Lord of the Manor; or, Rose Castleton's Temptation. An Old Engli

Henry William Herbert

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The Lord of the Manor; or, Rose Castleton's Temptation. An Old English Story

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Left by his sire too young such loss to know,
Lord of himself;—that heritage of wo,
That fearful empire which the human breast
But holds, to rob the heart within of rest.

—Lara.
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CHAPTER I.

It was the morning of the first of May, that merriest morning of the year, in the old days of merry England; and never did a brighter dawning illuminate a fairer landscape, than that wherein the incidents occurred, which form the basis of one of those true tales that prove how much there is of wild and strange romance even in the most domestic circles of existence.

The landscape was a portion of the western slope of a broad English valley, diversified with meadow−land and pasture, and many a field of green luxuriant wheat, and shadowy woods, and bosky dells and dingles; and with a clear, bright, shallow river rippling along its pebbly channel, at the base of the soft hills, which swept down to its flowery marge in gentle loveliness.

The foreground of the picture, for it was one indeed, on the left hand side, was made up of a thick mass of orchards, and beyond these by a clump of towering lindens, above which might be seen the arrowy spire of a village church, piercing the cool air with its gilded vane and weathercock— the river sweeping round and half enclosing the garden grounds, and cottages seen among the shrubbery, in a blue glancing reach spanned by a three−arched bridge of old red brick, all overrun with ivy. Close to the bridge, but on the west side of the stream, lay a large tract of open common, carpeted with rich short greensward, whereon a thousand fairly rings were visible, and sprinkled with all the bright wild flowers of the early spring. A winding road of yellow sand traversed the varied surface of the waste, which was much broken up by hillocks and deep hollows, alternating clear sunny lights with cool blue shadows; and, after crossing the river by the old bridge, was lost for a little while among the orchards of the village, till it again reappeared, near the centre of the middle distance, above the fringe of willow, birch, and alder bushes, which skirted all the eastern margin of the river. Beyond this screen of coppice, the view extended upward for nearly a mile in distance, over a beautiful park−like lawn, dotted with clumps of noble trees, and enclosed on every side by woods of tall dark oak.

A large white gate gave access to this fair demesne, with a snug porter's lodgenestled into a shady covert close beside it; and at the very crown of the slope, overlooking all the broad and fertile vale, stood a large mansion of red brick, built in the quaint architecture of the Elizabethan era, with large projecting oriels and tall clustered chimneys, and a wide free−stone terrace, bedecked with urns and balustrades, in front; the dwelling evidently of the lord of that fair manor. To the right of the woods, which skirted that side of the park, lay an abrupt ravine, through which a brawling trout stream made its way down, among large blocks of limestone, and under tangled covert, to join the river in the valley. Beyond this gorge, the sides of which were feathered thick with yew, and box, and juniper, rose a broad barren hill, crowned by the gray and weather−beaten keep of an old Norman castle, frowning in dark sublimity over the cultured fields, whose fruits its lords of old had reaped, won by the mortal sword—and beyond this a range of purple moors towered, summit over summit, till they were lost at length in the gray mists of the horizon.

It was, as has seen said, the early dawning of the sweet first of May—so early that the sun had not yet reared the whole of his red disc above the eastern hills, but half emerged was checkering all the slopes and the level meadows at the bottom of the valley with lengthened streams of ruddy lustre, and casting long clear shadows from every tree or bush or stone that met its rays. Yet, early as it was, the village was alive with merriment and bustle. A joyous peal was chiming from the bells of the tall steeple, while a May−pole that almost vied in height with the neighboring spire, was planted on the common by the waterside, where the ground lay most level to the sunshine, and where the greensward grew the mossiest and softest to the tread. The whole waste had was covered with glad groups of peasantry, all in their holyday attire, speeding toward the rendezyous, beneath a huge gnarled hawthorn, which had beheld the sports of their grandsires, now white as if a sudden snow storm had powdered its dense foliage with the sweet blossoms that derive their name from the delicious month which witnesses their birth—the sandy road, too, and the bridge were glistening with moving parties; while the shrill merry laugh of girls, and the yet shriller whoop of childhood, came frequent on the ear from many a sequestered spot among the budding orchards— nor did the rugged castle hill display no joyous company; for there, and through the dim−wood glen, and over the old turn−style, and through the park itself, the happy yeomanry came flocking to celebrate their feast

of flowers.

Just at this moment the park gates were suddenly thrown open, and a young man rode out into the sandy road, accompanied by several dogs, and followed by three serving men—two mounted and the third on foot—and taking the downward track, to the left hand toward the village and the bridge, was quickly lost to view behind the willows on the river bank. As he appeared, however, even at that distance, both by his dress and air to be a person of superior rank to any of the groups around, and as I shall have much to do with him in the course of my narrative, I shall attach myself to him during his ride from the manor gates to the meadow of the May−pole.

He was a young and extremely handsome person, well formed and tall, and giving promise of great future strength, when his slender and almost boyish frame should be developed to its full proportions; for he was, in years, all but a boy, having on that very morning attained to his majority, and the possession of the fine demesnes, and ample fortune, which now called him master. His hair was long and slightly curled, of a deep rich chestnut color; and notwithstanding that it was the fashion of that day, even for the young and comely, to cover the whole head with a disfiguring mass of flowing powdered horse−hair, under the title of a periwig, he wore his locks all natural and undisguised; and well they harmonized with the fine coloring and noble outlines of his well marked frank features, sparkling as they were on that bright happy morning with gratified ambition, and high hope, and all the bounding energies of prosperous unbroken manhood.

There were, it is true, some indications— which would not easily be missed by an experienced physiognomist—that told of strong and fiery passions concealed beneath that bold and beautiful exterior— there was a quick and hasty sparkle in the fine open eye, which indicated a temperament prone to blaze out, at any check to its desires, into fierce bursts of angry vehemence— there were deep lines for one so young about the mouth and nostrils, that clearly spoke of latent but indomitable pride; and something, too, of the existence of many a voluptuous feeling, ready to spring up giants from their birth, when any chance occurrence should kindle them to sudden life; still, in despite these drawbacks to his beauty, for such in truth they were, he could not fail to be pronounced, and that too in the highest sense of the term, a fine and noble looking man. He was dressed, too, in the rich fashion of the day, with a low crowned and broad brimmed beaver, decked by a hat hand set about with short white ostrich feathers—his coat of grass green velvet, ornamented by a slight cord of gold, sat closely on his graceful form; while breeches of white doeskin, with heavy hunting boots and massive silver spurs, completed his attire; a light *couteau de chasse* hanging at his side, being carried rather as an indication of the wearer's rank, than as a weapon of defence; which, in the settled and peaceful state of England at that moment, was almost as unnecessary as at the present day.

The dogs, which ran beside his stirrup, were six or eight in number, and noble specimens of several choice and favorite breeds. There was the tall lithe English bloodhound, with his sleek tawny hide, his pendulous ears, and coal black muzzle; there were two fleet and graceful greyhounds, one white as snow, the other black as the raven's wing, with their elastic limbs and airy gait; there were a leash of King Charles' spaniels, beautiful silky creatures, with ears that swept the dew; and last, though not least in the owner's estimation, a savage−looking, wire−haired Scotch terrier, with shaggy jaws, and keen intelligent expression, though many a scar, of wounds inflicted in desperate encounters with the hill−fox or prowling wild−cat, seamed his rough grizzly face.

The male attendants of the young gentlemen were three, as I have said, in number; one a gray−headed, venerable−looking man, dressed in a suit of plain snuff−colored clothes, and mounted on a strong brown cob, which set off admirably, by the contrast, the fine points and superb condition of the splendid hunter which carried the young lord of the manor. This aged man, who was, indeed, the steward, who had lived on the property in the time of this youth's father, and to whose care and faithful man agement much of the present wealth of the estate might be attributed, rode not exactly abreast of his master, nor yet entirely behind him, but so that while preserving a respectful distance, to show that he laid claim to no standing of equality, he was still near enough to maintain, without any inconvenience, whatever conversation it might please the younger man to originate.

On the other side, among the dogs, which looked up to him from time to time with a very evident mixture of fear and affection in their features, strode along a well−built sturdy fellow of some eight−and−twenty or thirty years, standing some six feet in his stockings, and powerful in due proportion to his height. This man, who was dressed as a gamekeeper or forester, with leather buskins on his legs, and a short musquetoon or carabine in his hand, was what would be generally called goodlooking, by those at least who, in the habit of regarding the mere animal qualities of humanity, neglect the nobler characteristics of intellectual beauty—for he was dark−haired and

fresh complexioned, with a full bright eye and prominent features. There was a strong resemblance, moreover, in all his lineaments to the calm and serene face of the old steward; but it was in the outlines only, and, even of these, one of the most remarkable in the father was wholly wanting to the son—for such, indeed, was their relationship—namely, the ample and majestic forehead; which striking feature was changed in the younger man for a low and receding brow, giving a mean and vulgar expression to the whole countenance, which was, moreover, of a dogged and sullen cast, with large thick sensual lips, heavy and massive jaws, and all the animal portions of the head unusually and ungracefully developed. This unprepossessing face, for such indeed it was, gloomy and lowering, unless when it was lighted up by a smile even more inauspicious than the darkness it relieved, flashed out at times under that brief illumination with a shrewd gleam, half cuning, half malignant, which rendered it, nor the moment, almost fearful to behold.

The third person was an ordinary groom, in a blue coat with a livery badge on his farm, carrying pistols at his holsters, and a heavy hunting whip in his right hand.

Such was the little party which rode down from the manor gate toward the village−green, on that May morning, amidst the loud and hearty congratulations of every rustic group they passed on their way—the honest heart of every jolly yeoman expanding, as he welcomed to his new possessions the young man, who had dwelt among them when a gay and thoughtless boy, and won affections which had still remained unchanged throughout his absence from the home of his fathers, during his education at school and college, or, in vacation time, at the distant mansions of his guardians.

It did not take the horsemen long, although the heir paused several times for a moment or two to converse cheerily with some of the older farmers, whom he remembered to have been kind to him when a child, or with some of the stalwart striplings with whom he had fished, or bird−nested, or ferreted wild rabbits, as companions in the blithe days of boyhood—it did not take the horsemen long to thread the windings of the sandy road, to cross the old brick bridge, and reach the beautiful green meadow, where the tall May−pole stood, as it had stood for ages, surrounded by a merry concourse, engaged in decking it with clusters of the flowery hawthorn, and garlands of a thousand dewy blossoms. While one bold boy, who had climbed to the summit of the dizzy mast, was hoisting up a hollow globe composed of many intersecting hoops, all bound with wreaths of eglantine, and hawthorn, and wild roses, with flaunting streamers and bright ribbons of every hue under the sun, to crown the flower−girt fabric, another group was busied, as the horsemen wheeled from the high road into the velvet green, in piling up a rustic throne beneath the aged hawthorn, composed of turf bedecked with crocuses and violets, and the sweet cuckoo buds, and briony, and bright marsh marigolds from the stream's verge, and water−lilies from its stiller reaches, and buttercups and daisies from the meadows.

All ceased, however, instantly from their slight labors as the young gentleman rode forward at a slow pace, his progress actually hindered by the pressure of the people, crowding up to greet their honored landlord; and a loud ringing shout, echoed back many times by each projecting hill through the long valley, spoke, and for once sincerely, more of heart−love than of lip−loyalty.

A brilliant flush of pleasure suffused his cheeks, and his eyes sparkled with excitement, as he doffed his plumed hat and bowed repeatedly to his assembled tenantry. He said, however, nothing in reply to their tumultuous cheering, until the old steward pricking his cob gently with the spur, rode up unbidden to his master's side, and whispered in his ear—

"Speak to them—speak to them, Sir Edward—for they expect it; and will set it down to pride, it may be, if you do not. Speak to them, if it be only twenty words."

"Not I, faith!" said the young heir, laughing; "I should stop short for very bashfulness before I had got ten words out, let alone twenty. But tell them, good Adam"—

No! no! Sir Edward"—the old man interrupted him, "you *must* , so please you, be guided for this once by your old servant; your father was a favorite with them always; and so were you, God bless you! while you were but a little boy; and, take my word for it, you shall gain more of good will, and of general favor, by speaking to them frankly for five minutes, than by distributing five hundred pounds."

"Well, if it must be so, old Adam, I suppose it must," returned the other, "but, by my honor, I had rather scatter the five hundred pounds, you talk about, among them."

Then drawing himself up in his saddle, without a moment's thought or preparation, he once more doffed his hat, and addressed himself in clear and well enunciated words, although his tones at first were somewhat low, and

his manner flurried, to the yeomanry, who stood around in silent and attentive admiration. As he went on, however, and gradually became accustomed to the sound of his own voice, that voice grew stronger, clearer, more sonorous, and his air less embarrassed, till at length, before he had been speaking quite five minutes, his notes were even, and sustained, flowing into the ear like a continued strain of silvery music.

"I thank you, my good friends," he said, "I thank you, from the bottom of my soul, for this, your frank and warm−hearted reception, and, when I say I thank you, I would not have you fancy that I am using a mere word, an empty form of speech, filling the ear indeed, signifying nothing. No, my good friends and neighbors, when I say here, I thank you, I mean in truth that my heart is full of gratitude toward you, and that it is my full and resolute intention, to prove that gratitude by my deeds to be done among you. I am a very young man yet, as you all know—and, of the few years which have hitherto been mine, the most have been passed at a distance from you. Many of you, whom I see round about, remember well my birth and boyhood; as I remember many, whom I look upon, for their frank, manly kindness toward a wayward schoolboy; but as I said even now, I have hitherto lived afar from you, and you know nothing of my heart or habits; and therefore, though I feel that your welcome is sincere, your gratulations honest, I am not such a fool of vanity, as to suppose all this affection and respectful greeting to be won from you by any merits of my own. Oh! no, my friends, I know it is the legacy, the precious legacy of your esteem and love! left to me by the virtues of a father, a grandfather, a race who have lived here in the midst of you, for ages, doing good, and receiving ample payment in looking on a free, a prosperous, and a grate ful people. My heart then would be dull, indeed, and senseless, if I did not appreciate the richest legacy of all, which they have left me, in your hereditary love—my mind must be brutish and irrational, if, in perceiving and appreciating this, I did not perceive, also, how I must merit your affection— how I must make it my own absolute possession, even as it was my father's— how I must leave it to my children, after me—if it please God, in his wisdom, through me to continue our line. My friends, I *do* perceive it! I have come hither to−day, to live among you, as my fathers did—to be no more your landlord, than your friend, your neighbor, your protector. I will not draw my revenues from the country, to lavish them on the idlers of the town! No, my friends, where my father's life was passed, there will I pass mine, likewise; and when the time allotted here to us shall be measured to its end, I trust that I shall lay my bones beside his bones, in your quiet churchyard! Now, mark what I would say, for I must not be tedious; I promise you that no man's rent shall be screwed up by me, beyond his own ability to pay, so he be sober, industrious, and frugal! I promise you, that no new tenant shall be preferred before an old one, so long as he deal with me justly. I promise you, that no strong man shall want good work, and ready payment—no sick man medicine, and succor—no old man aid and comfort—no poor man whatsoever help his exigencies need, that I can give to him; so long as God continue me among you. This, then, I promise you, not as a boon or bounty, but as I hold it here to be my bounden duty— and this will I make good to you, so surely as my name is Edward Hale of Arrington! Now I will trouble you no more, except to pray you to continue your sports, as if I were not present; and to request you all to dine with me at noon, on good old English beef and pudding. My fellows will be down anon, to pitch some tents here on the green, and set the ale a−flowing—and so once more I thank you."

It is probable that no set oration, delivered by the mightiest of the world's rhetoricians, bedecked with all the gorgeous ornaments, that genius can produce from its immortal garners, was ever listened to with more profound and rapt attention, than the few simple words, which flowed as it appeared so naturally from the heart to the tongue of the young landlord. It is certain, that none ever sunk more deeply into the feelings of the audience—their better, holier feelings! There was no violent outburst of pleasure—no loud tumultuous cheering—but a deep hush—a breathing silence! Many of the old men, and all the women, were in tears; and when they spoke, at length, it was with husky interrupted voices that they invoked Heaven's blessings on his head; and when they thought, it was with gratitude for their own happy lot in owning such a master.

Sir Edward was himself affected, partly it might be from the excitement of delivering a first speech, and that with success, so apparent and complete—it might be from the genuine warmth of his own heart, and strength of his own feelings; for the hearts of the young are almost ever warm, whether for good or for evil; and their emotions powerful and abundant; and oftentimes it happens, that the mere speaking forcibly of feelings, which perhaps at the time exist but faintly—and as I might say speculatively—will give those feelings actual force, and cause them to develop themselves with new and unsuspected vigor. And so it surely was with Edward Hale, in this case.

He was, as we have seen, extremely young—not in years only, but in knowledge of the world—and volatile, and hasty, and impetuous—too much, indeed, a creature and a child of impulse—I say not that his impulses were evil—I believe not that the impulses of the very young *are* so; except in rare and almost monstrous instances—but they were impulses, ungoverned, uncontrolled by any principle, any set rule of action, any guide of religion—and, therefore, even when most originally good, they were liable to be pushed into excesses; to be deceptive; to be self−deceivers; to degenerate into downright vices. That Edward Hale had thought, at times, of the condition of his subordinate fellows, is most true—that he had often dreamed bright day−dreams, concerning the happiness of a half patriarchal life among his tenants, is undoubted; and that his tastes, his habits, his pursuits, all led him to prefer a country to a city residence, no less so.

So it is true, that being liberal as the wind—nay, almost lavish—charity, so far at least as charity consists in giving, was an accustomed and familiar pleasure; that, like all men of glowing and enthusiastic minds, he was by no means without some crude and undigested notions of a wild species of Utopian justice! that he was of too bold and fiery a temperament not to abhor and loathe the very name of fraud or falsehood—and more, to do him simple justice, too kindly−hearted to be cruel, or systematically overbearing and oppressive. Still, it is no less certain that, until that very morning—nay, until the very minute when accident called on him to deliver an impromptu speech, when the excitability of his emotions, and his gratification at his warm reception by his tenants set loose the flood−gates of his faney and his heart—for in this instance, both were acted on, and both reacted in connection—he had never thought consecutively for half an hour on the subject; never had laid out for himself any rule or principle at all; never had, indeed, considered that he owed any duties to his fellow men.

"What then," I fancy I can hear the reader say, "What then, was Edward Hale a hypocrite? Was all his fine, apparently free−hearted speech a piece of absolute deception?" Neither, dear reader, neither; the young are rarely, oh! very rarely, hypocrites; rarely deceivers even, unless it be from fear, in timid dispositions, of some contingent evils, which they imagine they can shun by falsehood. And Edward Hale was neither; scarce even a deceiver of himself.

He had returned, only the previous night, to the home of his happy boyhood, after years of absence; had looked upon the picture of a mother, whom he almost adored— had trod the floors, along which he had bounded years ago; how changed, and yet the same; and every thing he saw and heard and thought of, conspired to call up his better feelings, and to attune his spirit to a mood more reflective—nay, almost melancholy— than his wont. A passionate lover of the charms of nature, he had felt, while he gazed out from his window over the lovely landscape, while he rode in all the consciousness of power and health, on his splendid hunter, beneath his old ancestral trees, he had felt, I say, that he could never love a spot on earth so well as his own fair demesnes; that he could never live so happily or with so calm a dignity in any other place, as he could here among his people. Then, when he found himself quite unexpectedly the object of affection so enthusiastic, of greetings so sincere and earnest, his fancy pictured to him in a moment, the pure and exquisite delights of such a life as he described in his brief speech; his heart yearned to the kind and humble yeomanry, whose very souls, apparently, were overflowing with love to all his race. He spoke embarrassed at the first, and faltering, and undecided; but, as he warmed to his task, his rich imagination woke; image suggested image, and though, perhaps, he actually thought, now for the first time, of many of the things he stated, they glowed so vividly before the eyes of his mind, that he believed them for the moment to be old and familiar ideas—the well remembered consequences of past reasoning. He believed, from the bottom of his heart, that every word he uttered was strictly and indisputably true; not for his life would he have uttered one, had he not so believed! And when he ceased to speak, he was affected by the very ideas that his own lively fancy had, for the first time, set before him; and he could safely then have registered a vow in heaven that such had *always been* his view of his own duties; and that so he would surely act, as long as he lived to act on earth at all.

As he ceased speaking, he turned his horse half round, as if to leave the green, saying to a fine hearty−looking yeoman who stood nearest to him, one of the patriarchs, unquestionably, of the place.

"I must ride, Master Marvel, to Stowcum−Barnesley, to meet some college friends of mine who promised to come down and spend my birth−day with me; but it is early yet, you know, and Oliver here," patting as he spoke the proud neck of his horse, "makes nothing of fifteen miles an hour; so I can ride thither easily, and be back with my friends to dinner."

"Ay, that thou canst, Sir Edward," returned the old man, laughing cheerily— "Ay, that thou canst; so go thy

ways, go thy ways, and God speed thee!"

Edward Hale touched his horse lightly with the spur, that he made one quick bound forward; but as he did so, the rider turned half round in the saddle, for something caught his attention so keenly that his eye sparkled, and his cheek flushed suddenly. The consequence was, that he checked Oliver so sharply with the curb, although involuntarily, that he reared bolt upright, and by the suddenness of the movement, so nearly unseated his master, that his hold on the saddle depended for a moment on the rein, and consequently the strain was increased greatly on the bit.

The hunter stood erect, pawing the air with his fore−feet, as if in an effort to retrieve his balance. Every one thought that he must have fallen backward, crushing his rider in the fall, and a shrill female shriek rang piercingly into the air; but, active, young, and fearless, Sir Edward scarce perceived the error he had committed before he repaired it. Throwing himself forward in his stirrups, by a rapid and elastic spring, he wreathed his fore−finger lightly in the mane, and gave the horse the spur so sharply that he made a violent plunge forward and alighted on his fore−feet with a dint that threw the turf into the air, in fifty several fragments, but failed to move the horseman in his saddle in the slightest degree.

Then the hot temper of the young man rose; and, though a moment's thought would have shown him that the horse was in no respect to blame, he checked him again almost fiercely with the heavy curb, and spurred him till the blood spirted from his sides, under the galling rowels. Stung by the treatment, the noble beast yerked out his heels, and fell into a quick succession of balotades, croupades, and caprioles, and furious plunges, such as must have inevitably cast headlong to the earth a less accomplished cavalier, than he who backed him now.

Firm as a rock in his demipique sat Edward Hale, as though he had been a portion of the animal which he bestrode; but maddened, by the resistance offered to his first momentary action of injustice, he plied both lash and spur with almost savage impetuosity, yet with so rare a skill, that in five minutes' space, or even less, the brown horse stood stock still, panting, and humbled, and subdued.

He gazed around him for a moment, with a triumphant and defying glance; and without again looking in the direction of the object, whatsoever it was, that had before attracted his attention, he bade his mounted groom give up his horse to the game−keeper, and stay himself to wait on master Adam Eversly. The change was accomplished in aminute; and, without any farther words, he dashed into a gallop, and was speedily lost to view beyond the summit of the hills, which bounded the valley to the westward.

"Oh! father," cried a beautiful country girl, who was leaning on the arm of an old gray−headed farmer, "Oh, father, father— how beautifully young Sir Edward spoke, and what a kind speech that was, and then how well he sat on that vicious horse of his, and how quickly he did master him. He is the handsomest gentleman, I think, in all the country; and the best−hearted too, I'll warrant him."

"And yet, Rose," answered a young stalwart yeoman, who had been been standing close beside her, leaning on a long two−handed quarter staff, "and yet, Rose, it was all of his own fault, that the poor horse *was* vicious; and then see how he dealt with the dumb beast for his own failing. He is a handsome man, that's true, as ever an eye looked upon; but did you see the way his black brows met together; how the passion flashed out, almost like lightning, under them; and how he bit his lips till the blood came? Be sure, now, he has a fearful temper. Why he looked liker to a handsome devil, than to a Christian man! I would be loth to stand against him, in aught he had set his heart on."

"For shame—for shame to thee, Frank Hunter," cried the girl he had addressed as Rose—"For shame on thee, to speak so of the young winsome gentleman. I hate an envious spirit—and he so kind, too, and so gentle—didst not hear what he promised— how no poor man should ever want for any thing; and how no sick man should need doctoring, so long as his name was Edward Hale—and then to liken him to a devil! I'm sure, I think he looked like an angel; and spoke like an angel, too, just come down to us out of heaven!"

"Have a care, Rose," returned the other, gloomily, "have a care, lest he lure thee to somewhat, that will not lead thee up there; whether he came down out of heaven or no. I reckon it was all along o' looking at those brown curls and hazel eyes o' thine, that he came so near falling from his saddle."

"Why, here's a nice to do," answered the girl, very sharply, "and what an' he was looking at my curls, or my eyes either; what is that, master Hunter, to thee, I'd be pleased to know—or who gave thee the right to say who shall look at me; or who I shall look at either, for that matter? You are no kin of mine—much less a master."

"Oh, Rose! oh Rose! can it be come to this, between us—and we troth−plighted too!"

"Aye, has it," answered Rose, tossing her pretty head, "aye, has it come to this— and better now than later!—better trothplighted, and rue the plighting! than wed and rue the wedding!—better an envious sweetheart and a jealous; than a hard tyrannizing husband! Aye, has it come to this, and thou must mend thy manners, ere aught else come of it, I tell thee."

Her father tried to interpose; but the village beauty was quite too indignant, to be appeased so readily; and she left his arm instantly, turning her back without ceremony on her luckless swain, saying that she must go and join Susan Fairly, for all the girls were seeking her. So little does it need, to raise a quarrel between those who truly and sincerely love each other, especially in quick and ardent dispositions.

CHAPTER II.

It often happens that, in places far removed each from the other, events are occurring to different individuals, almost at the same moment, which are destined to produce the most serious results to other persons, who are equally ignorant of the present action, and unsuspicious of the future consequence. So intricately and inextricably blended are the threads of mortal life, and so wonderfully linked are those chains of cause and effect, in which even unborn generations are not unfrequently involved, by that vast and all comprehensive Providence which mortals, in their blindness, are wont to call chance.

Especially was this the case with Sir Edward Hale, at the present moment of my tale; though he would have laughed very heartily had any one told him that the whole happiness of his future life was brought into jeopardy, while he was thinking only of the pleasures of the hour, by the intrigues of men in London, some of whom he had never seen, and scarcely even heard of; yet such unquestionably was the case.

It was about seven o'clock on the same morning that a plain dark carriage, con taining a tall, thin, grave looking gentleman, with a peculiarly sardonic smile, drove rapidly from the door of the Secretary of State, at whose house an extraordinary cabinet council had been just held, through Charing Cross, where the magnificent statue of King Charles the First, by Hubert le Soeur, had resumed its position, and passed the stately front of Northumberland House, toward Spring Garden.

Here it paused, before the portico of a stately mansion; and the footman springing down from the board behind the chariot, notwithstanding the earliness of the hour, raised such a noisy summons as soon brought a servant to the door, when the name of the untimely visitor procured his admittance without delay, although the man appeared at first somewhat reluctant—saying that the Earl was not yet awake, and had left word that he should not be disturbed, as it was very late when he retired.

"I know it, my good friend," replied the visitor—"I know that it was very late; but it was later by two hours before I was abed, and I have been up, I assure you, since four o'clock this morning. But, leaving this aside, which is no matter, I will be your security that you will do no wrong in awakening my lord, seeing that I have news for him about which he is very anxious; and it is, moreover, on business of his majesty that I must see him."

This, of course, put an end, on the instant, to all discussion or remonstrance on the subject, the man showing him immediately into a handsome library, containing several thousand volumes, and decorated with many busts, and two or three fine antique statues.

Begging the visitor, with whom he appeared to be well acquainted, to take a seat while he apprised the earl of his arrival, he then withdrew, but returned in a few minutes, saying, "My lord, Sir Henry, will be down in a quarter of an hour, at the farthest, and begs that you will wait for him. He desired me to ask if you would take some chocolate, Sir Henry?"

"Yes, bring me some, Anderson, if it be ready; and, hark ye, tell my fellows to go home with the chariot; I will walk, when I go hence."

As soon as the man had left the room, the other arose from his chair and walked toward one of the tall book−cases, as if to seek a volume, wherewith to while away the time; but, after he had opened the glass doors, and suffered his eyes to run over a shelf or two, he either changed his mind or fell into a different train of thought, and forgot it; for he turned round abruptly, and walked across the room again, with his hands clasped behind his back.

"It must be done! it must," he muttered to himself; "we must have his vote, or the whole thing is at an end, and we may just as well give up the campaign at once! But this will do it; I think, I dare swear it will! and, if not—if not—we must give him more; though, hang me! if I know what there is that we *can* give him that he is fit for! The garter! aye, the garter—a rare successor he to the great champions of the order!" And he smiled, with the bitter, sneering, caustic expression that has been mentioned as peculiar to him.

At this moment the servant returned, bearing a silver salver, with a tall chocolate pot of the same metal, richly embossed, and a couple of superb French−china cups. Scarcely, however, had he frothed and poured out the rich beverage, which had but lately been introduced into England, and was still a rarity, before his master entered the library, in some small agitation, as it seemed, and perhaps even anxiety. He was a tall and powerfully made man,

of some fifty−seven or fifty−eight years, with features that would have been positively handsome had there been a solitary gleam of intelligence—a single trace expressing any thing of character in their symmetrical outlines and harmonious coloring. He was magnificently, though not completely, attired in the costume of the day; wearing a dressing gown of splendid brocade in place of the embroidered coat, and a cap of green velvet, with a gold band and tassel, in lieu of the huge periwig, which was then an essential part of a gentleman's full dress.

"Give you good day, Sir Henry," he said as he entered, with a bland smile upon his face, which did not, however, conceal a nervousness of manner that told something of eager and fretful expectation. "You come so early that, as you see, I make no ceremony with you; I have not even tarried to finish dressing, as I presumed you were in a hurry."

"I thank you much, my lord," returned the other, sipping his chocolate, "both for what you have done, and what you have left undone; for, indeed, I have something to say to you of moment." Then, seeing that he did not take the hint, as he expected he would do, and dismiss the valet, who stood with both his ears wide open, ready to drink in every word, he said carelessly, "Excellent chocolate, this, my lord, but I do not think it has ever paid any duty."

"No, no! not it, not it! Sir Henry," answered the ponderous earl, making precisely the reply for which his guest was looking. "I had it, in a present, from my good friend, the French ambassador."

"Ah! ah!" answered Sir Henry Davenant, as if thoughtfully, "and *apropos* of French, had you Anderson, here, with you when you were at Paris last?"

"No; he came to me after my return," said the obtuse earl, not yet perceiving that the drift of Sir Henry's question was to call his attention to the presence of the man. After a few minutes, however, during which he appeared to ruminate very sagely, he lifted up his head with what he intended for a very knowing smile, and told his valet that he need not wait.

"Very deep of you—very deep, that, Sir Henry. Almost too deep! for, drown me for a witch if I caught your meaning at the first!"

"But why, in Heaven's name, my dear lord, do you keep such a long−eared knave as that about you? Why, curiosity is written, as plainly as the name of a book on its title−page, in every feature of his face; the very owning such a fellow is enough, almost, to destroy one's reputation for diplomacy. It is true that the Earl of Asterly has less need to regard such things than we beginners; but, nevertheless, even with your finesse, I would hardly desire to risk it!"

"Ha! ha! you are flattering me—you are flattering me, I am afraid, Sir Henry; though you have not very much the character of saying pretty things, even to the ladies, bless their souls!" And, while he spoke, it was as evident as the sun in heaven, that he had swallowed the dose, palpable as it was, without wincing, or suspecting that it was, even as he said, a mixture of the grossest adulation with the most bare−faced ridicule. "But, come," he added, after another pause of hesitation, "unbuckle your budget, my good sir; what can you possibly have to say to me so early this morning?"

"Why, the fact is, my lord," answered Davenant, who filled at that time the very useful post, in reference to the then ministry, which is now known as that of whipperin to the House of Commons, "that, as I told you would be the case, when I had the honor of speaking with you last night, there has been a meeting of the cabinet at Mr. Secretary's house, this morning."

And the wily baronet paused at this piece of information, partly to give his heavy auditor time to take in its whole meaning, and partly because he wished to see exactly what was the amount of his dupe's anxiety on the subject.

"Indeed—indeed?" the earl replied, in the tone of one inquiring farther; "you are well informed always, Sir Henry; and what then? What was the result of their conference, my dear sir?—that is to say, if it may be spoken."

"Oh, yes, my lord, it may be spoken. If that were not the case, you would not have seen me here this morning; for my object in coming was purely to give you the inforformation; which I have leave to do from Mr. Secretary, and a message from him, likewise—that is to say, if the government may rely, as they presume they can, on the continued support of the Earl of Asterly. If not, why—I must keep my budget closed; which I should be the more sorry to do— because, if opened, it contains news that I think would give you pleasure."

"Oh! yes, Sir Henry," replied the peer, immediately. "His majesty's government may certainly count on my support in all matters consistent with the Protest—"

But before he could get out the whole word and commit himself to any measure, Davenant interrupted him.

"Oh! my dear lord, of course, the cabinet will not attempt to carry any measure out, which shall not have received, previously, your distinguished approbation. But your lordship is too good a politician, not to feel that no ministry would be justified in submitting a plan of its campaign, and perhaps offering honors, to any gentleman or nobleman, how sure soever they might feel of his support, without something more definite, in the shape of a pledge—"

"Ah!" said the earl, affecting to ponder on what he had heard, but in reality endeavoring to outwit the keen clear−sighted diplomatist, who could read every thought in his bosom, almost before it was formed. "Ah! that makes all the difference!—"

"That is to say," thought Davenant in his own heart, "the hope of office, or additional rank, makes all the difference. Showing your hand, rather too openly, my good lord!"

"That makes all the difference, Sir Henry," he resumed, "for as you say, the fact of the ministry being desirous of consulting me on their measures, or indeed of their asking for my support at all, is as I think a sufficient guarantee of their intentions. For it is evident that they could not imagine it possible that I should lend my countenance to measures—"

"Of which your lordship's well known capacity and foresight should not induce you cordially to approve. You take the same views of the matter which I do myself, my lord. The noble lords, now at the head of his majesty's government, doubtless would not expect any thing incompatible with Lord Asterly's known character, for political consistency and personal integrity. Nevertheless, it is their resolution in the present unsettled state of parties—and I think your lordship will admit it to be a necessary and a wise one—to associate no person, however great his merits, with themselves, unless it be upon an unconditional pledge."

"Well, sir, I cannot blame them, upon my word, Sir Henry, I cannot. For there is now−a−days so much political tergiversation, even in the highest quarters, that no one can be absolutely above suspicion!"— and, at the very moment he said this, despite all his dullness, he clearly understood what was expected of him; and, having fully made up his mind to desert his party for a consideration, was only now endeavoring to conceal his premeditated baseness from Sir Henry; which he had about as much chance of doing, as the ostrich, when it buries its head in the sand of the desert, has of keeping its body hidden from the lynx−eyed Arabian hunter.

"Then I am to understand, my lord, that you do not object to give such a pledge to the Secretary—a written pledge, my lord?"

"Why—no—no!" said lord Asterly, in a sort of half−doubtful tone, "Not absolutely— no! I should not absolutely object—but I should like to know something a little more definite about the nature of the measures!"

"Well, then, my lord," returned Sir Henry Davenant," since your lordship is so scrupulous, for which I confess I honor you so much the more, I will venture to give you a few hints. In the first place, the captured French colonies will not be given up under any circumstances!" This piece of information, by the way, was the more valuable, because it was the first *any one* had ever received concerning the question of their cession; which had never once been mooted. But notwithstanding this, the earl expressed his grave satisfaction at the firmness of the noble lords.

"In the next place, his grace of B— will have the vice−royalty of Ireland. The earl of F— goes as ambassador to France, and your humble servant, I believe, to the Hague— but that is not quite certain yet!"—the other two appointments having been known to all the *quid nuncs* of the town for a week past, the earl learned little by this last sentence, and that little, utterly of no account; but he replied—

"Excellent—excellent—Sir Henry, no better men for the offices, than they. I will say that it does honor to Mr. Secretary's discernment. For I presume he had a word to say in the appointments."

"Surely, my lord—surely. His word, I may say, is almost omnipotent with their lordships; and that, I fancy, is one reason why he is so desirous of attaching you, my lord, with some others of his friends, to the party; while he is himself in power."

The Earl of Asterly noted and treasured up the words, but pretending not to have given them much attention, he added—

"But have you nothing more to tell me?"

"Faith! very little more, my lord—there will be several new additions to the peerage— two or three ancient titles to be raised to a higher grade; and then, there are, you know, the two vacant garters— But upon my life!" he

added, breaking off, suddenly, "this is scarce fair of your lordship; here, you have pumped me of almost all my secrets, and given me nothing satisfactory after all. But I trust your lordship will deal kindly with me—this would go far to ruin me with the great man, if it got wind."

"Why! ha! ha!" responded the earl, laughing very knowingly, "I think I have been a little hard on you, Sir Henry, a little too hard—I believe! But, ha! ha! ha! you young fellows ought not to fancy that you can hood−wink us old boys!—well—well— well!—but, as you say, I must make it up with you. See here, I will write a word or two—pray you, excuse me."

Could the dull nobleman have marked the cold, calm, cutting smile, ineffably contemptuous and full of loathing, with which the politician surveyed him, while he penned his memorandum, well cased as he was in complete panoply of self−conceit and gross, complacent stolidity, he must have been cut to the quick; but he did not raise his head till he had finished writing, and when he did so, Davenant's eyes were fixed on the ground in quiet and apparently conscious humility.

The earl pushed the sheet of paper, on which he had written a few lines with his signature appended to them, across the table to Sir Henry, saying—

"There, my good friend; see if that will meet Mr. Secretary's views!"

It was a full and formal promise to support, with all his personal and political influence, the present cabinet in all its measures, whatsoever.

"I presume," he added, "that of course it will not be shown."

"Of course not, my lord," Sir Henry answered, as he took it; and then, after casting his eyes slightly over the document, "Perfectly—perfectly satisfactory," he added,— "nothing can be more honorable, open, or above board. And now, my lord, allow me to congratulate you—"

"To congratulate *me*, Sir Henry! upon what?" said Lord Asterly, with a pleasant and conscious smile, which he endeavored vainly to dissemble.

"There is a dormant marquisate in your lordship's family, I believe. Beverly, is it not? which your lordship claimed from the last ministry."

"And was refused!" replied the earl, haughtily, "owing to the opposition, I think, of my Lord Calverly, who lays claim to it likewise, though he has no more plea of right, than he has to the dukedom of Northumberland! I never cared much about it myself, Sir Henry. But it was an old hobby of my father's; and in respect to his memory, it was, that I revived the claim."

"And gross injustice was done to you in the refusal. Well, my lord, in consideration of this, his majesty has been pleased of his own accord, quite unsolicited, to create you Marquis of Beverly, and I am happy to be the first person to salute you by the ancient title of your family."

"Indeed! Sir Henry—indeed!" exclaimed the new marquis, exceedingly gratified, "this is indeed very flattering. His majesty is very gracious—the rather, as you say, that it is quite unsolicited; and that no one can say that it is a reward of any party services!"

Old hand as he was at intrigue, and an adept at concealing every emotion, Davenant hardly could refrain from laughing aloud at the impudent self−complacency of this speech, when he thought of the precious document, which he had just pocketed; but he did refrain—and answered, quietly, and as a matter of course—

"Yes! marquis, it must be very gratifying. But now let us speak of business. The Irish Bill comes on, you know, next Tuesday se'nnight; and by it the ministry have determined that they will stand, or fall."

"The Irish Bill! indeed! the Irish Bill!" said the marquis, as he must now be called. "I did not look for that! you should have told me of that, Sir Henry."

"Why, marquis," answered Davenant, as if surprised, "I took it for granted that you must see that. It followed as a natural consequence, from his Grace's nomination to the vice−royalty."

"And so it did— and so it did—upon my word!" replied the other, quite as much relieved by the futile explanation, as if it were a satisfactory excuse for his adopting the measures to−day, which yesterday he had repudiated—"I never thought of that before."

"I felt quite certain that you would view it in that light, when you came to reflect," answered Davenant.

"Certainly—certainly—I could not do otherwise," said the marquis, "but what was it you said about the garter? who did you say were to succeed to the two vacant stalls?"

"I did *not* say, marquis; for I don't know; and I don't know, simply because it has not yet been determined by

their lordships."

"Not yet determined! Is not that very strange? a matter, too, of so great and paramount importance."

"Doubtless there are strong reasons for delay, marquis. In the first place, notwithstanding the accession of strength to the government from the complete over−throw of the Duke of Monmouth's people at Sedgemoor, and the final close of all that infamous affair, you are aware that there is still a very strong opposition— and on this Irish question—by the way, how many votes do you carry with you, marquis?"

"Five in the lower House, and in the Peers my son−in−law Helvelyn's, in addition to my own."

"Oh! in the Peers we are safe enough; but, to be frank with you, marquis, there is a good deal to fear in the Commons—at the best, we can only count a tie, reckoning all your votes—and, I fancy, though I do not know it for certain, that any one who could bring over one or two votes so as to make sure of a majority, might reckon pretty certainly on the garter."

"Aye! aye!" responded the marquis, falling into a deep fit of cogitation, from which he presently aroused himself to inquire who were the members that remained at all doubtful.

"Why, by my honor!" answered Davenant, "there are but three whom we dare even to count doubtful—and they are at the present dead against us—the only reason why I call them doubtful is that they are against us from whim only, or what they call principle; and not from any pledge, or any great interest, that they have in the matter."

"And who are they?"

"First of all, Captain Trevor—"

"Why don't you give him a regiment?"

"It would not do—he is not at all that sort of man—besides, it is hardly worth the while to try him; he has a grudge of some kind, I believe, against Berkley; and we may set him down against us, without more ado. The next is Frampton of Frampton, and as there is not a newly imported Arab stallion, or an invincible gamecock of extraordinary lineage, to be got for love or money in the kingdom, we have no means of bribing him. As for offering him rank, that is useless to a man who thinks that to be Frampton of Frampton is a far finer thing than to be premier peer of England, if we could make him that, which we can't. Money—worse yet, to a fellow who complains that he cannot for his life get through a third of his rent roll; though I believe he feeds half the East Riding with beef and beer, the year round. Ashley did speak of sending to the Dey of Algiers for a barb, but there is not time enough. So he is a lost vote, too! The third and last is Lord Henry St. Maur."

"Ah! St. Maur—St. Maur! is he inclined against you?"

"Not inclined merely. He has declared himself opposed to all our measures; and he is too young, too full of generous and high fantasies, to be approachable."

"And yet I think I could approach him on the subject," said the marquis.

"You—my lord—you? impossible!" cried Davenant, the whole aim and object of whose mission was simply to procure the influence of his man on young St. Maur. "Impossible! we were not aware even that you knew him."

"I do, but very slightly," answered Beverly; "and yet I think he can be won. Nay! I almost think I can promise you his vote. Do you know where he is, Sir Henry?"

"By accident, I do—for I called at his father's yesterday. He is on a visit to some young country bumpkin of a baronet or other, at Arrington, in Hampshire—the post town is Stow−cum−Barnsley."

"Indeed, at Sir Edward Hale's—is he?"

"Hale—Hale! By George! I believe Hale was the name. Upon my word, marquis, you seem to know all the world."

"My place is near Oxford, you know, Sir Henry, and this young fellow was at Christ Church, with my son, who brought him to Asterly last year in the long vacation. But he is not at all a bumpkin."

"I dare say not, indeed—for I know nothing about it—only Fred Jermyn, of the Life Guards, was laughing at him for a quiz the other night, at the Nag's Head," replied Davenant, who never said a word without its object, and who had now his own peculiar reason for doing the young baronet an ill office with the marquis.

"I will write to St. Maur to−day," said the marquis, after a moment's thought, "I am nearly sure that I can secure you his vote."

"I do not think it is possible," said Davenant, knowing all the time that it was pretty certain, if the old peer only chose to exert himself on the right track. "It would require immense influence—immense influence!"

"I flatter myself I have a good deal of influence over him," answered the marquis, knowingly.

"I thought you said, but now, that you only knew him slightly?"

"I do only know him slightly."

"Then how, in the devil's name," Sir Henry began, with well feigned astonishment, when the peer interrupted him—

"Ask me no questions—it is a secret— but I tell you, that Mr. Secretary may make himself tolerably easy on the matter. I will write to him this very day, and I shall have an answer by to−morrow night, for I will send one of my fellows post."

"You *are* an extraordinary man, marquis; but, if you accomplish this, I shall set you down as a second Mazarin. Well! well! you are a fortunate man, too; for I see that you will be the wearer of this garter, which his grace of Lauderdale, they say, is looking after."

"Fie! fie! Sir Henry—fie! Do you suppose that a thought of that kind ever occurred to me? Oh no—fie! fie! but, on my word, I believe I can do it."

"I trust that you may not be disappointed. But, in the mean time, I will take my leave; for I can hear the marchioness', and pretty lady Fanny's voices in the breakfast parlor. Besides which, I must make haste with this good news to master Secretary."

Then, with the courtly ceremonial of the day, he took his leave; but as he crossed the threshold, he muttered to himself—

"Cursed old hypocrite and knave! and idiot, worse than either, for daring to imagine that he could hoodwink me. Well! never mind. St. Maur will get Lady Fan's pretty hand, and we shall get his vote; and Beverly his garter; and, what is worth all the rest, I shall go to the Hague! the Hague—and then—and then!" and he walked rapidly away, in the direction of Whitehall, with his whole brain boiling with ambition, and his whole heart elated and self−confident.

As soon as he had left the room, the new−created marquis rang his bell, and when his valet entered—

"Anderson," he said, "let Parkins take the green chariot, that has the coronet only and the cipher on the panels, in embossed work, down to the coachmaker's, and have them altered instantly for a marquis' coronet and the letter B—the silver−mounted harness must be all changed likewise, in the same manner. Do you understand?"

"Yes, my lord."

"And let him tell Mr. Ryckman that all must be ready by two hours after noon— that it *must* be ready. I shall require it to go to St. Stephens. My Lady's chairs must be remounted also, and the coach newly painted—and do you see that the liveries are correct—"

"Correct, my lord?"

"Yes! correct, you blockhead—correct! The Marquis of Beverly's—do you understand, you stupid fellow?"

"Yes, my lord marquis," replied the man, with an obeisance almost oriental in its depth and duration—"your orders shall be performed instantly, my lord marquis."

"Now, then, follow me to the dressing room, I want my coat, and periwig, and sword. Has the marchioness come down stairs yet?"

"Yes, my lord marquis."

And strutting away like a peacock, with his head half a foot higher than when he had come down stairs, as yet an honest man, he conceived that he had made a capital bargain in swopping away his own conscience,and the happiness of two or three human beings, one of them his own daughter, for an empty title, and a yard of satin ribbon!

CHAPTER III.

In the room adjoining the library where the Earl of Asterly—now Earl, or Asterly, no longer—and his ministerial guest had been carrying on their political machinations, two ladies were seated at a breakfast table, which, for the benefit of the pleasant air of the sweet May morning, had been drawn up to a large open window of the French fashion, giving access to a balcony full of the rarest exotics cultivated at that day.

The room was sumptuously furnished in the gorgeous style of the period, with cabinets of buhl and marquetry, tables inlaid with the most precious Indian woods, armed chairs and sofas cushioned with Genoa velvet, curtains of flowered brocade, Persian or Turkey carpets, several fine pictures by Sir Peter Lely and Vandyke, and two or three well executed marble statues, copies from the antique, the taste for which articles of virtu had just begun to be considered fashionable in England, when it was checked for awhile by the rude and ignorant barbarism of the Puritan iconoclasts, not to revive again until the kingdom returned to the rule of its legitimate hereditary monarchs.

The ladies were very different both in age and appearance—more different, indeed, in appearance, than the difference in age would seem to justify in relations so near as a mother and her daughter. The elder lady was a small, slight, meagre person, considerably below the middle size; and, though she had been praised and ad mired in the zenith of her womanhood for the sylph−like and graceful symmetry of her proportions, her figure was now angular and emaciated, and almost disagreeable to look upon. Her face and features, too, had in her younger days been called handsome, and to this hour her high and intellectual forehead had preserved its fine contour, and its expression of solidity and thoughtfulness. Little, however, else was there left, that could be called pleasing in her aspect—large, keen, black eyes, piereing and cold as ice, placed very near together, gave an air of craft and shrewd half−malignant cunning to features which would otherwise have been bold and commanding; her nose was almost Roman, thin, high and nearly fleshless; her mouth compressed, and characteristic of both energy and resolution. It was impossible to look at her even for a moment without perceiving that she must be a person of exceedingly superior mental faculties, of capabilities more stern and sustained, and of an intellect more massive and imposing than are natural to her sex; and at the same time it was almost equally impossible not to believe that she must be as deficiently endowed with the qualities of the heart, as she was pre−eminently furnished with those of the head.

There was, indeed, something more than mere craft, and coldness, and inflexibility of purpose written upon her keen polished lineaments; for never stranger looked upon her without a vague feeling of dislike and apprehension; a sort of intuitive sense, that here was one of those few beings to whom the sufferings of their fellows are not only wholly unimportant, when ministering to their own advancement, but are actually subjects of curiosity and interest, and of a kind of pleasurable excitement.

The other was an extremely beautiful girl of about eighteen or nineteen years, in every respect the very opposite of the lady I have described; for she was rather tall, and though her waist was symmetrical and round, her figure and bust were unusually developed and voluptuous. She was a blonde, too, as decidedly as her mother was a brunette, with a profusion of luxuriant light brown hair, scarcely restrained about her temples by a broad blue ribbon bandeau, and falling down her neck and over her shoulders in heavy silken masses of waved ringlets. Her eyes were of the very darkest blue, almost violet colored, with eyebrows slightly curved, and long lashes, dark as night, giving an air of character and decision to her face, which is usually wanting in very fair beauties.

The expression, too, was very fine and prepossessing; there was mind enough visible in every lineament to counteract every thing voluptuous or sensual; while there was not too much to be perfectly compatible with that softness, that predominance of the affectionate and tender feelings, that superiority of the imaginative to the reasoning faculties, which we desire to see in a woman. She looked, in short, such as Wordsworth has so beautifully painted the ideal of her sex— "On a nearer view, A spirit, yet a woman too, With thoughts sublime and fancies free, And steps of virgin liberty; A creature not too bright or good For human nature's daily food, For gentle censures, pleasing wiles, Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears and smiles."

The breakfast table at which they were still seated, although they had finished their slender meal, was very differently arranged from the modest breakfasts of these degenerate days; for although there were chocolate and

coffee, and dry toast, and bread in many forms, there were flasks of red and white wine also, and highly seasoned ragouts, and roast wildfowl, and fruits, and pastry in abundance. And not these only—for on a second table were displayed a huge sirloin of beef, a boar's head from the black forest, and an enormous venison pasty, flanked by their regular companion, a vast silver tankard mantling with toast and ale. None of these, however, had they partaken of, limiting themselves to the fresh fruit, and dry toast, and frothing chocolate; and they were now loitering at the board, waiting for the appearance of the master of the house, who had been thus unwontedly detained.

At last the sound of the front door, clapping heavily after the visiter, showed them that the detention was at an end, and at the next moment Sir Henry Davenant walked past the window, and seeing the ladies, raised his hat and bowed very low.

The blood rushed to the fair face of the younger lady, and she said at once, with the ingenuous frankness which was one of her most remarkable characteristics—

"Oh! I declare it is that odious man, Sir Henry Davenant. I am sorry that he has been here, for he always leaves my father restless and ill at ease. I suppose it is very wrong of me," she added, laughing, "but I do really almost hate the man."

"Aye! indeed it is very wrong—and, what is worse, very ridiculous, and even childish. He is the ablest and most rising young man of his party, and exceedingly clever, well−read, and witty. There is not a man more courted by society, or one more sure to achieve greatness," replied her mother. "But I have long given up all hopes of ever seeing you rational or like the rest of the world, with your perpetual whims and prejudices."

"I know all that you say, madam," answered the girl; "and it is all quite true, he is very clever, and witty, and wise too, I dare say, and sometimes he entertains me in spite of myself, and I almost begin to like him. And then most likely he commences some odious tirade against the existence of honesty or honor among men, and of faith or affection among women, and looks at me with that strange fascinating eye as if he were reading every thought in my bosom, and that dark sneering smile which makes every word he utters, how seriously and solemnly soever, seem like a sarcasm or a mockery. It is as if he were always ridiculing one!"

"Most likely he is," replied her mother; "most likely he is always ridiculing you; for indeed, my dear Fanny, you are most thoroughly ridiculous, with your romantic and Utopian fancies. I do wish I could see you growing a little rational—a little practical— but I grow sick of wishing."

"Well, mother mine," replied the girl laughing, "I am very sorry for it; but I cannot help it, I do assure you. I cannot like the society, or listen patiently to the conversation of men whose every action, every word, proves so clearly that they are altogether heartless and hollow."

"Heartless!"—cried the elder lady with a harsh and bitter sneer—"heartless! what, prithee, dost thou know about hearts, minion? But here comes my lord—take care that you anger him not with your nonsense, Fanny."

But of this there was little danger, for to do him justice he was at all times a good natured man, and especially a kind father; and now he wore his face dressed in its brightest garb of smiles, and was evidently in one of his most complacent moods.

"We waited breakfast for you awhile, my lord," said the unconscious marchioness, "but your good friend Sir Henry detained you so long that we were forced to begin for very hunger. But Fanny will ring for hot chocolate in a moment."

"Sir Henry brought you good news, I am sure, dear father," cried Lady Fanny, speaking in the same breath with her mother, and springing forward to meet her favorite parent—for if he were pompous and a dullard, he was affectionate nevertheless, and kind hearted, and proud of his children. "What is it? what is it? dear father."

"Nothing that makes much difference to thee, Fan," he replied with a tender smile, as the beautiful girl threw her arms about his neck—"though it will to thy brother!"— and for a moment his heart smote him for the thought he had begun to entertain against her future peace of mind. Then turning toward his wife he added—

"Yes. Davenant did bring me pleasant tidings. His majesty has been pleased in the most gracious manner, quite unsolicited moreover, to revive in my person the dormant Marquisate of Beverly. There will be a levee, and a drawing room on Wednesday of next week, at which you will of course be present to kiss hands."

"A marquis—a marquis!—are you indeed, father? I am so glad—so glad! because I know you wish it"—exclaimed the lively beauty, clasping her hands together— "and then dear Arthur will be an earl; will he not? and have a seat in the Peers, during your lifetime; and he is sure to distinguish himself, he is so clever."

"I don't know about that, Fan," replied the marquis; "the title he will have of course, by courtesy at least—but whether he will be called to the Peerage is more doubtful."

And as he spoke, he sat down and helped himself largely to a *salmi* of teal, which had been kept smoking hot over a silver chafing dish, and to a large goblet of Bordeaux wine. But gratified, although his wife was by the announcement, whose spirit was no less ambitious and far−reaching than it was shrewd and piercing, she looked at him steadily, as he applied himself to the good things which he so sincerely loved, and became certain as she gazed, that there was something yet behind. She turned toward her daughter then, and said in the most natural and unconstrained voice in the world.

"Frances, my dear, I thought you had promised to visit your cousin, Lady Serena Fortescue, this morning! You can have my chair if you wish it, and Meredith can follow you with two of the running footmen; I cannot endure, child, that you should suffer these unpunctual habits to grow upon you."

"I will go, then, immediately," said the fair girl tripping lightly across the room; but as she reached the door which opened on the grand staircase, she nodded her head, and smiled, saying to herself—"A gentle hint once again, that I am *de trop!* and rather a transparent hint too, for my lady, who generally laps such things up pretty thoroughly. Just as if she cared a rush whether I go to Serena's at twelve of the clock, or earlier. But I will go to her— I will go—for she is a good girl, and I love her dearly. Heigho! I wonder why I feel so sad this lovely morning, A sudden chill seemed to run through my very heart when I saw that cold−blooded serpent Davenant sneer as he passed the window. I hope it was not ominous—but no! no! I am not superstitious!"

The moment she left the breakfast room, the marchioness looked full into her husband's face, and said, "Well! my lord— well! what else—what more have you got to tell me? and what is the price of this?"

"Why, is not this enough? is not this more, Adeliza, than we could hope for, or expect, under a ministry who have not hitherto seemed very friendly?"

"That is not what I asked you," answered the lady very sharply, "I asked you what more you expected, and what price you had paid for this?"

"Price! price! my lady!" replied the new marquis, in his most dignified and stately manner, "how can you think of any thing so disgraceful, or speak of it in so coarse a manner, my dear lady?"

"Yes, price, my lord marquis, I said *price!* Every thing has its name; and the name of the pledge, or promise, or vote, or concession, or whatever else you gave the ministry for this title, is its *price!* Now, then, I saw just now in your eye that you wished to consult me about something or other. I dare say it is not of the slightest consequence! and if that is the case, or if you have changed your mind, I will go my way, and get my tatting—but if you mean to speak, speak plainly—for you are not exactly a sphinx, to propound riddles; nor do I desire to be the Oedipus to unravel yours, which I think would be rather unperspicuous than otherwise."

The cruel sarcasm of her tone and manner, even had her words been less bitter, would have been enough to hinder any but the weakest of men, and most domineered of husbands from replying; but it had no such effect on the marquis, long used to hear and obey the imperious mandates of his wife, whose superior intellect he could not but acknowledge. He answered, therefore, and at last to the point.

"Of course I gave the ministers a written pledge of my adherence to their party, and support of their measures; but no one can presume, except you, my dear Adeliza, who may do any thing with impunity, to speak of my title as the price of this, since it was granted before my adhesion."

"And did *you* know that it was granted, Beverly?"

"Why, not exactly, not entirely—Davenant did not—that is to say, my lady—"

"That is to say, my lord, `not one word about it!'—of course you did not; for if you had, you would not have promised entire adherence to a party, some of whose measures you almost stand pledged to oppose. But now comes my second question— what more do you expect to gain from them, as the price of your abandoning the Protestant interests?"

"The vacant stall—the garter! marchioness!" he answered, even more pompously than his wont, though he had writhed visibly as she gave his conduct its true appellation.

"The garter, indeed! the garter!" she said, a flush of exultation beaming across her pallid and sallow face. "That is indeed worth playing for—that is indeed worth an *apostacy!* But how is this? I thought Lauderdale was to have had it?"

"He does aspire to it, my lady. But it will be mine notwithstanding; or I am much mistaken."

"You generally are very much mistaken," said she quietly, and then resumed. "But what is to be the price of this—what new iniquity?"

"Upon my soul, my lady!" answered the marquis, writhing under the consciousness that all the harsh words she used were richly merited, and at the same time losing temper at her taunts—"you are a most extraordinary personage; one would think you were vexed or angry at the very things which you constantly urge and encourage me to do. I should like monstrously to know whose wish it was that I should sue for the marquisate!—it is too provoking! quite too provoking!"

The lady arched up her eyebrows as he spoke, and smiled, as was her wont, and then answered very meekly,

"Oh! never mind, my dear lord, what sort of a personage I am. I should think you must know that, pretty well, by this time; and pray do not fancy that I am vexed, for on the contrary I am prodigiously delighted. Still I like calling every thing by its right name, and you know quite as well as I do—for, though by no means clever, you do not lack a certain sort of plodding common sense, which is capable of discerning right from wrong! You know, I say, quite as well as I do, that it is iniquitous for a politician to desert his party, and vote against his conscience, which you are going to do, you know, on the Irish Bill; that is to say, so far as you have got a conscience! Oh yes! it is certainly very iniquitous! though, at the same time, it may be, and *is* very expedient; and much more creditable to you as a convenient husband, and provident father, than as a public man or a patriot; which, after all, you never were, nor will be! But come, you have not told me what you are to do for the garter."

"Well then, if you will have it in plain English—"

"To be sure—to be sure—that is the only way—"

"If you will have it, I am to bring Lord Henry St. Maur over to our side; and persuade him to vote the Irish Bill, which will carry it for the ministers by a majority of two. It is a tie now—St. Maur voting in the opposition."

"Excellent! excellent!—" exclaimed the lady, clapping her hands joyfully together, and now appearing to be really delighted— "which you can do very easily, by breaking off Fan's match with Sir Edward Hale, and promising her hand to the other—that will buy him!—of course that will buy him!—and though Fanny can't endure him, and loves Hale with all her heart, that can't be helped, you know! Girls can't expect that their whims should be gratified, when the advancement of their families stands directly in the way."

It is perfectly true that the Marquis of Beverly had resolved in his own heart to do exactly as his wife stated—that he knew the complete and unquestionable truth of every word she uttered, touching his daughter's hatred to St. Maur, and love for Sir Edward Hale—in both of which feelings he had hitherto given her his full sanction; for, where his base and grovelling ambition stood not in the way of his paternal feelings, he was a kind and indulgent father. It is true, likewise, that he knew St. Maur to be worthy of the hatred, and Hale to merit all the love—and, having well considered all these things, he meant to sacrifice poor Fanny's happiness, without a moment's hesitation. Still, as his wife suggested it in her barefaced sarcastic manner, he positively shuddered—stung to the quick by the malicious ingenuity with which she probed his very soul, and held up his every vice and meanness clearly and visibly before his eyes. And yet she was no paradox, that artful bitter woman. She had deliberately, when a young, beautiful, clever and much admired girl, married the gross and dullard earl, at the promptings of her ambition. Almost hating herself, when she found that the world had penetrated and branded her motives with their right name; and hating him to a degree that can hardly be imagined—a degree increasing day by day with the mortifications which his pompous stupidity day by day heaped upon her, she avenged herself to the utmost of her powers—perpetually driving him on to the commission of fresh meannesses, so as to gratify that ambition, which she now only lived for; and constantly tormenting him by exhibiting those meannesses to himself in the most odious light. Having herself smothered down and stifled in her bosom a sincere and honorable passion for a young man who, though poor and of small pretension when she abandoned him for his dull titled rival, had since risen, by dint of worth and talents only, to high rank and power, she could not even think of prosperous and happy love without disgust and fury. Disliking her own daughter, because she felt her to be equal to herself in intellectual parts, and superior in all other qualities—jealous of her, because she perceived how popular she was in all society—fearful of her, because she felt that her own baser essence must naturally be revealed by the test of her purer spirit, as Satan's at the touch of Ithuriel's lance—this bad and unnatural wife and mother almost rejoiced that, while advancing her own narrow and morbid ambition, she was torturing the guilty conscience of her lord, and breaking the heart of her too virtuous and charming daughter.

The marquis, I say, positively shuddered, as she revealed to him his own future intentions and their consequence; and he was silent a minute or two, before he answered—

"Poor Fan! I am afraid it will grieve her a little while at first; but young ladies' love−smarts are not generally very lasting. And St. Maur is young and handsome, and has far greater wealth than Hale, and title also—I daresay she will be very happy."

"I daresay," answered his wife, with another sneer. "Fanny's mind is just of the sort most likely to be captivated by money, which she calls dross—and title, which you have often heard her style tinsel! Do not you think so? And then as St. Maur never keeps less than three or four mistresses, and is the most confirmed gambler in London, and drinks, they say, frightfully, and has a most infernal temper— he shot his favorite horse in the park the other day, with his servant's pistol, because it shied from a passing carriage! On all these accounts, I say, he is very likely, I think, to make her very happy. But as it must be done, there is no use in troubling ourselves about it. How do you purpose to proceed?"

"I thought of writing to St. Maur to inform him that we have thought better of the addresses he paid to Lady Frances Asterly, and that were it not for his unfortunate opposition to my party, especially on the Irish Bill, we should rejoice to receive him as our son−in−law!"

"Upon my word, Marquis, you improve— you grow quite diplomatic. Yes, that will do very well, for as Henry is not scrupulous, and *is* very much in love with Fan's pretty figure, and has not an iota of principle, he will doubtless chop about like a weathercock, in less time than it takes us to talk about it. But how will you get on with Fanny?"

"I shall merely tell her that I have changed my mind, and that she must marry St. Maur."

"Then she will merely tell you that she will do nothing of the kind, and she will keep her word, too, as she always does. That will never do, my lord—never— never!"

"How then? I do not see how else it can be managed."

"She must be made to think Edward Hale faithless to her—told of some evil and dishonorable deeds of his, artfully simulated, and if not true, at least truth−like. Hold—where is St. Maur now?"

"Staying with Hale at Arrington— Davenant told me so just now."

"Yes! yes! I recollect he told me himself he was going down thither to celebrate a birth−day, or some such Tom−foolery; and Percy Harbottle is to be there too, and that notorious *pendable* Captain Spencer. Let me see—let me see—I will write myself to St. Maur and to Spencer also to−day. They can surely either invent something that will do the business with Fan; or, what would be much better still, lead Edward in reality to commit some disgraceful action—to cheat at cards—or rather, for he is incapable of that, to get drunk and play, so that they could lay the imputation on him—or to carry off some country wench or other. Lord! it will be as easy, as they say, as lying, marquis! But I forgot—I beg your pardon—I forgot that you do not like to hear the names of the things you do every day. There, there—do not stay to answer me now; but go away and write your letter to St. Maur; and write it as short as you can, do you hear, and as much to the point—and none of your honorable and virtuous rhodomontades, I beseech of you—which are always ridiculous, and impose on nobody, you know; because nobody in the world believes in such things as honor or virtue; and which would be doubly out of place here, because St. Maur, I am sure, would not know the meaning of the words. There, now; why don't you go away, and do it?"

"Because I want to know what I shall do with the letter, after I have written it, my lady," answered her lord, quite crestfallen, and stripped of all his peacock plumes of self−complacency and pompousness.

"Bring it to me; that I may read it, first of all, and see how many absurdities you can contrive to squeeze into six lines, and then enclose it in a long letter of my own to this young hopeful. You must send a man off with it post to−day; he can reach Arrington to−night, and return to−morrow morning. Benedict, the newly hired man, will do, and he must wear plain clothes, and take care that he drop no hint whose man he is, or whence he comes; but I will tutor him."

"And then—" began the marquis, in an inquiring tone.

"And then," she answered, with a sneering accent, "you can go and order the coronets on the carriages and harnesses to be altered, and choose new buttons at the button−maker's, and new liveries at the tailor's— business just suited to your calibre."

"I have sent Anderson to do all that two hours ago at least. Do you suppose it possible—"

"I crave your pardon," replied the lady, with an air of affected blandness, "I ought not to have supposed it possible, marquis— possible, that business of real instancy or moment could banish from your mind those nice frivolities and frivolous niceties which are so thoroughly congenial to natures as comprehensive and politic as your own. And then, since you have done all this, I would go, were I you, to Master Child's, and order a new service of gilt plate, with the proper supporters and coronets, marquis. That will be an amusement for you; and the old plate is getting rather out of date. I believe it was as old as the creation in your grandfather's time, who was, I think, a Lincolnshire grazier! But go—do go, and write the letter!"

CHAPTER IV.

When Sir Edward Hale left the meadow of the May−pole in the manner I have described, he galloped forward at three−quarter's speed of his fine brown hunter, Eversly having some difficulty in keeping up with him, until he reached the foot of the western slope of the valley, where he slackened his pace, and rode on, for a while, in a deep reverie. And was it indeed Rose, on whom, as Hunter insinuated, the young baronet cast that quick glance, which had so nearly cost him a heavy fall from his horse? Reader, it was—for like most youths of hot impetuous dispositions, he was a passionate admirer of female beauty; and Rose's loveliness was, in truth, of so high an order, that it might well have attracted the eyes even of a colder and less inflammable nature.

She was, indeed, in face and figure, a paragon, more fitted for the sphere of courts, than for the simple and somewhat hard realities of a plain country life. Her beauty was not the mere animal beauty, consisting chiefly of fresh coloring and vigorous health, which marks so frequently the country maiden—it was of a far higher and more delicate order.

Had she been robed in unison, she might have moved, her birth and rank unquestioned, among the most magnificent array of England's aristocracy—for she was very tall, and though her swelling bust and ample shoulders, and all her lower limbs were exquisitely modelled and developed to the most voluptuous symmetry, her waist was small and tapering, and the whole contour of her person slender and graceful. Her arms were like rounded ivory—her hands, small, delicate and fair, as if they had been little used to any hard or menial labor—her ankles trim and shapely, and her feet singularly little for so full and tall a figure.

Her face, however, was yet more striking than her person—it was that of a clear brunette, with but the palest flush of the most delicate rose tinging the lustrous darkness of her cheek—her features approached nearly to the classic model, but there was a trifling upward inclination in the outlines of the well shaped thin nose, which added a charm of archness, that regularity too often will be found to lack— her pouting lips were, if such a thing can be, almost too deeply crimson; for to nothing that exists, of warm and soft and sentient, could the hue of that balmy mouth be possibly compared.

It was the eyes, however, the large, deep lustrous eyes, of the darkest hazel, that caught most suddenly the observation of all who looked upon her, if it were but for a passing moment—there was an indescribable fascination in those eyes, an inexplicable mixture of wild out−flashing light, and soft voluptuous languor, half amorous, half melancholy, such as is rarely indeed seen at all, and never but in orbs of that clear translucent brown, that is so far more beautiful than the dull bead−like black, or the more shallow glitter of the blue. Her hair, of a dark sunny brown, shining with many an auburn gloss, where the light fell strong upon its heavy masses, was luxuriantly abundant; falling off on each side of her high polished forehead in a maze of thick clustering ringlets, and flowing down her neck, and over her sloping shoulders, in large and natural curls.

The dress of this fair girl was simple as it could be; yet, perhaps, no magnificence of garb would have so well displayed her wondrous charms as that undecorated garment. A low−necked frock of plain white muslin, sitting quite close to her bust and slender waist, with tight sleeves reaching to the elbow, and terminating there in ample plaited ruffles, and a long flowing skirt— a little cottage bonnet of home−made straw, with a pink ribbon to match her silken neckerchief and sash, a cluster of violets in the bosom of her frock, and a nosegay in her hand, the gift—much prized that morning—of the now half−rejected lover.

Such was the choicest finery of the village belle, and, as I have already said, it would have been hard indeed to deck her comely person in any thing that could have displayed her beauties with more advantage. Those were the days, in courts, of whalebone stomachers and hoops five fathoms in circumference; of stiff brocaded stuffs, and powdered head−dresses; of art, and most ungraceful art, against any touch of nature. Grace and simplicity were discarded, and every native movement, so beautiful in its natural ease, was hampered and confined by every species of ligature and bandage that the most depraved and artificial taste could by any means imagine or suggest.

What wonder, then, that Edward Hale, a passionate admirer, as he was, of female beauty, accustomed so much to the stiff airs and affected minauderies of starched ladies, should have been momentarily struck by the natural and simple loveliness of that fair villager, whose every turn and motion was full of poetry, and instinct with easy life. What wonder, then, that when he crossed the hill, and lost sight of the gay concourse, he should have called

the keeper up to his side, and asked him quite abruptly—

"Tell me, Mark Eversly, tell me," he said, not without a slight shade of embarrassment appearing in his manner, "who was that fine old silver−headed farmer who stood close to me on the left−hand side, when my horse reared so suddenly? There was a tall young fellow at his elbow, with a quarter staff—Frank Hunter, I believe, if I have not forgotten more than I think I have. I used to ferret rabbits with him, if it be the same, many a year ago, in the Monk's coppice. But who was the old farmer, Mark? I can't remember him."

"Oh, that was Master Castleton, I think, Sir Edward," answered the fellow, with a cunning grin, clearly perceiving the drift of his master's question, "there was a very pretty lass upon his arm, wasn't there, sir?"

The hot blood rushed to the brow—the ingenuous brow—of the young gentleman; and, vexed at the bare idea that his thoughts should be read, his secret penetrated by a menial, he answered hastily—

"Was there? I did not notice—I hardly think there was, though; for I suppose I should have observed her, if there had been— seeing that I am a great admirer of pretty faces."

"I'm sure, then, you'd admire Rose's," answered the wily keeper, "for it's the prettiest eye, and the handsomest face, too, in all the village; and then her shape is not behind her face, neither. But I'm a−thinking it couldn't have been Master Castleton, else, as you say, you must have noticed Rose. It might have been old Andrew Bell, or Simon Carter, or John Hall, they were all gathered thereabout, and they are all grey−headed men, too."

"No, no!" replied the landlord, "it was not any one of these; I recollect them all right well. It must have been old Castleton; what did you call him—Harry?"

"No. James, so please your honor; but I don't think it could have been he, anyhow, Sir Edward; least ways I don't see how you could have missed observing Rose. Why, bless you! she's the beauty of the village; there's not a girl like her for twenty miles around. I don't believe, Sir Edward, you ever saw a handsomer in London."

"Well, now I think on it, I believe there was a girl—a very tall girl—on his arm; dressed all in white, was she? but Oliver reared up, just then, and that prevented me from taking notice, I suppose. What is she? daughter to old Castleton?"

"Yes, sir; and troth−plighted, they say, to that Frank Hunter, d—n him? but I don't reckon much of that, for she's an arrant jilt—is pretty Rose. Why she kept company with me, Sir Edward, six months and better, and then flew off as if she was meat for a king, when I asked her to be my wife. I warrant me she'd fly from Frank, there, just as sudden, so be she could 'light on a higher or a richer sweetheart."

"Well, well!" said Hale, half angrily, perhaps, at feeling that his servant was tampering with thoughts that were even then, though faintly and uncertainly, at work in his own bosom, and not being yet prepared to be hurried on his way—"well, all that's nothing to me, Mark. But why did you damn the young fellow, Eversley? He used to be as fine a lad as any in the country; and, if he did win your sweetheart, I dare say that he won her fairly. You should not bear a grudge, man; all goes by luck in love and liking."

"Oh! it's not that, Sir Edward, it is not that at all! I would not now have the girl if I could; I'm very glad he took her off my hands, and very grateful to him for it. I would not have her now, I'm sure, unless it was for a mistress—and that she is not like to be for a poor fellow, whatever she might for a born gentleman. It is not that, at all, that made me damn him; but, bless you! he's the biggest poacher in the country!"

"Ha! is he—is he? that's bad; we must see to that. Have you got any proof against him?"

"Not clear—not clear, Sir Edward; but I keep a tight watch on him always, and I'll be nabbing him, I warrant me, one of these times."

"Do so—do so!" returned the other, forming, almost unconsciously, a secret feeling of dislike to the young man, who was known as the accepted suitor of Rose Castleton. "Do so; and if we catch him tripping badly, we can send him out of the county, or, perhaps, get him pressed on board the fleet; and then you can get the pretty Rose, you know."

"Oh! I don't want, her, sir—not I," returned the keeper, "I would not marry her at all, unless I was to be well paid for it, and then I'd marry the foul fiend, if need were."

"Fie! fie! Mark!" answered Hale— "don't talk in that profligate manner, I beg of you. But, tell me, where does old Castleton live now? Your father was saying something to me about his lease, I think, this morning. It has run out, I fancy, and he wants it renewed."

"Yes, yes, Sir Edward," the other interrupted, eagerly, "it *has* run out; and he does want it renewed; but then, Sir Edward, it's the home−farm, like; between Monks' coppice and Raywood; and the springbrook trout pond lies

in the very middle of it—all the best ground for game in the whole manor—and the best water, too, for fishing! Now I've been thinking that it will make bad work, if Hunter marries Rose, and Castleton gets a new lease. Why, bless you, sir! Frank would not leave a feather in the woods, or a fin in the waters, after he'd lived in the home−farm a fortnight; besides, the kennel lies so handy; it always seemed to me the keeper should live there. I was going to speak to you about that myself. I should like well to rent it; and my two brothers could look after it, so that I would not be kept from my duties, neither."

"I'm afraid, Mark, that can't well be; for, you see, I promised not to remove any tenant; and, besides, old Castleton lived there, under my grandfather, if I remember rightly; and has been a good tenant, too. But I won't forget you, Mark, never fear; for I won't forget you. But now we must make haste, or we shall be late at Barnsley;" and, with the words, he again put spurs to his horse, and rode on as fast as he could gallop, until he reached the little post−town; where he drew bridle at the door of the next country inn, and called aloud to the hostler—who came running across the court−yard toward him—asking whether "Lord Henry St. Maur and Captain Spencer had arrived from London?"

But, before the man had time to answer, a loud burst of laughter from within replied; and then a gay voice cried—

"Here we are, Ned; here we are; and here have we been these two hours. Come in—come in hither; quick man, or that rogue Percy Harbottle will finish the cool tankard before you get a taste of it. Our horses will be ready in a minute; come, make haste, you must be athirst this hot day!"

Edward Hale leaped down at the jovial summons, and flinging his rein to the keeper, ran up the steps, and entered the small clean parlor, to the left of the passage, where he found his three friends merrily employed in circulating a mighty silver flagon, filled with the generous compound of ale and sherry, sugar and toast and spices.

Three very comely personages were they, who occupied the solitary parlor of the country inn; three such, indeed, as it had probably never contained at one time before, such that not the landlord and land−lady only, but Doll the chambermaid, and Dick the tapster, and even fat old drunken Deborah, the cook, had contrived to find something or other to do in that parlor, in order to get a glimpse of the handsome gentlemen from London.

They were three in number, all of distinguished family, and of appearance and manners suitable to their rank, and none of them above the middle age, though two were scarcely beyond their boyhood.

The eldest of the three was the notorious Captain Spencer, a peer's second son, the commander of a gallant frigate now in commission, and as Lady Beverly had truly designated him, within an hour of the time when he was sitting there so calm and unruffled, although he knew it not, the most celebrated *pendable* of the metropolis. Of tried and distinguished courage, a good seaman for those days, a gentleman of the most courtly and finished manners, the Honorable Edmund Spencer was perhaps as thorough a debauchee and reprobate as existed at that day in all England. An admirable player at all games, a perfect musician, a very graceful dancer, his success among women had been almost unparallelled; and, although several of his adventures had been marked by very thorough depravity, and had terminated miserably for his fair victims, still fair and virtuous and innocent and noble women were found to smile upon the cold−hearted seducer, while they had not one tear to shed for the hapless beings he had brought down to shame and misery and untimely death.

With men, his ready wit, his liberality, his frankness and his courage made him even more generally a favorite than he was with the softer sex. The very boldness of his vice was to him a protection; and, as it seemed, a fresh claim on the world's admiration. No subterfuge had ever sullied his character for truth—whatever wrong he did to any one, he avowed it openly, and gave honorable satisfaction. He had shot one husband dead, and desperately wounded two brothers, fighting to avenge wife's and sister's reputation. An honorable man *par excellence* was the Honorable Edmund Spencer. Yet many a better man had expiated his crimes on the gallows.

Spencer was at this time about forty−three years old, although no person would have suspected him of being nearly that age; he was extremely handsome, though of a dark and somewhat saturnine complexion, with a full bright black eye, an aquiline nose, and one of the most fascinating smiles that ever wreathed a lip in blandishment. His hair black as the raven's wing, and without one speck or line of gray, was exquisitely soft and glossy, and almost as redundant in its fall of natural tresses as the huge wigs of the day. His voice was silvery music, and by long habit he had learned to modulate his accents like the tones of a delicate instrument.

For the young of both sexes never was created an enemy more dangerous than Edmund Spencer. In the

slightest glance of his eye there lurked wily fascination— in the most trivial word he uttered there was a covert meaning—a concealed power! But his smile, his caress, his friendship, or his love, were ruin—utter, inevitable ruin!

His dress, although in some degree professional, was rich and magnificent; for at that period a gentleman could be recognized, by his distinctive garb alone, from his valet. He wore a coat, cut in the naval form, with the open sleeves of the period, showing from the elbow to the wrist the shirt sleeves of plaited lawn fringed with ruffles of superb Valenciennes lace. It was of dark blue cloth, long waisted and broad skirted, lined throughout with white sarcenet. His breeches were of blue velvet, and his vest of the same color, both slashed with white silk, and adorned with many buttons of solid gold, embossed with the crown and anchor. He wore high boots and spurs, having travelled thither on horseback, being rather an uncommon thing for a sailor, a perfect and graceful cavalier—his hat, with a band of feathers, and a short crooked hanger lay on the table near him.

Lord Henry St. Maur, who was standing up with his back to the fire−place, now filled with greens and May−flowers, instead of its winter decoration of sea coal, was a tall, slight, fair young man, with nothing particular in his appearance, unless it were a mixed expression of licentiousness and audacity, which ill became his beardless lip, and smooth, effeminate features. He was dressed far more splendidly than the sea captain, in a full suit of maroon colored velvet, lined and slashed with philomot satin, and decorated with large ribbon shoulder knots of the same color. He had much costly lace at his bosom and wrists; the buttons of his coat and his knee buckles and sword hilt glittered with brilliantly cut steel; and to complete the picture, a huge fleece of curls, the natural hue of which was disguised by a profusion of reddish marechal powder, fell down over his shoulders, and impregnated the whole atmosphere of the inn−parlor with musk and ambergris, and Heaven knows what beside.

Percy Harbottle, the third of the company, was the youngest likewise, and the least worthy of notice, though perhaps the most worthy to be esteemed a gentleman. He was good looking, and good humored; and, though by no means a fool, certainly neither a genius nor a wit—in a word, he was a frank, lively, generous−hearted, rash, impetuous young man, likely enough to be hurried by evil association into the contracting of bad habits, and of committing follies, or becoming subject to the more venial vices—but kindly at the same time, and honorable if unthinking.

In fact, he was a type of that large class of youths at all times floating like the froth on the top of that great syllabub—the social world!—whom every one pronounces an "excellent good fellow," without being able in the least degree to specify wherein their excellence consists—whose greatest merits are good looks and animal good−humor, and whose greatest demerit is a want of ballast, of stability of character, and singleness of purpose, without which a man may be agreeable, but cannot possibly be great.

Such was Percy Harbottle—and there be many Percy Harbottles around us every where—who, exquisitely, and rather coxcombically attired in light blue silk, laced with gold, and bewigged and bepowdered to the very acme of the mode, was, at the moment of Sir Edward's entrance, apparently justifying the apprehensions of the others concerning the contents of the tankard, by the prodigious draught which he was making on its racy mixture. He set it down, however, and drawing a long breath, as Hale came in, jumped up with a good deal of eagerness, and with his hand extended, to meet him.

Spencer arose also, and put out his hand; but though there was much elegance and grace in every motion, though his tones were perfect harmony, and his words not well chosen only, but courteous and even friend ly, there was something that gave the young baronet a strong impression of the sea−captain's heartlessness; for he had known him before but slightly, and was now receiving him rather as a friend of his school−fellow St. Maur, than as an intimate of his own choosing.

The truth was, that although the captain's manner was exquisite, it was too evident that it was manner only—there was a total want of cordiality, or warmth, or in fact of any feeling. And, sooth to say, it would have been very strange had there not been that want—for it was on his total freedom from all touch of genuine nature, his complete mastery over his strongest feelings, his absolute impossibility of temper, and immobility of feature, on which Edward Spencer prided himself the most. He had been all his life acquiring it—and though he had given much pains to many fine accomplishments, to none had he devoted half the study this had cost him. No wonder he was perfect in it!

St. Maur nodded, and smiled, and thrust out a single finger, with a delicious attempt at nonchalance. He was really glad to see Edward Hale, whom he liked, as well as he liked anything, except himself; that is to say, so far

as he amused him, and gave him no trouble—and he said he was glad—but he said it as if he was rather sorry than otherwise. He wanted to be easy and careless; he had heard Spencer ridicule enthusiasm as boyish and ladylike—and he had the greatest horror in the world of being thought a boy; and in endeavoring to be un−enthusiastic, one of the *nil admirari* school, he became as stiff as the poker, and as unnatural and unlike his model, whom he flattered himself he was very closely imitating, as it is possible to conceive.

In a few minutes, however—for St. Maur's character was far too impulsive and ill−regulated to be true to any thing— even to itself, for above half an hour—he became boisterous and noisy, and displayed spirits so exuberant as to justify in some measure Percy Harbottle's assertion, that he had only drained the tankard, which it appeared on inspection he had done to the very dregs, for the purpose of preserving him from the commission of such a solecism as to be drunk before dinner.

"Upon my life!" said Spencer, "I do not feel so perfectly assured that you were in time enough to save him, Percy! Who will bet odds that he does not tumble off his horse before we reach Arrington?"

"I will, by heaven!" cried St. Maur himself; "I will, in rouleaux! Is it *done!*"

"No, not exactly," aswered Spencer, laughing, "not with you, my dear fellow; for if I did, you would not drink any more in the first place; and in the second you would keep yourself quiet; and, in short, I should not be *sure* of winning."

"And do you never bet, Captain Spencer," asked Hale, half jesting and half serious, "but when you are *sure* to win?"

"Never, my dear sir, never," replied Spencer, in his blandest tones, "do you?"

"Generally, I am afraid," said Sir Edward, laughing merrily.

"Ah! so does Harbottle; except that for `generally' you may read `always.' Harbottle *always* bets when he is *not* sure to win; or, in other words, when he *is* sure to lose. He pays too, which is something in these days. Harbottle is an undeniable man to bet with. I bet with him myself, a good deal."

Nothing could, indeed, be more strictly true than this last assertion of the gallant captain, to whose gentlemanlike necessities Percy Harbottle's betting−book annually ministered, to the tune of a cool thousand, at the least reckoning. A more cunning and less artful man than he would have shunned the topic and been detected by his silence. Spencer knew better, and talking of it openly, those who knew it to be true scarcely believed it, and those who were not certain utterly scouted the idea.

For a few minutes after this, the young men conversed merrily and gaily of fifty trivial incidents which had occurred since their last meeting; and light jokes called forth lighter laughter; as for the most part is the case when the gay−hearted and the cheerful, over whose head time has not shed a single sorrow, meet after passing absence. But by−and−by the replenished tankard was once again exhausted, and the young comrades soon began to lack some newer and more keen excitement.

"Come, come," cried Edward Hale, "let us get, all of us, to horse, and ride, as quickly as we may, back to the manor. There is a kind of merry−making of the villagers— a May−day frolic on the green; and, as it is my birth−day, too, I was obliged to promise the good people there that I would join their sports; and, what is more, to ask them all to dine with me at noon, under a tent. I am afraid it will be but a tedious sort of merriment to you, my boys, after the gaieties of London; but we must make the best of it; and, to compensate for it, we'll sup at eight, when all is over, and try my father's choice old Bargundy."

"Ods−life!" cried St. Maur, "there will be nothing tedious in it, so far as I'm concerned; for, I doubt not, you have store of pretty lasses here among your tenantry; and if we are to pass the summer here with you, you know, we must look out for something in the shape of *bona robas* to while away the time before the shooting season."

"Well, well, Lord harry, you shall see all of them, I promise," answered the baronet, with a quick meaning smile; "but then it must be honor bright. You shall have every help from me in *your* amours, but then you must not interfere with *mine* — hey, St. Maur?"

"Hark to him—hark to him, Spencer; hark to him, Harbottle!" cried the young lord, laughing; "did you, in all your lives, did you ever hear such a Turk? Why, he only came down hither last night, for the first time these sixteen years, and the dog has cut out an intrigue already!"

"Oh, I don't wonder at it, not I, in the least," Harbottle answered; "the fellow always had the eye of a hawk for a pretty wench, and the devil's own luck in winning them, too. Don't you remember, St. Maur, how he tricked Neville, at Christ Church, out of his black−browed Julia, after two days' acquaintance, when Neville had been

better than six months in bringing her to reason?"

"And Neville such a lady−killer, too!" lisped St. Maur; "but I suppose we had better promise him."

"To be sure, to be sure we had!" answered the other in a breath, "for if he has got the least start in the world with the girl, we have no more chance of her than the merest bumpkin in the country."

"So it's a bargain, Hale," continued St. Maur; "you will give each of us the best of your countenance and assistance, provided we keep all due distance from your own dulcinea."

"A bargain!" answered the young baronet; and "a bargain! a bargain!" chimed in his gay, licentious comrades.

"And now, Sir Edward," inquired Spencer, gravely, after they had mounted, and galloped a few hundred yards from the inn door, "what is your wench's name? that we may have no mistake here; and what does she look like?"

"Her name is Rose Castleton," answered Sir Edward Hale, the hot blood rushing hurriedly to his brow and cheek, as he named her, against whose peace and honor the wild words of his reckless and unprincipled companions had almost instantaneously matured his vague thoughts into violent designs.

"Her name is Rose Castleton; and she is like—simply the most beautiful woman it ever was my luck to gaze upon. The finest and most voluptuous figure—the brightest and most sparkling face—the most luxuriant hair—the softest and most passionate eye! By heavon! the loveliest girl I ever yet have looked upon were but a foil to her transcendant beauties!—but let us hurry on our way, or we shall be too late!"

And, at the word, they gave the rein to their good steeds, and touched their sleek sides with the spur, and no one could have found fault with the pace thereafter, till they came to the hill which overlooked the vale of Arrington.

CHAPTER IV.

No fatrher words were spoken by the gay companions; for, indeed, the fiery rate at which the cavaliers spurred on toward the manor, precluded the possibility of conversation— the thick beating clang of their horses' hoofs on the country road drowning all words pitched in tones lower than a shout.

It was, indeed, a charming—a delicious morning; the soft south wind which fanned their brows and fluttered their hair, as they cut through it rapidly, came laden with the fresh odor of the new mown hay, and the mingled perfumes of a thousand wild flowers; for all the hedge−row banks were studded, as thickly as the parterres of a well kept garden, with primroses and cowslips, and dark clustering violets,—the scent of which pervaded the whole atmosphere. The tall hedges, bordering the road on either hand, with their green buds just bursting into leaf, were actually sheeted with white bloom; while many a briar rose flaunted with its red blossoms, and many a honey−suckle hung its rich clusters over brake and thicket.

Myriads of larks were pouring their clear merry notes into the cool air, as they floated far beyond the reach of human vision, at the very gates of Heaven; one soaring upward as another dropped, faint and exhausted with the sweetness of his own melody, to repose himself on the fresh greensward, and meditate another hymn.

Every thing in the sounds and sights of nature, that spoke to the senses of the young men, was pleasant and exhilarating; and from a distance, as if to swell the chorus of general rejoicing, the chime of a village church came pealing down the wind with notes, as it were, of mirthful invitation.— Their hearts, too, were glad and jocund; no selfish thoughts, or interested motives, were at that time alive within bosoms too generally the slaves to such evil feelings. They had come down into the free, blithe country to divest their spirits of the cares and half toilsome pleasures, the din and rivalry, the jealousy and turmoil of the great city; and having come, they were prepared and willing to be pleased with almost every thing.

After they had galloped a few miles on their road, the lane which they had followed hitherto, turned off almost at right angles to the left hand, another pathway coming in from the opposite direction. Here the young baronet pulled up his horse, and pointing straight forward, over a high wattled fence, dividing a large pasture field from the highway, he called out—

"That is our nearest way, gentlemen, by three miles; and over as pretty a line of country as you ever rode across. There is not one ploughed field or meadow in the range; all good firm pasture land, with fair stand−up fences, and one ten foot brook— nothing more; what do you say to a lark?"

"By all means! by all means!" cried St. Maur, giving his horse the spur, and sweeping over the fence cleverly; "which is the way?"

"Straight for the tall oak tree on the hill, in the third hedge−row; thence you will see the top of the old castle on my grounds; steer straight for that, boys!"

And away they went, with whoop and halloa, skimming the bright green fields, and swinging over the easy fences with scarce an effort of their mettlesome and high−bred horses. It was not long, however, before the headlong pace at which they rode brought them to the summit of the hills commanding the scene which has been heretofore described; and so extraordinary was the beauty of that scene, with its tranquil landscape, and gay grouping, that the three guests of the young lord of the manor pulled up, as it were by a common impulse, their hot horses, and uttered a simultaneous expression of surprise and admiration.

"Is that your place? By Heaven! you are a luckier fellow than I fancied, Ned," cried St. Maur.

"Give us your hand, old boy; long may you live to enjoy this fair manor!" said Harbottle, yet more cordially.

"By the Lord! what a lovely picture. A Poussin in the distance, and a Tenier merry−making in the foreground," added Spencer, looking at the view with a paint er's eye, for he was indeed no mean connois seur in that delightful art.

"It is a fine old place," Hale answered gratified much by the pleasure of his friend and college comrades; "but come along and you shall see the place and its inhabitants more nearly."

And, with the words, he again touched his horse with the spur, and gallopped lightly down the slope, and across the greensward of the common, toward a large and gaily decorated tent, with several flags and streamers fluttering in the summer air above it, which had been erected during his temporary absence, at a short distance

from the May−pole. About the entrance of this grand marquee, a dozen or more of Sir Edward's servitors were clustered, and flinging his rein to the foremost of these as he alighted, he bade the others look to the horses of his friends, and lead them to the stables of the manor.

Loud rang the plaudits of the tenantry as the young master of their destinies, accompanied by his distinguished looking friends—for they were all finely made and handsome men, and all, as I have said, superbly dressed in the rich mode of the day, with gold embroideries, and rich lace, and fluttering shoulder−knots, and waving feathers—walked through the merry throng, now pausing for a moment to shake hands with some sturdy yeoman, whom he remembered as his play−fellow of yore; now listening to the tedious, but not, for that, insincere or unwelcome gratulations of some hoary−headed farmer; now giving brief directions to his steward or serving men concerning the ale butts to be broached, and the ox to be roasted whole by noon; now chucking some bright−cheeked demure looking damsel under the chin, with a light laugh; till all pronounced him the most affable and kindest−hearted landlord in the county, and augured years of peace and comfort under his patriarchal sway.

But it was acting all—sheer acting!— natural acting indeed, and such as might have imposed on the shrewdest judge of human nature; and for this reason—that Edward Hale but enacted, at that time, what would have been his own instinctive, natural conduct at another, had his mind been at ease, and his thoughts disengaged; and even while he was thus acting, he was almost if not entirely unconscious of the fact; for he was not a hypocrite—not even a dissembler—and, though full many a gay licentious vice might have been laid with justice to his charge, he never had committed any very serious, or at least any premeditated wrong—and was not, in the least degree, a hardened or habitual sinner. But now all the worse portions of his nature were aroused within him.

Voluptuous by nature, and not, perhaps, disinclined to sensuality, his attention had been struck at first sight by the singular beauty of Rose Castleton; and a keen, although vague desire of possessing her had occupied his mind for a moment. A little thought, however, had quickly brought him back to his better senses; and while he was thus fluctuating, between the influences of his good and evil genii, a single admonition from a wise and sincere friend would have drawn the black drop from his heart. But in the place of the sage adviser, Edward had met the tempter. The question which he asked of his ill−disposed game−keeper, in curiosity, and from the want of any other interesting topic, had been so answered by that artful man as to inflame the nascent passions of his master; and, by creating a doubt of Rose's mental purity, to palliate to his mind the offence which he soon began to meditate against her.

Twofold was the design of Eversly—first, and most prominently he desired, by basely pandering to the evil qualities of the young baronet, to gain such an ascendancy over his mind as might contribute to his own advancement— second, to wreak his vengeance on a girl who had rejected his addresses, and on the man who had won the love of her whom he once courted. With his heart burning yet at the hints and instigations of that bad servant, he had been thrown into the whirl and vortex of licentious merriment which characterized the conversation of his companions; and thus his passions were excited, and his dormant vanity aroused, until by degrees he worked himself into a resolute determination to make Rose Castleton his victim and his mistress.

It was on this account that he walked with an absent mind among his shouting peasantry; uneasy that he could not discover the object of his burning passion, and unwilling to inquire her whereabouts, lest he should prematurely wake suspicion.

Suddenly, as he passed the May−pole, and neared the hawthorn bush and pastoral throne beneath it, his glad eye fell upon the rustic beauty. She had been chosen Queen of the May, and sat on high, surrounded by the prettiest of the village maidens, upon the grassy seat—her bright eye sparkling even more brightly than its wont, with gratified ambition—her dark cheek flushed with the quick lustre of successful vanity.

A crown of gorgeous flowers had now supplanted the humble cottage bonnet, and many a dewy bud was mingled with her long curled tresses; the modest kerchief that had veiled her sloping shoulders and fair neck was gone, and was but insufficiently replaced by a gay wreath which crossed her bosom like a baldric and twined around her waist. A tall white lily, meet sceptre for so beautiful a queen, graced her right hand, as with young artless mirth she issued her commands to the blithe crowd around her.

Why does her cheek so suddenly turn pale—why flush to so hot a crimson? Alas! poor maid! her eye met Edward Hale's as he drew nigh, and again noted the strong and passionate expression of delighted admiration, which it had noted once before. And yet she loved Frank Hunter—ardently, truly loved him! And yet—and yet—oh woman! woman! well said the great Magician of the North, noting thy changeful mood, well did he paint

thee—

"In hours of ease Fantastic, wayward, hard to please"— for thou, Rose Castleton, loving—most truly and most singly loving—Frank Hunter, and caring nothing for Sir Edward, all for a poor brief triumph of thy sex's passion, and therewithal to punish Frank, for his short jealous fit that morning, didst meet the eye of the young baronet, with that half bold, half bashful glance of thine— half innocent, half conscious—that made him fancy thee half won already—made him strain every nerve to win thee.

Fair face and graceful form, and eloquence so warm and wily, as never peasant maiden listened to without dread peril, and rare skill in the mazes of the dance, and sumptuous garb, and dignity and rank! Beware! beware! Rose Castleton.

All day he danced with her upon the green; his gay companions selecting for their partners the prettiest three of her attendant nymphs, and, like Sir Edward, monopolizing them the live−long day—and at the noonday feast she sat beside him, her little heart high fluttering with vanity and pleasure, and ambition.

She had listened to his vows of love, how delicately syllabled to her fond foolish ear— his arms had been about her waist—his lips had snatched a kiss before they parted— and she had promised too—promised to meet him in the Monk's coppice, ere the moon set the following night—and yet, weak fool! she dreamed not that she did any real wrong—and laid the flattering unction to her soul, that she would forgive Frank soon—when she had made him soundly jealous. Beware! Rose Castleton, beware! Heaven succor thee! or thou art but a lost one!

CHAPTER VI.

The moon rose bright and broad behind the castle hill, and poured its full flood of lustre over the tented meadow, whereon the revels and the dances of the yeomanry were still kept up with unabated spirit, long after the young lord of the manor and his guests had retired from the scene of sylvan merriment.

Meanwhile, a ruddy light began to shine out of the oriel windows of the old hall, showing that mirth and gaiety maintained their empire within, as steadily as without the hospitable walls of the proprietor.

The supper room was a fine old fashioned chamber, wainscoated and ceiled with dark English oak, polished so brightly that the walls reflected every object almost as distinctly as a crystal mirror. The monotony of the black woodwork was relieved by a rich cornice, round the summit of the walls, of flowers and fruits and arabesques, highly gilt and burnished; the surbase and the panels were surrounded with workmanship of the same kind, as were the posts and lintels of the doors, the chimney piece, and the frames of several large Venetian looking−glasses that hung, one in each angle of the room, which was an oblong octagon, reaching from the floor to the roof. The floor, where it was not covered by a fine Turkey carpet, was polished till it was as bright and almost as slippery as ice; the curtains and the furniture were of ruby colored velvet, laid down with broad gold lace; and, when it is taken into consideration that there were above fifty large wax lights in lamps and chandeliers of cut glass with many pendants, so disposed in every part of the hall that it was nearly as light as day, nothing could easily be imagined more grand and striking in the shape of decoration.

The table was spread with its snow−white drapery, and a profusion of cut glass and silver glittered upon the board, while the long necks of several flasks of champagne and Bordeaux, protruding from the massive coolers, showed that due preparation had been made to gratify the palate, at well as to delight the eye.

Supper was served, and so well was the household of the young baronet organized, that all the guests were loud and sincere in their commendation of his wines, his cookery, his whole menage; and Spencer, the fastidious spoiled child of the world, privileged to find fault with any thing at will, whispered aside to St. Maur that his country friend was by no means to be despised as an Amphitryon, and immediately challenging Sir Edward to drink champagne with him, told him aloud, in his significant, blunt−seeming manner, "that it would not be his fault if he did not become an *habituè* at his house—for that his bill of fare was as undeniable as Harbottle's betting book."

It must not be supposed, however, that on this, the first evening of the young heir's majority, he sat down with his three guests alone to supper. Far from it—the board was laid with more than twenty covers, and all the landed aristocracy of the county were assembled to celebrate the birth−day, and welcome the arrival of their young neighbor.

Some few of these were men of the world and gentlemen in the highest sense of the word, the venerable Earl of Rochefort and his three noble sons being among the number.

The greater part of the company, however, with the exception of one or two clergymen, consisted of country gentlemen, as country gentlemen of that day—for it is of the time of the last of the unhappy Stuarts that I am writing—were, almost to a man—that is to say, mere boorish and unlettered sportsmen, stanch riders after stag or fox from sunrise to mid−day; stanch topers at the bottle or the bowl, from afternoon to midnight!

It had not been deemed wise, or in any sense advisable, to omit this class of neighbors, for many reasons; not that Sir Edward had the least idea of either becoming one of their number in reality, or of affecting to do so for the sake of gaining their votes; for, as he entertained no thought of standing for the county, even at a future period; nor, had he done so, would he have condescended, therefore, to any indirection.

Something of this sort he slightly hinted to the old peer who sat on his right, while apologizing for the rather uproarious mirth which soon began to prevail at the lower end of the table; but the good old man smiled slightly as he answered—

"You do not owe me the least apology, my dear Sir Edward; since all these gentlemen are occasionally guests of mine, likewise, at the castle; and several of them, though somewhat rough and unpolished, are very estimable men in their way; good landlords and good neighbors— upright and charitable, and true English hearts—proud to the proud, and kindly to the poor. It may be they are a little addicted to elevating trifles, which are well enough in

their way, into the serious occupation of a life−time. But, after all, I do not know which of us all is free from this weakness; and it is at least more venial to pass a life−time in hunting foxes, than in misgoverning nations, merely for pastime."

"I agree with you perfectly, my lord," said Hale, "and am glad to find that you do not altogether disapprove of fox hunting, as I must confess myself rather fond of it, and believe I shall sometimes join my neighbors when the season comes."

"Disapprove of it—oh, no!" said the earl, laughing, "so far from that, I was very near determining to set up a pack myself some years since, when your respected father died, Sir Edward—a loss which you were too young to feel at that time—and I should probably have done so, had not our friend, Sir Willoughby de Willoughby, whom I see you have made your vice−president for the day, undertaken them. Oh, no! I think hunting an admirable, bold and manly exercise, tending to hinder our young men from degenerating into mere city coxcombs, or singing, dancing *dilettanti*, like the noblesse of Italy— I mean, of course, if it be not abused. No, no! indeed; I think there are many pursuits more blameable than hunting, and many associates, too, more dangerous than fox−hunters!"

And, as he spoke the words, his eye dwelt for a moment on the handsome face of Captain Spencer, whose character he knew thoroughly well by reputation; and whom he was extremely sorry to see on terms of intimacy with a young man to whom, on many accounts, he wished well; and of whom he was disposed, on a very short acquaintance, to think highly.

Sir Edward's eye followed the transient glance; and, as he thought he had detected a hidden allusion to himself and his guests, the ingenuous blood rushed crimson to his frank face, and he remained for a moment or two absent and embarrassed, This was not, however, noticed by the old nobleman, for he had not made the observation with reference to Spencer, although the fitness of it struck him the moment he had spoken; and, not wishing to assume the monitor, or to interfere in the affairs of others, he had cast his eyes upon his plate, and appeared to be busy only in apportioning the condiments to his wild fowl.

The direction of the earl's eye had not, however, been unnoticed by St. Maur, who, though he did not catch the words uttered, had no doubt, as he saw the glance followed by his host's embarrassment, that something had been said in disparagement of his friend. Nothing occurred, however, at the moment, although a sentiment of dislike was implanted in St. Maur's breast, which he evinced afterward by taking every opportunity of holding up the old lord to ridicule, as a fanatic and half a fool; and of quizzing his sons behind their backs unmercifully, as milksops and twaddlers, scarce one shade better than the country bumpkins round about them.

Conversation, except among the few persons at the head of the table, was soon at an end; bumper toasts circulated fast; song followed song; and glees and catches without number were trolled, with far more energy than melody; and cork after cork was drawn; and punch−bowl after punchbowl was replenished; yet the interminable thirst of the country squires seemed all the thirstier for each attempt to allay it. Before the bounds of decency had yet been transgressed by any person present, the butler entered in a pause between the quick following bursts of song, bearing two letters on a large silver waiter—one of which he handed to Captain Spencer, and the other to Lord Henry St. Maur, saying aloud that they had just been brought by a servant, who had ridden post from London, and waited an immediate answer.

Just at this moment the Earl of Rochefort, excused by his age and character from prolonging the festivities of the board to morning light, arose to go; begging, however, that he might not break up the party, and apologizing for carrying off his sons— two of whom were about to set out for London in the morning.

There was, of course, a general movement of the company, but at Edward Hale's request they all resumed their seats—he alone following the earl into the hall to take leave of him; while, on the same pretence, but in reality wishing to gain an opportunity of reading their letters, Spencer and St. Maur glided out of the room immediately behind him.

A short time was occupied in hunting up cloaks, hats and swords, but it was not long before the earl's party were all in readiness, and moving toward the hall door.— Just as they reached it, after taking leave of Sir Edward, Colonel Hardinge, the peer's eldest son, saw a tall man, in a plain riding dress, with heavy boots and spurs, and a courier's leather belt about his waist, standing in the vestibule; and Spencer, who had been questioning him about the letters he had brought, gliding away, as if desirous of escaping observation.

There was something so singular in the movement, that the Colonel's attention was called somewhat particularly to the servant, and he at once recognized him for a fellow who had left him, a few months before, in

order to take service with Lord Asterly.— The man had, as it happened, been rather a favorite servant, and the colonel, without much consideration, said as he passed him,

"Ha! Benedict, what has brought you hither? Are you not living still with my Lord Asterly?"

"Yes, colonel," answered the man, quickly, and quite off his guard; and then stammering, and appearing a good deal embarrassed— "that is to say, colonel," he added, "I have left—I brought letters!"

Hardinge, who had merely spoken for lack of any thing else to do, and without any great interest in the matter, nodded only and passed on; but Edward Hale had caught the words of the servant, and perceived his obvious confusion; and, as he returned from escorting the earl to his carriage, he stopped and asked—

"Did you bring letters for me, my good fellow?"

"No, sir," replied the man at once, "I brought letters for the honorable Captain Spencer, and my Lord Henry St. Maur! and I want their answers, if you please, Sir Edward."

"From Lord Asterly?" asked Hale, in astonishment. "Are you Lord Asterly's man?

"I was, Sir Edward—but—but" and the man began again to stutter, and turned fiery red.

"That will do," answered the baronet, passing on—"it does not signify, at all;" and he thought within himself, "that fellow has been drinking—or, if not, he is a knave;" and, with his mind a little disturbed, he re−entered the supper room, where all was revelry and noise, and loud uproarious glee. Spencer and St. Maur had not yet returned into the room; but Percy Harbottle, who had contrived already to render himself very popular with the good−hearted country gentlemen, called to him as he came in—

"Come, Ned Hale, come—now that your steady friends have left us, let us set to work instantly; we are bound, I must say to you, in honor, to drink all of these gentlemen under the table, without any more delay— for they have had the audacity to challenge us to the test, and to talk of us Christ Church−men as if we were mere milksops. Come, order some mulled Burgundy, and let us fall on gallantly."

"Certainly! certainly!" replied Hale— and muttering to himself, "for this time, at least, there is no help for it, I suppose," he resumed his chair, and the supper party soon degenerated into a wild and frantic orgie—through which Hale and Harbottle sustained their parts with more success than either had anticipated; for, whether it was that their young and unbroken constitutions offered better resistance to the wine they swallowed than the enfeebled systems of the inveterate topers, or that their quietness of manner, and comparative abstinence during the early part of the evening, gave them an advantage, certain it is, that while reveler after reveler fell from his chair, and was carried, or staggered out of the room to be thrust into his carriage, or conveyed to bed in a state nearly approaching to insensibility, the young men were by no means even seriously affected by the liquor they had drunk; and, when they had seen the last guest safely carried to his chamber, they walked, with feverish brows indeed, and quivering nerves, and blood unduly heated, into the drawing−room, where they found St. Maur and the Captain playing, with perfect coolness, at picquet, and sipping some strong coffee, which Spencer urged them to take as a sovereign remedy against the effect of over−drinking.

Edward Hale poured himself out a cup of coffee, and then fixing his eyes quietly on St. Maur's face, asked him in a tranquil voice,

"Was your letter from the Asterlys, St. Maur?"

"No!" answered St. Maur steadily, "three tierce majors, captain, and the quatorze of aces, count fourteen."

Spencer looked up quickly, in utter astonishment at the absurd and reckless falsehood of his friend; but not the smallest sign of wonder was visible in his composed manners, or on his inscrutable and impassive features. But he replied at once, eager if possible to repair the evil which he foresaw from St. Maur's injudicious deniar— a denial which he knew must sooner or later be discovered, if it was not so already.

"Nor I, Sir Edward, nor I, either—from the Asterlys—inasmuch as they are Asterlys no longer—for that I suppose is what Henry means; since I saw him get a letter from the people you mean, at the very moment I got mine—which certainly is from her spiteful ladyship; and a very pretty piece of spite it is too! considering that one would have expected her to be in a better humor."

The wonder, which the self−possessed and cold−blooded man of the world had kept down so perfectly, positively beamed from every feature of St. Maur's face, as he heard this avowal, which appeared quite as incomprehensible to him as did his falsehood to the other; who, by one of those marvellous contradictions which we sometimes discover in the characters of men, though he would have done almost any other evil thing in the whole world, would not have told a lie to save his life.

Astonished as he was, however, he saw the utter inutility of trying to carry the deception out as he had intended. So with a loud and boisterous laugh, he cried out, "Oh, fie, you blab! You mar−sport! You have spoiled all my fun. Why did you not stick to it, Spencer?"

"I never say the thing that is not, even in fun!" replied the other gravely; and as he spoke he met a glance of approbation beaming from Hale's clear eye, and noted it; and determined to turn the feeling which it indicated to his purpose. This of course passed as quick as lightning; and at the same moment St. Maur said, for Spencer's shaft had pierced deeply,

"Nor I, nor I, Captain Spencer, but your words do not apply; for I said the thing that is—the true thing!—I did *not* get a letter from the Asterlys."

"True, true!" replied the captain with a smile, "my remark was uncivil and inappropriate. Excuse it."

"But gentlemen, gentlemen," interposed Hale laughing and yet puzzled, "why am I to be left in the basket? how is this, you speak truth to the ear and riddles to the sense? The Earl of Asterly—"

"Is Earl of Asterly no longer," answered Spencer. "It has pleased his most gracious majesty James by the Grace of God, for reasons which I suppose he and his ministers know—for I am sure nobody else does—to create his dull earlship Marquis of Beverly; so now I suppose he will be duller, and more pompous, and more utterly intolerable than ever."

"Indeed, Marquis of Beverly? and your news, captain?—"

"Is from the new made marchioness. I cannot show it to you, Sir Edward. Ladies' letters you know—but I wish I could, for it is capital—capital!"

"Strange, strange!" thought Edward Hale within himself, although he gave his thoughts no utterance; "strange that I should have heard nothing of the matter."

But aloud he only said—"Does her ladyship mention any thing of Lord Arthur's wherabout? I hoped and in fact expected that he would have been here to−day Does she mention him at all?"

"Not a word, not a word about him," replied Spencer. "Her ladyship is not, fancy, the most anxious or affectionate of mothers! By heaven! I repique you, St. Maur. Yes, I repique you—three for my point! twelve for my four tierce majors fourteen for my four aces! fourteen for my four kings! fourteen for my four queens! sixty for the repique! thirteen I gain on the cards in playing, and forty for the capot! a hundred and seventy in all. never saw that stroke happen before. doubt if it ever did! but it is just, I will bet ten to one. Will you bet, Harbottle? No? Well, good night!—it is late; good night."

CHAPTER VII.

That same night there had been a gay and sumptuous ball in London, at the prime minister's. The king had himself honored it with his presence for an hour or two; and all that was gay and witty, great, beautiful, wise, noble, or in any way distinguished, had been assembled round the monarch's person. Nothing could possibly have been more brilliant in the shape of a fête, nothing at the same time more magnificent and merry.

But the ball had come to an end, as all earthly pleasures will, even the purest and the most enduring; and once ended had left the heart full of bitterness and ashes, or at the best vacant and exhausted. The guests had departed to their homes, to abuse one another, and criticise, as it might be, the ostentation or the meanness of their entertainers. The crash of carriages and the din and quarrelling of drunken servants had subsided into stillness; the lights were extinguished in the ball−room; the flowers were fading on the walls; the tables were strewn with the relics of the splendid supper; and who was now the happier, for the wild gayety, the lavish luxury, the vast expense?

In a large airy bed−chamber situated in the corner of a stately house in Spring Gardens, the newly created marquis's, the lady Fanny Asterly was sitting by an open window that overlooked the beautiful and quiet Thames, pensive and melancholy, and undressed, as if for bed; yet she sat there as she had sat for above an hour, and taken no thought of the time, nor dreamed of lying down since she dismissed her woman.

That evening she had been the beauty of the ball−room, the admired by all men, the observed of all the observers. Adulations had flowed into her ears in one continuous stream of silvery music; homage the most devoted, attentions such as must gratify every female heart, even when those who tender them are but regarded lightly, had been paid her on all sides.

Even the monarch had remarked her charms with an observant eye, and struck with her graceful manners and rare beauty, had desired that she should be presented to him. Beauty could have no greater triumph than Fanny Asterly's had met at that high festival. Nor, while the triumph lasted, had she been insensible to something akin to gratified ambition, to the high perilous excitement of successful vanity, and conscious superiority.

Her cheek had flushed with a warmer and more bright carnation; her eye had beamed more exultingly than its wont, as she swam through the mazes of the voluptuous dance, the cynosure of every eye; and heard the stifled hum of admiration which followed her steps every where— that hushed and sincere applause, paid by the heart to loveliness, which every woman understands, and to which she who is insensible, can scarcely be called woman.—Greater or less it may be, but not genuine, very woman—not that sweet fascinating compound, whose very weakness is so far more adorable than any strength of mind or purpose; whose very virtues are so much made up from, and complicated with, those weaknesses, that you can scarcely destroy one without throwing down the other; whose very love of pleasing and thirst for admiration are perhaps half the secret of the pleasure which she inspires—the admiration which she wins from half reluctant reason.

And Fanny Asterly was not insensible, nor yet ungratified—for she was indeed all woman—sweet, gentle, innocent and amiable; yet in her every phase of thought, in her every fault, her every charm, a very, very woman. Yes! she had been pleased, delighted, almost intoxicated by the events of that evening; yet now, though she had not one thought or deed for which she could reproach herself with justice, it was with no sense of pleasure that she recurred to the events of the ball.

She felt annoyed and angry with herself that she should have been pleased and amused by such frivolous folly; she fancied that she had been guilty of a sort of half infidelity to Edward Hale, in suffering herself to listen to the flatteries, and to be pleased with the attentions of the young cavaliers of the court of James.

"And this is his birth−day, too—this is the very day on which, one little year ago, he plighted me his faith, and we exchanged rings in the linden avenue at Asterly. Dear little ring—" and she raised her fingers to her lips, and kissed the senseless gift of her lover's affection—"dear little ring, how I love you—how I wish that he were with me here who gave you to me a year since; and he, I doubt it not, he hath been thinking of me all this night; while I, false girl, have been listening and smiling, as if I had forgotten—but no! no! Edward, Edward—" she went on, becoming more excited as she gave vent to her feelings— "it is not so—it is not. I am true—true to you in my heart of hearts, Edward! There is not, in my most secret soul, dear Edward, one thought which I would hide from

thee—one thought which I would hesitate to tell—one thought on which thou wouldst not smile thine approbation, even as, I doubt not, in *thy* spirit there is not one passing fancy which should raise a blush or call up a frown on my cheek or brow—did I know it."

Alas! for the pure confidence of innocent and guileless womanhood. Unsullied herself as the virgin snow, her heart and mind an unsoiled sheet, as it were, of parchment, until love had inscribed there one fondly cherished name, she never doubted that he on whom she had set the priceless jewel of her inestimable love was spotless as herself from any taint of voluptuous and sensual sin—nothing that she could have heard, scarce any thing that she could have seen, were it not in his own handwriting, or from his own tongue, would have induced her to believe that at this very moment he was coveting if not loving the charms of another woman.

Alas! alas! how does the boasted virtue of the most virtuous and moral of us men shrink into measureless vice, when compared with the purity, the trust, the truth of an innocent and loving woman.

Edward Hale was no worse, nay, he was far less evil than the generality of young men of his age, at that, or perhaps at any day. Yet, troth−plighted as he was to that sweet girl, he dreamed not that he did *her* any wrong in dallying with other women, in winning their affections, in defrauding them of their virtue, so long as he preserved his own *heart* and his own affections in allegiance to her empire; and by a sophistry not uncommon, though most absurd and inconsistent, he justified himself in this breach both of purity and truth by saying to himself that by her father's decision a year was yet to pass before she could yet be his wife. And she, while his heart was afire with unholy passions for the betrothed wife of another, and his brain busy with intrigues whereby to work her ruin, she, in her exquisite purity of soul, was accusing herself of faithlessness, and almost weeping over her own imaginary delinquencies, because she had danced a few harmless dances, and listened to a few unmeaning compliments, and perhaps, at the most, endured a casual pressure of the hand from some gay coxcomb, whose attentions had no meaning beyond the present moment.

But she was sad at heart—the excitement of the last hours had ceased, and the cold reaction had ensued, as is so frequently the case, more painfully than the bygone sensations had been pleasurable. She was sad, almost sick at heart.

The moon was shining broadly into the tall French windows of her chamber, for she was near her full, and the skies were almost as light as at noonday, except when some great cloud came sweeping over the bright disc, and veiling every thing for a few moments in clear and almost luminous obscurity, when compared to the darkness of a moonless midnight. And still she sat there watching the vast shadows creeping over the river's breast, and over the silent streets, and drawing fancied auguries from their strange forms and ghost−like movements.

After a while she pressed her hand on her heart and said, in low, mournful tones, "I know not what it is—I know not what ails me! I do wish that I had seen Serena this morning, or that I could see Arthur now—I have no reason, it is true, for any fear or apprehension—yet I do fear everything! Oh! how unhappy I am—oh! how unhappy! There seemed to fall a shadow on my heart, a chill upon all my spirit, as I saw that Sir Henry Davenant pass by the window, with his bitter and sarcastic smile— and he has seemed to haunt me ever since! I met him twice when I was walking out this morning in the park, and both times he sneered at me with his horrid supercilious courtliness—and then, this evening at the ball, his cold snake−like eye was never withdrawn from my face for a moment; whenever I stopped in the dance, or turned my head from hearing some gay speech, I was sure to catch sight of him.— He put me in mind of the skeleton the old Egyptians used to place at their banquets as a ghastly admonition. Whenever I beheld him, my heart stood still within me; and my blood seemed to run cold. Why can it be that I so loathe that man? Can it be, that the soul is prescient of its secret foes, and is inexplicably warned against those that shall work it wo?—No! no!—It cannot be—and yet—I do believe—I do— that he will one day injure me." And she paused for a long time, and sat still, thinking deeply; but almost unconscious that she was thinking at all, so wildly and fantastically did her thoughts come and go; at last she gave a sort of start; and exclaimed,— "Yes! there is something going on—there is something wrong and evil plotting against us, I am sure. My mother—I observed my mother's eye many times to−day, fixed on me and not lovingly.—She does *not* love me!—and yet, my God, my God, what have I ever done, or failed to do, that she should not? She never loved me; never liked Edward! alas! alas! and my father, though kind is not energetical.—Oh! Arthur, Arthur, my dear brother, why are you not here, why are you not at hand to help and comfort your unhappy sister?—She wrote to−day to St. Maur, and to Spencer, at *his* house at Arrington, and not one word to him! To Spencer—for what

can she write to him; but for evil—evil, it must be evil! And oh! why will he associate himself with comrades such as Lord Henry, and this Captain Spencer, of whom no man or woman had ever yet one good word to say—whose very glance is poison!—Oh! Edward—Edward— did you but know—could you but know what agony it gives me.—But no! he knows it not—he cannot know it!—Nor can I send him word at all, nor even summon him to town, unless my brother should come back!" For a few minutes she was again silent, but then rising from her chair suddenly, she fell down upon her knees, and prayed fervently and long; and her meek supplication finished, stood up refreshed and strengthened, and feeling something like a ray of heavenly consolation shining upon her heart.

"Well, it is very late," she said; "I will to−bed, to−bed! but, I fear, not to sleep!" and drawing the curtain over the window, through which the moonlight fell too brilliantly and full upon her couch, she walked across the room to reach something from a table, covered with books and drawings, and a few stands of flowers, before she lay down to rest.

She had taken up the article, whatever it was, of which she was in search, and was in the act of turning away from the table, when her eye fell quite suddenly, and as if by accident, upon a neatly folded note, which she did not remember to have seen when she came into the room, on her return from the minister's ball. She took it up; it was unopened, and secured with a seal of red wax, bearing a deep impression, an antique head of Minerva. Thinking to herself that something must have been lying over it when she looked upon the table as she re−entered her room, she walked with the note to the window, in order to read it by the aid of the clear moonlight.

Though she was very anxious, she knew not why, to arrive at the contents; and though she half prognosticated something of evil tidings, she yet, as we often do, even when we are the most impatient, turned it again and again, to examine the seal and superscription, and conjecture from whom it could possibly have come, when in all probability by opening it she would have learned the whole in a moment.

The hand−writing was strange to her— certainly strange—and this very fact, which should naturally have hurried her proceedings, since it was clear that she could conjecture nothing, probably yet delayed her longer. It was a clear, correct, Italian hand, rather erect than otherwise, and larger than is common, but by no means bold, or free, or dashing. On the contrary it was rather over−nice, every hair−line being traced with almost mathematical precision, and every dot and period inserted with clerk−like regularity. It was directed "To the Lady Frances Asterly, Asterly House, Spring Gardens." The seal was formed as accurately as the band−writing was minutely finished, and was equally unknown to the excited and half trembling girl, who by this time had convinced herself that the small square note contained some horrible and painful mystery.

Her hand literally shook as she broke the seal, and her eyes swam, as if dazzled by excess of light, so that some moments passed before she could fix the letters. At last, by a great effort, she composed herself, and read as follows:

"One, who has seen and known the Lady Frances Asterly, almost from her cradle to the present day, although she knows him not, nor has ever seen him— who has watched her growth, daily, nay almost hourly, from the wild buoyant days of thoughtless infancy, through the sweet spring of girlhood, up to her present plenitude of glorious beauty—who has marked every growing charm both of mind and body—who has noted her features, full of rare inborn music, her form ripe in most perfect loveliness—who has read her soul, and knows it to be pure and bright and spotless as the spirit of the new−born babe, fresh from the hands of the Creator—who loves her with an affection surpassing that of a father, because, unlike a father's, it is divested of all prejudice, and arises only from his sense of her exquisite and peerless beauty, beauty both of the mind and body. One who, had he the means of altering his mission and changing his existence, would be her guardian spirit—one who has many times already stood, though she knew it not, between her and many an earthly peril—writes now once more to warn, and if possible to save her. Mark his words, innocent and lovely one, mark his words; and, although the task be a hard and bitter one, believe them and be warned. And oh! above all, fancy not that he who writes these lines, has any secret or unworthy object— that he is a resentful rival, a discarded suitor, an avenger of wrong done—"

"For I am none of these. Before thou wert born I was old, wronged and wretched. It was a fate, a wondrous fate, that interested me in thy birth, and it has been my fate ever to cross thy path, till I am, as it were, wound up in thy well being. I had a daughter once, innocent as thou art, and almost as beautiful—she heard, but would not heed my warnings—she wedded, was deceived, lived wretched, and died young, young and heart−broken, as thou wilt live, and die also, Fanny, if thou attend not this my warning.

"He unto whom thy troth is plighted is not what thou deemest him, not what could make thee happy. Even now his house is full of revelry and riot, debauchery and— what it befits thee not to hear of. His friends and chosen comrades, the worst, the most notorious of the world's wicked devotees. Beware! beware! ere it shall be too late!

"Be warned by my words, Fanny; but, even warned, I ask you not to act upon them, until convinced that they are true— true to the letter, or if lacking truth, lacking it only in that they come not up to the full measure of his wildness, his unworthiness, his falsehood.

"Reject this warning, and you are lost forever!"

Eagerly she devoured every word of this strange wild epistle. She read it and re−read it, and in her own despite she felt that it had left a sting in her soul. It was in vain that she said to herself, "Tush! it is but an ordinary slander! a vile thing composed by a wretch who dares not sign his name to the emanations of his own guilty mind." It was in vain; she could not so banish it, for there was something in the whole style and wording of the letter, in the antique and flowery phraseology, in the obscurity and mystery in which the writer was shrouded, in the dark sounding prophecies, and the strange emphasis of the warning, that made it obviously different from a commonplace anonymous letter.

The character of Lady Fanny was naturally somewhat poetical and romantically inclined; and on this doubtless the writer had calculated in framing his artful and insidious missive. It happened, moreover, that the very tone of thoughts, in which she was indulging herself at the time, harmonized singularly with the spirit of the letter, and of the warning it contained. She had been secretly deploring the connection of her betrothed husband with the men whom she knew to be his companions at this moment; and lo! the letter spoke, not in dark hints, but in open language, and spoke, as she believed truly, their characters in the world's estimation; and when the world does indeed condemn unanimously, it is rare that it condemns unjustly.

Besides, did it not challenge investigation? Did it not recommend inquiry? It could not, therefore, be a mere baseless slander. Oh! of a truth it was very plausible! A very cunning spirit had devised that shaft, had steeped it in the very poisons which with a devilish foresight it knew would be the most likely to corrode and canker that pure heart; and a strong hand, and practised in the works of evil, when the unguarded moment had been duly chosen, sped it with sure aim to the mark, to rankle there, and blight the very soul of confidence.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was not until a late hour, late at least for those primitive days, that Edward Hale awoke on the morning following the revels of the first of May; and when he did awake it was with a fevered frame and an aching head. Some one or other, I forget who, has said that a man ought to get drunk every now and then for the sake of the serious thoughts, the earnest promises of reformation, and the very thorough process of remorse and repentance which he goes through on the morning succeeding to a hard debauch. Without entering into the morality of this question at all, or inquiring whether, even if the salutary effects be not overstated, a man *ought* to do ill that good may come of it, it cannot be disputed that the frame of mind in which a man is left on the subsidence of that violent excitement, conjoined with the discomfort of the body, is such as to lead him naturally to grave and serious reflection.

And so it was, in this instance, with the young baronet. He was not by nature at all disinclined to calm, and, at times, almost solemn meditation; although the character of his reveries was for the most part rather imaginative and romantic than contemplative or moral. Although gay and joyous, and endowed largely with those high spirits which flow from youth and health, unchecked by present ills, or presages of future sorrow, he was rather of a poetical temperament, and that leads oftentimes to a reflective mood.

This morning in particular, after he had arisen from his bed and dressed himself partially, he sent away his valet, and began to ponder seriously on the occurrences of the past day. And it was not long before he became aware, that those occurrences, although in themselves neither very striking nor uncommon, had given rise to feel ings in his own bosom, to which he could revert without pain and something near akin to remorse.

As he sat in his armed chair, partially leaning on the sill of the open window, looking over the green meadow whereon still stood the tall May−pole, although the giddy crowd who had made all the space around it so gay on the preceding morning were now dispersed about their ordinary avocations, his thoughts reverted instantly to the beautiful queen of the May. At this calm season of the day, ere the sun had yet heated the earth, while the air came in fresh and dewy from the cool woods and grassy meadows, and fanned his brow with its fresh breath, the feverish excitements and hot passions of the past day seemed out of place, unhallowed, and distasteful. Better things were at work within him; better thoughts were aroused by the comparison involuntarily drawn between that innocent and tranquil day−break, and the wild revel of the past night.

He was a different man this morning, and the pictures which his mind conjured up before him of beautiful Rose Castleton, were not such as he had seen through the medium of glowing Burgundy. He thought not of her now, with her voluptuous figure swaying and bending in the dance, its every wavy line instinct with hidden passion; of her white bosom, all too much exposed by the disordered kerchief, glowing and throbbing in soft tumult; of her eyes now beaming bright with gratified ambibition, now swelling, swimming, languishing in amorous dimness; of her sweet pouting lips; her balmy breath fluttering and panting between surprise and half offended modesty; of her honeyed kiss; of her rare form struggling in his embrace, and yet half willing to be detained, as he snatched the kiss from her lips, and the rose−bud from her bosom; of the low, silvery, faltering voice in which she promised to meet him the next evening in the Monk's coppice! No! these were not the pictures which his fancy this morning set be fore him. Far, far from it. He saw her weeping, disconsolate and pensive at her spinning wheel, in some such touching attitude as that wherein the great German painter has given a form and body to the rare spiritual Margaret of the great German poet. He saw her with every vestige of color vanished from her wan cheek every spark quenched in her bright eye all the soft roundness of her lovely form wasted away and lost. He saw her kneeling at the village shrine with clasped hands and streaming eyes, while the sternfiend remorse was whispering in her ear to despair and die. He saw her prostrate at her gray−headed father's feet, clasping his knees and supplicating him to pardon his lost child—he saw the clenched hand and the knitted brow, and the indignant eye of the relentless father, driving forth the dishonored girl, who had brought shame on his gray hairs—he saw the rude route of the village, the coarse brutal rabble hooting *the harlot* through the long sunny street, and hallooing for the beadle and the ducking stool! He saw her by the still pool in the dark woodland, where the stream has no ripple on its surface, and the black waters tell of its unusual depth, kneeling and striving vainly to syllable a prayer for mercy before that awful plunge which should remove her, and forever

from the cold sneers of the ruthless world! He saw her drawn out by the shuddering hands of superstitious rustics, cold, wan dishevelled, dead—dead, by her own rash act—her own! say rather *his! his* whose false love had driven her to the brink of that abyss whose bottom is perdition!

All this he saw, or seemed to see, in the delineations of his vivid fancy; he saw and shuddered at the strength of his own imaginings. "And shall I," he said to himself, half aloud, "shall I, for the poor gratification of a foul sensual passion, shall I do this thing? For a few hours, or a few days of fierce and fiery pleasure, shall I pollute so fair a temple, a temple reared by the hands of our common God and Father, to be the dwelling of as fair a spirit? shall I, for any temporal delight, perhaps consign her to eternal ruin? God forbid? God forbid!" and he stood up in the intensity of his feelings, for he had worked himself up to a state of considerable excitement, and walked for several minutes to and fro the room, strengthening his good resolves at every turn, and manning the fortress of his heart against the assaults of the Evil One, till he at last satisfied himself that he was again master of himself, that he could see and converse with the country beauty, without incurring any danger, or feeling any undue admiration of her charms; and finally he determined that with a magnanimity, like that of Scipio, he would at once bring about her marriage with young Hunter, and give her the lease of the home farm for a dowry. This honorable resolution taken, well pleased with himself, conscious of honorable feelings, and proud of his own integrity, superior to its first very grave temptation, he sat down once again to reflect on the perfections of his legitimate lady love, and anticipate in imagination his future marriage with the charming Lady Fanny.

In truth, he loved her very dearly; as dearly, perhaps, and devotedly as any very young man untried in the world, unschooled by suffering, und undisciplined by sorrow, can love a woman. For it is not in very early youth that are born those deep, interminable, everlasting passions, which seem to become coexistent with the soul, and, as it were, part and parcel of it. Nor is it from the lap of happiness and luxury and joy, that springs the pure strong love that mocks at time and space, and defies death itself to limit or affect its infinite duration. No! I believe few men have ever loved with that intensity which is the very essence of the only love that is worthy to be called love, until they have known what it is to want that love, and find it not— until they have experienced real grief and suffering, and deep sorrow—until they have looked in vain to the cold world for sympa thy and affection, and learned what it is to lack them; and then—then, when they have found the one, true, faithful heart wherewith to share their joys—wherefrom to seek consolation in their sorrows—then, then they love indeed! and their love is well worth the winning!

But for one whose whole life had been but one scene of success and pleasure, who had scarce known, as yet, the meaning of the word sorrow, so little had any touch of it come near to him, Edward Hale did truly and sincerely love Frances Asterly. It was not her beauty, only, nor her sweet manners that had won him; but her heart, her mind—the purity and truthfulness of the one, the kind, affectionate and cordial nature of the other! And when a man sets his love on the qualities of the intellect and of the heart—the qualities that are immortal and endure forever in never fading and undying glory—and not upon the qualities of the poor body, that speedily are but as grass cut down and cast into the oven— small risk is there of his loving unworthily, or of his changing easily! For, in a word, so to love is a proof of character, higher than ordinary men possess, in the lover, and a guarantee for the existence of unusual qualifications in the object beloved.

And, in both points, this was true of the present case; for Sir Edward Hale was, beyond doubt, a person of qualifications and mental character far above the standard average of men. It might be doubtful, hitherto, whether that character would turn out powerful for good or for evil in the end—whether those qualifications would serve to adorn and decorate a virtuous and honorable life, or to lend a false and meteoric splendor to an irregular and disorderly career; but there could be no doubt that, whichever way the wheel of his destinies should turn, in that course he would be found conspicuous and above his fellows, either in virtue or in vice.

And, perhaps, at this very time, the inward struggle was in progress, which should decide whether his better or worse genius would prevail; whether his course through this world should be like that of a calm and abundant river, bounteous, benevolent and fertilizing, and flowing gently, after a long and pleasant journey, through a fair country, into the boundless sea; or, like that of the sublime mountain torrent, leaping in foam and fury, full of romance and sounding fame, and dazzling to the eye, and stunning to the cool ear of reason, but carrying destruction on its way, and leaving devastation in its rear, and plunging, at the last, headlong down some precipitous abyss, among groans and cries, and shudderings of horror, to be swallowed up in the nether gloom.

If it were so, thus far, at least, the better spirit had prevailed; and, as he finished dressing himself, which he did

unassisted by his valet, his heart was more at ease, and he was in truth both a happier and a better man than he had been on the previous morning; and it was with a gay and joyous exterior, covering a self−satisfied and tranquil confidence in his own good intentions, that he descended the grand staircase to join his companions in the breakfast parlor.

Some short time, however, before he was ready to go down, he was not a little surprised to hear the sound of voices on the terrace, below his windows; the rather as he knew of old that St. Maur was habitually a late riser—rarely displaying the glories of his well decorated person to profane and vulgar eyes, until high noon—and he had no reason for suspecting that the gay captain was more matutinal than his friend. He looked out of the window, therefore, wondering who these could be that were astir already; and yet, more to his surprise, he found that the very men whom he would almost have sworn had not yet turned themselves over to take their second nap, were walking to and fro upon the terrace, pausing every now and then, and talking earnestly in a low voice, as if they were unwilling that their words should be overheard.

This Hale did not observe at the time, but afterward events occurred which often led him to reflect on various things which passed that morning; and then he recollected this, and recollected, moreover, that when they first saw him leaning out of the window looking at them, there was a sort of consciousness, if not embarrassment about St. Maur's air and manner, indicating that he was, in some sort, the subject of their discourse.

He did notice, however, and not without surprise, that they were both fully dressed their periwigs arranged and powdered with careful nicety, and the whole of their attire showing, by its scrupulous precision that they must have been on foot some hours, and that their toilets had been performed not negligently nor in haste.

Hale waited for a moment without speaking, until they came directly under his windows, when he dropped a rose−bud which chanced to be lying on the table— the same which he had snatched from the bosom of Rose Castleton in the evening— so that it fell immediately in front of St. Maur.

He stooped to pick it up from the broad flag−stones that paved the terrace, and then cried, as he raised his eyes to the window before seeing who it was—

"By George! a fair challenge, be you who you may, sweet—Ah! you rogue you rogue, Ned! so it is you, is it? I thought it had been some fair dame or damsel of whom my *beaux yeux* had made a conquest. This is a pretty disappoint ment! Your ugly phiz, in lieu of black eyes and cherry cheeks, and I know no what beside! The devil take you, Ned the devil take you!"

"Many thanks to you," replied Hale laughing, "for the warmth of your morning salutation, which I will not return. I have to crave your pardon, Captain Spencer, for playing such a sluggard part, as host, who ought to have been on foot to receive my guest. But it seems the mulled` Burgundy made me a more sleepy night cap than it did for you!"

"You forget, you forget," answered Spencer, "that St. Maur and I did not double the said night−cap quite so often as you did; and it sat in consequence less heavily on us—but pray do n't think of apologizing, we have been amusing ourselves delightfully here this fine clear morning, looking about your magnificent old place."

"Thank you for saying so," returned Hale, "but I fear you could have found little to amuse you; but I will dress myself in haste, and come down to you—will you be so kind in the mean time as to call for chocolate, and make yourselves quite at home? After breakfast we will see what we can do to kill the day. It is not a good time of the year for country sports, unless any of you are fishermen; there are fine trout in the river. But I fancy Mark can find us a heron or two, and I have a few cast of fine hawks, if you like to see a flight; coursing and hunting are of course out of the question; but I can give you some capital rabbit shooting in the fern of the upper deer−park."

"Oh! I have no doubt we shall do very well; but make haste, make haste, what we desire most is your company," said the captain, but almost in the same breath, he added in a half whisper to St. Maur, "and as our desire will be gratified in a few moments, we must talk out our talk at once. What were you saying—oh, yes! about Harbottle—no, no! that will never do—he is not at all to be trusted in delicate matters like these. No, no! leave it to me, and my life on it, I arrange every thing to your wishes. But after all I cannot guess, for my soul, why you are so wild to marry this penniless girl. It is true, I confess, that she is devilish handsome, and sprightly looking also; if she were some fellow's wife now, I could understand it; but to marry her—to marry her! Pshaw, pshaw! it is mere boy's play. If I were you I would let Hale marry her, nay, help him to her, and then take her from him; by the Lord, there is a great game to be played there."

"Hold, Spencer, hold!" St. Maur interrupted him, "you forget that you are talk ing of a girl whom I seriously

intend to make my wife."

"Indeed I do not, my good fellow; I only wish to give you all the good advice I can beforehand; after she is your wife I shall remember it, you may be sure—unless indeed I should take a fancy to her myself— there is no saying what may happen, when men marry handsome wives; a friend's wife now is twice as good as an acquaintance's, and an acquaintance's as a stranger's!"

"By heavens! Spencer, you are incorrigible; I should be hurt and angry with you, if I did not know that it is only your wild way of talking, and that you would not *do* the things you talk about to win the world!"

"Oh no," said Spencer, with a dubious smile, "not at all, not at all! only, as there is no saying what may happen, and as I hate treachery as I do the devil or the parson; only don't say, if any thing should turn up, that I did not give you fair warning, Harry."

St. Maur looked at him for a minute or two steadily, as if to see whether he was in earnest, and then said, bursting into a light laugh—

"You are a sad fellow, but I am not afraid of you. Well, go on, what is the whole of your scheme? let us be perfect in it."

"Why it seems that this old she devil has arranged all the preliminaries with pretty Fan already. She is to be made to believe Hale a perfect devil of licentiousness, and so to break off the match with him; when you will have it all your own way; for there was never a man yet, who, backed by father and mother, could not win any girl's love at any time, when her fancy is disengaged, unless he is a greater fool than I take you to be. Then she will be piqued and her vanity wounded in this case, which will make it easier yet for you; and if, as you say, she does dislike you now, that does not hurt your chance a straw's value; for my own part, when I want to win a woman, next to her loving me beforehand, I would choose to have her *hate me!* Nothing is so difficult to deal with as indifference— for they always go by contraries and extremes— women do, I mean Harry—and so if they begin by hating you, and thinking you a fiend of darkness, they are pretty sure to adore you in six weeks, and discover that you are an angel of light."

"Yes, yes! that is all very fine—one of your wiredrawn theories that come to nothing! However I do not doubt but I can win her easily enough if we can set her against Hale."

"Well, that is easily done enough, I am sure. Why here is luck playing into our very hand. The old woman has laid the foundation of distrust in her daughter's heart already; and here is this young baby half wild now after this country girl—who by the way is pretty enough to make a wiser man wild. My only fear was that she would be too willing. But I have taken care of that—she will not meet him to−night, and that will whet his appetite; then you must play your part well—extol her beauty, feed his passion as much as you can; and I will sneer at him—we will bet high on his success, you for and I against it! I saw at a glimpse that game−keeper was a rogue, and I have bought him; he will help us through any thing. Then I have sent for my lieutenant and a press gang to be here to−morrow, and we will screw him up to−night to sign an order to have Hunter pressed. It is a devil of a stretch I know; but we who serve King Jamie to the utmost, know how to stretch a commission without cracking it; and we will have him carry off the girl, and so arrange things that it shall all come out directly; and so he will be disgraced in the eyes of all good people, and dished with lady Fan."

"Yes, that will do, if we can accomplish it."

"If, if!—to the devil with your ifs!—I tell you it *is* half accomplished now. I should not at all wonder, if he have half repented of his wicked wishes this fine morning, now that he is maudlin—your maudlin state is a great virtue−breeder! But I have laid a trap for him that will set his tinder in a blaze presently. Do you but play your part well, and talk all day of her charms, and try to make him jealous of that fool Harbottle, who is I think smitten a little with the wench already—get him to show that if you can—and now, do not forget to write to Delaval, as I told you, expressing your surprise at finding Hale, as he had hinted to you, such a wild rake and jolly fellow. Invent, invent!—describe his harems and his orgies! Draw, draw upon imagination, or if that fail you, look to the Arabian Nights! But hark you, all in your proper character—reckless and rash—no sermonizing, or you will spoil all. Do you understand?"

"Yes, to be sure; it will be shown—"

"To her cousin, Lady Serena Fortescue who will tell her so, that she shall never doubt the channel. I, too, will write to Davenant, in a quite different strain, but to the same effect. I only wish I could have got him to commit some outrage or indecency before that puritanical old beast and idiot, Rochefort; that would have set *him* talking."

At this moment Sir Edward appeared coming down the steps from the front door to join them; and at the same time Eversly passed them going to meet his master, with a beautiful black greyhound bitch following at his heel, and a large bunch of violets in his hand.

"Ha! Master Keeper," exclaimed Spencer, as the man went by; "what's in the wind now?" and he spoke loud, on purpose that Hale might hear him; and then, as Eversly turned round to answer him, he went on—"By George! what a posy thou hast got there! Here, give it to me, man, give it to me, and take this guinea in exchange, for I am mortal fond of posies."

"Excuse me, Captain Spencer," said the fellow, grinning and pocketing the guinea which the sailor flung to him; "excuse me, for I would give it willingly if it was mine, which it is not; it is a present I am carrying to master."

"What's all this? what's all this?" said the young Lord of the Manor, laughing "Why don't you give Captain Spencer the flowers, Mark?"

"Nay, nay, Sir Edward, she that gave them to me desired me to put them in your own hand, and by the same token she sent a message, too."

"*She? she!*" exclaimed St. Maur; "Sponcer, I'll bet you a rouleau I can put a name to the *she!*"

"Done! done!" replied the captain; "done, that you cannot put the *right* one. Whisper it now to me, and we will leave it to his honor afterward."

"Well, then, I say Rose Castleton," replied St. Maur, in what was meant to pass for a whisper, although it reached Edward's ears as plainly as if it had been uttered in a shout.

"I bide my bet," said Spencer, in the same sort of whisper; "I shall win it, too; that girl is not to be won so easily—*he* will never win her! But come," he added, now speaking in his natural tones, "come; Mercury, it seems, will not deliver his message in the presence of the assembled gods, but keeps it for the private ear of Jove. Let us leave them"— and they moved off a little way, out of earshot, although they watched every movement of the parties.

They saw the hot blood mount crimson to the fair brow of the young man as he received the nosegay and the message; but it was evident that his face reddened not with anger, for his eye sparkled and there was a smile upon his lip, as he asked several questions, to all of which he got prompt answers from the keeper, who had been primed already for his part by the wily plotters, and now played it to perfection.

The conference did not last above five minutes, when Hale turned away, saying—

"Be in the way, keeper—be in the way, after breakfast; for we will either shoot, or see those new merlins fly. Canst find us a heron−shaw this fine morning?"

"I'll warrant you, Sir Edward?"

"Well, we will see anon. Now let us go to breakfast, gentlemen. I think a broiled turkey's gizzard will suit my stomach to a turn this morning, for, to speak truth, I do feel a little squeamish after the Burgundy. But where is Harbottle? has nobody seen Harbottle? Run, Mark, and send some one to call Mr. Harbottle to breakfast."

"But in the mean time, baronet," said Spencer, "touching this bouquet, of which I see you think so well that you are wearing it next to your heart; will you decide our bet, upon your honor?"

"Is it correct to do so, Captain, when it concerns a woman?"

"No, if it be a lady—yes! if a country girl, Sir Edward."

"I believe you are in the right; the rather that she seems to me rather a light o' love. How stands your bet?"

"St. Maur bets that it was Rose Castleton sent you the violets. I hold the opposite."

"St. Maur has won, captain; it *was* she!"

"There, Spencer, there," cried the young lord, triumphantly, "unbuckle, sailor−man, unbuckle your fat bags; out with the rouleau."

Spencer pulled out his purse, and with apparent reluctance handed to him the sum which he had lost, saying, as he did so,

"I must look out for Percy Harbottle, now—for you dare not stand the other bet, St. Maur."

"What other bet? what other bet, Captain Spencer?" answered Lord Henry with well feigned eagerness, and a little show of anger. "I do not like such remarks as these! I stand any bet, that any man dare stand, at least if I see a possibility of winning it. What bet is it you mean?"

"That he wins her," answered Spencer, "that he wins the girl in any reasonable time; you dare not bet that, St. Maur; but it does not come within your category—there is *no* possibility of your winning it."

"I will, though—I *will!*" exclaimed St. Maur; "I will bet you a cool thousand that he has her living with him as his mistress in a fortnight."

"A cool thousand! done! I shall win that," said the captain, confidently.

They had been all walking together toward the house, while this conversation, if conversation it can be called, was going forward; but now Sir Edward stopped short, piqued not a little at the sort of undervaluing way in which Spencer spoke of his chances with the girl, and said, trying to laugh, but evidently a little mortified—

"And why do you think so, Captain Spencer? Have you so vast an idea of the girl's virtue?"

"Why, I had rather you would pardon me. I was in the wrong to speak as I did; I would rather you should ask me no more."

"No, no! speak out. You have said too much, or too little. I insist on it, that you let us have the whole. Do you think her impregnable?"

"Oh dear, no! Far from it. She is willing enough, any one can see. But you will excuse me, Sir Edward, I have some experience in these matters, and I do not think you are the man."

"Who then? yourself, perhaps, captain?" replied Hale, still more piqued by his answer, although perfectly good humored.

"Oh, no! not myself, upon my word! though I should like very well to have the wench in London for a month or so, for she is a devilish handsome woman, that is certain; and her slim, rounded figure would show admirably well in a mazarine blue riding−dress of the last mode, slashed with gold colored brocade. By heaven! I think I can see her now, reining that strawberry roan Spanish jennet of mine through the Parks. Heavens! St. Maur, how she would catch men's eyes. It would be a year's renown to return to London as her protector. But I beg your pardon, Sir Edward, for wandering from your question— no! I assure you, on my honor, that I had not myself in mind at all, when I spoke. No! I think Percy Harbottle a likelier man. I saw her look at him out of the corners of those large languishing eyes of hers, two or three times while you were dancing with her."

"Perhaps you would like, captain," replied Hale, assuming a tranquillity which he did not feel, "perhaps you would like to bet that she will be Harbottle's mistress in a week, and *not* mine, for I intend to try all means to make her mine."

"Of course you do," said St. Maur; "nobody doubted that—nobody, at least, who knows you. With the encouragement you have had, you would be a precious ninny if you did not. Of course you will try, and succeed, too. I'll be sworn of it."

"I cannot bet that she *will* be Harbottle's mistress; for I don't know, at all, that he is thinking about her. I *would* bet—but no, no! baronet," he interrupted himself, "I am your guest, and I don't wish to win your money. Besides, it is my jesting that has put you up to the notion. It would not be fair."

"To the notion of what?" asked Hale, very quickly, "put me up to the notion of what?"

"Of courting this girl, to be sure," answered Spencer. "But let us say no more about it. Come, let us go to breakfast."

"You forget that I told you yesterday at Barnsley that my eye was upon her—you forget—"

"Yes, to be sure he does," interrupted St. Maur, "or rather he pretends to forget, to get off betting. He knows as well as we do that you *will* win her."

"I know nothing of the sort! I know that he will not."

"Once again, will you bet?" said Sir Edward, who was growing almost angry.

"If you insist upon it, yes."

"I say, then, that I will have her openly as my mistress within one week from this day."

"I understand you perfectly, and take the converse. For how much?"

"For any thing you please, from one to five thousand."

"Oh! one—one is enough; for one thousand be it. It is a bet!"

"Very well, there is an end of that— then let us go to breakfast; and here comes Percy Harbottle," and he took several quick steps forward in advance of the rest, to greet him. As he did so Spencer fell back to St. Maur a pace or two, and whispered in his ear—

"You stand my loss to him, if I should lose the bet; as it is most likely that I shall."

"Yes, yes! I understand it so," said the other, "but come on quickly, or he will see us whispering together, and suspect something."

And overtaking him, they all walked on together, and entered the breakfast room, joking and laughing merrily.

[1] Retsch's Outline Illustrations of Goethe's Faust.

CHAPTER IX.

Breakfast passed joyously and gaily, no more allusions were made to the bets, Spencer carefully avoiding the subject, as if he thought that he might give offence by continuing it; but St. Maur and Harbottle continued to expatiate upon the charms of Rose Castleton, the felicity of the man who should have the luck to gain her, and the certainty of its giving him the greatest eclat of any one in London, to produce her in the parks, or at the theatre, as a part of his menage.

Breakfast was in those days, as I have said before, a far more solid affair than it is with us; the draughts, which were quaffed at it were not mere tea and coffee, but humming ale and generous wines; and with the thirst upon them that is the sure successor of a last night's debauch, and with their somewhat wild and boyish ha bits, all drank somewhat largely; not, of course, to excess at all, or even to exhilaration, but enough to enliven the blood, and open something of the reserve which bars men's hearts at times, till they are thawed by some such genial application.

And I am sorry to say that between the slight stimulus of the wine, and the spur of the witty and licentious conversation that was going on around him, Sir Edward soon lost the recollection of the better feelings which had that morning possessed him; and now completely under the empire of false pride, and vanity, and fear of mockery, and goaded by the burning spirit of rivalry, felt as completely and as resolutely bent on ruining pretty Rose Castleton, as a few hours before he had been determined to give her to another.

As soon as breakfast was over, while St. Maur and Spencer excused themselves for the purpose of writing a few letters, Edward with Percy Harbottle walked round the grounds, and visited the stalls, and the kennels, and the mews of the falcons; and finally set to amusing themselves by making the grooms ride the hunters in succession backward and forward over a high leaping bar.

While thus employed they were joined by the others, and the question was put, how the day was to be spent, until dinner time.

"Oh! confound dinner!" replied Spencer; "I hate your regular two o'clock dinner, it so thoroughly breaks up the day. Let us go out and hawk or shoot, if Sir Edward likes my plan, all day; taking some ale and cold meat with us, and come home to a good early supper, and we will have another bout at the Burgundy. What say you, worthy host of mine?"

"That is a bright thought, and a right good plan," answered Hale. "I am like you; I hate your ceremonious dinner so early in the day, and I love your extemporaneous sylvan meal on the green turf, under the shady trees, or beside some clear and bubbling runnel."

"Yes," answered St. Maur, "or in some jolly farmer's house, with his pretty daughter to pour out the ale, and kiss you behind the door, when the father is looking the other way."

A loud laugh followed this characteristic speech; and then they began to inquire what should be the order of the day, and it was speedily decided that they would shoot rabbits in the park, in preference to hawking in the meadows, or fishing in the stream— and Eversly being called in to name a farm−house situated conveniently for taking the mid−day meal, suggested, not altogether unexpectedly to Edward Hale, nor without having pocketed beforehand a handsome fee for his advice, suggested farmer Castleton's.

"Ha! ha! Then we shall see the pretty Rose again—hey, Ned?" said St. Maur.

"And Percy Harbottle will have a chance of entering the lists, if he will," said Spencer.

"No, no!" replied Harbottle, "every lad to his own lass. I stick to my promise; he gave me a good chance with a pretty girl yesterday, and hang me if I cross him to−day."

In a few moments they were all equipped, and ready for the sport, accompanied by servants with hunting−poles to beat the bushes, and spaniels to start the game, and boys with spare ammunition, and all means and appliances for a blithe day's sport.

Taking their way across the trout stream, and through the dense oak grove, they crossed the tall castle hill, and going out by a postern in the brick wall of the park, entered a deep and hollow road, between high banks of sand, crested on either hand by the walls of the home park and the deer park—and overshadowed by the rich foliage of the huge oaks, which almost crossed their branches overhead, and made the lane at noonday almost as dark as

midnight. A second postern, at a short distance up the lane, gave access to the deer−park—a wild tract of barren broken land, with many gulleys and ravines, each watered by its gushing streamlet, each clothed with feathery brushwood and tall fern, among which the gray burrowers, they came in pursuit of, squatted by hundreds.

At a short distance from the double portions, they caught a glimpse, as they crossed the road, of a large rambling brick farm−house, with tall fantastic pinnacles, and the twisted chimneys of the Elizabethan style, peering from out the shade of the dark oaks, and abutting on the deer−park wall.

"There is the home farm," said the keeper—"old Castleton's, you know, Sir Edward; I sent the boys up with the wine, and word we would be there at two hours past noon; and he says, if you please, Sir Edward, he will be very blithe to see you, and they will have the goose pie ready."

"A capital thing, too, is a good goose pie," said Hale, "and we will find appetites conformable, I'll warrant it. Now, give me my gun, for here we are upon the ground, and so let loose the spaniels. Are they steady, Mark?"

"No steadier in England, your honor," answered the keeper, "than the two black King Charles'! they are worth fifty guineas any day, of any gentleman's gold! I'll be judged by these gentlemen if they be not—although I say it who should not, seeing that it was I who broke them."

Then, without more ado, they betook themselves to their sport; and here I might easily describe the merry pastime, which I love; expatiate on the sagacity and discipline of the well trained dogs, the wiles and exertions of the game, the skill and woodcraft of the sportsmen, the lovely woodland scenery, the free fresh air, and all the pleasant sights and cheery sounds which give half their charm to the manly and exhilarating sports of the field. But it would all too long detain us from matters of more stirring interest; and, moreover, such things are far more exciting in reality than in description, and *will* pall in the telling.

Suffice it that the game was abundant, the day prosperous, the young marksmen in good cue; the dogs behaved well, the shooting was extremely good, and the sport undeniable, for above a hundred rabbits had been bagged by the three guns before the hour indicated for their rustic dinner was announced, by the long keen blast of a bugle, strongly and scientifically winded, from the porch of the neighboring farm−house.

"There goes old Castleton," cried Hale, "he was the huntsman to my father's pack, many years since! That says that the goose pie is ready."

Leaving the brakes wherein they had been shooting, a short walk brought them to the well stocked and hospitable farm−house, where blunt old fashioned English hospitality received them, with its cheery and unceremonious welcome. The goose pie was pronounced excellent, and such justice done to it as showed that the praise was sincere; the home−brewed ale as clear as amber, as mild as milk, and almost as strong as brandy, was duly honored; and, above all, as Edward expected, lovely Rose Castleton was there—looking, he thought, even lovelier than before, in her tight fitting russet jacket, and short blue petticoat, with her beautiful round arms bare nearly to the shoulder, and her trim shapely ankles, displayed by her brief draperies.

There was, however, something in Rose's manner that Hale did not understand; she would not talk much to him, nor jest at all; yet many a stolen glance met his—now dwelling boldly, now as coquettishly averted; still he could not exactly make it out, until, as her father turned aside to speak to St. Maur, she cast her eye quickly toward the old man, and laid her finger on her lips.

Frank Hunter, with the wonted indiscretion of men and lovers, under such circumstances, had been to see her that morning; and, like a fool as he was, instead of coaxing, had reproached and harrassed her; and, concluding by calling for her father's interposition, had procured her a sound scolding, in set terms, for her flirtiness and vanity, in fancying that a gentleman like Sir Edward would demean himself so much as to look at her.

This, very naturally, excited her ire; and, as she knew right well that Sir Edward was not only marvellously well inclined to look at her, but to accept very thankfully any favors that she would grant him, she felt more than half disposed to prove to her discarded swain how much he and her father were mistaken, by doing things that yesterday she would have been ashamed to think of.

In truth, between the fascinations of the young lord of the manor, the sulky and unflattering resentment of her lover, and the most injudicious violence of her father, who really had not the least suspicion that Hale was thinking about his daughter, and fancied that it was merely an absurd whim of the girl's, to tease Frank Hunter—in truth, Rose Castleton was in dread peril of going irretrievably astray.

Nothing of any moment passed; nor could Sir Edward find any opportunity of speaking to the poor girl alone until when the dinner was finished, and they were returning to their sports; after they had all quitted the house

with the old farmer, he made a plea of having left his shot pouch, and ran back himself, before any one could anticipate him, to fetch it. He found, as he expected, Rose Castleton alone, looking out of the window after them. As he entered the garden gate she looked round, and seeing the shot bag, guessed, with a woman's rapid wit, what it meant—caught it up, and stepped out into the porch to meet him.

There were two servant girls removing the dinner things in the hall, and, as if accidentally, she pulled the heavy door to after her. The porch was deep and projecting, and, as Hale entered it, he cast a quick glance round to see if he was observed, but all was safe!

The very air of Rose, her heightened color, the quickened motion of her bosom, and the trembling of her small hand, showed that she was not all unconscious.

"I thank you, Rose," he said quite aloud, in order to be overheard; "that is just what I came back for."

But, with the words, he caught her round the waist with both his arms, and pressed her soft and panting bosom to his own— took one long kiss from her unreluctant lips, and whispered, "You will come, Rose, you will come, dearest Rose, to−night?"

"Be sure I will," she replied—"if they will let me—if I can slip away; but—but," she added, with an arch smile, "you must promise that you will not harm me."

Before he could reply, however, the old man's step was heard without; and putting her fingers up to her rosy lips, and blowing him a kiss, she vanished. The door clapped heavily, and, making as if it had closed on his own exit, Edward walked out with the pouch in his hand, spoke a few words to the old man, and hurried on to join his comrades.

They returned to their sport,—but the mind of Edward was too much engrossed by other matters; his heart beat thick and fast—his hand was unsteady—he missed four or five fair shots in succession; and his friends laughed at him; but he bore all their jeering in good part, and laughed, in his turn, at them, as he told them that "He laughed the loudest who laughed last!" "Look out," he added, "look out for your thousand, captain!"

"Ha! is it so?" said Spencer, "has she made an appointment?"

"For nine o'clock to−night!"

"Hurrah!" cried St. Maur. "Hurrah! we shall do the captain—I knew we should. Halloa! there goes a rabbit, right from between my legs!" and he took a quick sight and fired.

"Missed him, by Jove!" said Hale, and firing himself, he turned the rabbit over; and the little spaniel, not much bigger itself than the beast it presumed to carry, retrieved it very cleverly.

Their shooting was continued until the shades of evening had begun fairly to set in; and then, with their shooting ponies fairly laden with the quantity of game they had shot, their dogs almost tired out, and themselves in the highest possible spirits, they returned homeward to supper.

Just as they came in sight of the house, the first bell was ringing out clearly and merrily, so that there was little time to spare before the social meal should be set on the board—and this little Captain Spencer, determined that Edward should have no more time for quiet consideration, contrived to make still less, by detaining him some minutes on the steps of the hall door, in frivolous conversation.

Then starting suddenly, as if he had forgotten himself, he said—"Upon my word! we shall scarce have five minutes to make our ablutions. Now, pray, lose no time, my dear Sir Edward, for I am perilous hungry."

"Not I, faith," answered the baronet, running up stairs in high glee—"I will be with you in five minutes."

Then Spencer turned round, with a quiet smile, to St. Maur, and said—

"The game is won!—that is to say, if you have not made any blunder in your letter to Delaval. I wish I had found time to see it before you sent it off. Mine to Davenant was a master−piece! Not a word that could be contradicted; yet not a word that might not be construed into any thing."

"I think, for my part, that the game is lost! Here is this silly wench going to meet him quietly to−night. He wins her almost without wooing—wearies of her as soon as she is won—and there 's an end of the whole thing, and no one the wiser."

"That is all you know about it! and, true enough, that is all that would come of it, if there were no head wiser than your own to arrange it."

"How is it, then? How—"

"Never you mind. It is all well, that is enough for you. Go away now, and prepare yourself for supper."

It was not twenty minutes before to the light−hearted sports of the day the excitement of the lighted hall

succeeded—the sumptuous supper—the rich and genial wines—the frolic mirth—the graceful revelry— the voluptuous song—the licentious boasting. Now there was nothing of the gross and low debauchery which had rendered the orgies of the past night disgusting to every refined or gentle spirit; now there was nothing coarse or boisterous or obscene; wine flowed, it is true, liberally, but not to excess; now there was present every thing that could excite and stimulate, and nothing that could jar upon or disgust the senses.

So passed the evening, until the hour drew nigh for the host's appointment, and then, easily excused, Sir Edward stole away to the rendezvous in the low Monk's Coppice.

The setting moon shed her long rays of silvery light over the velvet greensward, and the huge shadows of the giant oaks slept peacefully amid the sheeny radiance; there was not a breath of air to stir even the highest sprays; the fleecy clouds hung motionless in the depths of the unfathomed air; there was not a sound abroad, but the gurgling of the distant trout stream, brought nearer, as it seemed, by the absence of all other sounds; the deer were couched among the tall fern, in dreamless slumbers; the only living object that met the eye of the young baronet, as he glided like a guilty thing through his rich demesne, was a large white owl sweeping with its great wings along the wood−side, noiseless and wary as himself, and like himself in pursuit of innocent prey.

All abroad was content, and peace, and tranquillity, but in his heart was the hell of fierce passions, unchained and for the time indomitable; the calmness of the scene was unregarded; or, if regarded, was considered only as convenient to his purpose; not as inculcating a lesson, or contrasting with the turbulence and tumult that he felt within.

That night, although they waited for him, and revelled late, his friends saw nothing of their host; and when, two hours past midnight, they adjourned, they were informed by the house−steward that Sir Edward, not being well at ease, had been a−bed these four hours.

"I told you so," whispered Spencer, "I told you he would not get her very easily. Good night! good night! to−morrow will play out the game."

The morrow came, and when the party were assembled at the breakfast table, the brow of Edward Hale was so dark and moody, that from this alone it was evident he must have been disappointed; but this it did not suit his guests to perceive, and as soon as he entered the apartment, St. Maur, who was awaiting him, cried out, with a merry laugh—

"Why this is the very insolence of conquest, Ned. They tell me that you were abed at ten o'clock; was not the lovely Rose worth one hour's attention?"

"Tush!" answered the young baronet, sharply; "damnation on it! she did not come at all. Instead of Rose, I met that great brute, Mark Eversly, at the place, to tell me she was watched, and could not get out to meet me. And now, to wind up the whole, her old dotard of a father has been here, as soon as it was light this morning, with Frank Hunter, to ask my sanction for her marriage, on the day after to−morrow. He did not directly tell me so, but it is quite clear that she had told him every thing, for he talked about a love−quarrel with her betrothed husband, and her flightiness, and coquetting with some other man to punish him! And how sorry she was now, and how much she repented of her misconduct, and how willing Frank was to forgive her, and how anxious he was himself to marry her at once to the man she loved, lest scandal, and perhaps worse should come of it."

"Pshaw! pshaw! that is the merest humbug. They have found you out somehow or other, and have been badgering the girl out of her wits. It is as clear as day−light that she loves you, and would rather be your mistress than that bumpkin's wife. Only do not despair, and you shall have her yet."

"No, no!" replied Hale bitterly, "no— St. Maur—no! it is impossible. By all the powers of hell! she is lost to me altogether, and forever; and I—I—by the Lord that lives! I would give half my fortune, half my life to win her."

"Nonsense, man, nonsense," replied St. Maur, "why the deuce should she be lost to you? It will never do to give it up thus. Why Spencer will win our two thousand guineas; I suppose that does not signify to you, who are as rich as Croesus, but it is every thing to me, who have not been a minor eighteen years, with ten thousand pounds per annum to accumulate."

"Why, what the devil would you have me do, man?" answered Sir Edward, angrily; "I tell you I would give ten thousand pounds to win her."

"Then why don't you win her, baronet?" said Spencer, laughing. "I could do it, for a twentieth part of the sum."

"Oh, you mean buy her, I suppose; buy her of the father, or the bridegroom! But you would be very much

mistaken if you were to try that game. You would be pretty sure to get your head broken with a quarter−staff, for your pains."

"Indeed, I mean nothing of the kind," said he; "but I could do it."

"How? how? I will do any thing— any thing in the world to win her."

"You forget, baronet, that I have bet against you; and it is hardly likely that I should help you to win my own money."

"Oh, I have lost the bet; I have lost the bet fairly, for I have consented to her marrying Hunter," replied Edward. "I had given up all hopes of success, and, indeed, had filled up a draft in your name on my goldsmith before I came down stairs; here it is, Captain Spencer. Now we are straight on that score. So you are free to help me now. How would you win her?"

"Why, by a little gentle violence. Carry her off, to be sure," answered Spencer, pocketing the draft.

"More easily said, that, than done!" answered Hale.

"Oh, you are young—you are young," replied the other. "Give me the necessary orders, and I will arrange it all for you, in the twinkling of an eye."

"I will give you any thing you please, captain," answered the baronet, very quickly, "if you will show me how you can do it."

"Well, just sit down at that table. You are a magistrate, are you not?"

"Yes; what of that?"

"Every thing—every thing! Just sit down, and write me an order to take in charge Francis Hunter, as a poacher, or vagabond, or any thing you please, and to put him on board my frigate—and I will do it this very night—if I take him out of his own house."

"But how will you get the force?"

"Never you mind. I have got force nearer than you think for. My frigate lies in the Southampton river, and perhaps my lieutenant and a gang are nearer at hand than she is. Perhaps I brought them hither with a view to some fun for myself; you need not inquire. In these times the king's very good friends, as I am, can do a great many very funny things. Only do you give me the order, and tell me where to catch Master Frank, and he shall find himself to−morrow night under hatches of the good ship Royal Oak, instead of being under a coverlet with a bonny bride. And, if he needs must be married, my boatswain shall be parson, and tie him up to the gunner's daughter. A saucy scoundrel, to interfere thus with his betters."

"That is soon done," said Hale, who was now thoroughly maddened between passion, rivalry, and disappointment, "that is soon done," and with the words he drew an order, signed it, and gave it to Spencer; "and for the rest, there is no difficulty in getting hold of Hunter. He told me himself that he should ride to Alresford this evening, to buy the wedding ring, or some such foolery, and return homeward by the forest road ere midnight; I will show you where you may post your men, and catch him—and what then?"

"Why, then, you shall ride out with me, and show me the spot; and then go on and call to pay your respects on the good Earl of Rochefort; and, if he press you, as it is like he will, stay dinner with him. Then you must let Mark Eversly show St. Maur which is the window of the girl's bed−chamber, and he must have the carriage waiting in some safe place by the park wall, and carry off the girl for you, and the scandal of that will fall on him, not on you; and he has earned so good a reputation for such deeds, that one more or less will make no difference to him; and as for Hunter, I will not post my men until sunset, and when the job is done will return quietly to the Hall, and no one will be a word the wiser, until a three years' cruise is over, and by that time the whole thing will be forgotten."

"Excellent! excellent!" exclaimed Sir Edward. "And as I return from Rochefort's, I will meet St. Maur in the carriage, have a sham quarrel with him, and bring her back to her father's as her rescuer."

"And so secure a two hour's *tête à tête* with her in the first place, in which, of course, you can overcome all her scruples, if she have any, and win her for your mistress under her father's very nose; and that, too, with his everlasting gratitude to you for saving her from this vile profligate. Ah! you are a cunning fellow, Hale; and, before many years, will be as deep a hand as myself, I warrant you."

It needed little time to arrange all their schemes of iniquity, in due form, and with every probability of success; and then, when all was planned, St. Maur and Harbottle set out to fish the stream; while Spencer and the young lord of the manor rode out together, the former, as he gave it out, to carry letters to the post at Barnsley, the latter

to pay his respects to the Earl of Rochefort; but it was a matter of some little surprise to the household that they took no attendants with them, and that they ordered a late supper, saying that they should neither of them be home until near midnight.

CHAPTER X.

Throughout that day every thing went on well for the conspirators; Spencer had reconnoitered the ground thoroughly, as he rode out with his friend in the morn ing; had found his lieutenant with the men, as he expected, at Barnsley; and had given them his instructions so skilfully that he felt well assured no suspicion could in any case fall upon him as the perpetrator of the meditated outrage, until he should himself choose to reveal his agency in the matter.

Meanwhile, Sir Edward Hale had galloped onward, without giving his mind time to cool from the turmoil of fierce passion which was still raging there, to Kingston castle, the seat of the Earl of Rochefort; and there, too, every thing had happened to his liking, for shortly after his arrival a furious thunder−storm arose, and lasted so long that he was pressed, as he desired to to be, to stay for dinner, and no plea was left him for refusing the kindly and oft urged invitation.

Thus passed the day, unmarked by any thing of moment, and night came on untimely for the season, and boisterous, and unpleasant, and in all respects suited to the purposes of the conspirators. Few men were likely to be abroad on such a night, if it were not on urgent business; for it had been a dim gray misty evening since the thunder−storm, with every now and then a violent burst of cold and wintry rain; the wind howled fearfully among the tree−tops, and the chimneys of the manor, and it was withal so dark and black, that long before midnight a man could not have seen his hand at a yard before his face.

This storm had afforded Spencer a fair excuse for dining at the little Inn at Barnsley; while his men went off singly, or in small parties, so as to pass unnoticed, to rendezvous at a well known and conspicuous landmark, the Battle Pillar, as it was called, a large block of gray granite, commemorative of some event long since forgotten, standing by the wayside, on a large waste common, covered with fern and bushes, and interspersed with pools and pits full of water, where they were to be joined by their officers in the course of the night, and receive further orders.

Hale had, however, some difficulty in escaping from the hospitalities of the castle, in consequence of the unusual inclemency of the night; and it was only by alleging the presence of his guests at home, as an insurmountable obstacle to his remaining all night, that he was enabled to avoid the well meant persecutions of the old lord.

After that, he had another struggle to undergo, before he could get away without accepting the escort of half a dozen of the earl's blue−coated serving men, whom it would have very illy suited him to take along with him that night; but finally, when it was nearly ten o'clock, he succeeded in making good his retreat, and began to ride rapidly toward the place appointed.

Eleven o'clock struck from many a village steeple, and quarter elapsed after quarter, and now it was almost on the stroke of twelve, and all things were prepared for action—a carriage, one of the lightest of the ponderous vehicles of that day, with four strong horses harnessed to it, stood in a hollow way close to the postern gate in the park wall, sheltered from observation by the dense shadows of the overhanging trees, ready to bear off Rose to London so soon as she should be seized by the ruffians appointed for that task under the orders of Lord Henry St. Maur. Meantime the gang of sailors, well armed, with bludgeons, pistols, and cutlasses, lay hid in the dark thickets by the side of the Alresford road, with Captain Spencer and his first lieutenant; while guarded by three men, in a low charcoal burner's shed, long since deserted, on the skirts of the forest−land, and scarcely half a mile distant, a light taxed cart, with two swift horses attached to it, tandem−fashion, was in waiting to bear the captured yeoman to his floating prison.

The times had been calculated closely— and all, so far, had gone successfully. Frank Hunter was even now jogging homeward, as the leaders of the press−gang anticipated, with a full purse and happy heart, from the distant market−town; and now Lord Henry, with his ruffians, was actually at his post by the lonely farm, and consulting his repeater ere he should give the word to plant the ladder against the chamber window of the innocent girl, who slept, all unsuspicious and unconscious, the calm, soft sleep of youthful happiness.

Sir Edward Hale, however, was ill at ease and anxious he was too young in evil—he had too much of actual

goodness in his composition—was too unhardeued in the road of sin, not to feel many a twinge of conscience, many a keen compunctious visitation. He, too, was now near the place of action—he had already ridden many miles since leaving the castle, where he had spent the day; and his heart, fearfully agitated, began to turn almost sick within him, as he was now rapidly approaching the point on the great London road whereat, an hour or two later, he was to meet the carriage bearing his destined mistress from her terrified and grieving family.

He had, as I have said already, felt full many a prick of conscience, full many a touch of half repentant sorrow; but still, whenever he made up his mind to turn from the evil of the way in which he was going, as he did many times that night, dread— that false dread which so often drives frail man to crime and sorrow—dread, I mean, of the mockery and laughter of his more hardened comrades, prevailed, and hindered him from turning his head homeward, and countermanding the perpetration of those base outrages.

Still, though he dared not halt in the career of sin—though he felt that he *could* not, even though he would, repent—he was sad, moody and reluctant; and he rode onward slowly, guiding his horse with an irresolute and feeble hand through the blind darkness. He was now two or three miles only distant from the station at the cross−roads, which had been fixed upon as the spot where he was to overtake the carriage, and enact the part of Rose's rescuer from St. Maur and his myrmidons. He was just in the act of crossing the bridle−road which led from the market−town, whence Hunter was returning, past the wild forest−land skirting his own park, wherein the press−gang was patiently awaiting the appearance of the young yeoman.

The London road, after it crossed the narrow track in question, mounted the brow of a short bold hill, and dived at once into a deep and shadowy dingle, with a large brook, which had been swollen by that night's rain into a wild and foaming torrent, threading the bottom of the dell. The brook, which lay between rocky banks, was spanned at this place by a rude wooden bridge, that had, for some time past, been gradually falling into ruin; and scarce two hours before the time at which Sir Edward reached the spot, the whole of the weak fabric had been swept away by the swollen torrent.

At the cross−road the youthful baronet paused, even longer than before, and doubted— yes, greatly doubted—whether he should not alter, even now, his purpose; but, as he did so, the distant clatter of a hoof came down the house−road from the direction of Alresford—and, instantly suspecting that the traveller could be no other than Frank Hunter, he dashed his spurs into his horse's side, and gallopped furiously across the hill, and down the steep descent, toward the yawning chasm, fearful of being seen, under these circumstances, by the man on whom he was preparing to inflict an injury so fearful.

Down the steep track he drove furiously— headlong—spurring his noble hunter— on! on! as if he were careering in full flight— flight from that fearful fury, a self−tormenting conscience; which, to borrow the imagery of the Latin lyrist—"Climbs to the deck of the brazen galley, and mounts on the croupe of the flying horseman!"

"On he came! on! Now he was at the brink of the dread precipice! One other bound would have precipitated horse and man together into the dark abyss! But the horse bounded not! he saw, almost too late, the frightful space, and stood with his feet rooted to the verge, stock still, even as a sculptured image! stock still from his furious gallop, even at the chasm's brink!

Headlong was Edward Hale launched by the shock into the flooded stream; and well was it for him that the stream *was* so wildly flooded; for had he fallen on the rocks, which in ordinary weather lay bare and black in the channel, he had been dashed to atoms.

Deep! deep he sunk into the wheeling eddies—but he rose instantly to the surface, and struck out lightly for his life! for he was both a bold and active swimmer. At the same instant he shouted loudly—wildly— so as no man can shout who is not in such desperate extremity—again and again for succor!

Just at this moment the moon came out bright from the scattered clouds, and showed him all the perils of his state, but showed him no way to escape them, so steeply did the rocks tower above his head—so wildly did the torrent whirl him upon its mad and foaming waters.

Again he shouted—and again—and once he thought his shout was answered; fainter he waxed and fainter; he sunk—rose— sunk, and rose again; a deadlier and more desperate struggle—a wilder yell for help, and the water rushed into his mouth, and a flash reeled across his eyes, and he was floating helplessly—hopelessly down the gulf, when a strong arm seized him, and dragged him to the bank; for he had drifted through the gorge, and the stream flowed here through low and level meadows. A little space he lay there senseless, and then, by the kind and attentive energies of his rescuer, he was brought back to life—and his first glance, as his soul returned to him,

fell on the frank face of the man who had preserved him! That man was Frank Hunter! All Edward Hale's best feelings rushed back in a flood upon him—he started to his knee!

"I thank thee!" he cried fervently— "with all my soul I thank thee, mighty, Almighty Lord! that thou hast saved me— not from this death alone, but from this deadly sin!"

And, seizing Hunter's hand, he poured into his half incredulous and all bewildered ear the story—the confession—of his dark meditated crime.

"But there is time—there is yet time," he cried—"the horses! where are the horses?"

"Here! here, Sir Edward," cried the stout yeoman; "I caught your hunter as I came along, and tied him with my hackney to a tree here at the hill foot."

A moment, and they were both in the saddle, furiously spurring toward a cross−road, which led directly to the place where we have seen the carriage, and leaving the press−gang far behind them; for Hunter had quitted his homeward track on hearing Sir Edward's cry for help, and so avoided that danger. A second bridge, a little lower down the river, soon gave them the means of crossing it and regaining the high road; and they were nearing the lane by which the carriage must come up, at every stride of their horses; and there was now no longer any doubt but they were in good time. Just as they were about to turn, however, down the oft mentioned lane, they were arrested by the clang of several horses at a gallop, coming down the great road from London, so as to meet them, and by a shout—

"Stand! stand! and tell us the road to Arrington!"

Edward Hale answered in a moment, for he knew the voice. "Good God! Lord Arthur, is that you?"

"Hale! Heaven be praised," cried the new comer; "then I am in luck. But what the deuce are you doing here? and who is this with you?" Where are St. Maur and Spencer?"

"I will tell you another time—I will tell you another time, Arthur Asterly," replied Sir Edward; for it was Lady Fanny's brother—an officer in the Life Guards— who, at his sister's entreaty, had ridden down post−haste. "Come with me, quick! come with me, and see me repair a great intended wrong!"

"One minute—for I *must* tell you now what I have ridden post from town to tell you. I was just off guard at Windsor when Fan sent for me, and I have not had time to take off my uniform! You are the dupe of a set of scoundrels! Spencer and St. Maur have been urging you to a great offence, for their own evil ends! and, grieved I am to say it, with my mother's cognizance. They thought themselves very cunning with their anonymous letters, and base schemes to make Fan think you a villain; but Fan and I detected them in no time; and, I thank God! it has been the means of bringing my poor father to his senses; and he would have thrown up the cursed marquisate, which was the price of all this knavery—but the king, for all the ill they speak of him, has acted nobly— nobly! I saw him myself, and told him the whole story, and he wrote a manly and generous letter, in his own hand, restoring the pledge he had given to that scoundrel, Davenant! and I have come down here, post−haste, to save you—and I am time enough to do so—am I not, dear Ned?"

"Sir Edward was saved ere you came, my lord—if I may be so bold as to speak to you, who are a great gentleman. His own good heart and good feelings saved him," cried the bold yeoman, half crying with the violence of his emotions.

"I am afraid not," said Sir Edward, unwilling to take any credit he did not deserve; "it was chance only, or rather Providence—a blessed accident—and gratitude to this good man for his timely service! But for him, Arthur, I should be dead now—dead in the perpetration of a cowardly base crime!"

"Well, God be praised that you are saved by any means," cried Lord Arthur, "but let us gallop on, if there is any thing to do!"

"Much, much! there is much to do," answered Hale; "follow, follow!"—and, putting spurs to his horse, he dashed down the lane toward the brick farm−house.

They reached it in time; reached it just as Rose Castleton, fainting between surprise and terror—for the girl's head and not her heart had been led astray, and her repentance had been real—was thrust into the carriage by the hand of Henry St. Maur.

"St. Maur!" cried Edward, springing from his horse, as he arrived on the spot, "St. Maur, you are a villain! You drove me into this for your own evil ends—but all your villanies are discovered—and you may thank God, if you believe that there is a God, that no more harm has come of it."

And, lifting Rose respectfully out of the carriage, he placed her in the arms of her chosen bridegroom, saying, "Here, take her, Hunter—take her! I give her to you, and will give you her dowry to−morrow— take her, God bless you, and be happy!"

"Sir Edward Hale, you shall answer me for this, by heaven!" cried St. Maur furiously.

"When you will, my lord, when you will!"

"Then now, now!" exclaimed St. Maur, "I say now!"—and he unsheathed his rapier ere the words were out of his mouth. Sir Edward Hale followed his example on the instant; and before any one could interpose, their blades were crossed. It was almost too dark for sword play, but the lamps of the carriage were lighted, and the inmates of the farm had by this time run out, with several torches and lanterns, so that the gleam of their weapons could be distinguished in this glimmering light."

The young baronet fought only on the defensive, St. Maur thrusting at him with insane and revengeful rashness, so that Edward might have killed him two or three times, had he been so minded. But, at the fourth or fifth pass, the young lord's foot slipped on the wet greenward, and he fell his full length, breaking his small sword as he did so.

"Take your life. Take your life, my lord, and mend it," said Edward, putting up his sword.

Sullenly the young nobleman arose, and shook the hilt of his broken blade at the victor.

"You will repent of this!" he said; and, snatching the rein of one of the servants' horses, which stood near, he sprung to its back, and galloping off toward the Hall was quickly lost in the swart darkness.

But Edward Hale never did repent it.

A pause ensued of some moments after his departure, which was at length broken by Lord Arthur Asterly, who said, "Well, we had better all go quietly home to our beds now; and to−morrow we can talk over these things at our leisure; that is to say, if it be not the better plan to bury them all in oblivion; for, by the blessing of Providence, there has no harm befallen any one, and I think the adventures of this night are over. So send away the carriage, Ned, and your people; and let us two trot to the Hall together, for I have a good many private explanations for your ear; and we will not hurry, for it is just as well to let those scoundrels have time to evacuate the premises. I do not think they will have the impudence to wait for our coming."

But the adventures of the evening were not over. For, unhappily, Spencer having grown weary of waiting with his men, left them in charge of the lieutenant, and came galloping up to the entrance of the hall in one direction, just as St. Maur arrived there from another, bareheaded, his dress covered with clay, and his scabbard empty by his side.

"Ho! St. Maur," said the captain, as he saw him, "what does all this mean? Whence do you come in this array? Where is Sir Edward?"

"It means, sir," replied St. Maur furiously, for he was in the mood to wreak his spite on any one who happened to be near him, "that Arthur Asterly has come down post from London, and all is discovered, and we are a brace of fools and villains!"

"Speak for yourself, pray, my good lord! With regard to yourself I have no doubt you are perfectly right—*you* must know best," said Spencer, in the most coolly irritating manner. "But I allow no man to apply such words to me."

"You will have to fight half the world, then, captain," answered St. Maur, seeing the folly of quarreling with his own confederate, "for every thing is blown—blown to the four winds!"

"Then Hale has given up the wench?"

"Given her up! to be sure he has! given her to the farmer fellow! and called me a villain to my teeth! We fought, and but that I fell and broke my sword, I would have—"

"Done wonders, doubtless!" interrupted Spencer. "But see here, if I understand you aright, I win a cool thousand of you! You bet me that Hale would have this cursed wench, within a fortnight, for his mistress. Now, as I mean to make myself scarce, and to keep myself on board my frigate until this blows over, you may as well book up."

"Why, Spencer," exclaimed St. Maur, "you forget—"

"Indeed, I forget nothing! did you not make the bet?"

Just at this moment Harbottle, who knew not a word of what had been passing, disturbed by their loud voices,

came out upon the terrace, with several servants bearing lights, and every word that followed was heard by all of them.

"I did; but did we not understand that it was to be drawn in case?—"

"Not I, my lord—not I, my lord; I never play child's play. When I bet, I bet; and when I win, I expect to be paid. Now the question is, will you pay me?"

"No, sir, I will not, for you have not won it. You are cheating me."

"My lord!"

"Yes, sir, you *are* cheating me," exclaimed St. Maur fiercely. "You *are* cheating me, or trying to do so! You are—"

"Quite enough said, my lord," answered Spencer, perfectly composed. "You heard him, Harbottle; you heard what he said. Now, my Lord Henry St. Maur, in my mind the quicker these things are settled the better. My pistols are in my holsters loaded; your are doubtless the same— if not, take your choice of mine!"

It was in vain that Harbottle, that the servants, would have interposed—both were determined, obstinate, unyielding!

Ten paces were stepped off upon the terrace—the reluctant servants were compelled to advance the torches—each took a weapon in his hand, and to prevent worse horror—for they swore that if balked they would fight muzzle to the breast, and give the word themselves—Harbottle gave the signal.

The pistols flashed at once—but one report was heard—and, ere that reached the ears of the spectators, St. Maur sprung up a yard into the air, and fell to the ground dead, with the bullet in his brain!

At this moment the approaching sounds of Sir Edward and his friend were heard, quickened by the pistol shots. Speneer's keen ear first caught them; and, as he sprung to his horse, he took a sealed package, undirected, out of the bosom of his coat, and threw it to Harbottle, exclaiming, "Give that to Edward Hale—it is his—and say I am sorry for what has passed; for to him, at least, I owe no ill will."

It was the order to arrest Frank Hunter, under Sir Edward's hand and seal; but before Harbottle had raised it from the ground, the homicide was out of sight, and the young baronet came upon the ground with Lord Arthur Asterly.

The fall of the guilty and unhappy St. Maur, was the catastrophe of this romance— for a romance it was of domestic life!— and, like all other romances, it ended in a marriage!

From that day forth Sir Edward Hale was a better and a wiser man!—from that day forth sin had no more any permanent dominion over him! No obstacle now opposed his union, in due season, with charming Fanny Asterly—and with his sweet wife and a fair and noble family—for God smiled upon his marriage—he lived long and happily among his happy tenants; and when he died the country people mourned him, as "the good Lord of the Manor!"