore, that he would adhere for better and worse to a connection so contracted, more especially as Agnes's retreat from Park Lane, which Mr. Conyers had mentioned, in answer to Wighting's letter, went far to justify its relinquishment. "If he had cared for her he would have bid me seek her and get her back," was the natural conclusion.

All these considerations induced him to take some days for deliberation before he wrote to Paris; and, in the interim, a piece of intelligence reached him, that whilst it seemed to settle the question of the marriage in the negative, decided him as to the course he should pursue.



CHAPTER XVI.

SIR FRANCIS and his family were established in an hotel in the Champs Elysées, near the Arc de l'Etoile. They ought to have been on their way to the south—at least, it was with that intention they had left home, but circumstances had modified their plans.

Young Lord Minevar was dead, and the mother and daughter, the latter now one of the richest matches in England, was in Paris. The death of the young man had been anticipated, and

Georgina had been for some time, in the mind of Sir Francis and his wife, the selected bride of their son. When they found Lady Minevar and her daughter in the Place Vendome, they persuaded themselves that Lionel was so much better, that it was needless to go farther; and as he preferred Paris himself, he declared for the same opinion. Their party consisted of their three selves and Isabel, and also an elder sister of Lady Grosvenor's, the Honourable Miss Dacres, one of those quiet, sensible, useful old maids, that are treasures to the families they belong to. She had, however, had little opportunity of fulfilling her functions at Ravenscliffe, where her company was not sufficiently appreciated to be much coveted, whilst she, on the other hand, was drawn by a powerful interest in another direction. The lover of her youth had died and left two motherless sisters—young, beautiful, and consumptive—and she had proved her devotion to his memory by consecrating her life to their service as long as they were upon the earth to need it. Death had freed her from this tie; and when a tender and careful nurse was required for Lionel—one who would not weary of watching—Dorothy Dacres was sent for to Ravenscliffe.

Lady Grosvenor was too delicate, languid, and indolent to do much duty in the sick chamber, and Isabel was considered too young; added to which, confinement and vigils would spoil her complexion and dim the brightness of her eyes.

As the size of the Hotel Montalembert was rather in accordance with the dignity of the family than the extent of it, the young married people—the Langhams and Damers—broke up their own little establishments and came to reside with their father. Here the Minevars also spent a great part of their time; and Georgina, whom, in the unsophisticated days of their childhood, the young Grosvenors had all disliked, or, as they termed it, *hated*, was now their particular friend; yet she had grown up very much what her early years had promised—that is, a plain, ailing, ill-conditioned young woman; but they were unconsciously influenced by her immense wealth, and the numerous advantages it gave her. Louisa and Frances entered fully into the scheme of their parents, and wished to see her married to Lionel; and Lionel, though he did not like her much better than he had done formerly, considered her fortune highly desirable. Idle and uncultivated, he had no amusement or pursuit in the world but to spend money; and as he reclined on the sofa, turning over the leaves of a French novel, it was astonishing what innumerable modes of dissipating a fortune presented themselves to his mind.

It is needless to say that since the discovery of Agnes's intimacy with the brother her name was never uttered by the ladies, at least in his presence, nor ever except in moments of confidence amongst themselves, and that then it was with the reprobation that her conduct seemed to deserve. The more pure and proud she had appeared before, the more vile did she appear now. It always is so. Instead of letting people's good conduct balance their bad, their virtue is set down as an aggravation of their vice.

There could be no doubt that Agnes's conduct had for a long time been unexceptionable; so much the worse for her now. Nobody had any pity for her but Isabel, and she was snubbed for not entertaining a more lively sense of propriety; but having extremely romantic notions of love, all errors committed in the name of that deity won her compassion. The whole affair—at least, all that part of it in which Agnes was concerned—was carefully concealed from Georgina, who, when she asked what had become of that “impudent little girl?” was told that she had turned out very bad; to which she answered, that “she had always expected it.”

It was impossible, however, that Lionel could banish Agnes altogether from his recollection; on the contrary, she intruded on it at times very disagreeably; but he had less difficulty than might have been supposed in bringing himself to look upon the ceremony that had been performed, as a sort of mystification—a little bit of private theatricals, got up, with the assistance of his two friends, for his own particular convenience.

He could hardly believe that Agnes looked upon it herself in any other light; and her going away from the house he had taken for her, and making no further claim on him, seemed to imply that she did not; at the same time, that it released him from any duty towards her. He brought himself to consider her very much as his parents and sisters did; and to take that view, both soothed his conscience and released him from anxiety.

He raised no objection to the proposed alliance with Georgina Minevar, except some slight ones on the score of not liking her, which were not considered valid, and which indeed he did not insist on; so that everything proceeded conformably to the wishes of Sir Francis, Lionel's ill-health being the only obstacle to a more rapid development of the plot, till a hint from Mr. Conyers alarmed the baronet, and caused him to write for further explanations.

This hint was given after the second interview with Agnes, and in answer to a letter from Sir Francis, wherein he first

intimated the prospect of an alliance with the rich heiress. It occurred to Mr. Conyers that the affair with Agnes, which it was now evident was, as he had suspected, only a frolic, might nevertheless give rise to future inconvenience if not settled. It was better to do something that should prevent her making applications, or preclude her cherishing the notion that she had claims on Mr. Grosvenor; so he answered Sir Francis's inquiries by giving a slight sketch of what had passed, and recommending that whatever was necessary should be provided for the approaching confinement; adding, that as the woman would then have her living to get, an allowance should be made for the child till it could be put into some way of earning its own subsistence; the whole, however, on condition of abstaining from further demands, and so forth.

On perusing these details, Sir Francis fell into a violent passion, and was preparing to vent his fury on his son, when the mother interfered to prevent him.

"Don't," she said, "I beseech you; say nothing about it to Lionel. He is not thinking of the girl now, or caring for her. Remember the Scotch axiom: '*Dinna wauken sleeping dogs!*' It was very wrong of him—shocking, to deceive the girl in that way; but no doubt she wished to be deceived. Of course, Agnes Crawford was not such a fool as to suppose Lionel really intended to marry her. But bad as it is, it will only be making it worse to speak to him about it. No doubt he thinks she has gone off with somebody else, and he's quite content to get rid of her; but if he heard the contrary, and that she's in the family way, one can't tell what effect it might have on him. I wouldn't say that it mightn't lead to a renewal of the connection. Leave well alone, and write to Conyers to settle it and get rid of her and the child the best way he can."

Mr. Conyers was not exactly a dishonest man, but he was devoted to the service of his aristocratic clients, and he had a supple conscience. He by no means approved of Lionel's frolic; it was not only immoral, but, what was worse, illegal and extremely dangerous. However, the affair standing as it did, he considered that in sending for Agnes, and persuading her to accept the proposed terms, he was doing the best thing for all parties concerned. Still, the indignation and amazement she exhibited on the thing being hinted, somewhat shocked and alarmed him. He saw she had really been deceived, if deception there was; and he saw how serious a matter it might become, if she only found friends to counsel and sustain her. He wrote again to Sir Francis hinting as much, and advising him to inquire

further into the business. But the marriage with Lady Georgina was advancing rapidly to a favourable issue, and Conyers was desired to get rid of the woman and child on any terms. Who was Agnes Crawford, that she should stand betwixt them and their plans, or be considered at all? What was proposed to be done "was more than she had any right to expect. She was artful and clever, and knew very well what she had been about, Mr. Conyers might rely on it. He did not know her as well as they did, &c. &c."

Mr. Conyers did as he was desired, and gave Agnes to suppose that she was the victim of a false marriage—it was not very difficult, since she did not know what constituted a legal one. He did not attempt to justify such frolics; they were very wrong, indeed. The only wonder was, that young women would continue to be victimized by young men, whom they might be quite sure never intended really to marry them. What sort of wife would she make for a gentleman of Mr. Grosvenor's rank? How could he introduce her at Court, present her to his friends, or place her at the head of his table? She must see that the idea of such a thing was sheer absurdity, and that she would be the laughing stock of society. He expected that she would have threatened legal proceedings, and reckoned on having to buy her off, but no such notion occurred to her. She did not know that she could do it; and she would not have done it if she had been aware of the power. Had she been vulgarly ambitious she probably would, but that was not the sin whereby she fell. She would have been happy to be really a lady born and bred; to have enjoyed all the privileges, and be surrounded by all the elegances belonging to that condition, and to have escaped the contumelies and contaminations of a lower grade; but indecently to force herself into the ranks that closed against her, to make her *entrée* into good society, amidst the laughter and the ridicule of that aristocracy, which her early habits had led her to envy, admire, and reverence, and to live a life of humiliation and abasement in the midst of splendour, was a fate that had no temptation for her; whilst she would have shrunk with horror from the idea of presenting herself again in a court of justice, after the insults she had received on the former occasion.

Had Agnes lived all her life at the farm, and never been an inmate of the castle, she might through ignorance and inexperience have felt differently; but she had seen enough of the fashionable world to comprehend something of its humanities, and to retain her own self-respect in poverty and obscurity was

a thousand times preferable to putting them to the test. So she swallowed her wrongs with a protest. She made no appeal to Mr. Grosvenor's honour or affections; but she requested Mr. Conyers to say, that he, Lionel, knew very well that she had been deceived; and that if she had not believed herself legally married, she should not have been in the situation she then was. "I suppose, sir, he does not deny that the child is his; and if I take any of his money, it is only for his child I take it. I have no means of maintaining it at present, and I have no right to deny it the support its father is bound to give it."

Mr. Conyers said she had not only a claim to the money, but that she would be acting very ill towards her child to refuse it. He was sure Sir Francis would never let the boy want; as he spoke he put his fingers into its cheeks as it lay sleeping on Martha's bosom, whose tears dropped fast upon its face. Agnes shed none, but her complexion was as white as marble as she answered, that she hoped her child would be able to get his own living in a few years, and not be dependent on those who disowned him.

That evening was passed by the sisters in forming plans for their future subsistence, as well as for the disposal of the child; and John Gibson, who came at night to inquire how Agnes was, was called into council. When he was told the news, he could not believe it. He was sceptical as to the existence of such an amount of wickedness in the first place, and in the second, he could not conceive what mortal man could desire beyond such a wife as Agnes, to him the *beau ideal* of all perfections. The most beautiful, the most virtuous, the most amiable of women; for amiable and kind he had always found her. She was a duchess—a princess—in his estimation; and yet he, Gibby, as she called him still, was always her welcome friend. She knew his worth and his devotion, and her pride was not of that vulgar kind that would have undervalued or despised them; neither was there any danger of his ever forgetting the essential difference betwixt himself and her. He would as soon have thought of indulging a passion for one of the ladies of Ravenscliffe as for Agnes, and whilst they continued on those terms of perfect familiarity and apparent equality that had originated in childhood, he considered her as far removed beyond his sphere as if she had been a goddess.

I have not undertaken to represent Agnes as suffering severely from wronged affection. It is certain that Lionel Grosvenor had never found his way into the deep recesses of her heart. Whatever wells of love might have been hidden there for the

man who could reach them, these sweet fountains flowed not for him. He had never gone the right way to unseal them. He had never been able to disguise his consciousness that he was a gentleman and she a farmer's daughter. He had made his addresses to her for three years by fits and starts, with intervals of evident hesitation and repentance; so that there was a repeated backsliding and losing of the ground he had gained, and on her part a constant undercurrent of mortification and distrust, even in their happiest moments. Thus it must be confessed that the pain she now felt was not so much occasioned by the loss of Lionel, as by the indignation at the deception that had been practised upon her, and the cruel position it had placed her in. What, she felt, would be the use of telling people that she had been deceived by a pretended marriage? Even if they believed her, they would only laugh at her folly in supposing it could have been a real one. She preferred concealing the fact to encountering the disagreeableness that might ensue from disclosing it.

"We can say your husband's dead," said Martha.

"Then they'll want to know who my husband was," said Agnes. "I must take some other name, and I must have a name for my child. I mustn't call him after his father, and I wouldn't if I might. He shall never know who his father was; and remember, Gibby, you never tell him, nor you, Martha. If I die let him believe that I was married, and that he lost his father in his infancy, and that he hasn't a relation in the world except you two."

"What name do you mean to call him when he's christened?" asked John.

"Call him after father, Daniel Crawford," said Martha.

"No, I won't," said Agnes, "for that's only another way of telling who's son he is, if anybody comes across him that knew us. No, I'll call him after Gibby, and let him think John's his uncle."

"I had a brother, as died, called William," said John.

"Then I'll call him William Gibson," said Agnes; and after some further discussion, it was agreed that she should pass as the widow of the deceased William; and as it was at all events necessary that they should move into cheaper lodgings, they entered on their new domicile as Mrs. Gibson, widow, and her sister. The next thing needful was to find work; and here, again, John was their good angel. He had an ally at the Adelphi Hotel, in the person of Sarah Peddie, the housekeeper, who had interest enough with her mistress to procure some

employment for John's sister-in-law; so that, with the liberal allowance made for the child, they were able to ward off distress; whilst, by this mode of maintaining themselves, the sisters escaped the necessity of separating themselves from the baby—an important consideration to both, for the heart that had not been touched by the father was devoted to the child, with all the tenderness and enthusiasm of a first awakening to the joy of loving something better than ourselves; and the love of the mother scarcely exceeded that of the aunt. The pride and hardness that had been the faults of Agnes's character, were subdued and mellowed by this wholesome influence. She had hitherto encouraged and cherished a morbid sentiment of isolation: if she had loved her sister, it was with a certain reserve—as one who could not enter into her feelings, nor understand her thoughts; and she had found herself in the disagreeable position of having no equal—everybody was above or below her. But now she had a subject of unfailing interest, that Martha could participate and comprehend. She was linked to society by a chain that ramified in all directions, and which brought near those who had been far from her. She had heretofore seen nothing but herself in the world; now she only saw herself as necessary to her child. All her hopes and fears were for him; if his cheek was fevered as he slept, she felt as if the earth was overshadowed with a cloud; if the dew of health was on his brow, the heavens were all sunshine. In short, she forgot to think of her wrongs or to accuse them. How could she bewail the source of that sweet life!



CHAPTER XVII.

WHILST the character of Agnes was thus forming, and the true heir of Ravenscliffe was growing out of his babyhood and flourishing exceedingly under the obscure name of William Gibson, Lady Georgina Minevar had changed her name to Grosvenor, and had also become the mother of a son—a sickly child—but an object of intense interest to his grandfather and grandmother.

It was not to be expected that a union formed under such auspices would be of a very close or tender nature, and accord-

ingly, though inhabiting the same hotel, there was little intercourse betwixt the young couple. Lady Georgina, whose pains and aches returned with augmented vigour as soon as the little excitement of her new situation had passed away, seldom quitted her room till the middle of the day, by which time Lionel, though by no means an early riser either, was over head and ears in what he called business—that is, he was inventing and putting in practice various modes of spending money. In the afternoon she drove in one carriage and he in another, or he rode. They frequently dined at the same table at home or abroad, when she occasionally heard how much he had given for an *objet*, or for a new carriage, or a new horse—subjects in which she took little interest. A physician called daily, for she was never well enough to dispense with one, and his visit always extended to the nursery, where the young Francis squalled and kicked in embroidered cambric and Mechlin lace. As for Lionel, he did not see the child from one week's end to another; Lady Georgina saw it every morning; but the intense selfishness engendered by always thinking of her health rendered her an indifferent parent; added to which, the infant, seeming to share its mother's peculiarity, appeared to be generally too much engrossed with its own personal sufferings to be able to make itself agreeable to its visitors. Thus the child formed no bond of union or common interest betwixt them; and it was perhaps fortunate; for if they had united in an interest they would have quarrelled about it, for Georgina had a peevish, obstinate temper, and Lionel was always run away with by his own caprice and its indulgence, which he was never disposed to sacrifice to anybody else's. Thus their indifference about everything but their own individual personalities was their security, and the foundation on which peace subsisted betwixt them.

"I cannot conceive how two people can call themselves husband and wife, and care so little for each other as Lionel and Georgina do," said Louisa Langham. "I can understand not loving one's husband—that's quite simple—but then I should hate him, or at least dislike him exceedingly."

"Well, I think indifference and peace are better than love and war," said Mrs. Damer, as she took up her netting.

"I suppose that is a hit at me?" said Louisa.

"I really almost agree with Frances," said Miss Dacres. "I do wonder you persist in contradicting your husband as you do, Louisa."

"But, good gracious, aunt! when I know he is entirely mistaken!"

"Of course you think he is mistaken, and he thinks otherwise; that is the foundation of all disputes."

"But he *is* mistaken," interrupted Louisa. "I don't think it—I know it."

"It's just a question of which of you heard most correctly," said Miss Dacres. "But what does the thing signify? Is it worth an argument?"

"What does anything signify?" exclaimed Frances, languidly. "What does anything signify?" reiterated Louisa. "Why, I suppose you thought it signified whether you went to the *bal masqué* or not, or else you would not have persisted in going when you knew William Damer wished you to stay at home."

"Well, but I didn't argue about it, did I?" said Frances.

"No, but you went without arguing," replied Louisa. "Now, I should like to know which is the worst—to contradict a man when he is wrong, or to go and do a thing in direct opposition to his wishes. Words are but words, at all events."

"Still they have made many a wound that could never be healed," said Miss Dacres.

"Here comes Isabel, looking daggers at me," said Louisa to her youngest sister, who just then made her appearance in the drawing-room.

"Oh, Louisa!" exclaimed Isabel, whilst the tears almost started to her eyes, "how can you contradict Henry in the way you do?"

"Oh, mercy!" exclaimed Louisa. "Quarter! quarter! There's no bearing this! Who'll attack me next? I shall expect to hear Bennett, when she's dressing my hair, exclaim, 'Oh, Mrs. Langham! how could you be so cruel as to contradict that sweet young gentleman, Mr. Henry!'"

"And I'm sure it's enough to make her," answered Isabel. "How anyone can delight in vexing a person they love in that manner I cannot conceive."

"What nonsense you talk, Isabel," said Mrs. Langham; "I don't delight in vexing him. One would think you were speaking of a sick child instead of a man."

"But you know, Louisa, men are not used to contradiction," replied Isabel, "and they don't know how to bear it."

"Then the sooner they learn the better," said Mrs. Langham.

"That's very true," observed Miss Dacres; "but I should not recommend you to undertake the office of preceptress."

"And why not?" returned Mrs. Langham. "The liberty I take, I mean to give. All I ask is that independence which I think the right of every human being—independence of opinion,

mind, I mean; not of action. In action, I think, a wife is bound to obey her husband; but thought is free."

"Certainly," answered Frances, "as long as you keep it to yourself."

"There's the first dinner-bell, young ladies," said Miss Daeres.

"Louisa," said Isabel, throwing her arm round her sister's neck, and detaining her, as she was leaving the room, "do go and make friends with poor Henry before you go to dress. I have been watching him from the window, and he's walking backwards and forwards on the terrace, looking the picture of wretchedness."

"What nonsense!" said Mrs. Laugham. "Why should he look wretched, because I happen to differ with him in opinion?"

A few hours subsequent to this conversation, the family party, with the addition of one or two visitors, were all assembled in the *salle à manger*, except Henry Langham, who, under the influence of irritation, had paced the terrace at the back of the hotel, till he had scarcely time to change his dress. When he entered the dining-room, he saw his wife radiant in smiles and brilliant in beauty, laughing and talking with her brother-in-law, William Damer, near the head of the table. Isabel, who was at the lower end, made a sign to him to come and sit by her.

"I have reserved a place for you," said she.

"Thank you," he answered; "you're always kind." And he dropped into it with the uncomfortable consciousness that he could not command his countenance to look either happy or indifferent.

"There's Louisa nodding to you," and, raising his eyes, he saw his wife's face beaming on him with the most perfect good humour. Henry forced a smile, and tried to look good-humoured too, but he had the mortification of feeling he did not succeed.

"How well she is looking! Is she not?" exclaimed Isabel, the peacemaker. "She has got on your favourite dress."

"I think it suits her better than any she has," said Harry, making an effort to rouse himself, a feat which, with his neighbour's assistance, he at length succeeded in accomplishing, his wife's good looks aiding not a little. It was pleasant to call so much brilliancy and beauty his own—so entirely his own—for Louisa never excited his jealousy; she never flirted or played with her power. She really loved her husband, and she would have scorned to palter with his dignity or her own, by accepting, or feigning to accept, the homage of any man upon earth. So

this light cloud fled by, as many such had done before; and the evening was passed away by the ladies in the interesting discussion of what they should wear at a *déjeûner champêtre*, about to be given by the Duc de Rivoli; expected to be the most superb thing of the season. The most charming bonnets, dresses, and mantelets were prepared for the occasion; and as the sun in France has not that antipathy to *fêtes champêtres* that our more prosaic luminary entertains, great pleasure was anticipated. But two days before that appointed for the *déjeûner*, Mr. Langham sprained his ankle; and when the morning arrived, the postman delivered a letter, with a black seal, addressed to "The Hon. William Damer."

"How very provoking!" exclaimed Isabel; "William has just got a letter announcing the death of a cousin of his!"

"What cousin?" inquired Frances, looking up from the "Journal des Débats."

"His cousin George, who was in the Guards," answered Isabel.

"Oh," said Frances, returning to her newspaper, "I never saw him."

"It's very disagreeable of him to die just now," said Louisa.

"People always do die so very injudiciously," observed Frances, without raising her eyes from the journal.

"Where is William?" asked Mrs. Langham.

"I believe he went to take a turn in the garden; he seemed a good deal affected at the news," said Isabel.

"They were brought up together," said Louisa. "Hadn't you better join him, Frances? I must go and give Harry my arm; he can scarcely hobble alone yet."

"I think it looks chilly," answered Frances, glancing at the window. "Vaudré," she added, to the groom of the chambers, "go and tell Mr. Damer we are waiting breakfast for him."

"Its very unlucky," said Isabel. "Georgina says she is too ill to go, and I'm sure mamma won't, for she hates *fêtes champêtres*."

"And if the day does not get warmer, I'm sure I shall not go," said Frances.

"And I don't think Louisa will," said Isabel.

"Why not?" asked Frances.

"On account of Henry's foot," answered her sister.

"Nonsense!" said Frances; "her staying at home won't make his foot any better."

"So the end will be that you and I shall have to go alone,

Isabel," said Miss Dacres. "It is lucky you have me to chaperone, you I think."

"Go alone where?" inquired William Damer, who had just entered the room.

"To the *déjeûner*," said Miss Dacres. "I'm sorry to hear you cannot accompany us."

"No," replied Mr. Damer; "poor George's death has quite unfitted me for gaiety. We had not been much together lately, but as boys we were inseparable."

"Such losses always touch one nearly," observed Miss Dacres.

"Isn't the morning very cold, William?" inquired Frances.

"By no means," answered he. "There is a little mist that obscures the sun; but he'll break through presently, and it will be a beautiful day. How's your foot, Langham?"

"Better," said the latter, who had just entered the room leaning on his wife's arm. "I am sorry to hear you have bad news this morning. I'm afraid we shall muster very thin at the *déjeûner* to-day."

"There'll only be Lionel and me, and Isabel, unless you go, aunt," said Frances.

"Then you do mean to go?" said Louisa, with an expression of some surprise.

"To be sure I do!" answered Mrs. Damer.

"I fancied your aunt said that she and Isabel were going alone," said William, affecting more indifference than he felt,

"Because I thought the day was chilly," answered his wife. "I detest a *déjeûner champêtre* in cold weather."

"And are not you going, Louisa?" inquired William.

"Oh no; Henry's foot is not well enough," answered she.

"I don't like your staying at home at all, Louisa," said Henry.

"It's quite unnecessary. Why not go without me?"

"Because I had rather not," answered she.

"I have a great mind to go rather than you should stay at home," said Harry. "I don't know that it would do me any harm. I need not walk about, you know."

But his wife would not hear of it; and when he reiterated his regrets at her being deprived of the expected pleasure, she laughingly told him to hold his tongue, or she should think he wanted to get rid of her.

"He knows you won't go, that's why he presses you so," said Isabel.

"Then it would only serve him right if I went on purpose to punish him," said Mrs. Langham.

This amiable devotion, however, did not prevent her entering into a fierce argument with her husband on the state of the suffrage, till Frances, seeing the storm that was brewing, recommended that they should retire to dress.

"The mist's quite gone off, and we shall have a beautiful day. It's a pity you can't go, William."

William shook his head, whilst the three ladies left the room to dress, and Mrs. Langham to superintend their toilettes.

"It's lucky I brought you away," said Frances to her sister as they went upstairs. "You'd have argued with Henry till bedtime if you hadn't been interrupted."

"I'm sure I never lose my temper," said Louisa.

"No, you don't," answered Frances; "but you're apt to make other people lose theirs. What a beautiful bonnet this is! What a pity you can't wear yours," she exclaimed.

"I don't care the least about it," replied the other. "I should have no pleasure in going without Henry; and I wonder that you care to go when William can't go with you."

"Oh, pooh!" said Frances. "What good would my staying at home do him?"

"Why, it would be a compliment, at all events. It would be showing some deference to his feelings."

"It's a very bad practice to pay men compliments," said Frances. "It spoils them, and makes them *exigeants*."



CHAPTER XVIII.

WHEN the party returned from the *déjeuner*, they met Mr. Langham in the ante-room with his taper in his hand, going to bed. He nodded to them, and wished them good-night.

"Is your foot worse, that you're going to bed so early?" asked Isabel.

"No; I am tired," answered Henry.

"So am I," said Lionel, yawning; "it was a devilish dull business."

"Well, I thought it so pleasant!" said Isabel, as Henry disappeared through the door.

When they reached the *salon* they had to impart all the details of the entertainment they had been at; to describe the decorations and the dresses; and tell who everybody flirted or danced with. Lionel repeated that he thought the whole thing *manqué*: whereupon Frances whispered to Louisa, that that was because Madame de Grandmenil was not there; she had been prevented going by a violent *migraine*. Georgina said she was very glad she had remained at home. She had caught cold, as it was, by taking a turn on the terrace; she never put her head out but she caught cold now—she was sure the wind must be in the east. William Damer, however, assured her it was in the west, which she said was very odd. She could not think why she always caught cold.

Lady Grosvenor inquired with whom Isabel had danced.

"With Colonel Aitchison," answered Frances. "He danced with her three times; two quadrilles and a waltz."

"Quite remarkable!" said Lady Georgina. "He is so proud and fastidious, that he thinks he honours any woman by looking at her."

"Then he must think he has covered Bel with glory; for he did nothing else but look at her," said Frances.

"He has one of the finest estates in Dorsetshire," observed Lady Grosvenor.

"And belongs to the Aitchison's of *White Ladies*; one of the oldest families in England," rejoined Sir Francis.

"How would you like to be the Honourable Mrs. Aitchison, Bel?" asked Mr. Damer.

"I cannot tell," answered Isabel. "I am not sufficiently acquainted with him to judge."

"So like Bel!" said Frances, laughing.

"Quite right," said Louisa.

"Little Bel takes everything *au sérieux!*" said Lionel.

"I should think it very serious to be married to anybody I found I could not like," said Isabel, blushing when she had uttered the words, remembering how personal they were to her brother; but Lionel was not susceptible.

"I should think anybody might like Colonel Aitchison," said Lady Grosvenor. "I never met with a handsomer or more agreeable man."

"But Bel means to be desperately in love before she marries; don't you, Bel?" said Mr. Damer.

"I hope so!" answered she.

"Well, I recommend her to try and fall desperately in love with Colonel Aitchison as fast as she can," said Frances; "for

I am very much mistaken if she has not made a conquest of him, and she's never likely to get a better offer."

When the party broke up for the night, Frances said to Louisa,—

"You and Henry have been having an argument again."

"We have had a little one," said Mrs. Langham.

"A little one! Not a very little one, if I may judge by his countenance," responded Frances.

"He says Sir James Livingstone was a Knight of the Bath; but that's a mistake. I know the order he had was St. Michael and St. George."

"So you fought it out. Well, I confess I think you'd have been better engaged at the *déjeûner*."

"I can't agree with you," answered Mrs. Langham. "If I had gone to the Duc de Rivoli's without him, indeed, he might have had some cause for being out of temper."

"William is not out of temper, and yet I went to the Duc de Rivoli's without him," said Frances.

Mrs. Damer's predictions regarding Colonel Aitchison proved to be perfectly correct. After a few more *déjeûners* and *soirées dansantes*, he presented himself one morning at the Hôtel Montalembert, and requested Sir Francis's permission to make proposals to his youngest daughter. Nothing could be more agreeable to the father and mother. Colonel Aitchison was considered in every respect a most desirable alliance; his fortune, family, and character were all unexceptionable. Isabel was considered exceedingly lucky, and was desired to hold herself prepared for a visit from her innamorato on the following day.

"I think he is too precipitate," she observed. "We are not sufficiently acquainted."

"*Cela viendra après!*" said Frances. "You'll have plenty of time to get acquainted, believe me!"

"But that acquaintance may not improve our liking; and, in the meantime, it is impossible to learn anything of a man's character by dancing with him."

"Colonel Aitchison's character has never been impeached," said Sir Francis.

"But I don't mean what you call his character, papa," said Isabel; "I mean his temper—his disposition—all those qualities which make a person agreeable or disagreeable to live with."

"All which, if you have any desire to ascertain, you must begin by marrying him!" said Frances. "An apprenticeship

of seven years would not suffice to discover them before marriage!"

"But I ought to love him," objected Isabel, "and I don't."

"How absurd!" exclaimed Lady Georgina.

"I can't think what you can see to dislike in him," said Lady Grosvenor. "I suspect there was not a young person at the ball last night, who wouldn't have been glad to receive the attentions he paid you."

"I don't dislike him—I like him!" said Isabel.

"Then what more can you desire?" said Georgina. "What in the world do you expect to feel?"

"Depend upon it, Bel, nothing makes people so certainly miserable as a violent passion," said Frances. "Not one man in a thousand can be the object of one, without being spoilt: it develops all their bad qualities—their extreme selfishness, their *exigence*, their vanity. Never love a man too much; or, if you're silly enough to do it, never let him know it."

"I wonder," thought William Damer, "whether Frances loves me or not."

Isabel was silenced, but not convinced. She had been dreaming of love and devotion and self-abnegation and so forth, ever since she was old enough to know the meaning of the words; and she was not disposed to fling down her castles and violate the principles she had set up for herself upon the first assault, however difficult self-defence might be in the present instance. Of all the men she had seen, Colonel Aitchison was, beyond a doubt, the most attractive to her. If she must, perforce, select a husband immediately, he was the one she would have chosen; but her sentiment went no further. She did not feel certain that he was the *only* man in the world she could love; nor had she the slightest apprehension that either he or she would break their hearts if they did not come together. This was not love in the way Isabel understood it, so she resolved to act upon her own responsibility and be perfectly candid; it would be treason, both to herself and him, to give him less than her whole heart. She, however, communicated nothing of her intentions. Nobody would have appreciated her feelings but Louisa; and even she might have thought them a little extravagant, considering that she had not a shadow of any other attachment, and that she really did prefer Colonel Aitchison to any other man.

On the following morning, between twelve and one, Isabel was seated in Lady Grosvenor's boudoir, when Colonel Aitchison was announced. It was enough to shake any woman's resolution to look at him! Such perfection of person and

dress—such a noble aristocratic bearing! and when he opened his lips to speak, a voice and accent so musical and polished, that they might have sufficed to make nonsense agreeable, had he put them to the task, which, however, he did not. Colonel Aitchison never talked nonsense; he spoke very little; his manners and appearance were so satisfactory, that people were scarcely aware *how* little; but whenever he did say anything, it was appropriate and becoming. The secret of this was, that, though he had very little intellect, he had a great deal of taste, and by means of this judicious reserve he continued to keep his own counsel. Some people thought him very clever—what they called very superior; others doubted it; but at all events he was quite clever enough to know that he had not an understanding of the first water, and as he was exceedingly proud he was correspondingly susceptible. At the same time he was fully aware of the advantages he possessed, and by no means disposed to undervalue them. Fastidious about women to the last degree, he bestowed his attentions on few, and those only the favourites of nature and the *élite* of society. He knew how welcome and desired those attentions were, and so far from ever meeting with a rebuff, he had always found “the smallest favour gratefully received.” He was, therefore, not a little astonished when he informed Isabel that he had Sir Francis’s permission to lay himself and fortune at her feet, to see her hesitate and look more embarrassed than delighted. As soon as she could command her voice to speak, she thanked him sincerely for the honour he had done her, adding, with blushing cheeks, “But I think we ought to be better acquainted. The happiness of married life must depend so much on a thorough knowledge of each other’s characters, and on an exclusive attachment which can only be founded on intimate acquaintance, that ——”

“You decline?” subjoined Colonel Aitchison, with a grave bow, and turning very pale, as he saw her hesitate how to conclude her speech.

“Oh, no!” answered she, eagerly, for her resolution was wavering; “I only ask time for better acquaintance, and for that amount of attachment to be formed that ought to subsist between ——”

“I have been too precipitate, I see,” said he, rising. “Pardon me, Miss Grosvenor,” and he passed his hand over his face, as if to conceal his emotion. Isabel felt quite distressed, and wished she had taken another course. She expected he would have entered into her scruples, and have consented to give her time, without feeling hurt or disappointed; but it was evident

he was very much hurt. He seemed to take her answer more as a rejection than she intended it.

"I only ask a little time—a very little time!" she said. "I have notions that are perhaps somewhat romantic in regard to the attachment that ought to subsist betwixt married people."

"You are quite right," he said, taking the hand she offered him. "It is I who have erred; but I am very inexperienced in affairs of this sort, and you must excuse my mistake. Do you happen to know if Mr. Grosvenor is at home? I have a little business with him about a horse."

"I dare say Lionel will be in his own apartments. This is about his breakfast hour." Don't think ——" she said; but Colonel Aitchison did not give her time to go on; he clearly wished to get out of the room. He was agitated, and though he tried to recover himself, his hand shook, and even his lips had lost their colour. As he closed the door, she burst into tears. She saw it all—or thought she did. He was violently in love with her—devotedly attached; and the disappointment of her coldness and hesitation was too much for him. She was ready to call after him and bid him come back, that she might heal the wound she had made. Isabel could not resist the sight of a grieved lover; and all that was to be done by time and intimate acquaintance was done already by the wan lips and trembling hand. She was ready to retract her conditions and accept him directly; but he was gone. However, she promised herself the pleasure of raising him from the depths of despondency to the summit of joy. She would not prolong his pain, but would restore him to happiness by avowing his conquest without delay.

She had, however, no immediate opportunity of realizing her intentions. Nearly a week passed without a visit from Colonel Aitchison, and of course every hour he stayed away rendered his presence more eagerly desired. His absence seemed to open Isabel's eyes to the state of her own heart. She grew desperately in love with him from day to day. Her cheek grew pale; her appetite failed; her sleep was disturbed. Then everybody blamed her. Sir Francis and her mother were quite angry; they had never heard such nonsense in their lives. To reject such an offer!

"Mamma, I did not reject him. He could not take it as a rejection."

"I suspect he *has* taken it so; and who can be surprised? A man that may have any girl he chooses to ask! If you had

disliked him, or had any other attachment, one might have understood it."

"I only asked for a little time," urged Isabel.

"A little nonsense!" said Sir Francis.

"You don't understand that sort of thing, Bel," said Mrs. Damer. "They don't want to be loved in that violent way by their wives; they'd find it a perfect bore."

"I don't know that," said her husband.

"I agree with Frances," said Lionel. "I shouldn't wonder if Aitchison has taken fright. He did look rather terrified when he came to me that morning to speak about my bay mare."

"He was disappointed I dare say," said Louisa; "but I think at least he must esteem Bel's motive."

"Why doesn't he prosecute his suit then?" said Mrs. Damer.

"They cannot get better acquainted unless they meet."

"I dare say he will, after a little while," said Mrs. Langham. "Give him time."

"It will be rather a slow courtship, if so much time is needed on both sides," observed Lionel.

"I fancy Colonel Aitchison's the sort of man who would detest a *grande passion*," said Georgina, languidly. "I don't the least expect to see him here again."

"I hope you misjudge him," said Henry Langham. "I should think such conduct would be both unfeeling and ungentlemanly."

"I don't agree with you," said Louisa. "I think Bel's hesitation by no means unreasonable; but on the other hand, I don't see that Colonel Aitchison is bound to await a decision that must be uncertain."

"Well, I think, having once made the offer, that he is," said Henry.

"How long?" asked Louisa. "A month? a year? two years? ten years, for anything he knows."

"Oh no," said Isabel; "three months are all I should have asked."

"It's like taking a horse or a pianoforte on trial, to be returned if not approved," said Mrs. Langham.

"All courtship is so," said Henry.

"Very different before a proposal has been made," said Louisa.

"Stop her," whispered Frances to William Damer, "we shall have an argument else."

"It is quite certain," said Mr. Damer, "that if Colonel

Aitchison is attached to Isabel, he will not be so easily repulsed ; and if he is not she is better without him."

Conversations of this description occurred almost daily, and were very painful to Isabel. This was not the way she wished her love affairs to be treated at all—discussing them as if they were matters of business and calculation. She felt wounded and pained by the publicity and the ridicule. No one properly understood and sympathized with her but Mr. Damer ; but he always did. He admired in Isabel that devotion and faculty of loving in which his own wife was so singularly deficient. He was himself a severe sufferer from her want of it. Above all things he desired to be loved ; he hungered and thirsted for affection, and yet by that strange fatality which makes people so often marry the very opposite of what their imaginations or their hearts had panted for, he had fallen in love with a woman remarkable for her coldness and selfishness.

"Bel's star is rising again," said Mrs. Damer, one morning ; "here are cards for a *soirée dansante* at Lady Longford's."

Lady Longford was Colonel Aitchison's mother.

"That looks well," said Louisa.

"I don't know that it signifies anything one way or the other," answered Mrs. Damer. "They could not leave us out, you know."

"At all events, Bel will have an opportunity of seeing what his intentions are."

Bel thought so too, and she looked forward to the evening with a beating heart. Colonel Aitchison's continued absence had alarmed her exceedingly. She was considerably relieved, however, by accidentally learning that he had gone to Fontainebleau to visit a friend there ; so that after all no unfavourable conclusion need be drawn from his non-appearance. This comfortable intelligence was very opportune, as it enabled her to shake off the depression and embarrassment that might otherwise have shown her at a disadvantage. Still her heart beat almost audibly when she entered the *salon*, and saw him leaning against the wall, observing the dancers. He came forward immediately, was all smiles and graciousness, and seized the first opportunity of engaging Isabel for the next quadrille. It seemed evident that he had been waiting for her. All was right, and her anxiety at an end. He danced with her several times, as often, indeed, as his duties towards his other guests admitted. Isabel found it the most delightful party she had ever been at. It is true he made no allusion to their late conversation, but that only showed his tact and his delicacy,

and how well he understood her. He wished to leave her quite free. How kind! how noble! how charmingly heroic! She came home radiant with happiness, and promising herself she would not keep him long in suspense. In short, had he had less delicacy, and put the question now, she would certainly have waived her scruples about not being sufficiently attached. But how much more she admired him for acting as he was doing! Her enthusiastic young heart bounded with joy at the prospect of happiness that awaited her. Neither was she further annoyed with the disagreeable comments of her friends. They were quite satisfied with Colonel Aitchison's mode of taking Isabel's bit of romance; perhaps, after all, he was a man who liked that sort of thing; it might have been better than accepting him too hastily, considering their short acquaintance; had she said yes at once, it would have appeared as if she had been husband-hunting, and was ready to take the first man that asked her. In short, the result justified the deed; what had been wrong before was right now; and Isabel's marriage was henceforth familiarly discussed by the family party. The old people talked of the settlements, the ladies of the *trousseau*, and the gentlemen of hunting with Aitchison's hounds.

In order to promote the affair, and furnish opportunities for frequent meetings, Lady Grosvenor gave several dinners and entertainments, to which Colonel Aitchison was always invited. Happy days these were to Bel. It is true he never said anything about love or marriage, but he danced with her as frequently as propriety admitted; whenever he was not desired to take some one else, he generally led her in to dinner or supper; in short, he distinguished her by such a degree of attention as, after what had passed betwixt them, could scarcely have but one meaning. That he was not hasty in going further, who could blame him? he had erred by too much precipitance, and would doubtless be cautious the second time. Besides, Isabel thought that after what she had said regarding the necessity of an exclusive attachment, he must feel doubtful how far he had been able to inspire the requisite amount of affection. Oh! he need not have doubted! He had her whole heart now! He was all that her imagination had painted; all that her heart desired. A few years older than her—indeed he was turned thirty; but she liked him the better. His age gave him dignity and added respect to her love; yet he was young enough to retain all the graces of youth. She was herself scarcely twenty, and she would have thought a man of her own age a boy. Colonel Aitchison had certainly a fine person;

dark hair and eyes, and a *blue beard*. He danced gracefully, rode admirably; had a beautiful set of teeth and the most aristocratic hands that ever were seen. In short, he was the fulfilment of Isabel's best dreams; and she was happy!



CHAPTER XIX.

As I mentioned in a former chapter, John Gibson had a powerful ally in the person of Sarah Peddie, who was an old servant and great favourite at the Adelphi, where she had things a good deal her own way. Sarah was over head and ears in love with John, and would have done anything in the world to please him; in short, she adored his ruddy cheeks and white teeth; and, as she said herself, "made a perfect *hidoll* of him." She was older than John by about twelve years; rather fat, and considerably marked with the smallpox; but she was a good-natured creature, and had a great deal in her power, especially that which was of principal importance to the object of her affection; she could supply Agnes and Martha with work. There was not only often house-linen to be made, but also dresses for the servants in the house, or those who came to lodge in it; and not unfrequently a gentleman would ask Sarah if she could recommend him somebody to make a set of shirts. When it was discovered that Agnes was really a good dressmaker, Mrs. Mortlake, the mistress of the house, began to employ her, and even to recommend her to her customers. So that John's recommendation and Sarah's patronage were the foundation of a reasonable degree of humble prosperity. The sisters worked hard, but they wanted none of the common necessaries of life; and whilst little William Gibson grew and thrived apace, Agnes found in her maternal love such rich sources of enjoyment that she was much happier than she had ever been before.

In the meanwhile, John Gibson, as is the case with "*hidolls*" in general, was not grateful; at least not as Sarah Peddie would have had him. He was not responsive; he worshipped at another shrine. Sarah, however, suffered no jealous pangs, for she never suspected Agnes of being her rival, believing John's attachment to the sisters to be merely a family one. She attributed her ill success to her age and want of attractions; and

instead of having recourse to reproaches, she sought to vanquish him by patience and kindness, exercised not only towards himself, but towards those he loved. She recollected that the airs and caprices of youth and beauty would ill become her, and that if she won John's heart, it certainly would not be by the charms of her person. So far from bearing an enmity to Agnes and Martha, she entertained really a friendly feeling towards them, because they were John's friends, and because they were always ready to sing his praises, a theme most welcome to her ears; and out of kindness to them, as well as because she thought he was John's nephew, she lavished all manner of favours on the child. Often when Agnes and Martha were busy, and had not time to amuse him, they were not sorry to indulge Sarah with his company. Being housekeeper and barmaid, she was always bustling about, and little William liked nothing so well as hanging on to her apron, and what she called helping her; which was, in fact, hindering her. Sometimes she carried him about in her arms, and when she was too busy to attend to him, she would set him on the floor to amuse himself with a toy. She told John she meant to leave the boy all her money; which, whilst it pleased him, was also a delicate way of informing him she had some to leave; and so she had, for she was prudent, and had saved what she described as *a pretty penny*.

"No. 9 wants a set of shirts made," said she one day to John. "He's given me the cloth; but he wants to speak something about the collars; so you'd better ask Mrs. Gibson to call up."

"I shall be going there as I pass presently," answered John; "and if you like I'll leave the cloth, and tell her to come."

"Tell her to come up about ten; that will be afore he goes out."

No. 9 was at breakfast in the coffee-room when Agnes arrived one fine morning, and she waited in his chamber till he had finished.

"You're come about the collars?" said he, as he entered the room; but as his eyes fell on her face his countenance changed, and he added with some confusion, "I beg your pardon!"

"Yes, sir," answered Agnes. "The housekeeper said you wished to speak to me!"

"Oh, you—you make shirts, do you?"

"Yes, sir."

Hereupon, No. 9, whose face had become very red, cleared his throat, and hesitated a little; whilst Agnes drew herself up, and endeavoured to look as cold and forbidding as she could, for she expected some impertinence. Such annoyances were not infrequent. When gentlemen sent for a sempstress in order to

give directions about their collars or wristbands, they did not expect to see a beautiful young woman, with an air and bearing far above her condition; and the effect upon them when they did see her, varied according to their characters. Some, uncertain of their ground, began to address her with a fulsome gallantry; others, jumping at once to ill conclusions, showed a disposition to still more offensive proceedings; the few treated her with augmented consideration. Altogether, however, Agnes disliked these summonses exceedingly, and occasionally had recourse to sending her sister as her substitute; but although Martha was very capable of doing the plain work, she could not cut out or take an order; and to avoid mistakes Agnes was obliged to go herself.

“I—I want a dozen shirts made, Mrs.—Miss—I beg your pardon!”

“Mrs. Gibson, sir.”

“Gibson! oh? and I’m rather particu- lar about the collars.”

“How do you wish them made, sir?” asked Agnes.

“I’ll give you a pattern;” and as he spoke he lifted the lid of a portmanteau that stood on a chair; but appearing to be suddenly struck by some new idea, he let the lid fall again, and added, “I’ll cut a pattern in paper and send you;” and then proceeded to mention some further particularities regarding the wristbands.

Agnes thought him a very odd person; for as he allowed her to go quietly out of the room without saying anything that did not relate to the shirts, she could hardly attribute his confusion to herself. When the work was done she bade John ascertain whether they were to be marked; and the answer being in the negative, Martha took home the shirts, and the money was duly paid.

A few days after this event, Lionel Grosvenor received a letter from his cousin, Lewis Watson, requesting the loan of a few hundreds; the said Lewis being *hard up*. When the writer had dismissed that subject, and some other more indifferent ones, he went on to say, that having been “lately in London, he had very unexpectedly come across a certain lady, whom he little looked to find in her present situation. She is a sempstress, and I have at this moment the honour of wearing a shirt constructed by her fair hands. She calls herself Mrs. Gibson, and, according to the account I got of her at the hotel, *is a widow, living with her sister and her brother-in-law!*” This happened shortly before Lionel’s marriage to Lady Georgina, and when little William was an infant.

The money was sent, of course, and in his answer Lionel took the opportunity of announcing his approaching marriage with Lady Georgina Minevar; casually remarking, that *of course* he did not consider that foolish frolic at Ravenscliffe as any obstacle to his intentions, and that he was sure his cousin would see it as he did—more especially as the girl had thought proper to leave him, and had gone off with God knows who! and from what he, Lewis, had heard, had doubtless fallen into some low connection. “You are aware,” he added, “that Minevar is dead, and that my intended *sposa* is one of the richest heiresses in England; and be assured, my dear cousin, that if in financial or any other matters I can ever be of use to you, you have only to say so.”

This last sentence cost Lionel some pangs; not that he cared for the money that Lewis might suck out of him, but by this time he had grown to dislike his dear cousin. He not only felt that he was unpleasantly in that dear cousin's power, but he also thought that Lewis should have stood betwixt himself and his folly. The passion he had entertained for Agnes—for sentiment it cannot be called—had been long since extinct; and he was not only very angry with himself for marrying her, but he could scarcely conceive what had possessed him to do it; and whilst the absurdity and incongruity of the match stared him in the face, her calm and cold rejection of his gallantries faded and dwindled into a politic resistance, which it would only have required a little perseverance on his own part to overcome. It occurred to him, too, that so far from throwing any impediment in the way of this foolish step, Lewis had rather encouraged it—not openly, but covertly; and whilst he disclaimed the part of adviser, and had actually refrained from giving an opinion, he had somehow or other urged him forwards more effectually than any advice could have done. Lionel had not the abilities of his sisters; he was weak and without principles, but he was not a fool; and he saw with a dim vision that Lewis was not his sincere friend, though he was far from penetrating the depth of his cousin's plots—plots which were altogether so complicated, and, as the framers of them believed, far-seeing, that they were quite beyond the ken of Lionel's simple understanding.

Lewis Watson was emphatically a schemer; he never did anything without a motive, and what he considered a deeply-laid plan; and he had long been persuaded that, betwixt luck and scheming, he was destined to be the possessor of Ravenscliffe. It was this expectation that had prevented his ever

entering into any profession, or even seriously preparing himself for any. He had selected and rejected half-a-dozen; and his late appearance at college was not in reality with any view to study, but with the design of recommending himself to his rich cousin whilst his mind was young and impressionable. He was far too idle, and too much occupied with his schemes and visions of future wealth, to work either mind or body; and he now considered that the obligation he had conferred on Lionel by facilitating his marriage, or rather the power he had obtained over him as the possessor of his secret, would suffice henceforth to replenish his purse and exonerate him from the annoyance of any sort of labour. In short, the heir of Ravenscliffe must either maintain him himself, or, by procuring him some easy and profitable situation, quarter him on somebody else. Lionel's illness, and some circumstances connected with it, defeated these hopes for several months. Lewis Watson retreated to the Continent, and nothing was heard of him for a considerable period. At length he returned; and the letter above alluded to was the first intimation Lionel received of his cousin's whereabouts, as well as the first draft drawn upon his gratitude or his fears.

The receipt of the money was agreeable, and the contents of the letter no less so—this second marriage being exactly what Lewis had wished and counted on, from his knowledge of his cousin's character, whom he considered now sold to him body and soul. Lionel had, in fact, no wife but Agnes, whom he disowned, and could raise up no legitimate impediments to his (Lewis's) succession; added to which, he knew he was in very infirm health, and likely enough to die young. Lewis gave the table a triumphant blow with his fist when he read the letter, exclaiming, "He knew he'd do it!" triumphing both in the opening prospect and the successful scheming.

The meeting with Agnes, too, was extremely opportune. He wished to keep his eye on her, and to know where to find her when wanted. In short, he was Fortune's favourite—everything was turning to his advantage.

On the whole, matters did not look bad, certainly; and if not well enough to justify such sanguine expectations, their aspect was much more encouraging than that on which many as sanguine are indulged.

CHAPTER XX.

THUS, easy and comfortable in his circumstances, Mr. Watson resolved to enjoy himself. He made another visit to the Continent; and upwards of two years having slipped pleasantly away, he returned again to England; and partly from a desire to learn something of Agnes, without ostensibly making inquiries, he took up his quarters at his old lodging in the Adelphi, and communicated to Sarah that he wanted a set of shirts, and that, as the last were very well made, he would like to employ the same person again.

"That was Mrs. Gibson, sir, I think."

"I think that *was* the name of the young woman."

"Well, sir, she don't make shirts now."

"Indeed! I'm sorry for that! Don't you think she would make mine? What is she doing?"

"She's got into a fashionable milliner's at the West-end, sir. Perhaps you may recollect she was very handsome; and they wanted her for the show-room. They claps the bonnets and caps upon her head, and the folks that buys 'em expects to look as handsome in 'em as she does."

"I understand. But isn't that a dangerous situation for so pretty a person as Mrs. Gibson? A widow, too, I think you told me?"

"Yes, sir, she's a widdy, and sister-in-law to our John."

"I hope it's a respectable house she's got into."

"Bless you, yes, sir! It was Mrs. Mortlake as recommended her to Mrs. der Will.

"To who?"

"To Mrs. der Will, the famous milliner in Bruton Street."

"And she's sister-in-law to one of your men?"

"Mrs. Der Will? No, sir; Mrs. Gibson is. But I can get your shirts made just as well as Mrs. Gibson made 'em, sir: there's never no want of shirtmakers for them as has shirts to make."

This conversation took place in Mr. Watson's bed-chamber; and just as Sarah had uttered the last oracular sentence, she was interrupted by a noise outside the door, and the cry of a child.

"Lank ha' mercy! there's that child tumbled over the slop-pail!" cried Sarah, darting out of the room, and catching up the boy, who was sprawling on the floor.

"Hush, hush, Billy arn't hurt," said she, patting the child on the back. "If Billy makes a noise, we shall have the missus up, and she'll send Billy home."

Billy was squalling with the whole power of his lungs, but this hint silenced him.

"There's a man; Billy wouldn't cry," said Sarah, wiping the child's eyes and nose with her apron, and re-entering the door of Mr. Watson's room. "I begs your pardon, sir," she continued; "it's only little Billy Gibson, as can't abide to be away from me. He follows me about like a lamb a following of its mother. But about them shirts, sir?"

"Pretty dear! What did you say his name was?" said Mr. Watson, whose eyes were perusing the features of the child with a considerable degree of curiosity.

"It's Billy Gibson, sir: Mrs. Gibson's little boy."

"You don't mean the Mrs. Gibson who made my shirts?"

"Yes, sir. You'd scarce think she was old enough to have a child, she looks so young, poor thing: but she was married when she was little better than a child; and this here babby wasn't born till after she'd lost her husband."

"Lost him!"

"Yes, sir; I believe he fell from a scaffold."

"Then she's a widow?"

"In course, sir; I thought I told you so."

"And his name was Gibson, the brother of your porter here?"

"Yes, sir; the same."

"The boy's not like his mother. Does he resemble his father?" inquired Mr. Watson.

"I don't know, I'm sure, sir; I never see him. He died afore Mrs. Gibson came to Lunnun; but he's no ways like our John, his uncle."

"A very fine child! How old is he?"

"Just turned three, sir. Shall I take the linen for the shirts now, sir?"

"I'll give it you to-morrow or next day."

"Hell and the devil!" exclaimed Mr. Lewis Watson, dropping into a chair, as Sarah left the room; "the boy's as like Lionel as two peas; I could have sworn to him anywhere."

It was certainly an unpleasant surprise. Matters were going on so propitiously, that he was in the highest spirits. Such a *contretemps* as this had never occurred to him.

“A child! a boy too! A brat that looks as if he was destined to live above a hundred, at least. D—n vaccination! I wonder if he’s had the measles. I wish he’d broken his neck over the pail just now. What the devil’s to be done? The resemblance and the age would settle the question at once. I wonder if his birth was registered. John Gibson! If I mistake not, that was the name of the man who signed the certificate; in which case, he must know who’s the father as well as I do. What can have induced her to hold her tongue about the birth of the boy? Not money, for she’s poor. They must have persuaded her the marriage was illegal.”

And yet that seemed improbable, too. Concluding that Agnes had formed some second connection, and never suspecting the existence of a child, Lewis Watson had fancied that he comprehended her conduct. He supposed she had relinquished her claims upon Lionel, because she had forfeited them. But, not to mention the rights of the boy and the natural desire a parent would feel to see them established, the great advantages to herself of being the acknowledged mother of the heir of Ravenscliffe were surely not likely to be flung away, if she was blameless, without an effort to attain them. Why should she work for her bread, make shirts, or stand on her feet all day in Madame de Ville’s showroom? It was the most extraordinary abnegation ever heard of. Unless, indeed, she believed herself not really the wife of Lionel. But then, again, how had she been persuaded to sit down quietly under such an injury? Why not make a struggle for compensation? The thing was inexplicable.

All these reflections, and many more, chased each other through Mr. Watson’s excited mind, within the first five minutes after Sarah left him, with Willy Gibson in her arms. Unacquainted as he was with the character of Agnes, her conduct *was* inexplicable. It was impossible for him to conceive the respect and awe which circumstances had engendered in her mind towards the Ravenscliffe family on the one hand, and her own pride and delicacy on the other; the two combined making her shrink from enforcing claims which she knew they would think monstrous and ridiculous, and which even appeared so to herself; and so far from seeking redress for the injury she had received, she recoiled with horror and dread from the ridicule and scorn that she knew would be lavished on her were she to allege it. If she asked nothing of them, at least they could not trample on her; if she claimed nothing, they could not revile her.

Willie, as his mother called him, and Billy, according to Sarah

Peddie, had grown in the affections of the housekeeper till she was never happy without him, nor he without her; and now that Agnes was generally all day from home, the child spent nearly his whole time with his patroness, who publicly declared her intention of making him her heir. Not that she had conquered her passion for John, nor quite relinquished the hope of calling herself Mrs. Gibson, but she was quite aware that she could in no more effectual way recommend herself to his regards than by such an avowal. Sarah was, perhaps, not exactly the tutress that Agnes might have selected for her son had she been free to choose, but she didn't know how else to dispose of him so well. She proposed, when he grew a little older, sending him to school—infant schools were then unknown—but he was too young for that at present, and in the meantime he was well fed, well taken care of, and perfectly happy under Sarah's protecting wing. He was thus always about the house or the door; running with John when he was sent on messages, or hanging on Sarah's apron as she went about her business; and thus he daily fell under the observation of Mr. Lewis Watson, who thought it inconceivable that he did not get ruu over or tumble down the area steps and break his neck. For several days after he first learnt the child's parentage, he fancied something of the sort must inevitably happen; and he never came home after being absent any time without expecting to see Sarah in tears, and to be told the boy had met with an accident; for, as I have observed, he was of a sanguine disposition, and was pervaded by a strong conviction that the wished-for fortune was destined to be his. So numerous, it struck him, were the dangers lying in the path of infancy, that he only wondered how any child, however watched and tended, should grow to manhood; and that this child should do so, who played half the day in a London street, seemed highly improbable. He read all the accidents in the newspapers with peculiar pleasure, and counted with interest the infantine deaths recorded in the obituary. He even took the trouble of procuring some statistical calculations on the subject; and having ascertained the number of children that die in London, he felt a strong persuasion that little Willie Gibson was not destined to arrive at manhood.

This persuasion, however, which at times almost amounted to a conviction, did not bring him repose; he was too impatient for the *dénouement* of the drama to wait contentedly for the catastrophe; he felt that he should like, in some way or other, to expedite it. He was conscious, in short, of an extreme desire to kick the child from the top of the stairs to the bottom; and

one day, when, on passing an open door, he saw him leaning half out of a window, he would certainly have helped him a little further had not reading and education instructed him that such indulgences are perilous to the contriver.

But when the state of alternate hope and disappointment had continued through a considerable part of the London season, Mr. Watson's patience began to be exhausted, and it occurred to him that if fortune would not help him, he must needs help himself; but how? He was not a man for violent measures; he wished to get the child out of the way, but not to harm him, for that would be harming himself. After much reflection, a scheme struck him that he thought might answer; and as it was in consonance with his character, a *deep* one, he immediately set about laying the train for its execution.



CHAPTER XXI

"WHAT'S the matter there below?" inquired Mr. Watson one evening of the waiter, who had followed him upstairs to take his orders. "What are those women making such a noise about in the passage?"

"It's about the child, sir, that you may have seen running about the house. They don't know what's become of him."

"What, has any accident happened to him?"

"They're afraid so, sir; or he's strayed away, or something. He was out playing afore the door in the afternoon, and whether anybody's caught him up, or whether he's strayed away of his self, nobody knows."

"Why should you think anybody'd catch him up? What motive should anybody have for doing such a thing?"

"One of them child-stealers, sir, might do it; sometimes they takes children and strips 'em for their clothes."

"But in that case they'll let him go again."

"I can't say, sir; sometimes they keeps 'em to beg."

After some further conversation and inquiries as to what measures had been adopted for the boy's recovery, the man was dismissed, and Mr. Lewis Watson undressed himself and stepped into bed. What sort of night he passed I will not pause to inquire, but rather proceed to the weeping women below.

Dressmaking, of however humble a description, being more profitable than shirtmaking, Martha, under her sister's tuition, had taken to that line, continuing to work in their lodging for the sake of having a home for the child and a resting-place for Agnes, when she was released on Saturday nights. On other nights she slept at Madame de Ville's, in order that she might not be subject to the annoyance of passing at a late hour through the streets. Sunday was her gala day, for that she passed with her boy; the rest of the time he was under the charge of Martha; and when, as happened four or five days in the week, he had been carried off by John or Sarah in the morning, she was in the habit of fetching him back at bedtime, if not duly returned before.

On the evening in question, she had been very busy, having a dress to finish which was imperatively demanded by an impatient maid-of-all-work for the approaching Sunday, and had somewhat delayed fetching the boy, hoping to see him arrive under the escort of one of his friends. At length, as he came not, between eight and nine, she threw on her bonnet, and proceeded to the Adelphi. John was busy carrying up the trunks of some travellers just arrived.

"Ha'n't you got Billy home yet?" said he.

"No; where is he?" returned Martha.

"In doors with Sarah, I suppose," said John, swinging a heavy portmanteau over his shoulder, whilst Martha entered the house in search of the child.

"He went away with John some time in the evening," said Sarah; "and I've never seen him since; I thought he'd took him home."

"Dear me!" said Martha, "John hasn't got him. I just saw him carrying in some luggage as I came by."

"He's got upstairs with missus in her room, I warrant," said Sarah. "He's o'er fond of going there when he can run away."

Sarah's hypothesis, however, proved to be unfounded. Willie Gibson was not there, nor could he be found in any part of the house.

For some time it was suspected that being later than usual he had got tired, and had fallen asleep in some corner or another, and every room was searched, and every bed and sofa examined, but to no purpose; the child was not to be found.

Then followed the inquiries as to who had last seen him and where; and it appeared that in the course of the evening, John, when starting on an errand to Pall Mall, had found him

playing with a girl of his own age in the street. The girl had some toys, particularly a little tin carriage painted red and blue, with which they both seemed highly delighted, insomuch that Willie was at first unwilling to leave it, even to accompany his much-loved John; but John having recourse to the well-known expedient of applying his red cotton pocket-handkerchief to his eyes and pretending to cry, the child relented and went. When they returned, he met one of the lodgers at the door, who desired him to run off immediately and engage him two places in the York mail, and then to proceed as far as Oxford Street with a note. He sat the boy down upon the steps, bidding him go in to Sarah, and since that he had been kept on his feet running from one place to another, and had never seen him. Neither did any one else appear to have done so. Two or three of the servants agreed that they had observed him playing with the little girl and the tin carriage, with whom it appeared he had been seen playing before; but none could be positive at what hour they had last remarked him; and the gentleman who had been standing at the door when the child was set down, had already departed. The probability was, that Willie Gibson had gone off with the little girl, and it became important to discover who she was and where she lived, but this did not seem an easy matter. She belonged to none of the neighbours; several people had seen her, but no one knew whence she came. The man who swept the nearest crossing might have been able to give some information, but he was gone before the child's absence was discovered, and the affair, as well as the night, grew darker and darker every minute; and whilst the two women talked and wept, and wondered and suggested, John, no less distressed, as soon as his work was done, set off to scour the neighbourhood, and give notice at the police-offices of their misfortune.

Agnes slept well that night after her day's labour—the labour of standing on her feet and talking to one woman after another about her cap or her bonnet; listening to their various requirements and complaints, sympathizing with their doubts and aiding their discussions anent flowers and feathers, and ribbons and gauze. No anxious dreams visited her pillow that Friday night; but as she lay down, she thanked Heaven that the next day would be Saturday, and that she could go home to her boy—that little star that alone cheered her existence. Agnes was now a very different person to the Agnes of the Holmes Farm; experience and trouble had mellowed her character, and since her heart was open and her affections roused by becoming

a mother, her pride was modified and her selfishness conquered. If she submitted cheerfully to a life of fatigue and to an irksome employment, it was not for herself that she did it, but in order that she might earn the means of giving her boy a respectable education; and if she was still proud, it was a pride that recoiled from insult, and from all that was repugnant to her innate delicacy as a woman. Whatever germs of ambition or love of grandeur had been mingled with it formerly, were now wholly eradicated. She saw the absurdity of wishing to be lifted by external accidents out of the class she belonged to by birth and education, into one for which she was wholly unqualified except by personal beauty, which belongs to no class. She conceived clearly all the mortifications and vexations that would have embittered her elevation, and she saw enough of great people every day to know how little toleration they have for those who encroach upon their outworks. She comprehended too perfectly the immature and superficial sentiment that had led Lionel to deceive her and perhaps himself, and whilst she despised and resented what she thought the deliberate deception he had practised on her, she was almost ready to forgive him, in consideration of the splendid misery she had escaped.

But during that night, whilst Agnes reposed in happy ignorance, John and Martha were scouring the streets in search of their strayed lamb, whilst Sarah, whose office did not permit of her leaving the house, stood weeping and wringing her hands at the door of the hotel. When the morning brought no tidings, the sad necessity impended of acquainting the mother with what had happened. Should they do it at once, or wait till the evening? One suggested it would be such a dreadful shock, if they broke in upon her with the news at Madame de Ville's; another that it would be worse to reserve it till she came home at night, expecting to find her darling safe in bed; and the third protested against being in haste.

"Ill news travels fast enough of itself," said Sarah, "without our helping it. What need be in such a hurry? Who knows but we may find him again before night!"

But Martha, who always felt a certain awe of her sister, feared the responsibility of delaying the communication. She might think they had not done all that could be done, and that had she herself been earlier informed, she might have found her boy; so she overruled their objections, and set off with a heavy heart for Bruton Street. When she arrived, there was a carriage at the door, and, fearful of intruding, she lingered at the corner

till she saw Madame de Ville's door open, and the owners of it depart. Then she crossed the street and rang at the bell.

"I want to speak a word with my sister, Mrs. Gibson, if you please."

"Very well; you had better sit down."

There was a bench in the passage for footmen on wet days, whereon Martha seated herself. Presently there was a loud rat-tat at the door; the young lady, dressed in the height of fashion, who had admitted her, opened it; several ladies entered, and ascended the stairs, whilst two others came down and went out. A succession of such goings and comings had lasted for above an hour, before Martha, who was sitting on thorns of anxiety, found courage to obtrude herself again upon the notice of the elegantly-dressed young lady. Then she ventured to ask if she thought her sister would soon be down, and the young lady answered that she had not yet been able to speak to her; the show-room was full of ladies.

Another hour elapsed, with no better success; for there still flowed on an interminable stream of ladies, so that Martha began to think she should better spend her time in seeking the child than in sitting there; and remembering, besides, how unfit a place that would be to communicate such a piece of intelligence, she came away.

Little dreaming of the ill news that awaited her, Agnes was in the meanwhile going through her duties of setting off coiffures and mantles by her handsome face and figure, whilst her mind was engrossed with thoughts of her boy alone, whom she seldom saw except on Saturday nights, when, in order to make her return a festival to the child, she was in the habit of taking him a new toy and some sweetmeats; and there was a shop in the Strand, which lay in her way, at which she always stopped to make her purchases. It being scarcely nine o'clock, the shop was still lighted, and the pavement crowded with busy pedestrians, when, after inspecting the various dogs and rabbits and jumping-joans in the window, she was attracted by a little carriage, painted very showily in red and blue. It would probably cost more money than she was accustomed to give, but as it looked very attractive, she stepped in and inquired the price.

"It's eighteen-pence," said Mrs. Bint, the shopkeeper, who was acquainted both with Agnes and her child from her frequenting the shop; "but you mustn't buy him that: a lady brought him here to-day, and gave him one exactly like it."

"A lady! what lady?" asked Agnes.

"I couldn't say who she was. She'd a little girl with her, and she had just such another toy in her hand, which she had bought in the morning. I fancy your boy had been crying for it, or something, so she brought him here and gave him one to his self."

Agnes supposed the lady might be some good-natured lodger at the hotel, so she altered her intentions, and selected a leaping frog, with which she proceeded to her lodgings. Being earlier than usual, she ran upstairs as soon as the maid opened the door, hoping the child might be yet awake, but the door of her room was locked. Martha must be out—probably gone to fetch him; so she turned to descend again, when the girl, who had followed her, asked her if she had "heard anything of him yet?"

"Heard anything of who?" asked Agnes.

"Of the child," answered the maid. "Lauk! don't you know they've a-lost him? Your sister's been in and out all day a-secking of him, and asking if he were comed home. She said she was going to the Adelphi, and would be back afore you came."

"Oh, my God! my God!" cried the mother, clasping her hands with passionate anguish, as she flew down the stairs again, and along the street, in pursuit of Martha, whom she presently met hastening home, with the intention of being there first. Then came the eager inquiries, the painful discouraging answers, the despairing ejaculations: "Oh, my boy! my boy! what shall I do without my boy!"

Neither Martha nor John Gibson had been able to obtain any intelligence. Agnes herself had heard more than anybody else, as it happened, from the toy-shop woman; and thither they now went to make further perquisitions, and to learn what sort of lady it was that had bought the toy.

"*Was it a lady?*"

Mrs. Bint said "No," she didn't think she was, though she'd very good black clothes on. She spoke kindly to the child, and led him by the hand. She had never seen her before but once, and that was the same morning when she had come in with the little girl and bought her the tin carriage. The little girl was extremely pretty, and in the morning neatly dressed in a cotton frock and coarse straw bonnet, tied down with a green ribbon; but when they returned with the boy, she looked dirty and smutty, as if she had been playing in the street. She suggested that the stranger might have taken the boy home with her, and

would bring him back ; and she promised to be on the look-out should she pass the window.

This was all they could get there. John had been to the police-offices ; and in short, he and Martha had been everywhere they could think of, and the latter recommended Agnes to go home and wait ; but that was impossible. Who can sit still when one's heart and brain are impatiently ranging the earth in search of one's lost treasure ? She took Martha with her, and they set off, rushing through every street in the neighbourhood, entering every open door, and questioning everybody of whom question was possible. Some shook their heads, and said that there were so many children about the streets, that it was not likely any one could remember one from another ; some sympathized with her grief, and related how they had lost their own children and recovered them ; others told her sad stories of accidents and child-stealing ; whilst others again, who liked gossip, and wished to prolong the pleasure of the excitement, declared they had seen just such a child as she described led by a man, or a woman, or crying at the corner of a street ; but she obtained no intelligence. The whole weary night they tramped the streets, till by Sunday morning they were so much exhausted that they were perforce obliged to rest,—at least to lie down, for rest there was none for them. After a few hours passed in tears of anguish and tossings of despair, Agnes rose and went forth again with Martha, whose sufferings were not much less than those of her sister ; but it was all in vain. On Monday handbills were posted offering a reward for any information, Sarah Peddie declaring herself willing to give all the money she had in the world for the recovery of “poor little Bill.” As for John Gibson, he was in despair, and could not even bring himself to see Agnes, for he took all the blame upon himself. If he had only delivered the child to Sarah when he brought him back, instead of leaving him upon the steps, the misfortune might not have occurred. Betwixt the sufferings of his mind and the fatigues of his body, for he was scouring the town night and day, and took no sleep, a week reduced him to the shadow of his former self, and the ruddy cheeks that had won Sarah's heart were as wan and hollow as those of the under-waiter at the end of a sharp season.

CHAPTER XXII.

ON Monday morning Martha went to Bruton Street to make an excuse for her sister's non-appearance; and, having delivered the message to the young person who opened the door, was about to depart, when the girl begged her to stay till she had transmitted it to madame. The answer she presently brought back was that madame said it was "very inconvenient, and she begged Mrs. Gibson would return as soon as possible, as she could not do without her." Mrs. Gibson was, however, in no humour to think of Madame de Ville, who, unfortunately, did not so easily forget her. When a couple of days had elapsed she sent to say that Agnes was very much wanted, and the messenger reporting that she had found her ill in bed, the illustrious lady condescended to call herself. At the sight of her Agnes burst into a fresh passion of tears, whereupon Madame de Ville recommended her not to spoil her beauty by crying, adding that she had herself lost fourteen children; yet there she was *toute fraîche*, she hoped. In short, she was of opinion that the loss of children was often rather a blessing than otherwise; for who could say how they might turn out, or what trouble they might occasion us when they grew up? Whereas the possession of beauty was a positive good, and the preservation of it an imperative duty. As a good deal of her homily, however, was delivered in French, Agnes understood it very imperfectly; but she took care to make her comprehend clearly that she expected her to return with as little delay as possible to her post in Bruton Street. Agnes answered that when she had found her boy she should see her.

"Mais avant s'il vous plait, madame!" said Madame de Ville, with such a ferocious aspect that Martha felt quite frightened, and inquired what she had said; but Agnes was too much occupied with her own thoughts to trouble herself about Madame de Ville or her affairs.

"I wonder," she said, "if Mr. Grosvenor would help me?"

"How could he help you?" said Martha.

"Oh," she answered, "great people can do many things. The police will give themselves no trouble for me; but if they

knew whose child he was they might find him. I'll go to Mr. Conyers; perhaps he could assist me."

But however desirous of doing this, she was for some days unable to leave her bed from extreme weakness, consequent on her over-exertion. The moment she felt she could stand upon her feet she rose, in spite of Martha's entreaties, and having called a coach they drove to Saville Row. As she had been for some time accustomed to go there regularly to receive the stipend paid for the child, she was always admitted without question. Three months, however, had elapsed since she had called, and on seeing her Mr. Conyers supposed she had repented of her last visit, which had been for the purpose of telling him that being now able to support her boy herself, she no longer needed the allowance. Struck by her disinterestedness, he advised her not to be in a hurry to relinquish it, as illness or accident might render it very necessary to her yet.

"You have thought better of it, I see," said he, nodding his head significantly. "I think you're right."

"It's not for the money I've come, sir," she sobbed out. "I've lost my child."

"Indeed. What did he die of?"

"He's not dead; at least, I hope not!" she answered, bitterly weeping; and then she related what had occurred. Whilst she spoke, the face of Mr. Conyers expressed considerable surprise and curiosity, and he asked her several questions; but when he had elicited all he could, and she requested his advice how to proceed, he professed himself unable to give her any.

"You have been to the police offices, you say, and put up handbills. I don't know anything else you can do."

Agnes thought there was something very peculiar in his manner, and she came away possessed with a new idea; namely, Mr. Conyers had some reason for suspecting Lionel of abstracting the child. Why Lionel should do it, she could not conceive. He could have no affection for the boy, nor any reason that she could imagine for bearing him ill-will. The paltry stipend could not be a consideration; besides, wherever he was he must cost something; but still his disappearance seemed very like the result of a plot, and who but his father could have any motive for forming such a plot?

Perhaps, either by accident or design, he had seen him, been captivated by his beauty and innocence, and longed to possess him; or somebody else had seen him, and represented what an engaging child he was! These were mother's fancies; but they

seemed to her consistent with probability. She had heard indeed that Mr. Grosvenor and all the family were still in Paris, and that they intended spending the ensuing winter there; still Lionel might have been in England for a short time, and taken the boy away with him. But how should she ascertain the fact? She saw but one way, which was to go to Paris herself, and see Lionel. It was a very painful thing to do; but there could be no pain like that she was now suffering. When she communicated her suspicions to her sister, Martha adopted them at once. Indeed, she seldom held any opinion opposed to that of Agnes, whom she looked upon as much more capable of judging on all matters than herself, except indeed they were household matters; there Martha shone, and Agnes pretended to no rivalry. The next question was; how was the journey to be managed? And how was money to be provided for it? Madame de Ville owed her some, but she feared she would only pay her, on condition she returned to her situation; a thing she shrunk from under present circumstances. She had been engaged for the season, and there were yet several weeks of the term unexpired.

They were yet discussing this question when they heard the voice of the owner of the house calling them from below. Martha rose, and opened the door.

"Here's somebody wants Mrs. Gibson," said the woman.

Martha flew downstairs, and Agnes after her; it was surely some one bringing news of the child. A man stood in the passage.

"What is it?" they cried with one voice.

"It's a summons," answered the man. "Is your name Gibson?"

"No," answered Martha. "This is Mrs. Gibson."

"Then she must come along with me to the police office," said he, "unless she prefers going back to Mrs. de Will's. If you like to go back and pay the expenses of this here summons, she'll take you; if not, you must go along with me."

The owner of the house stood near them, observing what passed.

"What must I do?" inquired Agnes, turning towards him.

"You'd better go to the Frenchwoman's," said he; "if you don't, they'll fine you; and if you can't pay the fine, they'll put you into jail."

The word *jail* frightened Agnes, and she said she'd go to Bruton Street directly; but the man insisted he must see her

safe there, lest she should not keep her promise; so she flung on her bonnet and shawl, and set off.

As they marched along, he asked her why she disliked returning, and whether it was because her "mistress treated her ill." Then Agnes told him of her misfortune, together with all the particulars she had been able to collect.

"It is so extraordinary," she said, "that we can't find out who the little girl belonged to that he had been playing with, although several people had seen her, not only that day, but for a day or two before. She belonged to nobody in the neighbourhood, for I and my friends have been to every house round about the spot."

"Some lodger, as decamped, I take it," said the officer, whose name was Parsons.

"But everybody denied having any lodger who had left with a little girl, such as we described."

"And wasn't there nobody ever seen with that 'ere girl?"

"No, except at the toy-shop; but the day before my child was taken away, a person that lives close by where they were playing, happened to be looking out of the window, when a coach drove up to the hotel door, and she saw a woman, or a lady—she couldn't quite say whether she was a lady, but she was very well dressed—rush forward and lift the child on to the pavement; and she appeared to be warning her to keep out of the way of carriages; but whether this person belonged to her or was only a chance passenger that saw the child in danger, we can't find out. The sweeper of the crossing says that there was a lady in black that walked about a good deal for two or three days, and seemed to be looking at the river; but he never observed her speak to the child."

"She was a decoy, I take it."

"Who was?"

"The little girl. They wanted your boy for som'ut, and she was sent out to decoy him away."

"But she was too young to comprehend such a plot."

"Maybe; but he'd get used to play with her, and then he'd go away with them to the toy-shop."

Parsons seemed to think, however, that the child would be recovered; and he promised to be on the look-out himself, and to speak to his brother officials on the subject. As they were passing up the Haymarket, a man came out of an eating-house on the left-hand side, and stood upon the step, whilst he drew on a pair of ragged gloves. As Agnes's eyes met his, she recognized his person; it was Leighton, Mr. Grosvenor's former

valet, but sadly changed; his features were haggard, his figure wasted, and his clothes shabby. He knew her too, and advanced, saying—

“How do you do, Miss Crawford?”

She would rather not have acknowledged him, but did not know how to avoid it. She did not stop, however, but walked on, whilst he fell in beside her.

“Are you living in London, still?” he said.

“Yes,” she answered; “I and my sister live together.”

“And is Mr. Grosvenor in London?”

“I don’t know, indeed,” she answered, blushing. “I heard that he went abroad to recover his health.”

“That was a bad business for me, Miss Crawford,” said Leighton, with a sigh. “God’s my witness, I was as innocent of the whole thing as the child unborn. I saved master’s life, for if I hadn’t gone downstairs he’d have led to death most likely; and in return I’m a ruined man. Who’ll ever take me into their service again?”

“It is certainly very hard,” answered Agnes.

“You never had any idea,” he said, “who it was you saw in the park that night?”

“Never!” replied Agnes; “but it was a taller, stouter man than you, and I’m pretty sure that he passed me on the road near the milestone whilst I was waiting for the coach.”

“If I could find him, I’d take his life!” said Leighton, clenching his fist.

“Hallo!” said Parsons, an exclamation which first drew Leighton’s attention to Agnes’s companion, whom he now eyed with considerable curiosity.

“If you’d as good reason as I have, perhaps you’d say as much,” said Leighton. “I’m thinking of going to Mr. Grosvenor, wherever he is, to ask him how I’m to get my bread honestly without a character.”

Agnes did not know what to say, and heartily wished she had not met him. His case was undoubtedly, according to her own persuasion, a very hard one, but she was too much engrossed with her own sorrows to have much sympathy to bestow upon his; so when they reached the crossing, she wished him “good morning” in a manner that left him no alternative but to depart.

“Good morning!” he said, in a desponding tone. “If you see Mr. Grosvenor, I should be glad if you would say I’m badly off and like to continue so; and that it’s very hard to suffer for a thing I never had any hand in.”

"I would willingly say it," answered Agnes, "but I am never likely to see Mr. Grosvenor. Good morning!"

Parsons was evidently desirous of asking some questions regarding this acquaintance of Agnes's, but the explanation would have been embarrassing to her, and she eluded it by recurring at once to the subject nearest her heart, which occupied them till they reach Bruton Street. The young lady who admitted her asked if she had heard anything of her child, which brought so vividly to her mind the delighted expectations with which she had last left that door, that she burst into tears again, and instead of ascending to the show-room, was obliged to take refuge in a small parlour where the young people were in the habit of taking off their bonnets and shawls, or receiving anybody who called to speak to them. In it she found one of the dressmakers, whose name was Barber, in conversation with a respectable-looking woman, attired in mourning.

"Well," said the stranger, rising when Agnes entered, as if the interruption had caused her to move, "I'll bid you good-bye then for the present."

"I'm afraid I'm interrupting you," said Agnes, turning away her head to hide her tearful face. "I'm not going to stay."

"Oh, no! I must go back to the work-room," said Miss Barber. "But when do you go, Jane?"

"To-morrow, or next day at farthest," answered the woman.

"Of course the sooner the child has a change the better, but a couple of days wouldn't make much difference, and I wish you would stay over Sunday."

"I can't," said the stranger; "but I shall be back before winter."

"And how much longer do you think David and the Major'll be away?"

"Lord knows! It depends upon these slaves that are making a rumpus. But I must be going, for I've left the children locked up, and I'm always afraid they'll get into mischief."

"Oh! stop a moment," said Miss Barber. "I want to send Helen a piece of silk for her doll. I'll fetch it in a moment."

"It's very warm weather!" observed the stranger to Agnes, when Miss Barber quitted the room.

"Very," answered Agnes, who felt that the observation was probably prompted by the colour of her own face, which was flushed with weeping and keeping pace with the officer; so she waited, wishing to put herself into a little better trim before she appeared upstairs.

"London gets disagreeable at this season, though the fashion-

able folks don't seem to think so," continued the stranger; "and yet for heat, it's nothing to the place I was at abroad; but somehow, I think I feel it more than I did there, but I'm going down to the sea at Brighton, and I hope it will be cooler down there."

Miss Barber now re-entered the room with some scraps of silk and gauze for the doll; and after a few words of farewell the stranger took her leave, wishing Agnes good morning as she passed. When Miss Barber had let her out, she returned, saying that the woman was her sister, and that she had made a very bad marriage, poor soul!

"I don't mean that her husband treats her ill," she said, as she smoothed her air and pulled out her curls before the glass, "but he's a soldier, and she's had a miserable time of it ever since she married him. But I hope you have found your little boy!"

"No," answered Agnes, sadly shaking her head, whilst the tears she had been trying to stem, began again to course each other down her cheeks. "I'm afraid I shall never find him!"

"I've often heard of children being lost and found amongst the chimney-sweepers!" rejoined Miss Barber. "They steal them to sweep the chimneys. My sister once lost a child, and she was in a dreadful fright for fear the sweeps had taken him, but he had just strayed away by himself."

"Then she did find him again?" said Agnes, eagerly, grasping at the precedent.

"Yes, she did; but he was away a day and a night. The watchman had found him crying on a doorstep, and took care of him; but he died afterwards, poor little fellow!"

"From being out all night?"

"Oh, no; it was in fine summer weather. But the regiment David (that's my brother-in-law) belongs to, was ordered abroad, to Jamaica, and the climate was too hot, I fancy; for, though he was as fine a child as you ever saw, he sickened and died very soon after they got there. They thought it would have broke my sister's heart; but, luckily, a little girl came to make up the loss; and she's the only one she has now. I'm very glad of it, for dragging a family about after a regiment is a horrid thing."

A young head was now put in to inquire why Mrs. Gibson did not make her appearance upstairs, whereupon Agnes wiped her eyes once more, and swallowing her tears as well as she could, ascended to the show-room, and resumed her former function. But her pale cheeks and swollen eyelids no longer set off the *coiffures*, adding a grace to the pretty ones, or making

the ugly ones becoming; and when she should have been soothing the vanity of Madame de Ville's customers, and enticing the money out of their pockets, her eyes were straying to the window, watching every child that passed along the street; and her absent thoughts were wandering after her boy. Now, in imagination, she saw his little body cast upon the strand—he had fallen into the river, and been drowned; she sat upon the earth, laid it in her bosom, weeping over and kissing those wan little features; then she saw him dragged along the streets by some wretched beggar, clothed in rags, his back marked by stripes, and his face disfigured by tears and dirt; then, again, she sat upon his grave—he was found starved to death—found just too late; an hour or two sooner and he might have lived! Then her heart would stir with a sudden hope—Lionel had taken him! It was no beggar, but a well-dressed person, that had been seen with him. What could any well-dressed person want with her child? What could *anybody*, who was not a beggar, want with him, except Lionel? She would go to Paris and see Mr. Grosvenor; the money Madame de Ville owed her would pay the journey, and she eagerly reckoned the weeks that must intervene before she should be free.



CHAPTER XXIII.

"If I am not much mistaken, Bel," said Mrs. Langham, one day, "Sir Abraham Towers aspires to enter the lists as one of your admirers."

"He may save himself the trouble—Bel hates him!" said Frances. "He crosses the path of Colonel Aitchison, as the fortune-tellers have it."

"I see Bel is getting uneasy. I observed the other night that her eye followed him anxiously; and her spirits are flagging a good deal," said Mrs. Langham.

Poor Bel! they certainly were. Upwards of six months had elapsed since that unlucky declaration, and not a word had been dropped that she could anchor a hope on. He was attentive and deferential; always danced with her when they met, though latterly not so often as he had done at first. He sometimes called, sometimes rode with them to the Bois de Boulogne; and,

in short, maintained a regular and friendly intercourse, in which Isabel was generally more or less distinguished by his attentions. But were they the attentions of a lover? It was impossible to say.

His conduct might certainly be the result of an excess of delicacy; and as this was the most comforting conclusion she could come to, it was that into which she generally subsided after these anxious self-examinations; but still there was a constant undercurrent of anxiety, damping her spirits and quenching her natural gaiety, added to which she had no small degree of annoyance and vexation to encounter from her mother. Her sisters, who felt the delicacy of her situation, and were more or less capable of comprehending her feelings, seldom said anything to give her pain; but Lady Grosvenor, who was disappointed at her risking the loss of so desirable an establishment, gave way to her natural peevishness on the subject; and Lady Georgina, who looked upon Bel's romantic notions with contempt, found innumerable opportunities of making ill-natured and sarcastic observations, which often brought the tears into the poor girl's eyes, and forced her to a rapid retreat to hide them.

In the meanwhile, Sir Abraham Towers maintained a regular system of visits and civilities without very particularly distinguishing Isabel from the rest of the family, only as she was the sole unmarried female amongst them, she must be his object, if he had any at all.

Lady Grosvenor, who had considerable misgivings about Colonel Aitchison, made the baronet very welcome, and begged Sir Francis to do the same. "For it will be indispensable," said she, "if Colonel Aitchison hangs back much longer, that Bel should not appear slighted. It must be thought that she has rejected him, for everybody remarked his attentions, and this can only be obtained by her early acceptance of somebody else, and Sir Abraham would be an excellent match, in point of fortune, at least."

Affairs were still in this position in the month of May, when somebody proposed making a gay party to Chantilly, and taking a large château there that happened to be vacant, not merely for the race days, but for a fortnight, which, with the aid of the beautiful park and forest, and a pleasant society, might be got through very agreeably. The plan being approved was carried into execution, and efforts were made to collect as many young and pleasant people as possible, and to exclude the disagreeable and the elderly. Amongst the acceptable were the

Langhams and Damers, and their young sister. Sir Abraham Towers had a horse to run, so he was to be one of course; and Colonel Aitchison was never omitted from anything that was fashionable and *recherché*.

"Now we shall have an opportunity of seeing how your swain conducts himself," said Louisa; "and if he does not make some very decided manifestations now, I recommend you to make a clever retreat. If you don't, you'll be the laughing-stock of Paris: for depend on it, if you let the world suspect that you are *délaissée*, it will not spare you."

Isabel said she did not care a bit for the world; but she prepared with a beating heart for the excursion to Chantilly, for she thought, too, that this fortnight would decide her fate. She had not seen Colonel Aitchison for three weeks, he having been to England, as his mother hinted, on business of importance; and he consequently did not join the party till the day after everybody else. As he was an object of much speculation, and as the ladies who had designs on him, more or less developed, were extremely desirous of knowing the real state of affairs betwixt him and Isabel, she was pretty closely observed, and all her little agitations and blushes registered against her—blushes and agitations which of course increased in proportion to the uncertain ground on which she felt herself standing. Sure of him, she could have been calm and self-possessed in her happiness; but now she lived in an eternal alternation of hope and fear, which rendered it impossible to conceal her emotions; whilst Colonel Aitchison, by the easy friendly uniformity of his manner towards her, placed her always at a disadvantage.

When nearly a week had elapsed, the weather, which had been very fine, suddenly changed, and becoming wet and cold, constrained the party to fall back on indoor amusements. The ladies took to their music and their embroidery frames, whilst the gentlemen flirted or played at cards. One morning, when they were all assembled in this way, the ladies at one end of a large saloon, and the gentlemen at the other, sitting round a card-table, a servant entered the room with a number of letters sorted and arranged on a salver, which he handed round for everybody to take their own.

"Now we shall hear what they're doing in Paris," said Mrs. Damer, as each person broke the seal of their own despatches.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Louisa, as her eye ran over a letter from Lady Georgina.

"What is it?" asked Frances.

"Oh, nothing," answered Louisa, who had at first turned red,

but was now very pale, whilst at the same time she pretended to be reading her letter with perfect unconcern.

"Dear me!" said the Honourable Mrs. Waterhouse; "the Prince de Villafranca's dead. What a pity! I'm so sorry!"

"Was he a friend of yours?"

"Oh dear no! but you know he's Madame de Casanova's father: and as she was very much attached to him, she'll be out of society for a year, I'm afraid."

"The Dartmores are coming to Paris immediately," said Mrs. Damer; "and they want us to take a house for them for three years."

"Oh dear!" said Lady Longford, eagerly; "I wish ours might suit them."

"Do you want to give it up?" asked Frances.

"Yes, I do," answered Lady Longford; "and if you'll propose it to them, I should feel particularly obliged."

Of course, at hearing this Bel's heart began to beat twenty to the dozen. It appeared to her that Lady Longford could make no move which would not affect her happiness one way or the other. What did this move portend? Was it for good or evil?

"But is there anything objectionable in the house?" asked Frances. "I thought you liked it so much."

"So we do, but business will oblige me to go to England, and I want to get the house off my hands."

Isabel bowed her head over her work, for she felt her cheeks were flushing. She would have been glad to slip out of the room, but she had not courage to rise from her chair.

"To England!" exclaimed half a dozen voices. "What a pity! How we shall miss you! And what in the world are we to do without Colonel Aitchison?"

"But I'm not going to take my son away with me," exclaimed Lady Longford, smiling.

"What!" exclaimed Mrs. Waterhouse; "will you venture to leave him here alone? *Mon Dieu!* How much do you expect will be left of him? He'll certainly be devoured betwixt the two nations."

"Oh!" said Lady Longford, smiling and nodding significantly, "he'll be very well taken care of, or I should not leave him, rely on it."

"Madame de Prévile's youngest son, Auguste, has got an attachéship," said Mrs. Langham, making a desperate effort at a diversion. "What a fine boy he is."

"Very," said Mrs. Waterhouse, who had never seen him,

and did not know whether he was or not, but she wanted to dismiss the subject and recur to the previous one, having a little *tendresse* for the colonel herself. "But where is Colonel Aitchison to live if you go away?" she asked.

"He'll find somebody to give him a home, I dare say," said Lady Longford.

Isabel's ears grew hot; she heard something beating in her head like a drum at a distance; and although she bent over her frame, she could not see where to put in her needle.

"Now, Lady Longford, this is abominable!" said Mrs. Waterhouse. "There's a secret, and we *must* have it."

"Lady Longford has certainly a very mysterious air," said Lady Craven.

"There are the gentlemen breaking up their game," said Mrs. Waterhouse. "I shall go and ask Colonel Aitchison himself for an explanation."

"Well, I believe it is no use making a secret of it any longer, for I hear they've got it in the *Morning Post* already."

"He's going to be married!" exclaimed Mrs. Waterhouse. "Who's it to? Who's the bride?"

"Hush! he's coming this way," said Frances, who, as well as Louisa, was in an agony for her sister, but did not dare to speak to her, or scarcely look towards where she sat.

"I think I can guess," said Lady Craven, glancing towards Isabel, of whose face nothing remained visible but the forehead, which was crimson.

Lady Longford's eye followed that of the last speaker, and the poor girl's attitude seemed to reveal to her something she did not know, or to remind her of something she had forgotten.

"Say no more, I request," she said, gravely. "I'll tell you all about it another time. Here come the gentlemen."

"That's what took you to England, you sly dog," said young Harry Vane, pointing his finger at Colonel Aitchison, who was his cousin. "The murder's out."

The card-party had risen and were walking towards the ladies, some with letters and some with papers in their hands.

"Young ladies," cried Harry Vane, "prepare yourselves for a shock. Set your maids to pluck rue and weave garlands of the weeping willow. Colonel Aitchison is going to be married! See there, he slinks away, blushing and hiding his face," he added, as Colonel Aitchison turned toward the door.

"De l'histoire ancienne! we know it already," cried Mrs.

Waterhouse. "But who's to be the bride? that is the question," she added, attempting to snatch the newspaper out of Harry Vane's hand, assuming more gaiety than she felt, in order to conceal a secret feeling of vexation.

"Come here, Aitchison, and confess," said Vane, who was a frolicksome, thoughtless young man, scarcely out of his boyhood, and could take more liberties with his cousin than anybody else could; and darting towards the door, he playfully barred the colonel's passage.

"I have it! Here it is!" cried Mrs. Waterhouse, who had possessed herself of the paper. "Lady Jane Stuart, I declare!"

"Nonsense! Don't be so foolish Harry," said Colonel Aitchison; but Vane held him fast, saying they wanted to congratulate him, and a sort of playful struggle ensued, which created a general laugh. Everybody laughed; not because they were all pleased or amused. Mrs. Waterhouse was in reality very sorry, Louisa and Frances were exceedingly distressed; still they laughed; but there was one laugh that sounded high above the rest, and that continued still when all the rest subsided. Colonel Aitchison broke free and left the room, the other gentlemen went after him, except Mr. Langham and Mr. Damer, who walked to where their wives and sister were sitting. Lady Longford seemed much distressed.

"I think it looks clearer than it did," she said. "Let us see if we can't get a little fresh air before the dressing-bell rings."

Isabel was left alone with her sisters and their husbands, but still that laugh resounded through the halls.



CHAPTER XXIV

THE weary weeks dragged on, and at length Agnes was free to resume the search of her lost child. The oftener she reviewed the circumstances, the more satisfied she felt that the boy had been taken away by an emissary of Lionel's, and the more resolved she was to pursue and reclaim him. Mr. Grosvenor had done her wrong enough, and she had borne it all in silence—making no complaint, seeking no redress; but this last was an

injury unbearable. If she was not his wife, he had no right to take away her child. (Wives, we are taught, are defenceless mothers with no rights at all.) And even if it were not so—if her suspicions in this instance wronged him, he was at least bound to lend his aid towards recovering her lost treasure. So Agnes was no sooner free from Madame de Ville than she started for Paris by way of Brighton and Dieppe, a route recommended to her by Miss Barber, who had travelled it the preceding summer, and who, as Agnes abstained from communicating the real motive of her journey, concluded she was going abroad for the sake of improvement in the arts of dressmaking and millinery.

“It is the shortest land journey,” she said, “less expensive and less fatiguing; and I’m sure, if you stop at Brighton, my sister will be happy to be of any use to you she can. She lodges at No. 7, West Street, and her name is Mrs. Driscoll; by the bye, you saw her here one day, when she was speaking to me in the parlour.”

Agnes said she remembered; she was in mourning.

“Yes,” answered Miss Barber, “she’s in mourning for Mrs. Lawrence, who died abroad, where my sister was. The truth is, as I think I mentioned to you, Driscoll, her husband, is a soldier. How she came to do such a foolish thing I can’t think; but she was taken by his red coat, I suppose, and she married him without letting anybody know what she was going to do. I never was more shocked in my life than when I heard of it, for she was in a very good situation at the time, in one of the first families in Sussex. However, what was done couldn’t be undone, and by-and-by she had to go abroad with the regiment, and all sorts of hardships she suffered; first in the transport they went in, and then from living in barracks, so that she was glad enough to get a place as lady’s-maid with Mrs. Major Lawrence, and the Major took David. Mrs. Lawrence had not been long married, and being very ill after her confinement, her husband wanted her to come to England, but she wouldn’t leave him, all he could say; and so at last she died, leaving one little boy, and as the Major was afraid the child might die too, from the climate, he sent him to England under Jane’s care; and that’s what’s taken her to Brighton, for the child has been ill with a scarlet fever, and wants change of air.” Miss Barber added that she had a new frock to send to her niece, Jane Driscoll’s little girl, and Agnes promised to deliver it.

There were no railways then, and it was two o’clock when Agnes reached Brighton. The packet by which she was to cross

the Channel did not sail till evening, so, as she had nothing to do, and did not know where else to go, she directed her steps at once to No. 7, West Street, and inquired if Mrs. Driscoll lodged there. The girl said she did, but she was out with the children; so Agnes left the parcel she had brought from Miss Barber, saying she would call again by-and-by, and then strolled down to the beach, thinking she might there meet with them. There were a great many children of various classes playing about; she had never before seen so many on one spot. She looked into their little faces as she passed, with a strange, vague hope that one of them might be the face she would have given her life to behold; and when she happened to see a boy of the same age, complexion, and temperament as her Willie, so that imagination could paint a resemblance, she lingered and looked with such longing eyes, that more than once the nursery-maids turned upon her with an expression of curiosity and surprise. Mrs. Driscoll and her charges were, however, not amongst them; and when a couple of hours had elapsed, she returned to West Street, and was desired to walk up to the second floor, where she found Mrs. Driscoll in a very comfortable apartment, though somewhat disordered by toys and a variety of child's clothing, which lay upon the floor. The parcel had prepared her for Agnes's visit, and she received her with civility.

"I was in hopes you would have come back and taken a bit of dinner with me, but perhaps you'll drink a cup of tea before you go on board."

Agnes said she should be very glad of some tea; and while Mrs. Driscoll brought out her bread and butter, set her tea-things, and desired the maid of the house to bring up the kettle, and be sure the water boiled, she remarked that she was quite alone for some hours, the children having gone to dine and spend the afternoon with Mrs. Archibald Lawrence, the widow of Major Lawrence's brother, so that she was aunt to the little boy she, Mrs. Driscoll, had the care of. "The Major wrote lately to desire me to come to Brighton, and that Mrs. Archibald would recommend us to a lodging. She has been very civil, and often has the children to dine, which is a relief to me, and gives me a little time to myself. You're going across the water to improve in the dressmaking and millinery line, my sister tells me in her letter. Are you going to stay any time?"

"No; I hope not," answered Agnes.

"You should stay a year, at least, if you mean to learn anything, so I'm told. My sister was a year over there, at Victorine's, before she went to Madame de Ville's."

"It will depend on circumstances whether I stay or not," said Agnes. "I may be obliged to come back very soon."

Agnes was rather of a reserved nature, and from the singular circumstances of her life, she had acquired a habit of speaking as little as possible of her own affairs to strangers. Of course, at this time, as at all times, there was one thought predominant in her mind, namely, the loss of her boy; and yet she felt a certain difficulty in communicating her misfortune to Mrs. Driscoll, since from her not alluding to it, she supposed that Miss Barber had not mentioned the circumstance in her letter, in which conclusion, however, she was mistaken, Miss Barber having added a postscript to the effect that "Mrs. Gibson had lately lost her only child, and had been in sad trouble about him. I daresay she'll tell you about it."

In the second place, she knew she could not touch upon the subject without tears, and it was not desirable to go on board the vessel in a state of visible agitation and distress. Added to this, Mrs. Driscoll was not only a perfect stranger, but there was, moreover, nothing about her that attracted confidence,—at least so Agnes felt. She was perfectly civil, but not cordial; and although she talked quite as much as the occasion required, conversation appeared an effort rather than a pleasure. Not that she seemed depressed either, but rather uncomfortable and anxious; yet she looked in good health, and everything about her seemed to argue an ease of circumstances beyond what her condition would have entitled her to enjoy. In short, we all know that there are people who invite our confidence, and people who repel it; and Agnes felt that, for some reason she could not define, Mrs. Driscoll belonged to the latter class. She could not weep at ease in her presence. After the first few minutes, the conversation began to lag; and the only subjects they had in common being the mysteries of making caps and dresses, Mrs. Driscoll turned the discourse in that direction, after having expatiated rather ostentatiously on the extraordinary amount of confidence reposed in her by Major Lawrence and his late wife. On one of these occasions Agnes, by way of saying something, remarked that the care of the boy was a very serious charge, adding, "it would have been a dreadful thing for you if he had died when he had the scarlet fever!" an hypothesis that seemed powerfully to affect Mrs. Driscoll's feelings, for she suddenly turned as red as if she had the scarlet fever herself, and looked quite fierce.

"Oh!" she said, "he was never the least likely to die, nor in any danger whatever. The scarlet fever's nothing at all. Every child has it some time or other."

Perceiving that her suggestion was not agreeable, Agnes excused herself by observing that Miss Barber had told her the child had been very ill indeed.

"Charlotte knows nothing about it," answered Mrs. Driscoll, with evident displeasure, "she always exaggerates everything: he wasn't ill to signify at all."

On the whole, Agnes was not sorry when she could with propriety propose to move.

"I have to get a porter to carry my things from the coach-office, where I left them, down to the beach; and as the packet sails at seven, I think I had better go."

Mrs. Driscoll made no objection, but said that as she had to fetch the children she would walk to the boat with her.

"Perhaps you'll like to put your bonnet on by the glass," she added, opening a door of communication with the adjoining room in which there was a bed belonging to the house, and a very handsome child's crib; so handsome indeed, that Agnes approached to examine it.

"It's a present from Mrs. Archibald to Master Lawrence," said Mrs. Driscoll. "She didn't like him sleeping in the lodging-house beds, for fear he should catch some disorder; so she went to Morton's, the upholsterer's, and bought him that."

"It's very pretty," said Agnes, with a sigh.

There was the impression of the small head yet upon the pillow, and a little nightgown and cap, that had been worn on the preceding night, lay upon the coverlet. Agnes laid her hand upon them, she could not tell why, but it was at once a pain and a pleasure to touch them.

"My boy!" her heart whispered. "Oh, my boy! my boy!"

Having found a porter to carry her luggage to the boat, Agnes accompanied her companion across the Steyne to a very handsome house on the West Cliff, wherein resided Mrs. Archibald Lawrence. Mrs. Driscoll rang the bell, and the door was answered by a footman in a green livery.

"Are *my* children ready to come away?" she inquired.

"They're gone down to the beach with Missus and Mrs. Tomkins," answered the man.

"Oh, very well; I'm going that way, I dare say I shall meet 'em," said Mrs. Driscoll: "if I don't, I'll call again presently."

"You needn't mind," said the footman; "I'll bring 'em home for you."

"No, no, thank ye," responded Mrs. Driscoll. "Let 'em

stay till I come; I'd rather come back for 'em. Besides, I want to speak to Mrs. Lawrence about Master Charles's clothes, for his things are getting too short for him—children shoot up so."

As she said this she turned away, leaving the man standing at the door.

"The truth is," said she, "I don't want him to bring 'em home. Young lads like that are not fit to be trusted with children; and an accident so soon happens."

"It does, indeed," responded Agnes, with a sigh.

"It's only about a fortnight ago that I saw a child knocked down by a horse and nearly killed," continued Mrs. Driscoll. "It was the father of it too that was with it; but he was standing talking to somebody he had met with in the street, and never looking what the child was about. The poor little thing's ball rolled off the causeway into the middle of the road, and just as she ran to pick it up, a horse came full trot round the corner. For my part, I never expected to see the child taken up alive; and it was frightfully cut and bruised as it was, but luckily not killed. The truth is, children require somebody to be constantly watching 'em; take your eye off 'em for a moment, and they're in mischief directly."

"Misfortunes soon happen," said Agnes, with a sigh. "God knows, I have reason to say so!"

"I believe you've lately lost a child?" said Mrs. Driscoll, with an appearance of sympathy. "Jane mentioned it in her letter, but I did not like to speak of it; it's no use reminding folks of their misfortunes. Was it an accident?"

"Oh, yes," answered Agnes, dropping her veil over her face to conceal her tears. "He had not been out of sight for ten minutes. John Gibson, the person he had been with, left him at the door whilst he ran on a message. He thought the child had gone into the house, and they thought he was with John; and how it happened God only knows!"

"Was he run over?" inquired Mrs. Driscoll.

"Oh, no; if he had we must have heard of it."

"But how was he hurt, then?" inquired the other, who concluded that Agnes had *lost* her child by death.

"He was not hurt that we know of," answered Agnes. "He was lost or stolen, or God knows what. From the moment John Gibson left him on the steps we never saw him again. That's now six weeks ago; and though I have done everything in the world I could, we can hear nothing of him."

Here Mrs. Driscoll suddenly laid her hand on Agnes's

arm and turned her up a side street that led away from the beach.

"How shocking! how dreadful!" she said, so much affected that she quite gasped for breath.

"All we could ever learn was, that he was seen with a respectable-looking woman in mourning, who took him into a toy-shop, and bought him a little tin carriage. She'd a little girl with her; and as he had been seen playing with just such a little girl for a day or two before, the police think the child was used as a sort of decoy to my poor child."

"How shocking! how dreadful!" gasped Mrs. Driscoll again, taking out her pocket-handkerchief and applying it to her eyes. "I never heard of such a dreadful thing. How could anybody do such a thing? And what could anybody want with anybody's child? It must have been some beggar that did it, to strip it; nobody but a beggar would do such a thing."

"Oh, no," answered Agnes; "that is the puzzling part of it. The toy-shopkeeper says that she did not think the person that had him was a lady exactly; but she was very well dressed, and so was the little girl. What could be her motive, God only knows. They say sometimes rich people want children that have none of their own; it may be that. But, oh, it was cruel to take my poor boy, that was all I had in the world to comfort me."

If Agnes had thought Mrs. Driscoll somewhat chilly before, she certainly had reason now to alter her opinion, for that good woman exhibited an amount of demonstrative sympathy that quite astonished Agnes. Neither John nor Martha had appeared half so overcome at her misfortune as this stranger was. At length, when she was able to utter anything but interjections, she said,—

"And was it in France this happened?"

"No," answered Agnes, looking round at her with surprise; "the child was with a friend of mine that lives at the Adelphi Hotel."

"Oh, dear me!" suddenly exclaimed Mrs. Driscoll, looking down an opening that led to the sea—"if there isn't the packet just a going off."

"Oh, good gracious!" exclaimed Agnes, quite agitated; "what shall I do?"

"Run," said the other, at the same time setting her the example. "If you make haste you may be in time yet."

It is needless to say that Agnes did run, and in three minutes

she found herself on the beach beside her panting companion, who being older and stouter was still more out of breath than she was herself.

"This way, this way," cried Mrs. Driscoll, seizing her arm, and dragging her towards a boat in which were some sailors and a good deal of luggage. "You had better not lose a moment," she continued. "You can't think how often people get left behind. They go off in a minute, before you know where you are; and if you miss this boat there won't be another. How lucky I saw it. Good-bye! good-bye!"

"Oh, my box! Where's the man with my box and my bag?" cried Agnes, as Mrs. Driscoll pushed her into the boat.

"There they are," said Mrs. Driscoll. "I see they're all safe."

"Sit down," said the sailors; "sit down."

"Where?" cried Agnes, as they pushed off.

"There! there!" cried Mrs. Driscoll, pointing to the after-part of the boat.

Agnes hoped they were *there*, and stood up to look; but there were so many boxes and bags, that she could not tell whether they were or not; and as the boat heaved over the surf, she lost her footing, and falling backwards she would certainly have gone over into the water had not the man at the helm caught her, and fixed her in a seat. She was so confused with all this hurry and bustle that she scarcely knew where she was, or saw or heard anything, till a boat passed them coming from the ship; and as her eye followed it to the shore, she saw Mrs. Driscoll not far from the spot on which they had parted, approaching a lady; behind whom walked a maid-servant, leading a child, who had on a wide-brimmed straw hat, with a black ribbon round the crown. Just behind them came a little girl, apparently a couple of years or so older than the first, who, by its costume, she judged was a boy.

This was, doubtless, Mrs. Archibald Lawrence and Mrs. Tomkins with the two children. When Mrs. Driscoll reached them, the lady and the maid stopped to speak to her, and the two children stooped down, and began picking up stones or shells. Agnes could not discern their features; but the little boy, like all little boys, interested her, because he was just the size of her own Willie. It was he who slept in the pretty crib, and wore the little nightgown and cap; and she felt that she would like to have taken him in her arms and kissed him.

Although Mrs. Driscoll stood with her back to the sea, Agnes saw her several times during the short conference with Mrs.

Lawrence turn her head and look towards the boat ; the conference, however, *was* very short. Mrs. Driscoll quickly took the little boy by the hand, and made a move to go ; but Mrs. Lawrence had something more to say ; it was not till she had made two or three abortive attempts at getting away that she succeeded ; and then catching the boy up in her arms, and seizing the girl somewhat roughly by the arm, she walked hastily off towards the town, whilst the lady and her maid strolled onwards along the beach.



CHAPTER XXV

As soon as Agnes found herself on board the packet, her first care was her luggage ; and as Mrs. Driscoll had assured her that it was in the boat, she leant over the bulwark to watch its unlading. Box after box, bag after bag, made their appearance, but her own was not amongst them, whereupon she naturally became somewhat uneasy ; and the more so, when she recollected that the man who had undertaken to convey them to the beach would probably not be disposed to relinquish them till he had secured his remuneration. Having communicated her trouble to the boatmen, they promised to inquire for the things, pay the porter, and bring them on board ; so reposing in this hope, she went below to secure a berth, as Mrs. Driscoll had strenuously recommended her doing immediately.

She found only one person in the ladies' cabin, and she appeared to be unwell ; or perhaps being afraid of becoming so, she had lain down in the hope of averting sickness. At all events, she was snug in her berth with the curtains drawn ; and had she not been seized with an irrepressible fit of coughing, Agnes would not have discovered her presence at all. Having established a claim to the adjoining bed by placing in it her parasol and a cloak she had carried over her arm, she reascended to the deck to watch for the arrival of her luggage.

Besides the lady above mentioned, there were a few steerage passengers aboard, and two or three elderly steady-looking people on the quarter-deck, who looked as if they had been determined, come what might, they would not be too late. The beach, however, showed symptoms of further embarkations,

and several boats with passengers and luggage were soon rowing towards the vessel. Agnes peered eagerly amongst them for the men who had brought her out, and by-and-by they came, but without the boxes, or any intelligence concerning them. This became alarming; and although they promised to make further inquiry, she began to fear that she must either relinquish her voyage, or go without her property, either very vexatious. She felt not a little provoked with Mrs. Driscoll too, for so needlessly hurrying her away, since she saw no symptoms of the vessel's sailing even yet, though she had been already three-quarters of an hour on board. Whilst engaged with these reflections, she heard somebody inquire of a sailor where the captain was.

"He's not come on board yet, sir," answered the man.

"Why, it's past seven o'clock," said the gentleman, looking at his watch; "he ought to be here."

"Plenty o' time, sir," responded the sailor. "The tide won't serve for us to get into Dieppe harbour till to-morrow forenoon."

Whilst the traveller uttered sundry lamentations and complaints regarding the want of punctuality, and the incorrectness of intelligence respecting the packets, Agnes applied herself to learn whether there might not be time for her to go ashore, and look after her luggage herself. It being decided that she might do so, without danger of losing her passage, provided she made haste, she was assisted into a boat that was then alongside, and rowed to the beach.

One of the difficulties she had to contend with was, that she did not feel sure of recognizing the man; having trusted to recognizing her boxes, and to Mrs. Driscoll, who had summoned him off the street. There was a good deal of luggage still unembarked, and several porters to be seen; but her own things not being visible, she thought her best expedient was to run to the coach office at once, which she did; but they had not seen the luggage since it was carried away, neither had they observed who had taken it, since she herself was present at the time. Her last resource, therefore, was to go to Mrs. Driscoll, and inquire the man's name. The maid said she was at home; and heated, excited, and out of breath, Agnes rushed up the stairs, and burst into the room, where Mrs. Driscoll was sitting by the dim light of a tallow candle with a very long wick, for the evening was by this time closing in.

When Agnes entered, she had her elbow on the table, and her head resting on her hand, in apparent meditation; but

when she looked up, and saw who her visitor was, she started to her feet with the attitude and expression that we may conceive of a wild animal, when first he hears the approach of the huntsman. It was not altogether fear, though fear there was; but there was anger and defiance too.

"I can't find my luggage," said Agnes, "nor the man that took it. What shall I do?"

"Your luggage!" gasped Mrs. Driscoll, speaking as if she was suffering from a fit of spasmodic asthma, "I don't know where it is. Isn't it on board?"

If Agnes had been well read in the tricks occasionally practised on unexperienced travellers, she might have been apt to suspect that Mrs. Driscoll had not only got her boxes, but that they were safely stowed in the next room; for whilst she spoke, she moved round the table, so as to place herself exactly between Agnes and the door, which had been ajar, but which she now closed.

"No," returned she. "You said you saw it in the boat, but it was not there; and I shall lose my passage, if I can't find the man."

"Mother, mother!" cried a small voice from the adjoining room, "Charley's getting out of his crib, and he'll tumble."

"Be quiet, and be still, you naughty child," cried Mrs. Driscoll, through the door. "I'll whip you if you don't lie still, and go to sleep directly. Really, Mrs. Gibson," she added, turning sharply on Agnes, "I'm not answerable for your luggage. The porter told me he'd put it on board, and I paid him the shilling for you, and I can't do no more. You'd better go to the coach office, and look for him yourself."

"I have," said Agnes, "and they don't know which man it was. All I wanted of you, ma'am, was to tell me his name."

"How should I know his name?" answered Mrs. Driscoll, impatiently. "I don't know nothing about the man, and I can't waste more time about it; so I'll wish you good evening, ma'am."

There was evidently no more to be said, so, indignant at the rudeness and inhumanity of the woman, and heartily regretting that she had ever gone near her, Agnes turned on her heel, and departed at the very moment that another "Mother! mother!" from the adjoining room announced that Charley was doing something he ought not. But she hadn't reached the bottom of the stairs, when she suddenly remembered that she had not given Mrs. Driscoll the shilling she said she had paid the porter, and as under the present unpleasant circumstances she could not think of remaining in her debt, she took

out her purse and retraced her steps. As she ascended, she heard the voice of a child crying, and Mrs. Driscoll in loud objurgation. Charley had clearly either tumbled out of bed, or was being whipped to keep him in it. There was something about the little voice that so reminded her of her own Willie that her heart almost stood still as she listened to it; but time pressed, so she opened the door, and advancing towards the one that separated the two rooms, she said,—

“I came back to pay you the shilling, ma’am!” Mrs. Driscoll, who seemed in a violent passion, had evidently not heard her approach, and Agnes had just time to see her leaning over the crib with an uplifted arm, when the other, perceiving her, darted forward into the front room, shutting the door behind her and placing her back against it, pouring out at the same time on the unlucky intruder such a volley of abuse as took away her breath.

“What did Mrs. Gibson mean by forcing herself into her house in this way? She knew nothing at all about her, and didn’t wish to know! She wished people wouldn’t send people to her as she didn’t want. Did Mrs. Gibson suppose she’d stole her dirty boxes?”

“I didn’t wish to remain in your debt, ma’am,” said Agnes retreating; “and I’m sure you can’t be more sorry for the introduction than I am!” and with that she once more descended the stairs and let herself into the street.

What was to be done next? She could not think of going without her luggage, and she had just resolved to renounce the idea of crossing the water that night, when she met the very man she was seeking, in the street. She would not have known him but he recognized her.

“I put your luggage aboard, ma’am,” said he; and then when they came to an explanation, it appeared that having other commissions on hand he had embarked it before she and her companion reached the beach, trusting to seeing them afterwards. Agnes’s hasty departure had caused him to miss her, but meeting Mrs. Driscoll on her return with the children, she had paid him the shilling, and told him the lady had just gone off to the vessel. The danger now was, that whilst her baggage was conveyed to France, she would be left behind; but the man told her if she made haste she would still be in time, and as he good-naturedly accompanied her, and put her into a boat, she just saved her distance.

All this anxiety and worry, however, had over-heated and fatigued her, and being afraid to encounter the cool evening air

on deck, when the ship began to move she descended to the cabin and took possession of her berth, as did several other female passengers.

"Stewardess!" cried a languishing voice from the adjoining couch, when they had been about half an hour afloat, "Stewardess! are we off yet?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am!" answered the stewardess, "we've been afloat this half-hour."

"I'm so faint, I think I should like something," continued Agnes's neighbour, who was she who had so early taken possession of her berth.

"Would you like a little brandy-and-water, ma'am?" asked the stewardess.

"I think I should," answered the other, "and something to eat with it. Have you got a cold fowl and some ham?"

The stewardess said she had, and immediately set about producing her provisions, whilst the lady got out of bed and prepared to eat. The sea was quite smooth, leaving people's stomachs undisturbed. Agnes had had a great deal of running about, and at the sight of the food, she began to recollect she had had no dinner; nothing in short since she left London, but rather a scanty allowance of bread and butter at Mrs. Driscoll's.

"I should like something to eat, too, stewardess," said she, stepping out of her berth.

"We had better eat together, I think," said the lady. "Here's plenty for both of us."

"Thank you, ma'am," answered Agnes, with a certain degree of hesitation, for the fashionable appearance of the lady, who had not divested herself of a handsome silk pelisse and an expensive shawl, led her to conclude that the stranger was her superior in rank, and might not have invited her to eat with her had she known who she was.

"Come and sit down, here's plenty of room on the sofa for both of us," said the lady. "I think we had better make use of our time and eat whilst we can. If the sea rises, it will spoil our appetites. Are you sick at sea?"

"I don't know; I never was at sea before," answered Agnes.

"Oh, I have crossed the Channel very often," said the stranger, "and I do pretty well if we have a smooth passage. I don't know what sort of one we're likely to have now. Then you have never been in France?"

"Never."

"Perhaps I may be of some use to you then, for I am well acquainted with Paris. Are you going to make any stay?"

"I don't know," replied Agnes. "It will depend upon circumstances."

Inquiries, advice, and offers of service ensued, whilst they ate their supper; and as Agnes, at the advice of her new friend, took a glass of brandy-and-water, of the strength of which she was not aware, a sound sleep followed, from which she did not thoroughly awake, till disturbed by the movement that ensued in consequence of the agreeable information that they were within sight of Dieppe.



CHAPTER XXVI.

WHEN Agnes looked out from between her curtains in the morning, she saw her new acquaintance arranging her hair, and ready to wish her good morning and inquire if she had slept well; whilst the passengers complimented one another on their easy voyage. The lady now proceeded to open a small *carton* containing cuffs and frills, with which she completed her toilet; and Agnes felt quite mortified that in her indifference to everything but the object of her journey, she had neglected to provide better for her personal appearance.

"I am so unused to travelling," she said, "that I never thought of such things."

"Do accept the loan of one of my collars!" said the lady, whose name, by the inscription on the box, proved to be Mrs. Aymer.

Agnes declined; but the other insisted and prevailed. "Yours is so tumbled," she said, "that you must oblige me." It was evident that this obliging stranger had taken a fancy to her; so they went to breakfast together, and afterwards sat side by side on the deck, till they stepped ashore at Dieppe. Nor did her civilities cease when they became more needful than before; for Agnes knew only a few words of French, which she had picked up in her childhood from Madame Charpentier and her young friends at Ravenscliffe; and Mrs. Aymer's company and assistance at the custom-house, and in arranging the continuation of the journey, were really a great convenience to her.

"And where are you going to in Paris?" inquired that lady.

"I shall stop at the inn the coach puts up at," answered Agnes.

"Oh dear! that won't do at all. The diligences stop at the Messageries, answered Mrs. Aymer. "Have you nobody coming to meet you?"

"I know nobody in Paris," answered Agnes.

"You know nobody in Paris! and you can't speak French! Well, I really think it's fortunate you fell in with me. Gracious, my dear! Do you make a practice of running about the world with that pretty face of yours without knowing where you're going to?"

"I have never travelled yet at all," returned Agnes, "and I'm afraid I'm very inexperienced."

"Inexperienced, indeed!" said Mrs. Aymer, patting her on the back. "But I must really consider how you had best manage, or Heaven knows what may befall you in that city of sinners. You know nobody, you say? Nobody! neither French nor English?"

"No," replied Agnes, "I don't know anybody."

"Now, don't think me impertinent," continued Mrs. Aymer; "but you know it is not easy for me to advise you, unless I have some idea of what would suit—what I mean is, that I could direct you so much better if I had any idea of your object; of course I don't mean as to particulars, but some general notion of your object in coming to Paris."

"I want to find a person," answered Agnes, blushing, and feeling confused at an avowal which she feared might seem so strange as to alarm her obliging friend. But not at all; Mrs. Aymer nodded her head complacently, and said "*Oh!*" in a tone that implied her perfect comprehension. "French or English?" she inquired.

"English," answered Agnes.

"Do you know where he lives?"

"No," answered Agnes, with a certain qualm at the *he*.

"But you're sure he's in Paris?"

"Yes; at least, almost sure. I know he was there lately," with another pang at the pronoun.

"Humph! there are many ways of finding people in Paris, at least where the name is not disguised. There's the police, to begin with."

"Oh, no!" answered Agnes, alarmed at the name of the police. "I wouldn't have anything to do with the police for the world! Besides, it's a gentleman."

"You mean a man of condition? a man of rank?"

"Yes," responded Agnes, blushing deeper than before.

"Then we shall have no trouble whatever; every man of that

sort is easily found at Galignani's, where they all put down their name and address. So that matter being settled, the only thing we have to consider is your lodging. What do you say to putting up at an *hôtel garni*? it's a place something between a lodging-house and an hotel."

"If it's not expensive," said Agnes.

"Oh, they're at all prices—dear, cheap, and middling. I'm going to one in the Rue St. Honoré, which is moderate enough; and I think the best thing you can do is to stay there for a night at least, till we've time to look about us."

Agnes thought it was, and accepted the proposition; so they started together in the *diligence*, for I write of a period anterior to railways, and as they lumbered along the paved road, Agnes sat wondering who and what her new acquaintance could be.

She was a handsome woman of perhaps four or five and thirty; she might be a year or two more, but she was *bien conservée*, and exceedingly well dressed, in a dark silk pelisse, fitting close to a very well formed bosom. She was of the middle height; her figure round and compact, approaching to the *embonpoint*; her complexion dark, and without colour; her eyes large, black, and bright, with a constant restless motion of the eye-ball from side to side whilst she spoke. The face was round; the mouth wide, displaying a set of teeth not bad, but rather irregular; and her jet-black hair was arranged in bands over her low forehead. She wore a neat, close Leghorn bonnet, very plainly trimmed with a ribbon of the same colour, and a black Chantilly veil. Her gloves, which were dark, fitted as if they had grown upon the hand. She had on a wedding ring and a diamond guard; and her slate-coloured prunella boots, tipped with black leather, fitted as neatly as the gloves. She had also a handsome white Cashmere shawl, which she threw over her shoulders when needful; and besides the small carton already mentioned, her luggage consisted of a middling-sized trunk, a carpet-bag, and a silk umbrella, the whole of these appointments distinguished by the same air of neatness and good order which pervaded her own person.

What could she be? Experienced people would have hesitated betwixt a fashionable milliner from London, a professional man's wife, and a lady of impeachable character. She might be any of these; but Agnes could only connect that off-hand easy manner with the idea of a certain degree of rank and independence, nor could she divest herself of a feeling of diffidence whilst accepting her civilities. "I think I ought to tell her who

I am, and how I am situated," haunted her mind, whilst at the same time her extreme unwillingness to disclose her sad secret kept her silent.

When Agnes appeared dressed on the following morning to accompany her friend to Galignani's, the latter looked at her with a critical and approving eye. Though nothing could be plainer than her black gros-de-Naples and straw bonnet trimmed with white ribbons, they were well made and put on; whilst the grace of her person, and her really distinguished style of beauty, could not escape so experienced an observer as Mrs. Aymer, who remarked, with jesting complacency, that she flattered herself two better-looking Englishwomen would not walk the streets of Paris that day.

"Now, my dear," said she, as they walked along, "you must tell me the name of your friend."

"What friend?" inquired Agnes.

"Your male friend—the gentleman you want to find. We can't learn his address, you know, without giving his name."

"His name is Grosvenor—Lionel Grosvenor," answered Agnes, most unwillingly.

"Grosvenor! That's the baronet, I suppose?"

"No; his father's a baronet."

"Well, we shall have no difficulty in finding him—that is, if he is in Paris." Nor had they. He had just moved to the Hôtel de Breteuil, Champs Elysées, they were informed. "Now what can I do for you next? Would you like to go there at once?"

"No," replied Agnes; "I prefer writing."

"*Bêtise*, my dear! Men never answer letters of that sort. He'll put it in his pocket and forget it, or perhaps throw it in the fire, and desire his servant to deny him when you call."

"Why should you think so?" inquired Agnes, amazed at the acquaintance with her private concerns this opinion seemed to argue. "Do you know him?"

"Not at all—never saw him in my life; but I know the sex, and I know the world; and I know that, in certain circumstances, if you want to get hold of a man, you must surprise him."

"I can't think he would refuse to see me," said Agnes.

"No, my dear; women never can think *he* will refuse to see them; but *he* generally does, for all that. You're obliged to run all the way to Paris after him, at any rate; that don't look very *coming*, I think."

"But I couldn't go to the house," urged Agnes. "I should see other people."

"And they know you?"

"Yes."

"*C'est autre chose!* we must find some other way then. I wonder what his habits are—whether he walks or rides? I'll tell you what, we'll go and reconnoitre the ground."

Agnes trembled at the mere idea of approaching a house inhabited by the Grosvenors; but Mrs. Aymer assuring her that the Champs Elysées were so wide as to afford every facility for passing unobserved, she consented to go.

"That's their carriage, I suppose. Do you know their liveries?" inquired she, as a barouche drove out of the gates.

Agnes hung down her head. "Yes," she answered; "those are his sisters. I hope they didn't see me!"

"Not they! Now what do you say? Wouldn't this be a good time when the ladies are out?"

"But there's Sir Francis and her ladyship!" urged Agnes. "Oh, no! I can't go. I must write."

"Well, as you please; but I think you're wrong," returned the other. "When once a man ceases pursuing, and requires to be pursued, take my word for it, there is no animal more difficult to catch."

When they returned home, Agnes wrote her letter, and to guard against accidents, put it in the post herself.

It next became a question with her, whether she should remove to a cheaper lodging, or remain where she was. If Lionel consented to see her, she might only be detained a few days, in which case it would be better not to move. The company of Mrs. Aymer, too, was certainly cheering, and her *savoir faire* useful; though, at the same time, the tone of her remarks, and the want of delicacy with which she had pressed herself into her confidence, were rather repulsive, still she was so good-natured and obliging, and Agnes felt so sensibly how forlorn her entry into Paris would have been without her kind offices, that she resolved to remain where she was for the present.

Another question that arose was, should she or not take her into her confidence wholly, or leave her to her conjectures. What those conjectures were, Agnes shrank from penetrating. They could not be favourable, yet the impression did not seem to be unfavourable, or why was she so friendly? It occurred to Agnes that her indifference did not speak very well for herself. Still she was a married woman, for she wore a wedding-ring; and her husband was alive, for she had alluded more than

once to Aymer, as to a person in the flesh. Neither did anything appear incorrect in her conduct, though what she had come to Paris for did not appear.

In the course of the day she met an acquaintance, a young Frenchman, whom she called Monsieur Adelmair, and whom she engaged to accompany them at night to the Variétés, which he did, and escorted them afterwards to the door of their hotel; but he did not enter their apartments, nor did she invite him to do so. If she had any mission in Paris at all, it seemed to be to spend money; for although the lodging she had selected was not expensive, Agnes was surprised at the number of articles of dress she bought that were so.



CHAPTER XXVII.

AGNES had not told Lionel that she suspected he had robbed her of her child, fearing that if he wished to retain the boy, he would simply refuse to see her, or give any information. She desired to obtain an interview, under the idea of making an appeal that might work upon his feelings. Besides, she wished to judge from her own observation whether he was the guilty party or not; however, he did not seem disposed to give her an opportunity, for a week passed without the arrival of an answer.

When Mrs. Aymer heard this, she said it was exactly what she had expected. "He'll never write to you, depend upon it; and if you want to see him, you must adopt my plan at last."

"What plan? You know I told you I cannot go to the house."

"In the first place, French houses are not like English ones. You may go to visit one member of a family fifty times, without meeting the others; but I suspect it's too late for that now. I have no doubt he has given orders to be denied to you. By the bye, you might go disguised, though."

"Oh, never," exclaimed Agnes; "I couldn't do such a thing."

"There is a vulgar proverb, my dear, which says that necessity has no law; and if you must see this Mr. Grosvenor, you must submit to accomplish your object how you can. Don't be angry with me for what I'm going to say, but the truth is, you

seem to me so proud and so reserved, that I can't for the life of me think how you should have ever let any man get the advantage of you."

Agnes felt the blood rush to her cheeks, as she answered, haughtily,—

"I don't know what you mean."

"Now, don't be offended, for I don't mean any offence," said Mrs. Aymer. "Of course, I don't pretend to be acquainted with your secrets; but it is evident that you are in some difficulty, and it was natural in me to conclude that a young and pretty woman like you might have had a little affair of the heart. If I am wrong, I beg your pardon."

"I ought not to have been so touchy, when you have been so kind," returned Agnes; "but the circumstances of my story are very peculiar, and I feel so mortified and embarrassed, because I know I must appear to others what I am not."

"Well, my dear, many people appear better than they are, and some appear worse; I confess I prefer the latter, considerably. Whatever the circumstances you allude to may be, I can't guess; but I judge from what I see of you, and I'm not very often mistaken on such points, I can tell you."

"And what is it you see?" asked Agnes.

"Why, I see that you are an injured woman, though exactly in what way, of course, I don't know; but I am quite certain that you have either been the victim of your own heart, or of a deception; and you have no idea what allowance I can make for women in either case. I first took a fancy to you on board the packet because you are so pretty, and I like handsome people. If you get nothing else out of them, they are at least good to look at. But I have quite another sort of interest in you now; I see that you are an injured woman, and I like injured women. I'm an injured woman myself."

"I have been injured, certainly," said Agnes in a quiet tone; "cruelly injured."

"I'll tell you what," rejoined Mrs. Aymer; "I'll make a bargain with you. If you'll tell me your story, I'll tell you mine; and what's more I'll speak first."

Agnes was not unwilling to enter into the compact, feeling that the truth would probably be much more favourable to her than Mrs. Aymer's conjectures; and the proposal being accepted, that lady promised to commence her narrative after tea. However, the communication was deferred by the accident of her meeting some acquaintance on the Boulevards, who invited her to spend the evening with them at their apartments in the

Rue de Helder; requesting politely that her friend would accompany her. Mrs. Aymer introduced them as Monsieur and Madame St. George. Madame, however, was an Englishwoman, and her husband, from the facility with which he spoke the language, seemed to have resided more in Britain than in his own country. He was a showy-looking be-whiskered man of fifty, extremely well dressed, and with agreeable manners. The lady had been handsome, but time and fat were fast abating her attractions. She also was *très bien mise*, and there was something extremely cordial and friendly in her demeanour.

"You'll excuse my going with you," said Agnes to Mrs. Aymer. "I don't know Mr. and Mrs. St. George; and I have no spirits for visiting."

"Take my advice and go!" answered her friend. "In the first place, the St. Georges are very agreeable people, and in the next, they may be useful to you, particularly if I leave Paris before you. Besides, I shall really take it as a favour if you'll go, because I know they would like it."

Agnes complied; and was on the whole not sorry that she had done so. The host and hostess paid her the most marked attention, and the few guests, consisting chiefly of gentlemen, were extremely agreeable and well-bred. The apartments were elegant, and the company was attended by servants in a handsome livery of blue and gold. The suite consisted of four rooms, in one of which, when the door was occasionally opened, Agnes observed several gentlemen standing round a table; in the adjoining one there were others playing at cards; whilst in the outer chamber, to which she wholly confined herself, a very handsome woman was singing Italian airs to the pianoforte. Everything was conducted with the most marked propriety and good taste; and Agnes, whose early predilection for what was *recherché* and elegant though suppressed was not extinct, in spite of her anxious mind, was pleased and amused.

On the following morning Mrs. Aymer commenced her promised revelations by saying that her father was a clergyman who took pupils, and that, having no mother to look after her, she had run away with one of them—a young nobleman who had promised to marry her; "And the worst of it was," she said, "that there was another, called Armstrong, who really wished to make me his wife, and who would be a very good match if I had had the sense to accept him."

"And did not you like him?"

"I dare say I might have done so; but no sooner did Lord C—— discover that Armstrong was really paying his

addresses to me, than his pride or his conceit or the devil of envy that was in him took the alarm, and he set about making love to me himself. And alas! I was only seventeen, and he was an earl, besides being one of the handsomest men you ever set your eyes on."

"Well?" said Agnes.

"*Eh bien! que voulez-vous?*" as the French say; "I was caught like a gudgeon, and one fine moonlight night I went off with him. It was at the vacation time, when the young men went home; and he arranged to have a carriage ready for me about a hundred yards from the parsonage. He brought me to Paris and deserted me. That was my first visit here."

"And what did you do?"

"Why, I wrote to him letter after letter; I waylaid him; I went to his lodgings. I left nothing undone to move him; but it was all in vain. My letters he didn't answer. When I tried to speak to him in the street he threatened me with the police; and when I went to his hotel his servants turned me out of doors. At last I fell ill from the distraction of my mind; for I loved him passionately. For three weeks I was delirious, and I should have died, I dare say, if the people where I lodged had not sent for a physician. He was an elderly man, and when I came to my senses I told him my story, for he saw I was in great trouble, and asked me the cause. Upon this he offered to go to Lord C——, and he did. What passed I don't exactly know, but when he came back he shrugged his shoulders and advised me to go home to my father. But I was ashamed to do this; I couldn't bear to face either him or my former friends, and I consulted the doctor how I might stay here; but he said he couldn't advise a *belle jeune femme* like me to reside alone in Paris; and at length he persuaded me to write a letter to my father, in which I confessed and lamented my fault, and begged for pardon; but it was quite useless, as I had expected. My father answered that I had ruined him and myself; that all his pupils had been withdrawn in consequence of the disgrace I had brought upon him; that he *could* not receive me into his house if he would, and that he wouldn't if he could.

"'All I can do for you, or ever will do,' continued the letter, 'is to pay for your board if you choose to go into Sussex and live with your Aunt Jackson, who, as a *very great favour to me*, has consented to allow you to reside under her roof, where I hope in solitude and prayer you'll endeavour to expiate your heinous crime.'

“ But I knew too well the miserable life I should lead there. I had always hated Aunt Jackson, and she me; and I felt certain that her sole motive for consenting to the plan was, that she might enjoy the satisfaction of tormenting me. So come what might I resolved to remain in Paris, and when the good Dr. Harlai found he could not shake my determination he said he would see what could be done for me. Fortunately for me he had an aunt, too, and a very different kind of aunt she was to Aunt Jackson. She was an old lady who had once been very handsome, and who had not forgotten it; and she was as vain at seventy as if she had been seventeen; but she was also good-natured and romantic, and the story of my misfortunes moved her so that she desired her nephew to bring me to see her. She was very kind, and did not reproach me with my folly, for which I felt most grateful.

“ Lord C—— had not left me destitute; but my resources were now nearly exhausted, and the first necessity was that I should find a means of earning my living, and so I told Madame Harlai. She offered me money, but I refused it, saying I had been a gentlewoman in my own country, and that I could not take alms. At length, I obtained through her recommendation a situation as English governess in a French boarding-school; and as I had received a very respectable education from my father, I was capable enough for what I had to teach.”



CHAPTER XXVIII.

ALTHOUGH this long story of Mrs. Aymer's was told at different intervals, as leisure and opportunity offered, I prefer not to break its continuity, and will therefore proceed with it at once.

“ I was so desirous,” said she, “ of recovering a decent position in the world, that I resolved to do my utmost to give satisfaction to Mesdames Regnier and Bordelais—those were the names of the ladies who kept the school, or *pension*, as they call it here; and as I have a mind very susceptible of amusement, and am constitutionally cheerful, I really did not find the situation disagreeable, especially as there were several English girls there, some almost as old as myself. Of course, my business lay amongst the French pupils, but when the school hours

were over we English used to congregate together; and as one has a tender affection for one's compatriots abroad, which they by no means inspire at home, we became very intimate and loving. The only inconvenience was, that they were always asking me what part of England I lived in, and a variety of similar questions, which I could not answer without inconvenience, for how did I know but some of them might have friends in my father's neighbourhood, and that so my unlucky story might transpire."

"And what did you answer when they asked where you came from?" inquired Agnes, in whose breast the similarities and differences of this story with her own had awakened considerable interest.

"Why, I said I came from London," returned Mrs. Aymer, "and that generally put a stop to their inquiries; but I confess, as I am naturally sincere, I could never say this without a very uncomfortable feeling and a good deal of confusion, which was not diminished by finding it was observed. Instead, however, of suspecting anything like the real cause of my distress, the young ladies concluded, as I discovered from something I accidentally overheard, that my family were in an inferior condition of life, and that I was ashamed of my humble origin; and as they had no desire to mortify me, they henceforth abstained from the subject.

"For some months everything went on smoothly enough. The young people liked me, and I really tried to do my duty, for sad experience had taught me the value of a home, and I was most desirous of keeping my situation. I remember it was only the day preceding a circumstance I am going to relate, that Madame Regnier expressed her entire satisfaction with my conduct, and the progress the pupils were making under my tuition. *Mais!* as the French say;" and here Mrs. Aymer shrugged her shoulders like a veritable Parisian.

"Near where we lived, in the Faubourg du Roule, there is a garden called Mousseaux, belonging to the Orleans family. It was not open to the public, but Madame Bordelais had obtained permission for her scholars to walk in it, through the interest of Madame de Genlis, or Madame de Sillery, as she then called herself; and very delightful it was—pretty, shady, and private. Formerly I should have thought such walks dull; but I had lived through what Shakespeare calls a storm of fortunes, and had learnt to prize tranquillity. Besides, I had not relinquished all hope of better days. I was still very young, and I thought I might redeem myself, and by some turn of luck recover my

place in society. I was, therefore, content to keep out of sight in the mean time. But it was not to be.

“As we did not often meet anybody in the garden, we amused ourselves in it much as if it had been our own, without constraint; but one day, as we were sitting on the grass under the trees, we heard voices and footsteps approaching from behind.

“‘Voici du monde!’ said one of the French girls; whereupon we all rose, and caught up our bounets; but by a refinement of ill luck, a Chautilly veil that was on mine got entangled in a rose-bush, and whilst I was trying to extricate it the strangers were upon us.

“‘Permettez-moi, mademoiselle!’ said a young man stepping forward to my assistance. ‘You’ll hurt your hauds.’”

“I looked up to thank him, whilst one of the young ladies, twitching my dress, whispered, ‘C’est le Duc de Chartres!’

“I confess that this information confused me a little, whilst at the same time it awakened my curiosity. Close behind him stood two other persons: one of them an exceedingly beautiful woman, who so attracted me—for you know I delight in beauty—that for a moment or two I did not look at her companion, on whose arm she was hanging in a sort of loving, confiding attitude. When my eyes did move to the other face, judge of my feelings when I saw that it was Lord C——, who appeared at the same moment to have recognized me! What I felt I will not attempt to describe. My heart seemed to have leapt into my throat, my knees shook under me, and I felt a damp, chilly sensation creeping through my veins. He on the contrary became suddeuly red, and I saw that the meeting was not more agreeable to him than to myself. Of course I turned away my eyes immediately, and relentlessly tearing my poor veil from the thorns, I flung my bonnet on my head, and moved off, too confused to think even of thanking the duke for his politeness. The alacrity with which he had endeavoured to assist me, had, however, amused the young ladies; and whilst I was suffering tortures of vexatiou and anxiety, they diverted themselves with quizzing me on what they called my superb conquest.

“For several days I could not recover the shock I had received; and my evident depression being jestingly attributed to the impression made on my heart by the prince, the subject was never dropped, and the story ran through the school, reaching those who had not been present when the thing happened, and who of course made more of it than the others.

“Amongst these were two young ladies called Wallace, the

daughters of a baronet, who, in order not to be separated from them, had come to reside in Paris whilst they were at school. Every Saturday they went home, in order to attend the Ambassador's chapel with their parents on Sunday morning; and as my unfortunate rencontre happened on a Saturday, they were not with me, which they said they regretted the more, because they were acquainted with the Duc de Chartres.

"'But we shall certainly tell him who you are,' they said, 'and what an impression he has made on your susceptible heart.'

"I entreated them not, till the tears stood in my eyes; but my urgency only diverted them, and made them fancy they really were in possession of a secret worth telling.

"I can't tell you how miserable all this made me. There was an end of my tranquillity. Every time I walked out I expected to meet Lord C—; and every Sunday night, when these girls came home, I expected something disagreeable, though I did not know exactly what; and it came at last, though not till so many weeks had elapsed that I was beginning to hope my fears were groundless.

"We English, you must know, all breakfasted and drank tea together; an arrangement that had been made in consequence of the discovery, that apples and plums and sour wine did not suit British stomachs at eight o'clock in the morning, though the French did very well with such fare. The governesses liked tea too, such tea as it was; and from economical motives, I suppose, we took ours at their table; and very chatty little parties we often had. Well, it was, I dare say, six or seven weeks after my adventure in the gardens, that whilst we were at tea one Sunday evening, Margot, the wife of the *concierge*—that's the porter who keeps the gate, and does many other things—Margot brought up a note, which she presented to Madame Regnier.

"'Qu'est-ce que c'est donc, Margot?' said Madame Regnier.

"'Sais pas, madame,' answered Margot. 'Je crois que c'est le domestique des Demoiselles Wallace qui me l'a donné.'

"In the meantime, the governess had opened the letter, and I saw the colour come into her cheeks. It evidently contained something unpleasant.

"'Qu'est-ce qu'il y a donc, madame?' inquired Madame Bordelais.

Madame Regnier closed her lips, bowed her head slightly with a haughty expression, and handed the paper in silence to her partner.

“Mais qu'est-ce que cela veut dire?” cried Madame Bordelais, who was a gayer, more animated temperament than the other.

“‘Nous verrons demain, j'espère,’ answered Madame Regnier, proudly

“‘Mais c'est inconcevable!’ exclaimed Madame Bordelais, with a little contemptuous laugh.

“‘Allons, mademoiselle, ayez la bonté de verser le thé, s'il vous plait,’ said Madame Regnier, turning towards me, whose business it was to make and pour out the tea,—a duty which I had been too much engrossed with what was passing to remember.

“The fact is, that from the moment I heard where the letter came from and observed its effect upon Madame Regnier, I had an instinctive conviction that it was the harbinger of mischief to me. I suppose my alarm was painted on my countenance, for certain it is, that as soon as Madame Regnier turned her eyes upon me, a new light, or at least a new suspicion, seemed to break upon her mind. I read it instantly in her face, and no doubt my confusion, and the trembling of the hand that held the heavy Britannia metal teapot, must have confirmed it.

“However, she said nothing, for she was a very well-bred woman, and the tea-drinking went on, as usual, except that she scarcely spoke again, and I said never a word. Neither could I eat a morsel, though we dined early and badly, and our tea was our supper. I felt dreadfully uncomfortable whilst the meal lasted, and yet I dreaded its termination, for I was afraid Madame Regnier would detain me, and speak to me when the others were gone; but she did not; she suffered me to leave the room with the ladies, and as I always went last, I saw her draw her letter from her pocket, and prepare for a consultation with Madame Bordelais.

“It's curious how, in some situations, the instinct of fear enlightens one! It's like a sort of second sight. Somehow or another, I understood all this perfectly. I knew as well what was in the letter as if I had read it; and I foresaw all the horrors that were before me. I'd the greatest mind in the world to run away at once, and so escape them; but, as ill-luck would have it, I had no money. They owed me some, but I had requested Madame Regnier to keep it for me, as I had no place to lock it up.

“What to do I didn't know. I kept aloof from everybody, as if I knew I was a leper; and the worst of it was, I had not

a corner to myself to go and shed my tears in, for I slept in a room with ten others.

“I stayed in the garden, though it was a cold, damp autumn evening, till the last bell rang, and then I slunk up stairs, assisted the young ladies to bed, and lay down upon my own, to toss and turn in a fever of misery all night.”



CHAPTER XXIX

“YES, that was a dreadful night!” continued Mrs. Aymer, when she resumed her story. “What thoughts, what projects chased each other through my unhappy brain! How my head throbbled, how often I turned my hot pillow, and how often I rolled my poor burning body from side to side. How weary I was of the night, and yet how I dreaded the morning; for I felt certain by Madame Reguier’s saying they would learn on the following day what the note meant, that Sir James or Lady Wallace, or both, would come and explain. Then I should be called into the room, be exposed and reviled, and asked how I, so guilty and so infamous, had dared intrude myself into a respectable establishment, and consort with those innocent young girls; and next I should be turned out of doors in the presence of the whole school, with every contumely that could be heaped upon my unfortunate head.

“And then I asked myself if I was so guilty and so infamous? I had done wrong, certainly — very wrong; of course I knew when I quitted my father’s house that I was acting very imprudently; but I had attached no idea of criminality to the act, for I never doubted Lord C——’s marrying me. I had been, doubtless, very foolish; but I was young, and in love, and I had tried to redeem my error. But I saw that the world would not let me. I had taken a step downwards, and it would push me the rest of the way. Very well, be it so; I would go and live amongst bad people — people of lost reputations; they won’t reject me, they can’t look down upon me. Indeed, it was probable that necessity would force me to do so, whether I would or no; for I could not again expect to obtain a situation, nor could I have ventured to accept one. I felt very much grieved

about Madame Harlai, too, who had been so kind to me, for I foresaw that she would be called to account for the recommendation she had given; and I determined not to go near her, nor trouble her again with my misfortunes, but to write, thanking her for her kindness, and expressing my deep regret that she should incur any annoyance on my account.

"Amidst all this conflict of thoughts and feelings, it is singular that Lord C—— played a very small part. I had suffered dreadfully when he forsook me; but the struggle and fever and delirium that followed seemed to have exhausted my power of suffering on that subject. I confess that I had ceased altogether to care for, or to regret him; and that he inspired me with much more contempt than resentment. What he had done was so base and so vile, and so meanly selfish, that I thoroughly despised him. No; *les souffrances du cœur* were over with me once and for ever. Thank God! I have never been in love since, nor should not if I were to live a hundred years, and be young all the while. Out of my sea of troubles *that* is the only pearl I gathered; and it was one worth picking up, wasn't it?"

"I don't know," answered Agnes.

"Can you doubt it?" cried Mrs. Aymer; "you who have loved and suffered!"

"I do not think I was ever really in love," returned Agnes; "but go on with your story, and I will tell you mine afterwards."

"Well, the morning at length dawned upon this dreadful night; and I arose and assisted the ladies to dress, and went through my duties as usual till breakfast-time—a moment I dreaded, as I had then to meet Madame Regnier and Madame Bordelais, and I was afraid they would broach the horrid subject. But they did not, and the breakfast went off as usual, only that when one of the young ladies inquired when the Miss Wallaces would return, Madame Regnier answered, 'She didn't know,' in such a dry, forbidding tone, that I concluded they were not coming back at all. Besides this, there was nothing particular in their demeanour, except that I observed Madame Bordelais' eye frequently fixed upon me with an expression of curiosity, and I thought pity; I dare say she did pity me, for she was a lively, good-natured, soft-hearted creature, and a Frenchwoman to her fingers' ends. Besides English, I had to teach music to the beginners, and Monday being one of the days appropriated for my lessons in crotchets and quavers, instead of going to the school-room as usual, my business lay in a small *salon* adjoining the large one, and communicating with it by a door, the upper part of which was of glass, shaded by a green

silk curtain. The windows of each of these rooms led into the garden.

"It was in the large *salon* that company was received; and whilst I was guiding the stupid fingers of my pupils, and counting *un, deux, trois*, I was listening intently for what I momentarily expected—namely, the arrival of my accusers.

"It was mid-day, however, and I had nearly finished my music lessons, before I heard a noise in the adjoining *salon* that betokened the arrival of visitors; whereupon, as the sound of the instrument was audible from one room to the other, I retreated by the garden, as I had been directed to do on all such occasions. To get round to the school-room I had to cross the front court, where I saw Sir James Wallace's carriage empty, and also a *fiacre* driving in, out of which peered Madame Harlai's friendly face. The idea immediately occurred to me that she had been sent for to give an account of her *protégée*, and in my shame and mortification I was seeking to avoid her, but she saw me, and called me to her as she was alighting.

"'Qu'est-ce qu'il y a douc?'" said she.

"'I don't know,' I said; 'but I'm afraid that my unhappy history is known, and I am so grieved about you! I know you'll be blamed for the kindness you've shown me.'

"'Voyons!' said she, stumping confidently towards the *salon* by the aid of her stout stick, for being rather lame from rheumatism, she always walked with one, whilst I went forward to the school-room where my business lay.

"I had to give lessons in English next, and you may guess what sort of lessons they were that day, for I momentarily expected to be summoned and turned out of doors. However, fully an hour or more passed without any light being thrown upon my fate, when Margot entered the school-room, and told me I was wanted below. I followed her out, with the feelings of a criminal about to be led to execution; but, to my agreeable surprise, instead of taking me to the *salon*, she conducted me to Madame Harlai, who I saw sitting in the hackney coach, and beckoning to me, whilst Lady Wallace's carriage was no longer visible.

"'Have you packed up your things?' she said.

"'No,' I replied; 'but I can do it in a moment.'

"'Allez! Vite!' said she; 'and come back as soon as you can. I'll wait for you here.'

"I leave you to judge if I was long getting ready! I flew upstairs, tied up my few clothes in a large shawl I had, and was with her again in less than ten minutes.

“ ‘Montez,’ said she, bidding the coachman open the door.

“ I jumped in, and away we drove; and never did I feel more relieved in my life, than when old Margot shut the gates upon us.

“ My first words were, ‘O Dieu, que vous êtes bonne!’ and if ever a creature felt grateful for a helping hand in extremity, I’m sure I did then.

“ ‘But how came you to be here? Were you sent for?’

“ ‘Yes,’ she said. ‘I received a note this morning from Madame Regnier, requesting me to come to her at noon, as she had something very particular to say to me about you. My mind misgave me there was mischief. But how came Lord C—— to find out where you were?’

“ I then told her of my unlucky adventure in the Jardin de Mousseaux, and begged her to relate to me what had passed in the *salon*.

“ ‘When I entered the room,’ she said, ‘I found Madame Regnier and Madame Bordelais, with two strangers, both English, evidently; one a stout, rather high-coloured woman, *d’un certain âge*, with what is called an imposing presence; and the other, a thin, pale, nervous-looking man, of fifty, who appeared to be her husband. The lady was talking loudly and earnestly in French, as I opened the door, and I heard her say something was *une infamie*.’

“ ‘Ah, Madame Harlai! C’est heureux!’ exclaimed Madame Bordelais; whilst Madame Regnier declared that she was quite unable to understand the meaning of so extraordinary a circumstance, but that, perhaps, I could explain it.

“ ‘It was this lady,’ she said ‘who recommended Miss Grieves to us; and when I tell you that she is the *très respectable tante* of the *célèbre* Docteur Harlai, I hope you will admit that we could have no reason to doubt the character of a young person she so warmly patronized.’

“ I thought it was now time for me to put in a word; so I said that I had understood that Miss Grieves was giving every satisfaction, and I hoped she had not altered her conduct.

“ ‘By no means,’ said Madame Bordelais. ‘She is very capable, and very attentive; but Lady Wallace has received information that Miss Grieves is not a proper person to be admitted into a house of this description.’

“ ‘Of this description!’ exclaimed miladi; ‘of no description! Of course, madame, you were not aware of this person’s character?’

“ ‘Cela dépend,’ said I. ‘Without doubt, I may have been

mistaken in my notion of her. May I ask what you have to allege against my *protégée*?' I added, addressing Madame Regnier and Madame Bordelais.

" 'Nothing that we have seen,' they answered; 'nothing but what miladi has heard.'

" 'Except her coming into our establishment at all, which was an unjustifiable act,' added Madame Regnier.

" 'For that I am answerable,' I said. 'I may have been wrong; but I wished to serve a young creature who has been cruelly treated by a villain, and I was far from thinking you would be a sufferer by having her here. Neither does it appear that you would, but for the interference of some meddler who would have done better to be silent.'

" 'I beg your pardon,' answered miladi, haughtily. 'The friend who warned me of the danger of my daughters, was an English nobleman—a gentleman—whom only an imperative sense of duty would have induced to interfere in such an affair.'

" 'C'est autre chose,' said I. 'Since the impeachment comes from such a high and unexceptional quarter, it has more weight than I expected. Is it too much to inquire the name of the nobleman you allude to?' for you see, *mon enfant*, I guessed who it was, and I was determined to get at the truth and expose him.

" 'By no means,' answered miladi, with more snavity than she had spoken yet, for she thought she had silenced me with her English nobleman; 'by no means. It was Lord C——, who, happening to hear my daughters mention the name of the young woman in question, in reference to some accidental encounter with the Duc de Chartres, most kindly drew me aside, and warned me that, to his certain knowledge, she was a person of improper character.'

" 'And he told you no more?' said I, with an air of innocent curiosity; 'he didn't tell you how he became acquainted with the fact?'

" 'Nothing, of course,' said miladi. 'It was not a subject for me to discuss with Lord C——. He pointed out the danger, which was all that was necessary.'

" 'No, doubt,' said I. 'The truth is, and I can't deny it, that the reputation of Miss Grieves is not intact, and I may have been wrong in introducing her here; but perhaps when you hear the circumstances of the case, you may view her with more indulgence.'

" 'I have nothing to do with the circumstances!' said miladi,

'the fact is enough for me; and I strongly recommend that the girl should be sent for immediately, and, after warning her to beware of the consequences of such another attempt to intrude into respectable society, be turned out of doors!'

"I beg your pardon," said I. "These ladies have the right to dismiss Miss Grieves, but not to insult her."

"Insult a creature like that!" said miladi, contemptuously.

"'Et à quoi bon?' murmured Madame Bordelais, in a low voice.

"During all this time, Sir Wallace (as Madame Harlai called him) had uttered never a word; he only twitched his neck when his wife said anything particularly harsh and despotic. But now he rose from his seat, and gently suggested that they had better go.

"Allow me," I said "one word. I am very sorry for what has happened, and I shall be doubly so, should my imprudence produce any injurious consequences to those excellent ladies. I shall take Miss G. away with me; and I hope, madame, you will endeavour to suppress rather than circulate a story which, after all, will I fancy tell more against your informant, Lord C——, than anybody else!"

"Comment, madame?" said miladi, looking more *farouche* than before; 'vous osez—.' Here poor Sir Wallace twitched dreadfully, and pulling his wife's cloak, tried to get her away.

"All I mean to say is, miladi," said I, "that Miss Grieves' reputation might to this day have been as intact as your own daughter's, or that of any young lady under this roof, but for Lord C—— himself, who first enticed her, a girl of seventeen, from her father's roof under a promise of marriage, and after bringing her here abandoned her to starve, or go upon the *pavé* if she liked it better."

"I wish you had seen her when I said this," said Madame Harlai. "Her face turned all the colours of the rainbow, and I thought she was going into a fit."

"Are you quite certain of what you say, madame?" said Sir Wallace, with some dignity and without any twitches.

"Perfectly sure, sir," said I. "My nephew attended this poor girl through a dangerous illness, occasioned by distress of mind when Lord C—— abandoned her, and that is the way I made her acquaintance."

"From Madame Harlai's account, it was evident," continued Mrs. Aymer, "that Sir James was extremely shocked and surprised at this piece of intelligence; but the extraordinary effect

it had upon her ladyship we could not comprehend, till it ultimately appeared that Lord C—— was paying his addresses to her eldest daughter. ‘And so,’ said the old Frenchwoman, ‘I had my revenge upon miladi at last!’”



CHAPTER XXX.

“SINCE I have known the world better than I did then,” said Mrs. Aymer, “I see clearly that, however well meant, Madame Harlai had done an imprudent thing in selecting such a situation for me; because, however well I conducted myself, and I had certainly more motives than another would have had to do my duty, still, in order to serve me, she had run the risk of injuring the school. But I saw only one side of the case then, and I thought myself most cruelly treated. Hard it was, assuredly; but the world is always hard to women. It is said that adversity is profitable, but I cannot say I ever found it so. Being ill-treated makes me wicked, and the sense of injury I now felt, certainly didn’t improve me. It is not in my nature to be unhappy long together,—I can’t; I have what the French call a *besoin d’être heureuse* that will be satisfied; and as I was determined never to expose myself again to such sufferings as this affair had inflicted, I resolved to defy the world that rejected me, and if they wouldn’t let me be happy one way, to find another; but the question was, what that other was to be. In the first place, I had to earn my bread. It is true Madame Harlai, in the fulness of her benevolence, offered me a home; but I would not have accepted it for the world. It was not only that, much as I liked her, I should have found the life too dull and inactive, but I should have lived in hourly terror that her visitors might take umbrage at me. ‘No!’ said I to her; ‘I must find employment amongst people who will not trouble themselves about my private affairs as long as I perform the service they require of me.’”

“It was much against Madame Harlai’s will that I left her; but after some inquiries, I found a situation in a milliner’s shop in the Rue de la Paix, where they wanted somebody to speak English; and strange as it may seem, I didn’t much dislike the way of life. I saw a great many people, and many odd charac-

ters, which amused me, and I was all the better off that I had no mistress. Madame Adelmars had died shortly before, and her husband was trying to keep on the business without her, for the sake of his son, whom you have seen. It was he that accompanied us to the theatre the other night.

“When I found how Monsieur Adelmars was situated, I saw that I could make myself useful and valuable to him in conducting the business; and it was not long before he discovered my merits, and was willing to reward them by making me his wife. But I not only did not care for him, but I had made up my mind never to place my happiness in the power of any man again. He gave me a good salary for managing his business, an occupation, by the bye, for which I found I had a peculiar genius, and I felt I was much better off as Miss Grieves, with no anxiety on my mind, than as Madame Adelmars, with the cares of a family on my shoulders, though he was a very good man, and I believe really liked me; indeed his subsequent conduct proved it.”

“But you must have been so lonely.”

“Not at all. I lived in the world all day.”

“But you had no connections—no sister; no friend, but the old lady.”

“I’m afraid I’m the sort of person that can do without; as long at least as I have occupation, and that I am mixed up with the world. I tell you, adversity didn’t improve me; it hardened me, and made me selfish. I cared for nothing but keeping out of trouble, and being tolerably comfortable and well dressed. My situation required that I should be extremely well dressed, and that contributed very much to my happiness. I got a great many gallant speeches and letters from the fine gentlemen too, that came to the shop occasionally to buy gloves; and, received several offers of marriage from the neighbouring tradesmen, so that my vanity didn’t starve; but I was not to be moved; and I confess, whilst I acquired a reputation for the most extraordinary prudence and virtue, I used daily to hug myself in my security; especially whenever I saw any poor girl caught in a snare, which however, I did all I could to keep them out of. I had paid dearly for my experience; but at least I had learnt something.

“In this situation I passed some years very happily, seeing and hearing a great many odd things, I assure you; but to myself nothing very particular occurred.

“At length, however, Monsieur Adelmars having unfortunately a determined predilection for matrimony, and finding

that I was inexorable, transferred his affections to the daughter of his next-door neighbour, who accepted him without hesitation. This was the first vexation I had experienced since I went to live with him, and it was no small one; for I knew the girl, and I was quite certain that the first thing she would do would be to dismiss me; and so I told Monsieur Adelmard; and, moreover, that I was so sure of this, that I should not wait to be turned off, but go at once.

"He was exceedingly sorry; but having convinced him I was right, he made a proposition which I fell into willingly. This was, that I should head a branch millinery establishment in London under the name of Adelmard; a fourth of the clear profits of which he assigned to me. So, in order to arrange this affair, we went to England together, and there he took a lodging for me in St. James's Street, and I carried on business as Madame Adelmard and Co., from Paris. But it was some time before I got accustomed to my new situation, nor did I like it as well as my former one. It was less amusing, more laborious, and not so free from anxiety. In France I had had a fixed salary, and I never thought of money beyond it. Here everything depended on my own exertions and success. I might make a great deal; I might fail; injuring Adelmard, and leaving myself destitute to begin the world again; and it was ten to one I ever got so pleasant a situation as my first. Added to this, in my periodical visits to Paris to study the fashions and settle accounts, I found myself very unpleasantly situated with Adelmard's new wife, who was jealous of my influence with her husband, and suspicious of my integrity, or affected to be so. But though she worried his life out, and at length sent him to his grave, she never succeeded in shaking his confidence in me. He was quite right in thinking I would not wrong him of a penny. If I am anything in the world I am honest; but on the whole he thought better of me than I deserved, because he attributed to native prudence and excess of virtue what was, in fact, the result of bitter experience and selfish caution. However, everything is to be judged by contrast; and although I was not so happy in St. James's Street as I had been in the Rue de la Paix, I was much happier than I am as Mrs. Aymer of Russell Square."

"Dear me! you seem the happiest person I ever saw!" said Agnes.

"It's my good spirits, my dear; besides, now I'm free from my tormentor. Bless you! if I didn't run away now and then to get breath, I should die of it."

“And who is your tormentor?”

“Why, Mr. Aymer, who in an evil day I married. His wife used to deal with me; and every now and then, when she wanted to get some expensive article of dress, she would bring him with her to see how becoming it was; and it appeared afterwards, that in these visits my *beauz yeux* made a great impression on his heart. For my part, I was only intent on selling my goods, and never thought of the little man at all. But as ill-luck would have it, Mrs. Aymer met with an accident and died; and some time afterwards, to my inexpressible amazement, the widower waited on me, to what he called lay himself and his fortune at my feet.”

“I confess I was so astonished that I didn't know what to say. I knew he was a West-India merchant; that he lived in a handsome house, and kept a handsome carriage, and was reputed rich; but I knew nothing more about him. Neither can I say that I felt the least fancy for him. I would much rather have married poor Monsieur Adelmair, as far as liking went. But unfortunately my situation was just then rather precarious. I knew Adelmair could not live long, and I felt certain that when he died the branch establishment would be broken up, and I should be thrown upon the world nearly penniless; for my fourth of the profits was barely enough to supply my own expenses. As therefore I had no money to set up in business I should have had to become an assistant somewhere, and I had seen enough to know that such situations are often very miserable ones. Besides, I was now older, and had acquired habits of liberty, and doing as I pleased, that I feared would not well brook authority. Then Mr. Aymer was an older man than me, and as he professed to be very much in love, I thought I should govern him and have everything my own way, with my fine house and carriage, and plenty of money to do as I liked with. So I married him, and as the saying is, I never repented it but once; and that's ever since the ceremony was performed that made us one. Indeed, my repentance began before. I had misgivings all the while; but I never was certain that I hated him till the day before that fixed for the wedding; but then it was too late to recede. I had given up my business, spent every farthing I had in clothes, and should have been left destitute.”

“In what way does he make you unhappy?” inquired Agnes.

“By being an insupportable fool; absurdly fond of me, and very jealous. You can have no idea of anything like it! I assure you, if he ill-treated me, in the common sense of the

word, I could bear it better. But the alternations of love and rage—love that I can't respond to, and rage about nothing—would drive a saint insane. Then I have no society; his friends and relations refusing to visit me because I was a milliner of doubtful character. You cannot imagine what a dreary thing it is to live in a fine house, and never hear the knock of a visitor, or to roll about London in a fine carriage without a soul to speak to. Often and often I have resolved to leave him, and fling myself upon the world to get my bread as I can; but it is so hard to begin life again. Besides, if he found me he could reclaim me. And then, I was such an idiot as to marry him without a settlement, so that I am entirely dependent on his caprice."

"But how is it he allows you to come here alone?"

"He does not allow me; but it's the only way I can bring him to reason, and punish him for his causeless jealousy. When he has behaved very ill, I take flight, and leave him to tear his hair by himself. Then he is so dreadfully afraid of losing me altogether that he knocks under."

"And doesn't he know where you are?"

"Sometimes he finds out, and comes to fetch me back."

"I can't think how you dare do such a thing!" said Agnes.

"Why, what can he do but part with me; and if he did he must make me an allowance. I should be too glad if he would; but his own inclinations won't let him. If women were not weak, men would have much less power to ill-treat them than they have, depend upon it!"

"And where is that kind Madame Harlai now?" asked Agnes.

"Dead!" answered Mrs. Aymer. "She died in my arms, and in my lodging in St. James's Street. All she had to live on was an annuity from her nephew, the doctor, whilst he lived. When he died he left her everything he had, which, so great had been his charities and so astonishing his carelessness about money, proved to be nothing at all. When I heard of it I came over to fetch her; and she lived with me very comfortably till her death. She was a dear old soul; and never forgot the revenge she took on Miladi."

CHAPTER XXXI.

It was now Agnes's turn to fulfil her promise; and whatever interest Mrs. Aymer had taken in her before, was certainly doubled by the narrative. That the marriage was a fictitious one, she took for granted, and rather wondered how Agnes could ever have supposed it to be otherwise.

"But you should have employed a lawyer, and prosecuted him, or at least frightened him. You'd have got heavy damages, depend on it."

But Agnes disclaimed the idea; the indelicacy of it shocked her. It was a dreadful injury, but one to be borne in silence. Then, with regard to the child, Mrs. Aymer was at a loss what to think. The abduction was evidently not a common case of child-stealing, but a plot; and who could have formed it, and what could be the motive? It occurred to her that it might be done at Lionel's instigation, in order to preclude the possibility of any future attempt to found a claim on the score of the marriage; and now that she was in possession of the facts, she promised her best assistance and advice. But on the following morning, whilst she was out, there came a ring at the bell; and presently in walked a little sallow man, with immense white bushy whiskers and a bald head, who said he was informed that Mrs. Aymer lodged there. Agnes bowed assent. He then inquired where she was, and when she would be at home; and seating himself, declared his intention of waiting for her. He seemed very nervous and irritable, and Agnes was wondering who he could be, somewhat apprehensive that he might be a discontented creditor, judging from the number of *objets* and fine things the lady bought, when he said:

"You don't know me, ma'am, nor I you; but my name's Aymer."

He had traced his wife through the passport-office, and come to fetch her back.

Alarmed at the *scena* that she supposed would ensue, Agnes rose and retired to her bed-room, where she sat listening with anxiety for the return of Mrs. Aymer, the more especially as she heard the husband's boots pacing the *salon* with what ap-

peared to her an angry and impatient creak; when at length the bell rang, she opened her door with the intention of warning her friend of this inauspicious visitor, but he either foresaw her intention, or his love-sick impatience would not wait, for he was in the anteroom before her, and seizing his wife's hand, she heard him exclaim:

“Oh, Susy, Susy, how can you do so?”

Mrs. Aymer did not seem the least alarmed, but walked deliberately into the *salon*, where a conference of about a quarter of an hour ensued; at the end of which time she opened the door of communication and requested Agnes to come and be introduced to her husband, who now looked radiant and triumphant. A walk was then proposed, and she being invited to accompany them, they went first to a banker's, where Mr. Aymer drew a pretty large sum of money; after which they visited the various shops where he paid for the articles she had had, and sometimes bought her more. On the whole, he appeared to Agnes to be the most generous and forgiving of men, though certainly most unprepossessing and unlovable; but Mrs. Aymer told her afterwards, that she had only seen him in his *tame fit*. “If you saw him in the other, you'd take him for a wild beast.”

On the following morning, they departed, leaving a pressing invitation to Agnes to call in Russell Square, where they would be found, after their return from a short visit to Jamaica, whither she had promised to accompany him.

“As for your affairs, my dear,” said the lady, “I am very sorry to leave you, for I think you are quite unfit to manage them yourself; and I don't think you'll ever get any news of your child, unless you obtain the aid of some more experienced person. Now, the St. Georges have evidently taken a great fancy to you, and I should think they would advise you as well as anybody in the world, if you tell them the circumstances of the case. And, by the bye, they'll recommend you a lodging, for this will be too expensive for you, now you're alone; and, mind, you may get into difficulties if you go into a house of an inferior order that you know nothing about.”

Whatever Mrs. Aymer might be, either nature or circumstances seemed to have made her a strange mixture of good and evil. Agnes felt her loss severely; she was so cheerful and good-natured, so active, so fearless, and so full of life.

Previously to Mr. Aymer's unexpected arrival, the St. Georges had made an appointment with her to spend the morning at the Jardin des Plantes, and they consequently arrived in a coach before Agnes had well recovered the first feelings of depression

consequent on her friend's departure; an event that of course took the visitors quite by surprise. Agnes told them she knew nothing but that Mr. Aymer had arrived to fetch her, saying he could not wait, as business demanded his immediate return to London.

"And what are you going to do here alone?"

"I must find another lodging less expensive than this, and Mrs. Aymer thought you might be kind enough to recommend me one."

"Willingly; but that is a thing not to be found in a day. Lodgings in Paris are so often objectionable for young persons. *Les belles surtout!*" added Mr. St. George; but Agnes not understanding him, it did him no harm.

"I think," continued Mrs. St. George, "the only plan for you will be to come and stay a few days with us, whilst we look about; and I'm sure Mr. St. George will be delighted to have your company, as well as myself."

An assurance which Mr. St. George corroborated without hesitation.

Agnes did hesitate, however, chiefly from diffidence. She feared to intrude, and was pervaded with a notion that she should be somewhat out of her place in such an establishment as that of the St. Georges; but they were so pressing, and so evidently sincere in their desire to have her with them, and moreover the advantages might be so considerable, if, as Mrs. Aymer suggested, Mr. St. George would aid her with his advice, that she was induced to accept; and, in order to make sure of her, they waited whilst she packed up her things, and carried her away.

Had Agnes's mind been free from anxiety, she would have found herself very pleasantly situated here, for her hosts made her heartily welcome, and were willing to do everything they could to induce her to remain; but some days passed without her being able to effect the main object for which she had accepted their invitation. A private conference with Mr. St. George was not always attainable; and betwixt her own horror of telling her story and his engagements, nothing had been done.

In the morning, they were very late before they made their appearance at all; then they went out; and in the evenings there was always company, as on the first night she was there; music in the outer room, play in the inner ones.

Amongst the visitors there were frequently Englishmen, and both French and English were disposed to pay her great atten-

tion—often indeed more than was agreeable, inasmuch, that if she had had a room to retire to, she would sometimes have done so to escape their civilities; but she had not; the rooms that were occupied by the company being, in fact, those in which the family slept. However, these attentions, though not welcome, were so far inoffensive, that they were always confined within the bounds of good-breeding.

It was evident that her host's visitors were really gentlemen of condition. The few ladies that came—for the company consisted chiefly of the other sex—were generally handsome or very musical, and might be best described, perhaps, by the word *stylish*. They never played, but remained in the music-room, as did Agnes; and the players came in and out and talked to them.

The gentlemen were always in full evening costume, but the ladies never *en toilette*; so that Agnes's plain dark silk and braided hair were not at all *inconvenable*, and as she was much the youngest of the lady visitors, so she was assuredly much the handsomest, and the one that attracted the most attention and admiration; to avoid which to the utmost she usually seated herself by the pianoforte, with her back to the company.

Signora Grazia was singing "*Ah! per te*," and several people were standing about, listening to the air, when the door that communicated with the anteroom opened, and somebody entered. Agnes saw Madame St. George nod and smile, and hold up her finger, as to an *habitué*, as who should say: "Not a word till the song's over;" whilst the visitor silently advanced and stood behind Agnes's chair. When the Signora had finally shut her large mouth, she pushed back the music-stool and rose, but so abruptly, that she ran foul of Agnes, who of course started up to get out of her way; and as she did so, found herself face to face with Lionel Grosvenor! Agnes was not the sort of woman that screams or faints; she turned pale and held on by the back of the chair; whilst Lionel, with all the *sang-froid* of *un homme comme il faut*, who could never be surprised out of his self-possession by anything, stepped back, made her a bow, and deliberately lifted the signora's stool aside.

CHAPTER XXXII.

DURING the little ceremony of removing the music-stool and making way for the signora, Lionel had time to consider the crisis and resolve on the line of conduct to be pursued, and the result of his brief meditations was, that he stepped forward and held out his hand as to an old acquaintance.

"How do you do? I did not expect to see you here! Are you making any stay in Paris?"

As there was nothing extraordinary in the recognition of two people from the same part of the world, no eye was upon Agnes's face when she moved her lips in the vain attempt to answer.

"Allow me to give you a chair," said he, drawing one forward and placing it so that her back was to the company, whilst he seated himself opposite. "Shall I bring you a glass of wine or water?" he added, hastening to fetch both from the buffet, on which slight refreshments were placed.

When he had seated himself again, he said in a low voice, and with a *déagé* sort of air, "And what brought you to Paris? Did you come here with the St. Georges?"

"No, sir; I came alone. I cannot tell you here what I came for. I have written you several letters begging you to see me."

"I am really ashamed. The truth is, I was in the country when your letters came; and when I returned I meant to call; but one thing or another came in the way, and then I lost the address."

"I wish very much to say a few words to you. It is only to ask one question——"

"Ask it now."

"I dare not; and yet suspense is so dreadful! Oh, if you would tell me the truth!"

"Can you doubt me?" said Lionel, expecting she was going to inquire into the validity of her marriage, or the constancy of his affection.

"Is it you that have taken my boy?" she whispered, gazing eagerly in his face.

"What boy?" asked Lionel, not comprehending her.

"My child—my little Willie!"

"What in the world should make you suppose I should take him?" said he.

"Who else could I suspect?" said Agnes. "Oh, for God's sake, sir, give him back to me if you have. It's the only thing I'll ever ask of you as long as I live!"

"We must talk further of this," said he. "Are you staying here?"

"Yes, for a few days."

"You must come and see my country-house. I've got a charming little place at St. Cloud, and I'll drive you there to-morrow. I'll call for you at three o'clock," he said, rising. "I must go and speak to our hostess now," and he left her to pay his respects to Madame St. George.

Agnes would have given the world for a corner to retreat to till she could somewhat recover her agitation. But, as I have said, there was no such thing to be had. On receipt-nights every room of this small but elegant house was public, whilst all the bed-chamber appurtenances were thrust into closets. So she was obliged to sit out the evening with as much composure as she could command, whilst Lionel disappeared into one of the inner rooms.

On the whole, her heart was lightened and her hopes awakened by the interview. Lionel had not denied that he had the child, and his evasive answers left room for suspicion that he knew more than he was immediately prepared to disclose.

When the company had separated, Madame St. George said, "Mr. Grosvenor is an old acquaintance of yours, I see."

"I knew him in England," answered Agnes, in a manner that did not encourage further inquiry; for having no motive now for taking the St. Georges into her confidence, she resolved to spare herself the pain of talking to them of what she wished never to mention, and madame knew the world much too well to ask inconvenient questions.

Agnes's heart beat high with hope as the hour appointed by Lionel approached; the more especially since the idea had occurred to her that she might perhaps find her child at this country-house; and the longer she thought of it, the stronger grew her persuasion that it would be so. "Why else should he wish to take me there?" she asked herself. And she pressed her hand upon her beating heart to keep it still when she anticipated the joy that awaited her.

Lionel was not remarkable for punctuality, and it was not

far from four when his groom ran upstairs to say that the cabriolet was waiting.

It was a strange situation for Agnes, seated there besides the man she had believed to be her husband, and who had so infamously deceived and injured her, and most women would have felt it acutely; but for her part she was so wholly engrossed with the one subject nearest her heart, that she could think of nothing else. For many reasons Lionel had never inspired her with a profound attachment; whatever sentiment she had entertained for him had been long extinct, and with her joy in her child the resentment had expired too; so that, in fact, he had grown to be an object of perfect indifference.

"Do you know you've very much improved, Agnes," said he, as soon as they had cleared the bustle of the city. "Very much, both in beauty and *tournure*. But you should have a cashmere or a mantle for an open carriage. I must buy you a cashmere."

"I don't want one, I'm obliged to you, sir," said Agnes, drily. "I want nothing in the world but my child. If you'll give him back to me, I'll never trouble you again as long as I live."

"But I don't know that that is the best way to attain your object with me, Agnes. Perhaps I should like to be troubled with you, as you call it."

"Is my boy at the place we're going to?"

"What makes you think he is?"

"Because I think—I hope you are taking me to him. What else would be the use of my going there?"

"Wouldn't you go to oblige me?"

"I'll do anything if you'll give me back my child."

"But suppose I can't. Suppose I haven't him to give."

"Oh, sir! don't say that. You would not be so cruel as to raise my hopes in this way if you had not got him."

"In what way have I raised your hopes, my dear girl? I have never said that I had the child."

"No, sir, not said it; but you have not denied it; and I am sure from your manner that you know where he is, if he is not with you. Besides, why should you take me to this place we're going to if he's not there?"

"Perhaps it is because I want to have your opinion of my little *ménage de garçon*. When I want to fly from all the bore and annoyance of home and Lady Georgina, I take refuge there."

Agnes remembered how he hated Lady Georgina formerly, and supposed he intended to imply that he went out of the way to avoid her visits. But she made no remark on what he said.

His likes or his dislikes, his goings and his comings, and Lady Georgina to boot, were matters of perfect indifference to her. If she could have believed she was only invited to accompany him to listen to this idle talk, and to gratify his vanity and re-awakened passions, she would have leaped out of the carriage, and left him on the high road; and yet this was the whole and sole object of his invitation.

He had gone that night to the St. Georges, who kept a private *maison de jeu* of a higher class, not so much to play, but to see the beautiful English widow of whom the *habitués* of the establishment were talking in raptures. Who she could be they could not imagine, as modest as she was handsome too; and evidently from her retiring manners of quite a different class to Madame St. George's usual visitors, who were generally women attached to the theatres, or in some public line of life.

When he discovered that this admired beauty was no other than his own ill-used wife, his morbid vanity was infinitely gratified; and as he sat talking to her in the corner of Madame St. George's *salon*, and looking into that lovely face, grown a thousand times handsomer since she had suffered and loved, he felt, what he would himself have called, "damnably in love with her."

He hated Lady Georgina; he was weary to death of Madame de Grandmenil, who had *affiché'd* a passion for him, and Agnes had come in the very nick of time to renovate his exhausted feelings. It is true he had flung her letters into the waste-paper basket with perfect indifference; but then he had not seen her. When he did, he was amazed at her beauty, all the more that the other frequenters of the house admired it so much; and he was no less amazed and delighted that she advanced no claim upon him, nor uttered a single reproach for the infamous delusion she had been led to believe he had practised on her. Utterly unable to comprehend the source of this forbearance, he put a wrong construction on it, and this view was strengthened by seeing her on terms of apparent intimacy with people whose path lay so wide of that which should have been hers.

As they drove up to the door of the villa, Agnes almost expected to see her child playing in the little flower-garden in which it stood; for Lionel saw too well the power her delusion gave him to undeceive her. The cold indifference with which she listened to his levities and gallantries during the drive somewhat perplexed him; and the pertinacity with which she always recurred to the one subject nearest her heart was beginning to confound his tactics. He had not the slightest affection for Lady Geor-

gina's weakly, sickly boy, and he could not conceive Agnes's devotion to hers, especially situated as she was—poor, obscure, and deserted—with no estate or title to descend on her offspring. But, however strange, it was no less certain, as he discovered during the drive, that her lost child occupied much more of her thoughts than he did; and too shallow and incapable of any profound feeling himself to appreciate *her* feelings, or his own barbarity in trifling with them, he contrived, without encouraging, not altogether to annihilate her fallacious expectations.

But there was no Willie in the garden, nor was he to be seen in the elegant little apartments to which she was introduced.

"Now, Agnes, come and sit down by me."

"It's useless to sit down, sir, I came here in the hope of seeing my child; and I beseech you, don't keep me in suspense. If he is here, let me go to him!"

"But you must first tell me what you think of my villa. It has been fitted up by Monroy in his best manner. Look at these tables!"

"I dare say they're very pretty, sir; but I don't understand such things."

"Why, Agnes, I remember there was nobody fonder of pretty things than you were formerly. I'm sure you admired my cabinets at Ravenscliffe; and they were not to be compared to these!"

"Very likely, sir; but I want my child," she answered, beginning to weep; "I care for nothing but my child; I came here to see him, and if he is not here let me go; but don't keep me in this dreadful suspense!"

Lionel now found it was time to be serious, too. Talking of bull and marqueterie to a woman in an agony of distress about her lost child was out of place; so he changed his tune, and fell to making violent professions of love. For his past neglect, he excused himself on the score of the attack that had been made on him, his subsequent illness, and absence from England. Of the marriage he said nothing, not feeling it was necessary to enter into any defence of an act she did not seem disposed to arraign; whilst, at the same time, this abstinence from reproaches only augmented her charms—partly because it spared him pain, and partly because it aroused his curiosity.

"I swear I love you better than any woman in the world, Agnes; won't you believe me?"

"No, sir; and it would make no difference if I did. I hope it's not to listen to this that you have brought me here."

"But why not listen to it, Agnes? Come here now, and sit down."

"I'll not sit down, sir; and I'll not listen to what I ought not to hear. If you will not tell me where my child is, please to let me go!"

"Ought not to hear, Agnes! Why, you know you're mine, and can never be anybody else's!"

"I wonder, Mr. Grosvenor, you can like to recall what you ought to be ashamed of!" said Agnes, with indignation, and turning towards the door.

"You shall not go, Agnes!" he cried, seizing her by the arm. "Listen to me for one moment! I have behaved very ill to you, I confess it; and I cannot wonder at your resentment. But I am willing to repair it all. This house shall be yours. Nobody ever comes here but myself. Here you shall live with me, and enjoy every luxury you can desire. You know this is just what we had planned. It will only be here, instead of in Park Lane; and I'm sure this is much the pleasanter place of the two."

"I wouldn't live with you, sir, if it was to be mistress of Ravenscliffe Castle! So please to let me go. You have no right to detain me, and I *will* go."

"You don't know what rights I have. I have a right to detain you. You're mine for ever, Agnes, whether you like it or no. Stay with me, and I'll make you the happiest of women!"

"You may make me miserable, sir; but you could never make me happy, unless you would restore me my child, and let me go."

As Agnes was unwilling to make such a noise as would attract the observation of the servants, she might not have speedily succeeded in effecting her escape from these importunities, had not an unexpected visitor come to her aid.

"Who, the devil's that?" exclaimed Lionel, hearing a ring at the bell, and immediately afterwards some one enter the outer room. Then there was a knock at the door of the boudoir, and a page entered to announce Mr. Lewis Watson; whereupon Agnes, finding herself free from Lionel's grasp, slipped through the half-open door, and hastening through the adjoining room where the visitor was, without turning her eyes towards him, quickly found herself outside the house, and on the high road to Paris, whither she made the best of her way on foot, till a chance conveyance overtook her, into which she stepped, rejoiced at having got away, but bitterly disappointed at the result of her expedition.

She reached the St. Georges without further adventure, and

feeling that her longer residence there would be unpleasant, from the liability to meet Lionel, and beginning to fear also that even if he had the child, which she still suspected, he would not be easily induced to relinquish him, she debated whether it would not be better to return to England at once. A lingering hope that through Mr. Grosvenor she might yet recover her lost treasure, and the conviction that even if he had not the child himself, without his aid she was never likely to discover who had, alone made her hesitate. The question was finally decided by a letter from Lionel, entreating her not to quit Paris without seeing him, as he had something of the greatest importance to communicate to her.



CHAPTER XXXIII.

“On revient toujours à ses premiers amours!” cried Mr. Watson with an assumed air of gaiety, as Lionel entered the *salon* by one door at the same moment that Agnes quitted it by the other,

“D—d little chit!” said Lionel, his eyes following her from the window as she flew down the lawn towards the gate. “I’d pursue her, and force her to come back; but we should have a scene, I suppose.”

“Et la belle Alphonsine?—the *?* superb marquise?” said Watson, “how will she like that this retreat, dedicated to her, should be profaned by a rival goddess?”

“One gets tired of a marquise as soon as of anybody else,” returned Lionel. “But Agnes is the most *agaçant* little devil! She always was indeed; and that was the way she got me to make such a fool of myself.”

“She seems to understand her trade thoroughly,” observed Watson, “She flies to be pursued, of course.”

“If it were any other woman in the world I should say so; but, upon my soul, she confounds all my maxims! If she’s not an honest girl, she’s the best actress I ever saw.”

“A natural gift cultivated by observation and experience,” answered the other. “Her residence in London, and the sort of life she’s been leading must have furnished her with ample opportunities for self-improvement. You know, I told you I

found her hanging about a second-rate London hotel, pretending to get her living by shirt-making. I don't know whether I'm not wearing at this moment one of the products of her industry," he added with a sneer, looking at the wristband of his shirt.

"Pray have you any personal reason to believe that she got her living by less creditable means?" asked Lionel, rather fiercely.

"Oh dear, no, by no means," returned Watson, hastily; "you cannot suppose that I, knowing all the circumstances, should have enrolled myself on the lady's list; but I certainly have very strong suspicions that that silk dress and lace veil were never purchased out of the profits of shirt-making, which I have understood to be one of the worst trades going."

It is curious, but true, that Lionel, who had so despised and neglected her, was sensible of certain twinges of jealousy on hearing these imputations flung on his disowned wife, though he did not believe them. He had an intuitive conviction that they were false,—an involuntary faith in Agnes's virtue; and he felt that he should like exceedingly to knock his dear cousin down.

This was not the first time, by any means, that he had been conscious of such a proclivity. The intimacy that had begun at college and which had been sought by Watson for purposes of his own, had been accepted by Lionel because he was flattered by the attentions of a man older and much more up to the ways of the world than himself; added to which, young people are naturally generous, and indisposed to adopt the family prejudices of their elders. Watson soon found out the way to make himself useful and convenient to one on whom he wished henceforth to keep a watchful eye, not to save, but in order that he might overlook the tables, and never lose an opportunity of throwing in a card to help his own game.

During this early period of their acquaintance, Lionel had perhaps fancied he liked him; but for some time past he had been very certain that he did not. It was impossible he should, for he felt he was in his cousin's power; whilst his cousin evinced his own knowledge of the same unpleasant fact by his unscrupulous demands for money, on all sorts of pretences. In short, he was a constant drain upon one end of his purse; and as Lionel's own expenses kept the other always flowing, the consequent exhaustion was becoming not a little inconvenient and vexatious. However it would not do to quarrel with a *friend* possessed of such a secret; and therefore a forced inti-

maey and familiarity was maintained betwixt them, which very well answered the purpose of Watson, of the depth of whose designs Lionel had no suspicion whatever; it never occurring to him that his cousin could entertain hopes of a succession so remote—for remote it appeared to him, not simply because he had a son, but also because, except whilst he was very ill indeed, the idea of his own death never presented itself to his mind.

But in spite of his dislike and distrust, he had not strength of mind even now to keep his secrets to himself, and he laid open his feelings with regard to Agnes as unreservedly as if he believed Watson to be his best friend.

“I must get the better of that pride and obstinacy of hers, somehow or other,” said he; “for, after all, I like her better than any other woman. I wonder what has become of her child!”

“Better for you that you shouldn’t know,” replied the other. “It’s to be hoped he’s dead, as indeed he probably is.”

“She does not seem to think so,” said Lionel. “I’ll write to her, and promise to do all I can to recover him, if she will come here and tell me the particulars of his abduction. That will be sure to bring her.”

Lewis Watson thought so too, and he did not like it at all. A revival of the connection betwixt Agnes and Lionel might frustrate all his schemes, whether the child were recovered or not, for they might have more children; and Lady Georgina, always sickly, and her weakly boy, might die; and then an heir would be welcome, come from what quarter he might; and the first marriage might be acknowledged. In short, a whole volume of contingencies seemed to be comprised in this unfortunate reconciliation; a reconciliation which he looked upon as certain, if nothing was done to prevent it; for well he knew, that with Lionel, the fancy of the moment was paramount, and must be gratified be the consequences what they might. He endeavoured even now to deter him from a renewal of his connection with Agnes, by suggesting the possibility, or rather, as he said, the extreme probability, of such a step leading to the disclosure of a secret so fatal to him, but so advantageous to her, that of course the slightest suspicion of the truth would urge her to the recovery of her rights, and those of her boy.

“And you are well aware,” he said, “that there are always attorneys to be found who will undertake such a case, for the sake of the contingent advantage if they succeed.” But Lionel denied the danger. “If she ever intended to seek either justification or revenge, she would have done it before. Besides,

she was not a woman to brave the publicity and exposure of such proceedings. She was too proud and too modest."

The sneer on his cousin's countenance when he said this did not escape him; and again he felt he should like to knock him down. It was not intended to escape him; Mr. Watson meant to look incredulous and amused. To a certain degree he was so; for bad men do not believe in the real virtue and disinterestedness of women; and although he was far from believing Agnes to be what he had insinuated, yet he never doubted; first, that she would return to live with Lionel, provided sufficiently favourable terms were offered her; and, secondly, that had she the most remote suspicion of her marriage being legitimate, she would make a vigorous effort to establish her claims.

On Lionel, however, these representations fell aimless; and when Mr. Watson mounted his horse, leaving his cousin in the act of inditing an epistle to Agnes, it was to ponder on some scheme whereby he might impede a reunion so fatal to his interests; and as he slowly wended his way to the city, his brain was as busy inventing plots as a romance writer, nor were some of them a whit less extravagant than those with which we are apt occasionally to favour our indulgent readers. Amongst them some had even a spice of desperation in them; but these he banished, desperation not being in accordance with his character, which was emphatically that of an unprincipled schemer, who was for attaining his ends without any risk to himself.

When two people are to be kept apart for some private ends of a third, calumny and falsehood are the weapons commonly used to make them twain; but calumny was of no use here. Lionel evidently did not, or would not, believe his insinuations against Agnes—it did not suit him to believe them; and what could he allege to her against Lionel worse than she knew? His infamous deception and cruel desertion! If she could overlook these, any other allegation he could make would be idle. What if he told—no, that would not do; but what if he *threatened* to tell Lady Georgina of the marriage, which rendered hers null and void, unless Lionel relinquished all intercourse with Agnes. This might be effectual, but it would infallibly lead to a quarrel, a thing he wished to avoid; but how if the quarrel resulted in a duel, and he had the luck to kill his cousin in fair fight? But unfortunately there were two words to that bargain—his cousin might kill *him*.

Suppose, too, he did succeed in deterring Lionel from renew-

ing the connection now, that would not prevent his doing it if Lady Georgina died; an event which, according to rumour, would surprise nobody, since she had been reputed to be in a dying way ever since she was born.

Then a transitory thought of Agnes in connection with the muddy waters of the Seine glauced through his mind; but a vision of the Morgue followed and chased it away. The best thing, after all, would be her forming another attachment—a second marriage; why not? since she did not believe in the legality of her first! But how was that to be brought about? She had been deceived once, and would be wary.

With this question on his lips he passed under the Arc d'Etoile, and as he did so his eyes fell upon a shabby-looking man in a faded suit of black, who, on observing him, touched his hat. Remembering the face, but not whose it was, Watson returned the salute and rode on; but when half way down the Avenue de Neuilly he met an acquaintance with whom he stopped to speak. Whilst yet in conversation, the man in black overtook them, and as he went by turned to look at the equestrians. That glance brought back his name; it was Leighton, Lionel's former servant. Upon the impulse of the moment, without pausing to reflect why, Watson no sooner shook off his friend than he put his horse into a trot and followed him. He was soon overtaken; for he was lounging on with the purposeless pace of one who has nothing to do, and nowhere to go. On hearing the horse's foot, Leighton, whose ears had the alertness of a man waiting upon fortune, to whom some lucky accident might bring a dinner and a bed, stopped and touched his hat again.

"I think I know your face?" said Mr. Watson; "I have certainly seen you somewhere."

"My name's Leighton, sir."

"Leighton? Leighton?"

"I was Mr. Grosvenor's valet, sir," said Leighton; immediately adding, "and I lost my place by a shameful accusation about being concerned in a thing I'd no more to do with than you had, sir."

"Oh, ay, I recollect. It was at Ravenscliffe, I think?"

"Yes, sir,"

"There was a robbery, I believe?"

"No, sir; there was no robbery. I think they were interrupted before they'd time to get hold of anything worth taking. I heard a noise below, for I slept in the same tower as master, overhead; and I came downstairs, and found Mr. Grosvenor

lying on the floor of the dressing-room in a faint; and if I hadn't come down, there's no doubt, I believe, he would have bled to death."

"And you saw nobody?"

"Nobody, sir. They'd plenty of time to get away, before I could get down. There was a young woman there that night, supping with master; and she got a sight of one of them, as he was making off."

"She didn't see his face, though, I think?"

"No, sir; unluckily, she was too frightened to stop."

"And you never had reason to suspect anybody? Nobody about the neighbourhood?"

"No, sir; but my opinion always was, that it was somebody that knew the place, and that expected master was from home, as he was to have been at Sir Abraham Towers's, but for a letter that came that morning to put him off. So as they could find nobody else to accuse, they accused me."

"And what has brought you to France?"

"Why, sir, I can't get a place. It's not to be expected, when a man's been two years in prison; and I'm like to starve. So hearing Mr. Grosvenor was here, I came across, in hopes he will give me a character."

"And will he? Have you applied to him?"

"Yes, sir, I called, but he wouldn't see me; and then I wrote, but I got no answer; and when I called again, the porter shut the door in my face. What he said I don't know, for he spoke French; but I suppose it was to bid me not go there any more."

Mr. Watson put his hand in his pocket, and drew out half a crown.

"I lodge at the Hôtel Windsor, Rue de Rivoli," he said. "Let me know where you're to be found; perhaps I may be able to get you some employment."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

LIONEL's letter decided Agnes's wavering resolution ; the rather that Martha and her friends in London wrote that they had not been able to obtain the slightest clue towards the recovery of the boy.

"John and I," she said, "have done all we can, and we never leave asking people wherever we go, and the constables and everybody ; but it's all of no use. They say they'll make inquiries, and ask us all the particulars ; but I don't think they ever take any more trouble about it. Nobody'll take trouble without money. If it had been a rich person's child, it would be different. If you could get Mr. Lionel to mind about it—and sure he ought, if anybody in the world ought—he might help us."

Agnes was so strongly of that opinion, that she determined to remove into a lodging at once, and there await the issue of Lionel's offer of assistance. One of Madame St. George's servants said that she knew of a *petit appartement au quatrième* to let in the Rue Joubert, but she feared it would be *trop mesquin* for madame. Barbara, the *concierge*, was a friend of hers, so Agnes went to see it.

It was not elegant, certainly ; but her financial affairs were by no means flourishing, and she thought it prudent to be content with it.

The house of which these rooms formed a part was very large, formerly a grand hotel doubtless, with two staircases ; one leading to the first, second, and third floors, or flats, and the other to those above ; and very different kinds of people they were that had, in the process of years, ascended one and the other.

Agnes entered on her new habitation forthwith ; and having set up a small allowance of wood, a pound of candles, and a *quinquet*, with a little oil to burn in it, her *ménage* was completed : so easy a thing, to those who can suffer the barrenness of it, is life in France. But how uncomfortable !

Barbara assured her that the apartment was *charmant*, and that she would find herself *parfaitement bien* there ; but Agnes

felt quite depressed when the little woman closed the door and left her to herself. It was a dull, foggy September afternoon, that made everything look dingy and cheerless. She had nothing she was called upon to do, not so much as a book to lighten the heavy hours. The height of her lodging from the street, together with the thick atmosphere, robbed her of the last resource of dulness—looking out of the window; so she did what was very natural under the circumstances: she sat down on the faded yellow settee and wept—wept for the present, and wept for the past; but her regrets went no further back than her life in London, for there, for the first time, she had been happy, which even under her father's roof, since her early childhood, she had never been. Her own mind was in fault there. The unfortunate introduction to Ravenscliffe had awakened feelings which poisoned the simple enjoyments and rustic pleasures that satisfied other girls of her class; whilst her dislike of concealment, the awe in which she stood of her husband's family, and an instinctive distrust of she scarcely knew what, had rendered the short period of her intercourse with Lionel anything but blest; yet she could not regret the deception that had been practised on her, nor resent it.

She despised Lionel because he was capable of acting so basely—not because he had acted so to *her*, for his injury had been the source of her only happiness. The views of life it opened had cured her of the worst faults of her character; and how could she regret a deception that had given birth to her boy? but for whom, it appeared to her, that her existence would have been a blank far worse than all she was suffering for his loss. Besides, she might recover him, and be happy again; and having reached this point in her reflections, she roused herself, and sat down to answer Lionel's letter. The experience of her first visit to his villa disinclined her very much to a second; but after giving him all the particulars she had collected regarding the child's disappearance, she concluded by promising, that if he was restored to her by his means, she would return him her thanks in person.

The occupation this had furnished, and the hopes it awakened, having somewhat raised her spirits, she sat down to her needlework, consisting of a piece of fine muslin embroidery, by means of which she hoped to recruit her purse. She would have very much liked a cup of tea, but she was unwilling to encounter the difficulties of procuring it till she was better acquainted with the localities; so she sat working and thinking, till she was suddenly surprised by finding that her lamp was going

out; whereupon she started up to get hold of a candle, but before she could untie the paper they were wrapped in and light one, the last drop of oil was exhausted and she was in the dark; for although Barbara had lighted a fire—wood-fires, like jealous lovers, requiring constant attention—that had gone out also. What was to be done? She would willingly have gone to bed; but she was yet so unacquainted with the room, that she could not tell in the dark in what direction to seek for it, or for her trunk, which she had not even unpacked; so nothing remained but to make an expedition below in search of the *concierge* or his wife. A lamp swung by a pulley from the ceiling emitted a feeble light, by which she descended to the bottom of the stairs, but when there she could find no porter nor any signs of the place he should inhabit. The gates were closed, but there was no lodge. Yet Barbara had said they were always to be found below. There they were not, however, as far as she could see; so she crept up again, and knowing that there were lodgers over her head, she ascended the next flight, having vainly rang at the door of the flat beneath her, which appeared to be uninhabited. Everything of course deteriorated as you ascended, and she knocked gently at a shabby-looking door, whence she fancied she heard the sound of a man's voice. The voice continued, as if reading aloud, but there was no answer; so she pulled the bell. Then a chair creaked, as if suddenly pushed back on the tiled floor, a foot approached, and the door was thrown open.

“*Que voulez-vous?*” inquired the disturbed lodger.

“A light if you please—*lumière*,” answered Agnes, holding forth the candle she had brought with her.

“Come in,” said the stranger, with a perfect English accent; and she followed him into the inner chamber, the outer one being dark and divested of any sort of furniture.

Without looking at her he began lifting the shade from his lamp, took her candle and lighted it. It was not until he was in the act of returning it that he lifted his eyes to her face. When they fell upon her features, he drew back the candle for a moment, with an expression of surprise on his countenance.

“I beg your pardon,” he said; “I’m so absent. I think you are my countrywoman?”

“I am English,” answered Agnes.

“I thought so,” he replied, with a look that seemed to say, ‘there are no such faces elsewhere.’ “Are you living in this house?”

“Yes; on the floor below. I only came in this afternoon,

and I should not have troubled you, but though I went to the bottom of the house for a light, I couldn't find either the porter or his wife."

"Ah!" said he, smiling, "you didn't know where to look for them. They were in their nest."

"And where's that?"

"Behind the wall, as you descend the last flight. A panel draws back, and discloses a space just large enough to hold a small bed and one chair. That is their home, their little halcyon nest, with which they are perfectly contented."

"I remember seeing the hole in the wall this afternoon, and wondering what it was for. Do they really live there?"

"That is their home, I assure you. Pierre and Barbara are excellent philosophers."

"They must be easily satisfied indeed. But how do they eat?"

"Their dinner is brought by the waiter next door, on a couple of plates. In winter they sit upon the bed to eat it, their own laps their table. In summer they eat it outside, in the court—*au frais*, as they call it—which they think *charmant*. Their breakfast, consisting of a slice of bread and a mug of wine, they require neither table nor chair for that. I often smile as I pass this snug retreat, in which two virtuous human beings enjoy perfect happiness, to think of the struggles of mankind for space and property."

"She seems a simple creature," said Agnes.

"There's the secret of their happiness. They are both so. Not unintelligent either regarding the things they have to do with; but they have no artificial wants. A bed, a dinner, and a change of raiment, is all that appears to them necessary to carry on existence pleasantly; and then they love each other with a truly admirable devotion."

"Have they no children?"

"None. I fancied a child would embarrass the little *ménage*, and I asked Barbara if she could make room for one if it came. 'Et pourquoi non, monsieur!' was her answer. 'Mon Dieu!' she said, 'wouldn't I or Pierre always have it in our arms, *le petit amour*, except when it was asleep, and then where could it be better than in the bed?' But you are standing all this while; perhaps you'll do me the favour to take a chair," and he drew one forward.

"Not now," she said; "I left my room door open."

"Then you must allow me to see you safely down the stairs."

"Is there any danger?" she asked.

"Oh, no, no," he answered. "I am rather consulting my own pleasure than your safety. But I hope, since we are neighbours, we shall be neighbourly."

"Do you live alone?"

"Quite alone."

"So do I."

When they reached her door, he placed the candle, which by the way was all this while without a candlestick, in her hand.

"If my lamp should go out to-morrow, may I come and ask you for a light?" he said, with a smile.

"Certainly," she answered.

"Don't be surprised if it does then," he said.

They then bade each other good night, and he retreated upstairs, whilst Agnes re-entered her room with something stirring in her breast that she had never felt there before; the sum of which interpreted might perhaps have been, that she could conceive anybody being perfectly happy in the hole in the wall inhabited by Pierre and Barbara, if they happened to have this young stranger for their companion.

Who and what could he be, with that pale thin cheek and lustrous eye? Whence had he that bright smile, so open, frank and free; and the voice so deep and yet so clear and musical? Poor he must be certainly—his lodging denoted that—though he seemed to be rich in books, for every table and chair was loaded with them—old, musty-looking books most of them. She saw also two large globes, and, lying about, several sheets of thick white paper covered with diagrams. She had heard of the colleges and the English students that attended the lectures; he was probably one of them.

He wore a blue-coloured dressing-gown and slippers, and a black handkerchief tied carelessly round his throat. But it was the ease and grace of his manner that puzzled her most—the way in which, without any effort, he had won her confidence and placed her at her ease. Agnes perfectly understood good manners when she met with them; from the quiet dignity of her character, and the aptness with which she imbibed and appropriated what was refined, her own were good. Nature has her own ladies and gentlemen, as we all know.

There was something about him withal so frank and undisguised; he spoke out his thoughts so freely; and without the slightest shadow of *fade* and foolish gallantry, he let her see so plainly that he was agreeably impressed with her and desired her further acquaintance.

How fortunate she felt herself in having him for a neighbour ! How fortunate that she had engaged that lodging ! How fortunate that her lamp had gone out ! But for that accident, they might have lived close to each other for the whole winter and never met.

The wisest people have their foolish moments, and the most reserved their open ones. Agnes had been originally reserved from her morbid pride and sensitiveness, and latterly from the uneasy consciousness of her peculiar situation ; but the barriers seemed to be all falling away before that free smile and earnest eye. She was sure he was honest and true ; she felt sure he would respect her ; and she had not the least scruple about receiving his visits.

Her room no longer looked *triste*, and she began to think with Barbara, that it really was *charmant*. Once or twice she said, "How foolish it is to think so much of a person I had never set eyes on an hour ago." But still she did think of him ; and not the less for telling herself it was foolish.



CHAPTER XXXV

A FEW days after Agnes's removal to this auspicious lodging, Mr. Lewis Watson was sitting in his *entresol* at the Hôtel Windsor in close conversation with Leighton, who was also seated—a circumstance, it is needless to observe, full of significance.

"Of course," said Watson, "I can have but one motive."

"Of course, sir," responded Leighton.

"I wish to alienate my cousin from a connection that I know would be extremely obnoxious to his family, not to mention the immorality of that sort of thing."

"Certainly, sir," said Leighton.

"Nothing but mischief can accrue from it, and it must be broken off at any cost."

Leighton did not know what was meant by *cost* in this instance ; he wondered if it meant money ; but he reiterated, "Certainly, sir." He had not a shilling in his pocket, and did not know where to get one, and was therefore not in a position to dispute any man's axioms.

“Argument, reason, persuasion, have been tried in vain,” continued Mr. Watson. “They have not the least effect—the least in the world!”

“Indeed, sir!” said Leighton.

“There is nothing left for it therefore—at least, nothing I can see—but to try other means. She has followed him here under the pretence of getting him to find this child of hers, and she’ll fasten herself on him like a leech if we cannot contrive to open his eyes.”

If Leighton had been in a situation to utter the ejaculation that arose to his lips, it would have been not very friendly to his eyes. What cared he for his eyes, open or shut! The thing he wanted to know was, what Mr. Lewis Watson proposed to give him for meddling with them; and how soon the donation or payment would be made; the voice of the inner man being at that moment extremely importunate for something to eat. But unfortunately for Leighton Mr. Watson was a slow rogue; not one that jumped rapidly to his ends, but a schemer that went round about to them, hedging himself in on every side from exposure or discovery or even suspicion; one therefore who would not admit anybody into his confidence. He did not intend to put it in any man’s power to betray his secrets, and he thought it necessary to deceive Leighton as to the motive of his present interference, whilst he made him his tool; and Leighton, who was a small, slight, feeble-looking man at the best, looked such “a poor devil” in his adversity, that Mr. Watson never doubted his own success. But rarely, if ever, is anybody deceived under similar circumstances. People may pretend, or may choose to be deceived, but in their secret hearts they are not; neither was Leighton. He did not clearly comprehend Mr. Watson’s motives, because he was unacquainted with all the circumstances connected with the affair; but he saw intuitively that they were selfish motives, and a vague idea crossed his mind that the possession of this knowledge might furnish him with the means of living. Not that he was by any means such a rogue as the gentleman that sat opposite to him. He would have continued honest if the world would have let him alone, if his bread had not been taken away by a false accusation—“*mais*,” he would have answered to an objector, “*il faut vivre!*” and accordingly he waited with impatience to learn what it was that was required of him—how he was to earn the means of obeying the above-named imperative necessity, and this was, in fact, all the interest he had in the matter—but Mr. Watson thought otherwise. Leighton had been cruelly injured by the

accusation brought against him ; nobody knew that better than Lewis himself, and he naturally supposed that the resentment would be in proportion to the wrong. But in this respect he was mistaken. Resentments are not to be measured by injuries ; their intensity depends on the character of the sufferer—not on their religious principles either, but on their innate dispositions, and especially on the amount of self-esteem they happen to possess. People may sometimes conquer their resentments from pious motives ; but, I confess, my observation does not lead me to the conclusion that the so-called religious are by any means less resentful than others. The only difference I see is, that they contrive to justify their resentment either by magnifying the injury, or by lending it extraneous relations and fictitious importance. Leighton did neither. He knew he had been greatly wronged—so were many other people ; if not in the same way, in various other ways. He never supposed the thing had been done out of malice, or from any desire to injure him personally. He saw it was a mistake—a most unlucky one—but it did not occur to him to throw the blame on anybody in particular ; nor, although distress had driven him to appeal to Mr. Grosvenor for help, was he greatly surprised at the ill success of his applications. He was aware that appearances were more or less against him ; and he had seen too much of Lionel and young men of the same class to expect him to take trouble about what did not personally concern himself, or to be sanguine as to his making any considerable exertions to disentangle truth from falsehood regarding an affair which had ceased to interest him. Justification, therefore, Leighton had not expected ; all he looked for in following Lionel to France was, that if he obtained an interview he might, by solemn assertions of his innocence and pathetic representations of the sufferings he was enduring for a crime he had not committed, procure some assistance.

“Now an idea strikes me,” continued Mr. Watson, “arising out of your former acquaintance with this woman, that might answer our purpose. You saw a good deal of her, I suppose, when she was living at the castle in the capacity of lady’s-maid ?”

“I saw her a good deal, off and on,” answered Leighton. “Of course she took her meals with us in the housekeeper’s room ; but at other times she kept very much to herself. The young ladies were fond of her, and she was a great deal upstairs with them.”

“Still you were living under the same roof.”

“No doubt, sir.”

"And it would not have surprised anybody, I suppose, if you and she had taken a liking to each other."

"There's no telling but I might have felt something that way, sir, if she hadn't been so proud; but she never treated any of the servants as her equals."

"No doubt she had other views. But if we could raise the slightest suspicion in Mr. Grosvenor's mind that you had been his rival, I think his pride would take the alarm, and our object would be accomplished. What do you say?"

"I can't say, sir, I'm sure."

"Why, there's no answering for anything certainly. The best laid schemes sometimes fail—we can but do our utmost to prevent mischief—the issue must depend upon a higher power. However, to come to the point, for I see it's later than I thought, and I've an appointment at two o'clock—to come to the point, what I propose is, that you should see Mr. Grosvenor."

"But he won't see me, sir."

"Leave that to me. He wants her to meet him at a place he has a few miles out of town, and, for ends of her own, she makes difficulties about it, promising to see him if he restores her child, and so forth. He showed me her letter this morning. It has no date, and though he has been to the people she was lately living with, they profess not to know where she's gone. She's playing a deep game; but if you'll help us, I think we can checkmate her yet. If you could make Mr. Grosvenor believe that she is attached to you, and that you came here together, for example, I'm persuaded he'll throw her off at once."

"I don't think he'd believe me if I said so, sir. He knows what sort of girl she was, and how she looked down upon the servants at the castle. They said many a time that she was a great deal higher than the young ladies themselves."

"I dare say; but that sort of *hauteur* is often used as a cloak. However, it would not do for you to depend on your simple assertion, without anything to support it; but as I will instruct you, you will appear to be in her entire confidence. All I require of you is, to go to Mr. Grosvenor in the way I shall direct."

"Very well, sir," answered Leighton, who desired nothing better; though with respect to the story he was to tell he felt considerable misgivings; partly because he expected to be arraigned as a liar, and partly because, bearing no ill-will to Agnes, he had a certain repugnance to harm her, though how far what he was engaged to do *would* harm her he could not decide. It

was a calumny, undoubtedly; but if it served to break off her connection with a man who was the husband of another woman, it might be rather a benefit than an injury; whilst, as regarded himself, having nothing to lose, any card was better than none.

At the same time, whilst he accepted the gratuity Mr. Watson placed in his hand, after giving him his instructions in what manner he should proceed, he registered in his heart no vow of fidelity to his employer. He would do what he was paid for, and if the thing came off easily, well and good; but if any particular urgency arose for avowing the truth, and giving up the name of his employer, he knew no reason why he should not do it; the rather that the more he saw of Mr. Watson the more certainly he felt that the real motives that actuated him were such as he did not wish to disclose. Howbeit, be these motives what they might, he entered the field as a free companion, without any interest whatever in the result.

Nor was this want of aptness to enter into the conspiracy unobserved by Mr. Watson; and he congratulated himself on the caution with which he had hedged himself round, so that if Leighton betrayed him, although Lionel might be angry with his interference, he would have no reason to suspect him of anything worse than an intemperate zeal in his service. In short, he had miscalculated from want of acquaintance with the man he was dealing with, to whom he attributed a desire for vengeance which did not exist.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"HERE'S a man, sir, wishes to see you. He says he comes from a Miss Crawford," said Mr. Grosvenor's page, as he opened the door of Lionel's elegant little *salon* at the "Favorita," which was the name he gave his villa, from the circumstance of its being dedicated to the reigning queen of his heart, whoever she might happen to be at the emphatically "ignorant present;" for "unstable as water" by nature, his instability had been augmented by the deteriorating effects of a bad marriage till nothing sufficed him but change. He desired only what he had not.

"From Miss Crawford? What sort of man? Is he an Englishman?"

"Yes, sir; he looks like a servant out of place."

"Let him come in."

And Leighton advanced into the room, with his hat in his hand.

"What brings you here?" said Mr. Lionel, with a frown.

"I came, sir, to speak to you about a young woman you're acquainted with—Agnes Crawford that was."

"What concern have you, sir, with Miss Crawford? And what do you mean by coming here upon any pretence whatever?" said Lionel, angrily; for, with the same inconsistency he had exhibited in his conversation with Watson, he was as indignant that anybody should take liberties with Agnes's name, as if his own conduct had not exposed her to every possible degree of contumely.

"Why, sir, I know Agnes is too proud to ask herself; but I thought, if you knew we were in distress, you might help us."

"What do you mean, fellow, by *us*?"

"I and my wife, sir."

"You and your wife! What the d—l are you talking about?"

"She didn't tell you we'd kept company, I suppose, sir?"

"Kept company?"

"Yes, sir; we were intimate ever since she lived at Ravenscliffe as lady's-maid; and when she would come here to France after little Bill, because she thought you'd taken him away under a mistake, I came too; as being her husband, I thought it my duty so to do."

"Who do you mean by little Bill?"

"Our little boy, sir."

For a single moment Lionel was taken aback; but Leighton made a poor villain; he was not well up to his part, and when he felt Mr. Grosvenor's eye upon him, his own fell before it.

"And pray may I ask you what has put it into your head to come here with such a confounded lie in your mouth?" he coolly inquired. Leighton was silent. "Is it a scheme to get money?"

"I'm very badly off, sir; and whatever you may think, I'd no more to do with that business at Ravenscliffe than ——" and he stopped short for want of a comparison.

"Than who?" asked Lionel.

"Why, sir, I was in no ways concerned in it, so help me God! I heard a noise below, and I jumped out of bed and ran downstairs; but whoever'd done it was away before I got there."

Lionel looked hard at him, and thought he was telling the truth.

"But if it was not you, who the d——l could it be?"

"I've no idea, sir. Did you ever ask Miss Crawford about it?"

"No; but I will. Where is she? I want her address."

"I don't know where she is, I'm sure, sir."

"That's a lie!"

"It's not, indeed, sir. The truth is, I've never seen Miss Crawford since that business but once, and that was by accident in the street. I didn't know till yesterday she was here."

"And how came you to know it now?"

"A gentleman told me, sir."

"A gentleman! What gentleman?"

"Mr. Watson, sir."

"Where did you see Mr. Watson?"

"In the Champs Elysées, sir. He knew me, and stopped his horse to speak to me."

"And he told you Miss Crawford was here, and upon that piece of information you constructed this pretty scheme to get money; and what do you think you deserve for your pains?"

"I called several times and wrote several letters, sir, and you wouldn't see me; and it's hard to suffer for a thing one had no hand in."

Lionel thought it was; and now, being face to face with the man, he was inclined to believe him innocent of the crime he had suffered for.

"The best way of proving your innocence would be to find out the guilty," he said.

"That's not easy for a man like me, sir, when the lawyers couldn't do it."

"Very true; only they all agreed it was somebody well acquainted with the premises, and nobody knew who was in the habit of coming about the place so well as yourself."

"I'd be very glad to find out, I'm sure sir. I always thought it was somebody that knew you was going away that day to Towershill, and was disappointed at finding you at home."

"Well," said Lionel, drawing a piece of gold from his pocket, "don't come here with any more lies; and if you can find me Miss Crawford's address I'll give you a napoleon for your pains."

He then handed him the one he held, and Leighton, with a bow and thanks, retired, having made forty francs by the business and done nobody any harm. Indeed, he had done himself good, for the bungling business he had made of his attempt at rascality had actually aided his cause. Lionel

thought justly enough that a real villain would have done it better.

"Just as I expected—he wouldn't believe a word of it!" answered Leighton, to Mr. Watson's inquiries as to how he had sped in his undertaking.

"Humph! He wouldn't!"

"No, sir. He said he knew it was a confounded lie."

"Then I suppose he was very angry?"

"Not so much as you'd think sir; for when I saw he wouldn't believe me, I thought it better not to persevere in it; and he thought I'd been drove to it by distress."

"Then you didn't say anything about my sending you?" said Mr. Watson, putting his hand in his pocket.

"No, sir; I thought it best not."

"Of course; for however good one's intentions may be, no man's obliged to another for trying to save him against his will. Well, Leighton, we must let him take his own way," added Watson, dismissing his unsuccessful emissary with another gratuity to requite his past and ensure his future silence.

As Leighton walked away with sixty francs in his pocket he felt himself a warm man, and resolved to refresh himself with a good dinner at a certain *traiteur's* known to him in better days, when, being in service, he had accompanied his different masters to Paris, and been placed on board-wages because they were living *en garçon* and had no establishment.

Mr. Watson felt less comfortable. His scheme was a signal failure, and he had exposed himself to a certain degree of risk without any gain. He was sorry he had had anything to do with Leighton, who he now discerned was not the man for his purpose; and for some time he walked about the room with his hands in the pockets of his dressing-gown, perplexing his brain with other schemes, not a whit more feasible than the last, for preventing a reunion, which Agnes's inclinations as well as her principles forbid; and which, even had no other obstacle existed, the young lodger, *au cinquième*, without any scheming at all, was fast rendering impossible.

Agnes was so afraid of missing his promised visit that she remained at home the whole of the day subsequent to that of their first meeting; but he did not come till the evening, when she had almost given him up, and was beginning to feel quite disappointed. When he did appear she thought he had dressed himself for the occasion, for he looked like a man refreshed by a change of attire, less pallid and hollow-cheeked than the night before. He wore a brown surtout coat, and a black handker-

chief round his throat ; and if he did not look like a gentleman, as that term is understood, he looked like a man distinguished from others by his qualities or his acquirements. Nobody could have taken him for a common man. He entered with the same free and frank address with which he had received her on the previous evening ; and whilst her heart beat and her hand shook, he appeared quite at his ease. Yet he was not indifferent, either, for he said with an air of perfect sincerity, that he had been looking forward to this, meaning the visit, all day, but that he had not been able to come till now.

Agnes wondered what his occupation was, but she did not dare ask questions for fear of provoking any which she could not answer honestly ; and to deceive him by passing for what she was not, was a thing she recoiled from. This difficulty had not occurred to her till his communication seemed to call for a rejoinder, and then the recollection of it kept her silent and embarrassed. And this was the more awkward because he seemed to have no concealments himself.

" I attend a good many lectures," he continued, on finding she made no inquiries ; " and there was a meeting at the Observatory this evening, which has detained me unusually late."

Agnes thought of all the books and diagrams she had seen lying about his room, and judged he was a student, a learned one, she feared ; and her diffidence was augmented by an immediate sense of her own ignorance. Her silence, however, drew on her the very thing she feared, it being difficult for a man to continue talking of himself without more encouragement ; so he asked her if she had been long in Paris.

" About two months," she answered.

" And is this your first visit to the Continent ?"

" Yes ; I never was out of England before."

" And how do you like Paris ?"

" Not much. Whilst the weather was fine, I liked it very well ; but I think it is much worse than London in bad weather."

In this strain the conversation ran, or rather lagged, for some time, he trying to draw her out and give animation to it, whilst she continued oppressed with a sense of inferiority, and a consciousness of her false position that sat like lead upon her spirits. She had felt nothing of the sort the night before, for then her whole thoughts and attention had been concentrated upon him ; but now she could not divest her mind of anxiety regarding the impression she was to make herself, and hence all this embarrassment, and the more sure she was that the impres-

sion must be unfavourable the greater was her constraint. And doubtless, had that been their first interview, her apprehensions might have been well founded; but the cheerful facility with which she had accepted his civilities on the first occasion had ensured her against the immediate condemnation she feared; and instead of thinking her a stupid prude, he concluded that some accidental circumstance, or some feeling he had not the key to, was the cause of her ungenial manner, and that to give her time to recover herself and restore her confidence, the best thing he could do was to resume his first subject, and speak of himself. So, from talking of Paris and its people, he contrived to slide into his own personal affairs and motives for being there.

"Perhaps there is no place in the world," he said, "so constantly diverting as this. I am not merely alluding to the public amusements, but to the hourly spectacles, the streets and Boulevards, and cafés themselves present to an observer. But to enjoy them you must be a man that can go anywhere; not a fine gentleman either, nor so well dressed as to excite observation or incur danger. You have no idea what strange sights and scenes I often witness."

"Do you?" said Agnes, raising her eyes to his face.

"The circumstance of the French being in quite a different era of civilization to us," he said, "renders their whole existence, internal and external, either picturesque or grotesque; even their poverty and their vice are not so *banal* as ours in England; they are more savage and romantic, and consequently present more to excite the mind and waken curiosity. It is this abundant source of interest, as much as the facilities offered to students, that keeps me here. To a poor man who cannot afford to pay for his recreations there is no place like Paris. There is none where one can so well dispense with society. He may trust to his eyes and ears to furnish his amusements, if he has only learnt to use them.

"I have seen very little of Paris," she said. "A friend I had here took me about at first; but now she's gone I'm quite alone, and I don't much like going out."

"Alone! and in a lodging in this strange city; so young and so beautiful!" for Agnes, though a mother, was not yet two-and-twenty; and from the delicacy of her features and complexion, scarcely looked so much. "Married, too! Where could her husband be?" for he not only observed the wedding-ring on her finger, but he had on that morning inquired of Barbara the name of the lady, *au quatrième*.

"Ah!" answered the little *concierge*, "c'est jolie ça, n'est-ce pas? As for her name," she added, "I have it here on a bit of paper, in case the postman should bring her any letters—Madame, Madame Gibson—c'est ça!"

"And is her husband with her?"

"Non personne—nobody."

"And what does she do?"

"Nothing. C'est une dame je crois. She's a lady I fancy."

He would have liked to ask more—whence she came, and if anybody had recommended her; but he was afraid his inquiries would reach her ears, as the inquiries of other lodgers regarding himself had reached his; Barbara's natural benevolence inclining her to communicate everything she thought would be agreeable to her hearers, and being unable to conceive that the inquiries of a *belle dame* or a *beau jeune homme* could be otherwise than gratifying.

One less candid, or who comprehended less of life, might have drawn unfavourable conclusions from this isolation; but he knew that equivocal positions are as often the result of poverty and misfortune as of guilt, and was content to wait and trust.

Having spoken of his life in Paris, he next alluded to his previous one.

"I have another reason for liking this city," he said, "and a very powerful one—namely, that I never was really happy till I came to it. My father had a small business in an English country town, which supported us decently, and enabled him even to lay by a trifle for the future; and naturally enough, he brought me up as his successor; but unfortunately, as it then appeared, I was born with tastes so exceedingly adverse to my father's views, that I was not only extremely dissatisfied with my employment, but I was worse than useless in the office; making all manner of mistakes, because instead of minding what I was about, I was furtively reading some book or other that I kept hid under my desk; so that my poor father and I could never agree. His friends advised him to flog me; and I must do him the justice to say he was not neglectful of their counsel; but innate propensities are not easily overcome, except from motives of interest, and I was too young to be moved by them."

"But how did you get the books?" asked Agnes. "I suppose your father would not give them to you?"

"Why, there was a poor learned man in the town, that had been a teacher, till he grew too deaf for his function. He was what the Scotch call 'a dungeon of learning;' and so fond of

communicating it, that the loss of his occupation pained him much more than the pecuniary one it entailed. We made acquaintance at a bookstall that we both frequented; and whenever he found I was eager to acquire knowledge, he soon showed me that he was as eager to impart it. There was a dreadful struggle at home about the time I *wasted* in his company, but I was not to be overcome; and at last my father and I came to a compromise, and it was agreed that I should have the command of my time after five o'clock, provided I attended to business the rest of the day. After this we went on better; and from the hour of my liberation till midnight, and often later, I used to listen to the teachings of my old philosopher. But as my appetite grew with what it fed on, the more I was in his company, the more distasteful I found the employment to which I was condemned the remainder of the time. However, I adhered to the agreement till I was old enough to be accepted as an instructor myself; and then I relinquished the business altogether, and through the recommendation of my philosopher I obtained an engagement as classical teacher in an academy. But instead of liking it as I expected, I disliked it exceedingly; for I had no time to myself, and the master of the school was neither disposed to make me his companion, nor capable of being an agreeable one if he had. However, I was ashamed to complain, as it had been my own choice; and, besides, I had no other means of living, without going back to the office, which was out of the question. So I toiled on despondingly till my father died; and then, to my surprise, I found that by turning everything he had left into money, I could realize enough to provide me with absolute necessaries, and a few books into the bargain; and as the sort of life I contemplated is more agreeably carried on in Paris than in London, I came here."

"And here you are happy?"

"Perfectly. I am always busy, and busy in the way I like. Sometimes I submit to a little drudgery with my pen, to enable me to buy books, but the end reconciles me to the means, and I flatter myself I am an improving example of how little a man can be happy on."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

IN consequence of the *esclandre* at Chantilly, it was considered absolutely necessary for the credit of the Grosvenor family that Isabel should be married with as little delay as possible; and as Sir Abraham Towers was at hand, and willing as ready, the world was given to understand that she was under an engagement to that gentleman. This step was taken without exactly consulting Isabel; she was only told that it must be so; and that having covered herself and everybody belonging to her with ridicule, there was no other way left of redeeming her honour.

And nobody protected Isabel,—none defended her; for even those whose better feelings might have done it, were so far carried away by their indignation at Colonel Aitchison's conduct, as to second those members of the family who acted from more worldly motives. Whilst the latter cried, "Marry directly, to save yourself from the ridicule of a hopeless passion," the others cried, "Marry, and let him see you are not going to break your heart for him."

Isabel submitted to the arrangement, but not from fear of the world's ridicule—she cared nothing about it; not to persuade Colonel Aitchison of her indifference—she would have preferred that he should know her sufferings, and how deeply she had loved him. That was the only revenge she desired. She thought, if not now, the time might come that he would regret her; and that when he heard of her early death—a consummation she both wished and expected—his heart might melt, and his eye drop a tear for the anguish he had caused, and the love he had lost. No, she submitted because she had neither bodily nor mental energy to resist the influences that pressed upon her; and because the future that laid before her would be so short, and, take what form it would, so hopeless and wretched, that it was not worth an exertion to attempt to shape it in one way or another; so the *trousseau* was prepared, and the Ambassador's chaplain was spoken to, and the cards were issued for the *déjeûneur* which was to be given on the day that was to make Isabel Grosvenor the wife of Sir Abraham Towers.

But although the young girl's moral nature was so far sub-

duced that she submitted to the arrangements made for her, her physical nature took the affair in a different temper; and, accordingly, before the day arrived on which the wedding was to take place, she was extremely ill. The shock she had received at Chantilly, and the forced suppression of her sufferings since, formed altogether an accumulation of mental mischief that, sooner or later, must produce its effects. She was to have been married on a Thursday; but on the Tuesday evening she fainted at the dinner-table, and was carried to bed, where she laid for three weeks in a fever, and from which she rose so debilitated that, impatient as Lady Grosvenor was on the subject, she found it necessary, in conformity with the advice of the physician, to forbear troubling her daughter with any agitating discussion; and even to fling into the fire the whole of the second edition of the invitation-cards which had been prematurely prepared, but, fortunately, not issued. The day appointed, he said, was too early. Lady Grosvenor must allow the young lady a little more time to recruit before her marriage.

No doubt this haste was very inhuman; but parents are often extremely inhuman, as we all know, or might know, if we looked fairly at the struggles and disagreements that arise betwixt them and their children, and I do not allude here to those whom the world calls bad and unnatural, but to those who are supposed to do their duty to their offspring.

The second edition of cards being destroyed, a third was prepared, and issued as soon as Isabel's convalescence was sufficiently advanced to warrant a hope that she would be quite well; and this was also done without consulting her; Lady Grosvenor, who took the management of the whole affair, shrinking from entering into any discussion with her daughter on a subject so unsafe. Her conscience told her that Isabel had been unfairly hurried into the engagement, and she feared that the respite she had had might have given her not only time for reflection, but fortitude to retract, and her apprehensions were not ill-founded. A good sharp fit of sickness will often do more to cure a hopeless passion, or blunt the sting of a disappointment, than months of sadness and repining in all the luxury of woe. The delicious sensations of returning health make us feel that life is not such an insupportable burden as in the extremity of our despair we had fancied, even though we are compelled to sustain it without the supporting arm we had fondly relied on.

As Isabel Grosvenor reclined on the sofa in her own bed-chamber, her mind began gradually to open to the conviction that Colonel Aitchison was a selfish, hard-hearted egotist, and

that he had treated her cruelly ; for well she knew that he had been under no mistake, but was perfectly aware that she loved him, and had been ready to say yes any day or hour he had put the question to her, since that day and hour when her scruples had caused her to hesitate ; the agonizing notion that she had ungratefully received so precious a distinction having emboldened her to display her feelings much more openly than her maiden delicacy would otherwise have permitted. She saw that he had remorselessly sacrificed her to his wounded vanity, and plotted to secure himself an ungenerous triumph at her expense. And then the question arose whether her being ill-treated by a man she had loved was any reason for rushing into the arms of another she hated ? And she wondered how she could have been so stupified by her grief as to accede to the engagement for a single minute. How fortunate her illness had been. But for the reprieve it afforded her she would have been irretrievably the wife of Sir Abraham Towers, and doomed to wretchedness for life ; but now, although a struggle might await her at home, and the world's ridicule abroad, she was determined the first time the subject was introduced to declare her resolution never to marry him. But it was a painful subject, and she was content to postpone it until forced upon her, the rather, that her meditated rebellion was something so new that she distrusted her capacity for conducting it well. Moreover, vague hopes arose that as nothing was said, nothing would be done ; perhaps her mother, seeing her sufferings, had relented ; perhaps Sir Abraham, attributing her illness to the right cause, was disgusted. Pleasing, but unfounded hypothesis ! Lady Grosvenor was as inexorable and Sir Abraham as ardent as ever, although it was an ardour that for the moment was exhibited only on paper, he having been obliged to visit England on pressing business which had been postponed till after the wedding, when he had hoped to travel thither with his bride.

On the pretence that they might be too agitating, the tender messages intrusted to the mother in these missives were not delivered to the daughter ; and it was not till the near approach of the day fixed for the marriage that Lady Grosvenor permitted the subject to be named.

Isabel was now pretty well, Sir Abraham was on the point of returning, the invitations were issued, the confectionery bespoke, the chaplain warned, and society attentive.

It may be judged, therefore, how the intended bride's protest was received ! Lady Grosvenor contemplated her with horror and amazement. Was the girl infatuated ? Was she mad ?

Was she resolved to cover herself and her family with disgrace and ridicule? Was there ever anything so romantic, so absurd, so inconceivable? If she did not wish to marry Sir Abraham Towers, why had she not said so at first? Why allow the thing to go on till the wedding-day was fixed, and the whole world apprised of the engagement? Had she no consideration for her own honour? No sense of her position in society? Was she lost to every sense of dignity and propriety?

Such a shock as this, such public disgrace, was more than Lady Grosvenor's failing health could support: it would kill her. Sir Francis had been threatened with gout for some time. This shock would assuredly send it into his stomach. They must instantly fly from Paris, however unfit she and Sir Francis were to encounter the fatigues of the journey, and hide their disgrace at Ravenscliffe. Finally, Lady Grosvenor called for her salts and her maid, who, with a countenance of the deepest concern, assisted her ladyship out of the room, and led her to her own chamber, leaving Isabel choked with tears and sobs, and intimately persuaded that she was herself a monster of folly and ingratitude; and that, be her own sufferings what they might, it was her evident duty, for the sake of her afflicted parents, to marry Sir Abraham Towers; an opinion so congenial to the general convenience of those about her, that she found herself universally supported in it.



CHAPTER XXXVIII.

It was with feelings of intense wretchedness that Isabel communicated her resolution to her mother, who, instead of accepting her acquiescence as an heroic sacrifice to the will of her parents—and heroic it was in the intention, however mistaken—simply rejoiced that her daughter had come to her senses before Sir Abraham arrived; an event which was not expected to take place till the day before the wedding.

I am afraid Isabel could not help wishing he might never arrive; but in the meantime the preparations were carried forward with the greatest alacrity, and everybody, except the victim herself, was more or less involved in the pleasing excitement. For her part, although, instead of sleeping, she passed

the night in tears; and although she continued so pale and thin, that the milliner recommended rose-coloured linings for her bonnets, and her maid was obliged to take in all her dresses, she exhibited no opposition, nor made any display of feeling. She appeared quiet and resigned; and as those about her looked no deeper than the surface, they had no suspicion of the struggle that was going on within. They never guessed, that, hopeless of any other escape, she was meditating how to elude the destiny she abhorred by death. But how to die? For death she wished ardently; but she dreaded the pain and horror of dying, and did not know how to compass her will. Poison seemed the only means she could command courage to use, and the only poison she knew of was laudanum; but what quantity should she take, and how procure it? She stole into her mother's dressing-room, and examined all the phials, of which there were not a few, but there were none containing laudanum amongst them; and even in Georgina's apartments she was not more successful. To ask any of the servants to purchase such a drug for her was out of the question.

She knew that the fumes of charcoal furnished an easy mode of eluding unpleasant engagements; but where was she to get it? Besides, she had no stove.

Young ladies of the higher classes are brought up in such a state of dependence on those around them, that they are rarely very rich in expedients or resources, and even suicide becomes rather an embarrassing operation to a timid, inexperienced girl, who would gladly die if she could but be translated or attain a painless death.

Thus perplexed and bewildered, frightened and wretched, "letting I dare not wait upon I would," she allowed the days to creep on till the one arrived on which Sir Abraham was expected. A large party was invited to dinner, and he was to be amongst them; and on the following morning she was to be married. Everything was in a forward state of preparation; her very trunks packed and strapped, and standing in the ante-room, ready for removal; for Lady Grosvenor was impelled, by a nervous impatience, to see the thing over, that made her hasten all the preliminary arrangements as if their completion could accelerate the flight of time, and bring the concluding ceremony nearer.

"To-day or never!" thought Isabel, as she viewed these indications of her approaching fate; but of all the days in the year this seemed the least likely for her purpose. The most courageous and determined self-slayer that ever sought death,

could scarcely have found leisure or opportunity of getting out of the world, with so many busy servants and congratulating friends about her; all the intimate ones, especially the young ladies, stepping in just for a moment, to see the *corbeille*, or to say good-bye. And curiosity gave Isabel more intimate friends on this occasion than she had ever suspected herself possessed of; for, as it is a well-known fact that people who make sacrifices to deceive the world very rarely succeed in their object, so all Lady Grosvenor's scheming to save what she considered her daughter's credit, was not of the least avail. Nobody forgot the scene at Chantilly. Everybody believed that Isabel was marrying Sir Abraham, if not altogether at the instigation of her family, yet out of pique rather than inclination; and in most instances, the animated congratulations were succeeded by exclamations of pity the moment the visitors found themselves safe in their own carriages; a pity that was not always genuine either, for Sir Abraham was very rich, and the *corbeille* was superb.

But, in spite of all this bustle and excitement, the victim herself became every moment more anxious. The scene around her gave a reality and a presence to that which, owing to the bridegroom's absence, had hitherto appeared indefinitely distant—more like an ugly dream than a stern reality. Her cheeks were flushed with agitation, and her whole deportment was so unquiet and confused, that she was like a person in an incipient stage of brain fever. These hectic roses in her cheeks, however, were very becoming; and when she was dressed for dinner, every one exclaimed how well she looked. It was quite true that they had not seen her look so well for many a day, yet despair was at her heart, engendering and suggesting all manner of wild expedients, amongst which was the hackneyed one of throwing herself on the generosity of Sir Abraham. She would confess all, and implore him to take the odium of breaking the engagement on himself. But this project was defeated by Lady Grosvenor's foresight; not that she had any distinct apprehension of it, but she had an apprehension that something unpleasant might occur, if the lovers were left alone at this crisis; so, on observing that Isabel's toilet was completed at an earlier period than usual, and that she was preparing to descend to the *salon*, where Sir Abraham was expected to make his appearance before the rest of the company, she told her daughter, that as there were some matters of business to be discussed, she must remain in her chamber till she was summoned, which, of course, was not done till there was no farther danger of a *tête-à-tête*.

Sir Abraham Towers was a tall, stont young man, with full cheeks and sandy hair, who spoke very slowly, and as if he had plums in his mouth—a thorough country gentleman. Good-natured from indolence, but stupid and thick-headed; and with very obscure notions regarding the character and feelings of women. He knew that he was considered an excellent match, and that innumerable young females, as he called them, would have been overjoyed to find themselves the mistress of Tower Hill; whilst one of his reasons for marrying, as he himself alleged, was to escape the plague of scheming mothers. He knew nothing whatever of that class of “young females” to which Isabel Grosvenor belonged; and in spite of the coldness and reserve and depression she had uniformly exhibited in their interviews, he never suspected that she was marrying him against her will. He only supposed her to be more shy and retiring than young women in general; and as his position had exposed him to too much of the opposite qualities, he liked her the better for it. Neither was he ignorant of what everybody knew, or, at least, strongly suspected—namely, that there had been some “love passages” betwixt his intended bride and Colonel Aitchison; but he did not look for a virgin heart, nor perhaps for any heart at all. If Colonel Aitchison was a good match, he had the satisfaction of feeling that Sir Abraham Towers was a better; and since he knew of no reason whatever for any regret on the part of the lady, he looked for none. The whole affair had been transacted with the mother; and even the daughter’s consent conveyed through her lips. Sir Francis was ill, and fast failing, both in mind and body, and left everything to his wife. Lionel cared for nothing but his own amusements and intrigues; Lady Georgina for nothing but her ailments and her sickly boy; Mrs. Damer for nothing but the indulgence of her own will; whilst Mrs. Langham and her husband lived a life of successive quarrels and reconciliations which unfitted them for being of use to anybody, since they never could have agreed upon any line of conduct whatever. As for William Damer, he seemed to have changed his character, and from being the most devoted of husbands to be fast becoming the most neglectful. He mixed little in the gay society that engrossed the rest of the party; and although he spent the greatest part of his day from home, he gave little account of the pursuits or amusements that occupied his time.

On this day, however, the eve of the wedding, every member of the family was present. How rich in friends the bride appeared! How enviable her position! How brilliant the destiny

that awaited her! None knew the pangs of her aching heart, nor felt the throbbing of her burning brain, nor guessed the unutterable loathing with which she submitted to the attentions of the bridegroom who sat beside her. Yet she smiled when it was expected of her—indeed, oftener! and exhibited most flattering acquiescence in all his opinions, for her mind was too much engrossed to follow his discourse, and she assented without knowing what he said. When the dinner was over, and the ladies were for a few minutes alone, she was surrounded by the young asking questions, and the old giving advice, till the gentlemen appeared, and then everybody made way for Sir Abraham, who seated himself beside her.

"This time to-morrow," he said, drawing out his watch, "we shall be at the end of our day's journey, I hope. I don't know what sort of an hotel this Lion d'Or is that we're to stop at, do you?"

"No," answered Isabel, turning away from him with a shudder.

"My courier recommends it strongly, and I've left him to arrange everything for us. Are you sorry to leave Paris?"

"No; yes. I don't know."

"I'm tired of it. I'm never happy anywhere long but at Tower Hill. I miss my own amusements. I hope you'll like Tower Hill."

"I shall never see it!" thought she.

"I have had your apartments fitted up by Davenport. I had him down from London on purpose. They're in green and gold, and mine are in crimson and gold; so that it makes an agreeable variety for the eye. As I'm fond of a domestic life, I've had everything made as comfortable as possible. I hope you like a domestic life; do you?"

"I like peace."

"So do I. I can't bear a turmoil. Tower Hill, with a few friends, and a little hunting and shooting in the season—that's all I want. Not that I shall object to London for a few weeks in the spring if you wish it. Are you fond of London?"

"No."

"I'm glad of it. No more am I, to say the truth. I see we agree in our tastes, and that we shall be very happy together. A conformity of taste is everything in married life. Then people don't differ. I confess I shouldn't like a wife that was always differing, like some people;" and as he made this observation he cast a glance at Louisa, who was just launching into an animated dispute with her husband with regard to the age of one

of the French princes. "I'm sure you are not fond of argument, are you?"

"No."

"I'm very glad of it. For my part I hate it. I like people that agree with me. I make it a rule never to invite people to Tower Hill that hold opposite views in politics or religion, or that sort of thing? What's the use of it? Let every man keep his own opinion if he likes, and let me keep mine. That's what I say. Don't you think I'm right?"

"Quite!"

"I don't like any of these new-fangled notions for my part; and I think it's the duty of every man of any standing in the country to suppress them. I always tell everybody that what was good enough for my forefathers is good enough for me; and that if they want to turn things upside down, they've come to the wrong person. What do you think of this new project of sending us flying over the country by steam?"

"I don't know, I'm sure."

"It won't do, depend on it! The landed proprietors will never allow it. They actually proposed to carry a line right through my park. I saw the plan with my own eyes? What would my property be worth in Ellerton if they turn all the traffic from the town, I wonder? It won't do, as I told them. It's all very well upon paper, but disfiguring the face of the country in that way is a thing the people of England will never agree to, and if they do the landed proprietors won't, that they may rely on. What's become of Lady Georgina? Why did she leave the dinner-table?"

"She was not well. She has retired to her room."

"She seems to have very bad health; she's always ill. I shouldn't like a wife that was always ill."

"I have been ill a long time, and I am very ill now," said Isabel; "and if you don't like bad health you had better not think anything more of me."

"But you've only had a fever," he said. "Anybody may have a fever. I had a bilious fever myself once, and I've very good health. A fever's nothing."

"To some people, perhaps, but it ruins the health of others; and the truth is, Sir Abraham, I know I'm not fit to be married, and I don't wish it. Late as it is, it's better to speak the truth now. You'll be much happier without me, and I entreat you to break it off!" This was spoken in a low hurried tone, her breath almost failing her with agitation and the palpitation of her heart.;

"This is too severe!" he said, supposing she had taken offence at his remarks about sickly wives. "I never thought of your being ill, I assure you. I was thinking only of Lady Georgina. Who could think of your being ailing? I'm sure I never dreamt of such a thing, and I hope you'll dismiss it from your mind. I should be the most miserable man in the world if I have given you any offence!"

"I'm not offended," she answered, "but I have been wishing to speak to you, and now that I have an opportunity I conjure you to believe what I say. Indeed, Sir Abraham——"

"Bel, Lady Jane Mortimer is going away, and would like to shake hands with you," said Lady Grosvenor: her eye had been for some time on her daughter, the expression of whose features alarmed her. Isabel was pleading for life; her bosom was heaving, her cheeks were crimson, her eyes suffused with tears. In her deep earnestness, her eager anxiety, she was beginning to forget the place she was in and the observers that surrounded her. Unconsciously her voice was becoming louder too; and other eyes and ears besides her mother's were turning towards the sofa she and Sir Abraham occupied.

"I have not seen you so long, dear Isabel," said Lady Jane, who had only reached Paris that morning, "that I could not go without bidding you good-night, and wishing you all happiness—though it was hardly fair of your mamma to interrupt such an interesting *tête-à-tête*. But I want to tell you that I saw your Aunt Daeres at Brighton, on Tuesday, and how grieved she is that she can't be with you; but she's perfectly disabled with that horrid rheumatism, and can't move hand or foot."

"I wish she had been here!" exclaimed Isabel, energetically.

"So does she, I assure you! However, you'll see her on your way. You go by Dieppe, I believe?"

"I don't know!" answered Isabel.

"I'll tell you what, my dear, I think it is high time you went somewhere; for whatever they may say you don't look well at all, in my opinion, with those bare bones and flushed cheeks of yours. Why, child, you're quite a skeleton I declare, now I get a near view of you."

"I have been very ill," said Isabel.

"So I heard, and I don't think you're very well now. However, your good native air will set you right I hope. They say Tower Hill is a fine place, and being so near Ravenscliffe it will be very pleasant for you. But there's your inamorata looking quite forlorn without you; you must go and console him, though

for my part I think you should go to bed. My gracious, child, you're quite in a fever—your hand's like fire. Come here," she said, beckoning to Lady Grosvenor. "Do send this poor child to bed. If you don't, I suspect you'll have no wedding to-morrow. Just feel her hand!"

"You had better go to bed, Bel," said Lady Grosvenor. "It's merely the excitement. Just slip out of the room, and I'll excuse you to Sir Abraham." And so failed the bride's project of appealing to the bridegroom's generosity.

"Thank God she's gone, foolish girl!" thought her mother, as she cordially bade good-night to Lady Jane. "When once she's married, she'll get rid of this nonsense, and behave like other people."



CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE servants at the Hôtel de Breteuil, betwixt clearing away the disorders of one feast and completing the preparations for another, had been up nearly all night—some of them, indeed, had actually not been to bed at all, when the morning dawned that was to see Isabel Grosvenor converted into Lady Towers. As it was intended that the marriage should take place at eleven, and the *déjeuner* at twelve, in order that the bride and bridegroom might start in time to complete without inconvenience their appointed journey, even the heads of the family made a violent exertion to rouse themselves betimes, with the exception of Sir Francis, whose extreme debility and fast failing intellect required indulgence. Bontems, his valet, therefore had her ladyship's orders not to take up his master's chocolate till ten; but the stimulus of the impending event seemed to have roused his memory and feelings into such an unusual state of activity, that he rang his bell at nine o'clock for the purpose of sending his servant to request that Miss Isabel would come to him immediately, as he wished to see her before he rose. The time had arrived, however, in which Sir Francis's commands were no longer the law of the house; and on receiving this message, instead of forthwith proceeding with it to her young lady's chamber, Ma'm'selle Valerie knocked at Lady Grosvenor's door

to inquire if she should deliver it or not, Miss Isabel having particularly desired not to be roused till ten.

“ Car elle était bien fatiguée quand elle s’est couchée, miladi ; et elle avait aussi une migraine affreuse ? ”

“ Don’t disturb her till ten, she can go to Sir Francis when she’s dressed,” said Lady Grosvenor, who, not only on account of the *migraine*, but for other reasons also, was quite content to let her daughter sleep till the hour of sacrifice. Indeed could she have slept through it, she would not have been sorry, as many a bride has done—virtually slept—through her whole courtship, dreaming of Elysian fields and loving hearths, to open her astonished eyes thereafter in a fearful waking.

Isabel not answering the summons, Bontems was instructed to say she was dressing, and would wait upon Sir Francis presently ; whereupon the old gentleman, with the impatience and irritability that accompanies certain maladies of declining life, insisted on rising immediately in order that he might be ready to receive her. But when his toilet was nearly completed, as she had still not made her appearance, he asked for his dressing-gown, and leaning on Bontems’ arm, proceeded to her room, holding in his hand a morocco case containing a superb set of jewels, the wedding gift, which he was impatient to present to her.

It was now nearly ten o’clock, and Ma’m’selle Valerie was just proceeding in the same direction with a cup of coffee and a slice of dry toast on a silver salver.

“ Sir Francis wishes to see Miss Grosvenor,” said Bontems.

“ Tout à l’heure ! ” answered the *soubrette* with an air of authority, as she advanced to the door. “ Mais où donc est la clef ? ” she added, surprised to perceive that it was not in the lock as usual.

“ C’est dedans probablement,” said Bontems. “ Il faut frapper.”

“ Eloignez vous donc ! ” said Valerie, as she tapped at the door, but no one answered.

“ Ma’m’selle dort, sans doute,” said Bontems.

“ Mais c’est singulier,” observed the waiting-maid, knocking again.

“ What is it ? What’s the matter ? Why doesn’t she open the door ? ” inquired Sir Francis.

“ The key’s inside,” answered Bontems, “ and mademoiselle’s asleep.”

“ Wake her ! wake her ! ” cried Sir Francis, striking the door with his stick.

But still there was no answer. They knocked and called, but the bride was silent. It must be a deep sleep indeed that is not disturbed by all this clatter! The valet and the waiting-maid looked at each other with significant amazement, whilst Sir Francis kept peevishly asking what was the matter, and why they didn't open the door.

The noise they made, however, if it did not rouse the bride, awakened the attention of the servants, and of other members of the family, whose chambers were adjacent; and amongst the rest that of Mr. Damer, who had early left his sleepless pillow, and to compose his spirits had been taking a stroll outside the Barrier. He had just come in, and was on his way to his own room to dress, when hearing the knocking he turned to inquire the cause of it, which he no sooner learnt than his cheeks and lips turned of an ashy paleness. Perhaps he thought of Juliet and her bridal day.

"Break open the door!" he said, advancing towards it. "Send for a locksmith, instantly!"

"What's the matter? Why don't they open the door?" reiterated Sir Francis.

"Come away, sir; allow me to lead you to your room," said Mr. Damer.

"No such thing, sir!" replied the old man, fretfully. "I want to see my daughter."

"I am afraid Isabel may not be well, sir," answered Mr. Damer. "You had better return to your own room, and I'll let you know when she's ready to see you."

"Ready! Why isn't she ready?" exclaimed Sir Francis. "I want to see her. I have got something for her."

"Get him away!" whispered Mr. Damer to Bontems; but the old man had a strong will of his own when he was roused to exert it, and he would not go.

By this time Frances and Mr. Langham had joined the wondering throng, and Louisa was gone to summon her mother, whose toilet had not yet reached that stage in which she permitted herself to be visible. She did not, therefore, like the Grecian mother, "rush dishevelled;" but, however alarmed and filled with a presentiment of evil, she waited till the mysterious operations of the dressing-room had in some degree concealed those ravages of time that grieve the heart and pain the eye of woman.

"Is Miss Grosvenor in the habit of taking the key out of her door?" she inquired of Ma'm'selle Valerie, looking very pale, but retaining the cold dignity of her voice and manner.

“Jamais, miladi! Enfin, c’est inconcevable!”

“Sir Francis, you’ll get cold. Bontems, take Sir Francis to his room.”

“Papa won’t go, mamma,” said Frances; “you had better leave him alone. He’ll make a scene.”

“Stand back!” said Mr. Damer. “Here’s the locksmith;” and the man being informed what was required of him, advanced, and in two seconds the door was opened. Hitherto, everybody had been pressing forwards. Now they all fell back; each seeming afraid to enter, uncertain what spectacle awaited them. Sir Francis alone, unable to grasp the intensity of the interest, and, indeed, only obscurely conscious that something was wrong—he alone attempted to move on, but was restrained by Bontems; seeing which, Mr. Damer stepped before him into the chamber. There was but a dim light in the room, for the window-curtains were closed; and all was silent as death. In an alcove at the farther extremity stood the bed, with a blue silk drapery, which shaded the pillow from the eager eyes that were peering in at the door. More to gain time than light—rather to defer the dreaded moment than to let in day on what he feared to see—Mr. Damer first drew back the window-curtains, and then with a sinking heart stepped across the room, and lifted the drapery. But no pale corpse was there! No Isabel, alive or dead! The coverings were undisturbed, the pillow unpressed. “She is not here! She has not been to bed!” he cried; whereupon everybody pressed forwards into the room exclaiming,—

“How extraordinary! Where can she be?” and so forth.

“Where’s Bel?” said Sir Francis.

“Has any one seen Miss Grosvenor to-day?” inquired her ladyship of the astonished servants, who at first looked each at the other; and then by degrees, first one and then another, answered that they had not.

“I have brought this to give her,” said Sir Francis. “Where is she?”

“I wish you would go to your room, Sir Francis,” said her ladyship, impatiently.

“I want Bel!” said the old man.

“Where’s Ma’m’selle Valeric? Did you see Miss Grosvenor in bed before you left her last night?”

“Non, miladi; elle ne le voulait pas.”

“What do you mean? Why wouldn’t she let you!”

“Mademoiselle said she had a very bad headache—qu’elle avait une migraine affreuse; and as soon as I had taken off her

dress, and removed the flowers from her hair, she dismissed me, desiring me to let her sleep in the morning till ten o'clock."

"Where is she?" said Sir Francis.

Whilst these inquiries were making, Mr. Damer had been casting his eyes round the room, in hopes of seeing a letter, or something that should indicate the cause of her disappearance, or rather the mode of it, and the intentions with which she had departed; for as to the cause he guessed it well,—it needed no sphynx to read that riddle. She had fled to avoid the marriage she abhorred; but whither? Where was her refuge? Was it beneath those dark waters where so many sad souls have sought a home? or had she, with the collusion of Ma'm'selle Valcrie, whom he half suspected, escaped to England? He hoped it was the latter; but his fears were stronger than his hopes.

Not only he, however, but every member of the family, except Sir Francis, put the same interpretation on her absence; they all saw that she had fled to escape being united to a man she could not love. But they all knew before, as well as now, that she did not love him; that he was the sort of man she never could love; yet had no one tried to save her, or even whilst they were lavishing large sums in rings and bracelets, brooches and aigrettes, each vying with the other in the splendour of their gifts, had they ever reflected on the hideous sacrifice for which they were adorning their victim, or on the life of misery that awaited one to whom affection was a necessity of existence!

Yes, they all knew it, if they could have found time to question themselves on the subject; but people, somehow or other, can't stop to look into such matters. Everybody wants to get on; the motto of life seems to be "keep moving;" whichever way you go, in whatever ditch you may find yourself at the end of your journey, only get along! Let's see you do something, good or bad, right or wrong! It makes the world lively, and prevents stagnation.

Isabel was gone! Lady Grosvenor was not only very much grieved, but she was angry, indignant, perplexed, and confounded. Still not only she, but every member of the family, except Sir Francis and Lady Georgina, felt more or less self-condemned. Nobody but William Damer entertained any apprehensions about life, for the reason above intimated—namely, that nobody else had any right comprehension of her character and feelings. They all concluded she had escaped to England to Miss Dacres, whose favourite niece and intended heir she was; but, nevertheless, it was a dreadful affair—an affair which would make them the talk of society, cover them all with

ridicule, and be the ruin of the young lady's prospects. But although these unpleasant consequences were readily anticipated, they had no time to think of them just now, when the bridegroom and the company were momentarily expected. Present difficulties must be first disposed of.

Whilst Sir Francis was led to his room, with the *étui* in his hand, turning back ever and anon to cry, "Where is she? I want to give her this," Mr. Langham started for Meurice's to convey the sad intelligence to the bridegroom. In the meantime, the ladies retired to their rooms in order to divest themselves of their wedding finery, and assume their usual attire; the preparations for the *déjeuner* were cleared away by the wondering servants; and as it was too late to send notices to all the expected guests, two footmen were stationed at the gate, commissioned to stop all carriages, and prevent their owners alighting, being instructed to say Miss Grosvenor was very ill, and the ceremony consequently postponed.

Of all the surprises occasioned by this catastrophe, there was no surprise like that of Sir Abraham Towers, who stood, when he heard of it, with his mouth open and his eyes distended, looking like an amazed cod-fish! Mr. Langham had found him just stepping into his carriage, and had considerately led him back to his apartment before he communicated the news, which he did in the most delicate manner possible, breaking ground by expressing his regrets that the marriage could not take place on that day. But when he proceeded to explain the nature of the obstacle, he had the pain of discovering that Sir Abraham could only put one construction on his bride's disappearance—namely, that she had gone off with somebody else. It was in vain that Mr. Langham represented that the thing was impossible, the imputation injurious, and that no mortal connected with her entertained such a suspicion, the baronet was incredulous and sulky, and obstinately determined to admit of no other explanation.

Perhaps he really thought as he said; perhaps it was a cunning salve to his wounded vanity, for fools are often cunning when their self-love is implicated. However this may be, his conviction seemed immovable, and the interview terminated with coldness on one side and indignation on the other.

CHAPTER XL

WHILST Frederick Capel was devoting all his leisure hours to Agnes, it was impossible he should not be struck by the anomaly of so young and beautiful a woman being alone in Paris, without friends and without any apparent object. Her extreme uncommunicativeness, too, added to his perplexity; and many a time he asked himself, "What can she be doing here?"

Poor Agnes! She was falling in love with him; sitting patiently in her dull room all day, supported by the hope that the evening would bring her a visit; and it was to lure him there the oftener that she had requested him to inquire for her letters. She had lost hope in Lionel; for, although he declared himself willing to assist her in the recovery of her boy, and even occasionally threw out hints that he knew more than he told her, she saw that he was only actuated by the desire to get her again into his power; but she was chained to Paris by another interest now. Her heart, hitherto untouched, except by maternal love, was unconsciously opening to a new and entrancing passion. Frederick Capel seemed to her a being of another world—a world of which she had never dreamt. The books, the globes, the diagrams, and all the apparatus of science and literature that she had descried in his room filled her with awe and admiration. So young, so learned, and yet so gentle and kind! With what tenderness she gazed upon that pale cheek, faded by long hours of study!

Wonder and euriosity are fertile sources of love. It is not necessary to be learned to adore learning; and many a woman has fallen in love with a poet, who was quite incapable of understanding his poetry. That which is much above us, and which we cannot comprehend, is an infinite mystery; and the enigma of his being was more alluring to her, than to him was the enigma of her situation; and thus, whilst he filled and satisfied her mind, she only occupied a part of his.

Whilst she sat, almost unconsciously, tracing flowers with her needle, with a view of converting her work into a sufficient sum of money to carry her to England, her mind wholly absorbed by

him, he was listening to lectures, or reading scarce books in the Bibliothèque Royale, and often not thinking of her till he was directing his steps homeward in the evening—but then he did. It was pleasant to feel that there was a beautiful woman, with a blazing log on the hearth, and a cup of tea, ready to give him a welcome; and the recollection of Agnes and her lonely life often brought him back, when but for her he would have sought some other recreation. He saw how glad she was when he came, or rather he saw that she *was* glad, not how much; and it was so natural that she should be so that he drew no conclusions from the welcome she gave him—a welcome not expressed in words, but manifested by the hospitable preparations made for his reception, and the late hour to which she sometimes waited tea in the hope he would return. In short, whilst he was only half in love with her, she was wholly in love with him; but it was a love that expected no return. She felt herself too much his inferior to hope, or scarcely even to wish, for a corresponding sentiment on his part. She knew that she was again loving above her degree, yet she could not deny herself the pleasure of his visits.

Nevertheless, agreeable as it was, this sort of life could not last for ever. Her object in coming to Paris had failed. Her purse was nearly empty, and would have been quite so but for the rigid economy she exercised; and though the strange delight she felt in the society of her new friend at times almost charmed away the sorrow that sat upon her heart, she knew that she must forsake the charmer and return to her sister.

“Going away!” he exclaimed, when she hinted her intentions. “Don’t tell me so, or I shall wish we had never met. How dull I shall be without you!”

Agnes blushed to the eyes, and said he had so many pursuits he would never miss her.

“I beg your pardon,” he answered; “I shall miss you dreadfully. I’ll admit that before you came I did not feel the want that you have supplied; but a blessing we have once enjoyed we cannot willingly relinquish. Must you really leave me?” he asked, with a degree of tenderness and anxiety that was perfectly genuine; for he felt at the moment as if he could not live without her. We all know how suddenly the thing rises in value that we are about to lose.

Agnes felt as if her heart was in her throat.

“I must go,” she answered, with a trembling voice, keeping her eyes assiduously on her work.

“And why must you go?” he asked. “Why must an ac-

quaintance so strangely begun, and so pleasantly cultivated, be prematurely cut off? Why must we part?"

And as he said this he drew his chair nearer, and took her hand in his. It was so like the preliminary to a declaration of love that, little as she had expected such a thing, she could put no other construction on the earnestness and emotion he displayed. Nor was she wrong. Her own agitation was so visible, she looked so beautiful, the idea of losing her for ever had come on him so suddenly, and he felt it so painfully, that in another moment the irrevocable words would have passed his lips. "Why," he was beginning to say, "why should we ever part?" when a sudden terror seized upon Agnes that made her withdraw her hand with a start, which appeared like an instinct of aversion.

What right had she to listen to such a declaration? She, the degraded woman—the unwedded mother! What could she say to him? How explain her situation? How expect him to credit her story? Something of her old pride came over her; horror at the idea of deceiving him, indignation at the idea of being disbelieved and doubted.

"I must go back to my friends that are expecting me," she answered, haughtily.

"I beg your pardon," he said, drawing back his chair, and altering the tone of his voice. "If I have said anything to offend you, forgive me, and place it to the true account, namely, my entire ignorance of the circumstances under which you are placed—circumstances which I have not thought myself justified in inquiring into, however interested I might feel."

"I am not offended," she said, "but—" and she hesitated.

Should she tell him? But he misunderstood her agitation.

"Don't imagine," he said, "that I have the slightest desire to intrude into your confidence; and, to prove that I have no such intention, I shall bid you good-night at once. I have some business in hand that will occupy me till a late hour; so, good-night."

And, before she could resolve what to say, he was gone. His footstep echoed on the stairs, and she heard him close the door of his own apartment.

What a bitter moment that was, and what would she have given to recal the last five minutes! She felt tempted to rush after him, and tell him all. But would not that betray her own feelings? and to what purpose? For, doubtless, when he heard her story, he would not only retreat, but retreat with suspicion and disgust. No, it was all over—over, past recal. She should

probably see him no more; or if she did, they could never more be on the terms they had been. She had tasted of a joy she should never taste again. Even the loss of her boy seemed for the moment to fade into the distance; for she read her own heart now, and she knew she loved Frederick Capel, and that he was lost to her for ever.

But, hush! she hears him leave his room, and descend the stairs again. Is he coming back to her? No; he has passed her door without stopping, and is doubtless going out. "Ah! he'll never stop at my door again!"



CHAPTER XLI.

SEVERAL hours had elapsed before Agnes was sufficiently composed to rise from the sofa and prepare to go to bed. She had wept till she could weep no longer, and she had with a despairing heart taken her resolution. She would go out on the following morning and sell her embroidery. That it would bring her more than enough money to take her to London, she did not doubt; for she had a skilful hand, and the work was extremely beautiful. Then she would pack up her small belongings, and send for a *fiacre*, pay her lodging, and depart without saying a word of her intentions to any one. She had only to drive to the Messageries, and take the first diligence that started for any of the ports whence she could embark for England. *Him* she would see no more; but she would leave him a letter to be delivered after her departure; a kind letter that if it could not efface the ill impression she had made, would at least convince him that she was neither ungrateful nor insensible. How should she word it? She felt that she would like it to be well expressed. She wished to raise herself in his esteem; to touch his heart, and make him regret her. How much should she tell him? Should she hint that there was a secret—a grievous secret? If she could be quite sure they would never meet again she might even tell him the truth; the whole truth; not only of the past, but of the present—that she loved him, or would have loved him, had she dared. She was preparing to undress as she thought of these things, and her

heart being full, and her brain excited, elegant expressions started to her mind that she wished to seize.

"Why not write my letter now?" she said. "I'm sure I shall not sleep if I go to bed—and to-morrow I shall perhaps not have the courage to do it at all." So she laid a sheet of paper before her, dipped her pen in the ink, and wrote "Dear Sir;" then drew her pen across it, and wrote "Dear Mr. Capel;" and then she leant her elbow on the table, and resting her forehead on the palm of her hand, she ruminated how to proceed. There are some letters very difficult to begin; and this was one of them; at least, to an inexperienced writer like Agnes. She had composed and rejected some half-dozen introductory sentences, when she was disturbed by hearing the gate-bell ring sharply below. She had not observed Mr. Capel return; probably this was he, and she wondered if Pierre or Barbara would wake and admit him. Yes; she hears the gates unclosed, for the street was silent now, and noises were distinctly audible that in the day only formed part of the general clamour; and she rose, and placed her ear to the door that she might listen to his step as he passed. But he did not pass; the person, whoever it was, stopped and rang her bell. In the middle of the night! Who could it be?

"Who's there?" she said, without turning the key.

"It is I. Pray open the door." Yes, it was Mr. Capel's voice; and a feeling of inexpressible joy came over her as she drew back the bolt; a presentiment that this unexpected visit portended her some unknown, undreamt of, happiness. Her hand shook so much, that she had scarcely power to turn the key in the lock, but when she had done so, and thrown open the door, great was her surprise to see he was not alone. Beside him there stood a lady, wearing a bonnet and veil, and a dark silk cloak that entirely enveloped her figure. Before he said a word, Mr. Capel led the stranger into Agnes's room and shut the door behind him.

"I am come to ask you a great favour, Mrs. Gibson," he said, "one that I feel assured you'll not refuse me. It is to allow this lady to share your room to-night."

"Certainly," said Agnes, willing to oblige him, though not free from a sharp pang of jealousy. "You've met with an accident," she added, anxiously, observing that his clothes were torn, and the bosom of his shirt stained with blood, which appeared to have flowed from his own forehead.

"It's nothing," he said; and then addressing the lady, he expressed his conviction that she would receive every attention

from Mrs. Gibson; "and if you'll allow me to wait on you to-morrow morning," he continued, "I shall be happy to take your commands if I can be of any further service."

"Thank you! A thousand, and a thousand thanks!" murmured the stranger, clasping her hands in an enthusiasm of gratitude. After which he wished them a "good-night," and disappeared, leaving Agnes alone with this unexpected bed-fellow, who had sunk into a chair, and was apparently weeping violently behind her veil.

"Won't you take off your bonnet and cloak?" said Agnes, feeling somewhat at a loss how to proceed.

"Oh, what will become of me! Oh dear! oh dear! oh dear!" sobbed the stranger, in a passion of anguish.

"Shall I make you a cup of tea? perhaps that would refresh you," said the hostess, blowing up her fire and preparing to boil some water, whilst the visitor continued to weep without heeding her.

"Who can she be?" thought Agnes. "What can it mean?" feeling so embarrassed and amazed, that she was glad of the interval for reflection afforded by the tea-making. When it was ready she poured out a cup and approached her visitor, who was wiping her eyes with a superbly embroidered cambric handkerchief. Moreover, from a change of posture, her cloak had fallen open, and Agnes was more than ever surprised to see that she wore a rich satin pelisse, and a pair of shoes that had once been white, but were now sadly disfigured by mud. The hand too that held the handkerchief was adorned by several valuable rings.

"She is some lady in distress," thought Agnes, her confidence in Mr. Capel precluding any suspicions unfavourable to the stranger, in spite of the questionable circumstances under which she appeared.

"Do, ma'am, take a little tea!" she said, addressing her deferentially.

"Thank you," answered the lady, lifting her veil. "How kind it is of you! And how ashamed I am! It must appear so strange! You must think me mad! And indeed I am almost."

"The tea will refresh you," faltered Agnes, sliding round behind her, and placing the cup in her hand.

It was Agnes's turn to look distressed and agitated now; the blood forsook her cheek, she stood trembling behind the chair like a culprit.

"My throat was parched," said the stranger, as Agnes took

the cup from her. "I don't know how to thank you, nor your friend, the gentleman that brought me here. Does he live in this house?"

"Yes, ma'am; he lives in the apartment over mine."

"And can you tell me his name, and who he is?"

"His name is Frederiek Capel; and I believe he does nothing but read and attend lectures. He is a very learned young man, I believe."

"I can never be grateful enough to him!" continued the lady, bursting again into tears at the recollection of the perils she had escaped. "I had lost my way—I didn't know where I was; and he saved me from some dreadful people! But I'm keeping you up. Pray do go to bed. I'll lie down on the sofa if you'll allow me till the morning, and then I'll no longer intrude on your hospitality."

"If you wouldn't mind lying down on my bed, ma'am," said Agnes, timidly, and still speaking from behind the chair.

"I had much rather lie on the sofa," said the other; "and you'll really oblige me if you'll go to bed."

Agnes hesitated for a moment. "What is the use of concealing myself?" she thought. "I had better brave it." And accordingly she proceeded to prepare the sofa and arrange matters as well as she could for her guest. It happened that hitherto the light that stood on the table had been behind her, so that her face was in the shade; but she now contrived to reverse her position, and render it as visible as possible; but it was not till the lady rose to take off her bonnet that her eyes fell full upon the features of her hostess.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed, in the greatest amazement; "Agnes Crawford!" Agnes looked as much confounded as a detected thief. "What in the world has brought you to Paris?"

"A great misfortune that happened to me, ma'am," faltered Agnes.

"In which I fear Lionel was very guilty," said the guest, seeing that she hesitated. "I don't mean to excuse your fault, Agnes; but neither should we excuse Lionel's. I hope you are not living here with him."

"Oh no, Miss Isabel! God forbid! I came to Paris to try to see him, but it was only in hopes of recovering my child."

"Your child! Has he got your child?"

"I thought he might have him, ma'am; for he was taken away by somebody in the street! and I thought it might be Mr. Grosvenor."

"Oh no! I should think that very unlikely. And have you seen him?"

"Yes once, ma'am; and, at first, I had some hopes; but I've none now. I don't think it was Mr. Grosvenor."

"And did my brother come here to see you?" inquired Isabel, alarmed for herself.

"Oh no, ma'am; Mr. Grosvenor does not know where I am. I don't wish to see him at all. All I desire is to recover my child."

"And he ought to assist you to find him," said Isabel, forgetting her own griefs for the moment, and proceeding to inquire into the child's disappearance.

The narration of the story reviving all Agnes's painful recollections, she exhibited so much genuine distress and so much affection for her boy, that her guest's gentle heart was quite moved; and after expressing her sympathy, she inquired what grounds there were for supposing Mr. Grosvenor concerned in the affair.

"None, ma'am; but that he was his own child," answered Agnes, blushing.

"But what could my brother want with him? Besides, he does not care for children; he does not seem to care for Frank—I mean Lady Georgina's child."

"Is Lady Georgina married, ma'am?"

"To be sure; she's Lionel's wife. Didn't you know it?"

"No, ma'am; I never heard Mr. Grosvenor was married," answered Agnes, with perfect indifference to the fact, however surprised at it. "I always thought Mr. Grosvenor didn't admire her ladyship."

"Ah, Agnes," returned Isabel, who was insensibly falling into the easy confidential tone in which she and her sisters had been accustomed to address their former favourite, "I wish nobody married any one but those they admired, or that there was no such thing in the world as marrying at all. All the misery of people in our condition of life seems to me to arise out of ill-assorted marriages. I shouldn't be in the distress I am now, Agnes, if it were not that I am expected to marry a person I don't like, and that I would rather die than marry. And so you never heard of Lionel's marriage?"

"No, ma'am; I saw Lady Georgina once when I was working at Madame de Ville's in Bruton Street; but I don't think she knew me. I shouldn't have known her, I dare say, if Lady Minevar had not been with her."

"So you worked at Madame de Ville's?" said Isabel; and

from this she was led on to ask several other questions regarding Agnes's mode of life for the last few years.

"And did my brother do nothing to assist you?"

"Oh yes, ma'am; I received an allowance through Mr. Conyers, for the support of the child, till I was able to support him myself."

"And then was it withdrawn?"

"No, ma'am; I gave it up."

Isabel began to feel her heart quite drawn towards her old friend. "That was right, Agnes," she said, looking at her approvingly. "And what are your plans for the future?"

"I have no plans now, ma'am," returned Agnes, sighing. "I shall go back to my sister and work at the dressmaking again."

"Oh, Agnes!" said Isabel, "I wish I could work at dressmaking, or anything else that would find me in a decent livelihood."

Agnes could not help smiling at the idea. "Ah, ma'am," she said, "such a life would never do for you!"

"I had rather break stones on the roads, Agnes, than marry a man I detest. I fled from my home to-night to avoid a hateful marriage, and I would die to avoid it. I should have done so but for an accident, and I believe it would have been better if I had, for what I am to do to-morrow I cannot tell. Go back I dare not!" Agnes was perfectly astounded to see one of the ladies of Ravenscliffe in such a predicament, and did not presume to advise; but she strongly recommended her guest to take some rest, and at length, not with any prospect of sleeping, but in order to induce her hostess to lie down, she consented to occupy the sofa. "And now, Agnes," she said, "go to bed, there's a good girl; and we'll talk more to-morrow; but for Heaven's sake, admit nobody into your room! Do not, for the world, let any one know I am here!"

"Mr. Capel, ma'am?"

"Oh, yes, of course; but remember he does not know who I am; and I entreat you not to give him the least hint on the subject."

Agnes promised she would not; and then, in order to satisfy her guest, she stretched herself on the bed, but without taking off her clothes.

It is needless to say that neither closed their eyes in sleep. The strangeness of the circumstance filled Agnes with so much amazement, that, for the time being, it banished all memory of her own cares. Her mind was possessed with wonder, whilst

Isabel, who had been for a short time diverted from the recollection of her own desperate fortunes, by the surprise of meeting Agnes, now that she was flung back on her reflections, was assailed by a double tide of wretchedness and perplexity. Where was she to go? What should she do?

After allowing her maid to take off her dress, and remove the flowers from her hair (fearing escape might be cut off by the closing of the gates), she bade her leave her; and then catching up her bonnet, and wrapping a pelisse and cloak about her, she had slipped downstairs and out of the house unseen by any one, just as Lady Jane Mortimer's carriage drove away; carrying off the key of her chamber door in her pocket, in order that nobody should get in to discover her absence.

Almost delirious with the horror inspired by the destiny that awaited her; she thought only of rushing to the river, and plunging into it with all her sorrows; but in her haste and confusion she had forgotten to take off her white satin shoes, and some loose revellers of the night espying so attractive a pair of feet and ankles were pursuing her, when, wild with terror, she rushed into the arms of a stranger, crying, "Save me! Save me!"

The stranger was Frederick Capel, who, vexed and mortified at having so nearly made a fool of himself, and annoyed at the rebuff he had incurred, all for a woman whom he was sensible he did not really love, had gone out to allay his irritation by a walk in the Champs Elysées, in which direction he was making his way when Isabel met him.

A short explanation sufficed to satisfy him that the fugitive was a gentlewoman in some extraordinary crisis of fortune; so, after gallantly defending her, he brought her to seek shelter with his neighbour.

CHAPTER XLII.

AFTER dozing a little towards morning, Agnes rose from her bed betimes, and was moving about softly, in order to arrange her room, and have some warm water ready for her visitor's breakfast, but Isabel was also awake.

"When the water boils, Agnes, if you could give me a cup of tea I should be thankful for it. I am parched with thirst, and I have such a dreadful headache!" Her eyes looked heavy; and as soon as she had swallowed the tea her head sank back heavily on the cushion, and she didn't speak again till there was a ring at the bell.

"That's Mr. Capel, ma'am, I dare say," said Agnes.

"Oh, wait a minute," answered Isabel, "till I can get up and speak to him;" whereupon she arose from the sofa, whilst Agnes arranged her dress a little. "Give me my bonnet and veil," she added, sitting down. "My head's so bad I can scarcely hold it up."

Mr. Capel entered, bowing respectfully, hoping she was well, and begging to know in what way he could be of use to her.

"I am so much indebted to you already, sir," she said, "that I am quite ashamed to trouble you further; but as you are so kind, I will confess there is one thing which would oblige me greatly. I want to go to England immediately, and if you would kindly take me a place in a diligence that goes to Dieppe, you would do me a great service. I should like my place taken for to-night, if you please."

Having promised to fulfil her commission he was about to depart, when she said,—

"There is one thing more. I know it must seem very strange, but I conjure you not to mention your having met with me—not to anybody whatever, not even if you were to hear that inquiries were made;" and then turning towards Agnes, she added, "Mrs. Gibson is in some degree acquainted with the circumstances that have led to my being so strangely situated, and I'm sure she will give me shelter till to-night, and then I shall depart and give you no further trouble."

Considerable hesitation and bashfulness accompanied the delivery of this little speech; and when it was concluded the speaker sank down upon the sofa, and covering her face with her hands she fell a-weeping. After giving her every assurance that she might rely on his silence, Mr. Capel took his leave; and as he went downstairs stopped to have a chat with Barbara, who eyed him with a somewhat peculiar expression of countenance, which he pretended not to observe.

"I was sorry to make you get out of bed to let me in last night, Barbara," he said; "but the lady I had with me was a friend of Mrs. Gibson's, who having been late at a ball had got locked out, so I brought her here."

"Et où est elle?" said Barbara, looking as if not quite convinced.

"She is still in Mrs. Gibson's room," he answered, with a careless air, as he passed on.

"Possible," said Barbara to herself; "c'est drôle ça;" and immediately ascending the stairs she rang at Agnes's bell, to the great alarm of Isabel, who could not divest her mind of the idea that she might be traced and discovered. "Who can that be?" she said, starting up, and endeavouring to hide herself in the recess where the bed stood.

"Voulez vous que je vous monte du bois?" said Barbara, making a step into the door, which Agnes held in her hand.

"No!" answered Agnes, shaking her head and endeavouring to shut it.

"Ah, vous en avez encore!" said Barbara, casting her eyes round the room, which alighted first on Isabel's bonnet and veil, which lay on a chair; and secondly, on the sofa from which she had just risen. "Ah, vous avez du monde!" she added, peeping round the corner into the alcove, where she caught a glimpse of the visitor.

"Oui, une amie," said Agnes, closing the door, whereupon Barbara descended the stairs again, and comfortably resumed her duties, relieved from an uneasy sense of enrosity. As soon as she was gone Isabel returned to the sofa, still complaining dreadfully of her head. Agnes thought she looked very ill, and moved about softly in order not to disturb her, but there was no repose. She kept turning uneasily from side to side, dozing for a minute or two occasionally, uttering low moans whilst she slept, and then starting into wakefulness with an expression of fear and horror on her countenance. About mid-day Agnes slipped downstairs, and begged Barbara to bring her a little soup from the *traiteur's* next door; but when it came the sick

stomach recoiled, and Isabel turned away her head, and begged to have it removed from the room. Tea was the only thing she could take.

So passed the day, the heavy head growing heavier as the hours advanced, and sleep becoming almost continual; Agnes, aware that her guest was very ill, and ardently wishing for Mr. Capel's return, which he had engaged should be time enough to conduct the stranger to the Messageries. On this very evening Agnes had intended to be doing exactly what Isabel proposed for herself, namely, to start by a night diligence for the coast; but the interest she felt in the troubles of her former mistress so entirely superseded her own, that they faded into insignificance beside what appeared a much severer distress. Adversity falling on one from whom prosperity seemed inseparable, struck her with a feeling approaching to awe. What a storm of fortunes she fancied that must be which had driven such a dainty bark from its safe moorings. For her own part things had never gone very well with her, and she had not so far to fall; but what a declension was this! With Isabel, too, the most pleasing recollections of her own childhood were connected; for being nearly of the same age, they had been playfellows previous to the period when Agnes's eyes were opened, and she saw that her companions were fine ladies and she but a farmer's daughter. Experience of the world, and her love for her child, had cured her of her old weakness on this subject; but these reminiscences, combined with the early habit of looking upon the inhabitants of Ravenscliffe as amongst the greatest people in the world, inspired her with the tenderest sentiments of sympathy and devotion for her guest, on whom she watched and waited all day like a loving sister.

As the diligence was not to start till eight o'clock, it was near seven before Mr. Capel arrived. At length he rang.

"Shall I order a coach at a quarter-past seven?" he asked. "It is better to be in time. There's always such a bustle at the last."

Agnes turned her eyes towards Isabel, asleep on the sofa.

"I'm afraid she is very ill," she whispered; "I don't think she's at all fit to travel. Look." Mr. Capel stepped softly forward, and looked at the sleeper, whose face, however, was turned to the wall. "What should we do? Shall I wake her?" continued Agnes.

"I think you had better, and let her decide for herself," he answered, at the same time retreating to the outside of the door.

"Miss Isabel," said Agnes, "it is nearly time to get ready."

But it was not easy to rouse her attention; and when at length she looked up, she did not at first understand what was said. On doing so, she rose, but when she tried to stand, she staggered, and would have fallen but for Agnes's arm.

"I am so giddy," she said, putting her hand to her head.

"You are not fit to go, ma'am," said Agnes. "I'm sure you had better not attempt it. You had better lie down again."

"But I must go," she said; "give me my bonnet."

But it would not do; the body was too sick to obey the will, and she was obliged to allow herself to be replaced on the sofa. Perceiving she was too ill to observe him, Mr. Capel then entered the room.

"I see it's impossible she can travel," said he; "and I am quite at a loss what to do with her. I wonder who in the world she can be? I found her in the street, in the most extraordinary circumstances for a lady, which she evidently is."

"She can stay here till she is better," said Agnes.

"But that would be such a dreadful intrusion on you," he answered, "though the offer is most kind, that I cannot think of it."

"The truth is," said Agnes, "she is not quite a stranger to me, and I——"

"You know who she is?" he exclaimed, with astonishment.

"Perhaps I do," she answered; "but as she has begged me not to tell, I must not."

"And has she no friends to whom we could take her? She seems quite young."

"It's her friends, her family indeed, that she is running away from; and as she is most anxious for concealment she must remain with me till she is better. But it appears to me she should have a doctor, only that sending for one might lead to a discovery of where she is."

"If she is not better to-morrow," said Mr. Capel, "I think I can bring a medical friend to see her who will keep the secret. I'll call in the morning as I come down."

With that, after asking if he could be of any further service, he took his leave.

"Eh bien, elle n'est pas partie encore; cette petite dame, là haut!" remarked Barbara, as she descended the stairs in the evening.

"She was so unwell," he said, "that she was lying on the sofa, and was going to remain all night with Mrs. Gibson."

Barbara said she supposed she had caught cold, which was ex-

actly the fact ; for the white satin shoes, which had attracted the inconvenient notice of her persecutors in the street, had also become soaked with wet ; notwithstanding which, she had kept them on all night, the agitation and confusion of her mind rendering her quite forgetful of the danger she was incurring. When Agnes discovered the state they were in, she was not surprised to see her so ill.

As it was now clear that the visit would be of some duration, Agnes set about arranging the bed, in which, after taking off Isabel's clothes, she laid her—quite unopposed, the poor girl being too ill to exercise any will on the subject—and then prepared herself to sit up all night, and watch her.

Long before daybreak the invalid was quite delirious. Sleep forsook her now, and with bright eyes and flushed cheeks, she talked incessantly. Glad was Agnes when the morning brought Mr. Capel, who, on learning the condition of the patient, went in search of his friend, with whom ere long he returned.

Monsieur Emile, as he called him, was a young man, and a medical student, but one who had walked the hospitals, and was not without experience. He said the lady was very ill, and would, he feared, be worse. According to the most approved French school of physis, however, he used no active remedies, but confined himself to the *médecine expectante*, with diluent drinks, and so forth, a system which seems to be fast making its way in this country also, where the heroic treatment formerly in vogue with the highest members of the faculty will soon be left for the delectation of country apothecaries. So much we owe to Homœopathy, not to mention a great deal more.

CHAPTER XLIII.

Now that Isabel had become so ill as to be incapable of recognizing him or being annoyed at his presence, Mr. Capel often shared with Agnes the fatigue of attending on her; and the mutual interest they felt in the patient having removed the embarrassment arising from their little misunderstanding, the demeanour of both became much more easy and familiar than it had ever been. This was especially the case with Agnes, who, occupied with her guest, had ceased to think of herself; and who appeared to much greater advantage now that the too much consciousness produced by the desire to please, or rather the apprehension of displeasing, had vanished.

They needed each other's support, too; for they often felt alarmed at the responsibility they were incurring. Indeed, but for what Agnes told him, Mr. Capel would have felt himself bound to make some effort to restore Isabel to her friends; but Agnes was most unwilling to betray her; and when Mr. Capel understood that she was flying from an unhappy marriage, his sympathies were so warmly engaged, that he was ready to incur any risk rather than expose her to so wretched a fate.

"She really intended to throw herself into the river," Agnes told him, "when she ran away; but she was in a state of wild excitement then, and we need not be afraid of her doing it now. She could not, she says—she has not the courage to do it in cold blood. Her plan was to go to an aunt she has at Brighton, who she thinks will protect her; and if we could but get her well, she would do that still. I promised her so faithfully to keep her secret, that I should be very sorry to break my word."

"But what if she should die?" said Mr. Capel, on the third day of her illness. "Emile thinks her in considerable danger."

"If he gives her over," answered Agnes, weeping, "I will then tell you who she is, and you shall inform her friends of her being here. In which case," thought she, "I must leave this house before they come. It would never do for them to know she had been under my roof."

Isabel, however, did not die. When the crisis of her disorder came, she took a favourable turn, and Monsieur Emile said she would recover, but would need great care for some time. On opening her eyes to consciousness, her recollection of the past was naturally confused, and when she beheld Agnes by her bedside, she imagined herself at Ravenscliffe, and inquired for her mamma and sisters. Gradually the truth was recalled to her.

"And I have been very ill," she said. "What trouble I must have given you!"

"Oh no," replied Agnes, "it was no trouble; besides, Mr. Capel helped me when I needed help."

"How good of him. As soon as I can sit up, he must come and see me."

Presently there was a ring at the bell, and Agnes went to the door, and spoke a few minutes to somebody outside of it. Isabel inquired who it was. It was Mr. Capel inquiring what he could do for her—what he could bring her, that she would like. Two or three times a day he came with the same inquiry.

"How good it was of him," Isabel said. "What a kind person he seemed to be," and Agnes corroborated the impression. By-and-by came M. Emile, who, from the peculiar circumstances of the case, together with the youth and beauty of his patient, had conceived a vivid interest in her recovery. Isabel was pleased with his manner, and surprised at seeing so young a doctor.

"He is a friend and fellow student of Mr. Capel's," said Agnes. "I was afraid to send for a physician, for fear he should know you; but Mr. Capel said he was sure he could trust Monsieur Emile."

"Does Mr. Capel know who I am, then?"

"No, ma'am; I did not think it right to tell him without your permission."

"And he has taken so much trouble without knowing who he's taking it for—only because I was in distress. How generous and kind. I thought he seemed a superior person when he protected me in the street."

"I believe he is very superior," answered Agnes.

One day, when she was a little stronger and able to talk without danger, after thanking Monsieur Emile for his attention, she alluded to her obligation to his friend.

"Quelle bonté pour une inconnue!" she said.

"Mais c'est le meilleur garçon du monde!" answered Emile. "I have known him these three years, and I like him better

every time I see him. Et pour l'esprit ! Ah ! c'est lui qui en a, ma foi !”

“Is he very clever ?” she inquired.

“C'est tout étonnant,” replied Emile. “He has read so much, and knows so many things, that we often accuse him of being some old fellow who possesses the elixir of life and has recovered his youth after living a hundred years at least.”

“And is he in any profession ?”

“No ; he has a little fortune, *tout petit, tout petit*, but enough to support him ; for his desires are very moderate, and his tastes extremely simple—that is, in everything but books.”

“What an interesting person !” said Isabel.

“He's a very extraordinary man, I assure you,” returned Emile, gravely ; “and I think, some day, will be a very distinguished one. I cannot imagine so much talent remaining in obscurity. In France it certainly would not remain so long.”

Isabel had yet seen but little of the subject of these commendations. In her distress she had rushed into the arms which manfully opened to receive her. After indignantly dispersing the *canaille* she was flying from, he had offered her a shelter for the night with a lady of his acquaintance when, in an agony of grief, she wrung her hands, and in answer to his inquiry whither he should conduct her, exclaimed, frantically, that she knew not where to go to. He was scarcely thirty, but he had, as he told Agnes, read many strange things in his life, and seen many stranger. He had wide sympathies, and a large understanding of human nature. He could comprehend and allow for much that by narrower intellects and feelings would be misconstrued and condemned. He knew that a slight error on her own part, or the misconduct of others, will sometimes involve a woman in painful and suspicious circumstances ; and he had an intuitive conviction that this was such a case ; but till he saw her raving in delirium, he knew almost as little of her features as she did of his. She had not had courage to raise her eyes to his face, and she had concealed her own under her bonnet and veil. Now, however, she desired to see him, for she was fast converting him into a hero of romance.

“If I met Mr. Capel in the street,” she said to Agnes, “I'm sure I shouldn't know him, but I should know his voice. He has a beautiful voice. I remember when he spoke to the people that were insulting me, the tones of his voice inspired me with immediate confidence. The next time he calls, say I shall be happy to see him.”

She was lying on the sofa, wrapt in her own silk pelisse and

a shawl of Agnes's; and on her head she wore a pretty little cap which her hostess had manufactured for her. She was much wasted, but where there is youth, beauty survives a great deal of sickness. When Agnes had dressed her and braided her hair, Isabel asked her to bring the looking-glass.

"I want to see how thin I am," she said. But that was not the sole reason—she wished to take a peep at her own face.

When Mr. Capel came, he approached her with the greatest reverence; his voice faltered as he said how glad he was to see her recovering. She tried to sit up, and holding out a transparent little hand, she said:

"Oh, sir, how can I thank you for all your kindness?"

"Don't thank me," he answered. "If I have been of use to you, the service does me more good than it does you. I mean," he added with a smile, seeing that she looked surprised, or as if she did not clearly understand his meaning, "I mean that to have assisted you in your trouble has made me happy. It does not fall to every man in a lifetime to have such an opportunity."

"And yet there are plenty of people needing assistance, too," she answered.

"But it is not always equally agreeable to assist them," he said, playfully.

One day, Isabel was lying on the sofa, with a book in her hand lent her by Mr. Capel. It was a volume containing an account of a few of the most interesting and startling facts of science. Some allusions he had made in conversation had induced her to ask him questions which led to his offering her the volume. Of science, Isabel knew no more than is usually comprised in the education of accomplished young ladies, but she was acquainted with the terms, and she had attended the *séances* of fashionable lecturers, so that, though knowing little, she was not unprepared to learn, or incapable of comprehending. And added to the interest of the subject itself, there was another that helped to sharpen her wits—namely, the desire to enjoy and appreciate his conversation. So much she admitted to herself; perhaps there was a third, with respect to which she was less candid; perhaps she wished to please and render herself agreeable to him by cultivating her mind in a direction to which his own tastes and talents particularly pointed. Howbeit, Isabel had diligently perused her volume, and had thrown herself back for a little repose, occasionally closing her eyes, and occasionally opening them to observe Agnes, who sat on the other side of the hearth, engaged in manufacturing certain necessary articles of dress for Isabel, who had been hitherto much indebted to her hostess's wardrobe.

“Agnes,” said she, at last, after a considerable silence, “do you know, that in spite of all that has happened, I am persuaded you are a very good girl?”

Agnes blushed a little, and smiled.

“I don’t know, ma’am,” she said. “I have been a very foolish one, I’m afraid.”

“Yes, you have been foolish, no doubt; and more than foolish—you have been very wrong; but what I mean is, that though you have committed a great fault, I believe your heart has never been corrupted. You have erred, Agnes, from too much loving.”

At these words Agnes’s blushes deepened, and she hung down her head.

“I know,” continued Isabel, “what an absorbing passion love is. I know how it makes one forget everything but itself; and I can easily understand that if Lionel set himself systematically to win your affections, it would have been very difficult for you to resist him. He is very much altered now, but at that time he was certainly extremely handsome, and I can imagine very fascinating when he chose to be so. It’s a cruel thing that men should think themselves at liberty to seduce a woman, and then remorselessly desert her, merely because her humble condition makes her defenceless. It’s a cowardly thing, too, for they dare not do it with their equals.”

This long speech, long for the yet feeble invalid, was delivered at intervals, Agnes the while stitching away, and making no answer.

“Tell me, Agnes,” continued Isabel, after a pause, during which she had been watching the nimble fingers, and putting her own construction on her companion’s silence; this construction being that Agnes was ashamed to confess the love she had felt for one who had evinced such contemptuous indifference for her. “Tell me; had you been long attached to my brother? When did his attentions begin?”

“Mr. Grosvenor began to be particular to me whilst I was living at the castle, but I didn’t give him any encouragement,” replied Agnes.

“Then how did he see you after you left us?”

“He used to come to the farm with the young ladies—Miss Louisa and Miss Frances; and once he came there with a doctor he brought to see my father when he was ill; that was the first time he spoke to me openly.”

“And after that did he come often?”

"Very seldom. I didn't give him any encouragement to come."

"Then when did you first become attached to him, Agnes?"

"I believe I liked him from the beginning — even from the time we were children, when we used to dance together but I don't think I was ever in love with Mr. Grosvenor at least, not very much in love. But I had never like anybody else."

"But, good heavens, Agnes," exclaimed Isabel, with an expression of disapprobation, "if it was not love, what in the world could induce you to do what you did?"

"I don't mean to say I had no regard for Mr. Grosvenor, returned Agnes; "but it would not be the truth if I were to say that it was my love for him that brought me into trouble. I am afraid it was more my own pride and foolishness. I can laugh at myself, now that I am older and know more; but had all my life been dissatisfied with my own situation, and I wanted to be a lady."

"But surely you took the very last way to accomplish your purpose, Agnes!" said Isabel.

"Yes, ma'am, as it turned out; but Mr. Grosvenor deceived me."

"How?" inquired Isabel. "How did he deceive you?"

Agnes blushed again, and was silent. She had not resolution to confess what she feared would make herself more than ever ridiculous, and give a fearful shock to the aristocratic prejudice of a daughter of Ravenscliffe.

"He surely was not so wicked as to promise you marriage!" exclaimed Isabel. "Good heavens! How shameful!" she continued, interpreting Agnes's silence affirmatively. "I could never have believed anything so bad of him! But how, my dear girl, could you be so silly as to believe him?"

"I didn't at first, ma'am——"

"But you must have known that papa and mamma would never consent to such a thing!"

"Oh, yes, ma'am, I knew that very well; but Mr. Grosvenor promised me Sir Francis and my lady should never know it."

"So that, in short, he systematically deceived you?"

"I don't think it would have happened if my father had lived for I was very unwilling to marry him secretly; but when my father died, and we had to leave the farm, I had no home, and I had then to accept or refuse Mr. Grosvenor for ever; because I knew it would never do for me to set up as a dressmaker at Ellerton if I was to marry him afterwards, and that so I must

do it then or not at all. I ought to have refused, I know, but I had little time for reflection, as I was obliged to do one thing or the other directly."

"It was cruel and wicked of my brother to make a promise he never meant to perform. But why, Agnes, didn't you say you couldn't listen to him till you were married?"

"So I did, ma'am."

"But he persuaded you he would marry you afterwards, I suppose?"

"I thought I was married, ma'am. Mr. Grosvenor got some friend of his to pretend he was a clergyman, and he married us in the castle chapel."

"Oh, Agnes!" cried Isabel, clasping her hands, and the tears rushing to her eyes.

"I didn't know till I went to Mr. Conyers, Mr. Grosvenor's lawyer, that the marriage had been only a trick."

"My God! my God!" exclaimed Isabel, in anguish. "Agnes," she continued, "I wonder you gave me shelter that night I came here! I wonder you didn't turn me into the street! And here have you been so tenderly nursing me, the sister of the man that has so infamously wronged you."

"It would be very wrong, ma'am, to blame you for Mr. Grosvenor's conduct. Besides, I know I had nobody to blame but myself. I shouldn't have believed him, and I shouldn't have consented to marry him unknown to Sir Francis and my lady."

"That's very true, Agnes; but your fault is nothing to his, and I don't see what right you had to disbelieve him. Why should you suspect a gentleman of such infamous conduct? Oh, Lionel! Shameful! shameful!"

Isabel next inquired into the circumstances connected with the ceremony; and Agnes related to her everything that had occurred at Ravenscliffe and since.

"Oh, Agnes!" she said, when she had heard the whole story, "how far superior you have shown yourself to my brother, who ought to have known so much better than you. It makes me blush to think how the whole family have treated you. But we never knew the truth; at least I did not, and I am sure papa and mamma couldn't have known it. They little think what they owe you. Suppose you had brought an action against Lionel! What a disgrace it would have been to the family."

"I would never have done that," answered Agnes. "That would have only made it worse."

"But how many would have done it for the sake of getting

money? Agnes," she added, holding out her hand to her companion, who rose and modestly took it, "I'm worse off than you now, and may never be better; but come what may, I shall always consider you as a sister," and drawing Agnes towards her, she leant forward and kissed her cheek.



CHAPTER XLIV.

THOUGH not a bad man, Leighton's principles, as has been shown, were not solid enough to resist poverty and temptation. He would have preferred, on all accounts, leading a decently honest life; but since the world seemed to have rendered that line of conduct inconsistent with living at all, he must needs submit to the exigencies of his fate, and live as he could. He had remained in Paris after his interview with Lionel Grosvenor, partly because he was unwilling to expend his small stock of money in a journey to England, more especially since, had he done so, he knew of no means of there replenishing his purse; and partly because he had fancied he saw symptoms of relenting on the part of his late master, on whom he justly felt, could he but convince him of his innocence, he really had considerable claims for compensation.

But when his money was gone, and his necessities again became pressing, he could not imagine on what pretext he could present himself before Lionel. Agnes he had not been able to discover; and he thought the probabilities were that she had returned to England. He had also certain sentiments of gratitude towards her for having appeared on his trial, that rendered him unwilling to occasion her trouble. He preferred, if possible, to serve himself at the expense of some other person—Mr. Watson, for example, to whom he felt rather an antipathy; and who he hoped might have further demand for services which he, Leighton, could turn to his own advantage, as had happened on the former occasion.

But Watson distrusted Leighton as a tool; and although the ex-valet frequently threw himself in his way, a nod of recognition was all he got for his pains. This system of throwing himself in his way, however, and hanging about near his lodgings, let him by degrees into certain secrets connected with Watson's mode of

life. He ere long discerned that he was not the high-caste gentleman he had assumed to be in their interviews ; but a man whose purse was somewhat slenderly furnished, and who associated with second-rate company, or with men of a higher class who were out at elbows. His intimacy with Lionel had kept him up at college ; but Lionel disliked him now, and avoided him as much as he could consistently with his own safety, which by the way he thought much less endangered since he had seen Agnes, in whom he discovered no traces of disappointed ambition, nor any desire for vengeance ; but, on the contrary, an apparent indifference to the past, which he could not comprehend ; and a thorough alienation from himself, which was equally inexplicable.

Thus unsupported, poor, and disowned by his aristocratic relations, Mr. Watson naturally declined in the scale of society ; and Leighton soon remarked that he was in the habit of visiting inferior *cafés*, billiard-rooms frequented by swindlers and black-legs, and other places of ill-repute ; observations which went far to confirm his previous impression with regard to the motives of Watson's interference about Agnes, which he felt satisfied were selfish ones, although how the scheme was calculated to benefit him it was not easy to discern. Now Leighton felt a considerable interest in these motives, since to discover them might in some way serve himself. Knowledge is power ; the ex-valet had never heard this axiom, but truth is eternal, and every man acts upon the principle, whether aware of the universal proposition or not. Moreover, to an idle man there is a certain fascination when once begun, in watching the proceedings of an individual, especially if you have got a theory to establish, or a mystery to unravel ; so that, having nothing else to do, and being somehow pervaded by an undefinable instinct that the bettering of his fortunes lay in that direction, Leighton continued to track Mr. Watson's footsteps with an assiduity that, if called upon to do so, he could hardly have accounted for himself.

Amongst the men who frequented Mr. Watson's company there was one whose person was not unfamiliar to Leighton, who remembered him about town ever since he himself had been in service. At the various watering-places too, those within a day's journey of London, he was always to be seen hanging about the libraries and billiard-rooms ; and Leighton had heard it asserted that he was the younger brother of a nobleman of unimpeached reputation, who had run through all he had, and been for some time in the Bench, whence he at length emerged to live

by his wits. He was a tall, red-faced man, with a high nose, bald head, and small eyes; who, dressed in the jockey style, was known to have no money, and to indulge himself in a habit of kicking people out of doors who persecuted him with demands for any. Yet he never looked as if he wanted for any of the luxuries of life. His figure continued portly, and his complexion rubicund; even his nose never "paled its ineffectual fires." In short, he possessed every external symptom of prosperity but one—and that was that he seemed to have no friends. But as he was reputed to be an unerring shot, neither did he appear to have any enemies. Some people asserted that he was married, some said not; but however that might be, he was never seen with any one, male or female, with the exception of one faded woman who, in a poke bonnet and veil, sometimes hung sadly upon his arm; not when he frequented the public resorts and promenades—there she was never seen; but they were occasionally met together taking a country walk, or, on a summer's evening, pacing the sands on the seashore.

In Paris, however, he appeared less solitary; he had even several associates, and amongst them Mr. Lewis Watson, with whom he seemed to be on terms of considerable intimacy, inso-much that they often met at the same *restaurateur's* and dined together, then walked away, arm-in-arm, to some of the little theatres, and from that to a billiard-room or gaming-house in the Palais Royal, to finish the night's amusement. Sometimes, when Leighton had watched them into a coffee-room brilliantly illuminated and adorned with mirrors and marble tables, presided over by a full-dressed goddess seated at a high desk with a pen in her hand and an ink-bottle beside her, and observed them place themselves at a table near the window, he has stood outside counting the dishes that were placed upon the table, from the *potage* to the *soufflet* and the *fromage à la gruyère*; watching every mouthful they swallowed; thirsting for the foaming champagne and the cool claret as they lifted their glasses to the light to admire its rich purple hue, and wondering how it was that they could dine so well when he could not contrive to dine at all, since one of them he had reason to believe had no money, and the other he suspected to be not much better provided.

More than once, when they emerged from the door of the *café* where they had feasted on these luxuries, Leighton has followed them unobserved to their next resort, Watson being utterly ignorant that the valet entertained any curiosity or suspicions about him, and Atherton, which was the name of his companion, not even knowing him by sight. On one of these

occasions, when the hungry aspirant outside had been flattening his nose against a window on the Boulevard Montmartre, watching the disappearance of the viands, he was struck by the unusually serious and earnest expression of the two countenances, which generally at those periods denoted nothing but an ardent devotion to the affair in hand. It was not that they neglected their dinner even now; on the contrary, they ate plentifully and rapidly, but it was evident that their minds were absent from the table and engrossed by other matters; in regard to which they seemed eager to translate their thoughts into words as soon as the principal business was over and the attendance of the waiter could be dispensed with; for then, whilst the chesnuts remained untasted, they placed their arms on the table, and leaning forwards, conversed closely, almost mouth to mouth, with occasional gestures of a finger, or a hand, or a shake of the head, indicating the interest of the subject under discussion. There was now and then, too, an eye cast over the shoulder, apparently to see if anybody was within hearing of their voices; and when a gentleman, whose appearance left no doubt as to his being an Englishman, entered the room and seated himself at a table near them, they both immediately drew up, and with a warning glance at each other, began to shell their chesnuts with the *sang-froid* of men who had nothing else in the world to think of.

When they had finished their bottle of Château Margot, and were pushing back their chairs from the table, Leighton, whose hungry curiosity kept his wits always on the alert, quitted his post, and placing himself behind a *fiacre* that was waiting at the door for the Englishman who had just now arrived in it, watched their coming out, prepared to follow them whichever way they took. Presently they appeared, and after a few words exchanged on the steps, they turned in the direction of the Porte St. Denis; whereupon Leighton slipped from behind the coach, and drawing his hat over his eyes, walked after them for some distance, without, however, being able to overhear a word they said. He tracked them, however, till they reached a lofty gate at the extremity of the Boulevard Poissonnière, which formed the entrance to very extensive stables kept by a man called Corbillon.

Here they paused so suddenly, that Leighton unexpectedly found himself upon their heels. So near was he, that he distinctly heard Mr. Watson say, as he withdrew his arm,—

“You must go in alone: it won’t do for me to appear in it at all.”

“Where shall I find you when I come out?” inquired Atherton.

“Over the way, at the Café Rouge,” replied Watson. “You won’t be long?”

“Not five minutes,” answered his friend, as he turned into the gates; whilst Watson crossed the way to the little *restaurateur’s* on the other side, without perceiving Leighton, who had slipped behind a tree.

Meanwhile, Atherton proceeded with a swinging stride up the broad ride, where the horses for sale were usually paraded, till at the further extremity he turned to the left, and disappeared down a side-road, from which, however, in a few minutes he re-issued in company with another person. The place was so well lighted by lamps from the roof of the covered way, that thus much it was easy to discern, but not the features of the last-mentioned stranger, who appeared, however, to be a short, thick-set man, in a jockey-cut coat, with a small cane or riding-whip in his hand, with which he kept tapping his boot as he slowly walked down the ride beside Atherton.

When they reached the gate, they stopped and conversed for about five minutes, and then, with a friendly shake of the hand, they parted, the stranger walking briskly back, and Atherton crossing the road to the Café Rouge; whilst Leighton, weary and heart-sick, bought a sou’s worth of bread, and strolled homewards, gnawing his dry crust as he went along.



CHAPTER XLV

UNDER the persuasion that Isabel had fled to Brighton, letters were written to Miss Daeres, animadverting severely on the romantic perversity that had covered herself and her family with ridicule and disgrace; and at the same time requesting that the delinquent might be detained in a sort of honourable captivity.

“Don’t let her be seen,” said Lady Grosvenor, “and don’t allow her to leave your house till we arrive, which will be as soon as we can make arrangements for returning to England. It would be too disagreeable to appear here after all that has occurred. Georgina says she is not equal to the journey at present, and the child is far from well; so that I suppose they will remain for some time longer.

“What we are to do with Bel I really cannot conceive. After two such *esclandres* it will be very unpleasant to take her into society; and, as you live so entirely out of the world, I think if you could keep her with you for a year or two it would be the best arrangement for her and for us. She would be a companion to you, and I often think you must need one, especially when you are laid up with these rheumatic attacks, &c.

“P.S. By the bye, is Lord George Mandeville in England now? I remarked that he was very much struck with Bel the season she came out, and I think might have proposed, if he had received any encouragement, but she was so young; and it was reported, at that time, that his brother was getting better, and was going to marry Julia Vandeleur, which would have cut Lord George out of everything, you know.”

Great was the amazement when Miss Dacres’s answer arrived, saying she had heard nothing whatever of the fugitive, and expressing considerable anxiety for her safety.

“I know Bel better than you do,” she said; “and I believe her capable of taking a desperate resolution under the pressure of circumstances—nay, Louisa, more, of committing a desperate act—and I am suffering agonies of anxiety till I hear from you again. Poor, dear little Bel! If I were not chained to my sofa I should start instantly for Paris; but, as it is, I must wait here with what patience I can. Would to God she had taken refuge with me, as you suppose! As for Lord George, I know nothing about him. I don’t like him, nor ever did; and I think whoever has the misfortune or the folly to marry him, will not live with him twelve months. If we find poor Isabel—my heart sinks whilst I write the words—but please God we have her amongst us again do not, for Heaven’s sake, contrive any more matches for her. You know, I have always told you, that what little I have will go to her. What does it signify if she never marry at all?”

Could anything be more unpleasant? No doubt the mother and sisters were both grieved and alarmed, but they were very angry too. In spite of every precaution that had been used to keep the affair secret, some rumour of Isabel’s disappearance had found its way into society; but the expectation of being able to *désorienter* their acquaintance, by simply saying she had been sent, by the advice of the medical man, to Brighton, for change of air, had hitherto supported them through the mortification; but now, who could tell what was to follow? She might be fished up out of the river some day, and be found

lying in the Morgue. She might be there now, for anything they knew. They wept at the thought of so dread a catastrophe, but they also deprecated the disagreeable position in which they would be placed by it; and, instead of delaying, Miss Daeres's letter only hastened their departure from Paris. Lionel and his wife remained behind; and if the secret inquiries, now set on foot, resulted favourably, there was a home and a protection ready for her.

Isabel's disappearance had not affected Lionel very deeply; he was reasonably sorry, however, and threw the blame entirely on his mother, who could not let people do as they like. Lady Georgina's view of the case was different. She had always thought Bel's notions utterly absurd, and expressed herself not at all surprised at the *dénouement*; but it was perfectly clear that a young person who had rendered herself so notorious in society should never be produced in it again, and, as far as she was concerned, she avowed her determination to decline lending her countenance to such an attempt, should Lady Grosvenor think proper to make it.

"If she asks me to chaperone her daughter, I shall certainly decline."

It was just at this crisis that Leighton, in the pursuit of his vocation—namely, prowling about to see if anything would turn up—observed, as he passed down the Avenue de Neuilly, certain symptoms about the Hôtel de Breteuil indicating an approaching move.

"They're off," said he to himself, with a feeling of disappointment; for, although he had profited little by Mr. Grosvenor's presence in Paris, yet that little had come at such an opportune moment as augmented its value; besides which, he had not relinquished the hope of convincing his former master of the injustice he had suffered, and the claim he had on his generosity.

If the family were going to England, it appeared to him that the best thing he could do was to go also. But how was that to be managed, when he had no money? Perhaps Mr. Grosvenor might give him enough to take him there, if he represented his case; at all events, it was an experiment worth trying; so he turned into a small *café* hard by, and expended his last five-sous piece in a *petit verre*, and the materials for writing a letter, wherein he told Lionel that he had done his utmost to discover Miss Crawford's retreat, and had sought her day and night without success. It was his opinion that she had returned to England, but that it was out of his power to follow

her, as he was penniless and starving. He then reiterated the assertion of his innocence and unmerited sufferings, concluding with a petition for a sum sufficient to carry him back to London.

He was just stepping across the road with this letter in his hand, when he saw Mr. Grosvenor issue from the gate, arm-in-arm with a friend. The two gentlemen took the direction of the Faubourg St. Honoré; and Leighton, thinking an interview might serve his turn better than the letter, followed them. When they reached the Rue de la Paix, they stopped at a jeweller's shop, to make some purchases; during which interval, Leighton waited near the door till they came out, when they proceeded to the Boulevards, and with occasional pauses, to look at this thing or that, or have a chat with an acquaintance, went on so far beyond the usual fashionable lounge, that it suddenly darted into Leighton's mind that they might be going to that same stable-keeper's where, two evenings before, he had tracked Watson and Atherton; and when he saw them actually turn in at the gate, and walk up the ride, he could not divest his mind of the suspicion that the present visit was in some way connected with the former one, more especially when he recalled Watson's remark, that "it would not do for him to be seen in it."

"They're going to jockey him about a horse," thought he. It was a thing very much in Atherton's line, and therefore probable; and Leighton wished he could earn his late master's good-will by a timely warning. However, he resolved to wait, and see the issue; and by-and-by a groom appeared, mounted on a magnificent black hunter, which he rode up and down, and displayed to the greatest advantage; whilst the two gentlemen stood by, accompanied by the same man Leighton had seen on the previous occasion, who seemed to be signaling the horse's points, and expatiating on his qualities.

Leighton stood near the gate, and eyed the horse curiously every time he came to that end of the ride. He knew something about horses, for in his boyhood he had been a groom himself, and he thought he had never seen a finer animal.

"They'll make them pay a long price for him," said he to himself; "but, by Jove! he's worth it. He'll be a right one to go. How he steps out!"

And he wondered what interest Atherton could have in the sale; for such a horse, of late years, he was not likely to have possessed.

By-and-by, when the animal had been duly exhibited by the

groom, Mr. Grosvenor mounted him himself. He was a notoriously bad rider, but he thought himself a good one; and when he could not manage a horse, he always lost his temper. They used to say of him at Oxford, that he made the beast's hide smart for his own wounded vanity. The black horse went very quietly, however, and Lionel stooped forward, and patted him on the shoulder. Just then a man, with a woman by his side, stopped to observe what was going on; and presently, in answer to some remark of his, Leighton heard her say,—

"Pooh! nonsense. How should you know him?"

"Lord love you! not know him!" responded the man. "If it aren't him, my name's not Tom Patton. I know'd the horse in Dublin as well as I know'd myself."

"He's an uncommon fine animal," said Leighton, observing the speaker wore the dress of an English groom.

"He's a good 'un to look at," answered the man.

"And a good 'un to go, I should think," returned Leighton.

"Ay, if it's the horse I take him for, he'll go with the best on 'em," answered the stranger.

"They'll be asking a long price for him," said Leighton.

"Ay, no doubt," replied the groom, who delivered himself with a certain sententiousness that seemed to imply he knew more than he said; at least, so it struck Leighton.

"But he'll be worth it, if he's sound?" he returned interrogatively.

"He's sound enough, I take it," answered the man. "Who's that 'ere chap that's a-riding on him?"

"Mr. Grosvenor, son of Sir Francis Grosvenor."

"Come along," said the woman, who was hanging on the man's arm, and who was probably his wife—for he took no notice of what she said—"I don't believe it's Mr. Luttrell's horse, any more than the horse in that 'ere shay is," added she, with a contemptuous tone.

"You've seen the horse before?" said Leighton.

"Not he," said the woman. "He knows no more about the horse than I do."

"I wish I'd a hundred pound upon it," answered the man.

"I see him many a time, when he was at Dyceer's, in Dublin."

"I wonder who he belongs to?" said Leighton.

The man shook his head, and said he did not know.

"Twig his eye," said he, presently, as the horse passed near them; and Leighton observed the animal turning back the ball of his eye till there was scarcely anything visible but the white.

"Is he vicious?" inquired he.

"Can't say," answered the man. "Is that 'ere your master on his back?"

"No," answered Leighton. "I'm out of a situation at present; I wish I could find one."

"Gentleman's servant, I s'pose?"

"Yes," answered Leighton.

"I heard Mr. Jerningham's valet's a-going to leave. They're at the Hôtel Windsor," said the stranger.

"Is he?" said Leighton, with a sinking of the heart; for what was it to him, if every valet in Paris left his situation? He could not hope to get one.

"Won't you never come along?" said the woman peevishly, tugging her husband's arm; and as Lionel had dismounted at the other end of the ride, and the horse was led away, the interest of the scene having subsided, the uncourteous invitation was complied with, and they trudged off in the direction of the Porte St. Denis.

A conference of some length ensued betwixt the two gentlemen and the livery-stable keeper; and when Mr. Grosvenor and his friend came away, Leighton had no idea whether they had bought the horse or not; and, indeed, his interest in the question being superseded by his anxiety regarding his own affairs, he ceased to think about it. As Lionel passed, he touched his hat.

"Have you anything to say to me?" inquired the former, significantly, but without quitting his friend's arm.

"Yes, sir," answered Leighton, on the spur of the moment; aware that he had nothing to say that would be welcome, but desirous of procuring an interview that might benefit himself.

"Come to me to-morrow, at twelve."

"Yes, sir."

When people have neither play nor work, time hangs rather heavy on their hands, especially if they have nothing to eat; and when the two gentlemen walked away, Leighton did not know what in the world to do with himself. It was the first day that he had been actually penniless; for hitherto, when he had no money, he had lived upon his clothes; but now, except the suit he wore, he had not an article left to dispose of; so he lounged along the Boulevards, as far as the Porte St. Martin, and as he was standing still, looking at the arch, he saw the groom and his wife crossing the street towards him. The man was carrying a bundle, and the woman had a sickly, dirty child in her arms. Her face looked very red and very angry, and she was talking vehemently; insomuch that, engrossed with

her own affair, whatever it was, she did not recognise Leighton; but the man, who seemed to be listening to her objurgations with a sort of tough endurance, as if he was used to that sort of thing, did; and probably, to make a diversion, and escape the clatter of her tongue, he saluted him, and inquired whether "that 'ere gen'leman" had bought the horse.

Leighton said he did not know, adding, "I don't think you've a good opinion of the animal."

"He don't know nothing about him," said the woman, who seemed to be bent on contradicting and undervaluing her husband.

"Well, maybe, I don't," said the man; "but if that 'ere horse is not Firebrass, I never see him—that's all."

"You think he's a horse that belonged to Mr. Luttrell," said Leighton, recurring to his former notion of obtaining some information that might be useful to himself.

"I'm a most sure of it," answered the man. "If it's the horse I mean, he gave three hundred guineas for him. He was then just rising six, and he sold him, ten days afterwards, for an old song. I was at Dycer's when he was brought there."

"How was that?" inquired Leighton.

"Why, the first day Mr. Luttrell mounted him, he reared right up on end, and came over on his back, with his rider under him. He'd ha' been killed, if it hadn't been on the turf. The next day he'd like to ha' killed the groom in the same way; so they brought him to Dycer's, to see if they could cure him of it; and one of the rough riders got upon his back—a man as I know'd very well—his name was Jenkins; a capital horseman he was, the devil himself couldn't unseat him; so that when Firebrass found he stuck to him, what did he do but run him up agen the rails, and jammed his knee to a perfect smash."

"But he seems very quiet now," said Leighton.

"So he did when Mr. Luttrell bought him, I fancy," answered the groom. "There's tricks in all trades, you know. But I minded his eye just now, and the twist of his nostrils, and I wouldn't trust him."

"If it's the horse you mean, I wonder how he came here?" said Leighton.

"They couldn't get their money for him in England, I take it; and somebody's brought him over on a spec."

Leighton thought it a very likely thing for Atherton to do; and moreover that, without telling Mr. Watson his character, he had got him to recommend the horse to his cousin.

Conversing in this manner, they continued walking side by

side, the wife stumping along with an irritated air, as if she was displeased at her husband's attending to anything but herself. Nevertheless, she spoke tenderly to the child; and Leighton learned that whilst they accompanied their master and mistress to the country, they had placed it at nurse with a woman who neglected it; in consequence of which they had been to fetch it away; and they were going to the English chemist's, in the Place Vendôme, to ask him to give it *some stuff*.

CHAPTER XLVI.

LEIGHTON had scarcely an acquaintance in Paris. There were several English servants there whom he had known at one time or other; but he had met with so many unpleasant rebuffs, that experience taught him to claim no fellowship with the prosperous section of the commonalty. The invitation of Tom Patton, therefore, "to go in and take a glass of something," was readily accepted. Tom's residence was situated over the coach-house in the court of a large hotel, inhabited by his employer, who was not yet returned from the country, whence the groom had arrived only a day or two before.

Tom produced a bottle of brandy, saying he could not drink their sour wine and he did not like their beer, whilst the woman took some bread and butter out of a cupboard for the child, who had evidently been kept short of food. Leighton had not swallowed a mouthful of anything that day but the *petit verre* of *eau-de-vie* and a roll when he wrote his letter, and longed for a bit of the child's bread and butter; but the woman took no notice of him, and seemed so cross that he did not like to ask her for any. Whilst they sat sipping their dram, Tom asked Leighton how long he had been out of a situation. Leighton cleared his throat, for it was an awkward question, and answered,—

"Upwards of four years."

Of course he might have named a shorter time, and so avoided the dilemma, but he was not remarkable for presence of mind, and his first impulse was generally to speak the truth, though he could deviate from it without any very inconvenient qualms of conscience, for his own convenience.

"Four years!" cried Tom; "then you've been ill, I take it."

"Partly," answered Leighton.

"Who was you with last?" inquired Tom; and Leighton told him it was the gentleman he had seen at the livery stables.

"The truth is," he added, "I have been unfortunate, and I wanted to see if he wouldn't do something to help me."

"And did you speak to him?"

"Yes I did; and I'm to go to him to-morrow at twelve."

"Well, if you can, give him a wink not to meddle with that 'ere horse—only don't say as you had it from me, for the owners on him may have me up to prove my words. It ought to be as good as a pound in your pocket."

"But he won't believe me. He thinks himself a great judge of horses."

"Well, tell him to find out who the horse belongs to, and who brought him over here."

"I saved his life once already," said Leighton, who had just tossed off a second glass of Tom's brandy, and was getting communicative, "but I might as well not have done it, for it only brought me into trouble." And his host inquiring how that came about, Leighton, partly moved by the effect of the liquor on an empty stomach, and partly by a feeling that it was better he should tell his story himself than that his new acquaintance should hear it from anybody else, related the circumstance that had reduced him from the enviable position of a gentleman's gentleman, to a penniless, half-starved pauper.

Tom listened with attention, twisting his mouth about the while, as if he was rubbing down a horse, and his wife, who had been before wholly engrossed with the puling child, coaxed it into quietness, whilst she also lent an ear to the tale. From their demeanour it appeared that Leighton had acted wisely, and that his confidence had made a favourable impression.

"I remember hearing on it," said Tom, "for Jem Walker, who had been fellow-servant with me when I lived with Mr. De Vere, was living coachman with Sir Abraham Towers at that time; perhaps you know'd Jem?"

"I knew him very well," said Leighton, "and he was over at our place that very morning, with a note for master to put him off from going to Tower Hill till next day; and it's always been my opinion that whoever did that business, didn't expect to find Mr. Grosvenor at home."

"Very like," answered Tom: "was there much property carried away?"

"Not an article," returned Leighton. "Whether they heard

me stirring overhead, or what, I can't say; but they were off before I could get downstairs;" and here he related the evidence that Agnes had given at the trial, with respect to the appearance of the person she had seen; adding that it had done him no good, for that her being there at supper alone with his master had discredited her character so much, that they did not believe a word she said; "and yet she was a very respectable young woman, for all that!" said he.

During this conversation the woman had been moving quietly about the room; and presently she spread a cloth on the table and produced some bread and butter and cheese, and a bit of German sausage, of which she invited Leighton to partake; observing that "as times was bad with him, a mouthful of food mightn't come amiss." He had thought her a terrible harpy at first, and had pitied the honest man that had got her, and she was certainly a bit of a virago to Tom; but she had a soft corner in her heart for the unfortunate; and as she fully believed Leighton's story, as anybody would who had heard him then and there relate it, she was moved to compassion by his hollow cheeks and dejected appearance. Being a woman of an energetic temperament too, she felt indignant at the injustice the man was suffering.

"It was a burning shame," she said, "for a poor servant to be thrown out of his bread for a thing he'd never done;" and she advised him to speak strongly to Mr. Grosvenor about it; and perhaps if Leighton had had such a wife, the vehemence of her representations might have had its effect. At all events, when the forlorn outcast took his leave, he felt all the better of the bread and cheese and sympathy, gladly promising to call again and let them know the result of his interview with Mr. Grosvenor.

In the meantime, he thought he might as well fill up the interval by ascertaining what Watson and his crony were about; which, knowing their hour of dinner and the *salons* they chiefly frequented, was not impossible. If they were really concerned in the sale of the horse, they would very likely pay another visit to the livery stables at an hour when nobody else was likely to be there, and, for the convenience of being in the neighbourhood, dine where they had dined on the previous day, instead of at the Palais Royal. So he strolled in that direction, and having taken up a convenient position for watching the entrance, he had in due time the satisfaction of seeing them arrive. They placed themselves at the same table as before, and after dining in the most enviable manner, he saw them issue

from the door and proceed straight to Corbillon's, where they staid upwards of half an hour. When they reappeared, the same person was in conversation with them, and Leighton had now no doubt whatever that there was a plot amongst them to do Mr. Grosvenor out of a large price for a horse that was worse than valueless.

The large hotel inhabited by the Ravenscliffe family had been divided amongst the various branches of it; Lionel and his wife occupying the *premier* or first floor, the *piano nobile*, as the Italians call it, because Lady Georgina objected to the fatigue of ascending the stairs any higher. The rest of the family were gone now, and when Leighton arrived to keep his appointment, he saw a board up announcing that there were *appartements à louer présentement*. As he had been several times abroad, he could speak French enough for common purposes; and after ascertaining that Mr. Grosvenor was at home, he inquired when the family were to leave. "They were all gone," the porter answered, "excepting Monsieur le fils, et la jeune Miladi;" adding that the *disparition* of the *demoiselle* was a sad affair, and he did not wonder they were glad to get away; but Leighton, knowing nothing of the circumstances connected with Isabel and her misfortunes, did not understand what he said, wanting the key to the allusion.

Mr. Grosvenor was still in his dressing-room, and having dismissed his valet, he inquired of Leighton what he had heard about Miss Crawford.

"I've not been able to hear anything, sir," he answered, "though I've been through every part of the town; but I made bold to speak to you, hoping you'll be kind enough to give me a little assistance to help me back to England, for I can't find anything to do here, and I haven't earned a penny since what you were kind enough to give me, except a trifle Mr. Watson gave me."

This last addition was made on second thoughts. Watson himself might have mentioned that he had given him something; but whether or not, Leighton was not unwilling to be interrogated.

Lionel, however, did not question him, the circumstance of his cousin giving the man a trifle appearing too unimportant to excite any curiosity.

"You want to return to England?" he said.

"Yes, sir, I think I'd better. I don't know what to do for the best, I'm sure."

Partly from a certain easiness of disposition, which, as it

acted more often injuriously than beneficially, I may denominate weakness, and partly from a lurking suspicion that the man had been wronged, all resentment against Leighton had vanished by this time, and Lionel felt some compassion for his miserable half-starved petitioner; insomuch that he would have been glad to have helped him to some way of earning his livelihood. His conscience was not very sensitive, but it is no light thing to be the means, though unintentionally, of blasting an innocent person's life, or of taking the bread out of the mouth of a defenceless fellow-creature.

"I don't see very well how I can help you," he said, after a moment's reflection. "I may give you a trifle to get you to England, but what will you do when you're there?"

"I can't say, I'm sure, sir; I can't expect to get a situation;" answered Leighton, drawing out a ragged red cotton pocket-handkerchief, and wiping the tears that, at the thought of his miserable situation, started to his eyes.

"Well," said Lionel, "if you wish to go to England, I'll give you something to take you there, but on the whole I incline to think you have a better chance of getting employment here. Wait a few days till I make some inquiries," he said, taking a handful of silver off the table, and giving it to him: "is there anything you can do besides being a servant?"

"I can write a good hand, sir."

"I recollect. Well, call again some day next week, and I'll see what can be done."

This was a dismissal, and Leighton turned to go, but as he placed his hand upon the handle of the door, he remembered what Tom Patton had said, and feeling grateful for the relief afforded him, and desirous of entitling himself to further protection, he stopped and said,—

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I don't know whether you know anything of that horse you were trying yesterday at the livery stables?"

"What do you mean?" inquired Mr. Grosvenor.

"I'm afraid he's not safe, sir. I understand nobody can ride him."

"I'll ride him, I'll answer for it!" said Lionel, with a self-confident air.

"He rears till he gets people off his back, I'm told, sir; nobody can sit him."

"He won't get me off, I promise him," answered Lionel, drily.

"I thought so," said Leighton to himself, as he left the room.

"I knew it would be of no use. It'll only make him the more determined to have him."

And he was right, such being the usual effect of advice that wounds the susceptible side of our vanity.



CHAPTER XLVII.

"DON'T call me '*ma'am*,' Agnes! You know I can't bear it," said Isabel, one day to her friend, almost impatiently; "have I not begged you fifty times to lay aside that distant manner you maintain with me, and treat me as I do you?"

"I forget," answered Agnes.

"You behave as if you didn't believe me, Agnes, when I tell you what is quite true, that you are much more a sister to me than Georgina ever was."

Agnes said she was very good, but somehow, although her attentions to Isabel were unremitting, the familiarity and equality of intercourse the guest desired seemed unattainable. If an attempt were made, as was occasionally the case, it did not last; there was always a sudden recurrence to the respectful reserve.

In the meantime, Isabel was daily gaining strength and health, a circumstance that, on the whole, caused her more anxiety than pleasure. As long as she was unable to move, she felt that she was not called upon to do anything, not even to form a decision. All she had to do, or could do, was to be passive and allow herself to be nursed and cherished; nursed by Agnes, and cherished by Frederick Capel, who sometimes neglected even his books and forgot his diagrams, to sit beside her on the sofa, and read volumes of love in those soft blue eyes, which continually discoursed the tenderest things without the owner of them in the least suspecting it.

During her convalescence she read with delight the books he brought her, to facilitate her understanding of the subjects to which his mind was most devoted; and here, in this poor apartment of the Rue Joubert, Isabel would have been happier than she had ever been in her life, could she have snapped the chain that united her to the past, and been free to plunge, a liberated soul, into the future; but the past embarrassed and the future

terrified her. She had forfeited her position in society, but this, in itself, occasioned her little sorrow, since circumstances had rendered that position a more fertile source of pain than pleasure. She had irrecoverably offended and alienated her family; she knew there could be no cordial forgiveness expected there; and, above all, she had seriously compromised her reputation. This formed the greatest embarrassment of all.

Although the new feelings that were taking possession of her, and her undiminished abhorrence of a union with Sir Abraham Towers, rendered it impossible she should regret the strange, wild step she had taken, yet every time she thought of it blushes burned her cheeks, and she covered her face with her hands, that the eye of day might not see her shame. To have been found flying through the streets at night; to have rushed into the arms of a stranger for protection; to have allowed him to lead her, she knew not where, taking it upon his simple word that it was to no evil; was altogether so strange and unaccountable, so apparently impossible, that she sometimes could not believe it had happened at all, and asked herself if it was not a dream—a nightmare—such as most people are occasionally subject to, wherein we fancy ourselves entering a room full of company, or walking about a crowded city attired like our mother Eve, complacently at first, and only gradually awakening to the horror of our situation.

Nothing indeed could account for it, but that which she herself could no longer recal or estimate—namely, an excitement of mind bordering on insanity. If she had drowned herself, as she intended to do, that would have been the verdict of a British jury, and a just one.

Even Agnes was bewildered when she looked at her visitor, and contemplated the extraordinary discordance betwixt what should have been and what was. She was astonished at “the heavy declension;” her own calmer nature and less poignant sensations rendering it difficult to comprehend the violent emotions and acute sensibilities developed in delicate organizations by a life of high nurture and over-refinement.

But Frederick Capel understood perfectly that which was dark to Agnes, for he was learned in all qualities of human dealing, and it would have spared Isabel many a pang of shame and anguish could she have known earlier how well his wide sympathies interpreted for her.

But all these shames and anxieties were the interludes; the main business of the drama was to decide on what she should do. It was a question, however, which, for various reasons,

neither Agnes nor Mr. Capel ever introduced ; Agnes forbearing, from motives of delicacy, lest it should appear that she wished to get rid of her ; and Frederick eschewing the subject, because he dreaded to learn what her projects for the future were, fearing that, be they what they might, the inevitable result to him would be to lose sight of her for ever.

Young ladies, as I have elsewhere observed, are apt to have very obscure notions about money matters, and their ideas of poverty are generally rather poetical. They think that being poor means only not having a *great deal* of money—the being unable to afford many luxuries and conveniences to which they themselves have been always accustomed, and which it seems odd that people should be obliged to do without. Having *no* money is a thing they have no conception of. Thus it never entered Isabel's head that Agnes's resources were so limited that this detention in Paris and the extra expenses incurred for herself were fast exhausting them. The services that Agnes performed for her, the hospitable shelter, and the careful nursing and tending, Isabel fully appreciated ; but the cost did not strike her as a matter worthy of consideration ; in fact, she never thought of it, or, if she did, it was as of an obligation to be returned in kind hereafter ; for she had no more notion of anything like real poverty awaiting herself, than she had of Agnes's empty pockets.

She was aware that she should henceforth not have a carriage to ride in, nor live in such handsome suites of apartments as she had been accustomed to ; but she had not the slightest conception of what people earned by teaching, nor of the sum indispensable to a decent maintenance.

She knew something of the prices of white satin shoes and Houbigant's gloves, but that was all. Everything else went to the Christmas bills, which she never saw or heard of. To have alluded to the expenses incurred for the little, the very little, she had had, would have appeared to her, not only absurd, but insulting. What was indeed but a 'chicken or a *potage*, and, when Monsieur Emile recommended it, a glass of Bordeaux ?

But this difficulty, unseen and unsuspected by the guest, was occasioning the most serious uneasiness to the hostess, who had not only expended the money she had set apart to carry her back to England, but also as much as she could raise upon every article of dress belonging to herself that she could dispense with. To obtain more she had commenced another piece of embroidery, at which she toiled many an hour when the invalid was asleep ; the people to whom she had sold the last being so well pleased

with their bargain that, they were willing to supply the muslin themselves.

When Isabel became well enough to sit up, she often helped her with her work, without suspecting the urgent necessity that existed for its completion. One night, however, or rather one morning, before it was light, happening to awake, she observed the lamp burning; and drawing aside the drapery that shaded the head of the bed, she was surprised to see Agnes, with the needle in her hand, working as if her existence depended on finishing the job.

"My dear Agnes, why do you slave in such a way at that tiresome muslin? You'll work yourself blind," said she. "Are the people in such a hurry for it?" for she was aware that the work was bespoken.

"Yes," answered Agnes, "I am obliged to get it done as soon as possible."

"Then I'll get up and help you."

"Oh, no, no; pray don't. You'll get cold, and be ill again," returned Agnes.

"Then you must come to bed, for I can't lie here sleeping comfortably, and know you are slaving yourself to death."

"I will presently, if you will go to sleep. I only want to finish this bunch of flowers."

"Well, then, promise me you'll come to bed when that is done."

"I will indeed," said Agnes; and Isabel turned round, and fell asleep; but the next morning, as soon as she was dressed, she asked for a breadth of the muslin, and set herself diligently to work upon it, whilst Agnes made the bed, and arranged the room.

Whilst they were thus employed, there came a ring at the bell, and on opening the door, a man appeared with a paper in his hand, saying he was the *propriétaire*, and that he had come for the *loyer*, which had not been paid, as usual, to the *concierge*. On learning his errand, Agnes stepped out, and attempted to close the door behind her, in order that Isabel might not hear the conversation; but the man, with the usual insolence of *propriétaires* to lodgers in arrears, pushed it back, and entered, casting his eyes about the room with a dogged, suspicious look, as if he expected to find some of his *meubles* missing.

"You shall have the money on Monday," said Agnes, in a low voice, and in the best French she could command.

"You told the *concierge* the same thing last week," said he. "I must have it now; I can't wait any longer."

"Only till Monday," returned Agnes.

"Je ne sors pas d'ici sans mon loyer," said the man, wagging his head, and striking his stick against the floor.

"Can't you pay him, Agnes?" inquired Isabel, amazed and frightened.

"I have not the money," answered Agnes in English, "but I hope this work will be finished by Monday, and then I shall be able to pay it."

Isabel was thunderstruck, and asked how much it was.

"I owe him twenty francs," returned Agnes; whereupon the other rose, and opening the drawer of an antique-looking, broken-down chiffonier, that stood in one corner of the room, she took from it a magnificent ring which she had had on her finger on the night of her flight.

"Voilà!" said she; "take that to a jeweller's and sell it for me, and then we'll pay you the money!" but when the man saw what it was she was offering him, he drew back his hand at first with a look of astonishment; but suddenly the idea that they were cheating him darting into his mind, he took hold of the ring and examined it more closely.

"Are they real?" said he.

"Mais, sans doute!" returned Isabel.

"Bien done," said he, returning it, whilst he eyed them with suspicion; "sell it yourself, and pay me."

"I had rather you would sell it," answered she.

"C'est possible," said he, with somewhat of a sneer, "mais je m'en lave les mains. Pay me my rent; that is all I require."

"Very well, then, call to-morrow, and you shall have it," answered Isabel, with hauteur—for she was indignant at the man's insolence. He said he would, and departed; but as he descended the stairs, he stopped to warn Barbara and her spouse to look well after their lodgers and watch that they did not decamp in his debt. "There are two of them, I see," said he; "who is the second?"

"That is what I can't make out," answered Barbara. "It's now near a month ago that she arrived here in the middle of the night, *toute parée comme une danseuse, avec des souliers de satin blanc.*"

"Alone?" inquired the *propriétaire*.

"Non, avec le jeune anglais qui loge au cinquième. He had gone out shortly before, saying he should not be home till next morning, and I and Pierre had just got to bed when the bell rang, and when I opened the gate—for Pierre had a cold, and I wouldn't let him get up, though he wanted to do it—what

should I see but Monsieur Capel avec cette petite dame. Ma foi, j'étais toute ébahie, vous pensez bien !”

“Et puis ?” said the *propriétaire*, whose name was Bellon.

“Well, they went upstairs, and he wasn't gone five minutes before he came down and went out again.”

“C'est quelque femme de théâtre,” said M. Bellon.

“Monsieur Capel said she was a friend of l'anglaise au quatrième ; et cela peut être, car elle a fait une maladie affreuse, et l'autre l'a soignée comme si c'était sa sœur,” said Barbara.

“Enfin, il faut payer le loyer,” said Monsieur Bellon, shaking his chin with an air of decision as he took his departure.

In the meantime, Isabel and Agnes were engaged upstairs in a discussion not less interesting.

“Why, my dear Agnes, didn't you tell me how you were situated ?”

“I knew I could get enough to go on with as soon as this dress was finished,” answered Agnes, “and I didn't wish to trouble you about such things.”

“But I must learn to trouble myself about such things. However, it is fortunate we are not without resources. How shall we dispose of this ring ?”

“Suppose we ask Mr. Capel to do it for us ;” but Isabel felt a repugnance to making him acquainted with their embarrassments. Nevertheless, as Agnes's imperfect knowledge of the city and of the language would expose her to the danger of being cheated, they saw no other course to take. Still Isabel felt terribly shame-faced about it ; it was such a strange commission to give him ; she wished Agnes would take it upon herself ; and Agnes, whose own struggles had prepared her better to encounter such difficulties, willingly consented.

“I wonder if he is at home now !” she said. “I'll run up stairs and see.”

“Do,” said Isabel, “I had much rather you did it when I am not present.”

He was not there, however ; but later in the day he called. As he entered the room, Isabel placed her finger on her lip, accompanied by a glance at Agnes that said, “Spare me ! don't mention it now !” He sat down beside her on the sofa, and began to discourse his eloquent music : the melodious voice, the command of language, the grasp of thought and the rich illustrations, made it so. “Sweeter than singing” was that talk to her. He was in a particularly happy vein too, and she hung upon his words with fond enthusiasm as he spoke of some late astronomical discoveries, and dilated on the new views

they opened with regard to the possible achievements of future science. He was in great spirits, for these were the things that elated him and made him happy, so dearly he loved nature. To interpret the works of the Creator was man's business on earth—the best thing worth living for—so he had thought till he saw Isabel—but life had a second object now; a new and entrancing delight that divided his heart with its first idol. Isabel thought he had never been so charming, and as she looked into those deep, dark eyes she drank long draughts of love. He paid an unusually long visit, because, he said, he should not see them again that evening; he had business that would detain him late. When he left them, Agnes, with the ring in her hand, followed him upstairs, and asked him if he would do them the favour to dispose of it for them. He looked at the jewels with admiration, remarking they were very fine stones, and that the ring must be worth a considerable sum.

"I don't know who to take it to, one may be easily cheated in such a transaction," he said. "I must inquire for some honest jeweller before I venture to part with it. I think I know a person that can advise me, and I'll call on him to-morrow."

But Agnes explained that that would not suit them, as they were entirely without money, and the *propriétaire* impatient for his rent.

"Why did you not mention this to me?" he said, reproachfully. "I have not much money, but I am seldom without any. We must not risk parting with this ring under its value, which I may do if I am not cautious; so you must allow me to lend you a trifle till I have time to make some inquiries."

Agnes thanked him, and as she saw the justice of what he said, she accepted his offer.

When Agnes came down and showed Isabel the money, the latter took it from her, under pretence of seeing how much it was, but it was in reality for the pleasure of looking at it and holding it in her hand. A pile of burnished gold would have appeared of less value than those few dingy five-franc pieces. What a pity it would be to give any of them to that horrid Monsieur Bellon!

They had nothing more to expect that day, as their friend was engaged, so they worked away at the muslin; and Isabel said she did not think it was at all disagreeable to be obliged to work. "Generally," she said, "one has no object in what one does. I think I could work hard for my living."

"It is very well if one is not obliged to work too hard; but I

was much happier when I was obliged to do something in London, than I used to be at home; besides, then I had my boy to work for, and that made work so pleasant."

They often talked of the child, that being the subject ever uppermost in Agnes's mind. Of Mr. Capel, as if by mutual agreement, they never spoke; that is they never praised him or discussed his merits—each had a consciousness that sealed her lips.

Isabel was quite tired when night came, but she felt a considerable satisfaction in having done a good day's work, and went to bed, anticipating Mr. Capel's visit. He would come to tell them about the ring; and then, the ice being thus broken, she thought she would venture to consult him about her own plans for the future. There would be a pleasure in this—everything was a pleasure that brought them nearer to each other.

On the following day, betwixt one and two, M. Bellon rang at the bell; the money was on the table ready for him.

"You have sold the ring?" said he, inquiringly.

"Qu'est-ce que cela vous fait?" said Isabel, coldly. "Take your money."

After examining the silver, he left the room.

"What a horrid man," said she, "and how disagreeable to be subject to the insolence of such a person." She had never before felt the rubs that poverty is obliged to take; nor did she apply the lesson now—she only thought that this *propriétaire* was a particularly brutal one.

"I wonder," she said, at length, "that Mr. Capel has not called about the ring. Don't you?"

It was not the ring but himself she was thinking of. It was now four o'clock, and both had been occupied with the same subject for some time. Agnes worked on—she had been used to work under the pressure of anxiety; but Isabel's fingers slackened, and at length she gave in.

"It's very odd Mr. Capel does not call about the ring, is it not?"

Agnes thought it was, but she wished to affect indifference, and answered that she dare say he would come by-and-by.

But hour after hour passed, and he did not come. He had told Isabel on parting that he should be with them without fail that evening, and the commission was an additional motive to bring him. Yet he came not. Nine, ten, eleven, twelve o'clock, and no Mr. Capel.

“Agnes, do just run upstairs and see if he is in his room. I hope nothing has happened to him.”

Agnes went willingly and rang, but no one answered. Then she went below and inquired if Barbara had seen him. Barbara was in bed, in the little hole in the wainscoting that Mr. Capel had described, and Pierre, in his red nightcap, by her side; but she put out her head, and said Monsieur Capel had gone out yesterday, and she had not seen him since.



CHAPTER XLVIII.

It was some time before Isabel fell asleep that night, but she slept at last; and when she woke in the morning, she wondered why she had been so anxious on the previous evening, since, on reflection, there was certainly nothing very extraordinary in Mr. Capel's absence. He had promised they should see him it is true, but he had also mentioned that he had an engagement on business, and this might have detained him. Besides, he had no reason to suppose that his non-appearance would occasion any uneasiness; and by lending them the money he had guarded against its causing them any inconvenience. Without doubt he would arrive to-day; so she rose with an alert spirit, and when she had taken her breakfast, set herself with alacrity to the embroidery again. Whilst she was full of hope she could work; and she did so with more pleasure that she fancied he would approve of her doing so.

“Nobody should be above work,” she had heard him say; and she was learning from him to think it a nobler thing to labour than to live on the labour of others. It is not necessary that everybody should till or dig, but everybody should work.

It is wonderful what erroneous notions society, especially the younger members of it, have on this subject. The uneducated classes, who are always intellectually children, think nothing is labour that is not performed by the hands; brain-work is idleness in their estimation; and the higher classes are brought up with the notion that manual labour is degrading, and that to do nothing—at least nothing that is useful—is an essential element of gentryhood.

I remember once hearing a boy reproved for associating with another, without knowing who he was.

"His papa is a gentleman," answered the child.

"How do you know?" said the father.

"Because he never does anything," was the answer.

So Isabel stitched away diligently, and sprig and flower grew fast under her agile fingers; but time moved on, and by-and-by the fingers began to slacken; as her heart grew heavy so did her hand.

Both occupied with the same thought, there had been little conversation betwixt the two young women; what there was, related to their future plans. Agnes wished to return to England; she must rejoin her sister. Perhaps it cost her a pang to go, but her place was London on all accounts. It was not fair to leave Martha, who had so devotedly followed her fortunes, to fight her way alone; and since there was no chance of recovering her child through Lionel, the spot whence he disappeared seemed the most likely one to hear of him again. Moreover, against the pain it cost her to part with Mr. Capel she had to balance that she suffered in being near him now, obliged to witness the growing attachment betwixt him and Isabel, the first germs of which she observed before they themselves were conscious of their existence. Jealousy has a hundred eyes to discern what is, and a magic glass that shows her what is not.

Agnes knew, besides, that whatever he had done for a moment Mr. Capel thought no more of her now. She knew that she was nothing to him but the friend and hostess of the woman he loved. Her beauty, even, though in reality much the most remarkable of the two, had faded before the ineffable charm he had found in Isabel's face—that charm that each man detects somewhere for himself, and which is often invisible to all the world beside.

Agnes had given him a rebuff at a critical moment, when the beauty, combined with the opportunity, had so far roused his imagination that he fancied his heart was touched; but with that rebuff the illusion was dispelled, and the circumstances that immediately ensued banished every vestige of it from his mind. If he recollected it, it was only to congratulate himself on her insensibility, and his consequent escape from a distressing involvement. That she cared the least about him he never suspected; her *posée* manner and habitual self-control completely deceived him.

Isabel, on the contrary, was most averse to leaving Paris on every account. She would have preferred to launch into her

new life there, where she was less likely to be known; and how that new life was to be carried on without Mr. Capel to sustain it, she could not conceive; his visits seemed such an indispensable part of the plan. Still the separating from Agnes entailed many inconveniences. Agnes's experience would be so useful to her; she had no idea, indeed, how she could manage matters alone.

No doubt, Agnes was not all she could have wished. In essential matters she was kind and good, but it was impossible to make her cordial and familiar; and Isabel, who never penetrated the jealousy, attributed this reserve and distance to an inconvenient sense of the difference of their conditions. No doubt this had its effect; but the repelling element was jealousy.

It appeared, therefore, that if Agnes persisted in going to England, she must go too; but the moment that necessity presented itself, her courage fell. All the fortitude and resolution with which she thought she was prepared to encounter this untried future, seemed to be somehow or other so intimately connected with the student, *au cinquième*, that whenever he disappeared from the scheme, she could not see her way at all; she felt quite perplexed and bewildered. In short, it was to be apprehended that he was the main support of the scaffolding, which fell to the ground as soon as he was withdrawn.

Of course, all these embarrassments furnished matter enough for thinking; and the more so, that neither could fully unbosom herself to the other; but as hour after hour slipped by, the anxiety for the future began to give way to one more urgent and immediate. Isabel was again the first to break silence.

"Agnes, don't you think it very strange? What can be become of Mr. Capel? He never stayed away so long before?"

"Never. It's certainly very strange."

"He surely would have called, if he had returned. Don't you think he would?"

"I think I'll run up and ring the bell again."

"Do. I really begin to be quite uneasy; don't you?"

"It's really very extraordinary," said Agnes, as she left the room.

"Well?" said Isabel, anxiously, when she returned.

"He is not there, and Barbara says he has never come in."

"Good heavens! I am certain something dreadful has happened to him," exclaimed Isabel, in great agitation. "Do you know any of his friends that we could send to?"

“Not a soul, except Monsieur Emile; and I don't know where he lives.”

This being the case, they were obliged to sit still, and bear their suspense as well as they could. Agnes was surprised and anxious, but Isabel's distress was so great that if her companion had not already read her secret, this agitation would have betrayed it.

That she might not retard her convalescence, the invalid had been desired to go to bed early, and she had hitherto done it; but to-night, when Agnes began to make the usual preparations, she begged for a little indulgence. “I feel so uneasy; I am sure I can't sleep.” She was still listening, and unconsciously hoping; but when twelve o'clock came, she felt herself obliged to yield to Agnes's entreaties, although she would much rather have sat up all night.

Again she lay awake till nearly morning; but when she awoke this time it was to an immediate sense of alarm for her friend. However, she was eager to be up and dressed, in case he should come; but now she would not admit hope. She was sure something had happened to him—he would not come. And so it proved. The day passed, and no Mr. Capel appeared.

There seemed now really cause for alarm; but Barbara said there was no accounting for the comings and goings of *ces jeunes gens*; and that she dare say he would come by and by. At the same time she admitted that he had never been away so long before; but he was frequently out all night, and his staying out several successive ones did not strike her as very extraordinary.

“Mon Dieu! que voulez vous? On ne peut pas toujours être sage! Even Pierre, who was the best of husbands, had been occasionally a little wild before he was married.”

But the young women were neither convinced nor consoled. They knew that when he was absent all night he was at the Observatoire; so he had told them, and they believed him entirely. What to do they knew not. Their only hope was that Monsieur Emile would call, but having ceased to see his patient medically, his visits were quite uncertain.

What added greatly to Isabel's distress, was the apprehension that the ring might have brought Mr. Capel into danger. Some dishonest person had, perhaps, seen him in possession of it, and perceiving its value, had murdered him to obtain it. She had heard her brother talk of the dangerous classes in Paris, and of the localities they inhabit, and how people had been reported

to have disappeared in a mysterious manner, no doubt being entertained that they had fallen victims to some of these desperate wretches.

“Do put away that muslin, Agnes. What is the use of slaving in that manner? It quite worries me to see you do it!” for, however disturbed, Agnes kept toiling on, as people accustomed to get their living learn to do; whilst Isabel, restless and agitated, could do nothing but walk up and down the room.

“Agnes!” she said, “were you ever at the Morgue?”

“Not that I know of: what is the Morgue?” answered Agnes.

“It’s the place where persons are taken that have been found dead; it’s on the Quai, near the Marché Neuf. When first we came to Paris, Louisa wanted to see it—and so did I;—and Mr. Damer took us.”

“And were there any dead bodies?”

“Yes, two, but I only looked in; I had not courage to approach them; but if I dare venture out, I’d go there now.”

Agnes shuddered and turned pale.

“Which is the way to it?” she asked.

“If you were to go straight to the Quai, and then ask for the Marché Neuf—I don’t quite know the way, because we were in the carriage—but I think it is not far from Notre Dame.”

“I know Notre Dame,” returned the other.

“Would you mind going, Agnes? Barbara could get you a coach, you know.”

“I’ll go if you wish it,” returned Agnes. “What is the name of the place?”

“It’s called the Morgue, and you’ve only to ring at the bell, and say you have a friend missing, and you wish to see—” here Isabel’s voice failed her, and she could not proceed in her instructions. Agnes laid down her work and prepared herself for the expedition; whilst Isabel, having raised up this image of horror for herself, gave way to a fresh access of grief.

Agnes’s feelings were by no means so vivid as her friend’s, still, as she drove through the streets, her heart sank at the thought of what she might behold, and her limbs trembled when she stepped out of the coach at that door which had been entered by so many wretched beings, seeking what they feared to find. Confused by her terror, Agnes’s French broke down when the man spoke to her.

“Que voulez vous?” said he.

All she could stammer out was, "Un ami!" "Entrez!" he said, making way for her. "We have only one, *un Anglais*. He was brought in soon after daylight this morning. A woodcutter found him, who went early to work in the Bois de Boulogne. Apparemment, il est tombé de cheval."

Agnes understood but imperfectly what was said, but the first glance showed her that the body that lay there was not Mr. Capel's; the hair was much lighter, and seeing there were no more, she drew back; but the man, thinking she was retreating from terror, without accomplishing what she came for, took her by the arm, and led her forwards, bidding her not fear.

"N'ayez pas peur!" said he, "les morts ne font pas de mal. C'était un beau jeune homme. Est ce celui que vous cherchez?"

"Oh, God!" cried Agnes, suddenly putting her hands before her eyes to shut out the dreadful spectacle.

"Ah!" said the man, "c'est lui. I thought so, since he is of your country. Sit down a bit, and recover yourself."

Agnes was dreadfully pale and shaking like a leaf; but as the passion she felt was horror, not grief, she shed no tears.

"Is it your husband?" asked the man.

"No," she replied.

"Your brother, perhaps?"

"No."

"Ah, l'ami! c'est fâcheux."

As soon as she was sufficiently recovered to answer him he proceeded to inquire the name and address of the deceased person. These she wrote down for him, bidding him send notice without delay to the family, who could have no suspicion of what had happened, or the body would not be there.

When Agnes left the place she stepped again into the coach, and bade the man drive her to the Tuileries; there she dismissed him and entered the gardens; she needed a little time to compose herself before she met Isabel, and also to resolve on the line of conduct she should pursue; whether to communicate what she had seen or not. As she was sitting on one of the benches, with her head hanging down absorbed in thought, a man passed her. She did not observe him, but he saw something about her that caused him to turn back and take a second look.

"Miss Crawford," said he. She raised her head; it was Leighton. "I have been looking for you ever so long," he

said. "Mr. Grosvenor wants to speak to you. He told me he had got something very particular to say to you, and that you would be very glad to hear. You had better come along with me to him; I am going that way now."

"I have just seen him," she said, with pale and quivering lips. "He's dead, and his body is lying at the Morgue."

There was nobody on earth whose departure from this life could have occasioned Leighton half so much concern. The only person at once able and willing to help him was gone. He could hardly believe it, he fancied Agnes must be mistaken; and he started full speed for the Hôtel de Breteuil to make inquiries. When he rang at the bell, the *concièrge*, who opened the gate, looked so composed and easy in his mind, that his hopes of the report being erroneous were strengthened.

"Is Mr. Grosvenor at home?" he said.

"Non."

"Has he been long out?"

"Since yesterday."

"Hasn't he been at home to-day? Where is he?"

"In the country, most likely. Perhaps he'll be home to dinner."

"Did he go out on horseback?"

"No, on foot. Is anything wrong?"

"Where is his groom?"

"Discharged. They quarrelled about a horse. The horse threw the groom, and he refused to mount him again; so monsieur gave him his *congé*."

Leighton then related what he had heard; but the thing seemed so improbable, that the porter did not believe it; Mr. Grosvenor's absence being nothing at all unusual. He was often away all night, and sometimes two, and was on these occasions supposed to be out of town; but the quarrel with the groom accorded so well with what Leighton already knew, and with what the man at the Morgue had said to Agnes, that he feared the ill news was but too true. They were yet discussing the matter at the gate when the messenger arrived with the address in his hand that Agnes had written.

It appeared that the woodcutter who had discovered the body, had given notice at the nearest police-station; whereupon, the officers finding nothing about the person to indicate the name and address of the deceased, had conveyed his remains to the Morgue. When found, Lionel Grosvenor, for it was he indeed, was lying in the middle of the road, bedaubed with

mud, his hat at a little distance, and his silver-mounted riding-whip a few yards behind; and from various circumstances, it was afterwards conjectured that he had dropped this whip, and had alighted to pick it up.

There was little congeniality betwixt the two brothers-in-law; but such a death as this softens and sweetens all memories, and Mr. Damer was very much affected when he heard what had happened. However, he made arrangements for the removal of the body, and then drove back to the Hôtel de Breteuil, to communicate the sad news to Georgina. There had been but a small modicum of affection between her and her husband—it could not well be less—but there had been few quarrels. They were seldom together, and were too indifferent and too fashionable a couple to bicker; added to which, Lionel was not ill-tempered. Many men who love their wives worry them; and many who do not love them do the same thing; it is altogether an affair of temper, with which affection has little to do; but Lionel was an easygoing person as long as he had his own way, and Lady Georgina was shocked and sorry when she heard of his death.

Preparations were immediately set on foot for conveying the remains of the heir of Ravenscliffe to the family vault, and Lady Georgina also announced her intention to return to England. But the weather was cold and damp, and betwixt her own infirmities, and the extreme delicacy of the child, she was perplexed with doubts and hesitations with regard to the prudence of undertaking the journey. To certain people, their children acquire additional interest and importance when they become the possessors, or immediate heirs, of wealth or title; and the weakly, pale-faced boy had suddenly grown into an object of so much anxiety in Lady Georgina's breast, as actually to rival Lady Georgina herself. Whilst engaged with these thoughts the doors were suddenly thrown open, and a visitor entered whom she little expected to see.

CHAPTER XLIX.

A CONSIDERABLE time had elapsed before Agnes had summoned resolution to return home, and when she rang at the bell, Isabel, who had been ever since she went walking up and down the room, or standing still to listen for her footsteps, in an agony of impatience, rushed to open the door. The pale cheek and agitated features that met her eye were the heralds of ill-news.

"He's dead!" she exclaimed. Agnes, overcome with horror of what she had seen, and the pain of communicating such dreadful tidings, burst into tears. "I knew it! I was sure of it!" cried Isabel. "Where?—how?" she sobbed, her words choked by her tears.

"It's not Mr. Capel—Mr. Capel's not dead; at least, that I know. I haven't heard anything of him," answered Agnes.

"Then what's the matter? Oh, you're deceiving me, Agnes! You have heard of him."

"No, indeed I have not."

"Where have you been, then?"

"Where you sent me?"

"To the Morgue?"

"Yes."

"And did you see nobody there? no dead?"

"Oh, yes—yes."

"Who was it? Anybody you knew?"

"Yes."

"And not Mr. Capel?"

"No, indeed."

"It wasn't your child? Oh, Agnes, speak!"

"It was—oh! I dare not tell you who it was."

"Oh, my God! It wasn't Sir Abraham Towers?" for accidents were not present to Isabel's mind, and the idea struck her that her desertion might have caused the death of her *fiancé*. It is true, nothing could be more improbable and apparently out of character than Sir Abraham's committing suicide; but as he was the only person she was acquainted with who, as far as

she knew, had any reason for wishing to bury their disappointments in the grave, her thoughts instantly reverted to him.

"No!" answered Agnes, "I don't think I should know him; it was somebody I do know," and she looked at Isabel with significance in her eye; she wished the name to be guessed rather than to tell it.

"It wasn't—it couldn't be my brother! No, no, Agnes, you cannot mean it. You must have been mistaken! Don't say it was Lionel!"

Agnes's tears answered; her nerves had received a great shock, and she felt much for the sister. Isabel's grief was excessive; Lionel had not done his duty by her, if he had she would not have been hearing of his death in a poor apartment of the Rue Joubert; but she never arraigned him for that, for he knew nothing about duty, and comprehended nothing of her character; and for the rest, he was her only brother, had been the darling of the family as long as it was possible to make a darling of him, and although he did them no good, he did them no intentional harm.

It was some time before she was sufficiently collected to hear the particulars, as far as Agnes knew them. On learning that the accident was supposed to have occurred when he was riding, she said,—

"How often I have heard papa and my brothers-in-law entreat him to be more cautious about horses. Many a time has Mr. Damer told me he was afraid Lionel would some day meet with an accident. He was such a bad rider, and so rash."

As soon as the first burst of grief and surprise was over, she was seized with an access of remorse and self-reproach; she had forsaken her family, Lionel amongst the rest, and now she should never see him again! She magnified the uneasiness her disappearance must have caused him, and lamented that she had not at least relieved it by a letter. Then came the thought of what her parents would suffer when this dreadful news reached them. And for the first time the image of the pain she must herself have inflicted rose up before her in all its enormity. She forgot the provocation she had received, to see only her own cruelty and ingratitude, and the anguish of her family. The only reparation that remained in her power was to fly to them in this hour of affliction; and if she did not make haste some other might have passed away, beyond the reach of her repentance. Hurried away by this passion of grief, Agnes was requested to send Pierre for a coach, and with her eyes blinded by tears,

Isabel threw on her bonnet and shawl. If a regret for Mr. Capel crossed her mind, it was so wrong to admit it, that she chased it remorselessly away.

"Good-bye, dearest Agnes! and be assured I shall never forget your kindness. I may not be able to come and see you soon, but I will write the moment I can, and I hope it will not be long before we meet again. Be sure to write before you leave this, that I may know where to address you. The emerald ring is in the drawer of the *chiffonier*, and that will suffice to pay your rent and other things for the present."

Agnes accompanied her downstairs and saw her into the coach. Isabel threw herself back and drew up the glasses.

"A l'Hôtel de Breteuil, Champs Elysées," whispered Agnes, in a low tone to the driver, as he mounted the box and set his horses in motion. Agnes stood looking after the coach as long as it was in sight. When it disappeared round the corner she turned to go upstairs and saw Barbara behind her.

"Eh! bien. Est elle partie, la petite dame?"

"Yes!" answered Agnes.

"Ha! she's going back to her husband, perhaps?"

"She's going home," said Agnes, drily.

"Et le jeune monsieur du cinquième? où est il?"

Barbara looked at Agnes as she asked this question, with an expression denoting that she thought there was some strange secret amongst them. Certainly the unaccountable appearance and sudden departure of the guest, and the mysterious absence of Mr. Capel, were sufficient to awaken curiosity if not suspicion.

"I don't know," answered Agnes.

"You don't know?" said Barbara.

"No, I don't. I wish I did; and I think some inquiries should be made."

"Eh! bien, je le crois aussi," answered Barbara. "We must send to the police."

"Do, pray!" said Agnes, as she ascended the stairs, bewildered by this succession of strange events, and shut herself into her apartment to resolve on her own plans. These were soon formed.

There was nothing left for it now but to quit Paris as quickly as possible. She would have liked to learn the cause of Mr. Capel's absence before she started; she would have been happy to know that he was safe; but she could not afford to wait, and she felt that it was better for her that they should meet no

more. The piece of embroidery was almost finished; that afternoon's work would complete it, and she might be ready to depart by the following evening. She had enough to occupy her thoughts, and the hours flew by as she plied her needle till bed-time.

In the meanwhile, Isabel had found herself at the gates of the Hôtel before she had had time or composure to resolve on what she should do or say; or to reflect on what sort of reception might await her. Indeed her mind was too much engrossed with her brother's death, and her parents' affliction, to think of herself at all; and the coach had stopped, and the driver had rang the bell, before she was awakened from the reverie that absorbed her.

"Pay the man!" she said to the astonished porter, as she passed him.

"Sacre!" said he to himself, as he rang his bell to give notice to the servants in waiting. *C'est drôle, ça!*" and his amazement was not diminished when he heard in what quarter the young lady had been taken up, a piece of information he of course extracted from the coachman.

As the only floor now inhabited was that occupied by Lady Georgina, when Isabel reached the top of the first flight of stairs, she found the door open, and the servants ready to receive whoever was coming up. Nevertheless, she would have continued to ascend, but when she attempted to pass them they said,—

"*Miladi est ici,*" and supposing they meant her mother, she entered.

Lady Georgina, who was lying on the sofa, started up with amazement as the groom of the chambers opened the door of the *salon* and announced her.

The expression of the countenance was that of haughty surprise. Georgina's character was not one likely to engage the affections of Isabel; but likings and dislikings are forgotten in great emergencies, and the grief of the sister for her lost brother, and her sympathy for the widowed wife, banished every other feeling and recollection. She forgot even how open she was herself to reproach; her own errors and sufferings seeming too petty to be thought of in this terrible crisis. She advanced with extended arms, crying,—

"Oh, Georgina! Poor, poor Lionel!"

But Lady Georgina's grief was not of that magnitude or quality to make her forget anything.

"I am perfectly amazed!" she said, drawing back. "Is it possible?" whilst Isabel, unable to speak, sank down weeping and sobbing on the first chair near her.

"It's very embarrassing, extremely so, that Sir Francis and Lady Grosvenor should have left Paris—I really——"

"Are papa and mamma gone?" exclaimed Isabel, clasping her hands in despair, "and my sisters gone too?"

"Certainly they are! How, after such an *esclandre* could you suppose they would remain? I really never found myself in so unpleasant a situation! Pray may I take the liberty of asking you where you have been all this time?"

"Never mind where I have been. You'll know all by-and-by. Oh! Georgina, don't let us quarrel when poor Lionel is lying dead!"

"I have no intention of quarrelling — I never quarrel," answered Lady Georgina, coldly; "but you must be aware, that in presenting yourself here after what has occurred, you are placing me in a very embarrassing situation. I am really at a loss what to do."

"I thought mamma was here, or I should not have come," sobbed Isabel; "and since my presence is so unwelcome, I had better go."

"Go where? Where are you to go to?" inquired Lady Georgina.

"I shall go to Ravenscliffe. I know I have done very wrong, Georgina, and I know I can hardly expect papa and mamma to forgive me; but the only reparation I can make is to return to them now that they will be in such distress."

"I think you have caused them distress enough yourself. Conduct so unaccountable, excuse me for saying, so shocking, I really never heard of in my life!"

"I know it must appear very bad — but I was scarcely in my senses. I couldn't marry Sir Abraham Towers; I preferred death to marrying him!"

"You have preferred disgrace, which is much worse, I think."

"I was taken very ill. For some time I was not even conscious of what had happened, nor of where I was. But for that I should have gone to Aunt Dorothy; and when I had been away so long, I was afraid to come."

"Ill! And pray who took care of you in your illness?"

"A friend; a very kind friend, whom I shall always esteem as a sister."

Georgina, seeing she did not intend to disclose her secret,

forbore to question her further; and Isabel knew full well that her brother's wife was the last person in the world to understand or forgive what had happened, and that the mere mention of Agnes Crawford's name would raise a storm of horror and vituperation. Little dreaming who it was, the mention of the friend who was to be esteemed as a sister produced a slightly mollifying effect on her ladyship. That it was a *humble* friend did not occur to her; and she began to suspect that Isabel had taken refuge with some over-indulgent aristocratic irony. Under this impression, she permitted her to remain under her roof, and condescendingly agreed to *chaperone* her to Ravenscliffe.



CHAPTER L.

ON the morning after these events, Agnes rose betimes, for she had many little matters to arrange before evening, when she intended to start by the diligence for Calais. Amongst others, she had her embroidery to dispose of; and, she feared, also her friend's emerald ring, which she was very unwilling to convert into money. But there were yet several small debts to be discharged, which had been incurred for the guest, and for which the produce of the muslin would not suffice. She had also to secure her place at the *messengeries*.

Her wardrobe was so much reduced by their late necessities, that she had very little to pack at present; but as she expected the ring would bring a much larger sum than she otherwise needed, she hoped to be able to redeem some articles of her best attire, which Barbara, at her request, had disposed of.

With these intentions, she descended the stairs in her bonnet and shawl, with the embroidery in her hand, and the emerald ring on her finger for safety.

"I am going away to-night, Barbara," she said, "and I want you to get me back my veil and shawl and my silk dress. Can you?"

"Mais oui, avec de l'argent," answered Barbara.

"I'll give you some when I come in again."

"Et le loyer?" said Barbara, interrogatively.

"I'll pay that too."

"You'll have to pay the whole week, you know. Monsieur Bellon is very particular."

"Very well, I will; and as all that, and my journey too, will take a good deal of money, I must part with this ring. Do you know any honest jeweller that would buy it?"

"Ce sont de pierres fines?" asked Barbara, looking at the ring with admiration.

But Agnes did not comprehend what she meant, and repeated her inquiry for an honest jeweller.

"J'ai un mien cousin," said Barbara, "who works for Monsieur Richard, bijoutier, Rue Vivienne; if you like, I'll show it him, he'll be able to tell me what it's worth, and perhaps Monsieur Richard himself may buy it—that is to say, if they are real stones."

"Do ask him," said Agnes, drawing the ring from her finger, and giving it to Barbara, in whose honesty she had perfect faith. "But, remember, I go to-night, and I want my things to pack up."

"Well," said Barbara, "I can't go out till Pierre comes back, but I think he won't be long now. He is gone to get some opera tickets for the Monsieur au Premier, and I told him to call at the Bureau de Police, and mention the absence of *ce pauvre garçon au cinquième*, who, I begin to fear, has met with some misfortune."

"I am afraid so, too," said Agnes. "If you hear anything of him after I am gone you must write and tell me."

Barbara said she could not write, but that Pierre had a friend *qui avait une très belle écriture*, and she would make him do it; whereupon, bidding her be sure to dispose of the ring, as the money was indispensable, Agnes bade her good-bye for the present, and departed on her errand, proceeding first to the *lingère* with her work, and afterwards, with part of the money accruing from it, securing her place in the diligenee.

At length, she turned her steps homewards; and as she approached the gate, she observed Pierre standing on the outside of it, turning his head first up and then down the street, as if he were waiting for somebody. When his eye fell upon her, he looked round, and spoke to some one behind him in a manner that led her to think she was herself the expected person.

"Mr. Capel is returned, or there is news of him," thought she, as she hastened her steps.

Pierre stood aside to make way for her as she entered, and

within she saw Barbara and two men wearing a uniform, whom she supposed to be soldiers; they were, in fact, *sergents de ville*. Barbara was talking to them with a countenance of great concern.

"Is there news of Monsieur Capel?" inquired Agnes.

"Oui," answered Barbara.

"Silence, s'il vous plait," said one of the officers, waving her back, as he advanced to Agnes, and touching his hat with civility, said that he must request her to accompany him to the *Commissaire de Police*.

"What for?" asked Agnes, surprised at the invitation.

"Ce n'est pas à moi de vous dire cela," answered the man. "You will learn that at the Bureau."

"Has anything happened to Monsieur Capel?" she inquired, turning to Barbara.

"I don't know," she responded, with a blank expression of face.

"Would you prefer going in a coach?" said the man.

"It would be better," remarked Barbara. "Pierre will fetch you one. Courez, mon ami, chercher un fiacre."

"What is it? I don't understand," said Agnes, looking from one to the other.

"Monsieur le Commissaire désire vous interroger; voilà tout," answered the sergeant.

"What about?"

"Ah, c'est-ce que je ne sais pas," replied the man, shrugging his shoulders.

All this while, Barbara stood with her eyes fixed on Agnes, with the same expression of blank dismay, but still with an evident desire to say something which the presence of the officers prevented.

There being a stand of coaches close at hand, one of them was soon at the door; whereupon saying, "A votre plaisir, madame," the two strangers proceeded to hand in Agnes; an operation that by no means passed unnoticed by the passengers in the street, who instinctively stopped to observe it; whilst Agnes, beginning to have a vague idea that she was a prisoner, felt extremely uncomfortable. But a prisoner for what? Was it anything connected with Mr. Capel or with Mr. Grosvenor, or had Isabel fallen into some new misfortune? She was, however, more annoyed than alarmed, being unconscious of harm, and not naturally timid.

One of the officers got into the coach with her, the other

seated himself on the box, and away they drove through the Boulevards and the Rue St. Honoré, till they crossed the river, and reached a long narrow street in the Faubourg St. Germain, where the coach drew up at a house, in front of which there was a square lantern of coloured glass already burning, the afternoon being dusky. Here the men alighted, and assisting Agnes to do the same, they led her up a dark stair, to a door on which was inscribed "Bureau de Police." This they pushed open, and having conducted her into a small room, they begged her to be seated, and left her alone.

There was no light in the room except what was reflected from the window, and that was extremely little; but as she explored the place, wondering how long she was to be detained there, she observed that it contained no furniture but a bench, and that the door could not be opened from the inside, except by those who had a key to it.

A weary half-hour, which seemed to her at least a whole one, had elapsed; and she was beginning to be very uneasy about the money she had paid for her place in the diligence, when the key was turned in the lock, and the door opened.

"Bring lights," said an authoritative voice; whereupon one of the men who had brought her there entered, and held a match to two tin lamps that hung against the wall. The illumination that ensued disclosed the portly figure of the commissaire.

"I have to interrogate you, madame," he said, with civility, "respecting some circumstances, with regard to which it is necessary that we obtain information."

He addressed her first in French, but finding her unable to follow him, he spoke English—broken, but intelligible.

To this exordium, Agnes bowed; whereon he proceeded to inquire her name, age, occupation, &c., together with the period of her arrival in Paris, and the address of the different houses she had inhabited since she came; comparing her answers with certain papers he held in his hand, one of which, she perceived, was her own passport; whereby it appeared he was aware that she had arrived in company with another Englishwoman, who had already quitted France. Her responses appearing so far satisfactory, he next desired to know the object of her journey.

"It was not simply an excursion of pleasure, I presume? You had some business?"

"There was a person here whom I wished to see."

"Had she any objection to name this person?"

At this question she hesitated, being very unwilling to name Mr. Grosvenor.

"I had rather not," she said. "It was about a private affair of my own, and cannot concern any one else."

"Had she seen that person?"

"Yes, I have."

"Was the lady who accompanied her in any way connected with that affair?"

"Not at all. I never saw that lady till I met her on board the packet."

"Can you tell me the object of that lady's journey to Paris?"

"Pleasure, I believe. I know of no other." And here, certain strange suspicions that Mrs. Aymer's flighty ways had occasionally suggested to the more staid mind of Agnes, re-occurred. "She has gone away in debt, or has done something wrong, I suppose," thought she.

"You say you are acquainted with a family of the name of St. George, residing in the Rue de Helder?"

"Yes."

"And you lived some days in their house?"

"Yes, about ten days."

"Did you observe anything particular during that residence?"

Agnes answered "No," but not quite with a clear conscience, since in a conversation with Mr. Capel, one evening, in which she had spoken of the company that frequented that house, he had expressed his conviction of its being a private *maison de jeu*. However, when the commissaire asked her if she had not seen a great deal of high play there, and other questions of a similar tendency, she could safely answer *no*; things having been so managed that she never had *seen* it. Suspicious sounds alone had reached her.

After putting to her in this manner a variety of questions, some of which referred to her late visitor, whilst the purport of others she could not detect, the commissaire suddenly drew from his waistcoat pocket the diamond and ruby ring that Isabel had requested Mr. Capel to dispose of for them, and inquired if she had ever seen it before. Agnes said "Yes, she believed she had, or one like it."

"Where did you see it?"

"In the house I lodge in."

"In whose possession?"

"It belonged to a lady, who gave it to a person to sell."

"Was that the lady who has been lately living with you?"

"Yes, it was."

"Can you tell me the lady's name?"

"No, I am not at liberty to tell it."

"Can you tell me the name of the person you allege she gave it to?"

"Yes; it was to a lodger in the same house, of the name of Capel, who went out, as we understood, to sell it, but never returned."

"And do you know anything of this other ring?" And here, to Agnes's amazement and alarm, he produced the emerald ring she had that morning given to Barbara.

Up to this period she had supposed herself not at all personally concerned in this examination. At first she thought it regarded Mrs. Aymer, then the St. Georges, and lastly Mr. Capel; but now she began to fear that it was Isabel and herself. For the first time she changed colour, as she answered that she did know the ring, and that it had belonged to the same lady. "But she gave it to me."

"Cette dame fait des cadeaux magnifiques," remarked the Commissaire. "Though you decline to name so generous a person, you will perhaps tell me where she lives?"

"In England," answered Agnes.

"Yes, when she is at home. But we wish to know where she resides in Paris when not with you?"

"I don't know," answered Agnes, anxious to shield Isabel, and indeed herself, from all the annoyances that might ensue were the connection that subsisted betwixt the rings and herself and Mr. Capel exposed at the Hôtel de Breteuil.

"And you don't know where she is now?"

"No," answered Agnes, casting down her eyes.

"But you could guess, perhaps?"

"If I could, I am not at liberty [to tell. I could not tell without her permission."

"Is she not sometimes to be found at the house of Madame St. George?"

"No, never," replied Agnes, again puzzled; for if it was Isabel they were seeking it was not likely they would look for her there.

"Are you sure she does not frequent the house of Monsieur St. George?"

"Quite certain!" answered Agnes with confidence. Whereupon, the commissaire after a moment's reflection arose and left the room. Upwards of a quarter of an hour had elapsed

before he reappeared, and when he did, it was in company with a lady whom Agnes immediately recognized as one of the *habituées* of the Rue de Helder, where she had seen her almost every night during her visit. She was an Englishwoman; at least, so she herself said, though Agnes would not have discovered it, for her manner and appearance was French, and she spoke the language like a native. Madame St. George had mentioned that she had come to France when very young. She was a handsome woman, extremely well dressed, and did not look more than eight-and-twenty. She had married a Frenchman, and her name was Guérin.

"You are acquainted with this lady?" said the Commissary.

"Yes," answered Agnes, "I have seen her at Monsieur St. George's."

"And it is from her you received this ring which I hold in my hand?"

"Oh! no," she answered. Whereupon the lady smiled triumphantly.

"Vous voyez comme vous vous trompez, monsieur," she said.

"C'est possible, madame; mais je ne le erois pas!" said he, and requesting the lady to follow him, he was about to leave the room, when Agnes rose and begged to represent to him the extreme inconvenience she should suffer if longer detained.

"I have taken my place for Calais in to-night's diligence," she urged, "and paid for it;" to which the Commissaire answered he was very sorry but it could not be helped; and so left the room.

She had sat for a long time looking through the dirty window into the dull street, weeping with impatience and vexation, when at length the door opened again, and the two men who had brought her there made their appearance, and civilly requested permission to conduct her downstairs. At the gate stood a *fiacre*, into which they handed her; one stepped in and the other mounted to the box.

"Thank Heaven!" thought Agnes, "they've done with me at last!"

CHAPTER LI.

WE parted with Agnes just now as she was handed into a *fiacre* congratulating herself on the termination of this tiresome investigation, though wondering whither she was to be conducted next.

A few minutes, however, revealed the mystery; for presently the driver stopped before a large hotel in the Champs Elysées, which she recognized as the one inhabited by the Ravenscliffe family, and a cold shudder of dread crept over her as the gates opened and the coach drove into the court. Isabel's secret then was no longer a secret. But what could they want with her?

She had not much time to perplex herself with the question, for presently the door was opened, she was handed out, and accompanied by the two officers and a very dignified person in black, who she concluded to be one of the upper servants, she was conducted up the first flight of stairs, and desired to take a seat in the anteroom whilst the gentleman in black announced her arrival.

"Cette femme est arrivée, miladi," said he, passing into an inner chamber where Lady Georgina reclined on a sofa.

"And what sort of person is she? Of what class?"

"Bourgeoise il me semble, mais jeune et belle."

"Does she speak French?"

"Very little, they say."

"But enough to understand your questions?"

"I doubt it. Moreover, excusez, I think miladi should speak to her; she will probably be more communicative to miladi. Aussi elle à l'air parfaitement modeste; et peut-être elle refusera de se confier à moi!"

"It's extremely embarrassing! at the same time I feel it indispensable to penetrate this mystery; I suppose I must see her, Millot?"

"Le dîner est servi, miladi!" said a servant, entering at the opposite door.

"The young woman can wait miladi's leisure," said Millot, attending his mistress into the *salle à manger*.

"Very well, I'll see her by-and-bye," said Lady Georgina. "Let Miss Grosvenor know that dinner is ready."

"Mademoiselle Grosvenor est avertie, miladi;" and at the same time, pale and *abattue*, Isabel entered the room, and silently took her seat at the table; and whilst the two ladies, in all the discomfort of dislike and estrangement, are sipping their soup, we will retrace our steps, in order to show in a few words how it came about that Agnes found herself where she so little wished or expected to be.

To explain Mr. Capel's absence, it is sufficient to say, that, as Isabel had apprehended, the attempt to dispose of the ring had subjected him to suspicion. There had been a robbery of jewels shortly before, the parties concerned in which had not yet been detected; and his obstinate refusal to reveal where he got the article he wanted to sell, had led to his detention. Fearing to expose Isabel to inconvenience, he had declined also to disclose his name and address; and it was not till Pierre went to give notice of the disappearance of one of his *locataires*, that they ascertained who he was, and proceeded to prosecute the inquiry further by arresting Agnes.

The sagacity of the commissaire, however, enabled him to form a pretty just opinion of his two *détenus*. He believed they were telling him the truth, and at first imagined them to be the unconscious tools of practised rogues; till the assurance of Agnes, that Madame Guérin was an utter stranger to the whole affair, inclined them to suspect they were on a wrong scent, several circumstances having combined to criminate her in the previous investigation regarding the robbery. This persuasion—namely, that they were not on the right track—was confirmed, on sending for Pierre, who assured them that he had never seen Madame Guérin before. The *petite dame* who had been staying with Madame Gibson was a much smaller person, and also younger by several years. It was his wife's opinion, also, that she was *une dame comme il faut*, her hands were so white, and her feet so small; the linen she wore also, when she came, was very fine, and *garni d'une Valenciennes superbe*.

Pierre was then interrogated as to the period of her arrival, which being found to coincide precisely with Isabel's disappearance, other suspicions began to dawn. Could the *petite dame* be the aristocratic fugitive who had formed a romantic attachment to the young student, and eloped to him? and had his detention

at the police-office driven her to some new act of desperation or imprudence? To clear up this point the commissaire himself stepped into his cabriolet, and immediately drove to the Hôtel de Breteuil, where he learned the family affliction, and that the elder members of it had quitted Paris. His request, however, to speak a few words with *quelque domestique de confiance*, brought down Millot, to whom he told his errand.

"We have traces," he said, "of a lady, *jeune et belle*, who came to a house in the Rue Joubert, under very singular circumstances, on the very night, and shortly after the hour of the disappearance of the *démoiselle* from this hotel."

"But we have her here; she is come back," said Millot.

"When did she come?"

"Yesterday afternoon, about five o'clock."

"Précisément. En fiacre?"

"Oui."

"La même. I have here two rings of value which have been offered for sale by the persons in whose company she spent the interval of her absence, and which, I suspect, belong to her. Will you have the goodness to inquire whether she really gave them to these people?"

Millot was Lady Georgina's confidential man, and aware that his mistress was on all accounts very desirous of knowing where the young lady had been, instead of carrying the rings to Isabel he took them to her ladyship, who recognized them at once; the rather that one of the two had been presented by herself as a wedding gift.

The wonder and consternation of Lady Georgina when she heard the circumstances the commissaire had to relate, may be conceived. Who could this brodeuse be? Mrs. Gibson and Mr. Capel! Two persons that it seemed utterly impossible Isabel could have been previously acquainted with! The thing was quite inexplicable. But the skein must be unravelled somehow; and as nothing was to be extracted from the young lady herself, it was resolved to see this Mrs. Gibson, and try what could be learned from her. This was the occasion of Agnes's finding herself at the Hôtel de Breteuil.

The temporary modification of hostility that had arisen out of Lady Georgina's delusion with respect to the rank of the parties with whom she had taken refuge was, of course, terminated by the disclosures of the commissaire; and Isabel found her sister-in-law as haughty, cold, and imperious as she had shown herself on their first meeting.

Dinner being over they separated; and Lady Georgina desired Millot to introduce the person that had come from the police-office.

When Agnes was requested to follow him, it was with no little tremor she complied; for though she expected to see Isabel, she thought she should see Lady Grosvenor also, of whom she stood in great awe. When she perceived Lady Georgina, however, she was less abashed. Her dislike diminished her fear; besides, she owed her nothing—there was no duty, no obligation. She stood, therefore, erect and possessed, but modestly, before the great lady, who was seated in her *fauteuil* by the fireside. There was a beautiful ormolu lamp on the table, which shed a tempered light around; but Agnes stood in the shade.

“Come forward!” said Lady Georgina, surveying her from head to foot, without recognizing the little plebeian whom she had pushed off the form in the dancing-school. “Your name is Gibson, I think?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“And you live in the Rue Joubert?”

“I do, at present.”

“And you’re an embroideress?”

“I embroider muslin sometimes.”

“Is that the way you support yourself?”

“Sometimes.”

“Do you reside in France?”

“No. I’ve been here some months.”

“Do you live alone? Where’s your husband?”

“Dead!” answered Agnes, as her thoughts reverted to Lionel.

“Have you ever been employed by the ladies of this family?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Oh!” thought Lady Georgina, “I begin to comprehend. This woman has been employed upon the *trousseau*, and in that way Bel has become acquainted with her. And pray is it true that one of Sir Francis Grosvenor’s daughters has been living under your roof?” Agnes was silent. “Will you have the goodness to answer me?” continued her ladyship, haughtily; “I wish to know whether I have been rightly informed.”

Agnes hesitated for a moment. If Isabel had confessed, what need of this interrogative? If she had not, she probably wished her sister-in-law to remain in ignorance of the fact.

“The ladies themselves could best answer that, ma’am,” she said.

"You equivocate," said her ladyship, sarcastically.

"No, ma'am, what I said was quite true."

"It's altogether the most inconceivable, the most shocking, the most disgraceful *imbroglio*—I really cannot understand it. And this man too, that seems mixed up with the affair—who is he? Capel, I think they call him. Is he a relation of yours?"

"No, ma'am; he's only a lodger in the same house. He lives on the floor above mine."

"And is it possible that Miss Grosvenor should have formed an acquaintance with such a person?" Agnes was again silent.

"I suppose you introduced this person to her?"

"No, ma'am, I did not."

"I perceive you have been tutored, and your evasions are no doubt very ingenious. Perhaps if Miss Grosvenor were to see you, you would not recognize each other."

On saying which she rang a small silver bell that stood on the table beside her.

"Millot," she said as that unexceptional domestic entered, "tell Miss Grosvenor I request she will favour me with her company for a few moments."

Probably the desire of mortifying and triumphing over Isabel had more to do in prompting this expedient, than the hope of eliciting the truth.

After delivering this order, her ladyship sat with her eyes fixed on the door, whilst Agnes stood with all the appearance of imperturbable composure, although in reality agitated at the prospect of seeing her late guest under such unexpected circumstances.

Without the most distant suspicion of the object of the summons, Isabel obeyed it, closely attended by Millot, who opened the door of the *boudoir* and announced her. Agnes stood in the shade, with her bonnet on, the veil, though thrown up, partly shading her face. Isabel passed her, and approached the table saying, "Did you want me?"

"I believe this is a friend of yours. I really admire the taste with which you select your acquaintance."

"I might make a worse selection," answered Isabel, holding out her hand. "I am under great obligations to Agnes, and but for her kindness, should most likely not be alive at this moment."

"Agnes!" reiterated Lady Georgina, struck by the name, and looking at her visitor with greater attention. "Is it possible that this is the girl I used to see at Ravenscliffe? Oh, I am

not at all surprised then at what has happened. I never could understand Lady Grosvenor encouraging such people about her daughters. And pray what has brought you to Paris?" she added, contemptuously.

"You have no right to inquire, Georgina," said Isabel. "She is as much at liberty to come to Paris as we are. My dear Agnes," she continued, "I am very sorry that your kindness to me should have exposed you to this annoyance, and I assure you it is not with my connivance. The fact is, Georgina—for I see that, for Agnes's sake, I must now confess that which I designed to reserve for mamma and papa—the fact is, that I quitted this house with the intention of never entering either this or any other door again. I did not know that Agnes was in Paris; chance alone brought us together. She gave me shelter, nursed me through a dangerous illness with sisterly kindness, and spent all the little money she had in supplying my necessities. I leave you to judge, therefore, how far you are justified in insulting her to whom I am under such great obligations."

"The greater pity. Obligations that cannot be too much lamented," said Lady Georgina, as she rang the bell; "and the sooner they are cancelled the better. Millot, bring me some money."

"How much would miladi desire?"

"Four or five hundred francs,—five hundred; will that sum reimburse you?"

"Yes," answered Agnes, "and much more. But I decline taking it."

"Take it from me, Agnes," said Isabel. "I shall repay it to Lady Georgina; and I am very glad to have the opportunity of giving it to you, not to discharge the obligation I owe you—that will always remain; but I know you distressed yourself for me, and you must want the money."

"I should wish to return the ring you left," said Agnes; "but they have it at the police-office, and I don't know whether they'll give it me back."

"It is here," said Lady Georgina, producing both the rings.

"The police!" exclaimed Isabel. "And here is the other, I see," she said, looking significantly at Agnes. "Where was that found?"

"I don't know," returned she.

"It seems to have been in the possession of another of your respectable acquaintance," said Georgina, "whom the police very properly detained on suspicion. Enfin," she said, raising

her hands and her shoulders with a deprecating gesture, "c'est à mourir de honte."

"I am very sorry—very sorry, indeed. Pray say so for me!" exclaimed Isabel, blushing, trembling, and with the tears rising to her eyes, as the full tide of recollections connected with Mr. Capel rushed to her mind. "I am so grieved that anybody should have suffered inconvenience on my account. Don't forget to say so, Agnes."

"I will not."

Isabel longed to obtain more intelligence, but her consciousness forbade her to ask it.



CHAPTER LII.

WHEN Leighton found that Mr. Grosvenor was really dead, nothing could exceed his disappointment. He had begun to build hopes of retrieving his fortunes, but his late master's compassion was the scaffolding on which they all rested, and he saw nothing now before him but starvation. As the cause—in some degree innocent cause—of the catastrophe, he felt more resentment towards Mr. Watson than he had ever felt towards mortal before, a circumstance which arose from the natural antipathy which he entertained towards that gentleman requiring only a small infusion of injury to effervesce it into an active enmity. He would have liked to do him some harm; and perhaps he might by exposing his connection with Atherton and the dealings about the horse, but who would listen to him, more especially as he could prove nothing against them? He did not see what he could do; but if the opportunity ever offered, he resolved not to let it slip. Those were his present sentiments, but not being a man of vivid feelings or strong resentments, they would probably have expired before any such opportunity offered, but for certain circumstances that unexpectedly opened a way to their gratification. In the meanwhile, the necessities of the moment had to be supplied; and as he quitted the Morgue, it occurred to him to go to Watson and tell him what had happened. Besides, he thought he should like to see how he took the news; so he proceeded forthwith to his lodgings, and inquired if he was at home.

"Say I come from the Hôtel de Breteuil," said he, in order to secure an audience.

Like everybody who lives upon expedients, Lewis Watson spent his money freely when he had any; and having just received his share of the equine transaction, he was at that moment indulging in a late and luxurious breakfast, with Atherton for his guest.

"Somebody from the Hôtel de Breteuil," said he, glancing at his companion. "What the devil can that be about? Anything about the horse, I wonder?"

"You know nothing about the horse, you know," said Atherton. "Let him come in."

Watson would have preferred not being seen by Lionel's messenger in the company of one so nearly connected with Firebrass, but he was afraid of offending Atherton, and forbore to ask him the favour of stepping into the next room.

"Oh, it's you!" he said, carelessly, on perceiving the ex-valet. "Do you come from Mr. Grosvenor?"

"I come from the Hôtel de Breteuil, sir. Perhaps you don't know what has happened?"

"Happened! no—where? Happened to who?" inquired Watson, with suppressed eagerness; for, like most people who expect an inheritance, near or remote, the extinction of the present possessors could never have taken him by surprise. It would be well if everybody was as well prepared for their own death as he was for theirs, every one of them.

"To Mr. Grosvenor, sir."

"What has happened to him?" said he, the colour rushing into his face; whilst Atherton lay down his knife and fork, and looked inquiringly at Leighton.

"He's dead, sir!"

"Dead!" reiterated Lewis, turning pale from the violence of his emotions. "You're surely mistaken."

"No, sir. I've seen his body at the Morgue. He was thrown from his horse in the Bois de Boulogne, as he was returning yesterday evening from the country, and was found this morning by a woodcutter."

When Leighton pronounced the word *horse*, Atherton resumed his knife and fork, and went on with his breakfast.

"Good God! And you have actually seen him?"

"Yes, sir; I'm just come from there now—that is, from the Morgue."

"A horse, you say? Do you know what horse?"

"Yes, sir; at least, I believe it was one Mr. Grosvenor had just bought at Corbillon's."

"At Corbillon's! I didn't know he dealt there."

"I warned him against buying the horse," said Leighton, without noticing this last assertion, "but he wouldn't be persuaded."

"You warned him? Why? What did you know about the horse?"

"I knew he wasn't safe, and that there would most likely be an accident."

By this time Mr. Watson had recovered his surprise at the first announcement of the news, and it required little discernment to detect gleams of satisfaction breaking through his assumed concern. On learning the character of the animal, however, his eye involuntarily turned towards Atherton, who continued eating his *œufs au jus* with imperturbable composure.

"He nearly killed two people in Dublin," continued Leighton; "one of them was the Hon. Mr. Luttrell, and the other was one of the rough-riders at Dycer's. There are people here that know the character of the horse very well."

At this moment the door opened, and in rushed a young man whom Leighton had occasionally seen in the company of Watson.

"Huzzah!" cried he. "What will you give me for the best news you ever had in your life? Come, it's worth something handsome, I can tell you;" and as Watson, who guessed his errand, hesitated a moment what to say before Leighton, the other continued: "Lionel Grosvenor's dead, thrown from his horse in the Bois de Boulogne, skull fractured, they say, but unmistakably dead; and now, old boy, you've only to strangle the brat, and the fortune's yours."

Watson would have preferred at that moment to have strangled him. Leighton was a poor, broken-down servant, out of place, and bore him no ill-will that he knew of; but his acquaintance with the character of the horse might be unpleasant, should any accident disclose his own connection with that questionable transaction. There were other reasons, too, why he did not wish Leighton to suppose him desirous of his cousin's death. These untimely congratulations, therefore, annoyed him, and he answered with some asperity,—

"I really don't know what you mean, Blessington."

"The devil you don't!"

"If you expect me to rejoice at my cousin's death, you are

very much mistaken. Besides, what advantage could it possibly bring to me when he leaves an heir?"

"An heir! Yes, but what sort of an heir? A ricketty brat, that you told me yourself could not possibly survive to manhood."

"I told you the boy was delicate, and I was afraid he might not; but I assure you I consider the death of my cousin Lionel a very melancholy event, and I regret it very much."

Mr. Blessington drew a long face and stroked it down with his left hand, whilst with his right he took out his pocket-handkerchief. "Oh, very well," he said, "I can be as melancholy as another man, when I see it's the cue of my company. Come," he continued, throwing himself down before the fire,

"Let's sit upon the ground,
And tell sad stories of the death of cousins.
How some——"

"Well, Leighton," said Mr. Watson, interrupting the quotation, and at the same time drawing a sovereign from his now well-lined pocket, "I'm much obliged to you for calling, and I'm sorry you are not the bearer of better news."

"What?" said Blessington, "is Lady Georgina in the straw? Another son? That *would* be the devil!"

Leighton put the sovereign in his pocket, bowed, and was about to withdraw, when he bethought himself of saying, "That Mr. Grosvenor was a great loss to him, he having promised to find him some employment. I've been a great sufferer, sir, for a thing I had no hand in whatever; and that Mr. Grosvenor knew; and if he had lived, he would have made it up to me."

"You want a situation?" said Watson, benevolently.

"Yes, sir, I do; and if you could help me to one, I should be very thankful."

"Well, I must think about it; I'm not sure that I shall not be wanting a servant myself. Leave your address, and you shall hear from me."

He had no intention whatever of taking the man into his service when he said this; but he wished to make it his interest to keep well with him. The ruse was thrown away, however, for the other saw through it; the benevolence not being in keeping with Watson's late behaviour, which was rather in accordance with his private conviction that every time Leighton lifted his hat to him, it indicated a design upon his purse.

"I wish, Blessington, you'd take care what you say before people you don't know," said Mr. Watson.

"I saw the fellow was only a servant," said Blessington; "besides, what does it signify? You didn't kill your cousin, did you? And they can't do you out of your money, if you danced a hornpipe at his funeral."

"Ah! by the bye, the funeral!" said Watson, "I ought to be at that funeral, but I suppose they won't invite me."

It was an admirable thing to see Atherton's composure during the whole of this scene, and the enviable appetite with which he enjoyed his *œufs au jus* and his *rogons au vin de Champagne*. On the catastrophe he had heard narrated, he made no remark whatever; but when he had finished eating, and used his finger-glass *à la Française*, he threw down his napkin, pushed back his chair, and walking to the pier-glass, buttoned his coat, took up his hat and gloves, saying, "Come, will you walk?" with an air of indifference worthy of a Stoic, who, considering that men die every day, could see nothing worthy of notice in the event that had just occurred.

In the meantime, Leighton had descended the stairs and reached the end of the street, without knowing what he was about; he was as unconscious as if he had been walking in his sleep. A rush of new thoughts possessed his brain—all confused, and jumbled, and cloudy—but still with something looming out of them that he could not define.

Mr. Watson was the next heir to the Ravenscliffe estate, was he? He (Leighton) had never dreamed of such a thing. A poor man, the succession must have been an affair of life and death to him; and he no doubt had eagerly desired his cousin's decease. He felt he should have done the same himself. What a fine chance the horse presented! Atherton had probably entered into the scheme in the hope of future recompense, and brought over the animal; whilst Watson undertook to recommend him to Lionel, whose ignorance and obstinacy on the subject of horses was notorious. The whole thing seemed as clear as day; and Leighton felt he had got hold of an important and valuable secret; but how could he avail himself of it? How make it pay? He might inform the family, and recommend them to take care of the heir; but would they believe him? It was not likely. But might not the knowledge he possessed give him a power over Watson? To some people that might have been profitable, but he distrusted his own capabilities for using such an engine; he wanted energy, will, and wickedness for it.

Then there were other parts of Watson's conduct that he began to suspect were not without some design, tending to the one great end, although he could not discern the relation betwixt them, especially his desire to separate Lionel and Agnes. Vague notions began to float in his brain connected with past events; small circumstances assumed a new importance. He felt elated and busy as if he had an object to pursue, though he did not clearly know what that object was.



CHAPTER LIII.

WHEN Agnes was dismissed by Lady Georgina she found herself at liberty; and, to the real joy of Pierre and Barbara, she reappeared at her lodgings, where she found Mr. Capel had arrived before her.

A few words of explanation sufficed to put them in possession of each other's adventures; but Mr. Capel had evidently no interest in anything that did not concern Isabel, whose message Agnes faithfully delivered, without disclosing her name; a reservation she thought it on all accounts her duty to observe—a duty, be it said, *en passant*, it cost her little self-denial to fulfil.

Agnes next informed him of her intention to depart immediately, and his expressions of regret were so vivid and evidently sincere, that they appeared to indicate a warmer regard than she had believed he entertained for her. He said he should return to England himself as soon as he could arrange some little matters regarding the publication of a paper he had read at the Observatoire, on Jupiter's satellites.

Poor Agnes wondered what Jupiter's satellites were; and she would have inquired had not the thought crossed her that Isabel would know without asking.

“But an acquaintance formed under such interesting circumstances must not terminate so abruptly,” he said. “I hope you'll allow me to call on you in London.”

“I shall be very glad to see you,” she answered, and gave him her address.

He was very kind, and desirous of being useful to her in

every way he could; but, ever and anon, his conversation reverted to the friend. He hoped she would be happier than she had been, and that her family would make no more attempts to force her into a marriage she disliked.

"But, perhaps," he said, "she had altered her mind, and intends to accept the gentleman she was engaged to?"

Agnes said she did not think so; at the same time it might be difficult to resist the united wills of her family.

A cloud passed over his face as she said this, and he expatiated eloquently on the barbarity of constraining so amiable, gentle, and lovely a creature to pass her life with one to whom she could not give her heart. In short, it was evident that, although he was talking to Agnes, his thoughts were with Isabel; and as his passion appeared at the moment perfectly hopeless, she could afford to pity him. In the evening he escorted her to the diligence, and, as he bade her farewell, he said he did not think it would be very long before they met again.

It was a rough, rainy, blowy day when they arrived at Calais, and there appeared some doubts of the packet sailing. Packets did not *steam* then—they sailed. However, after some delay, notice was given to the passengers to embark; and Agnes, who found the place anything but agreeable, and now that she was once on her way, felt very anxious to get home to her sister, eagerly responded to the invitation which some more timid travellers declined.

The wind was adverse, and they had not been long out of the harbour before the vessel began to toss and heave in a manner that soon cleared the deck of all but the crew; and at length, after they had been cheered with the intelligence that they were so near to Dover that the people on the pier, who were assembled to watch their arrival, could be discerned, it was found impossible to get into the harbour, and they were obliged to put out again and make for Deal, where they landed late at night—sick, wet, and weary—to fall victims into the jaws of the touters for the different hotels.

Agnes and two or three more were seized upon and carried off by the waiter of a small inn, called the Crown and Anchor, where the little party of voyagers, made friends by their misfortune, supped together. Amongst them was a comely young woman, with her husband, to whom Agnes rendered herself agreeable, by occasionally relieving the mother of the weight of her chubby child.

As they were all going to London they agreed to travel together; but the next day being Sunday, it proved, on inquiry, that fewer coaches ran than on other days, and they could not find places, having deferred their application too long for the morning conveyances: they therefore secured them for the evening, and retired to bed, resolved to enjoy a long rest, and indulge themselves with a late breakfast.

Agnes was at sea all night, and, after a disturbed sleep, awoke with a headache. Her fellow-traveller, the young woman, being not much better, they agreed to take a stroll through the town and its environs, to refresh themselves. In the afternoon Agnes said she should like to go to church; the young mother could not leave her infant, but the husband expressed his willingness to accompany her; so they went to St. Peter's, and found a seat in the aisle. The church and the congregation were so unlike anything Agnes had seen for a long time, that her thoughts wandered back to the old times when she used to attend the service at Ellerton, with her father and mother, till she was recalled by a voice from the pulpit, crying, "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, O Lord!" She fancied she had heard that voice before, and as she rose with the congregation, and the face of the clergyman met her view, she saw that it was that of the person who had performed the mock ceremony of her marriage in the chapel at Ravenscliffe.

"Mock ceremony!"—that was what Mr. Conyers had called it—"a very improper jest." But if he were really a clergyman, how could it be a mock ceremony? She wondered what constituted a real one. She knew it was customary to be asked in church—could that be the omission that invalidated the bond? But perhaps she was mistaken in the identity. A strong resemblance may have deceived her, and she looked and listened again. There was no mistake. Besides the features and voice, the reader had a peculiar way of pronouncing certain words which had struck her ear on the first occasion, and which she now recognized as the same beyond a doubt.

Engrossed with this discovery, she heard no more of the service, till she found herself on her feet coming out with the rest.

"What is the name of the gentleman that read prayers?" she inquired of the pew-opener as she passed.

"The Rev. Mr. Watson," answered the woman.

"Watson?"

"Yes; he's the new curate."

"Does he come from any part about Bristol?" inquired Hewson, Agnes's companion; but the stream pouring out, separated them, and intercepted the answer. "There was a Rev. Mr. Watson down near where I come from," continued Hewson, "that had two sons; and when first I went to service, I've often been at the vicarage with messages. I shouldn't wonder if this was one of those two boys."

"Do you see a likeness?" inquired Agnes, whose curiosity was on the alert.

"I couldn't say that, they were so young; the eldest was away at a boarding-school, I believe. However, Watson's a common enough name in most parts of England."

On that evening they started for London, whither they arrived on Monday. When they were drawing near their journey's end, Mrs. Hewson told Agnes that they would be very glad if she would call upon them, and gave their address.

"That is my sister's," she said, "and we shall be there for the present—that is, I and the child; for Hewson is going down to the country on a little business; but wherever we are, my sister's sure to know."

And so they parted. They went their way with a porter carrying their luggage, whilst Agnes stepped into a coach, and drove home.

Martha was sitting on the same chair as when she had last seen her at work, and running seams, as if she had been doing so uninterruptedly ever since they parted. When the door opened, and she found Agnes's arms about her neck, she wept for joy. She had been expecting her some days, but had given her up, so that her arrival had all the charm of a surprise.

"And how glad John will be!" she exclaimed. "He was so disappointed last night that you didn't come."

Then Agnes had to narrate all her adventures, which she had already imperfectly sketched in her letters; but the first intelligence she gave was the lamentable death of Lionel, and her meeting with the pretended clergyman at Deal.

"He is a real one now," she said, "whatever he may have been then."

When she came to the period of Isabel's arrival in the Rue Joubert, and Martha learned that she had been her sister's guest for several weeks, nothing could exceed her amazement. In short, the incidents of Agnes's journey were altogether sufficiently extraordinary to excite the most unimaginative mind.

Who that has had an object dear to her heart in some

jeopardy—ill, lost, or involved in peril—has not figured to herself as she approached the spot where her doubts were to be solved all the possible complexions the news might assume, often fearing when there was little cause, and hoping against reason, as if hope grew out of despair? So Agnes's heart fluttered as she drew near her home. Would not Martha have something to tell her of her boy? It was not long since she had received a letter from her, certainly, and she had nothing to tell then; on the contrary, she said all their researches and inquiries had been utterly fruitless; but that was a fortnight ago—many things might have occurred in a fortnight. What if she should find him there asleep in his crib, or hanging upon Martha's apron? It was not impossible—stranger things have happened. But, alas! Martha was alone; and there was neither toy, nor crib, nor trace of childhood in the room. Still there might be some news in store for her, and with an unconscious desire to husband her hope, she forbore to ask questions.

If Martha had any news, good or bad, it would soon come; and though her bosom was stirred with anxiety to know, she forbore, for some time, to inquire.

In the meanwhile, John Gibson arrived, and was both surprised and overjoyed to see her; but as soon as the first glow of the meeting was over, she thought he looked more grave and depressed than she could account for. To be sure, his self-reproach about the child had been very acute; and the sight of her, after her absence, had probably revived his remorse. To spare him, therefore, she said nothing on the subject nearest her heart, but talked of what had happened since they met, the particulars of which John promised to come and hear in the evening.

When he was gone, Agnes summoned resolution, and at length said,—

“Well, Martha, and have you no news?”

“About what, dear?” asked Martha, looking down at her work.

“About what! About my boy, to be sure. Oh, Martha, you've heard something! He's dead! I see by your face, he's dead!”

“No, no; indeed, it's no such thing,” cried Martha. “Perhaps I have heard something, but I hardly know whether it is good or bad; but he's not dead, only——”

“Say what it is, for God's sake!” gasped Agnes.

“I don't know whether you are able to bear it,” said

Martha, "and yet I think you should be glad; it might have been so much worse."

"What is it? I can bear anything. For merey's sake, tell me what it is!"

Martha rose from her seat, unlocked a mahogany box that stood upon the drawers, drew from it a letter, and placed it in her sister's hand.

"Read that," she said.

Agnes took the paper, but she could not read it; at first she could not even look at it. She knew that it contained her doom, her sentence—of death! Yes, Martha's white cheeks and tearful eyes showed that, and she understood now why John had looked so grave.

"When did it come?" she said.

"Only the day before yesterday."

"By the post?"

"Yes."

"Who from?"

"We don't know. It's only signed, '*A friend.*'"

"No date?"

"No; read it."

But Agnes sat trembling, and as pale as a statue, with the letter in her hand. It was written on a shabby bit of paper, half a sheet of foolscap, and the manner in which it was folded indicated little taste for symmetry. The address was crowded into one corner, and the writing was that of an untaught hand. By the post-mark it appeared to have been dropped into a box in Oxford Street; and it was closed with a red wafer, but without any impression.

"Then all hope is gone. Oh, my boy! my boy! my darling, darling child!" cried Agnes, laying her head upon the table, and bursting into a passion of tears. "I never could believe it. I have always hoped and hoped; I did not know how much I had hoped till now. I thought there must be some help, some protection against such cruelty and wickedness. If it's a crime to take one's life, and people are sought out and punished for it, why won't they seek those who have taken my child, who was a thousand times dearer to me than my life?"

"Read it, dear, read it. Perhaps it's not so bad as you think," said Martha.

"I can't—I haven't courage," sobbed Agnes. "Read it—read it to me yourself."

CHAPTER LIV.

ABOUT three weeks previous to the events detailed in the last chapter, a woman lay sick in an upper chamber of a house in Baker Street. She was somewhat seriously ill, though not so bad as she thought she was; but the apothecary who had been summoned to attend her, when her own skill proved inefficacious, made it a point to look grave and pompous on such occasions, because, the worse his patients had been, or fancied they had been, the more grateful they felt to him when they found themselves getting well again. Most people—women especially—who recover from a severe malady, are found to entertain an enthusiastic opinion of their doctor's skill, little dreaming where they would have been, nine times in ten, if Nature had not been more skilful than he.

Beside her bed sat a middle-aged man, wearing the dress of a gentleman's servant, but with a certain stiffness of the neck and erectness of carriage that, together with the cropped head of hair, bespoke him for a soldier. This woman was Mrs. Driscoll, and the man was David, her husband, who had just re-entered the room after conducting the doctor to the door, during which process the learned man had looked so grave and wise, and had responded to David's questions regarding his wife's condition so unsatisfactorily, that the conjugal affections took the alarm, and the husband's countenance reflected the gravity of the apothecary's. The sick woman scanned it seriously.

"What does he say, David? There's no danger, is there?"

"No, no, I hope not," answered David, passing his hand over his mouth.

"Does he think I'm very ill?"

"Why, you're not well, you know; but he hopes you'll be better."

"Hope? What does he mean by *hope*?"

"Why, what would you have him say? He can't tell, you know."

"I wouldn't give a groat for a doctor that can't tell," said

Mrs. Driscoll. "I don't believe I'm so bad as he wants to make me out."

"Bad and good's in the hands of the Lord, as master says," returned David. "It's not possible for man to say."

"Good Lord, David, how you talk! One 'ud think I was going to die!"

"No, no; not so bad as that, I hope. Come, come, old woman, you must keep up your spirits. Thinking so much about it won't do you no good, any way."

"It's you make me think about it, David, by the way you talk."

"I didn't say anything to frighten you, that I know," said David.

"But you looked enough to frighten one," reiterated his wife.

"Well, I didn't mean it," answered David.

After this Mrs. Driscoll was silent for a little while, and her husband, thinking she was falling asleep, rose softly, and was making his way on tip-toe out of the room. But she heard him.

"Where are you going, David?"

"I was only going below a bit."

"Don't go; I want to speak to you."

"I don't think you ought to talk so much; it's bad for people when they're ill."

"But I've got something on my mind; and if I thought there was any danger, I should like to tell it you."

This confession raised David's curiosity considerably. He had once been jealous of a certain ensign, who he fancied had been over civil to his wife. The married pair had had some squabbles on the subject, and upon this hint the husband's fancy took wing immediately in that direction.

"Well," said he, "there's no doubt you're pretty bad, and if you've got something on your mind, I wouldn't say but it might be best to make a clean breast of it."

Upon hearing this, Mrs. Driscoll, who thought herself doomed, burst into a flood of tears, accusing David of not caring whether she lived or died, and of hard-heartedness in general; whereupon he tried to soothe her, telling her that he did not think she was so bad after all, but that no doubt she would be better for relieving her mind of the load that oppressed it.

"But I don't like to tell you, David," she said, when he had got her into a better temper. "I'm afraid you'll be so angry."

This apprehension confirmed David in his suspicions, and he did begin to feel not a little irritated. "Come, come," he said,

"you may as well have it out. I always suspected it. There ain't so much smoke without some fire."

"You always suspected what?" asked his wife.

"You know very well, and good reason I had."

"What, your mind's not harping on young Mr. Cambell again?"

"Why, what is it, if it's not about Mr. Cambell?"

"It's about a very different person. I wish I'd no more to answer for than Mr. Cambell."

"Why, what the deuce! I never saw you intimate with nobody besides!"

"Pshaw! intimate! It's not about intimate at all. It's about the child—the master's child—Master Charles."

"What about him? He seems very well," answered the husband.

"Oh, David!" said she, weeping, "I can't keep it any longer. I must tell you."

"What do you mean? Can't keep what any longer?"

"Have patience, and give me a drink of the barley-water. I'll take a few minutes to rest, and then I'll tell you."

"Now, David, you must promise me not to be angry," she said, when she resumed speaking; "for I did it for the best, particularly for Helen."

"Well, what did you do?"

"I'm sure I took every care of the child, as if he'd been my own, and as it was my interest so to do; for if anything happened to him, the money stopped, and there was little likelihood of such another chance."

"That's true. But he looks uncommon healthy."

"Oh, David! little the Major thinks, when he's kissing and hugging him."

"What, is there anything the matter with the child?"

"Oh, David! he died—he died in the scarlet fever; and this is another!"

"What?" said the husband, staring at her; for he fancied she was becoming delirious.

"Helen sickened of it first, and I was nigh losing her; and just as she was a-getting well, Master Lawrence took it. I nursed him day and night, God knows! and the doctor came to him twice a-day; but we couldn't keep the life in him, do what we would."

"Well," said David, with an amazed countenance, for he was beginning to get a glimmering of the truth, "and was buried." J

“To be sure he was; and when I came back from seeing him laid in the ground, I sat me down and cried, for I was more vexed than words can tell; it was just a fortune to Helen, his being with me; and what was I to do with her if I went to service again?”

“That’s true. But how did you get this one?”

“Well, one day, just before Helen was taken ill, as I was going out with the children, Mrs. Smithers,—that was the woman of the house where we lodged in Duke Street, St. James’s,—said to me, says she, ‘You’re a-going out; you’re not a-going Adelphi ways, are you?’

“‘No,’ said I, ‘I’m going into the Park with the children.’

“‘Drat it!’ she said, ‘here’s a parcel I promised to take to John Street, Adelphi, yesterday, and I can’t get out for them new lodgers I’m expecting every minute, and I can’t send the maid, for the same reason.’

“‘Is it anything of consequence?’ I asked.

“‘Yes,’ she said. ‘It’s some papers for a lawyer there, that young Mr. Hartley left when he went away, begging I’d deliver them myself.’

“‘Well,’ said I, ‘I’ve been wanting to go as far as Fleet Street, to call on a person I know there, and I don’t care if I do it to-day, so I’ll leave your parcel as I go along.’

“So she thanked me, and away I went. That pain’s coming again. Isn’t it time I took them drops?”

“You’d better lie still a bit, and tell me the rest by-and-by,” said David.

Having entered on her confession, however, she was impatient to relieve herself of the secret, and as soon as she had gathered strength, she proceeded to say that it was on that day she had remarked a child playing about the steps of a door, apparently of the same age as her charge, and bearing a remarkable resemblance to him.

“Well,” she said, “when Master Charles was dead and buried, I couldn’t get that child out of my head, do what I would. Somehow, when I thought of that boy, it seemed as if he wasn’t dead, after all, and I felt as if somebody was driving me to go to the Adelphi, and see if he was still there. And there he was, sure enough; for it was fine, warm, summer weather, and the door being open, he seemed to be allowed to play upon the step as he liked.

“Well, the more I saw of him, the more I thought what a thing it would be for me, and for Helen, if I could get him

instead of the one that was gone; and for the major, too, for if he didn't know the difference, what would it signify to him? And no doubt the child belonged to some poor person, who perhaps had much ado to keep him; for I thought then he belonged to one of the servants in the hotel."

"And who did he belong to?"

"I'll tell you when I come to it. Well, one day, as I was agoing there, just to take a look at him, Helen saw a toy in a shop-window that she took a great fancy to; so I bought it for her, and as she was dragging it along—for it was a little carriage on wheels—what should the child do, but run after it. I'd made Helen speak to him before, whilst I walked a little way off, that they might get acquainted; so I said to him, 'If you'll come along with me, I'll buy you just such another;' and taking him by the hand, I led him away to the shop that was in the Strand. I declare to God, I had no intention of stealing the child that day; and if we had met anybody that claimed him, I should have said I was only going to give him the toy; but we didn't meet anybody; and when we came out of the shop, I walked on with him till we came to Charing Cross, and there I called a coach, and got into it, and I told the man to drive to Oxford Street. And as we went along, I bethought myself of what I should do; for now I'd got the child so easy, almost without trying for it, so that it seemed just like a Providence, I didn't like to give him up again; and I thought, the worst come to the worst, I could have said I found him in the street, and had taken him home for charity, for fear he should be run over.

"But now I'd got him, I didn't know what to do with him; for what could I say to Mrs. Smithers? Besides, I was afraid the child would cry for his own folks; and I wanted to accustom him to me, and for Helen to get used to him, as she was to Master Lawrence; and it happened lucky, that when Master Lawrence sickened, I had sent her away to my cousin Renton's, at Hampstead, for change of air; and when I got her back, poor thing, I only told her Master Charles was gone to see his poor mamma. She was puzzled at first, but she soon got used to the little stranger, and seemed to think it was Master Lawrence, as I told her it was."

This story was told with many breaks and rests, and occasional tears; but as David took it more kindly than she had expected, her remorse was somewhat deadened. She afterwards related, that after providing the child with a hat and

change of clothes, at a shop in Oxford Street, she had carried him to a friend of hers in the Edgware Road, whom she requested to take care of him and Helen for a couple of days, under pretence that there was a fever in the house she was lodging in, and that she must seek another. In the meantime she took apartments in that neighbourhood; and telling Mrs. Smithers she was going to leave London, she removed herself and her belongings thither, and then took the children home, where their infantile minds soon forgot the past.

Little Willie Gibson—for, of course, it was he—was too young to comprehend the change, or to feel it beyond the first twenty-four hours; and to Helen he filled the place of Master Lawrence, by which name, of course, he was called, so completely, that she soon forgot the little perplexity that had at first assailed her; and by the time Mrs. Driscoll received orders to proceed to Brighton, the whole scheme was so perfected, and all parties concerned were so well up in their parts, that there was neither difficulty nor danger in introducing the little boy to his aunt, Mrs. Archibald Lawrence, who had never seen the original of the counterfeit presented to her.

As Willie Gibson was an extremely pretty, pleasing child, she was, of course, delighted with her nephew, and struck with his resemblance to his father; and, in short, everything went on in such a smooth, easy, pleasant manner, that even Mrs. Driscoll herself had begun to forget all about the trifling substitution she had made, till Agnes's inopportune visit disturbed her repose.



CHAPTER LV

Mrs. DRISCOLL was not a whit better than the ordinary run of women of her class, and she had hitherto acted with that reasonable degree of honesty, combined with a due attention to her own interests, that we commonly meet with in such persons; but the strong temptation came, and led her astray. All her fortunes and schemes for the future rested on the life of the child; and the best quality she had, her maternal affection, helped to seduce her into the criminal act she had been guilty of.

As long as she did not know to whom the infant she had

kidnapped belonged, her remorse planted few thorns in her pillow; but the sight of Agnes had awakened some uncomfortable feelings. A fond parent herself, she understood the bereaved mother's anguish; and although self-preservation forbade restitution, she often regretted, if not the crime which had prospered so well, at least that the suffering should have fallen on one so sensitive. But there was nothing to be done. She could not risk the ruin and destruction that would follow on a confession, and she soothed her conscience, as well as she could, with the idea that she had improved the child's condition; rescuing him, perhaps, from abject poverty, to make him the cherished son and heir of an affluent father.

But other anxieties assailed her. Agnes was gone to France, but her absence was to be temporary. She might return as she went, and there was not a packet came in that might not bring her.

Mrs. Driscoll lived in terror of a second meeting; and even walking out with the children, especially when Mrs. Archibald would take them to the beach, to see the passengers come ashore, kept her in a state of worry and agitation indescribable, till she could quit the place, and get back to London.

But now a new and very unforeseen event came to disturb her. She was unwell with a severe fit of influenza, and had engaged a girl to take care of her children, when one day the postman brought her a letter. It was from Mrs. Archibald Lawrence, and was to the effect that the Major's regiment had been ordered home quite unexpectedly, and that Mrs. Driscoll and the child must return immediately to Brighton. But Mrs. Driscoll not being in a state to travel, Mrs. Tomkins was sent up to fetch the boy, whom his supposed father took to his arms and heart without a suspicion, although he avowed he thought him so much altered, that he should not have known him.

On the whole, Mrs. Driscoll was not sorry to be absent from so critical a meeting, which she soon learned, to her great satisfaction, had been extremely gratifying to the father. Of course, the boy did not know him—that was out of the question; but he was handsome and healthy, and all that a parent could desire.

Mrs. Driscoll's only *bête noire* now was Agnes, and the possibility of her falling in somewhere with the child; but in the meantime, the influenza was taking an ugly turn, and she was troubled by a fixed pain in her side, that alarmed her

Upon hearing which, the major sent up her husband to look after her ; and it was a few days subsequent to his arrival that he was amazed by this confession.

However, the pain in the side got better, and with returning health the remorse faded, and she contented herself with writing the letter that we lately left Agnes weeping over ; wherein she assured the mother that her child was safe and well, and would be brought up as the son of a gentleman, and inherit a fortune. "But," she added, "you'll never see him again ; and if you try, it might only lead to mischief, for the gentleman lives in foreign parts, and the child's gone to him across the water."

It was easy to discover Martha's address through her own sister, and having despatched this epistle, she felt she had discharged a duty, and recovered her spirits ; the more especially as Major Lawrence, when she joined him at Brighton, expressed the greatest satisfaction with the result of her careful tending. Charles was everything he could wish, and he quite doted on him.

After some time, however, it became necessary he should rejoin his regiment ; previous to which he proposed to stay a few weeks in London.

"And I suppose you'll go and see your handsome widow ?" said Mrs. Archibald, smiling.

"I feel I ought to call," answered Major Lawrence, "since she was so kind as to invite me."

"Certainly ; I know of no reason why you should not ; but widows are proverbially dangerous, you know. Take care of your heart."

The major answered that his heart was buried in the grave of his lost Eliza ; and having secured his place in the Highflyer, and packed up his portmanteau, he started straightway for the great city. When he had paid his visit to the Horse Guards, and settled a few other matters of business, he one morning, after taking a careful survey of himself in the glass, turned his steps in the direction of Russell Square, where he knocked at the door of our old acquaintance, Mrs. Aymer, who, it will be remembered, had accompanied her husband on a voyage to Jamaica, where circumstances connected with his property rendered his presence necessary. She went a wife but returned a widow, in the same vessel with Major Lawrence, who was not a little struck by her personal attractions and agreeable manners.

Mrs. Aymer was now mistress of herself, and, through her

husband's liberality, the possessor of a handsome fortune ; but she was still alone—she had no friends or companions. Mr. Aymer's relations detested her, if possible, more than when he was alive ; and the people she had known in her former condition she had necessarily dropped, and lost sight of.

In this splendid solitude, her mind reverted to Agnes, whose story had interested her feelings, and in whom she had found a companion that suited her, however different to herself. There could scarcely be a greater contrast, indeed, than betwixt the open, imprudent Mrs. Aymer and the reserved, self-possessed Agnes. Such contrasts, however, often agree well, when brought together ; and a letter was despatched to Paris, requesting a visit from Mrs. Gibson, as soon as she returned to England ; but Agnes had quitted France before it arrived.

Major Lawrence was a handsome, gentlemanly-looking man, with polished manners, and a decided military air ; but, since the death of his wife, he had taken what is called *a serious turn* ; that is, he forswore billiards and balls, shook his head at the light talk of his former companions, read prayers to his valet, acquired new views of sin, and set about working out his own salvation by a constant attendance at chapel, and a reverent attention to the grace before and after meat. In other respects, he was exactly the same man he had been before, his conversion being all upon the surface ; but he did not know that himself. Like the world in general, he mistook forms for realities, and thought to please God Almighty by genuflexions.

This *serious* temper of mind was a phenomenon Mrs. Aymer had never come athwart, and had it been exhibited by her husband, she would probably have given its manifestations a very unsympathetic reception ; but what would have displeased her in the uninteresting little West Indian merchant, bore a different aspect in the gallant Major ; so that when, on board the packet, he read prayers and sermons on a Sunday, and talked to her about the other world on a week-day, she found herself lending a patient ear to his discourses, and even occasionally making an effort to emulate feelings which, he assured her, since the death of his lost Eliza, afforded him the only satisfaction he was capable of.

But this new-born flame was too feeble to keep alive by itself, and after they parted at Portsmouth, and the neophyte came to London, it scarcely survived a week ; so that, when the Major arrived in Russell Square, he found his fellow-passenger in anything but a state of grace, though exactly in a state most

open to receive it; for, in the midst of luxury and abundance, she was dissatisfied and unhappy. Eminently sociable by nature, life to her without companionship was wretchedness; and, provided she had had a flourishing business that secured her from much self-denial, she would rather have been keeping a milliner's shop in Pall Mall than sitting alone in her splendid drawing-room, or driving through the streets in her well-lined carriage, where there was not a door open to her.

Under these circumstances, the visit of Major Lawrence was most welcome; and the reception she gave him so glad and warm, that, unaware as he was of her peculiar situation, it was impossible he could do otherwise than take it as a personal compliment; more especially when he cast his eyes around, and beheld the evidences of affluence that surrounded her; for serious people are by no means less influenced by external advantages than those reputed more lax.

As Major Lawrence, under his present vocation, thought it proper to drop a word in season on all occasions, it was not long before an opportunity presented itself of remarking on the insufficiency of all worldly prosperity to afford happiness—an observation that came so completely home to Mrs. Aymer's bosom, that she acceded to it with a heartfelt sincerity that there was no mistaking.

"I am sure I feel it so daily and hourly," she said. "I dare say there are many people who, seeing how I am situated here, would envy me, and think I ought to be very happy; but I am not, and yet I have good health, and every comfort in life that any one need desire."

"These are the instances I find so instructive," said Major Lawrence, "because I am sure the natural cheerfulness of your disposition would dispose you to contentment; but there is no real contentment in this life, be assured, from any source but one. We may sometimes deceive ourselves in the heyday of prosperity; but the first sorrow that reaches us shows that we have been building our house upon the sands."

"I have no doubt what you say is true," returned Mrs. Aymer; "but I have always heard people must have a vocation, and I am afraid I have not one."

"Seek and you shall find, my dear madam," said the major; "and I am sure, if I can be of any use to you, nothing would afford me greater pleasure."

CHAPTER LVI.

WE left Leighton, after his interview with Mr. Watson on the day of Lionel's death, or, at least, on the day it became known, replete with a sense of having something to do that was to help himself, though he could not see how he was to set about it, nor indeed what it was he was to set about. His head was in that state of excitement and confusion that is not unfrequently produced by a piece of unexpected good news which has thrown us off our equilibrium; and, in order to find some vent for the unusual effervescence, he proceeded to pay a visit to his new acquaintance, Tom Patton.

Tom was out, exercising his horses in the Champs Elysées; but he found Christie, his wife, at home, mending her husband's stockings, and rocking her child's cradle with her foot. When she learned that the gentleman had not only purchased the horse, but had fallen a victim to his vicious temper, she held up her hands with amazement.

"The Lord deliver us!" she exclaimed. "In the whole course of my life I never heard of such a thing. How could anybody find in their conscience to sell such a beast? Surely they couldn't know what sort he was!"

"I don't know that," answered Leighton, who was too full of his subject to keep his suspicions to himself; "I think it's been a conspiracy!"

"A what?" said Mrs. Patton.

"I believe them that sold the horse knew very well what they were doing."

"You don't suppose they had a design on the poor gentleman's life, I hope?"

"Well, I do," said Leighton; "for there was one concerned in the business, if I'm not mistaken, that'll be a good deal the better of what's happened; that is, it's not unlikely he may, if a child was out of the way."

This was an enigma that demanded an explanation, and it required but little encouragement to extract from the overcharged visitor all he knew and thought.

"God help the innocent babe!" exclaimed Mrs. Patton, "that stands betwixt that villain and the fortune! How do you know it wasn't him that broke into the house that night, and stabbed the gentleman that you got put into prison for? I shouldn't wonder. He's as like to do one as t'other."

The blood rushed into Leighton's face at this suggestion, for it was a thought that had been haunting him for the last half hour—that is to say, ever since he left Mr. Watson's lodgings; but which he had pertinaciously driven away as something absurd and extravagant, and, in short, too good to be true.

"I don't know," he answered. "It came into my head too, but I can't think he would venture such a thing as that."

"There's no telling what such fellows as that'll venture, after money," returned Mrs. Patton; "and if he'd killed the gentleman on the spot, he couldn't have told no tales, you know." And Leighton went away fortified in his suspicions, and resolved to do something, though still he knew not what.

About a fortnight after Lionel's death, Isabel Grosvenor was sitting on a low ottoman, at the feet of Miss Dacres, who, still an invalid, reclined in her arm-chair. The penitent had just concluded the history of her flight from home, and her return, alluding slightly to what had occurred during the interval of her absence.

"You see," said she, "it would be in vain to tell Georgina, or anybody else, that my meeting with Agnes was an accident; they wouldn't believe it. People think such things only happen in plays and novels; yet it *was* an accident; and, setting aside my desperate resolution of drowning myself, I couldn't help what occurred afterwards, being too ill to do anything."

"But, my dear child, the astounding incident of the whole drama, to me, is your permitting that strange man to take you where he pleased! Good God! suppose he had been some villain, of whom there are so many in every city!"

"Oh! but I saw he was not."

"But how could you see any such thing? It is not because people have the most unexceptionable air and manner that they are to be trusted."

"But he had not an unexceptionable air and manner—at least, not in the sense you mean. Oh, no—it was something quite different that inspired me with confidence: you know it's impossible to convey those things. But if you had heard his indignant reproof to the men that were insulting me, and saw how he took me under one arm, whilst he kept them back with

the other, you would understand it perfectly. There was such a sense of power, and dignity, and truth, that I could never have doubted him."

"I confess I can't understand it, my dear, the least in the world. I understand your flight, however wrong I think it; for it seems to me much more simple to have told your mamma that you could not marry Sir Abraham, than to throw yourself into the river to avoid him."

"Oh, aunt, but you know I never could oppose mamma's will, except by getting away from her; and the way I had committed myself about Colonel Aitchison had given her such a power over me."

"I don't think you were at all in fault with respect to Colonel Aitchison. He is a selfish egotist, and I think you were very fortunate to escape him."

"I was in fault to attach myself so much to such an undeserving person, and I am surprised at it now myself, for I see that I was merely fascinated by his superficial advantages; and I blush when I think of it, I assure you."

"You'll be wiser another time; but, to return to these terrible adventures of yours, and that Mr. —, what did you say his name is?"

"Mr. Capel. And you must remember, aunt, that when I rushed up to him, and begged his protection, I was wild with terror."

"That is a much better excuse than these indescribable qualifications you attribute to him. But pray, did you ever see him afterwards?"

"Oh, yes, frequently. He lodged in the same Hôtel Garni that Agnes did."

"And who and what was he?"

"I don't know exactly; but, however, he had not been able to adopt his father's profession, and they consequently had not agreed very well; and he supported himself by writing and teaching, and things of that sort."

"Then he is poor?"

"He is not rich, of course."

"Then I think we should make him some recompense for the service he did you; for it certainly was well meant on his part, however *inconvenable*."

"Oh, no! I wouldn't do such a thing for the world. You wouldn't think of it, if you knew him. He may be poor, but he is a——"

“Well, what is he?”

“Well, aunt, I know you’ll laugh at me—but it’s quite an exceptional case—he is not the least like anybody I ever saw.”

“Where is he now?”

“In Paris, I suppose; but I don’t know.”

“And you have no expectation of seeing him again?”

“None,” answered Isabel, with an involuntary sigh, as she uttered the word.

“That relieves me,” said Miss Daeres, “for I was really frightened. When romantic young ladies begin to talk of *exceptional cases*, I know what it means very well. Depend on it, my dear child, such exceptional cases are the offspring of your own imaginations. The young man you speak of may be a very respectable and a very well-informed person, but he cannot be a gentleman; the circumstances of his life preclude that. Your gratitude and enthusiasm beguile your judgment.”

“Well, aunt, it’s in vain to discuss, where we cannot convince. You are the best little aunty in the world—Heaven knows I have reason to say so; but you have always lived amongst people of a certain class, and you have no idea of any other. We cannot conceive what we have never seen anything like, and you have never seen anything like Mr. Capel. I never had before, and perhaps I should have been as unbelieving as you. Did you ever form any idea of what a poet would be?”

“I once saw one—I forget his name; but people told me he was a poet: it was at Granby House. Lady Grace had an unaccountable liking for such people. He was a dirty-looking fellow, with a head that looked as if it had never been combed, and a quantity of hair about his face. If your Mr. Capel is like Lady Grace’s poet, Heaven defend me from him!”

“But he’s not at all, I assure you. However, I see, aunt, the force of habit and education are too much for me. In spite of all your goodness, you are in one respect like mamma—you acknowledge but one class of people in the world.”

“Not as companions, certainly. But I should be very sorry if I did not acknowledge the poor and ignorant as my fellow-creatures, to whom I am bound to do all the good I can.”

“The poor and ignorant! I should not like such company either; but Mr. Capel is the farthest removed from ignorance of any person I ever spoke to in my life. He seemed to me to know everything better than anybody else I ever heard converse, and you can have no idea, aunt, of the effect of such high cultivation on a man’s whole being and bearing. It seemed to

inspire him with a noble confidence, which supplied that ease of manner and self-possession that more ordinary mortals only acquire by *usage*. However, I see I vex you, dear aunty, and I ought not to expect you to believe anything so apocryphal as this account of my *rara avis*; but I owe him so much, and I do so entirely think all I have said of him, that it would have been base in me to shrink from avowing it. And now I have something else to tell you, that I know will give you a great deal of pain, as Heaven knows it has me; but in justice to Agnes, I must not conceal it."

"I don't believe a word of it," said Miss Dacres, when she had heard the history of Lionel's secret marriage.

"I wish I did not," returned Isabel.

"It's very natural that Agnes Crawford should try to excuse herself by getting up such a story; but I can never believe that Lionel would be guilty of so infamous an action," said Miss Dacres, and as it was impossible to transfer to her the confidence in Agnes's veracity that she felt herself, Isabel forbore to insist.

"I am not surprised at your doubts," she answered. "Perhaps I should not have given credit to the story, if I had not had it from Agnes's own lips; but I am sure she told me nothing but the truth, and it makes me blush to remember all the abuse and revilings that were lavished upon her, now that I know how cruelly she has been wronged."

From this period, Mr. Capel's name was never mentioned betwixt the aunt and niece, and Miss Dacres trusted that silence and time would fade from the memory of so improper an acquaintance; but Isabel's mind was ever straying back to the *petit appartement* in the Rue Joubert, and, in spite of the extreme improbability of the thing, she could not help indulging vague hopes of seeing the young student again. How and where they were to meet she could not tell, but in all her visions of the future there was his image the prominent figure in the piece. And it was this persuasion that kept up her spirits, and enabled her to fling the past behind her, with its trials and vexations.

Secluded from all society, she devoted herself to Miss Dacres, who forbore to reproach her, for, in spite of her prejudices, she was one of the best of human beings; and for the rest she lived in a dream of some blessed chance which was infallibly to reunite her to Mr. Capel, on whose irresistible perfections she relied to effect her aunt's conversion.

In the meantime, Lady Georgina had arrived at Ravenscliffe, where she had raised a storm of horror and indignation, by the account of Isabel's adventures, and of the part played in the drama by Agnes Crawford, who they concluded at once had gone to Paris in pursuit of Lionel. But as that connection, and the birth of the child, formed a chapter in her husband's history that had been carefully concealed from Lady Georgina, this suspicion was not alluded to in her presence, neither was Isabel's name ever mentioned in the family *réunions*. No doubt Lady Grosvenor suffered, for with all her pride and her worldliness, she was not devoid of maternal affection; but Isabel had wounded her most severely in those two most sensitive points, and the love was not strong enough to conquer the resentment.

Sir Francis was slowly drooping into the grave, but he missed his favourite daughter, and insisted on being attired in mourning.

Mrs. Damer found nothing in her own heart to make her excuse Isabel; and though Louisa had greater sympathy with her younger sister, and understood her character better, she was too much engrossed with her own troubles to bestow much attention on other people's. She loved her husband, but she had driven him from her; she had literally argued and contradicted him out of the house, and now he was gone she was distracted. Before they were married, and for some time afterwards, their arguements generally regarded public affairs, or matters in which they were not personally much concerned; but when they came to have a family, the deep interest they both felt in the welfare of their children formed a source of perpetual strife. From the pap to the piano, everything was a subject of dispute.

Mr. Langham was not naturally an obstinate man, but he had taken it into his head that his wife despised his understanding; and it was quite true, that when she grew bitter in argument, and eager to seize any weapon she could clutch to wound her opponent, she often hit him on that tender point.

Fatal mistake! From the moment that persuasion seized him, his whole character seemed to change. When he took up an opinion, right or wrong, nothing would move him. He grew as arbitrary as a Turkish Pasha; and when he had said a thing should be done, done it must be, although his wife could prove to demonstration that it had better be left alone.

Passionate in her affections, she was a passionate mother; and when Mr. Langham, in ignorance or haste, issued an order

regarding the children which she disapproved, the most violent altercations ensued, in which, let her better resolutions be what they might, she was sure, when she found him impervious to argument, to arraign his understanding in some form or another; till at length, under the influence of extreme irritation, he one afternoon ordered his horse, and rode away from his own door, with the determination of never entering it again. All day she expected his return, but he came not; but by-and-by there arrived a letter from his solicitor, desiring his servant to join him in London, and another addressed to Mrs. Langham, announcing her husband's intention of allowing her, henceforth, a separate maintenance.



CHAPTER LVII.

THE anonymous letter received by Agnes had considerably augmented her affliction. It was true that the situation and prospects of her beloved child were fairer than she could have ventured to imagine, but the extinction of all hope of recovering him was a terrible counterbalance to this advantage. As she said, she did not know how much she had hoped, till that letter had wrenched all hope from her.

However, as she was naturally industrious and had her bread to earn, Agnes did not sit with her hands before her and weep; but as soon as she had recovered the first shock of the intelligence, she sought work, and employed herself,—her old acquaintance, Sarah, standing her friend, as before. As for John Gibson, he was as devoted as ever, and was indeed attached to the sisters by a new bond. Martha's quiet virtues had won his honest heart; and although Agnes was still his goddess, the other was to be his cherished wife as soon as circumstances permitted of their union.

Poor Sarah's rough face was suffused with blushes, of too deep a hue to be becoming, when she learnt that her own hopes were blighted; and at first she flouted John, and discontinued her civilities to Martha; but when Agnes returned from her unsuccessful expedition, to meet ill news at home, the kind nature prevailed, and conquering her feelings, she resumed her former

friendly intercourse—a proceeding which made a more favourable impression on the heart she had aimed at than all the tender attentions she had been so long lavishing on himself, which indeed, it is to be feared, had produced anything but the effect she desired.

One Sunday evening, when the two sisters and their faithful swain were sitting together, Agnes's fellow-travellers, Hewson and his wife, paid her a visit, in compliance with the invitation she had given them.

"I thought you'd have given me a call before this," said the latter; "but as you didn't, I told Hewson I was determined to come and find you out. My husband only came back on Thursday, and we've taken a lodging for the present, till we can find a place to suit us."

"You're looking for a situation, then?" said Agnes.

"We're not going to service again," said Mrs. Hewson, who seemed desirous of communicating that which engrossed her own mind. "We're thinking of going into the public line, and we're looking for a house with a good business, somewhere about this part of the town."

As this remark was rather in John's way, he joined in the conversation, observing on the good and bad localities for enterprises of such a nature; adding that it required a good bit of money to go into such a house and get everything tight about you.

"No doubt," said Hewson; "and I'm not sure that it wouldn't be wiser to put our money in the bank and go to service again, than risk it in business; but my wife here's bent on going into business for ourselves. Her father was in that line, and she tells me she knows all about that sort of business,—which is more than I do."

"Why, look here, Mrs. Gibson," said the wife, who seized the opportunity of letting out her secret, "we've got a matter of five hundred pounds left us in a legacy, and wouldn't it be a sin and a shame to let it lie idle instead of making it a nest-egg to bring more?"

"Ay, but if so be we should lose it in trying to get more?" said Hewson.

"Nonsense! Nobody'd ever venture anything if they always looked to the wrong side of things as you do," returned the wife. "Many a one's rode in their coach that began with no more than we've got."

"That's true, no doubt," said John. "I've heerd that Alder-

man Hunter come'd up from Scotland a-foot, and had to beg his way along the road; and now he's so rich that it's said he'll be Lord Mayor this next year."

"Hark to that, Hewson. Who can tell but you may be Lord Mayor, and ride in your coach before you die, if you look sharp?" But Hewson shook his head; he was evidently not of a sanguine disposition. "I'll tell you what, Mrs. Gibson," continued the wife, "if it hadn't been for me, he'd have been cheated out of a good part of what we've got, just because he wouldn't go down to Bristol to look after it. He said he was sure there would be nothing coming to him, and that he should only look like a fool if he went; but I never rested till I got him off; and lucky it was I did. You can't deny that, Hewson."

Hewson did not deny it; but he said he knew how long it had taken the old man, his uncle, to save such a sum of money, and that it would be a shocking thing for him to go and kick it all down before he was well cold in his grave.

John said it would be a pity, certainly, for trade was a thing not to be counted on, and it was easier to lose five hundred pounds than to earn it, work as hard as a man might.

"It wasn't so hard that my uncle worked for it either, for he'd a good easy place of it," said Hewson; "but he was a faithful servant for many years to a gentleman in that part of the country. By the bye, his master was the grandfather of the clergyman that read prayers when we was at Deal. You remember, we asked his name."

"The pew-opener said his name was Watson," answered Agnes.

"So it was," returned Hewson. "I thought I saw a likeness to the family. His mother's name was Grosvenor."

"Was it?" said Agnes, with some surprise.

"And she married Mr. Watson, the curate of the parish where her father lived; and much against the old gentleman's will they say it was."

"Watson," said Agnes to herself; "surely that was the name the young ladies once mentioned to me. Did you ever hear if the gentleman your uncle lived with was any relation to Sir Francis Grosvenor?"

"I believe he's brother," answered Hewson; "and they say down there that, sooner or later, it's most like Mr. Grosvenor'll come to the title."

"And the gentleman that read prayers was Mr. Grosvenor's

grandson?" said Agnes. "Do you know if he's been long in the Church?"

"I couldn't say how long," answered Hewson, "for it's some time since I left that part of the country, though I was born there. Howsoever, he's not the eldest son, for I inquired about him the other day. I think his name's Gerard or Gerald, or something of that sort. They say he's steady enough; but the eldest is rather wild, and has never settled to anything."

"It's a very strange thing," said Agnes, when the Hewsons were gone. "If Mr. Watson was a clergyman at that time, I can't make out why the marriage shouldn't have been a real one; and yet it couldn't have been real, or Mr. Grosvenor could never have married Lady Georgina."

"It must have been because you were not asked in church," said Martha. "I have always heard that people must be asked in church, and it was very stupid in me not to think of it."

"However, it don't signify now," said Agnes, with a sigh, which was a signal to the other two to change the conversation.

The next visitor that arrived was Mr. Capel, who had just returned from Paris, bringing with him two letters for Agnes, which he had found lying at the post-office.

After the usual salutations, he inquired for her friend.

"I know nothing of her," she answered, "except what this letter you have brought may contain."

"I thought it was from her," said he, glancing at it with a longing eye, that moved Agnes to tell him that Isabel was in England and well.

"With her family?"

"She's staying with her aunt," answered Agnes, "and sends you her best wishes;" and in spite of his evident disappointment at her remaining so uncommunicative, she felt it her duty to withhold any further information, unless she had Isabel's express directions to the contrary; a love affair betwixt Miss Grosvenor and Mr. Capel appearing to her as discrepant as her own with the heir of Ravenscliffe. Yet Mr. Capel's name occurred more than once in the letter, and there was a lingering on the passages relating to him that showed plainly how near the subject was to her heart.

He made a visit of some length, but he was not now the contented student she had first known him, needing nothing but his books and his pen to make him happy. Instead of the full flood of rich and varied discourse that used to keep Isabel in a fervour

of enthusiasm and delight, and set Agnes's ears tingling, because, whilst she wondered and admired, she was often unable to follow him, he frequently sunk into silence and abstraction, and it was evidently more an effort than a pleasure to converse.

The other letter was from Mrs. Aymer, the one written under the influence of that oppressive sense of loneliness that had been the thorn in her well-stuffed pillow ever since she married the rich West Indian.

But since that was despatched, matters had changed; she was now revelling in all the honours and glories of a conversion, and hourly rejoiced over by saints upon earth, in long bonnets and scanty skirts. She had prayer-meetings in her drawing-room, and grave consultations with gentlemen in broad-brimmed hats in her *boudoir*, for she was already up to her ears in the conversion of the Jews, and very busy about the souls of the heathen in the far islands of the Pacific. She was a happy woman now, and so she told her new friends, drawing tears of holy joy from their benevolent eyes by the confession that she had never known what real happiness was before.

At the same time, Major Lawrence grew daily more assiduous in his attentions, and to the consolations of religion were super-added those of love. Of course, under these circumstances, his little boy became a subject of the deepest interest to her, and when Mrs. Driscoll saw which way the wind blew, she seized every opportunity of recommending herself to this new power. In short, betwixt her wealth and her conversion, the before-neglected Mrs. Aymer suddenly found herself surrounded by admiring friends, the brightest star of the circle in which she moved.

It was just in this crisis of her prosperous fortunes that Agnes one day, attiring herself in her best silk gown and smartest bonnet, set out to visit her friendly fellow-traveller, for whom, in spite of the small sympathy betwixt their characters, she still had a liking; so she bade Martha not be surprised if she did not return till night.

"If Mrs. Aymer asks me to spend the day with her, I shall."

But in little more than the time that sufficed for her to walk to Russell Square and back she returned.

"The lady was not at home?" said Martha. "What a pity!"

But that was not it. When Agnes reached the house, there was a carriage standing at the door, and with her usual dislike to intrude herself into the company of her superiors—or of those who would let her see that they thought themselves so, for that was the real key to her humility—she crossed over to the

other side, and walked up and down till she should see the visitors depart.

By-and-by, the door opened, and a gentleman came out, leading by the hand a little boy, who the footman lifted into the carriage; the gentleman stepped in after him, and they drove away. When Agnes observed this from a little distance, she crossed over and gave a doubtful double knock at the door, the diffidence of which could not fail to inspire the footman with contempt; and, accordingly the door was opened in a manner that would have prepared any experienced caller for a denial.

"Is Mrs. Aymer at home?" asked Agnes.

"No:—at least I don't think she is," answered the man, examining her from head to foot.

"Oh, very well; say Mrs. Gibson called, if you please;" and repenting of her boldness, she prepared to retreat.

"Stay, I'll inquire," said the man; "what name did you say?"

"Gibson—Mrs. Gibson," reiterated Agnes, as he ascended the drawing-room stairs with the deliberate *nonchalance* that became him.

"Missus is not at home," said he, presently, as he came down again, and shut the door in her face.

The visitor had arrived when her company was no more needed. Besides, the reminiscences of Paris and her own confessions rendered Agnes too dangerous an acquaintance to be encouraged under present circumstances, and in spite of her good nature, Mrs. Aymer had the fortitude to cut her friend inexorably. As she believed herself sincere in her vocation, her conscience pricked her a little for this unkindness, but she justified it with the recollection that her acquaintance with Agnes was of a merely worldly nature, and that to maintain it might impede her salvation.

A few months after this, Mrs. Aymer yielded her hand and her fortune to the entreaties of the happy Major Lawrence, much to the satisfaction of all parties concerned, directly or indirectly, with the exception of her late husband's family. Immediately after the ceremony, the happy couple, accompanied by David Driscoll with his wife and the two children, proceeded to the North, where the Major's family resided, and where lay an estate of some five thousand a year, which, sooner or later, the bridegroom must inherit. In the meantime, however, his fortune being rather limited, the widow's wealth was no unacceptable addition; and that and her serious views being all

that were known to the major's connections, her reception was so gratifying, that she persuaded her doating husband to sell his commission and settle finally in that part of the country.



CHAPTER LVIII.

DESIROUS as Leighton was to keep his eye on Mr. Lewis Watson and pursue the investigation that he had a vague hope might terminate in something favourable to himself, he found it impossible to prosecute the inquiry; his poverty forbid it. The first thing he had to do was to live—a matter by no means easy with an empty pocket and no character. So desperate was the state of his pecuniary affairs, that he entertained serious thoughts of taking a crossing and turning sweeper, an occupation which he had understood to be profitable, only he objected to the society to which it would introduce him. Tom Patton's wife, however, stood his friend here again, never resting till she had got her husband to recommend him to a livery-stable keeper, who employed him about odd jobs, sometimes to rub down a horse, and sometimes to drive one. Under these circumstances, he lost sight of Mr. Watson, whom he had left in Paris, and although his mind was constantly reverting to the mystery of that gentleman's motives, and his desire to penetrate them was in no degree diminished, he was obliged to relinquish the inquiry till better times, if any such were in store for him.

In the meantime, Mr. Watson was not without his own difficulties. Persuaded against all likelihood that he should one day or other inherit the estates of the elder branch of his family, he could never bring himself to do anything towards earning one for himself. Circumstances were now certainly turning out more favourably for him than could reasonably have been expected. Fortune appeared to be taking his part, but *en attendant*, he was worse off than ever he had been. His father, who had died lately, had left nothing. He never had had anything but his preferment, and though it was a good one, he had lived up to the income it produced him. During his lifetime there had been little intercourse betwixt Colonel Grosvenor and his daughter,

for the old man hated her husband, and was as indignant as Sir Francis that she should have married a person with such a plebeian appellation. When his son-in-law died, however, he took his daughter home to live with him; but as he had never had more than the usual portion of a younger son in addition to his pay, he was a poor man and had little to spare. Nevertheless, he had done what he could for his grandsons; and he and Mr. Watson, the father, had repeatedly advanced sums for the purpose of establishing the elder in some way of life that should furnish the means of his support; but the money always went for very different purposes to those it was intended for, and Lewis preferred to depend on those precarious supplies and his expectations, to studying either law or physic, or the mysteries of double entry.

Divinity he had considered with greater favour, and he had more than once entertained serious thoughts of the Church, that being a profession not unsuitable to his indolent habits and plausible manners; insomuch that Colonel Grosvenor was wont to remark sarcastically, that if Lewis had had the slightest idea in the world of religion, he would have made a capital clergyman. However, he had not; but that might not have stood much in his way, had not his idleness and disinclination for study altogether precluded his passing an examination in Latin and Greek. However, he found his residence at college agreeable enough, and in the event very profitable. Indeed, it was not without a view to other advantages than those of study that, after he had turned his back upon various professions, his father consented to send him to Oxford, whither the young heir of Ravenscliffe had just repaired, not to read, but to ride.

An acquaintance betwixt the cousins was much to be desired, and, if well managed, might prove extremely advantageous to the two young men; and we have seen what use Lewis made of the opportunity. Gerald, on the contrary, who was farther removed from the fortune and quite in earnest regarding the Church, thought it much more his interest to read assiduously for orders and get a living from the present baronet, than to waste his time in courting the future one; and accordingly, it was with some unwillingness that he lent himself as an instrument in the affair of the marriage; a compliance, indeed, to which nothing would have won him, had he not been assured of its being the evident interest of all parties concerned to keep the thing a profound secret as long as Sir Francis Grosvenor lived.

Under these circumstances, it did not appear a very bad card to play ; for though not so far-seeing as his brother, he was not unwilling to purchase at such an easy price the good-will of the heir of Ravenscliffe. It was well to have the two strings to his bow. But Lewis's contriving genius had looked far deeper into the game. He was well aware of the grief and disappointment the tardy appearance of an heir had occasioned Sir Francis, and he felt sure that no time would be lost in forming an alliance for this cherished scion, in order to preclude, if possible, the chance of the estates falling into the other line. Already common report and the newspapers were making matches for him, giving Mr. Lewis Watson a dreadful all-overness every time he heard or read an allusion to the subject. When the weak and wilful Lionel first disclosed his passion for the farmer's daughter, Watson covertly encouraged it, simply as an impediment to his forming any other attachment ; but when he found this juvenile passion was likely to terminate in a marriage, new lights began to dawn upon him.

Lionel Grosvenor was notoriously incautious ; he was fond of boating, and had been two or three times nearly drowned ; and a very bad horseman, he would ride steeple-chases, mounted on any animal he took a fancy to, fit or unfit for the purpose. Advice was useless, for he never followed it. Under these circumstances, Watson considered his own chance a good one, provided the young man could be kept single for a few years, but that being a feat not easily accomplished, the next best thing was that he should marry Agnes.

Incapable of a lasting attachment, volatile and unstable, it was not likely that his love would long survive the marriage ceremony ; and it was pretty certain that no sacrifices or inconveniences would be submitted to from a sense of duty. When inclination died, the bond would be broken, and Lionel would be a married man without a wife. So well did Watson understand the character he had to deal with, that he even foresaw the possibility of what ultimately happened—namely, that if he could shake off Agnes, he would allow himself to be persuaded into another marriage ; but that second marriage, if it took place during Agnes's lifetime, would be invalid, and the offspring of it illegitimate.

To use his own phrase, "What a capital look-out !"

In order to invalidate the second marriage, however, he must have it in his power to prove the first whenever it became advisable for him to do so ; on this account, he was well pleased

that Gerald should perform the ceremony, and he advised Lionel to demand a certificate, which certificate he intended to have in his own keeping, but from some *arrière pensée*, some undefinable feeling of mistrust, perhaps, Lionel had afterwards reclaimed it.

This did not suit Watson, however, for the paper might be used to his disadvantage, if Lionel, contrary to all probability, took it into his head at any future time to declare his marriage; or if he got tired of his wife, he might destroy it. Besides, Agnes might produce an heir; in which case Watson might be disposed to spare him the trouble. There was also another contingency, which had led Gerald to extort a promise from his brother that he would try to obtain the custody of this momentous document; it might fall into the hands of Sir Francis, and then there would be no living for the young deacon. The certificate must, therefore, on all accounts be obtained, and accordingly, one morning, when the two young men were at breakfast, Watson said, "By the bye, what have you done with the certificate? I hope you haven't lost it?"

"On, no, I have it safe," answered Lionel, drawing it from his pocket and laying it beside him.

"You had better give it me," said the other. "It will be much safer than with you. Besides, suppose your father gets hold of it; there'd be the devil to pay."

"I'll take care he shan't," said Lionel; "besides, I promised to show it *her*."

"But you're so careless about your papers. I'm surc, when you were at Oxford, I might have read every letter you had, if I had chosen."

"I dare say; but I didn't care whether you did or not."

"Of course, I did *not*," answered Watson: "but you know how curious servants are; and suppose any of them got a sight of that, wouldn't they tell the old gentleman?"

"I'll lock it up in the box where I keep my money. Nobody ever opens that but myself."

"How do you know?"

"For the best reason in the world; it has a Bramah lock, and I have the key fastened to my watch-chain. There it is; I had it gilt on purpose that I might wear it so. I'll lock it up at once, for fear of accidents," and thus saying, he rose, and taking the paper, went into his dressing-room, followed by Watson.

"This is it," said he, opening a square ebony box inlaid with

ivory, and displaying the contents, which consisted of papers, chiefly bankers' debit and credit statements, a parcel of loose notes and gold, and a variety of trinkets, some of considerable value.

"I hate Bramah locks," said Watson; and so he did just then, for the invention was likely to interfere seriously with his interests.

"Why?" inquired Lionel. "I think they're capital. Nobody can open them, you know."

"Precisely; not even yourself or the locksmith, if you happen to mislay the key. Think of a dressing-case with a Bramah, and the key left behind when you want to dress for dinner."

"But I can't well leave mine behind; besides, I've a second key. By the bye, where is that key, I wonder;" and he began tossing over the papers to look for it. "Oh, here it is!"

"Excellent!" exclaimed his cousin. "I can't imagine anything more ingenious. Locked up here, this second key would be of great use to you, if you had lost the first."

Lionel laughed. "Why, one doesn't like to leave it about, you know, or somebody might get hold of it;" and as he held it in his hand, he looked round the room to see where he could place it in safety, whilst his cousin watched him with a curious eye.

"This will do," said Lionel; "nobody will ever think of looking for it here;" and so saying, he advanced towards a bookcase where there were some small drawers, filled with curiosities, coins, geological specimens, and so forth, carefully arranged. "Nobody ever disturbs these," said he, as he wrapped the key in a scrap of paper, and opening one of the drawers, he placed it in the further corner, out of sight, except to those who knew where to seek it.

CHAPTER LIX.

WATSON left Ravenscliffe with the avowed intention of taking a run along the coast of Devonshire, before he returned to London.

"Now I am in the neighbourhood," he said, "I should like to see a few of your watering-places; and they seem to be so near each other, that I suppose I can do the principal ones in two or three days."

"Easily," answered Lionel. "They are picturesque enough, one or two of them, especially Torquay. I'd go with you, and do the honours of my county, if it were not for this engagement at Tower Hill."

"You're to be there on the 14th, I think you said; that's Tuesday."

"Yes. We expect to have a capital run with the Granby hounds."

"And then I shall see you in London, I suppose?"

"Yes; I shall send *her* up, when I go from here, and join her as soon as I can, in Park Lane."

When Mr. Watson took his leave, he did not carry away "the key of the tea-chest," but of the outer door, to which was attached a patent lock, with extra keys, two of which were for the use of Leighton and Mr. Grosvenor, who kept them in their pockets, and let themselves in and out at their pleasure; they being the only inhabitants of the tower in which Lionel's apartments were situated. When he had a visitor, he generally gave them a key also, that they might enjoy the same privilege of easy access; that is, in the winter, for in the summer the outer door was generally open. As this extra key was one only used on such occasions, it was not very likely to be missed, and even if it were, what was more likely than that a man should forget such a trifle, and carry it away in his pocket.

The three days that were to intervene before that of Lionel's departure for Tower Hill, were spent by Mr. Watson as he had proposed; but on that afternoon he returned to C—, where he put up at an obscure inn, that he had observed outside the

town, as he passed through. From thence, an hour's good walking would take him to Ravenscliffe; and leaving his portmanteau, and a young pointer puppy of a very valuable breed, that Lionel had given him, he set out on his expedition, provided with his two keys, intending to be back time enough to be taken up by the London coach, as it passed through.

By crossing a field, and leaping a dyke, he could reach the castle, without troubling the gatekeepers; and all that was apparently necessary to secure success was to avoid observation, by not making his approach till everybody had retired for the night, which, when none of the family were there, was likely to be early enough.

Circumstances, however, had not turned out as he expected. The preparation of Lionel's little supper had kept the servants stirring to a later hour than he had reckoned on; and when he arrived within view of the windows, there was yet a light in the offices. He lingered, therefore, till he saw it extinguished, and then cautiously inserted his key, and made his entry by the aid of a dark lantern, with which he had provided himself at Exeter.

As the rooms were separated by double doors, and the windows looked into a garden behind, he neither saw nor heard anything to awaken a suspicion of danger; and with scarcely an apprehension of being disturbed, he proceeded deliberately to his business, which was to open the book-case, and with the small key there deposited unlock the ebony box, and extract the certificate.

The whole process had succeeded to admiration, till the moment that Lionel, preparing to accompany Agnes to the coach, had opened the door of the ante-room, to get his great-coat. Alarmed and flurried at the noise, Watson turned to fly, kicking over and thereby extinguishing his lantern, which during his operations he had placed upon the floor; and in an instant more he found himself collared by Lionel's vigorous grasp.

Nothing had been further from his intentions than to harm his cousin. Such desperate enterprises were quite out of his line; but the shame of being discovered, and the passion that is apt to rise in a man's breast, when engaged in such a struggle, got the better of his prudence, and, in order to free himself, he stabbed him with a weapon that Lionel himself had given him but a few days before—a short sword, sheathed in a walking-stick.

As he rushed forth, after committing the act, he passed a woman flying from the same quarter, whose person he could not distinguish, but whom he guessed was Agnes; but this, of course, he did not stop to ascertain, his business being to get as far from the scene of the tragedy as he could. He leaped the dyke, ran across the field into the high road, and, whilst hesitating whether to return for his portmanteau and dog or not, met the coach. This decided him. Speed was everything. He hailed it, got in, and proceeded with it, till symptoms of daylight appeared. Then he thought it prudent to descend, and proceed across the country on foot, till he fell into another line of coaches. Thus he reached London; and by the time the news of Lionel's dangerous state arrived in Brook Street, Mr. Watson was on the other side of the Channel, where he lived for some time a life of extreme terror and anguish, under an assumed name.

That he should be discovered, appeared almost inevitable. Had he had the slightest idea of such a tragical issue, or indeed of committing any act involving himself in danger, he would have made very different arrangements. But now he had left traces of himself at every step; above all, at the inn at C——, where he thought the portmanteau and dog would assuredly lead to his identification; and so they assuredly would, had not suspicion immediately fixed upon the valet, and thus precluded investigations in any other direction.

With what anxiety the fugitive watched the progress of the affair, in the reports of the English newspapers, may be well conceived; and how relieved he felt by the verdict of the jury, fixing the guilt on Leighton; shortly after which event, he ventured to return to England. But, although he now resumed his former mode of life, it was long before he felt himself at ease; the chances of detection appeared yet too numerous, and, above all, from the portmanteau and dog, which still he did not think it advisable to reclaim, hoping that, as the house he had left them at was of a very humble class, the host might be content to appropriate the property, without inquiring too curiously after the owner.

As time advanced, and Lionel recovered, his tranquillity returned. It was true, the certificate might be missed—that was a contingency he had always reckoned on; but since it was an article the owner could not take any public measures to recover, he did not foresee much danger to himself from the circumstance.

Lionel's long illness, slow recovery, and consequent removal to the Continent, however, had precluded even the discovery that the paper was no longer where he had placed it. He went away, leaving the ebony box undisturbed, occupied only with his own personal discomfort, and too indifferent about Agnes, and all connected with her, to care or think about the record of a ceremony that bore no more serious aspect to him now, than a scene in a bit of private theatricals.

It was not till Lionel married Lady Georgina, however, that Lewis Watson felt himself entirely at his ease. Then he was safe and triumphant, for he possessed a secret that would at once shield him from danger and fill his purse; and as long as his cousin lived, it answered the purpose, more or less. But Lionel was himself extravagant to the greatest degree, and had latterly been not only extremely unwilling, but often unable, to answer these demands; and hence it was that Watson had been eager to co-operate with Atherton in the sale of the horse—an affair that had terminated in a result far beyond his utmost hopes.

Lionel Grosvenor was dead, leaving but one sickly boy betwixt him and the fortune that had been through life his dream and his ruin. He would never under any circumstances have been a good man, but he might have dedicated his scheming wits to some profession, and passed through the world decently, if his mother had not, for the first few years of his life, reckoned too securely on the circumstance of Sir Francis having no son to cut out the younger branch of the family. The consequence of these too sanguine expectations was, that when Lionel was born she not only thought herself and her son extremely ill-used, but could not bring herself to believe but that fate and fortune would come to their aid, and give them back the rights of which they had been so cruelly defrauded—a persuasion which, not from design, but from the overflowing of her own weak and foolish discontent, she unfortunately had too successfully instilled into her son.

But though Lionel Grosvenor was dead now, and Watson's prospects for the future looked brighter than ever, his immediate difficulties were terribly augmented; with his cousin he had lost his banker; so he returned, like the prodigal son, to his mother, who was residing with his grandfather, and still as sanguine as ever with respect to the fortune. With all his faults, the extent of which, however, she was unacquainted with, Lewis was her favourite son. She thought his abilities remarkable; and her theory was that he was too clever to settle to

anything. She mistook cunning and scheming for talent—a not unusual mistake. But Lewis Watson soon wearied of the home that necessity had driven him to.

In the course of his reflections it occurred to him that there was one scheme he had never tried yet, nor taken into his serious consideration; and that was, to build up his fortune by marriage. He surveyed himself in the glass, as the thought occurred to him. He was a good-looking man—at least, that was his own impression; and he flattered himself he had an insinuating manner and persuasive tongue; but then he had no money, and his name was *Watson*. The first disadvantage he might have overcome, if it had not been for the second; but he feared “that would stand *devilishly* in his way with a girl that had money.”

Under the name of Grosvenor he might have made his advances, and won her heart before she knew whether he was rich or poor; but her first impressions would be so inevitably adverse to Mr. *Watson*, that nothing but a dazzling fortune could possibly efface them.

It was in the course of these deliberations that, for the first time, some new views opened to him in regard to the two widows of his late cousin, which he wondered had not presented themselves earlier. As these ideas crowded upon him, he rubbed his forehead, and tried to develop them into shape.

Had his power really died with Lionel! Were there not, on the contrary, two roads to fortune opened to him; neither, indeed, leading to a result so brilliant as the undivided possession of the Grosvenor estates, but either far preferable to languishing in poverty for years, or even as long as he lived—an alternative that, in spite of his sanguine temperament, his calmer judgment told him was by no means improbable.

CHAPTER LX.

WELL, then, what was to be done? *Voyons!* His cousin had left two widows, and two children, both sons. The first wife legitimate, but not believing herself to be so; the second, illegitimate, without knowing it. Now, might it not be possible to become the husband of one of these women, and so make his own fortune? Suppose he discovered where Agnes was, which he might possibly do through the housekeeper at the Adelphi, and told her the truth, saying, "Accept me for your husband, and I'll reclaim and establish your rights," would she agree to the compact? A large proportion of women would do it to escape from poverty or from ambitious motives; considering that he was, as he flattered himself not disagreeable; and that, if her child survived, it really became a duty, on her part, to vindicate his claims. Then the child might be dead; and if it were so, Lady Georgina and her boy would be removed out of the way, and his own road to fortune would be clear, only burthened with a plebeian wife.

But suppose, after he had told her the important secret, she refused to co-operate with him, and preferred prosecuting her claims without his assistance? Then he would be thrown out altogether. She would doubtless find people to assist her, and he would appear in a light at once ridiculous and contemptible. It would be better, therefore, to win her affections, and marry her, before she had any suspicion that she was the legitimate wife of Lionel Grosvenor. It being afterwards proved that she was so, a handsome provision must be made for her; and if the boy could be recovered, he (Lewis Watson) might perhaps be appointed his guardian. But, on the other hand, this provision would only be for her life; and the advantages he sought would cease when she died, and her son was of age.

Then he turned his eyes to Lady Georgina. There was a rich woman, with an enormous fortune of her own, and a liberal settlement from her husband's estate. Haughty and proud too! What would be the effect on such a woman, if, one fine morning,

Mr. Lewis Watson sent in his card, and requested an interview, wherein he informed her that she was no wife and her son illegitimate! Heavens! what a triumph for him, the tabooed cousin Watson! He laughed as he thought of it. But, alas! a barren triumph it would be. He would be kicked out of the house, and left to prove his assertion, for the benefit of Agnes and her son. But would not this proud woman rather purchase his silence at any cost, than submit to such public disgrace and mortification? Doubtless, unless she was a woman of high principle, she would. Principles were his only bugbear; but if *they* did not stand in the way of his scheme, might he not become the husband of this wealthy lady, with a handsome income, secured to him for his life, and the agreeable certainty of ultimately inheriting Ravenscliffe, if her son died without issue?

What vistas of pleasure he saw before him, now that this prospect opened to his view! Launched into all the amusements and delights of fashionable life, with plenty of money, and the position this alliance would give him; How he had never taken this view of the subject before, he could not think. Everything seemed now so clear, so easy, so certain of success, provided the principles did not thwart him; and that they would, he could scarcely believe. Such Puritanism would be too ridiculous!

"I think Lewis is certainly going to take to something," observed Mrs. Watson to her father, one day, as she saw her son pacing the gravel before the window.

"What do you mean by taking to something?" said the old gentleman, looking up from his newspaper.

"Why you know, father, I have always lamented that Lewis should allow his great talents to lie idle, for I am certain there's not a young man in England could have distinguished himself more than Lewis, if he had liked."

"If you had let me make a soldier of him, he might have distinguished himself, very possibly. I don't see how a civilian is to distinguish himself, particularly if his name's Watson."

"He might distinguish himself in the Pulpit or at the Bar, whatever his name might be."

The old man shook his head. He was persuaded that there were few, if any openings to distinction for a man called Watson.

"I don't mean to say," continued the mother, "that Lewis is thinking of the Bar or the Church now—perhaps it's too late—though I've heard of many, not so clever as he, who had taken to professions older than he is, and succeeded very

well ; and I don't see why he shouldn't do what others have done. But I don't mean that."

"You don't mean what?"

"I don't mean that he is exactly thinking of the Bar or the Church."

"What is he thinking of, then?"

"Ah! there's the question," answered Mrs. Watson, sagaciously ; "but I'm sure he's thinking of something."

"Most likely," answered Mr. Grosvenor, as he turned the leaf of his newspaper.

"Ah! but I mean of something particular. You don't observe Lewis as I do: I see a great alteration in him."

"I see nothing at all," said the father, glancing at the young man, as he passed the window, and then resuming his reading.

"He has got some plan in his head, I'm certain ; I know by the way he walks, with his eyes on the ground, and his hands in his pockets. Besides, don't you see how much more cheerful he is this last week?"

"On the contrary, his mind seems to be always absent and *distract*."

"But that's exactly it; that's when he's forming his plans. I know Lewis, and I'm certain he's got something in his head."

"Perhaps he has heard that Georgina's child has got the measles."

"It's not unlikely he may have them; for I saw in the paper yesterday an extract from the *Western Times*, saying that the measles and scarlatina were raging all round Exeter. I forgot to tell you about it. But that's not what's the matter with Lewis, because I saw the alteration in him before that paragraph appeared."

"Perhaps he obtained the intelligence through a private hand."

"No; for if he had, he would certainly have told me. He and I have never had any concealments on that subject, poor fellow. But it's something quite different."

"Here's your mother declaring you're in high spirits, because they've got the measles at Ravenscliffe," said the old gentleman to his grandson, as he entered the room.

"But the boy's not at Ravenscliffe," answered Lewis.

"I didn't say so," interrupted Mrs. Watson ; "but the measles and scarlatina *are* raging in that part of the country."

"So I observed," answered the son ; "but I have heard it

asserted, that it's more frequently robust children that die of the measles than delicate ones."

"But when the measles are complicated with scarlet fever, they're generally very fatal," said Mrs. Watson. "I've known whole families carried off."

"There's no reckoning on these things," said Watson. "It seems all a matter of chance. I believe it's better for a man to make an exertion, and try to do something for himself, than sit with his hands before him, waiting for a piece of luck that may never come."

"Didn't I tell you so?" exclaimed Mrs. Watson to her father, triumphantly. "I was certain Lewis had something in his head."

"What do you suppose I've got in my head, mother?" asked Lewis.

"Ah, it's impossible for me to say what," returned she; "but that you're thinking of something, I'm certain."

"What makes you think so?" he asked, complacently.

"Oh, I've my reasons," she answered. "Never mind what they are; but I see more than people suppose."

"And more than exists, I fancy," said the old man, without raising his eyes.

"I don't understand what you're both talking of," said Watson, who had his own reasons for not letting the subject drop.

"Why, your mother has got it into her head, that because you spend all your mornings in pacing the avenue or the gravel-walk, you are hatching some grand design that's to astonish the world."

"Well, suppose I am?" said Lewis.

"There, I told you so," exclaimed his mother. "Little as other people may think of him, I've always known what Lewis was capable of."

"And what is he capable of?" inquired the old gentleman.

"You'll see, in time, I've no doubt," said the mother, nodding her head significantly. "Leave that to him."

"With all my heart; I shan't interfere, I promise you," said the old man, who did not forget that all his grandson's former schemes for exercising these brilliant abilities in the service of the Law or the Church, or whatever else, had terminated in nothing but extracting a good deal of hard cash from his pocket.

"Poor fellow!" sighed Mrs. Watson. "It's very hard, I must say."

"Never mind, mother," said Lewis. "It has been my fault hitherto if I have not succeeded in anything I know; and it's natural my grandfather should judge the future by the past."

"Pray, may I ask what it is that you *must* say is very hard, Letitia?" inquired Colonel Grosvenor.

"Oh, nothing," answered Mrs. Watson; "only I do think it very wrong to discourage young people. Nobody can do anything if they are discouraged."

"Whom have I discouraged? Who's going to do anything?" inquired Colonel Grosvenor, looking round the room over his spectacles. "I haven't heard of anything that's going to be done yet."

"Nor my mother either, sir," said Lewis; "but she fancies she sees my mind at work about something, and she knows very well the remorse I feel at living here, month after month, in luxury and idleness."

"To be sure I do," echoed Mrs. Watson, who had never heard a word on the subject before.

"And pray what have you ever lived in but luxury and idleness, here or elsewhere, I should like to know?" returned Colonel Grosvenor, who had certainly some reason to be displeased at all these implied reproaches about he knew not what.

"Well, of course, this is your own house, and you can say what you like, father," said Mrs. Watson, with an air of humility and candour; "but I must say I think *that* very unfair."

"It may be very unfair, but I defy you to contradict it," answered the old man.

"I shall not attempt to contradict it; I know it would be of no use," rejoined Mrs. Watson, with an air of demure resignation, taking up her scissors, and snipping away at some scolloped muslins, whilst the colonel turned another leaf of his paper, and began at the top of the new page. The first sound interrupting the silence that ensued, was a heavy sigh that seemed as it issued to convulse the breast of Mr. Lewis Watson, who was walking up and down the room; whereupon his mother heaved another that might have swelled the mainsail of a small boat. The corners of the colonel's mouth contracted; he suspected there was a conspiracy against his purse.

There was no conspiracy thus far, however, only a remarkable sympathy betwixt the mother and son.

"Lewis, dear, as soon as I have done this scollop, suppose you come and take a stroll with me down to the mill, will you? I see you're not looking well, and it will do you good."

"You'll find me in the garden," answered the young man, in a subdued tone of voice, as he quitted the room, picking up the colonel's shagreen spectacle-case from the floor as he passed, and laying it respectfully on the table beside him.

After a few repetitions of the foregoing scene, Colonel Grosvenor, who began to weary of the thing, said to his daughter one day—

"I should like to know, Letitia, what's the meaning of all this indirect pushing and thrusting—of all these sighs, hints, and inuendos! What is it that you and Lewis want?"

"Oh, nothing," answered Mrs. Watson, searching for her needle-case amidst the litter on the table, as if she had no object in life but to find it.

"Then if you want nothing, have the goodness to leave off behaving not only as if you wanted something, but as if you were ill-used in not getting it."

"It's no use wanting what one can't get; but everybody has a right to their feelings."

"No doubt. I haven't made any attempt to rob you of yours, have I?"

"You seem to think it's a fault to feel?"

"To feel what?"

"For a mother to feel anxious about her son."

"I am not aware that I have implied anything of the kind."

"You reproach me for looking low when I see poor Lewis is uncomfortable. Who is to feel for him if his mother doesn't?"

"And pray what is Lewis uncomfortable about?"

"It doesn't signify."

"Well, if it does not signify, I request I may hear no more about it."

"You haven't heard anything yet that I know of; but any one may understand, without being told, what a painful thing it is for a young man like Lewis to be wasting his time here doing nothing."

"Then why does he waste his time? Why doesn't he do something? Who prevents him?"

"What can he do here, I should like to know?"

"Let him go elsewhere, then."

"He hasn't the means, poor fellow!"

"Humph! I thought so. And pray, if he had the means, where would he go? and what does he expect to do?"

"Ah! that's more than I know—at least, I don't know

exactly; but my own opinion is that Lewis has discovered something."

"Discovered something?"

"Yes; I mean invented something. He's very capable of it."

"Capable of what? What do you mean by inventing something?"

"Well, I don't exactly know; but I mean something like a steam-engine or a balloon, or something of that sort. Lewis thinks more than people suppose."

"He certainly thinks more than I suppose if he has invented anything useful. But may I inquire what grounds you have for this extraordinary supposition?"

"It's so unpleasant to speak to people who never believe what one says; but whether you choose to believe it or not, I'm positive that Lewis *has* got something in his head."

"So you have been telling me for the last week; and it is surely very natural that after hearing so much about it I should desire to know what it is that he has got in his head."

"But he won't tell what it is; and I, for my part, think he's quite right. He says himself that it might spoil all if he told. It's a secret."

"His secret won't be of much use if he keeps it all to himself."

"Nonsense! Of course he only means for the present. In proper time everybody'll know it; but if he were to tell it now, somebody might borrow his invention, and say they invented it themselves. I've often heard of such things, and I think Lewis is quite right to be cautious, whether people laugh at him for it or not."

"Well, I think he's quite right not to tell you, for you would certainly tell it again to the first acquaintance you met."

"That's what he says. He says I should be so surprised and delighted, that he's sure I couldn't keep the secret; and that it *must* be kept, or it won't succeed."

"Humph! And pray what is required for the carrying out of this wonderful invention?"

"A mere trifle—only a hundred pounds or so; and if it succeeds, as he's sure it will, he'll be able to pay it all back very soon."

"Devilish bad security!"

"I knew you'd say so."

"I must hear what Lewis himself has to say upon this subject."

"But it's so painful for him to speak about it; because, as he says himself, poor fellow, he can't explain it so as to inspire others with the confidence he feels; but he says he's sure he shall succeed—something tells him so."

"I dare say it does. Vanity tells him so."

"Well, I *must* say I don't think that fair! Whatever Lewis's faults may be—and of course he's not perfect, any more than other people—I never heard him accused of vanity before."

"I can't deny, sir," said Lewis, when his grandfather interrogated him, "that I think, this time, I have fortune in my grasp. I know my mother is too sanguine, and she thinks too highly of my abilities; but sometimes chance—a lucky hit—will do more than ability. A speculation of a very singular nature, arising out of a combination of a——"

"A combination of fortuitous atoms, I suppose? Humph! A speculation! I thought it was a steam-engine you'd invented."

"Not exactly; but there is one favourable circumstance attending this undertaking of mine; namely, that it involves no risk of loss. If I succeed, my fortune is made; if I fail ——"

"My hundred pounds are lost, I presume?"

"Well, sir, I hope not. Even should I fail in my grand object, I feel persuaded that a considerable profit, more or less, must accrue. At the same time, sir, if you distrust me—I know how difficult it is to place another in our own point of view, and to transfer that confidence, without which nothing can be done, nor, indeed, should ever be undertaken. Self-distrust has ruined many an enterprise that had in it the germs of full success; but at the same time, a hundred pounds is a large sum, and if you feel alarmed at the risk ——"

"Why, to say the truth," returned the old gentleman, "I am not very sanguine in my expectations of ever seeing it again, if once I give it to you."

"I shall only consider it as an advance, sir,—not a gift."

"Very much the same thing, I fancy."

"I hope you'll not find it so, in this instance, sir," answered Lewis, with modest candour. In short, he was so modest and plausible, that the old gentleman promised him a draft on Cox and Greenwood for the sum he wanted; and two days afterwards,

seated beside the driver of the Bristol Highflyer, he proceeded to London. It would have curtailed his journey considerably to have crossed the country; but he had business in the metropolis, that rendered the *détour* necessary.

In the first place, there was his outfit. The tailor, the hatter, the bootmaker, the glover, had all their parts to play in the success of his enterprise. He knew how important it was that Lady Georgina should not be shocked or repelled by any *inconvenience* in his appearance. Whilst these artists were engaged in his service, he visited the dentist, the hairdresser, and the ready-made linen warehouse; so that by the following Sunday he leant over the rail in Hyde Park, with the agreeable consciousness of presenting an unexceptionable toilet.

His second object in visiting London was to obtain some information regarding Agnes—information he expected to obtain through his old acquaintance, Sarah Peddie; it being of some importance to him to ascertain whether the child had been restored or not. Connecting these inquiries with his present need of a set of unexceptionable shirts, it was not difficult to introduce the subject.

Sarah said Mrs. Gibson did not make shirts now, nor her sister either. They were entirely in the dressmaking line now, poor things!

“By the bye, did she ever find that child of hers again? I remember it was lost or drowned, or something—wasn't it?”

“God knows what came of the poor baby,” Sarah said. “Mrs. Gibson had had a letter, saying he was alive and well, but that she must not expect to see him any more; and that ever since, she wasn't like the same woman she used to be: she looked oft-times as if she wasn't long for this world.”

This intelligence was decisive. It would never do to betray the secret of the boy's legitimacy to Agnes, who would certainly make use of her knowledge in order to recover him.

No; his game was clearly to marry Lady Georgina; and leaving his bills unpaid in London, with all his appointments complete, and eighty pounds in his pocket, to cut a figure with, he took his place in the mail for T—, in the neighbourhood of which city her ladyship was residing.

CHAPTER LXI.

WHEN Mr. Lewis Watson arrived in the neighbourhood of Redlands, he quitted the coach and established himself at the inn to prepare for his undertaking; he wished to survey his ground before he proceeded to action, and resolve on the best way of procuring an interview with the great lady whom he hoped, ere long, to have the honour of calling Lady Georgina—Watson!

“Curse the name!” he exclaimed, as he uttered it in connection with this hope. “If it were not for my name, I should stand twice the chance of success!”

The interview was the first difficulty; the probability being considerable that if he requested to see the lady on business, he would be referred to her land-agent or steward.

Redlands was within a mile of the town, and it was easy to obtain information of her daily habits from Grainger the innkeeper, who said that she not unfrequently drove through the street in an open carriage, with her son and Dr. Falkner, who had the management of the young gentleman’s health and education. Her mother, Lady Minevar, was with her; and her sister-in-law, the Hon. Mrs. Langham, had been staying at the castle, but he believed she had left. In answer to Watson’s question whether Mr. Langham had also been there, the host shook his head significantly, and answered that he believed he and his wife did not “set their horses well together.”

“Redlands was a fine place,” Grainger said, well wooded and watered, and it had always been well kept up. The young heir would come into a grand property if he lived, for her ladyship had several places besides this, having succeeded to her brother’s fortune as well as her own.”

Watson inquired if she had not the reputation of being very haughty.

“Them that’s about her say so,” answered Grainger; “and that she was bringing up the young gentleman to be like herself; but they say Dr. Falkner goes quite another way to work, and that the child’s made to speak civil to everybody.”

Watson was not sorry she should be haughty, for it was on her haughtiness he risked his hopes of success. A humble and a just woman would refuse to co-operate with him, but he trusted that pride had so far corrupted Lady Georgina's nature, that she would rather stoop to become his wife than submit to the dreadful mortification of yielding up her rights to Agnes.

It was indispensable to his success that nobody should participate in the confidence he was about to make but herself; the admission of any third party, be it who it might, into the secret, would vitiate the whole transaction; and here lay the difficulty. But deliberate as he would, he could find but one way of procuring access to her, and that was to write and request the honour of an interview on very particular business connected with some private affairs of the late Mr. Grosvenor, which it was important should be communicated to her alone.

When Lady Georgina had looked over the note, she handed it to Louisa, respecting whose departure the innkeeper had been misinformed.

"Read that!" she said; "how very odd! Isn't Watson the name of those horrid cousins of yours?"

"Lewis Watson!" said Mrs. Langham, "I'm sure he can know nothing of poor Lionel's affairs. Lionel hated him. I've often heard him say he was very sorry he had ever made his acquaintance, which probably he never would, if they had not been at Oxford together."

"I can't see him," said Lady Georgina. "I'm sure he can have nothing to say to me that I want to hear. I shall write and refer him to the agent. Perhaps you'll write a line for me?"

"I expected no less," said Lewis, when he received the answer; "but it won't do, I must try again."

"Here's another note from that man, Louisa," said Lady Georgina. "How excessively importunate and disagreeable. I certainly will not see him."

"Of the greatest importance to your ladyship, that what I have to say should be communicated to no ears but your own.' What can he possibly mean? I suspect it's a trick of some sort to get money. I know he used to borrow money of Lionel. The Watsons are very poor, and I've heard papa say they were a continual drain on the colonel."

"I wish you'd write and say that I really cannot see him, will you?"

"I've half a mind to see him myself," said Mrs. Langham.

"If it's what I suspect, I should like to give him a good set down for his impertinence."

"Just as you please," returned Lady Georgina, "only don't let me be troubled with him. But perhaps he will refuse to disclose this grand secret to you."

"We shall see," said Louisa, who thereupon wrote in her sister's name, appointing an interview on the following day at one o'clock.

"Remember, Barton," she said to the groom of the chambers, "if a gentleman of the name of Watson calls, and asks to see Lady Georgina, you show him into the blue drawing-room, and if I'm not there, let me know."

The fact was that Louisa, whose mind was of a much more active and inquiring character than Georgina's, had her own bit of curiosity to satisfy on this occasion. She greatly doubted Watson's possessing any real secret of importance connected with her brother, and she wanted to hear what sort of story he would concoct for his purpose, and then she anticipated the pleasure of giving him the *good set down* she had promised, an exercise of her keen wits that would divert her.

Her success, however, probably depended on his mistaking her for Lady Georgina, which she trusted he would do, he never having seen either of them to her knowledge. If he had, the plot might fail; but she would only then be where she was now, and he would be discomfited; so she resolved to try it.

Mr. Watson looked upon the following day as the most momentous of his life, "To be, or not to be?" Success or failure! Which awaited him? Success it must be, so his genius whispered, for his failure would bring down too much rain and disgrace on the house of Ravenscliffe to be encountered when it could be bought off by so small a sacrifice as he required. What pains he took with his toilette that day. How delicately he shaved. An infant's cheek might have rubbed his chin and not felt its roughness. Into what soft and wavy meanders he coaxed his dark brown hair. What a perfume of Bouquet d'Esterhazy he exhaled. Then his linen, his gloves; his whole attire was perfect. He went in a post-chaise lest he should dust his boots and disorder his complexion; and when the carriage dashed up to the door, the *empressement* with which the footman let down the steps and preceded him to the blue room inspired him with the brightest hopes.

"Mr. Lewis Watson!"

Mr. Watson bowed low, very low, and with great gravity;

he had studied everything, and then slowly raised his eyes on a very handsome woman reclining on a *bergère*; a *ruse* of Louisa's, this being Georgina's favourite attitude. She bowed in the most stately manner. This was the trying moment. If he recognized that she was not the person he expected to see, he would say so: he did not, however, but accepted the seat the servant had placed for him before quitting the room.

The truth was, he had never seen her or Lady Georgina either, except in the Champs Elysées, when the ladies were driving together. He recognized the liveries and concluded that the pink and white crape bonnets he saw, were worn by his cousins, but he saw their faces merely *en passant*, and he did not know one from another.

"I am afraid Lady Georgina will think me very troublesome," he began, in an exordium that alarmed Louisa; but as he proceeded, she found he was only using the refinement of addressing her in the third person; "for although I have the very great honour of being a member of the Ravenscliffe family, I have never so far profited by that advantage as to be introduced to your ladyship. Some unfortunate family differences, with which personally I have no concern, have established a misunderstanding betwixt the two branches, which nobody lamented more than my poor cousin Lionel!"

Here Mr. Watson sighed and gently shook his head.

"His feelings towards the junior branch of his father's house were widely different, as perhaps, your ladyship may know—so different, indeed, that there was probably nobody in the world so entirely in his confidence as myself; and I hope, poor fellow!"—(another sigh)—"he never found cause to repent the trust he reposed in me."

Louisa bowed in a manner that might be interpreted into a dignified acquiescence.

"There may be," continued Mr. Watson, "persons in the world, who, situated as I have been—but poorly endowed with the gifts of fortune—and at the same time, slighted, rejected, disowned—I fear I must use the word, without any fault of my own, by those to whom I might, without any undue presumption, have looked for countenance and assistance—there may be persons in the world who might have been tempted to avail themselves of the power that confidence conferred, to sow dissension and unhappiness—nay, to draw down ruin on the devoted heads of the beautiful and the innocent: but Lionel slept in peace; he knew I was not that man!"

The shrewd Louisa was so little persuaded, that she felt disposed to clasp her hands and cry, "brava!" but she only made large eyes and bowed again, gravely, like a great lady who thinks her inferior is dilating somewhat too much on irrelevant matters. She was exceedingly amused, however, and curious for the sequel.

"The subject I have to touch upon," he continued, "is so delicate, so strange—I feel that the communication I have to make will fall with such astounding weight on those it concerns, that—that I scarcely know in what terms to introduce it. I confess I almost regret my journey, and shrink from the office I have assumed."

"Pray speak out!" said Louisa. "I am really desirous of hearing what can be the communication that you usher in with so much solemnity. Is it something regarding my—*brother?*" she was going to say, but caught herself in time—"regarding the late Mr. Grosvenor?"

Mr. Watson drew his hand across his brow, as if to collect his thoughts and summon his energies to the task before him.

"It was at Oxford," he continued, "that my cousin and I first became acquainted. Uninfluenced by family prejudices, he no sooner heard I was there, than he held out his hand to me, and, I think I may say, to know each other was to like each other—we became inseparable. I don't think Lionel had a secret in the world he did not tell me. I needn't remind Lady Georgina that young men *have* secrets, sometimes of a delicate nature; nor that the volatile heart of youth is apt to range from object to object many times before it fixes. We were all too much given, I am afraid, to what is commonly called philandering with the young damsels of the neighbourhood, but Lionel, though he joined in our frolics, used to speak of our belles with contempt. They were not worthy, he said, to tie the shoes of a girl that lived on his father's estate, the daughter of one of the tenants; and whenever he was called on for a toast, the name he gave us was *Agnes Crawford!*"

"This is his grand secret," thought Mrs. Langham; "the old story of Agnes and her child! I wonder what he thinks to make of it."

"Of course, we thought this nothing but a boyish fancy, like similar ones of our own; to be superseded in due time by a worthier love;" here he bowed, "but I leave your ladyship to imagine my amazement, when, in process of time, as Lionel and I

became better acquainted, I discovered that it was his fixed determination to make that girl his wife."

"His wife! Impossible!" exclaimed Louisa, indignantly.

"I cannot wonder at your doubting it. I couldn't believe him myself when first he confided his intentions to me. I asked him if he was mad! But what avails preaching to a man intoxicated with passion? I might as well have talked to that marble figure that supports the candelabre. He was determined to marry her, and nothing could stop him."

"My—Lionel marry Agnes Crawford! But nobody would have dared to marry them! A mere boy like that—unknown to his father!"

"He was of age six months before the ceremony was performed, in the chapel at Ravenscliffe, by a college friend of his, who had taken orders."

"Yourself, I suppose!" said Louisa, almost fiercely.

"I beg your pardon, I have never taken orders."

"It's impossible! I can't believe it. Agnes Crawford is alive now!"

"I am aware of it. She is residing in London at the present time. There was a child also by that marriage—a son, who is of course the heir of Ravenscliffe."

"Impossible!" cried Louisa again; "if what you allege were true, she would have claimed her rights."

"She is ignorant of them," returned Watson, leaning forward significantly, and placing his finger on his lip; "she has been persuaded that her marriage is illegal."

His motive was plain; the quick-witted Mrs. Langham discerned it clearly; he wanted to be bought, but she did not see the price at which he intended to sell himself. Neither did she believe in the reality of the first marriage, it was too improbable that her brother would have committed himself so far as to venture upon a second.

"I have no doubt that her persuasion is perfectly well founded," she answered, contemptuously, "and that it *was* illegal."

"I beg your pardon," returned Lewis; "it was irregular, not illegal."

"You must excuse my remaining somewhat incredulous on that head," replied she; "but allowing for a moment that what you allege were true, why, since you think it necessary to make this circumstance known to us now, did you not perceive the same necessity before?"

“ I have had a long struggle with myself on the subject, I assure you, Lady Georgina. During my cousin’s lifetime many and many a time I expostulated with him on the cruel predicament in which he had placed your ladyship and the child born of your marriage. Would to God I could have prevented that marriage! But it took place in France, and the news did not reach me in England till it was too late to interfere.”

“ But since you didn’t prevent it, and since you have been silent all this while, why do you come forward now? ”

“ As long as my cousin lived, I was silent in compliance with his wishes; and whilst I felt that that silence made me the abettor of his crime, I shrank from bringing disgrace and ruin on the man I loved.”

“ But a year and more has elapsed since Lionel’s death.”

“ Could I add affliction to affliction?—heap coals of fire on the heart already bruised and broken? I wished to afford time for the unstrung nerves to brace themselves, and the bleeding wounds to heal.”

“ May I ask if you are in communication with Agnes Crawford? ”

“ Certainly not—as yet,” answered Watson, with a certain significance.

“ And you suppose her ignorant of the rights you say she possesses? ”

“ I am satisfied that she is.”

“ And do you or do you not consider it your duty to inform her of them? ”

“ Cela dépend! ” answered Watson, gently raising his shoulders and modestly dropping his eyes. “ What it may be advisable to do under such very peculiar circumstances, must depend very much on other circumstances—on the view your ladyship takes of the situation—and——”

“ In short, on the sum we pay you to be silent,” was the answer that hovered on Mrs. Langham’s lips; but although she believed firmly that the whole thing was a scheme to obtain money, and that the romance of the marriage was woven out of some written promise given to Agnes by her brother in the heyday of his infatuation, still she did not wish to break with her visitor till she had obtained further information.

“ The view I take must depend first on my conviction,” she answered. “ You cannot expect me to believe such an extraordinary assertion as this simply on your word. To be candid, I do not believe it. Where’s your proof? ”

"The marriage took place in the presence of witnesses; the clergyman who read the service is still alive."

"And pray who was he? What is his name?"

"That I am not yet at liberty to tell," he answered.

There was a certain tone of defiance gradually beginning to infect Watson's manner, arising out of the incredulity on the other side, and his uncomfortable consciousness that he could not produce sufficient proof of the marriage, without revealing to Agnes and her sister the very thing that it was his interest they should not know. This difficulty stood straight before him, and he could not see how to overcome or evade it. He might command the testimony of his brother, but what would that avail him? Gerald's word, where such an interest was at stake, would have no more weight than his own.

"It appears to me," resumed Louisa, "that till you can bring me the most satisfactory proof of the truth of what you say, all further discussion of the subject is idle. You cannot expect me to believe such an unaccountable story upon your simple word. Whenever you can produce such proof, I shall be ready to examine it. Meantime, I must wish you good morning. By the bye, if you write, if you write, have the goodness to enclose your letter to my sister, Mrs. Langham, as it might otherwise fall into my mother's hands and disturb her."

Mr. Watson was nonplussed; as soon as he had got beyond the park gates, he stopped the driver, and bade him let him out. He wanted to walk; the motion of the carriage disturbed his thoughts, and irritated his temper. He had not expected to be met with so much incredulity, or to encounter such a clear-headed, straightforward antagonist. His notion of Lady Georgina was quite different. He had reckoned on creating a terrible sensation—amazement, alarm, a fit of hysterics, or a swoon, in which, forbearing to summon aid, he would have remotely hinted, as he bent over her, and held the salts to her nose, that all was not yet lost, and that it might be possible to come to an arrangement that should smoothe away those distressing difficulties; but Louisa Langham was a very different kind of person; and in falling foul of her, he had, what is commonly called, "caught a Tartar!"

At the same time, although she betrayed no alarm, and had dismissed her visitor with all the dignity and calmness of unshaken security, she was not so much at ease as she appeared. She trembled at the bare possibility of such a story being

true—the infamy that would fall upon her brother's memory, and the calamity that would overwhelm his widow and his child. She had not thought Lionel unprincipled, but she had seen enough of the world to know that the code of honour which keeps men from injuring each other, does not extend to their dealings with women; especially to women of an inferior class. That he had once been more or less fond of Agnes, she knew—the trial having disclosed the secret of their intimacy—and that there had been a child, and an allowance paid to the mother for its support, she was also aware; but the most remote idea that any further claim existed, had never occurred to any member of the family. Mr. Conyers himself had not hinted at such a thing; he had too much respect for aristocratic feelings, to intrude so unpleasant a subject on their notice, uncertain, as he was, whether Agnes was deceived or deceiving. He trusted that the marriage had been a mock one; and, in any case, he thought the less said about it the better.

It was true, however, that those amongst them who knew Agnes best, had been the most surprised that the proud, reserved, modest girl should have turned out so ill. Since that period, the name of their former favourite was never referred to, till Lady Georgina's account of Isabel's unpardonable *escapade* revived the painful subject; whilst, from motives of respect and delicacy for Lady Georgina's feelings, as well as her brother's memory, except to Miss Daeres, Isabel had forbore to repeat the tale of Agnes's wrongs. But Louisa knew that her sister defended and upheld her, in a manner that had appeared to the family as disgraceful as it was unaccountable. Could Agnes have told her of this secret marriage?

Too active minded and energetic to rest quiescent under all these doubts and uncertainties, Mrs. Langham, who was really on the point of leaving Redlands, resolved to go through London and pay a visit to Mr. Conyers; and in a few days, hearing no more from Mr. Watson, she started.

Agnes's demeanour whilst she was receiving the stipend, her haste to relinquish it as soon as she could maintain her child herself, and her despair when this only object of her affection was taken from her, had inspired the worldly-minded lawyer with a favourable opinion; and he had gradually arrived at the conclusion, that she was a virtuous girl, more sinned against than sinning. But he spoke diffidently of this humble merit to the Honourable Mrs. Langham.

"I am inclined to think there was nothing very bad about the girl," he said. "She lived quietly, supporting herself and her child by her needle, I fancy, till she lost him."

"The boy's dead, is he?" said Louisa, much relieved.

"He had strayed away, or was stolen, I understood," answered Mr. Conyers; "but whether she got him back again, I don't know. She seemed to have an idea that Mr. Grosvenor had taken him away."

"We thought her a modest girl," said Mrs. Langham, "and often wondered how it could have happened."

Mr. Conyers looked at her, to see if she really wished to hear how it had happened.

"Young men," he said, "are sometimes not so scrupulous as they should be in these cases. They have recourse to deceptions, that cannot be justified."

"Have you any reason to believe that Lionel was guilty of anything of the sort?"

"Why, there's no saying. I never saw Mr. Grosvenor himself after that affair at Ravenscliffe; but the girl certainly hinted at something of the sort!"

"A fictitious marriage you mean, perhaps?"

"Exactly."

"But she could scarcely have been deceived, Mr. Conyers," returned Mrs. Langham; "she that had been brought up on the estate, and must have known the impossibility of such an alliance."

"One would say so; but, I must say, she appeared very much surprised when I undeceived her."

"Then you did undeceive her?"

"Of course, I told her she must be mistaken, and that I presumed the whole thing was a jest."

"And what did she say to that?"

"Why, I scarcely recollect; I don't think she said much. My impression was, that she took it more quietly than I should have expected. On the whole, she seemed to me a discreet, well-behaved young woman; and I was really sorry when she lost her little boy."

"I think I should like to see her," said Louisa. "No doubt she *has* been injured. Do you know where she is to be found?"

"I know where she formerly lived," he answered; "but I have not heard anything of her this long time."

It was remarkable that a sense of the injury done to Agnes,

should not have been awakened till it was roused by fear. How common such instances are! We must be touched ourselves before we can feel for others. They had forgotten the disadvantage at which she had been placed in a struggle betwixt virtue and temptation, where Lionel was the tempter. They had not taken into account the influence of his name, the *prestige* of his position, the fascinations of high breeding, to a girl in a situation to value them all above their worth. They saw only the error, none of the excuses for it. They were not only shocked by her lapse from virtue, but disgusted by her ingratitude. They did not consider how far their brother's injury outweighed their favours; a few years of capricious kindness, crowned by a blasted life.

Mrs. Langham had some consciousness of this now, and she resolved to pay her a visit, moved partly by this late sense of justice, and partly by more home interests; for she saw that Mr. Conyers had not spoken quite without reserve regarding the deception practised on Agnes; and her own mind was far from easy on the subject of this secret marriage.

Before, however, she could put her plan in execution she was summoned to Ravenscliffe by the illness of her father. On this occasion all the family assembled; and even Isabel, the disowned, was permitted to stand by the old man's death-bed.

Shortly after he was laid in the grave Lady Grosvenor retired to another residence, that had been settled on her as part of her jointure, whilst Lady Georgina and her son (now Sir Francis Grosvenor) took up their residence at the castle. Isabel accompanied her mother, and the rest of the family dispersed to their several homes.

CHAPTER LXII.

MR. LEWIS WATSON'S situation was now critical, and called for an immediate decision. He must either marry Lady Georgina or oust her; be her sworn ally or her declared enemy. Could he be quite assured that Agnes's child would not turn up again, the latter game would be decidedly the best. He had only to prove the legality of the first marriage, and young Sir Francis and his mother would have to vacate the castle and make room for the colonel and himself to step into their places. But, on the other hand, when the lost child was known to be the heir of Ravenscliffe, might not inquiries be instituted which would lead to his recovery, although Agnes's humble means had proved quite inefficient.

It was this consideration that had for the present led him to prefer an alliance with Lady Georgina, which would secure him a handsome provision for life, safe from all contingencies, what he might choose to do hereafter remaining on the cards. His marrying the mother did not invalidate his right to supersede the son whenever he might find it advisable to do so.

But the difficulty was to prove the first marriage without the aid of Agnes and her witnesses. If he but had that certificate, which he had risked so much to obtain, its evidence might have been accepted, but he had not—in the confusion and hurry of his flight on that momentous night he had most strangely lost it and amongst the fears that had for some time haunted him, had been the apprehension of its being found by somebody that would understand its importance. However that anxiety had subsided with time; a perishable scrap of paper, it had probably fallen in the mud and been long ago dissolved into its primitive elements; but the difficulty of proving the legality of the marriage to one party without betraying it to the other still remained.

Under these circumstances, Sir Francis being now dead, and his grandfather, unknown to himself, the legitimate possessor of Ravenscliffe, Mr. Watson finally resolved to inform his mother and the old gentleman of the real state of the case.

"I declare, here's Lewis returned!" exclaimed Mrs. Watson. "Good gracious! what can have brought him back so soon?"

"His own balloon, I dare say," answered the colonel, sarcastically.

"I shouldn't wonder if something has happened at Ravenscliffe. I dreamt last night that you and I were driving up to the castle in a carriage-and-four, and that just as we reached the terrace we saw two men bringing out a child's coffin."

"I dare say you did; fortunately your dreams are not prophetic."

"Why is it fortunate? I think it would be fortunate for us if they were. But I know you've no feeling for your own flesh and blood."

"I beg your pardon. You seem to forget that the little lad at Ravenscliffe is my own flesh and blood, as you call it, as well as that scapegrace of a son of yours."

"Well, I must say I don't think that's fair; there are not many young men steadier than Lewis."

"Nor idler!"

"That's the misfortune of being brought up with expectations, poor fellow!"

"Then why did you bring him up with expectations, poor fellow, as you call him? Expectations that are never likely to be realized. He had better have been a shoemaker than a poor gentleman living on expectations."

This proposition being unanswerable, Mrs. Watson considered it a proper occasion for tears, and being the kind of woman that enjoys the privilege of having them always at command, her eyes filled, and she was in the act of blowing her nose when her son entered the room.

"Good morning, sir. How are you, ma'am?"

"Good morning," answered the colonel, dryly; for he had had a strong persuasion that he should not see his grandson's face again as long as the hundred pounds lasted; and this speedy return augured a more rapid dispersion of the fund than even his fears had augured.

Mrs. Watson being at that moment in the proud attitude of an injured woman, held out her right hand silently, whilst with the left she wiped a tear from the corner of her eye.

"What's the matter, ma'am?" said Lewis. "I hope there's nothing wrong?"

"Oh, no, nothing," answered his mother in a resigned tone.

"Well, sir, where's this grand invention of yours that's to make your fortune?"

"Invention, sir? I never claimed to have made any invention that I know of."

"If you didn't, your mother did for you."

"My mother's too sanguine, sir, and too partial a great deal, as you know. I can boast of no invention; but I have made a discovery that I flatter myself will have no little effect upon your fortunes, whatever it may have on my own."

"I knew it," said Mrs. Watson, with a little scornful laugh directed against the colonel. "I called it an invention, because I don't understand those mechanical arts and sciences; but a discovery's just the same thing."

"A coal-bed in the kitchen-garden, I suppose; or a lead-mine under the paddock. I remember hearing something of that sort before."

"Not from me, sir."

"From your father, though."

"Well, sir, let my father's errors rest where he rests himself—in the grave." Mr. Watson had a very pathetic way of speaking, when he liked, which always affected his mother's feelings. He had inherited it from his father, who was in the habit of moving his congregation to tears, and charming the money from their pockets by exactly the same kind of eloquence. "No, sir; the discovery I have made, if, indeed, discovery it can be called, for I have been acquainted with the facts a long while, although I have forbore to make them public, from a weak sentiment of pity for those who have shown little pity to me——"

"What facts are you talking of?" inquired the colonel.

"What would you say, sir, if I were to tell you that the so-called heir of Ravenscliffe, Lady Georgina's son, is a bastard?"

"Why, sir, I should say you lied!" returned the colonel.

"I cannot wonder at it, sir, and yet you would be mistaken," returned Lewis.

"I was certain there was something more than common in my dream last night," said Mrs. Watson, shrewdly.

"It must appear on the first view an absurd assertion," continued the young man; "yet there is nothing more certain than that the present Sir Francis is an illegitimate child."

"I am not at all surprised," observed Mrs. Watson, with an air of cool conviction; "I always had my doubts that Lady Georgina was no better than she should be, as her mother was before her."

"I wonder you are not ashamed to sit there and utter such unfounded calumnies, Letitia," exclaimed the colonel. "What do you know of Lady Georgina Grosvenor, or of her mother either, to justify such imputations!"

"I know what I know. I remember well when Lord Minevar died—I don't mean the young lord, but the old lord—how she, the widow, I mean, was talked of with Sir Benjamin Halkett. It was in everybody's mouth."

"Scandal generally is in everybody's mouth — women's mouths, at least. It's a pity one can't cram it down their own throats, instead of allowing them to vomit it out upon society. I never heard any reflection whatever upon the character of either Lady Minevar or her daughter. But to return to this miraculous discovery of yours, have the goodness to explain yourself, will you? What is it you mean me to understand by a child being illegitimate that was born in undoubted wedlock?"

"Not undoubted wedlock, I am afraid, sir. I have the strongest reasons for believing that when my cousin Lionel married Lady Georgina Miuevar in Paris, he had a wife in England already."

"Impossible!"

"True, sir, I assure you."

Here Mrs. Watson let the work drop that she had been hitherto unconsciously holding, and began to clap her hands with a childish expression of triumph.

"A wife in England!" exclaimed the colonel.

"A wife in England, sir. You will remember something about a girl called Agnes Crawford, who came forward on that trial of the valet; she had lived in the family as lady's-maid, I fancy. Well, sir, before ever he left England, Lionel was married to that woman. She was very handsome, and he'd a fancy for her from boyhood."

"I can't believe it," exclaimed the colonel.

"I can," said Mrs. Watson.

"Married to Agnes Crawford! Her father held a farm on the estate—Daniel Crawford, I remember him very well; a very decent fellow."

"Exactly, sir; and his daughter Agnes is at this moment the real Lady Grosvenor as certainly as my name's Watson."

"And I hope there's no doubt of that!" said his mother, with a toss of the head that spoke volumes of virtue.

"And pray what's your authority for this extraordinary story? Is it the girl herself?"

"By no means, sir. She is not even aware of the circumstance."

"Married, and not aware of it herself!"

"I dare say she was married by special license," said Mrs. Watson, who had a vague idea that in such cases the ordinary ceremony was dispensed with.

"I mean that she is not aware that her marriage is legal," continued Watson, "which nevertheless it assuredly is."

"Where was she married? Who married her?"

"She was married in the chapel at Ravenscliffe, in the presence of witnesses, two of whom are now alive, and I believe all three are. The ceremony was performed by my brother Gerald shortly after he had taken orders."

"Young scoundrel!" exclaimed the old man, meaning his grandson, the parson.

"And knowing this, you permitted that foolish, thoughtless boy to contract a second marriage, the result of which must be to overwhelm the whole family with misery and disgrace."

"Upon my word, that's a good one. How could he help his cousin's marrying again if he chose to do it," exclaimed Mrs. Watson.

"You forget, sir, that Lionel married Lady Georgina Minevar abroad, and that I knew nothing of the engagement till it was too late to prevent mischief. Had the conduct of your brother's family been what it ought to be,—had they condescended to treat me as a friend and relation,—the result might have been very different; I might have saved them from ruin now inevitable."

The colonel paused for a moment's reflection. Was it inevitable?

"Are these circumstances known at Ravenscliffe?"

"They are, sir; at least, by Lady Georgina. Whether she has communicated them to the rest of the family, I cannot say; but she met the information with a degree of haughty incredulity, that shut the door at once to anything like negotiation."

"Negotiation!" echoed the colonel; "what do you mean by negotiation?"

"Merely, sir, that, actuated by the best feelings, I wished to ascertain if some middle term could not be found to avoid publicity, and avert the calamity that threatens the family. For this purpose, I procured an interview with Lady Georgina."

"And she rejected your overtures?"

"She did, sir," answered Watson, who, having adopted this

course, had abandoned all idea of temporising. "*Aut Caesar aut nullus,*" was his present device.

"And I admire her for it," said the colonel: "I admire her for it very much. She had no right to be a party to any such transaction. Pray, is there any family by this first marriage?"

"A son, sir," answered the young man; and there he stopped, feeling an intimate conviction, that if he added the child was not forthcoming, he should lay himself open to some unpleasant suspicions, on the part of his grandfather. His consciousness of what he had contemplated doing, when somebody else so strangely spared him the trouble, kept him silent. He was not obliged to know more than he had told; the rest would be disclosed in the due course of events.

When the young man went to bed that night, to build castles in the air,—for the ice now broken, he saw nothing to intervene betwixt him and fortune, except the remote possibility of Agnes's son reappearing, and his identity being proved—a difficulty which, it appeared to him, would not be easily overcome, the colonel, sleepless and anxious, remained by his fire-side; and when the next morning broke, it found him still lost in thought, sitting on the same spot, and almost in the same attitude, as when his daughter and grandson had bade him good-night on the preceding evening.

A man of the strictest honour, and yet with all the pride of the Grosvenors, he was torn by contending emotions; recoiling, on the one hand, from being party to an injustice; and, on the other, from bringing disgrace on the name in which he prided himself; and yet these were the only alternatives that presented themselves. He must allow Agnes and her son to be not only defrauded of their rights, but to pine under a cruel weight of unmerited ignominy; or Lionel's reputation, and Lady Georgina's happiness and her son's prospects, must be sacrificed.

Of the effect of either line of conduct on his own fortunes, he did not pause to think; and almost as little did he think of his grandson's. Certainly he had no right to be in any way instrumental in cutting the young man off from his inheritance; but, in the first place, as there was a son by either marriage, it did not make much difference to that individual which of them interposed to keep him out of the property; and, in the next, he had so little confidence in Lewis's conduct, and so little satisfaction in leaving a family representative of the name of Watson, that he was not disposed to take a step out of the way

to promote his succession. But, setting all consideration for himself and his own branch of the family out of the question, he could not remain inactive, with such a secret as this weighing on his conscience. Moreover, had he even been disposed to do so, it was no longer possible. It was already in the hands of those who would not let it rest. Watson had, doubtless, his own motives for stirring in the affair; and as for his mother, she would talk, if she did for it.

She, too, was restless and wakeful; slumbering, to dream of little coffins; and waking, to triumph in the anticipated downfall of Lady Georgina and her son, who had so long been the objects of her envy and hatred.



CHAPTER LXIII

As Lady Georgina and Colonel Grosvenor had never met since she was a child, she was somewhat surprised, therefore, to receive a letter from him, announcing an early visit; intimating, at the same time, that the importance of the subject on which it was necessary they should confer—a subject better avoided in a letter—must plead his excuse for troubling her.

“Something about that Mr. Watson again, I suppose; I wish Louisa was here to receive him;” for, unwilling to alarm her, Mrs. Langham had contented herself with referring the young man’s visit to some wild scheme for getting money. Her ladyship was, therefore, prepared with a cool reception for her guest; but Colonel Grosvenor was a tall, grey-haired, dignified-looking old man, who, possessed with the serious nature of the errand on which he had come, entered the room, and saluted her with such a kind, grave, almost sad expression of countenance, and at the same time with such an air of high breeding and refinement, that her haughtiness and suspicion gave way, and the better part of her nature took the ascendant.

Of infirm constitution, and educated by a weak mother into the most erroneous notions of her own importance, Lady Georgina was incessantly nursing and coddling herself, her mind for ever occupied with her own morbid sensations, to the exclusion of almost every other subject, except the welfare of

her son—welfare, that is, after her manner of thinking—which led her to pursue the object so injudiciously that the boy was at the gates of death, when an effort was made to save him, by substituting for her erroneous methods, the judicious treatment of Dr. Falkner.

Alarmed for his life, and intensely impressed with the magnitude of the interests involved in the preservation of this fragile representative of two great houses, she submitted to the recommendation of the physicians, and, up to the present moment, with every reason to congratulate herself on the change.

Colonel Grosvenor met her as a relative, held out his hand, and attempted to give her a hearty shake; but the irresponsive fingers disappointed him. Lady Georgina did not intend to be cool, but she could not shake hands.

“I hope I see you well,” said the old man. “How is the little fellow?”

This was the key-note to a fertile theme, and Lady Georgina entered into a vast number of details regarding her son’s state of health, which not only wearied the colonel, but somewhat surprised him, considering the momentous nature of the business that occasioned his visit. She spoke of the child, too, always as Sir Francis.

“Perhaps you would like to see him?” she said, raising her hand to the bell.

“Very much,” he answered; “but let that be by-and-by. My mind will be more disengaged after we have conferred a little about this distressing business.”

“What distressing business?” asked Lady Georgina.

“She does not believe the story of the first marriage,” thought he, “or she could not appear so indifferent.”

“I allude to the business that took my grandson to Redlands lately. At that time I knew nothing of the affair; if I had, I should not have permitted him to be the bearer of such unpleasant intelligence. It was very improper conduct on his part, and so I have told him.”

“I was very much surprised at his visit,” answered Lady Georgina, not knowing very well what to say.

“I don’t wonder at it, officious young blackguard!” said the colonel. “But, tell me, my dear lady, had you ever any reason to suspect that Lionel had entered into any unfortunate engagement?”

“No,” answered her ladyship, “never!” concluding the engagement alluded to was of a pecuniary nature.

"The thing is altogether so extraordinary," said the colonel, "that, to say the truth, at first I didn't believe it; but I have questioned that young jackanapes, my grandson, pretty closely, and I am afraid—afraid—" and, unwilling to overthrow that composure which he supposed to be founded on the most obstinate incredulity, he hesitated to proceed.

"Afraid of what?" asked Lady Georgina, still preserving her air of indifference; for what did it signify if her late husband *had* entered into some pecuniary engagement with Mr. Watson?—the loss of a few thousand pounds, perhaps; a thing doubtless to be regretted, but not worth disturbing herself about. "Afraid of what?"

"That there is some truth in this story of my grandson's regarding that girl, Agnes Crawford."

"I believe she's a very good-for-nothing person indeed!" responded Lady Georgina, with considerable bitterness; "and I always thought it exceedingly wrong and injudicious of Lady Grosvenor to encourage her about the castle, and permit such a person to associate with her daughters."

"You have reason to entertain an ill opinion of the girl, then, have you?"

"Certainly. I believe both Mrs. Laugham and Mrs. Damer were quite *désabusées* about her long ago. And that affair of Isabel's, you know, living with such a person as that, for several weeks together, in an obscure street of Paris, was really too shocking!"

"Did my niece, Isabel Grosvenor, do that?"

"Assuredly she did; I never was so shocked or distressed in my life as when I discovered where she had been."

"Most extraordinary!" said the colonel, altogether bewildered. "I suspect Bel must be, somehow or other, acquainted with the circumstances of the secret marriage; nothing else could account for her doing such a thing."

"What secret marriage?"

"Lionel's."

"Lionel's secret marriage! What are you talking of?"

"I thought my grandson had explained——"

"Explained what?"

"I beg your pardon—I feel very much distressed—I thought you were acquainted with the circumstances of an unfortunate engagement entered into by my nephew previous to his marriage."

Here Lady Georgina half rose from her recumbent attitude

on the sofa, and supporting herself by one hand resting on the cushion, she looked wildly into the colonel's face.

"An engagement!—you mean a promise of marriage?"

"Worse than that, I fear."

"Worse than that!" she gasped.

"Having said so much it's in vain to retreat—I am afraid there was a marriage!"

She laid her hand upon her heart, as if to keep it still.

"A marriage!—a marriage with the girl we just now named, Agnes Crawford!"

"It appears to have been solemnized at Ravenscliffe, here, in the chapel," continued the colonel, who, having stepped in so far, was eager to get through his painful task; "and there was a child—a boy—born within the year."

Lady Georgina's cheeks and lips were of an ashy paleness; she looked as if she were going to faint, and she had often fainted upon a hundredth part of the provocation; she did not faint now, however, but she spoke with difficulty.

"Will you have the goodness to explain to me the precise effect of—of such a marriage—if true—on my—my son and myself?"

"Of course, a second marriage cannot be valid whilst the first wife lives, nor the offspring of it legitimate," answered the colonel, with a quivering lip. He, too, was deathly pale, and the withered hand shook with emotion as he laid it upon hers. "But the sin and the shame will fall where it is due—not on you or on your child. You are blameless, and you will be the objects of universal sympathy and respect."

Lady Georgina clapped the palm of her hand violently on her forehead.

"Of sympathy!—pity!—scorn for the proud woman in the dust! But they shall never see it!" and so saying, she rushed out of the room, whilst the colonel rang the bell, and desired her maid might attend her.

When, anxious and alarmed, he some time afterwards sent to inquire for her, the message he received was, that her ladyship had lain down and was quite composed; and to his repeated inquiries during the evening the same answer was returned. Not thinking it right to leave the house under present circumstances, the old gentleman desired that a bed might be prepared for him, to which he retired early, very much regretting his undertaking, since the line of conduct he would have pursued had he supposed Lady Georgina ignorant of this terrible

secret, would have been extremely different. Concluding her, from his grandson's report, fully acquainted with the facts, he had not felt himself at liberty to take any step whatever till he had offered every assurance of his goodwill and desire to act as her friend; but now, he lamented that he had not first gone to London, and consulted the family solicitor, Mr. Conyers; for, after all, there might be some flaw discovered in Watson's story, however plausible it seemed; and he was induced the more to distrust it, from finding himself led astray, at the very first step, by an untruth.

Disturbed by these thoughts, he passed a restless night—the morning had dawned before he slept; and when he rang his bell, it was past ten o'clock. On descending, he found his breakfast prepared.

“Have you heard how Lady Georgina is this morning?” he inquired of the butler.

“I believe her ladyship was pretty well, sir.”

“I should like to see Sir Francis if he is disengaged.”

“Sir Francis and Dr. Falkner went away with my lady, sir.”

“Is Lady Georgina gone out?”

“My lady left early this morning for London, sir.”

“Her wounded pride will not allow her to meet me!” said the old man to himself. “Poor thing—poor thing! I must follow her to town, and see if Conyers cannot help us.”

He started for London that afternoon, but on calling at Lady Georgina's house in Grosvenor Square, he was informed that her ladyship had only remained there a couple of hours, and had then proceeded with all speed to Dover.

CHAPTER LXIV

ONE of Leighton's first objects on his return to England had been to find out Agnes; and his occasional visits at her lodging on a Sunday evening had brought him acquainted with Hewson and his wife, who, in compliance with her ambitious desires, had laid out their legacy in the purchase of a small house of public entertainment in the neighbourhood of Charing Cross; and here the ex-valet occasionally dropped in to take his glass of beer and have a chat. Except that he had been unfortunate, Hewson knew nothing of Leighton's history, he being now in a way to earn his living, and by no means anxious to tell it, since it was not certain that everybody would put so liberal a construction on his adventures as his compassionate friend Mrs. Patton had done. Here, also, he had an opportunity of once more indulging a taste cultivated in his days of prosperity, when the newspapers descended from the library to the steward's room. Hewson took in the *Times* for the benefit of such of his customers as had a political turn of mind; and it was a great pleasure to Leighton to get a spell at the broad sheet occasionally, although for his own reading he would have preferred the *Morning Post*, where the movements of the fashionable world were recorded, in which he, as a humble unit, had been formerly involved. These notices, when he happened to see them, brought back the savour of better days. They recalled to him the toilets he had superintended, the festivities he had witnessed, the roads he had travelled with four horses to draw him, and a pretty lady's-maid, with a pink parasol, beside him in the rumble; together with the *petit souper* of delicate remainders in the housekeeper's room, and all the luxuries of the second table awaiting him at the end of the journey. Ladies'-maids and valets are not poetical; if they were, we should certainly, ere this, have had a *recueil* of verses singing the lamentable fall of John Snipes or Jemima Higgins; for what can be more romantic, what more edifying, than the sudden reverses of fortune to which these unconscious heroes and heroines are subject? To-day in the full enjoyment

of ten, twenty, thirty thousand a year—to-morrow in a garret, living on tripe!

Leighton did not see the poetry of the thing; but he felt the bitterness of it very often. Like the discredited Legitimists, the idea of a *restoration* was never absent from his mind; and as the only possibility of this desideratum seemed somehow or other linked with the fortunes of Mr. Lewis Watson, that gentleman formed also a frequent subject of his cogitations. He wondered where he resided, and how he lived; but since quitting Paris he had neither seen nor heard of him, nor did he know anybody likely to give him the information he desired.

In this disposition he was sitting one evening with the *Times* in his hand, talking to Hewson and his wife, when his eye was arrested by an advertisement that suddenly brought the colour to his cheek; it was to the effect that, if the gentleman who, at a certain period named, had left a pointer puppy and a portmanteau at the Red Lion Inn, at C—, did not reclaim his property within a certain period, it would be sold to pay expenses.

It was the date that struck him—the 14th of December, 18—, that day from which dated all his misfortunes.

“A pointer puppy and a portmanteau;” exactly the two articles which had accompanied Watson when he quitted Ravenscliffe Castle. He remembered the circumstances distinctly. The two young men were at breakfast, and he was attending them. They were talking of sporting dogs; and Lionel desired Leighton to bring in Juno’s puppies, which he did, placing the three little things (then about six weeks old) on the floor. The gentlemen played with them for some time, and Lionel asked Watson if he would like to have one. He hesitated at first, saying he did not know how to get it to his grandfather’s. If once it was there, his mother would look to it, and it would do very well. Mr. Grosvenor said,—

“Carry it in a basket; it’s so young that it will travel quite safely, and it will want nothing but a little milk on the road.”

They then bade Leighton give the animal some milk in a saucer to try if it could lap, which it did. Nothing more was said on the subject till the morning Mr. Watson was about to leave, and then, whilst at breakfast, Mr. Grosvenor had desired Leighton to have the puppy put in a basket with some straw, and see it placed in the dog-cart. This he had done, and had also strapped the portmanteau, and brought it to the carriage himself.

He was so impressed with the coincidence, on reading the

advertisement, that he struck the table with his fist, and involuntarily exclaimed,—

“By G—d, I think I’ve got him now!”

“What’s the matter? Who do you think you’ve got?” inquired Hewson.

“A scoundrel, who has been my ruin!” answered Leighton. “I wasn’t always as badly off as you see me. I’ve lived in some of the first families in England, and should be still, but for a d—d rascal. But if I’m not much mistaken, I’m upon his track now, and, poor as I am, I’ll find the way to hunt him up, or my name’s not Leighton!”

Mr. and Mrs. Hewson, especially the latter, were naturally curious to learn more of the story; and, after a little pressing, Leighton related the circumstances, omitting, however, the names of the parties concerned, which he thought it not prudent to reveal till he was more sure of his ground.

“Now,” said Leighton, “if, as I have good reason to believe, he wanted to compass master’s death, in order that he might get the property himself, it’s likely he would leave his portmanteau and dog at a neighbouring inn, intending to go back for them when he’d done the job. But betwixt the girl supping there that night, and my hearing the noise and jumping out of bed, he was disturbed, and made off without them.”

“And should you know the dog and portmanteau again?”

“Should I? To be sure I should. The dog was all white, except his ears, which were liver-coloured, and he’d a liver-coloured spot just at the root of his tail; and then, besides knowing the portmanteau, I should know the mark on the linen. I could swear to them both any day.”

There was no denying that the circumstances were very suspicious; but Hewson reasonably objected, that although the dog and portmanteau turned out to be the articles in question, he did not see how that could prove the owner of them guilty of the assault, and the remark was just enough, since the instinctive conviction of Watson’s guilt, to which close observation had brought Leighton, could not be transferred to another. Hewson said, he did not see how he could go about to accuse a gentleman like that of such a crime, and that he did not think anybody would listen to him. But strong conviction supported Leighton in his project, urged on as he was by the desire to recover his own position, and by his unsatisfied thirst for vengeance. No, he would not be discouraged by difficulties. It was not easy for a poor man to get a hearing—that

he knew too well ; but he would not relinquish his object, and the passion that impelled him inspired him with confidence of success.

He had one friend now who he knew would be ready to listen to his tale and help him with her advice, and that was Patton's wife, to whom he next proceeded, having bought a copy of the paper containing the advertisement as he went along. Mrs. Patton was a bold, shrewd woman, and as she fully shared Leighton's conviction, she entered energetically into his interests.

"Depend on it," she said, "if you don't make haste, he'll (meaning Watson) get hold of the things himself, for it's most like he frequents coffee-houses and places where he'll see the newspapers, and when once he's got 'em, you're done for. You should be off by this night's coach yourself."

But to this plan Leighton objected that he had not money enough to undertake the journey, and that, moreover, if he went off in that manner, he should probably lose the situation her husband had procured for him.

"What I was thinking of is," said he, "that perhaps Mr. Patton could get Jem Walker, if he lives still at Tower Hill, to go over for me to the Red Lion Inn, at C——, and inquire about the things."

"What good will that do?" asked Mrs. Patton.

"Why, I might hear what kind of dog and portmanteau it was, and what sort of looking gentleman left them there ; and then, if they're the same, I think I'd go to a lawyer about it."

"What's the use of going to a lawyer when you haven't no money to pay him his fees? Lawyers 'll do nothing without money more than other folks."

The *no money* was a stop in every direction. However, it was agreed, as the only expedient that presented itself for the moment, to write to this Jem Walker on the subject. Leighton might have done it in his own name, for he had known him formerly, with such slight acquaintance as gentlemen's gentlemen acknowledge the *valetaille* ; but it was not impossible but that Jem, in the pride of unimpeached virtue, might decline a correspondence with the fallen valet. Leighton, therefore, as the better scribe, wrote the letter, with Mrs. Patton's authority, in her husband's name, giving no reason for the inquiry, but requesting an early answer, with full and particular descriptions of the dog and portmanteau, and also of their owner.

His master being absent, and Jem having little or nothing to do but to exercise a couple of hunters, the commission was not

unwelcome, and as he rode up to the door of the inn, he saw a remarkably fine pointer dog lying stretched out on the door-step with his nose on the ground between his two forepaws. The sound of the horse's foot brought the ostler to the door.

"That's a fine dog o' yourn!" said Jem, by way of opening his mission.

"Ay! he is," returned the ostler, patting the animal. "Shall I lead your horse round to the stable?"

"I'll do that myself," said Jem. "Who does the dog belong to?" he continued. "I like the looks of him. Is he broke?"

"Is he? Ain't he?" answered the ostler, knowingly. "I'll take a bet you won't show me his feller in all England, I don't care who the other be. Master broke him himself, and master was a capital shot; there warn't a better in the county. Why, that 'ere dog's worth twenty guineas if he's worth sixpence!"

"Is he to be sold?"

"Why, no, not exactly, though missis has been offered a good price for him since master died. I wish you saw him range! Such a goer he is! Steady, too, as old Time! Never runs in upon the game! And he arn't jealous, as some dogs be; he'll back another half across a field!"

"How old is he?"

"I never heerd say; but master had him afore I came here. I think he got him quite a puppy from some gentleman as stopped at the house."

Having ascertained that this was all the ostler knew, Jem next presented himself to the hostess. What was the object of the inquiries he was directed to make he did not know; but he suspected there was some act of robbery or swindling connected with the property so long unclaimed and so recently advertised, and he therefore thought it advisable to be very cautious and discreet. Besides, Jem prided himself on being "a knowing chap, and up to a thing or two," and it flattered his self-love to get all the information he wanted without giving any in return. So, after saluting Mrs. Clark, he inquired about the dog he had seen at the door, which, from the hints gathered from the ostler, he concluded to be the animal alluded to in the advertisement.

"He was a fine-looking dog," he said, "and he knew a gentleman that wanted a pointer; and if the dog was well broke, wouldn't mind giving a pretty long price for him."

The widow laughed. "Poor Rollo!" she cried, whereupon, the dog hearing his name, came in and rubbed his sides against her knee. "Poor Rollo! It's a strange thing, but I think

everybody as goes past the house and sees Rollo lying at the door takes a fancy to him. He's as good as a signboard, Rollo is; I'm sure he's brought us many a customer! Why 'twas but last week a gentleman offered me ten pounds for him; and Rollo's no chicken either now; be you, old dog?"

"Then you won't sell him?"

"I don't say that, neither," returned Mrs. Clark, "if so be he were mine to sell; not but I should be sorry to part with Rollo, too, poor fellow! But, as folks say, what's the use of a sporting dog to me? It's a sin and a shame, says they, to keep a dog like that basking in the sun all day, a-doing of nothing; and so it is! Lor' love you! My old man war as fond of Rollo as if he'd been a child; and it's my opinion the dog's never been the same since poor Clark died."

"A dog what's used to work's oft-times as fond of sport as his master is. Come! You'd better part with him. Name your price, and I think I can get you a customer."

"Nay," said Mrs. Clark; "he's promised already to a gentleman as was here last week; that is, if I sell him; but to say the truth, the dog bean't mine to sell."

"Not your'n! I thought he war your husband's. I'm sure I've seen Clark shooting to him."

"Ay, no doubt you may; for the truth is, the dog's our'n, and he isn't our'n. We've had him ever sin he war a pup, and my husband shot the first bird Rollo ever saw; and I've heard him say, he stood as steady as if the best keeper in England had broke him."

"But whose is he, if he bean't your'n?"

"Well, you see, it's near on for six years ago now—it was in the month o' December, the 14th. I mind it as if it was but yesterday, and I remember the day of the month, because it happened to be poor Clark's birthday, and we'd a friend or two in to drink a glass of punch at supper time. Well, I suppose it might be about six o'clock in the evening, a gig stopped at the door, and a gentleman alighted from it. Clark heard the wheels, and called Bill, the ostler as we had then, to take the horse; but the man as drove said he'd just give him a little hay and water, and bade Bill not take him out o' the shafts. The gentleman hadn't no luggage incept a small portmanteau, and a round basket, which Clark carried into this here very parlour we're a-sitting in. Howsomever, he called for tea and poached eggs; and though I sent in six, and two good slices of ham under 'em, I remember he cleaned the dish, poor

man; we often thought, Clark and I, 'twas his last meal. Howsomever, 'twas a hearty one, that I can bear witness to! Lauk a mercy, I'm so forgetful; I never axed you if you wouldn't take a glass of something! Don't say no!"

Jem Walker had no intention whatever of saying no; on the contrary, he said yes, with the best will in the world; and the hostess having mixed him a stiff tumbler of brandy-and-water, continued her story at his request.

"Well; when the gentleman had drank his tea, he poured some milk into a saucer, and says he to Clark, who had gone in to see if anything was a-wanting, says he, 'Just untie that 'ere basket, will you?' says he; 'I've got a young dog there, and I'll give him a little of this milk,' says he; so my husband unties the basket, and there, sure enough, was a puppy not much bigger than my fist. Well, he lifted the little cretur out, and put it on the floor, and set the milk afore it; and if it didn't lap it up as if it had been six months old! Didn't you, Rollo, my old man?" Whereupon Rollo looked up into his mistress's face, and wagged his tail assentingly.

"Well, sir, when the dog had lapped up the milk, the gentleman bade my husband put him in the basket, and tie it up again, for, says he, 'I'm a-going out for a bit; but I shall be back time enough to catch the Lunnun coach,' says he, 'as it passes your door.'

"That'll be 'twixt eleven and twelve o'clock,' says Clark.

"Well,' says he, 'I shall be back afore that;' and away he walked with his stick in his hand—I think I see him now."

"What sort o' chap was he?" asked Jem.

"Well, he'd ha' made two o' you. He was a well-grown man; and might be six or seven-and-twenty years old; and he'd got on a brown great coat; and when he went away, he tied a handkerchief, a blue and white check it was, about his throat."

"And what came on him arter?"

"The Lord knows! When he was gone, Clark brought the basket into the bar, and untied it to show me the dog—I was always fond o' them creturs; and I and Mrs. Blake as kept the grocery opposite—she and her husband had dropped in to take a glass o' something, 'cause it was my old man's birthday; she and I fondled the dog, and it played about the floor with a cork we gived it, till we thought the gentleman would be coming in; and then my husband put it into the basket, and carried it back to the parlour, and there it whined and cried—it wanted

to be back with us, and have the cork again, didn't you, Rollo?" Rollo wagged assent.

"Well, sir, when the church struck a quarter past eleven, Clark says, says he, 'If that 'ere gentleman arn't soon back, he'll miss the coach!' and presently he got up, and went to the door to look if he could see him a-coming. 'I don't see nothing on him,' says he, coming back presently, 'and in ten minutes the coach 'll be here!'"

"Well, it was scarce ten minutes, I think, afore we heerd the horn, and up jumped Clark.

"'There's the coach,' says he, 'and the gentleman's not come back!' So he runs to the door, and looks up the road and down the road; but there warn't no signs on him nowhere.

"'Shall I stop the coach?' says he.

"'No, to be sure not,' says I; 'don't go for to do that. Bob, that was the coachman's name as drove then, won't like to pull up for nothing. If the gentleman arn't come, he'll just have to stay all night, that's the whole on it,' says I, 'and many a gentleman 'll be worse off this night than sleeping at the Red Lion,' and with that I went in and put a pair of sheets to the fire.

"Well, sir, to make short of a long story, the gentleman didn't come. I made up the bed in No. 6, and put water in the jug, and hung a couple of clean towels on the horse, but deuce a bit we saw on him. Clark and I sat up till near one o'clock, and then we went to bed.

"'He's just a-going to stay where he is all night,' says Clark, 'and no doubt he'll be back in the morning.'

"Howsever, our Sal—that's my little girl—she's at school now; she goes to Miss Crumpton's school in East Street, perhaps you'll know Miss Crumpton?—she comes up to my bedroom when I was a-putting on my clothes in the morning, and says she, 'Mother,' says she, 'there's something alive, a-whining and crying down below, in a basket; what is it?'"

"'Bless me,' says I, 'it'll be the gentleman's little dog; we must give it a sup of milk, or the poor thing 'll starve!' So I hurries on my clothes, and down I went and guv it some milk, and thankful it war! Warn't you, Rollo?" Rollo, as usual, whenever he was appealed to, gave a corroborative wag.

"Well, sir, the day went on, and no gentleman; and two o'clock struck, and no gentleman; and then Clark says, says he, 'I'm afeared something has happened to him.'

"'Lauk a mercy,' says I, 'what could happen to him?'"

“ ‘He may have tumbled into the water,’ says Clark.

“ Well, sir, we was a-standing at the door when he said this, and who should we see just then a-coming towards us but a lad as had lived ostler with us, and he’d been a-living since at the ‘Eagle,’ at Ellerton; but he and Mr. Simmons had had words, and he was a-going to look for a place down the country. So he comed up to *my* husband, and says he, ‘Have you heard what’s happened at the castle?’ says he.

“ ‘No,’ says I. ‘Has anything happened at Laughton?’ for that’s the nearest to us; and we never had nothing to do with the Ravenscliffe folks, so that I didn’t think on ’em.

“ ‘No,’ says he, ‘it’s Ravenscliffe, I mean;’ and then he up and told us how the castle had been attacked by robbers in the night, and that Mr. Grosvenor was killed; he warn’t, you know, but that’s what we heerd at first; and how the Ellerton doctor had been fetched, and how an express had been sent up to Lunnun to bring down Sir Francis and my lady.

“ Well, sir, we was so taken aback at this that it was some time afore we could think of anything else whatsoever; but at last, when evening came, and no gentleman, I says to my husband, says I, ‘Lauk, Clark, I hope the gentleman didn’t fall in with them ’erc robbers.’

“ ‘I hope not,’ says Clark, ‘but that’s just what I was a-thinking on; and if he don’t come back, I’ve a mind to go to Slater the constable and tell him about it;’ and I believe he would, if it hadn’t been found out that it wasn’t robbers, but Mr. Grosvenor’s valet that had done it.”

“ And didn’t the gentleman never come back?” inquired Jem Walker.

“ Not he,” answered Mrs. Clark. “ We never see his face agen from that day to this; and it was always Clark’s opinion, and mine too, that he’d tumbled into the river in the dark, and got drowned.”

“ Well, maybe he war, and maybe he warn’t,” said Jem, who knew nothing about the matter, but had no objection to appear as if he did. “ And now you want to sell the dog?”

“ I don’t say that neither,” returned Mrs. Clark, “ for I’m fond o’ the animal, and my husband ’ud as soon ha’ thought o’ parting with his right hand as parting with Rollo; let alone that he arn’t our’n, as Clark used to say, when folks wanted to buy him, and we haven’t no right to sell what arn’t our own. But the truth is, I was advised to put in that ’ere advertisement. I s’pose you seen it, and that’s what brought you here?”

Jem nodded assent.

"It was a gentleman as offered me ten pound for the dog only last week. He knew Rollo, for he'd seen him out with my husband; and when I told him I didn't know as I'd any right to sell him, 'cause he'd been left here a pup by a gentleman, he bid me advertise him in the newspaper; so I thought I'd do it just to see if anybody claimed him, for I should like to know what come o' the gentleman that owned him."

"Well," says Jem, finishing his tumbler of brandy-and-water, "if the dog's bespoke, why he is, and there's no more about it."

"There's his portmantle upstairs in the garret closet," continued Mrs. Clark; "I see'd it only yesterday as I was a-turning out some old clothes of my husband's as I thought might make up for our Bill, as is a-growing a good big boy now. It's wonderful to see how them young 'uns do shoot up!"

"Did you never look what was in it?" inquired Jem.

"Lauk, no!" returned Mrs. Clark; "my husband was one as wouldn't lay a finger on no gentleman's property; more especial when it was locked, you know."

"But there might be something in it to show who he was," suggested Jem.

"That's true," said Mrs. Clark; "but we was always in hopes he'd come back."

An early post conveyed to Mrs. Patton the sum of the information thus collected.

"The dog and portmantle," said Jem, "was left at the Red Lion about six years ago by a gentleman in a brown great-coat, about twenty-five yearn old, as comed in a gig. He war taller than I, which he might easy be. He had eggs and ham for tea, and guv milk to the dog as lapt, and said he was a-going up to Lunnun by the coach. The dog was in a round basket, and when he went out he tied a check handkerchief about his neck, and said he'd be back for the up coach as passes at eleven—but he never comed. It was the same night as that ere business comed off at Ravenscliffe, twixt Mr. Grosvenor and his valet as was. The dog answers to the name of Roller, and is an uncommon fine animal, liver and wight, and a gentleman offered ten guineas for him, which is a long price for a dog six years old—but it war Clark as broke him, and he war a capital shot, and his tail's as fine as my lady's whip, and uncommon strong and clever. The portmantle's in the garret, but they han't never opened it."

These indications were too plain to be mistaken. Leighton felt quite satisfied that Mr. Watson was the missing traveller, and also Mr. Grosvenor's assailant; but now that he had obtained this information and convinced himself, what use was he to make of his knowledge? How convert it to his own advantage? Who could he address? Who would attend to anything he said? Even in this country, where something like justice and equal dealing is aimed at, it is astonishing how difficult it may be for a poor man to obtain a hearing of any one powerful enough to assist him; and what an amount of wrong may be endured before redress can be obtained by the humble. He formed a dozen plans, but not one was satisfactory. Had Mr. Grosvenor still lived, his way would have been clear, but as it was, he was quite at a loss. His confidential friends, the Pattons, were bad advisers. Mrs. P. was rash in counsel, and Tom was thick-headed, and understood nothing but the points of a horse. In this perplexity Leighton determined to consult the Hewsons, who were well disposed towards him, and already acquainted with the outlines of the business.



CHAPTER LXV

ONE evening, whilst she was at tea with her sister, Agnes was surprised by receiving a note from Mr. Conyers, requesting that she would call on him the following day at eleven o'clock. It was written in a respectful tone: "Mr. Conyers presenting his compliments to Mrs. Gibson, requesting her, if not inconvenient, &c., &c.," and the person who brought it waited an answer.

"What can it be about?" she said, the almost extinguished hope reviving for a moment.

"He must have heard something," said Martha. *Something* meant about Willie, of course.

"I wish he could see me this evening," exclaimed the mother; "it's so long to wait. I wonder if I should find him if I went directly!" But the lad who brought the note told her that Mr. Conyers always quitted the office at five o'clock; so she sent word that she would wait on him precisely at eleven.

Although the sisters sat up half the night, hoping, conjectur-

ing. and speculating on what the unusual summons might portend, Agnes was ready betimes, and thought ten o'clock would never strike. It came at last, and soon afterwards, with the certainty of being there before the hour appointed, she proceeded to the lawyer's. When the door was opened she was politely informed he was engaged just then, but she was shown into a private room and requested to wait. It was a clerk that admitted her, a man she had often seen before when she went there for her allowance, but it struck her his manner was different. Formerly, she was left standing in the passage till Mr. Conyers was at leisure, and then somebody, frequently this very person, would put out a hand, beckon to her, and say, "Come in, if you please." Occasionally, when she went into the lawyer's room, he desired her to sit down; at others, when he was busy, he let her stand whilst he counted out the money and took her receipt. But now she was ushered into the parlour with a deferential bow, and with a second a chair was placed for her. Agnes blushed as she seated herself. In old times this sort of respectful treatment would have been accepted as no more than her due, but her dreams of ladyhood were all gone by now, and she was very humble.

Her heart beat every time she heard a room door open or a foot in the hall; but another and another was let out, some by Mr. Conyers himself, for she recognized his voice—still he came not to her. She was, in fact, a great deal too early, and had nearly three-quarters of an hour to wait. She was getting quite sick with impatience, when she heard a carriage stop and a loud double knock. Immediately afterwards the same clerk opened the door of the room she was in, and ushered in a very dignified, aristocratic-looking old gentleman, who bowed to her, and as the door closed, said, "Miss Crawford, I believe?"

Agnes blushed and hesitated; she had been so long called Mrs. Gibson—even Mr. Conyers had called her so—that her first unconscious impulse was to deny her own name.

"I believe," continued the old gentleman, putting another construction on her hesitation, "I believe you have reason to think that you might justly have laid claim to another appellation."

"I am commonly called Mrs. Gibson, sir," answered Agnes, not well comprehending his meaning.

"But your name is not Gibson, is it? You are Agnes Crawford, of the Holmes, are you not?"

Agnes blushed, and looked rather angry; she thought the question impertinent, but she answered,—

"I was, sir."

"Are you married, then?"

Another awkward question; but she answered rather haughtily,—

"No, sir."

"I understand you adopted the name of Gibson?"

No answer.

Colonel Grosvenor—for of course it was he—felt a conviction that the story of the secret marriage was true. It might not, for some reason or other, be valid; but he did not doubt that *she* had thought it so. Agnes, as was just observed, had grown humble, that is, she had taken her station amongst the workers—she was one of the people, and her early and sad experience led her to recoil from everything that had a tendency to lift her out of her order. She had had such a fall once, that to avoid a second she liked to keep at the bottom of the ladder; but her pride had one tender side still, and the slightest assault upon that she resented. She had carefully kept her history secret, and she tolerated no allusion to it from anybody but her own early friends, John and Martha. The only circumstance that enabled her to meet Mr. Conyers being that he knew she had been deluded by a mock-marriage, mortifying as even that was. So now, interrogated by this stranger, well-bred though he was, the old leaven appeared again; the pale cheek flushed, and pride sat upon the still beautiful brow. That was not a woman to be led astray by a weak boy like Lionel.

"I am afraid you think me impertinent," said the colonel, "but excuse me, my questions are connected with interests of great importance. You have a son, I think?"

"Oh!" cried Agnes, clasping her hands with energy, and at once breaking through the reserve of her demeanour, "tell me—tell me, where is he?—where is my child?"

"Is he not with you?" inquired the colonel.

"Oh, no—no!—is he found? Is it about him that Mr. Conyers sent for me?"

"Certainly not," answered the colonel. "Am I to understand that you have lost your child?"

Agnes burst into tears, the disappointment was so great.

"I thought it was to hear of my boy that I was sent for," she said, when she could speak.

"Compose yourself," said Colonel Grosvenor, in whose breast a new set of suspicions were beginning to dawn; "pray be calm. It was I who requested this interview; and be as-

sured I should not have done so without cogent reasons. I had no idea you had lost your child. When did you lose him, and how?"

Agnes told her story.

"And you have never had any suspicion? There is nobody you think likely to have taken him? Nobody that had a motive for doing it?"

"Nobody, unless his father."

"But what motive do you suppose he could have?"

"He might have seen him, and wished to have him; he was a beautiful child." A fresh burst of tears. "But after I saw Mr. Grosvenor in Paris I gave up that idea. I don't think it was he."

"And you suspect nobody?"

"Nobody."

"But I do," thought the colonel. "Well, my dear madam," he continued, "I am very sorry for you. I incline to think you have been the victim of a great deal of wickedness; and I can only say, that if I can be instrumental in the recovery of your child, you may rely on my exertions."

Agnes was ready to fall at the feet of this impertinent old gentleman, who had an air of such high birth and prosperity about him that she thought he could succeed in anything he undertook.

"The boy you have lost was the son of—of Lionel Grosvenor, was he?"

"Yes, sir."

"To whom you supposed you were married?"

"Yes."

Colonel Grosvenor then proceeded to ask her a variety of questions concerning the marriage, and all that had followed it; and amongst others he inquired whether she knew the name of the person who had performed the ceremony. Her confidence won by the promise to aid her efforts for the recovery of her child, she answered him without reserve.

"I did not know at the time, but I know now. I saw the gentleman at Deal. He was performing the service there, and I learnt his name was Watson. I knew him again directly."

"Then you were married by a clergyman?"

"I don't know whether he was a clergyman then; and I was never asked in church. That may be the reason the marriage was not a real one."

She added that they had all signed a certificate, but she did not know where it was; Mr. Grosvenor had kept it.

He then questioned her with respect to her feelings; he wished to discover her character, and to ascertain whether she had any suspicion that she was really Lionel's wife or widow.

"If that accident had not occurred at Ravenscliffe, and if Mr. Grosvenor had come up to London, and I had gone on living with him, and then found he had deceived me, I don't know what I should have done: I think I should have put an end to myself. But it happened so differently: first I heard he was dead, and upon that I left the lodgings in Park Lane, and took to living by my needle; and before I heard he was alive I had got use to that sort of life; but still I thought when he was well we should come together again. It was not till I came here to Mr. Conyers that I learnt the truth; and though I felt myself cruelly treated, yet, by that time, many things had made me feel that I had been very wrong and very foolish in marrying Mr. Grosvenor, and that I was not fit to be his wife, and never could be happy in such a situation, because I had come to see how unfit I was for it, and I knew everybody else would see it too. Then, when my child came, I cared for nothing else in the world. I was so happy whilst I had him!"

This last exclamation was accompanied by another burst of tears.

"But were you not ambitious for him?" asked Colonel Grosvenor. "Did it not occur to you, that if you had been justly treated, he would have been the heir of Ravenscliffe?"

"No, I never thought of that, that I recollect. At least, I am sure I never wished him to be so!"

"Indeed! May I ask why?"

"Because it would have placed such a distance between him and me."

"And do you think if you recovered him you would be influenced by the same feeling?"

"I am sure I should. What comfort could I have of him if he lived at Ravenscliffe amongst all those great people?"

The tears swam in the old man's eyes as he laid his hand upon hers.

"You have been cruelly injured," he said, "and cruelly maligned; but you shall have justice, and I pray to God that I may be able to find your boy, and restore him to your arms."

Agnes clasped her hand upon his.

"Oh! thank you! thank you!" she cried. "May God reward you for befriending me!"

He then inquired how she was situated, and if she was in want of money.

"Oh, no!" she said, "we can earn quite enough to keep us."

"But you appear to be in delicate health, and you must not over fatigue yourself."

"It's only anxiety," she answered. "I should soon be well if I had my boy again."

He pressed money on her, but she would not take it.

"Well," he said, "we shall meet again soon. When I wish to see you I'll meet you here."

She longed to ask him who he was, but she had not the courage to do it.

He then offered to drive her home in his carriage, which she at first refused, but as he insisted, representing that she had been so much agitated that he could not permit her to walk, she yielded; a compliance she afterwards regretted, as it deprived her of the opportunity of inquiring his name.

"Tell Mr. Conyers we are gone, and that I shall see this lady home," he said to the clerk who entered the room when he rang the bell. "He shall hear from me to-morrow or next day, if I don't eall."

The clerk bowed with the utmost deference, and then preceded them to open the door, whilst the colonel offered Agnes his arm and conducted her to the coach. When he sat her down at her own door, he shook her hand with a kindness almost paternal, and reiterated his promise of seeing her soon.

When Agnes reached her own room she dropped into the first chair she came to, and for some time all she could say was: "Oh, Martha!" whilst Martha, uncertain whether her agitation proceeded from a sorrowful cause or a glad one, was afraid to ask questions. At length, however, the story was told; and then ensued the wonders and conjectures as to who this good angel could be, and whence arose his interest in her. She knew that Sir Francis had had a brother, and a likeness she discerned to the Ravenscliffe family led her to suspect this might be he; but if it were so, how he should have become her friend she could not by any possibility conceive; nor could she imagine why he should seek her out now when he had never done so before, unless his motive was in some way connected with the fate of her child.

She was strongly tempted to go to Mr. Conyers's office and inquire the old gentleman's name, but was deterred by the

apprehension that since he had not introduced himself, there might be a want of delicacy in seeking to penetrate what he might have disclosed had he so pleased.

The colonel parted from Agnes very much impressed with what he had seen of this sad, pale, wasted, yet still beautiful young woman, with her deep wrongs and her blasted life. That she was Lionel's legal wife he did not doubt; though why his precious grandson Lewis should have thought proper to be instrumental to the marriage he could not conceive, not having cunning enough to penetrate the far-reaching schemes of Mr. Watson. But what was now to be done? Had Agnes's child been forthcoming, the path to follow would have been clear; but unless he were recovered, it repugned the old man's feelings to unseat Lady Georgina and her son, opening thereby such a volume of scandal to the world, when the result of the proceeding would be to give Agnes a position which it was plain she did not desire, and to place Lewis Watson in the situation of next heir to the fortune, which would immediately fall to himself. He more than ever wished he had gone to London before visiting Ravenscliffe, which he certainly would have done had he not supposed Lady Georgina already apprised of the impending calamity. With regard to the disappearance of the child, he had jumped at once to a conclusion on which was founded the hopes he had suggested to the mother; the circumstances of the case were so singular in themselves, and so apt to the purposes of his grandson, that he did not doubt the child had been taken away through the agency of Watson, whose character and designs he was now beginning to understand. After some consultation with Mr. Conyers, therefore, he returned home.

The first question the colonel addressed to him, namely, why he had falsely asserted that Lady Georgina was acquainted with the fact of the secret marriage, confounded Watson as much as her ignorance of it had done the colonel.

"It must have been Louisa Langham you saw," said the latter, comparing notes, "you heard she was there, or had been there; but in that case there is another party to this terrible secret!"

"It's not of much consequence," returned the other, "since it will soon be known to the public."

"Where is that poor young woman's son, Mrs. Gibson, as she calls herself; where is that child?"

The suddenness of the question was a little *ruse* of the old

man's, who wished to put the young one off his guard, in order to see if his conscience betrayed him; and it did, giving him all the appearance of guilt that his worst enemy could desire; for although in fact he had had no hand in the abduction of the boy, nor knew where he was more than the colonel did, yet he could not forget that he had schemed to do that which somebody else had, in the nick of time, kindly done for him; and also that he had withheld from his grandfather what he perfectly well knew—that the child was not forthcoming. Nevertheless, he assured the colonel that he had not the most distant notion of what had become of him.

“I don't believe it, sir; this was evidently not a common case of kidnapping; and who had an interest in the removal of the boy but you?”

“Why Lionel himself, sir. Of course he did not wish the boy to oust young Sir Francis, as they call him.”

“Lionel was thoughtless, and had no steady principles; but I don't believe him capable of such a piece of deliberate villany as that.”

“He abandoned the woman, knowing perfectly well she was his wife, and married another,” returned Lewis.

“Yes, but he would not have done it if accident and circumstances, which he had not firmness or energy to resist, had not aided and pushed him on. Everything, as it happened, drove him in that direction; and he had neither will enough nor regard enough for her to resist the flood; but if that affair had not happened at Ravenscliffe, he would have followed her to London, and she would now be the acknowledged Lady Grosvenor. I am persuaded he had nothing to do with kidnapping the child, and that is the mother's opinion also. I believe firmly that it was you and nobody else; I don't mean that you did it yourself, but that you employed somebody else to do it.”

“I am sorry you have so bad an opinion of me, sir; but you are wrong, I assure you. I had nothing whatever to do with it.”

The colonel shook his head.

“I don't believe you,” he said, “and I shall leave no stone unturned till I find the boy, that you may rely on. With regard to the mother she shall be handsomely provided for; but as she does not desire to establish any claim on the title and estates of Ravenscliffe, either in her own person or that of her son, there is no necessity for disturbing those in possession.” The colonel said

this partly to try Mr. Watson, and also because he really had not made up his mind what line of conduct to pursue.

"I beg your pardon, sir," returned Lewis. "You seem to forget the claim we have on the property—a claim I think it necessary to see immediately established. You are not a young man, and——"

"I'll be no party to it—none!" said the colonel, "unless that child turns up."

"Which is very improbable," answered Lewis. "Besides, how prove his identity? On which account, possession being nine points of the law, I intend to move in the business without delay. Even if some boy is produced as Lionel's son, it will not be easy to turn us out when we have once got a firm footing at Ravenscliffe, I fancy."

"No, no," thought Lewis, "I have not been scheming all this while for nothing: and since these inquiries the old man threatens may rake up this child, or, if not himself, some pretender, there is no time to be lost; and as Lady Georgina and her son are gone, I'm not sure but the best thing I could do would be to go down and take possession in my grandfather's name at once."

"But the servants won't let you in," objected his mother; and this objection being apparently well founded, Watson resolved to start for London, and take legal advice, before proceeding any farther in the business, determined nevertheless to prosecute the family claims without delicacy or delay.

Nothing could be more obnoxious to Colonel Grosvenor than this line of proceeding on the part of his grandson, and yet he had neither the power nor the right to obstruct it. For his own part, he was an old man, with one foot in the grave, and he did not desire the fortune; whilst the misery inflicted on Lady Georgina and her son, and the disgrace that would accrue to the family, were sources of extreme distress to him.

But the situation of his grandson was different. At that very moment, he himself was the real owner of Ravenscliffe, and Lewis Watson was the next heir to it—that is, provided Agnes's child was no longer in existence; and it was unreasonable to expect that a penniless man would relinquish these claims, in compliment to feelings and sympathies which he did not share. He might be utterly unworthy of the favours of fortune, and the colonel suspected he was; but that did not entitle him to arrest his movements. It was with intense vexation, therefore, that he saw him depart for London, whilst he felt himself

becoming a tool in his grandson's hands. It was his name that would be put forward as the claimant to his brother's title and estates, and all the odium of covering the name of Grosvenor with infamy would be his.

Mr. Watson had been gone some days, and his mother was daily hoping for tidings, which his grandfather dreaded, when a letter arrived from Mr. Conyers, which determined the old man to proceed to London immediately. It was to the effect that a woman had come forward, who professed to be able to give some information regarding the child advertised for at such a date; and Mr. Conyers begged to know whether the colonel would wish to see her, or whether he should proceed with the business himself.

On the following morning the colonel started; and he had not been gone more than an hour, when a man rang at the gate, and requested to see him. On being told that he was gone to London, he expressed considerable disappointment, as he had come from there purposely to speak to him on very particular business.

"Please to tell him my name is Hewson," he said; "and it was my uncle that lived butler here with the colonel for many years."

CHAPTER LXVI.

NOT a hundred miles from the city of York there stood a handsome mansion, of the Elizabethan style of architecture, called Reston Hall. It was approached from the high road by a noble avenue of elm and oak; a broad, smooth, gravel-walk separated the house from a beautiful green pasture, dotted by a flock of sheep and their playful progeny; and on one side a nest of flower-beds reflected the bright sunlight, and scented the air.

The interior of this mansion corresponded with what I have described: there was nothing grand, nothing magnificent; but everything was clean, comfortable, and elegant.

At the period of this our first visit to Reston Hall, there sat in the dining-room a lady and gentleman; the latter, a middle-aged man, with a military aspect; the former, a fine-looking woman, fat, fair, and forty. They had finished their dinner, and the cloth had been just removed, when the door opened, and an extremely handsome little boy entered with a hop and a jump, and placed himself beside the gentleman.

"Is that the way to enter the dining-room, sir?" said the lady. The child coloured, and made no answer. "I wish you'd keep your romps for the nursery; and when you are allowed to come here, behave as you ought to do."

"What did he do? I saw nothing to find fault with," said the gentleman.

"I dare say not," returned the lady: "you never do. It does not signify how rude and ill-behaved that boy is: it's all right in your eyes."

"He is but a child," said the gentleman, laying his hand affectionately on the pretty young head. "You can't expect a child to enter a room like you or I."

"He's old enough to know how to behave himself," said the lady.

"Pa," said the object of this altercation, "may I have some cake?"

"You must ask your mamma, my love."

"Ma'll say no, if I do," answered the boy.

The lady curled her lip.

"Oh, no, she won't, I'm sure: try her," said the gentleman.

"May I, ma?"

"Upon my word, I don't know; I don't choose to interfere. If you're so cunning as to know exactly what I shall say before you ask, it's not worth while asking at all," said the lady.

Whereupon the gentleman cut off a slice of cake, and gave it to the child, who commenced munching it with great satisfaction.

"Have the goodness to take a plate, sir, and don't drop your greasy crumbs on the carpet. They get trodden in, and there's quite a black spot, from your standing there every day," said the lady.

The gentleman pushed the child aside, and looked at the carpet.

"I don't see any black spot," he said.

"Of course not. I can only say that Elizabeth was complaining last week of the grease in the dining-room carpet, and she asked me if I knew anything that would take it out."

"There's grease enough, I dare say," said the gentleman, "when there was half a plateful of mock turtle spilt at the last dinner party."

"Pa, may I have one of those green things?"

"No," answered the lady, "you may not have one of those green things. That's the last jar of limes I have, and I really cannot spare you any."

The gentleman took one upon his plate, cut it in half, and eating one portion himself, put the other into the boy's mouth.

"And now, Charles, my boy, go out and play, and amuse yourself a bit. I'll come to you presently, and we'll have a game at ball."

"Driscoll said I was to stay here, till she comes with Archy; and then we're going to take a walk," said the child.

"Oh, very well. You must do what Driscoll tells you, of course."

The lady looked eagerly towards the door, at the name of Archy, and her countenance brightened.

"Do you love Archy?" inquired the gentleman.

"Yes, pa; but he took my kite, and tore it all across, and now it won't fly."

"He doesn't know any better, you know. He won't do such things when he's older. I'll give you another, if you're a good boy."

"He doesn't deserve it," said the lady. "He took his

brother's little horse the other day—the toy the general gave him—and threw it into the pond.”

“I didn't mean it, ma; it went into the pond itself.”

“For shame, sir! What do you mean by telling such stories?”

“Yes, it did, ma. I just gave it a push, and it ran in.”

“Archy, my precious! come here,” cried the lady, her whole countenance lighting up with maternal delight as the door opened, and a little boy in a white frock and a broad purple sash, led by his nurse, toddled into the room. “How is he, Mrs. Driscoll? Has he had a nice sleep?”

“Oh, yes, ma'am, bless him! He slept like a top, for an hour and a half, and woke up as fresh as a rose. Take care, ma'am, he's got hold of your glass; he'll spill the wine over your dress!” a thing no sooner said than done; for, whilst the mamma was rapturously kissing him, the young gentleman, more interested in the shining metal than her caresses, had upset the fluid it contained; whilst the glass rolled on the floor and was smashed.

“Oh, Archy's broke the glass! Archy's broke the glass, ma!” exclaimed Charles, clapping his hands.

“And what is it to you if he has, sir? Have the goodness to mind your own business, and take care you don't do more mischief than he does. Archy's only a baby.”

“Wipe your mouth, Master Lawrence; you've got a pocket-handkerchief,” said Mrs. Driscoll, sharply. “Why don't you use it, sir?”

“Now my pet shall go out, and have a nice walk,” said the lady, fondly arranging little Archy's toilet; but Archy was not disposed to go: he too wanted a bit of cake, and in addition, his mamma's gold chain; so he clung to her, and manfully resisted Driscoll's efforts to take him. Coaxing was vain; and the mother, although she told him he was very naughty not to go when he was told, could not resist the flattery of those little arms that were twined round her neck; so that finally she consented to a compromise, gave him a piece of cake, and allowed him to take the chain away with him.

It was now the husband's turn to attack her about spoiling Archy—permitting him to eat such unwholesome things, and giving him whatever he cried for; but she argued, that he had had convulsions once, and she was afraid of bringing them on again, if she crossed him. When he was a little older, she should pursue a very different line of conduct; for she detested

spoilt children, and she hoped to see Archy a much better behaved child than Charles.

This sketch of one afternoon will do for every day in the year; for every day in the year since the birth of Archy did similar scenes occur.

Mrs. Lawrence, who, I need not observe, was our old friend, Mrs. Aymer, was by no means a hard-hearted woman; and when first she married the major, she was a kind enough mother to his son; whilst Mrs. Driscoll, who considered her own interests inexorably bound up with the boy's life, was the most careful of attendants; so that little Charles, as he was called, was extremely well off. But a reverse befel him which has befallen many another child; Mrs. Lawrence, his step-mother, became the mother of a child of her own, and Charley's nose, as the phrase is, was put out of joint; not as regarded his father, who loved him as much as ever, and who would doubtless not have permitted him to be ill-treated, if he knew it. But Charley was not ill-treated: he was neither beaten nor starved; but he was checked and snubbed, and altogether dealt with in a manner, that in the long run, when he was somewhat older, was likely to make his home and his step-mother hateful to him.

Mrs. Lawrence herself set the example, and, after some hesitation, Mrs. Driscoll followed it at a humble distance. She had hesitated at first, because natural tendency, as well as habit, inclined her to be kind to a boy on whom hung her own fortunes; but when she perceived clearly which way her interest lay, she was too weak to refrain from pursuing it.

Mrs. Lawrence's feelings in this instance were not amiable; but they were, it is to be feared, by no means uncommon. Her husband at the death of an uncle was entitled to an estate of several thousands a year—that is, provided the uncle did not marry; and as he was past the middle age, and had yet evinced no proclivity to matrimony, the major had a fair prospect of the inheritance, which would of course devolve on his eldest son; and under these circumstances, it may be easily understood why Charles was not an agreeable object to the mother of Archy.

The reflections which this peculiar situation of affairs awakened in the mind of Mrs. Driscoll may be in some degree conceived, for she understood perfectly her mistress's feelings; and it many a time occurred to her how glad that lady would be to know the secret which she (Mrs. Driscoll) could tell her.

But to tell it was to damn herself for ever. There could be no forgiveness for such a crime as she had committed; and even if they did not prosecute her for the fraud, she would assuredly be turned out of doors, with her husband and child, to starve. It was, therefore, not to be thought of: the secret must live and die with themselves. Willie Gibson must inherit General Lawrence's estate, and Archy must be content with the position of a younger son.

Yet, for all that, Mrs. Driscoll could not help dallying with the power she possessed. If she quarrelled with her husband, she would threaten to tell "he knew what;" and when she was in a bad humour with Charles, she often exclaimed, that if he didn't take care, she'd soon get him turned out of that home, and sent to a very different kind of house, where he would have to be made a tailor or a shoemaker, and be obliged to work for his bread; whilst at other times she threw out hints to Mrs. Lawrence, that if that lady had had the slightest clue, must certainly have awakened her suspicions. But, in spite of this coquetting, Mrs. Driscoll had no intention whatever of betraying herself: the motive was not sufficient, and the penalty was too great.

Affairs had been for some time in this position at Reston Hall, when an advertisement appeared in the *Times*, headed "Child lost or stolen." Date, place, and other circumstances, were then named, and a reward of £500 offered to any one who would give such information as would lead to his recovery. But Major Lawrence did not take the *Times*, and if he had, Driscoll and his wife would probably never have seen the advertisement. So Charles might have continued to be snubbed, and Archy to be spoiled; whilst every day he grew older, and his perfections ripened in his mother's eyes, she would have more and more lamented that he was defrauded of his natural rights by that nasty, troublesome brat, his elder brother, if another party had not unexpectedly stepped forward to unravel the mystery.

CHAPTER LXVII.

Mrs. SMITHERS kept a lodging-house in Duke Street, St. James's; and it was there, as I have formerly mentioned, that Mrs. Driscoll had lodged with her two charges, Charles Lawrence and her own little girl. Mrs. Smithers kept the lodging-house still; and it so happened that her first floor was inhabited by a Member of Parliament, of whom she was not a little proud, and about whose affairs she was not a little curious; insomuch that, under an idea that she might discover some important State secrets, she always made a point of peeping into the ends of his letters—luckily for her, envelopes not being in such general use then as they are now; and when he went out, she invariably paid a visit to his writing-table, and inspected his papers.

As Mr. Briggs was a club-man, he had no occasion to take any of the daily journals, since he read them more agreeably whilst lounging over his breakfast in Pall Mall; but whenever he proposed to make a speech, he always desired the *Times* to be sent to his lodgings, in order that he might preserve for posterity these specimens of his eloquence. Thus, when Mrs. Smithers went upon these voyages of discovery, she now and then spent a pleasant half-hour in perusing the news; and she had, one day, just rubbed her spectacles, and placed them securely on her nose, when her eye was attracted by an advertisement in the second column of that paper, headed "Child lost or stolen, April 10th, 18—; £500 reward," &c., to anybody that could give such information as would lead to his recovery, Mrs. Smithers laid down the paper, took off her spectacles, gave them another rub, and then read the advertisement over again. "Light brown hair, blue eyes, three years old; when last seen, was playing on the steps of the Adelphi Hotel. Apply to Mr. Conyers, solicitor, No. 6, Saville Row." Mrs. Smithers read the advertisement again and again. "Five hundred pounds!"

"I'll do it," she exclaimed at length, "come what will of it. She warn't so evil about that 'ere bit of pork she said I'd

took; and she was uncommon sharp about the candles. I'll do it. There's no harm in trying, any ways."

¶ On the following morning, Mrs. Smithers presented herself at No. 6, Saville Row, and requested to know if one Mr. Cony lived there? The clerks laughed in her face, and said "No;" which she remarked was very singular, since she had read it in the newspaper, and she was sure that was the house she was to go to.

This led to an inquiry of what she wanted; and Mr. Conyers being out of town, the head clerk asked her a few questions, the answers to which decided him to write to Colonel Grosvenor: "For," said he, "no time should be lost. People of this sort often get tampered with; besides, the child may be removed beyond our reach, if those who took him have any particular interest in getting him out of the way."

In about four-and-twenty hours after the receipt of this letter, in the same room in which the colonel had met Agnes, he found Mrs. Smithers.

"Your servant, sir," said she, rising as he entered. "I suppose you be the gentleman as put in that 'ere advertisement about the child as was lost or stolen; if it be the one I mean, I say stolen."

"Then you've reason to think you know something about the child?"

"I think I do, sir. I've a notion he was stole by a woman as lodged in my house, in Duke Street, St. James's. She left me, this last March was three years on that very day as is named in the advertisement."

"Have the goodness to tell me the particulars, and the grounds of your suspicion. Pray be seated."

"Well, sir," said Mrs. Smithers, squatting herself into a red leather armchair; "it's now upwards of four years ago that she comed to lodge with me."

"Pray what was her name?" inquired the colonel, anxious to discover if it were any one with whom he could trace a connection with his grandson.

"Her name was Driscoll, sir, Mrs. Driscoll; and her husband, as I understood, was a soldier, and lived servant with a officer somewhere in foreign parts, Jamaiky or the Cape, or somewhere thereabouts; I know it was over the sea, somewhere. Well, sir, she comed to my house with two children—a boy and a girl: the boy was the youngest and she was carrying of him in her arms; the girl, I suppose, was a year older."

“But this was four years ago, you say? Now—”

“Yes, sir; but please let me go on, and you’ll hear. Well, sir, she said she wanted lodgings nigh to the Green Park, for the sake of the children, and that was why she’d comed to me in Duke Street, because she could get in easy at the gate in St. James’s Place: ‘And so,’ says she, ‘have you a couple of rooms on the second floor that I could have?’ Well, sir, I was rather surprised to hear her ask for my second floor, because it’s mostly gentlefolks as takes it; I had Mr. Jones, as is one of the clerks at Coutts’s, the bankers, for a matter of three years and more. However, I told her it was vacant just then, but that I could not let it under fifteen shillings a week for the winter, and a guinea a week for the season, when the Members of Parliament was in town.”

“Well, I suppose she took it?” said the colonel.

“Why, yes, sir, to my surprise she did; but when I heard how she was sitivated, I saw the reason of it. ‘This here boy,’ says she, ‘is the son of a officer, and I have the care on him—his mamma being dead, poor thing! and I’m obliged to live in good sitivations, you see; but it isn’t I as pays the rent.’ ‘So far so good!’ says I; so in she comed the very next day—I remember it was of a Saturday, and it was rather inconvenient, because we’d got the stair carpets up, and I wanted to give ’em a wash down afore the first floor comed in, which I’d just let it to Captain Peasebody, as was a captain in the army, but I believe he’s out of it now; and a very nice pleasant gentleman he was! Perhaps you know him, sir?”

The colonel drew out his watch, and looked at it; “It’s getting late,” he said, “and I have not much time to spare; have you, or not, any reason to suppose this woman you speak of took the child I am in search of.”

“Well, sir, I have; God forgive me, if I wrong her; but you see, sir, there she was, wanting for nothing, neither she nor her child; and living in my second floor as was always okkipped by gentlefolks, and in course it all depended on that ’ere little boy.”

“Certainly; and I suppose she took every care of him?”

“Well, sir, to speak the truth, I can’t say but she did; but children’s subjee to a many diseases, sir, though I can’t say but he was as fine a little boy as ever I see; howsomever, he took the scarlet fever, and went off quite rapid like. The doctor gived him up from the beginning, and uncommon deal of trouble we had to keep it from the lodgers, as would have all left the house if they’d ha’ knew we’d got a fever in it. Howsomever, by the

blessing of Providence, they never know'd nothing about it till the day after the funeral, and then we just put 'em off, and said the child had died of water in the head."

"Well," said the colonel, who began to discern some meaning in all this talk, "I suppose the death of the child was a great trouble to her?"

"Sure enough it was, sir; as she said herself, it was just the loss of a fortin to her and her family."

"And it was to replace this boy, I suppose, that you think she stole the other?"

"Well, sir; it was a singler thing, and it seemed a Providence like; but it wasn't many days afore the child was taken ill that Mrs. Driscoll said to me, said she—she'd been down to the Adelphi, about a little matter of business I'd asked her to do for me, when she went into the city—'Well, Mrs. Smithers,' said she, 'I'm blest if I haven't seen a child to-day so like Master Lawrence that you might tak 'em to be brothers.'

"'You have?' says I.

"'Yes,' says she; 'it was down by the Adelphi there, where I went with your parcel; only he wasn't a gentleman's child; but if he'd been dressed like Master Lawrence I think I'd scarce known one from the other.'"

"And you are sure it was at the Adelphi she saw the child?"

"Yes, sir, for she went to a lawyer's there with some papers that I had promised to carry, but I was so busy with one thing or another that week that I couldn't find time to go. Well, sir, I thought no more of what she said; but soon after the child was buried, she said to me one day, all of a sudden like: 'Mrs. Smithers,' says she, 'I'm a-going to leave you; you know I can't afford to pay this here lodging now; and I'm a-going away to Norwich to live with my sister that's married there. She's sent me a letter to ask me to go, and I shall be off at once. My month 'll be up on Tuesday, you know, and 'twixt this and then I shall get ready to be off.'

"Well, I didn't think nothing o' that neither, 'cause it wasn't likely she could keep on my second floor now the child was dead and buried; only I said to the girl I had there, 'Nance,' says I, 'did the postman leave a letter for Mrs. Driscoll this morning?'

"'No,' said Nance, 'she hasn't had no letter since that 'ere foreign letter that you gave me the money for, 'cause she was out when it come.'

“ ‘She hasn’t?’ says I.

“ ‘No,’ says Nance; ‘I’m certain she hasn’t.’

“ ‘Well, she’s a-going away,’ says I, ‘and she says she’s got a letter from her sister at Norwich to ask her to go and live there.’

“ ‘Well, it never comed here,’ says Nance.”

“ ‘And did she go to her sister?’” inquired the colonel, in order to resume the thread of the narrative.

“ ‘Why, sir, in course I thought she did; for she went away from my house, bag and baggage, in a hackney-coach; but what should I hear some time afterwards but that she’d been living up in the Edgeware Road, next door but one to my late husband’s sister-in-law, Mrs. Philpots.’

“ ‘Indeed!’” said the colonel.

“ ‘And the curousest thing was, sir, that she’d got two children with her—a boy and a girl, just as when she was with me!’”

“ ‘And did you see the child—the boy she had got with her?’”

“ ‘No, sir; because afore I had time to go and take a cup of tea with Mrs. Philpots, which she’d been time out of mind asking me for to do, they was gone from there, nobody know’d where.’”

“ ‘But this Mrs. Philpots knew her, then?’”

“ ‘She’d seen her, sir, at my house, one day some time afore; but she said, that if it hadn’t been for the two children she didn’t know as she’d ha’ known her again; as she never see her but once, and then not to speak to her.’”

“ ‘Then, perhaps she was mistaken?’”

“ ‘No, sir; for as soon as I heard on it, my mind misgived me somehow, and I made it my business to call at the house, and inquire for her. ‘Is Mrs. Driscoll at home?’ says I, just nat’ral like, not letting out I know’d anything.

“ ‘No,’ says the girl as answered the door, ‘she’s gone from here into the country.’

“ ‘And the children with her?’ says I.

“ ‘Yes,’ says she; ‘they’re all gone.’

“ ‘And how was Master Lawrence?’ says I. ‘I heard he’d been ill!’ I said that just to try her, you know.

“ ‘Oh, he’s well enough,’ says she. ‘I never saw nothing the matter with him, except he was very fretful when first they came.’ When I told Betsey—that’s Mrs. Philpots—that Master Lawrence was dead and buried, I thought she’d ha’ swooned away.”

So far Mrs. Smithers could tell; but what had become of this woman and the children since, she had no notion; she recollected, however, that Mrs. Driscoll had a sister called Barber, who worked with Madame de Ville, the French milliner, in Bruton Street, where some information might probably be obtained.



CHAPTER LXVIII.

MR. WATSON found no difficulty in discovering a lawyer who took the same view of the case that he did; namely, that his grandfather ought to put in his claim immediately; and that under all the circumstances, including the possibility of the child by the first marriage being produced, the politic thing was to take immediate possession of Ravenscliffe Castle, let those who chose dislodge him at their peril. But since Colonel Grosvenor declined taking any part in the proceedings, what was to be done?

“Prove him *non compos*,” said the lawyer. “His refusing to claim what there is such a strong presumption he’s entitled to, will furnish us very good grounds to begin upon; and you as the next heir can enforce the claim.”

On the plan laid out by this limb of the law, it is not necessary to enlarge; suffice it to say that Watson liked it; and determining to put it in practice, he, after certain preliminary steps, prepared to start for Ravenscliffe. He was in high spirits, for the way at last seemed opening to that beatitude he had so long been anticipating, and as far as was in his power accelerating; whilst of the *contretemps* preparing for him by his uncle he knew nothing whatever; and even if he had, instead of slackening, it would have only hastened his movements, since to dispute the identity of any child produced as the lost heir, formed part of the scheme.

In this agreeable state of mind he was proceeding from the Strand through Cockspur Street, when he observed two men standing at an open door, one of whom he instantly perceived was the ex-valet Leighton, whom he had never seen since they met in Paris. He by no means desired to meet him now, for

he was an inconvenient acquaintance, replete with unpleasant associations, and always wanting money; but Leighton's eye was on him, and some secret instinct of caution made him willing to keep on civil terms with one who had more reasons than he supposed him aware of for being his enemy.

"Ah, Leighton, is that you? How are you? What are you doing here?"

Leighton's cheek and lips blanched with emotion, but the habit of deference prevailed, and touching his hat, he answered respectfully, "That he had got a job about Lawson's livery stables."

"I'm glad of it," said Watson, clapping his waistcoat pockets, as if to feel if he had any money in them. "I've nothing with me," he said, in an under-tone, adding in a louder key, "you must call upon me, some day. I'm at the 'Hummums,'" and nodding his head he walked on.

"Somebody'll call upon him that he little expects some day soon, I fancy," said Leighton. "It's just as if Providence sent him this way; for he might have been in town long enough before I could have told where to find him, and I didn't know but what he was out of the country."

Mr. Watson had had a comfortable dinner in the coffee-room of the 'Hummums,' and having finished his pint of claret, had gone upstairs to pack his portmanteau, when the waiter knocked at the door, and said a man below wished to speak to him. Expecting a dispatch from his lawyer, he said, "Send him up!" Presently afterwards the door opened, and a stranger appeared. He had no papers in his hand, and he had not the appearance of a lawyer's clerk; moreover, Watson recognized him for the man whom he had seen standing beside Leighton in the morning.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the stranger. "My name's Hewson. My uncle lived butler with Colonel Grosvenor at the Elms."

"Oh! and you're old Hewson's nephew, are you?"

"Yes, sir; and I came about a thing I thought it was best to speak to you or the colonel about. I went down to the Elms; but the colonel was come up to London."

"When was this?"

"I only come back yesterday, sir; and I was going to seek the colonel, when you happening to pass my door, the man that was with me told me who you were; so I thought it better to mention it to you."

"Mention what?"

"It's about that man, Leighton, sir. He's mentioned a thing to me about a dog and a portmanteau you left down at C——, at the inn there, and the people advertised for the owner lately."

"Oh, I'm much obliged to you," returned Watson, endeavouring to conceal his confusion by continuing his packing; "but they're not mine; I never left anything at an inn there. Indeed, except passing through in the coach, I don't think I was ever there in my life."

"Oh, well, I'm glad of it, sir. I thought there must be some mistake about it; but the man was so positive that I thought there would be no harm in just mentioning it."

Watson scarcely knew whether to press for further information or not, being afraid of what he might hear. How Leighton had discovered that the articles advertised were his, he couldn't conceive, but at all events the discovery was alarming, and might lead to other suspicions. Still fear and curiosity urged him, and he said, with as much carelessness as he could assume, that he wondered why anybody should suppose the things were his.

"It seems quite out of the way, sir, to be sure," answered Hewson; "but the man was sent to prison, it seems, for a thing he says he never done, and it's put things into his head as never should have been there. I was like to quarrel with him the first time he mentioned it to me, for the colonel was a good master to my uncle, and has always been a friend to our family; and that's why I went down to the Elms, for the man seemed so determined that I was afraid mischief might come of it."

There was mischief impending then! Leighton must have discovered that he had been in the neighbourhood of Ravenscliffe that night, and was drawing conclusions from the circumstance. Were they only conclusions, or had he fallen on some proof?

"My grandfather was very much attached to your uncle, I know," said Watson, desirous of securing Hewson's goodwill.

"Yes, sir; and of course it was very unpleasant to me to hear such things said against the family."

"I don't know any reason that fellow Leighton can have to speak ill of us. When he was in Paris lately, in great distress, I did what I could to assist him; but I'm afraid my cousin's ill opinion of him was too well founded; he always told me to beware of him."

“Indeed, sir; I’m sure I’m very glad I came to you, for he told such a story of his misfortunes, and how he was falsely accused and put into jail, that he quite got round me and my wife; we pitied him being out of bread so long; but we’ll have no more to say to him;” and with this determination Hewson took his departure, leaving Mr. Watson in a very different state of mind to that he found him in. The hands slackened that were packing the portmanteau; it was scarcely advisable to go to Ravenscliffe now, nor to take any step that would court public attention. He was in that situation in which a man feels that the less is said about him the better, and began to think he should be safer and more out of the way at the Elms than in London.

In the meantime, Leighton, who at heart was a timid man, little disposed to energetic action of any sort, was hesitating how to proceed; he wanted advice, and did not know where to get it; and in this state of mind he came back to Hewson’s in the evening to relieve himself by a chat, but he found a different reception to that which usually awaited him.

“To be plain with you,” said Hewson, “we wish to break off the acquaintance. You’ll be none the worse, nor we neither, and things’ll go on just as they did before.”

Mrs. Hewson turned away and busied herself about something in the room, for she felt sorry for the man. Leighton rose and took his hat, saying, he did not wish to press his company on anybody. He looked pale, and his hand shook, for it was a bitter thing to hear said in a house he had found a welcome in; and Hewson, who was a remarkably kind-hearted person, could not resist excusing his harshness, by avowing the cause—he found he had slandered a family for whom he, Hewson, and his uncle before him, entertained the greatest respect.

Leighton stood for a moment silent; quiet man as he was, his passions were fully roused now.

“Very well,” he said, “you’re quite right, and I don’t blame you at all. I’m glad you went to him. Somebody else shall go to him now, and you’ll soon hear more than you wish. The rest of the family may be very respectable for what I know—they ought to be, for they belong to a family that hold themselves very high; but if that Mr. Watson isn’t a scoundrel, may I never break bread!”

With the impetus furnished by this last provocation he proceeded with all haste to Marlborough Street, where the first

person he saw standing on the step was Parsons. This was not the first time by several that he had met Parsons in the street, and he had more than once contemplated telling him his story and asking his advice. But he had a considerable dislike to confessing that he had been in jail, and he was always afraid that with that circumstance against him, he should not gain credence, especially with a police officer. Now, however, he was too much excited to indulge in such misgivings, and as rapidly as he could, he related what had occurred at Ravenscliffe and since to excite his suspicions.

"And you are sure the dog and portmanteau are his?" asked Parsons. "Because if they are the strongest thing against him is his denying of it. For say he'd forgotten 'em all this time, or didn't think 'em worth claiming, that's no reason he should deny 'em being his."

The other, declaring his certainty of the facts alleged, Parsons desired him to walk in and wait a bit till he could find a magistrate at leisure to give his attention to the business; but when Leighton narrated his tale, elate with the hope that a warrant would be immediately issued for the apprehension of Watson, the magistrate demurred at the evidence. There was nobody's word for all this but that of a suspected person; and even supposing the dog and the portmanteau did belong to the gentleman in question, it did not follow that it was he who had made the attack on Mr. Grosvenor.

"But if they're his, why does he deny them, your worship," said Leighton, borrowing the hint from Parsons, "if he isn't afraid to own them?"

But the magistrate had too nice a sense of his own dignity to accept a shrewd suggestion that had not originated with himself, and was consequently less disposed than before to adopt the views of the witness. He inclined to the notion that the gentleman had disowned the things because in fact they were not his, and dismissed Leighton, saying that he must bring better evidence than that before they could feel themselves justified in interfering with a gentleman of family and condition like Mr. Watson.

On the following morning Mr. Watson returned to the Elms, where, to the disappointment of his mother, he arrived, not a little crest-fallen. Not even to her could he disclose the real obstacle that had impeded his road to fortune; nor could he think of anything to do but to keep himself for a while out of sight, in hopes this ill wind might blow over.

CHAPTER LXIX.

CHARLEY LAWRENCE was standing in the corner, in the nursery at Reston Hall, wiping away with his pinafore the tears that streamed down his rosy face. Archy and he had been playing together, when the former, for some trifling cause, began to cry; whereupon Mrs. Driscoll, hearing her mistress on the stairs, fell into a violent passion with Charley, and giving him a smart box on the ear, thrust him into the corner, telling him he was the plague of her life, and that she wished she'd never seen his face; a sentiment she reiterated to Mrs. Lawrence, who entered the room with a letter in her hand.

"This is for you, Driscoll," said the lady, giving it to her. "What has that naughty boy been doing now?"

"He's always making that dear child cry, with his rough, rude ways. There's no such thing as keeping him within bounds at all," said Mrs. Driscoll.

"Never mind," said the lady, nodding her head significantly at the culprit, "you shall go somewhere soon, where you'll be made to behave as you ought to do. I've been speaking to your papa, sir, about sending you to school; and to school you shall go, without more delay, I'm determined. Don't let him have any gooseberry pudding to-day, Driscoll; and I desire he may not come down to the dining-room this evening!" terrible denunciations, which provoked fresh torrents of tears.

Archy, the darling, was then duly petted and admired, and anxious commands issued for his benefit; after which, together with repeated kisses and embraces, the lady retired; and Mrs. Driscoll proceeded to read her letter, which she perceived was from her sister, Miss Barber. Lounging in the nursery-chair, with the infant in her lap, she broke the seal.

"Come now, be quiet, darling, and let me read my letter, and then we'll sing 'Hey diddle diddle, the cats and the fiddle.' Won't we?" Then she read a few lines; but Archy wanted to be amused, and began to whimper because she did not attend to him. "Hush, you little torment, you! Can't you be still a moment? My God! Have done, sir! I'll smack you, if you

don't! That old Smithers! Cunning devil! Will you leave the paper alone, sir? I'll put you in the corner, in a minute, to stand beside your brother! What in the name of the Lord shall I do?"

Then, after reflecting, she folded up the letter and put it in her pocket, washed the tears from Archy's face, desired Charley to stay where he was till she came back, and, under the impression that there was no time to lose, descended the stairs to her mistress's bed-room, into which she had heard her go when she left the nursery.

"What's the matter, Driscoll? There's nothing wrong with my pet, is there?"

"No, ma'am, bless him! He's quite well, thank God! And certainly the sun never shone on a sweeter infant. I never thought I could have loved a child, that wasn't my own, as I love this one; and often and often, when I've looked at him, it's been like a dagger in my heart to think that there should be one in the way to take from him what ought to be his!" Here she wiped her eyes.

"Well, Driscoll," said Mrs. Lawrence, unable to understand this sudden emotion, "it *is* hard, certainly; but we must not repine at the dispensations of Providence, you know."

Not that Mrs. Lawrence was by any means resigned to the dispensations of Providence in this particuilar; for the religious fervour which had been blown up, and artificially sustained in London, by the assiduities of the ladies in long bonnets and scanty petticoats, had soon cooled in the North, where the cheerful parties of the hospitable country gentlemen were much more attractive than the prayer and Dorcas meetings which had served very well in their day to fill up the vacuity of her existence. She was not resigned at all, but she was at a loss what to say to an exordium that might have introduced a proposal to "make quiek conveyance" with this incommodious elder brother.

But if Mrs. Lawrence was not resigned, Mrs. Driscoll was in despair. She stood crying and sobbing in the most piteous manner, ever and anon hugging and kissing Archy, in the midst of her blubbering, till Mrs. Lawrence actually took fright, and exclaimed:

"Good heavens! what's the matter, Driscoll? Where's Charles? Nothing has happened to Charles, I hope?"

"Pray for me, angel!" cried Mrs. Driscoll, flopping on her knees, and holding out the infant to its mother. "Though I

may die for it, I won't—I can't wrong you! Archy shall have his own!"

"In the name of God, woman, what do you mean?" exclaimed Mrs. Lawrence, snatching up the infant, and laying her hand on the bell-pull; for she actually began to believe that the nurse's enthusiasm for Archy had seduced her into the commission of murder.

"Don't—don't ring, ma'am; pray don't, and I'll tell you all!"

"All what?" cried Mrs. Lawrence. "Get off your knees, woman, and speak, or I shall go mad."

Then out it came, amidst sobs, and groans, and ejaculations—Charles was not Major Lawrence's child. The boy died of the scarlet fever; and fear of blame, and the father's grief, and the loss of the stipend, had overcome her principles, and she had substituted another, &c.

At first, Mrs. Lawrence did not believe her. She thought it was some mad scheme, prompted by that same enthusiasm for the younger child; but Mrs. Driscoll swore and protested that her tale was true, entering into all the details of her crime, but with one exception: she did not confess that she had discovered to whom the boy belonged—that being an aggravation of her guilt that she thought it better to keep to herself.

Whatever gratification this intelligence was calculated ultimately to afford her, Mrs. Lawrence was, in the first instance, too much surprised and shocked at the woman's delinquency, and too sensible to the grief the discovery would occasion her husband, to rejoice at Archy's promotion. She was really very much distressed; and feeling unwilling to be the organ of such ill news, she desired Driscoll to go to the nursery, and keep her own counsel for the present; and then putting on her bonnet, she set off to the vicarage, to make a confidant of the clergyman, and ask his advice.

As she walked down the avenue, a post-chaise passed her—there were post-chaises in those days—in which sat Colonel Grosvenor and Mr. Conyers; but, being little disposed for visitors, she did not stop to inquire who they were, but proceeded to her destination; and whilst she is telling her story to the vicar, and the two strangers are closeted with the major, we will return to the Ravenscliffe family, who were by this time made aware of the cause of Lady Georgina's sudden flight.

Seldom has the pride of race been more deeply wounded than by this disclosure; and all parties concerned were glad that he who would have felt it most bitterly—the old baronet—was

already gone where no domestic treasons could touch him more. But still Lady Grosvenor and her daughters were inexpressibly pained and mortified; and it added a barb to the arrow when they anticipated the probability that Lewis Watson would succeed to the estate; he by whose cognizance and connivance, in the first instance, and his eagerness to take advantage of the dilemma, in the second, filled them with indignation and disgust.

It was in consequence of this feeling that now, for the first time, the name of Agnes Crawford came to be uttered amongst them unaccompanied by scorn and contumely. It was now that Isabel dared to stand up for her friend, for young people are easily talked down by authority; and, in spite of her secret leanings, she had been silenced and perplexed by the confident denunciations of everybody belonging to her.

By this time, Henry Langham and his wife were separated, not legally, nor by mutual consent; for she was still very much attached to him, and it was much against hers; but her attachment could not overcome her love of argument, and after several unsuccessful attempts at release, he proposed certain amicable arrangements, which she perforce acceded to, but which, finding herself unhappy under them, she incessantly transgressed. She had neither temper to live with him, nor resolution to live away from him. Considered, therefore, in their matrimonial relations, as a couple, they might be pronounced a thoroughly unhappy one.

William Damer and his wife, on the contrary, resided under the same roof, in a state of complete indifferencism as regarded each other; and she, as regarded everything in the world, except herself. He pursued his own amusements, which were chiefly literary and scientific, became a member of various learned societies, and occasionally read a paper himself at their meetings, which, if nothing very remarkable, was a graceful contribution from a man of his condition, and was not thought the less of for "the Honourable" attached to his name.

On the occasion, however, of this grand domestic calamity, all the members of the family were called together, and met at the house of Mr. Damer, near Richmond, to bewail and talk over their misfortune. Since the death of Sir Francis, Isabel had been living in great seclusion with her mother, who, both in accordance with her own inclination, and because she considered that till the memory of her Paris adventure was blown over, her daughter should disappear from the world, neither received nor went into

any company. In that interval, therefore, Mr. Damer and she had not met, nor had he ever heard the account of her *rencontre* with Agnes, except as related to him by his wife; but this much-condemned and lamented escapade of Isabel's had now assumed a new interest, from the unexpected disclosures regarding Lionel's first marriage, and everything she had to tell about Agnes was listened to with eager curiosity. It was not their cue to abuse her now; for, however unwelcome she might be as Lady Grosvenor, the balance betwixt an heir, of whom she was the mother, on one side, and Mr. Lewis Watson on the other, decidedly inclined in her favour.

Accompanied by Louisa, who had been staying with them, Lady Grosvenor and Isabel arrived shortly before dinner; and having been welcomed by Mr. Damer and his wife, the two elder sisters retired to have a chat, Louisa all agitation at the prospect of meeting her husband.

"For God's sake be on your guard," said Frances. "My mind misgives me horribly that you will fall into an argument with Henry about this business as soon as you come together. Say nothing, rather than differ with him in the smallest degree; for if once you begin an argument, it's like gunpowder, there's no preventing an explosion." Louisa disowned the possibility of such a thing, lamenting, at the same time, with tears in her eyes, that Harry could not bear contradiction.

"But since he can't bear it, why in the world can't you leave it alone?" said Frances. "However, it's no use talking of it now; I always saw what it would come to, and you know, Louisa, there's a saying the common people have, 'You have made your own bed, and must lie in it.'"

"Perhaps it's not so much my fault as you think," answered Mrs. Langham; "but I can only say, that if Harry had married *you*, instead of living together seven years, you would not have lived together three. I may differ in opinion with him sometimes, and when I do, I think it hard I may not say so without his going into a rage; but if I pursued my inclinations in open defiance of his, as you do with William, our *ménage* would not have lasted six months."

"I don't believe it," answered Frances, "he would have got used to it; but no man can be reconciled to living always in a storm, or a succession of storms with short intervals of calm. But I'll leave you to dress, and to night, I suppose, we shall hold a conclave on this terrible affair. By the bye, Mr. Damer's

secretary dines at table with us; but he'll go to the library after dinner."

"I did not know he kept a secretary."

"It's only within the last six months; but you know William's a member of the Royal Society, and he met this young man there, and took a fancy to him, and I am very glad of it; for he used to look so lonely when I went into the library to bid him good night as I was going out; but he's quite comfortable now he's got a companion that likes the same pursuits as himself."

In the meantime, whilst her sisters had been chatting in Mrs. Langham's bedroom, Isabel had been making haste with her toilet in hopes of getting a few minutes alone with Mr. Damer, before dinner. There had always existed a very kindly feeling between them, and there was no member of the family whose feelings and opinions regarding this new aspect of affairs she desired so much to learn as his. Moreover, she wished to have an opportunity of imbuing him with favourable sentiments towards Agnes; or, at all events, to remove prejudices which it was very natural he should entertain. With this view she descended early to the drawing-room, and according to her expectations the first person that entered it was her brother-in-law.

"Dear Bel," he said, "how glad I am to see you once more."

"I wanted," she said, after mutual salutations, "to have a few words with you before mamma and my sisters come down. I don't know whether you are acquainted with the particulars of what occurred in Paris; but, of course, you know that I saw Agnes, and how that circumstance, as well as everything else, embittered mamma and poor Georgina and everybody against her, so that I was not allowed to mention her name; but though these feelings are a good deal modified now, yet you can understand how difficult it is for mamma to conceive of her but as an impudent, presumptuous, ambitious, designing woman, and it's only her hatred of the Watsons that induces her to listen to the name of Agnes at all. But you may believe me, William, Agnes is the very opposite to what they think; here's somebody coming, but remember what I've said."

"I will," answered Mr. Damer. "Come here, Capel!" he added, addressing a gentleman who just then entered the room; "let me introduce you to my sister-in-law, Miss Grosvenor. Isabel, this is my friend, Mr. Capel, who is living with us at present, and helps me to write those learned articles that I hear you give me the credit of. The glory's all due to him, I assure you!"

CHAPTER LXX.

OVERWHELMED with disappointment at finding his testimony not believed, or at least insufficient to procure the arrest of Watson, Leighton, full of his injuries, called on Agnes to tell her of all he had discovered and of his ill success. He had not seen her for a considerable time, for she encouraged no visits but those of the faithful John Gibson, and of Mr. Capel, whom she had not seen for some months.

"It's just as I thought," he said. "You know I told you that ever since what happened in Paris, I suspected that fellow was the cause of my ruin, and this business about the dog and the portmanteau proves it as satisfactory to my mind as if it had been sworn in a court of justice; but the magistrate don't think it proof enough, and so he'll get off, and I must suffer for it all my life."

"A thing strikes me," said John Gibson, who was sitting at the other side of the table beside Martha, "a thing strikes me about that 'cre person—gentleman, I believe he was—that was in the coach that night. Bob told me he took him up walking in the road just afore he met us, cause I asked him what company you had inside with you."

"I remember him," said Agnes, "but I scarcely saw his face. He was asleep, I believe, and he had a handkerchief over his head; and besides it was quite dark."

"If you remember," said John, "he got down where the coach stopped and paid his fare; and it struck me then he was the same as had passed us in the road when we was a-waiting at the milestone. I remember he gave the coachman a note, and bid him get it changed, and he kept walking backwards and forwards afore the door when I was a-talking to you at the coach-window whilst the inside supped."

"Yes, I remember seeing him," said Agnes.

"I wouldn't wonder if that was the very man. If I'm not mistaken he'd on a great coat, and he was a tallish, stoutish man like what you describe."

As it was no uncommon thing to pick up passengers on the

road, this suspicion had not struck John before ; but now the probability of the thing impressed them all.

"After the coach drove away that night," said John, "I saw a bit of paper on the ground, and it struck me that it was that gentleman that had dropped it ; but it warn't money, it was only a bit of a letter."

"I'd give five pounds, if I had as much, for that bit of paper," said Leighton. "There might be his name on it if it was a letter."

"I'll see if I've got it yet," said John, blushing. "I shouldn't wonder if I have."

"That would be very odd," said Martha, "to keep a bit of paper all this time." At which remark John's face grew redder still, but he made no answer. The fact was, that from that time to the present, that same bit of paper with Agnes's old handkerchief folded in it, had lain at the bottom of the box in which he kept his clothes, and now that he was engaged to marry Martha, he had more than once, when his eye fell on the little parcel, felt a certain degree of delicate embarrassment as to what he should do with this sacred relic of his early worship. To keep it was improper, and if found by Martha it might lead to questions he did not wish to answer ; and yet to throw it away was irreverent. This conversation inspired the idea of a middle course. He would neither keep it nor throw it away ; he would give the paper to Leighton, who could read ; and he would restore the handkerchief to its original owner by depositing it secretly in Agnes's room the next time he called.

Before this event occurred, however, Agnes received a note from Mr. Conyers, requesting her to be at his house on the following morning at half-past nine ; a summons that made her heart beat with anxious hopes and fears. She was punctual to the minute, and when she drove up to the door in a hackney-coach, a chaise and four that was already there, drew off to make way for her vehicle. As she was alighting, Mr. Conyers appeared with his hat and gloves on.

"I am going to put your patience to some trial, Mrs. Gibson," he said, "but I must request you to step into this carriage and go a little way out of town with me."

Most people will have felt that there are situations where a tremendous interest being in suspense—a suspense which a word would convert into a certainty of one sort or another—a certainty of happiness or misery—we forbear to ask for that word ; we prefer the illimitable privilege of hope that ignorance leaves us,

to the possibility of a dreaded conviction. So was it with Agnes. The blood rushed back upon her heart, her limbs trembled under her; but she obeyed in silence. Mr. Conyers handed her into the carriage, and they drove away. She sat back in one corner, with her veil drawn over her face, and he in the other; but once, when her agitation got the better of her, and he saw she was weeping convulsively, he said:

“Keep up your spirits. I hope we are going to hear good news.”

The journey seemed long, and yet she durst not wish it at an end, lest she should be wishing away moments of irrecoverable bliss: for whilst she wept, and bade herself not hope, she hoped everything she most desired on earth.

They had for some time had the river in sight, and at length they stopped at the gate of an elegant villa on its banks; the gate was thrown open, they drove in, and Mr. Conyers assisted her to alight, aided by two or three servants in livery, who preceded her to a room on the dining-room floor, with a bay window looking over the Thames. The butler threw open the door, and without being announced, she found herself in a room full of books, globes, maps, bronzes, and busts. In a large library chair sat the old gentleman she had met at Mr. Conyers's house, and between his knees stood a beautiful little boy, apparently six or seven years old. When the door opened the child looked round. Yes! there were the eyes; there the mouth! The hair was darker; the face, on the whole, a good deal changed by development; but Lionel Grosvenor was stamped upon the features with a distinctness that would have defied any degree of inerednlity that was not interested.

In an instant, Agnes was on her knees, embracing him, devouring him with kisses, amidst smiles and tears.

“Do you remember this lady?” said Colonel Grosvenor.

“No,” answered the child.

“But you tell me you remember living somewhere before you lived with your nurse, Driscoll, and that you thought it was with your mamma. Do you think this is like the lady you lived with?”

The child, however, had no recollection of his mother whatever; but it appeared that, as is the case with most of us, certain distinct memories of his earlier infancy stood out from the general blank—memories of isolated circumstances. Thus, he had no recollection of how he came to change his first home,

but he clearly remembered a woman, dressed in black, taking him to a toy-shop, and giving him a little carriage, and he also remembered something about the Adelphi Hotel; at least, he said he remembered once being in a large house, with a great many rooms, that he used to run about and play in. Mrs. Driscoll's own confession, however, and the resemblance to Lionel, were sufficient to establish the child's identity to the complete satisfaction of the family.

When her first transports of joy were over, and Colonel Grosvenor had informed her through what chain of circumstances the boy had been recovered, Agnes warmly poured out her thanks to him for his kind interference, and ventured to ask him—for yet she knew not—why he had interested himself in her favour. Then he told her who he was, and gradually broke to her the fact that they believed her to have been Lionel Grosvenor's legal wife; and that in that case her son was now Sir William Grosvenor, and the owner of Ravenscliffe. Agnes put her hands before her face and wept; but this time they were not tears of joy.

"Then he might as well have not been found! He'll be taken away from me, and I shall scarcely be allowed to see him!"

But the colonel assured her that should not be the case.

"You are his natural guardian, no other having been appointed. Proper arrangements must be made for his education, but you will not be separated, I promise you; and now the Dowager Lady Grosvenor and her daughters wish to see you; and if you feel yourself sufficiently composed, I'll let them know you are here."

Agnes received the civilities of her new connections without agitation, but with great modesty and humility. She could not imagine it possible they could pardon her intrusion into the family, not being able to comprehend that the heir she brought with her went far to expiate the fault, more especially as news had arrived of the death of Lady Georgina's son at Rome, where, by the way, the mother soon followed him to the grave.

Lady Grosvenor was dignified and polite; Louisa tried to be easy and familiar; Frances was civilly indifferent; the colonel affectionate and paternal; Mr. Langham and Mr. Damer kind and well-bred; but Isabel was sisterly. She threw her arms around Agnes's neck, and told her that to her she owed her happiness. Miss Daeres had died some time before, leaving Isabel her fortune; and she and Mr. Capel had already exchanged vows of eternal love.

"I hope mamma will consent," said she; "but no man except Frederick Capel shall ever be my husband."

That was another bitter pill for the dowager, who would probably not have consented, but for a combination of circumstances that smoothed away the difficulties, one of these being that Isabel, since her Paris adventure, was considered scarcely *présentable* as Miss Grosvenor; especially when so much public attention would be inevitably drawn to this extraordinary family *dénouement*. Above all, however, her consent was won by an arrangement entered into betwixt Agnes and Isabel, at the request of the former, namely, that Mr. and Mrs. Capel should reside at and do the honours of Ravenscliffe Castle; that Mr. Capel, whom Mr. Damer pronounced the fittest person in the world for the office, should undertake the management of the young baronet, and the direction of his education; and that Agnes, whose whole heart was now given to her boy, should live secluded in a suite of apartments appropriated to her use, and be allowed to eschew the great world for which she felt herself by habit and education unsuitable.

There was another couple of lovers, however, to whose hopes all these happy events at first seemed fatal. Honest John Gibson hung his head when he heard his intended wife's sister was Lady Grosvenor, and Martha agreed with him, that for Agnes's sake they must relinquish their engagement; the marriage would give such a shock to the dowager and her daughters. But Agnes forbade this sacrifice.

"Marry our good John, dear sister," she said; "we will shock nobody, nor do anything that would not be right in my present position; but wherever you live, in London or elsewhere, I and my boy will come often and see you, and I have already talked to Colonel Grosvenor about the means of making you both comfortable for life."

In short, with the exception of the Watsons, everybody was tolerably content with these issues; but Lewis Watson was outrageous, and directed his solicitor to take proceedings against the boy that had been falsely set up as the heir of Ravenscliffe; a timely hint, however, from a friendly quarter, caused him to decamp suddenly for the Continent, without waiting to see the event of his suit. The bit of paper picked up at the inn door, so curiously preserved by John Gibson, turned out to be the lost certificate of Agnes's marriage, which, together with the evidence of Bob Cary, the coachman who drove the Dispatch to London on that 14th of December, so irrefragably fixed the guilt of that

night attack on the schemer himself that his arms fell from his hands, and he fled.

Such compensation as could be made *was* made to Leighton; and in order to wipe off the stain and rehabilitate him, Mr. Damer took him into his own service, and the Ravenscliffe family presented him with five hundred pounds, and a written testimonial of their good opinion.

THE END.

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