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#98 in our series by Edward Bulwer-Lytton

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BOOK XII.

CHAPTER I.

THE MAN OF THE WORLD SHOWS MORE INDIFFERENCE TO THE THINGS AND DOCTRINES OF THE WORLD THAN MIGHT BE SUPPOSED.--BUT HE VINDICATES HIS CHARACTER, WHICH MIGHT OTHERWISE BE JEOPARDISED, BY THE ADROITNESS WITH WHICH, HAVING RESOLVED TO ROAST CHESTNUTS IN THE ASHES OF ANOTHER MAN'S HEARTH, HE HANDLES THEM WHEN HOTTEST BY THE PROXY OF A--CAT'S PAW.

In the letter which George told Waife he had received from his uncle, George had an excuse for the delicate and arduous mission he undertook, which he did not confide to the old man, lest it should convey more hopes than its nature justified. In this letter, Alban related, with a degree of feeling that he rarely manifested, his farewell conversation with Lionel, who had just departed to join his new regiment. The poor young man had buoyed himself up with delighted expectations of the result of Sophy's prolonged residence under Darrell's roof; he had persuaded his reason that when Darrell had been thus enabled to see and judge of her for himself, he would be irresistibly attracted towards her; that Innocence, like Truth, would be mighty and prevail; Darrell was engaged in the attempt to clear William Losely's name and blood from the taint of felony;--Alban was commissioned to negotiate with Jasper Losely on any terms that would remove all chance of future disgrace from that quarter. Oh yes! to poor Lionel's eyes obstacles vanished--the future became clear. And thus, when, after telling him of his final interview with the Minister, Darrell said, "I trust that, in bringing to William Losely this intelligence, I shall at least soften his disappointment, when I make it thoroughly clear to him how impossible it is that his Sophy can ever be more to me--to us--than a stranger whose virtues create an interest in her welfare"--Lionel was stunned as by a blow. Scarcely could he murmur:

"You have seen her--and your resolve remains the same."

"Can you doubt it?" answered Darrell, as if in surprise. "The resolve may now give me pain on my account, as before it gave me pain on yours. But if not moved by your pain, can I be moved by mine? That would be a baseness." The Colonel, in depicting Lionel's state of mind after the young soldier had written his farewell to Waife, and previous to quitting London, expressed very gloomy forebodings. "I do not say," wrote he, "that Lionel will guiltily seek death in the field, nor does death there come more to those who seek than to those who shun it; but he will go upon a service exposed to more than ordinary suffering, privation, and disease--without that rallying power of hope--that Will, and Desire to Live, which constitute the true stamina of Youth. And I have always set a black mark upon those who go into war joyless and despondent. Send a young fellow to the camp with his spirits broken, his heart heavy as a lump of lead, and the first of those epidemics, which thin ranks more than the cannon, says to itself, 'There is a man for me!' Any doctor will tell you that, even at home, the gay and light-hearted walk safe through the pestilence, which settles on the moping as malaria settles

on a marsh. Confound Guy Darrell's ancestors, they have spoilt Queen Victoria as good a young soldier as ever wore a sword by his side! Six months ago, and how blithely Lionel Haughton looked forth to the future! --all laurel!--no cypress! And now I feel as if I had shaken hands with a victim sacrificed by Superstition to the tombs of the dead. I cannot blame Darrell: I dare say in the same position I might do the same. But no; on second thoughts, I should not. If Darrell does not choose to marry and have sons of his own, he has no right to load a poor boy with benefits, and say: 'There is but one way to prove your gratitude; remember my ancestors, and be miserable for the rest of your days!' Darrell, forsooth, intends to leave to Lionel the transmission of the old Darrell name; and the old Darrell name must not be tarnished by the marriage on which Lionel has unluckily set his heart! I respect the old name; but it is not like the House of Vipont--a British Institution. And if some democratical cholera, which does not care a rush for old names, carries off Lionel, what becomes of the old name then? Lionel is not Darrell's son; Lionel need not perforce take the old name. Let the young man live as Lionel Haughton, and the old name die with Guy Darrell!

"As to the poor girl's birth and parentage, I believe we shall never know them. I quite agree with Darrell that it will be wisest never to inquire. But I dismiss, as farfetched and improbable, his supposition that she is Gabrielle Desmaret's daughter. To me it is infinitely more likely, either that the deposition of the nurse, which poor Willy gave to Darrell, and which Darrell showed to me, is true (only that Jasper was conniving at the temporary suspension of his child's existence while it suited his purpose)--or that, at the worst, this mysterious young lady is the daughter of the artiste. In the former supposition, as I have said over and over again, a marriage between Lionel and Sophy is precisely that which Darrell should desire; in the latter case, of course, if Lionel were the head of the House of Vipont, the idea of such an union would be inadmissible. But Lionel, *entre nous*, is the son of a ruined spendthrift by a linen-draper's daughter. And Darrell has but to give the handsome young couple five or six thousand a year, and I know the world well enough to know that the world will trouble itself very little about their pedigrees. And really Lionel should be left wholly free to choose whether he prefer a girl whom he loves with his whole heart, five or six thousand a year, happiness, and the chance of honours in a glorious profession to which he will then look with glad spirits--or a life-long misery, with the right, after Darrell's death--that I hope will not be these thirty years--to bear the name of Darrell instead of Haughton; which, if I were the last of the Haughtons, and had any family pride--as, thank Heaven I have not--would be a painful exchange to me; and dearly bought by the addition of some additional thousands a year, when I had grown perhaps as little disposed to spend them as Guy Darrell himself is. But, after all, there is one I compassionate even more than young Haughton. My morning rides of late have been much in the direction of Twickenham, visiting our fair cousin Lady Montfort. I went first to lecture her for letting these young people see so much of each other. But my anger melted into admiration and sympathy when I found with what tender, exquisite, matchless friendship she had been all the while scheming for Darrell's happiness; and with what remorse she now contemplated the sorrow which a friendship so grateful, and a belief so

natural, had innocently occasioned. That remorse is wearing her to death. Dr. F.-----, who attended poor dear Willy, is also attending her; and he told me privately that his skill was in vain--that her case baffled him; and he had very serious apprehensions. Darrell owes some consideration to such a friend. And to think that here are lives permanently embittered, if not risked, by the ruthless obstinacy of the best-hearted man I ever met! Now, though I have already intimated my opinions to Darrell with a candour due to the oldest and dearest of my friends, yet I have never, of course, in the letters I have written to him or the talk we have had together, spoken out so plainly as I do in writing to you. And having thus written, without awe of his grey eye and dark brow, I have half as mind to add 'seize him in a happy moment and show him this letter.' Yes, I give you full leave; show it to him if you think it would avail. If not, throw it into the fire, and--pray Heaven for those whom we poor mortals cannot serve."

On the envelope Alban had added these words: "But of course, before showing the enclosed, you will prepare Darrell's mind to weigh its contents." And probably it was in that curt and simple injunction that the subtle man of the world evinced the astuteness of which not a trace was apparent in the body of his letter.

Though Alban's communication had much excited his nephew, yet George had not judged it discreet to avail himself of the permission to show it to Darrell. It seemed to him that the pride of his host would take much more offence at its transmission through the hands of a third person than at the frank tone of its reasonings and suggestions. And George had determined to re-enclose it to the Colonel, urging him to forward it himself to Darrell just as it was, with but a brief line to say, "that, on reflection, Alban submitted direct to his old school-fellow the reasonings and apprehensions which he had so unreservedly poured forth in a letter commenced without the intention at which the writer arrived at the close." But now that the preacher had undertaken the duty of an advocate, the letter became his brief.

George passed through the library, through the study, up the narrow stair that finally conducted to the same lofty cell in which Darrell had confronted the midnight robber who claimed a child in Sophy. With a nervous hand George knocked at the door.

Unaccustomed to any intrusion on the part of guest or household in that solitary retreat, somewhat sharply, as if in anger, Darrell's voice answered the knock.

"Who's there?"

"George Morley."

Darrell opened the door.

CHAPTER II.

"A GOOD ARCHER IS NOT KNOWN BY HIS ARROWS, BUT HIS AIM." "A GOOD MAN IS NO MORE TO BE FEARED THAN A SHEEP." "A GOOD SURGEON MUST HAVE AN EAGLE'S EYE, A LION'S HEART, AND A LADY'S HAND." "A GOOD TONGUE IS A GOOD WEAPON." AND DESPITE THOSE SUGGESTIVE OR ENCOURAGING PROVERBS, GEORGE MORLEY HAS UNDERTAKEN SOMETHING SO OPPOSED TO ALL PROVERBIAL PHILOSOPHY THAT IT BECOMES A GRAVE QUESTION WHAT HE WILL DO WITH IT.

"I come," said George, "to ask you one of the greatest favours a man can confer upon another; it will take some little time to explain. Are you at leisure?"

Darrell's brow relaxed.

"Seat yourself in comfort, my dear George. If it be in my power to serve or to gratify Alban Morley's nephew, it is I who receive a favour."

Darrell thought to himself--"The young man is ambitious--I may aid in his path towards a See!"

GEORGE MORLEY.--"First let me say that I would consult your intellect on a matter which habitually attracts and engages mine--that old vexed question of the origin and uses of Evil, not only in the physical, but the moral world; it involves problems over which I would ponder for hours as a boy--on which I wrote essays as a schoolman--on which I perpetually collect illustrations to fortify my views as a theologian."

"He is writing a book," thought Darrell, enviously; "and a book on such a subject will last him all his life. Happy man!"

GEORGE MORLEY.--"The Pastor, you know, is frequently consulted by the suffering and oppressed; frequently called upon to answer that question in which the scepticism of the humble and the ignorant ordinarily begins: 'Why am I suffering? Why am I oppressed? Is this the justice of Providence? Has the Great Father that benign pity, that watchful care for His children, which you preachers tell us?' Ever intent on deducing examples from the lives to which the clue has become apparent, must be the Priest who has to reason with Affliction caused by no apparent fault; and where, judged by the Canons of Human justice, cloud and darkness obscure the Divine--still to 'vindicate the ways of God to man.'"

DARRELL.--"A philosophy that preceded, and will outlive, all other schools. It is twin-born with the world itself. Go on; though the theme be inexhaustible, its interest never flags."

GEORGE MORLEY.--"Has it struck you, Mr. Darrell, that few lives have ever passed under your survey; in which the inexpressible tenderness of the Omniscient has been more visibly clear than in that of your guest, William Losely?"

DARRELL (surprised).--"Clear? To me, I confess that if ever there were an instance in which the Divine tenderness, the Divine justice, which I

can never presume to doubt, was yet undiscernible to my bounded vision, it is in the instance of the very life you refer to. I see a man of admirable virtues--of a childlike simplicity of character, which makes him almost unconscious of the grandeur of his own soul--involved by a sublime self-sacrifice--by a virtue, not by a fault--in the most dreadful of human calamities--ignominious degradation;--hurled in the midday of life from the sphere of honest men--a felon's brand on his name--a vagrant in his age; justice at last, but tardy and niggard, and giving him but little joy when it arrives; because, ever thinking only of others, his heart is wrapped in a child whom he cannot make happy in the way in which his hopes have been set!--George-no, your illustration might be turned by a sceptic into an argument against you."

GEORGE MORLEY.--"Not unless the sceptic refused the elementary starting-ground from which you and I may reason; not if it be granted that man has a soul, which it is the object of this life to enrich and develop for another. We know from my uncle what William Losely was before this calamity befel him--a genial boon-companion--a careless, frank, 'good fellow'--all the virtues you now praise in him dormant, unguessed even by himself. Suddenly came CALAMITY!--suddenly arose the SOUL! Degradation of name, and with it dignity of nature! How poor, how slight, how insignificant William Losely the hanger-on of rural Thanets compared with that William Waife whose entrance into this house, you--despite that felon's brand when you knew it was the martyr's glory,--greeted with noble reverence; whom, when the mind itself was stricken down--only the soul left to the wreck of the body--you tended with such pious care as he lay on--your father's bed! And do you, who hold Nobleness in such honour--do you, of all men, tell me that you cannot recognise that Celestial tenderness which ennobled a Spirit for all Eternity?"

"George, you are right," cried Darrell; "and I was a blockhead and blunderer, as man always is when he mistakes a speck in his telescope for a blotch in the sun of a system."

GEORGE MORLEY.--"But more difficult it is to recognise the mysterious agencies of Heavenly Love when no great worldly adversity forces us to pause and question. Let Fortune strike down a victim, and even the heathen cries, 'This is the hand of God!' But where Fortune brings no vicissitude; where her wheel runs smooth, dropping wealth or honours as it rolls--where Affliction centres its work within the secret, unrevealing heart--there, even the wisest man may not readily perceive by what means Heaven is admonishing, forcing, or wooing him nearer to itself. I take the case of a man in whom Heaven acknowledges a favoured son. I assume his outward life crowned with successes, his mind stored with opulent gifts, his nature endowed with lofty virtues; what an heir to train through the brief school of earth for due place in the ages that roll on for ever! But this man has a parasite weed in each bed of a soul rich in flowers;--weed and flowers intertwined, stem with stem--their fibres uniting even deep down to the root.

"Can you not conceive with what untiring vigilant care Heaven will seek to disentangle the flower from the weed?--how (let me drop inadequate metaphor)--how Heaven will select for its warning chastisements that very

error which the man has so blent with his virtues that he holds it a virtue itself?--how, gradually, slowly, pertinaciously, it will gather this beautiful nature all to itself--insist on a sacrifice it will ask from no other? To complete the true nature of poor William Losely, Heaven ordained the sacrifice of worldly repute; to complete the true nature of Guy Darrell, God ordains him the sacrifice of PRIDE!"

Darrell started-half rose; his eye flashed-his cheek paled; but he remained silent.

"I have approached the favour I supplicate," resumed George, drawing a deep breath, as of relief. "Greater favour man can scarcely bestow upon his fellow. I entreat you to believe that I respect, and love, and honour you sufficiently to be for a while so lifted up into your friendship that I may claim the privilege, without which friendship is but a form;--just as no freedom is more obnoxious than intrusion on confidence withheld, so no favour, I repeat, more precious than the confidence which a man of worth vouchsafes to him who invites it with no claim but the loyalty of his motives."

Said Darrell, softened, but with stateliness: "All human lives are as separate circles; they may touch at one point in friendly approach, but, even where they touch, each rounds itself from off the other. With this hint I am contented to ask at what point in my circle you would touch?"

GEORGE MORLEY.--"I thank you gratefully; I accept your illustration. The point is touched; I need no other." He paused a moment, as if concentrating all his thoughts, and then said, with musing accents: "Yes, I accept your illustration; I will even strengthen the force of the truth implied in it by a more homely illustration of my own. There are small skeleton abridgments of history which we give to children. In such a year a king was crowned--a battle was fought; there was some great disaster, or some great triumph. Of the true progress and development of the nation whose record is thus epitomised--of the complicated causes which lead to these salient events--of the animated, varied multitudinous life which has been hurrying on from epoch to epoch, the abridgment tells nothing. It is so with the life of each individual man: the life as it stands before us is but a sterile epitome--hid from our sight the EMOTIONS which are the People of the Heart. In such a year occurred a visible something--a gain--a loss--a success--a disappointment; the People of the Heart crowned or deposed a King. This is all we know; and the most voluminous biography ever written must still be a meagre abridgment of all that really individualised and formed a man. I ask not your confidence in a single detail or fact in your existence which lies beyond my sight. Far from me so curious an insolence; but I do ask you this: Reflecting on your past life as a whole, have not your chief sorrows had a common idiosyncrasy? Have they not been strangely directed towards the frustration of some one single object--cherished by your earliest hopes, and, as in defiance of fate, resolutely clung to even now?"

"It is true," muttered Darrell. "You do not offend me; go on!"

"And have not these SORROWS, in frustrating your object, often assumed, too, a certain uniformity in the weapons they use, in the quarter they harass or invade, almost as if it were a strategic policy that guided them where they could most pain, or humble, or eject a FOE that they were ordered to storm? Degrade you they could not; such was not their mission. Heaven left you intact a kingliness of nature--a loftiness of spirit, unabased by assaults levelled not against yourself, but your pride; your personal dignity, though singularly sensitive, though bitterly galled, stood proof. What might lower lesser men, lowered not you; Heaven left you that dignity, for it belongs alike to your intellect and your virtues--but suffered it to be a source of your anguish. Why? Because, not content with adorning your virtues, it was covering the fault against which were directed the sorrows. You frown--forgive me."

"You do not transgress, unless it be as a flatterer! If I frowned, it was unconsciously--the sign of thought, not anger. Pause!--my mind has left you for a moment; it is looking into the past."

The past!--Was it not true? That home to whose porch came in time the Black Horses, in time just to save from the last worst dishonour, but not save from years racked by each pang that can harrow man's dignity in each daily assault on the fort of man's pride; the sly treacherous daughter--her terrible marriage--the man whose disgrace she had linked to her blood, and whose life was still insult and threat to his own. True, what a war upon Pride! And even in that secret and fatal love which had been of all his griefs the most influential and enduring, had his pride been less bitterly wounded, and that pride less enthroned in his being, would his grief have been so relentless, his attempts at its conquest so vain? And then, even now--what was it said, "I can bless?"--holy LOVE! What was it said, "but not pardon"!--stern PRIDE! And so onto these last revolutions of sterile life. Was he not miserable in Lionel's and Sophy's misery? Forlorn in that Citadel of Pride--closed round and invested with Sorrows--and the last hopes that had fled to the fortress, slain in defence of its outworks. With hand shading his face, Darrell remained some minutes silent. At last he raised his head, and his eye was steadfast, his lip firm.

"George Morley," said he, "I acknowledge much justice in the censure you have conveyed, with so artful a delicacy that, if it fail to reform, it cannot displease, and leaves much to be seriously revolved in solitary self-commune. But though I may own that pride is not made for man, and that in the blindness of human judgment I may often have confounded pride with duty, and suffered for the mistake, yet that one prevailing object of my life, which with so startling a truth you say it has pleased Heaven to frustrate, I cannot hold an error in itself. You have learned enough from your uncle, seen enough of me yourself, to know what that object has been. You are scholar enough to concede to me that it is no ignoble homage which either nations or persons render to the ancestral Dead--that homage is an instinct in all but vulgar and sordid natures. Has a man no ancestry of his own--rightly and justly, if himself of worth, he appropriates to his lineage all the heroes, and bards, and patriots of his fatherland! A free citizen has ancestors in all the glorious chiefs that have adorned the State, on the sole condition that he shall revere

their tombs and guard their memory as a son! And thus, whenever they who speak trumpet-tongued to grand democracies would rouse some quailing generation to heroic deed or sacrifice, they appeal in the Name of Ancestors, and call upon the living to be worthy of the dead! That which is so laudable--nay, so necessary a sentiment in the mass, cannot be a fault that angers Heaven in the man. Like all high sentiments, it may compel harsh and rugged duties; it may need the stern suppression of many a gentle impulse--of many a pleasing wish. But we must regard it in its merit and consistency as a whole. And if, my eloquent and subtle friend, all you have hitherto said be designed but to wind into pleas for the same cause that I have already decided against the advocate in my own heart which sides with Lionel's generous love and yon fair girl's ingenuous and touching grace, let us break up the court; the judge has no choice but the law which imperiously governs his judgment."

GEORGE MORLEY.--"I have not hitherto presumed to apply to particular cases the general argument you so indulgently allow me to urge in favour of my theory, that in the world of the human heart, when closely examined, there is the same harmony of design as in the external universe; that in Fault and in Sorrow are the axioms, and problems, and postulates of a SCIENCE. Bear with me a little longer if I still pursue the same course of reasoning. I shall not have the arrogance to argue a special instance--to say, 'This you should do, this you should not do.' All I would ask is, leave to proffer a few more suggestions to your own large and candid experience."

Said Darrell, irresistibly allured on, but with a tinge of his grave irony: "You have the true genius of the pulpit, and I concede to you its rights. I will listen with the wish to profit--the more susceptible of conviction because freed from the necessity to reply."

GEORGE MORLEY.--"You vindicate the object which has been the main ambition of your life. You say 'not an ignoble object.' Truly! ignoble objects are not for you. The question is, are there not objects nobler, which should have attained higher value, and led to larger results in the soul which Providence assigned to you; was not the proper place of the object you vindicate that of an auxiliary--a subordinate, rather than that of the all-directing, self-sufficing leader and autocrat of such various powers of mind? I picture you to myself--a lone, bold-hearted boy--in this ancient hall, amidst these primitive landscapes, in which old associations are so little disturbed by the modern--in which the wild turf of waste lands, vanishing deep into mazes of solemn wood, lends the scene to dreams of gone days--brings Adventure and Knighthood, and all the poetical colours of Old, to unite the homage due to the ancestral dead with the future ambition of life;--Image full of interest and of pathos--a friendless child of a race more beloved for its decay, looking dauntless on to poverty and toil, with that conviction of power which is born of collected purpose and earnest will; and recording his secret vow that singlehanded he will undo the work of destroying ages, and restore his line to its place of honour in the land!"

George paused, and tears stood in Darrell's eyes.

"Yes," resumed the scholar--"yes, for the child, for the youth, for the man in his first daring stride into the Action of Life, that object commands our respectful sympathies.

"But wait a few years. Has that object expanded? Has it led on into objects embracing humanity? Remains it alone and sterile in the bosom of successful genius? Or is it prolific and fruitful of grander designs--of more widespread uses? Make genius successful, and all men have the right to say, 'Brother, help us!' What! no other object still but to build up a house!--to recover a line! What was grand at one stage of an onward career, is narrow and small at another! Ambition limited to the rise of a family!

"Can our sympathies still hallow that? No! In Guy Darrell successful--that ambition was treason to earth! Mankind was his family now! THEREFORE Heaven thwarted the object which opposed its own ends in creating you! THEREFORE childless you stand on your desolate hearth! THEREFORE, lo! side by side--yon uncompleted pile--your own uncompleted life!"

Darrell sate dumb.--He was appalled!

GEORGE MORLEY.--"Has not that object stunted your very intellect? Has it not, while baffled in its own centred aim--has it not robbed you of the glory which youth craved, and which manhood might have won? Idolater to the creed of an Ancestor's NAMEE, has your own name that hold on the grateful respect of the Future, which men ever give to that genius whose objects are knit with mankind? Suddenly, in the zenith of life, amidst cheers, not of genuine renown,--cheers loud and brief as a mob's hurrah--calamities, all of which I know not, nor conjecture, interrupt your career;--and when your own life-long object is arrested, or rather when it is snatched from your eye, your genius renounces all uses. Fame, ever-during, was before you still, had your objects been those for which genius is given. You muse. Heaven permits these rude words to strike home! Guy Darrell, it is not too late! Heaven's warnings are always in time. Reflect, with the one narrow object was fostered and fed the one master failing of Pride. To us as Christians, or as reasoners, it is not in this world that every duty is to find its special meed; yet by that same mystical LAW which makes Science of Sorrow, rewards are but often the normal effect of duties sublimely fulfilled. Out of your pride and your one-cherished object, has there grown happiness? Has the success which was not denied you achieved the link with posterity that your hand, if not fettered, would long since have forged? Grant that Heaven says 'Stubborn child, yield at last to the warnings vouchsafed to thee by my love! From a son so favoured and strong I exact the most difficult offering! Thou hast sacrificed much, but for ends not prescribed in my law; sacrifice now to me the thing thou most clingest to--Pride. I make the pang I demand purposely bitter. I twine round the offering I ask the fibres that bleed in relaxing. What to other men would be no duty, is duty to thee, because it entails a triumphant self-conquest, and pays to Humanity the arrears of just dues long neglected.' Grant the hard sacrifice made; I must think Heaven has ends for your joy even here, when it asks you to part with the cause of your sorrows;--I must think that

your evening of life may have sunshine denied to its noon. But with God are no bargains. A virtue, the most arduous because it must trample down what your life has exalted as virtue, is before you; distasteful, austere, repellent. The most inviting arguments in its favour are, that it proffers no bribes; men would acquit you in rejecting it; judged by our world's ordinary rule, men would be right in acquitting you. But if on reflection you say in your heart of hearts, 'This is a virtue,' you will follow its noiseless path up to the smile of God!"

The preacher ceased.

Darrell breathed a long sigh, rose slowly, took George's hand, pressed it warmly in both his own, and turned quickly and silently away. He paused in the deep recess where the gleam of the wintry sun shot through the small casement, aslant and pale on the massive wall: opening the lattice he looked forth on the old hereditary trees--on the Gothic church-tower--on the dark evergreens that belted his father's tomb. Again he sighed, but this time the sigh had a haughty sound in its abrupt impatience; and George felt that words written must remain to strengthen and confirm the effect of words spoken. He had at least obeyed his uncle's wise injunction--he had prepared Darrell's mind to weigh the contents of a letter, which, given in the first instance, would perhaps have rendered Darrell's resolution not less stubborn, by increasing the pain to himself which the resolution already inflicted.

Darrell turned and looked towards George, as if in surprise to see him still lingering there.

"I have now but to place before you this letter from my uncle to myself; it enters into those details which it would have ill become me specially to discuss. Remember, I entreat you, in reading it, that it is written by your oldest friend--by a man who has no dull discrimination in the perplexities of life or the niceties of honour."

Darrell bowed his head in assent, and took the letter. George was about to leave the room.

"Stay," said Darrell, "'tis best to have but one interview--one conversation on the subject which has been just enforced on me; and the letter may need a comment or a message to your uncle." He stood hesitating, with the letter open in his hand; and, fixing his keen eye on George's pale and powerful countenance, said: "How is it that, with an experience of mankind which you will pardon me for assuming to be limited, you yet read so wondrously the complicated human heart?"

"If I really have that gift," said George, "I will answer your question by another: Is it through experience that we learn to read the human heart--or is it through sympathy? If it be experience, what becomes of the Poet? If the Poet be born, not made, is it not because he is born to sympathise with what he has never experienced?"

"I see! There are born Preachers!"

Darrell reseated himself, and began Alban's letter. He was evidently moved by the Colonel's account of Lionel's grief, muttering to himself, "Poor boy!--but he is brave--he is young." When he came to Alban's forebodings on the effects of dejection upon the stamina of life, he pressed his hand quickly against his breast as if he had received a shock! He mused a while before he resumed his task; then he read rapidly and silently till his face flushed, and he repeated in a hollow tone, inexpressibly mournful: "Let the young man live, and the old name die with Guy Darrell. Ay, ay! see how the world sides with Youth! What matters all else so that Youth have its toy!" Again his eye hurried on impatiently till he came to the passage devoted to Lady Montfort; then George saw that the paper trembled violently in his hand and that his very lips grew white. "Serious apprehensions," he muttered. "I owe 'consideration to such a friend.' This man is without a heart!"

He clenched the paper in his hand without reading farther. "Leave me this letter, George; I will give an answer to that and to you before night." He caught up his hat as he spoke, passed into the lifeless picture-gallery, and so out into the open air. George, dubious and anxious, gained the solitude of his own room, and locked the door.

CHAPTER III.

AT LAST THE GREAT QUESTION BY TORTURE IS FAIRLY APPLIED TO GUY DARRELL.

WHAT WILL HE DO WITH IT? What will Guy Darrell do with the thought that weighs on his brain, rankles in his heart, perplexes his dubious conscience? What will he do with the Law which has governed his past life? What will he do with that shadow of A NAME which, alike in swarming crowds or in lonely burial-places, has spelled his eye and lured his step as a beckoning ghost? What will he do with the PRIDE from which the mask has been so rudely torn? What will he do with idols so long revered? Are they idols, or are they but symbols and images of holy truths? What will he do with the torturing problem, on the solution of which depend the honour due to consecrated ashes, and the rights due to beating hearts? There, restless he goes, the arrow of that question in his side--now through the broad waste lands--now through the dim woods, pausing oft with short quick sigh, with hand swept across his brow as if to clear away a cloud;--now snatched from our sight by the evergreens round the tomb in that still churchyard--now emerging slow, with melancholy eyes fixed on the old roof-tree! What will he do with it? The Question of Questions, in which all Futurity is opened, has him on its rack. WHAT WILL HE DO WITH IT? Let us see.

CHAPTER IV.

Immunis aram si tetigit manus,
Non sumptuosa blandior hostia,
Mollivit aversas Penates,
Farre pio et saliente mica.--HORAT.

It is the grey of the evening. Fairthorn is sauntering somewhat sullenly along the banks of the lake. He has missed, the last three days, his walk with Sophy--missed the pleasing excitement of talking at her, and of the family in whose obsolete glories he considers her very interest an obtrusive impertinence. He has missed, too, his more habitual and less irritating conversation with Darrell. In short, altogether he is put out, and he vents his spleen on the swans, who follow him along the wave as he walks along the margin, intimating either their affection for himself, or their anticipation of the bread-crumbs associated with his image--by the amiable note, half snort and half grunt, to which change of time or climate has reduced the vocal accomplishments of those classical birds, so pathetically melodious in the age of Moschus and on the banks of Cayster.

"Not a crumb, you unprincipled beggars," growled the musician. "You imagine that mankind are to have no other thought but that of supplying you with luxuries! And if you were asked, in a competitive examination, to define ME, your benefactor, you would say: 'A thing very low in the scale of creation, without wings or even feathers, but which Providence endowed with a peculiar instinct for affording nutritious and palatable additions to the ordinary aliment of Swans!' Ay, you may grunt; I wish I had you--in a pie!"

Slowly, out through the gap between yon grey crag and the thorn-tree, paces the doe, halting to drink just where the faint star of eve shoots its gleam along the wave. The musician forgets the swans and quickens his pace, expecting to meet the doe's wonted companion. He is not disappointed. He comes on Guy Darrell where the twilight shadow falls darkest between the grey crag and the thorn-tree.

"Dear Fellow Hermit," said Darrell, almost gaily, yet with more than usual affection in his greeting and voice, "you find me just when I want you. I am as one whose eyes have been strained by a violent conflict of colours, and your quiet presence is like the relief of a return to green. I have news for you, Fairthorn. You, who know more of my secrets than any other man, shall be the first to learn a decision that must bind you and me more together--but not in these scenes, Dick.

'Ibimus--ibimus!
-----Supremum
Carpere iter, comites, parati!'"

"What do you mean, sir?" asked Fairthorn. "My mind always misgives me when I hear you quoting Horace. Some reflection about the certainty of death, or other disagreeable subjects, is sure to follow!"

"Death! No, Dick--not now. Marriage-bells and joy, Dick! We shall have a wedding!"

"What! You will marry at last! And it must be that beautiful Caroline Lyndsay! It must--it must! You can never love another! You know it, my dear, dear master. I shall see you, then, happy before I die."

"Tut, foolish old friend!" said Darrell, leaning his arm tenderly on Fairthorn's shoulder, and walking on slowly towards the house. "How often must I tell you that no Marriage-bells can ring for me!"

"But you have told me, too, that you went to Twickenham to steal a sight of her again; and that it was the sight of her that made you resolve to wed no one else. And when I have railed against her for fickleness, have you not nearly frightened me out of my wits, as if no one might rail against her but yourself? And now she is free--and did you not grant that she would not refuse your hand, and would be true and faithful henceforth? And yet you insist on being--granite."

"No, Dick, not granite; I wish I were."

"Granite and pride," persisted Dick, courageously. "If one chips a bit off the granite, one only breaks one's spade against the pride."

"Pride--you too!" muttered Darrell, mournfully; then aloud: "No, it is not pride now, whatever it might have been even yesterday. But I would rather be racked by all the tortures that pious inquisitors ever invented out of compassion for obstinate heretics, than condemn the woman I have so fatally loved to a penance the misery of which she cannot foresee. She would accept me?--certainly! Why! Because she thinks she owes me reparation--because she pities me. And my heart tells me that I might become cruel, and mean, and vindictive, if I were to live day by day with one who created in me, while my life was at noon, a love never known in its morn, and to feel that that love's sole return was the pity vouchsafed to the nightfall of my age. No; if she pitied, but did not love me, when, eighteen years ago, we parted under yonder beech-tree, I should be a dotard to dream that woman's pity mellows into love as our locks become grey, and Youth turns our vows into ridicule. It is not pride that speaks here; it is rather humility, Dick. But we must not now talk of old age and by-gones. Youth and marriage-bells, Dick! Know that, I have been for hours pondering how to reconcile with my old-fashioned notions dear Lionel's happiness. We must think of the living as well as the dead, Dick. I have solved the problem. I am happy, and so shall the young folks be."

"You don't mean to say that you will consent to--"

"Yes, to Lionel's marriage with that beautiful girl, whose parentage we never will ask. Great men are their own ancestors; why not sometimes fair women? Enough--I consent! I shall of course secure to my kinsman and his bride an ample fortune. Lionel will have time for his honeymoon before he departs for the wars. He will fight with good heart now, Dick. Young folks of the present day cannot bear up against sorrow, as they were trained to do in mine. And that amiable lady who has so much pity for me has, of course, still more pity for a charming young couple for

whose marriage she schemed, in order to give me a home, Dick. And rather than she should pine and fall ill, and--no matter; all shall be settled as it should be for the happiness of the living. But something else must be settled; we must think of the dead as well as the living; and this name of Darrell shall be buried with me in the grave beside my father's. Lionel Houghton will keep to his own name. Live the Houghtons! Perish, but with no blot on their shield--perish the Darrells! Why, what is that? Tears, Dick? Pooh!--be a man! And I want all your strength; for you, too, must have a share in the sacrifice. What follows is not the dictate of pride, if I can read myself aright. No; it is the final completion and surrender of the object on which so much of my life has been wasted--but a surrender that satisfies my crotchets of honour. At all events, if it be pride in disguise, it will demand no victim in others; you and I may have a sharp pang--we must bear it, Dick."

"What on earth is coming now?" said Dick, dolefully.

"The due to the dead, Richara Fairthorn. This nook of fair England, in which I learned from the dead to love honour--this poor domain of Fawley--shall go in bequest to the College at which I was reared."

"Sir!"

"It will serve for a fellowship or two to honest, bravehearted young scholars. It will be thus, while English institutions may last, devoted to Learning and Honour. It may sustain for mankind some ambition more generous than mine, it appears, ever was--settled thus, not in mine, but my dear father's name, like the Darrell Museum. These are my dues to the dead, Dick! And the old house thus becomes useless. The new house was ever a folly. They must go down, both, as soon as the young folks are married;--not a stone stand on stone! The ploughshare shall pass over their sites! And this task I order you to see done. I have not strength. You will then hasten to join me at Sorrento, that corner of earth on which Horace wished to breathe his last sigh.

'Ille to mecum locus et beatae
Postulant arces--ibi--tu "'

"Don't, sir, don't. Horace again! It is too much." Fairthorn was choking; but as if the idea presented to him was really too monstrous for belief, he clutched at Darrell with so uncertain and vehement a hand that he almost caught him by the throat, and sobbed out, "You must be joking."

"Seriously and solemnly, Richara Fairthorn," said Darrell, gently disentangling the fingers that threatened him with strangulation, "seriously and solemnly I have uttered to you my deliberate purpose. I implore you, in the name of our life-long friendship, to face this pain as I do--resolutely, cheerfully. I implore you to execute to the letter the instructions I shall leave with you on quitting England, which I shall do the day Lionnel is married; and then, dear old friend, calm days, clear consciences:--In climes where whole races have passed away --proud cities themselves sunk in graves--where our petty grief for a squirearch's lost house we shall both grow ashamed to indulge--there we

will moralise, rail against vain dreams and idle pride, cultivate vines and orange trees, with Horace--nay, nay, Dick--with the FLUTE!"

CHAPTER V.

MORE BOUNTEOUS RUN RIVERS WHEN THE ICE THAT LOCKED THEIR FLOW MELTS INTO THEIR WATERS. AND WHEN FINE NATURES RELENT, THEIR KINDNESS IS SWELLED BY THE THAW.

Darrell escaped into the house; Fairthorn sunk upon the ground, and resigned himself for some minutes to unmanly lamentations. Suddenly he started up; a thought came into his brain--a hope into his breast. He made a caper--launched himself into a precipitate zig-zag--gained the hall-door--plunged into his own mysterious hiding-place--and in less than an hour re-emerged, a letter in his hand, with which he had just time to catch the postman, as that functionary was striding off from the back yard with the official bag.

This exploit performed, Fairthorn shambled into his chair at the dinner-table, as George Morley concluded the grace which preceded the meal that in Fairthorn's estimation usually made the grand event of the passing day. But the poor man's appetite was gone. As Sophy dined with Waife, the Morleys alone shared, with host and secretary, the melancholy entertainment. George was no less silent than Fairthorn; Darrell's manner perplexed him. Mrs. Morley, not admitted into her husband's confidence in secrets that concerned others, though in all his own he was to her conjugal sight */pellucidior vitro/*, was the chief talker; and being the best woman in the world, ever wishing to say something pleasant, she fell to praising the dear old family pictures that scowled at her from the wall, and informed Fairthorn that she had made great progress with her sketch of the old house as seen from the lake, and was in doubt whether she should introduce in the foreground some figures of the olden time, as in Nash's Views of Baronial Mansions. But not a word could she coax out of Fairthorn; and when she turned to appeal to Darrell, the host suddenly addressed to George a question as to the text and authorities by which the Papal Church defends its doctrine of Purgatory. That entailed a long and, no doubt, erudite reply, which lasted not only through the rest of the dinner, but till Mrs. Motley, edified by the discourse, and delighted to notice the undeviating attention which Darrell paid to her distinguished spouse, took advantage of the first full stop, and retired. Fairthorn finished his bottle of port, and, far from convinced that there was no Purgatory, but inclined to advance the novel heresy that Purgatory sometimes commenced on this side the grave--slinking away, and was seen no more that night; neither was his flute heard.

Then Darrell rose and said: "I shall go up-stairs to our sick friend for a few minutes; may I find you here when I come back? Your visit to him can follow mine."

On entering Waife's room, Darrell went straight forward towards Sophy, and cut off her retreat.

"Fair guest," said he, with a grace and tenderness of manner which, when he pleased it, could be ineffably bewitching--"teach me some art by which in future rather to detain than to scare away the presence in which a duller age than mine could still recognise the charms that subdue the young." He led her back gently to the seat she had deserted--placed himself next to her--addressed a few cordial queries to Waife about his health and comforts--and then said: "You must not leave me for some days yet. I have written by this post to my kinsman, Lionel Haughton. I have refused to be his ambassador at a court in which, by all the laws of nations, he is bound to submit himself to his conqueror. I cannot even hope that he may escape with his freedom. No! chains for life! Thrice happy, indeed, if that be the merciful sentence you inflict."

He raised Sophy's hand to his lips as he ended, and before she could even quite comprehend the meaning of his words--so was she startled, confused, incredulous of such sudden change in fate--the door had closed on Darrell, and Waife had clasped her to his breast, murmuring, "Is not Providence kind?"

Darrell rejoined the scholar. "George," said he, "be kind enough to tell Alban that you showed me his letter. Be kind enough also to write to Lady Montfort, and say that I gratefully acknowledge her wish to repair to me those losses which have left me to face age and the grave alone. Tell her that her old friend (you remember, George, I knew her as a child) sees in that wish the same sweet goodness of heart which soothed him when his son died and his daughter fled. Add that her wish is gratified. To that marriage in which she compassionately foresaw the best solace left to my bereaved and baffled existence--to that marriage I give my consent."

"You do! Oh, Mr. Darrell, how I honour you!"

"Nay, I no more deserve honour for consenting than I should have deserved contempt if I had continued to refuse. To do what I deemed right is not more my wish now than it was twelve hours ago. To what so sudden a change of resolve, in one who changes resolves very rarely, may be due, whether to Lady Montfort, to Alban, or to that metaphysical skill with which you wound into my reason, and compelled me to review all its judgments, I do not attempt to determine; yet I thought I had no option but the course I had taken. No; it is fair to yourself to give you the chief credit; you made me desire, you made me resolve, to find an option --I have found one. And now pay your visit where mine has been just paid. It will be three days, I suppose, before Lionel, having joined his new regiment at * * * *, can be here. And then it will be weeks yet, I believe, before his regiment sails; and I'm all for short courtships."

FAIRTHORN FRIGHTENS SOPHY. SIR ISAAC IS INVITED BY DARRELL, AND FORMS ONE OF A FAMILY CIRCLE.

Such a sweet voice in singing breaks out from yon leafless beeches! Waife hears it at noon from his window. Hark! Sophy has found song once more.

She is seated on a garden bench, looking across the lake towards the gloomy old Manor-house and the tall spectre palace beside it. Mrs. Morley is also on the bench, hard at work on her sketch; Fairthorn prowls through the thickets behind, wandering restless, and wretched, and wrathful beyond all words to describe. He hears that voice Singing; he stops short, perfectly rabid with indignation. "Singing," he muttered, "singing in triumph, and glowering at the very House she dooms to destruction. Worse than Nero striking his lyre amidst the conflagration of Rome!" By-and-by Sophy, who somehow or other cannot sit long in any place, and tires that day of any companion, wanders away from the lake and comes right upon Fairthorn. Hailing, in her unutterable secret bliss, the musician who had so often joined her rambles in the days of unuttered secret sadness, she sprang towards him, with welcome and mirth in a face that would have lured Diogenes out of his tub. Fairthorn recoiled sidelong, growling forth, "Don't--you had better not!"--grinned the most savage grin, showing all his teeth like a wolf; and as she stood, mute with wonder, perhaps with fright, he slunk edgeways off, as if aware of his own murderous inclinations, turning his head more than once, and shaking it at her; then, with the wonted mystery which enveloped his exits, he was gone! vanished behind a crag, or amidst a bush, or into a hole--Heaven knows; but, like the lady in the Siege of Corinth, who warned the renegade Alp of his approaching end, he was "gone."

Twice again that day Sophy encountered the enraged musician; each time the same menacing aspect and weird disappearance.

"Is Mr. Fairthorn ever a little-odd?" asked Sophy timidly of George Morley.

"Always," answered George, dryly.

Sophy felt relieved at that reply. Whatever is habitual in a man's manner, however unpleasant, is seldom formidable. Still Sophy could not help saying: "I wish poor Sir Isaac were here!"

"Do you?" said a soft voice behind her; "and pray, who is Sir Isaac?"

The speaker was Darrell, who had come forth with the resolute intent to see more of Sophy, and make himself as amiably social as he could. Guy Darrell could never be kind by halves.

"Sir Isaac is the wonderful dog you have heard me describe," replied George.

"Would he hurt my doe if he came here?" asked Darrell.

"Oh, no!" cried Sophy; "he never hurts anything. He once found a wounded hare, and he brought it in his mouth to us so tenderly, and seemed so anxious that we should cure it, which grandfather did, and the hare would sometimes hurt him, but he never hurt the hare."

Said George sonorously:

"Ingenuas didicisse fideliter artes
Emollit mores, nec sinit esse ferus."

Darrell drew Sophy's arm into his own. "Will you walk back to the lake with me," said he, "and help me to feed the swans? George, send your servant express for Sir Isaac. I am impatient to make his acquaintance."

Sophy's hand involuntarily pressed Darrell's arm. She looked up into his face with innocent, joyous gratitude; feeling at once, and as by magic, that her awe of him was gone.

Darrell and Sophy rambled thus together for more than an hour. He sought to draw out her mind, unaware to herself; he succeeded. He was struck with a certain simple poetry of thought which pervaded her ideas--not artificial sentimentality, but a natural tendency to detect in all life a something of delicate or beautiful which lies hid from the ordinary sense. He found, thanks to Lady Montfort, that, though far from learned, she was more acquainted with literature than he had supposed. And sometimes he changed colour, or breathed his short quick sigh, when he recognised her familiarity with passages in his favourite authors which he himself had commended, or read aloud, to the Caroline of old.

The next day Waife, who seemed now recovered as by enchantment, walked forth with George, Darrell again with Sophy. Sir Isaac arrived--Immense joy; the doe butts Sir Isaac, who retreating, stands on his hind legs, and, having possessed himself of Waife's crutch, presents fire; the doe in her turn retreats;--half an hour afterwards doe and dog are friends.

Waife is induced, without much persuasion, to join the rest of the party at dinner. In the evening, all (Fairthorn excepted) draw round the fire. Waife is entreated by George to read a scene or two out of Shakespeare. He selects the latter portion of "King Lear." Darrell, who never was a playgoer, and who, to his shame be it said, had looked very little into Shakespeare since he left college, was wonderstruck. He himself read beautifully--all great orators, I suppose, do; but his talent was not mimetic--not imitative; he could never have been an actor--never thrown himself into existences wholly alien or repugnant to his own. Grave or gay, stern or kind, Guy Darrell, though often varying, was always Guy Darrell.

But when Waife was once in that magical world of art, Waife was gone--nothing left of him;--the part lived as if there were no actor to it; --it was the Fool--it was Lear.

For the first time Darrell felt what a grand creature a grand actor really is--what a luminous, unconscious critic bringing out beauties of which no commentator ever dreamed! When the reading was over, talk still flowed; the gloomy old hearth knew the charm of a home circle. All started incredulous when the clock struck one. Just as Sophy was passing to the door, out from behind the window curtain glared a vindictive, spiteful eye. Fairthorn made a move at her, which 'tis a pity Waife did not see--it would have been a study for Caliban. She uttered a little scream.

"What's the matter?" cried the host.

"Nothing," said she quickly--far too generous to betray the hostile oddities of the musician. "Sir Isaac was in my way--that was all."

"Another evening we must have Fairthorn's flute," said Darrell. "What a pity he was not here to-night!--he would have enjoyed such reading--no one more."

Said Mrs. Morley, "He was here once or twice during the evening; but he vanished!"

"Vanishing seems his forte," said George.

Darrell looked annoyed. It was his peculiarity to resent any jest, however slight, against an absent friend; and at that moment his heart was perhaps more warmed towards Dick Fairthorn than to any man living. If he had not determined to be as amiable and mild towards his guests as his nature would permit, probably George might have had the flip of a sarcasm which would have tingled for a month. But as it was, Darrell contented himself with saying gravely:

"No, George; Fairthorn's foible is vanishing; his forte is fidelity. If my fortune were to vanish, Fairthorn would never disappear; and that's more than I would say if I were a King, and Fairthorn--a Bishop!"

After that extraordinary figure of speech, "Good-nights" were somewhat hastily exchanged; and Fairthorn was left; behind the curtain with feelings towards all his master's guests as little, it is to be hoped, like those of a Christian Bishop towards his fellow-creatures, as they possibly could be.

CHAPTER VII.

"Domus et placens Uxor."

FAIRTHORN FINDS NOTHING /PLACENS/ IN THE /UXOR/, TO WHOM /DOMUS/ IS INDEBTED FOR ITS DESTRUCTION.

Another day! Lionel is expected to arrive an hour or two after noon.

Darrell is in his room--his will once more before him. He has drawn up a rough copy of the codicil by which Fawley is to pass away, and the name of Darrell be consigned to the care of grateful Learning, linked with prizes and fellowships;--a public property--lost for ever to private representatives of its sepulchred bearers. Preparations for departure from the doomed dwelling-house have begun. There are large boxes on the floor; and favourite volumes--chiefly in science or classics--lie piled beside them for selection.

What is really at the bottom of Guy Darrell's heart? Does he feel reconciled to his decision? Is the virtue of his new self-sacrifice in itself a consoling reward? Is that cordial urbanity, that cheerful kindness, by which he has been yet more endearing himself to his guests, sincere or assumed? As he throws aside his pen, and leans his cheek on his hand, the expression of his countenance may perhaps best answer those questions. It has more unmingled melancholy than was habitual to it before, even when in his gloomiest moods; but it is a melancholy much more soft and subdued; it is the melancholy of resignation--that of a man who has ceased a long struggle--paid his offering to the appeased Nemesis, in casting into the sea the thing that had been to him the dearest.

But in resignation, when complete, there is always a strange relief. Despite that melancholy, Darrell is less unhappy than he has been for years. He feels as if a suspense has passed--a load been lifted from his breast. After all, he has secured, to the best of his judgment, the happiness of the living, and, in relinquishing the object to which his own life has been vainly devoted, and immolating the pride attached to it, he has yet, to use his own words, paid his "dues to the dead." No descendant from a Jasper Losely and a Gabrielle Desmarets will sit as mistress of the house in which Loyalty and Honour had garnered, with the wrecks of fortune, the memories of knightly fame--nor perpetuate the name of Darrell through children whose blood has a source in the sink of infamy and fraud. Nor was this consolation that of a culpable pride; it was bought by the abdication of a pride that had opposed its prejudices to living worth--to living happiness. Sophy would not be punished for sins not her own--Lionel not barred from a prize that earth never might replace. What mattered to them a mouldering, old, desolate manor-house --a few hundreds of pitiful acres? Their children would not be less blooming if their holiday summer-noons were not shaded by those darksome trees--nor less lively of wit if their school themes were signed in the name, not of Darrell, but Haughton.

A slight nervous knock at the door. Darrell has summoned Fairthorn; Fairthorn enters. Darrell takes up a paper; it contains minute instructions as to the demolition of the two buildings. The materials of the new pile may be disposed of, sold, carted away--anyhow, anywhere. Those of the old house are sacred--not a brick to be carried from the precincts around it. No; from foundation to roof, all to be piously removed--to receive formal interment deep in the still bosom of the little lake, and the lake to be filled up and turfed over. The pictures and antiquities selected for the Darrell Museum are, of course, to be carefully transported to London--warehoused safely till the gift from

owner to nation be legally ratified. The pictures and articles of less value will be sent to an auction. But when it came to the old family portraits in the Manorhouse, the old homely furniture, familiarised to sight and use and love from infancy, Darrell was at a loss; his invention failed. That question was reserved for further consideration.

"And why," says Fairthorn, bluntly and coarsely, urging at least reprieve; "why, if it must be, not wait till you are no more? Why must the old house be buried before you are?"

"Because," answered Darrell, "such an order, left by will, would seem a reproach to my heirs; it would wound Lionel to the quick. Done in my lifetime, and just after I have given my blessing on his marriage, I can suggest a thousand reasons for an old man's whim; and my manner alone will dispel all idea of a covert affront to his charming innocent bride."

"I wish she were hanged, with all my heart," muttered Fairthorn, "coming here to do such astonishing mischief! But, sir, I can't obey you; 'tis no use talking. You must get some one else. Parson Morley will do it--with pleasure too, no doubt; or that hobbling old man whom I suspect to be a conjurer. Who knows but what he may get knocked on the head as he is looking on with his wicked one eye; and then there will be an end of him, too, which would be a great satisfaction!"

"Pshaw, my dear Dick; there is no one else I can ask but you. The Parson would argue; I've had enough of his arguings; and the old man is the last whom my own arguings could deceive. Fiat justitia."

"Don't, sir, don't; you are breaking my heart--'tis a shame, sir," sobbed the poor faithful rebel.

"Well, Dick, then I must see it done myself; and you shall go on first to Sorrento, and hire some villa to suit us. I don't see why Lionel should not be married next week; then the house will be clear. And--yes--it was cowardly in me to shrink. Mine be the task. Shame on me to yield it to another. Go back to thy flute, Dick.

'Neque tibus
Euterpe cohibet, nec Polyhymnia
Lesboum refugit tendere barbiton!"

At that last remorseless shaft from the Horatian quiver, "Venenatis gravida sagittis," Fairthorn could stand ground no longer; there was a shamble--a plunge--and once more the man was vanished.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FLUTE-PLAYER SHOWS HOW LITTLE MUSIC HATH POWER TO SOOTHE THE SAVAGE BREAST--OF A MUSICIAN.

Fairthorn found himself on the very spot in which, more than five years ago, Lionel, stung by Fairthorn's own incontinent prickles, had been discovered by Darrell. There he threw himself on the ground, as the boy had done; there, like the boy, he brooded moodily, bitterly--sore with the world and himself. To that letter, written on the day that Darrell had so shocked him, and on which letter he had counted as a last forlorn--hope, no answer had been given. In an hour or so, Lionel would arrive; those hateful nuptials, dooming Fawley as the nuptials of Paris and Helen had doomed Troy, would be finally arranged. In another week the work of demolition would commence. He never meant to leave Darrell to superintend that work. No; grumble and refuse as he might till the last moment, he knew well enough that, when it came to the point, he, Richard Fairthorn, must endure any torture that could save Guy Darrell from a pang. A voice comes singing low through the grove--the patter of feet on the crisp leaves. He looks up; Sir Isaac is scrutinising him gravely--behind Sir Isaac, Darrell's own doe, led patiently by Sophy, yes, lending its faithless neck to that female criminal's destroying hand. He could not bear that sight, which added insult to injury. He scrambled up--darted a kick at Sir Isaac--snatched the doe from the girl's hand, and looked her in the face (her--not Sophy, but the doe) with a reproach that, if the brute had not been lost to all sense of shame, would have cut her to the heart; then, turning to Sophy, he said: "No, Miss! I reared this creature--fed it with my own hands, Miss. I gave it up to Guy Darrell, Miss; and you shan't steal this from him, whatever else you may do, Miss."

SOPHY.--"Indeed, Mr. Fairthorn, it was for Mr. Darrell's sake that I wished to make friends with the doe--as you would with poor Sir Isaac, if you would but try and like me--a little, only a very little, Mr. Fairthorn."

FAIRTHORN.--"Don't!"

SOPHY.--"Don't what? I am so sorry to see I have annoyed you somehow. You have not been the same person to me the last two or three days. Tell me what I have done wrong; scold me, but make it up."

FAIRTHORN.--"Don't holdout your hand to me! Don't be smiling in my face! I don't choose it! Get out of my sight! You are standing between me and the old house--robbing me even of my last looks at the home which you--"

SOPHY.--"Which I--what?"

FAIRTHORN.--"Don't, I say, don't--don't tempt me. You had better not ask questions--that's all. I shall tell you the truth; I know I shall; my tongue is itching to tell it. Please to walk on."

Despite the grotesque manner and astounding rudeness of the flute-player, his distress of mind was so evident--there was something so genuine and earnest at the bottom of his ludicrous anger--that Sopby began to feel a vague presentiment of evil. That she was the mysterious cause of some great suffering to this strange enemy, whom she had unconsciously provoked, was clear; and she said, therefore, with more gravity than she

had before evinced:

"Mr. Fairthorn, tell me how I have incurred your displeasure, I entreat you to do so; no matter how painful the truth may be, it is due to us both not to conceal it."

A ray of hope darted through Fairthorn's enraged and bewildered mind. He looked to the right--he looked to the left; no one near. Releasing his hold on the doe, he made a sidelong dart towards Sophy, and said: "Hush; do you really care what becomes of Mr. Darrell?"

"To be sure I do."

"You would not wish him to die broken-hearted in a foreign land--that old house levelled to the ground and buried in the lake? Eh, Miss--eh?"

"How can you ask me such questions?" said Sophy, faintly. "Do speak plainly, and at once."

"Well, I will, Miss. I believe you are a good young lady, after all--and don't wish really to bring disgrace upon all who want to keep you in the dark, and--"

"Disgrace!" interrupted Sophy; and her pure spirit rose, and the soft blue eye flashed a ray like a shootingstar.

"No, I am sure you would not like it; and some time or other you could not help knowing, and you would be very sorry for it. And that boy Lionel, who was as proud as Guy Darrell himself when I saw him last (prouder indeed)--that he should be so ungrateful to his benefactor! And, indeed, the day may come when he may turn round on you, or on the lame old gentleman, and say he has been disgraced. Should not wonder at all! Young folks when they are sweet-hearting only talk about roses and angels, and such-like; but when husbands and wives fall out, as they always do sooner or later, they don't mince their words then, and they just take the sharpest thing that they can find at their tongue's end. So you may depend on it, my dear Miss, that some day or other that young Haughton will say, 'that you lost him the old Manor-house and the old Darrell name,' and have been his disgrace; that's the very word, Miss; I have heard husbands and wives say it to each other over and over again."

SOPHY.--"Oh, Mr. Fairthorn! Mr. Fairthorn! these horrid words cannot be meant for me. I will go to Mr. Darrell--I will ask him how I can be a dis--" Her lips could not force out the word.

FAIRTHORN.--"Ay; go to Mr. Darrell, if you please. He will deny it all; he will never speak to me again. I don't care--I am reckless. But it is not the less true that you make him an exile because you may make me a beggar."

SOPHY (wringing her hands).--"Have you no mercy, Mr. Fairthorn? Will you not explain?"

FAIRTHORN.--"Yes, if you will promise to keep it secret at least for the next six months--anything for breathing-time."

SOPHY (impatiently).--"I promise, I promise; speak, speak."

And then Fairthorn did speak! He did speak of Jasper Losely--his character--his debasement--even of his midnight visit to her host's chamber. He did speak of the child fraudulently sought to be thrust on Darrell--of Darrell's just indignation and loathing. The man was merciless; though he had not an idea of the anguish he was inflicting, he was venting his own anguish. All the mystery of her past life became clear at once to the unhappy girl--all that had been kept from her by protecting love. All her vague conjectures now became a dreadful certainty;--explained now why Lionel had fled her--why he had written that letter, over the contents of which she had pondered, with her finger on her lip, as if to hush her own sighs--all, all! She marry Lionel now! impossible! She bring disgrace upon him in return for such generous, magnanimous affection! She drive his benefactor, her grandsire's vindicator, from his own hearth! She--she--that Sophy who, as a mere infant, had recoiled from the thought of playful subterfuge and tamperings with plain honest truth! She rose before Fairthorn had done; indeed, the tormentor, left to himself, would not have ceased till nightfall.

"Fear not, Mr. Fairthorn," she said, resolutely; "Mr. Darrell will be no exile! his house will not be destroyed. Lionel Houghton shall not wed the child of disgrace! Fear not, sir; all is safe!"

She shed not a tear; nor was there writ on her countenance that CHANGE, speaking of blighted hope, which had passed over it at her young lover's melancholy farewell. No, now she was supported--now there was a virtue by the side of a sorrow--now love was to shelter and save the beloved from disgrace--from disgrace! At that thought, disgrace fell harmless from herself, as the rain from the plumes of a bird. She passed on, her cheek glowing, her form erect.

By the porch-door she met Waife and the Morleys. With a kind of wild impetuosity she seized the old man's arm, and drew it fondly, clingingly within her own. Henceforth they two were to be, as in years gone by, all in all to each other. George Morley eyed her countenance in thoughtful surprise. Mrs. Morley, bent as usual on saying something seasonably kind, burst into an eulogium on her brilliant colour. So they passed on towards the garden side of the house. Wheels--the tramp of hoofs, full gallop; and George Morley, looking up, exclaimed: "Ha! here comes Lionel! and see, Darrell is hastening out to welcome him!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE LETTER ON WHICH RICHARD FAIRTHORN RELIED FOR THE DEFEAT OF THE CONSPIRACY AGAINST FAWLEY MANOR-HOUSE. BAD ASPECTS FOR HOUSES. THE

HOUSE OF VIPONT IS THREATENED. A PHYSICIAN ATTEMPTS TO MEDICINE TO A MIND DISEASED. A STRANGE COMMUNICATION, WHICH HURRIES THE READER ONTO THE NEXT CHAPTER.

It has been said that Fairthorn had committed to a certain letter his last desperate hope that something might yet save Fawley from demolition, and himself and his master from an exile's home in that smiling nook of earth to which Horace invited Septimius, as uniting the advantages of a mild climate, excellent mutton, capital wine; and affording to Septimius the prospective privilege of sprinkling a tear over the cinder of his poetical friend while the cinder was yet warm; inducements which had no charm at all to Fairthorn, who was quite satisfied with the Fawley southdowns--held in just horror all wishy-washy light wines--and had no desire to see Darrell reduced to a cinder for the pleasure of sprinkling that cinder with a tear.

The letter in question was addressed to Lady Montfort. Unscrupulously violating the sacred confidence of his master, the treacherous wretch, after accusing her, in language little more consistent with the respect due to the fair sex than that which he had addressed to Sophy, of all the desolation that the perfidious nuptials of Caroline Lyndsay had brought upon Guy Darrell, declared that the least Lady Montfort could do to repair the wrongs inflicted by Caroline Lyndsay, was--not to pity his master!--that her pity was killing him. He repeated, with some grotesque comments of his own, but on the whole not inaccurately, what Darrell had said to him on the subject of her pity. He then informed her of Darrell's consent to Lionel's marriage with Sophy; in which criminal espousals it was clear, from Darrell's words, that Lady Montfort had had some nefarious share. In the most lugubrious colours he brought before her the consequences of that marriage--the extinguished name, the demolished dwelling-place, the renunciation of native soil itself. He called upon her, by all that was sacred, to contrive some means to undo the terrible mischief she had originally occasioned, and had recently helped to complete. His epistle ended by an attempt to conciliate and coax. He revived the image of that wild Caroline Lyndsay, to whom HE had never refused a favour; whose earliest sums he had assisted to cast up--to whose young idea he had communicated the elementary principles of the musical gamut--to whom he had played on his flute, winter eve and summer noon, by the hour together; that Caroline Lyndsay, who when a mere child, had led Guy Darrell where she willed, as by a thread of silk. Ah, how Fairthorn had leapt for joy when, eighteen years ago, he had thought that Caroline Lyndsay was to be the sunshine and delight of the house to which she had lived to bring the cloud and the grief! And by all these memories, Fairthorn conjured her either to break off the marriage she had evidently helped to bring about, or, failing that, to convince Guy Darrell that he was not the object of her remorseful and affectionate compassion.

Caroline was almost beside herself at the receipt of this letter. The picture of Guy Darrell effacing his very life from his native land, and destroying the last memorials of his birthright and his home--the conviction of the influence she still retained over his bleak and solitary existence--the experience she had already acquired that the

influence failed where she had so fondly hoped it might begin to repair and to bless, all overpowered her with emotions of yearning tenderness and unmitigated despair. What could she do? She could not offer herself, again to be rejected. She could not write again, to force her penitence upon the man who, while acknowledging his love to be unconquered, had so resolutely refused to see, in the woman who had once deceived his trust--the Caroline of old! Alas, if he were but under the delusion that her pity was the substitute and not the companion of love, how could she undeceive him? How say--how write--"Accept me, for I love you." Caroline Montfort had no pride of rank, but she had pride of sex; that pride had been called forth, encouraged, strengthened, throughout all the years of her wedded life. For Guy Darrell's sake, and to him alone, that pride she had cast away--trampled upon; such humility was due to him. But when the humility had been once in vain, could it be repeated--would it not be debasement? In the first experiment she had but to bow to his reproach--in a second experiment she might have but to endure his contempt. Yet how, with her sweet, earnest, affectionate nature--how she longed for one more interview--one more explanation! If chance could but bring it about; if she had but a pretext--a fair reason, apart from any interest of her own, to be in his presence once more! But in a few days he would have left England forever--his heart yet more hardened in its resolves by the last sacrifice to what it had so sternly recognised to be a due to others. Never to see him more--never to know how much in that sacrifice he was suffering now--would perhaps suffer more hereafter, in the reaction that follows all strain upon purpose--and yet not a word of comfort from her--her who felt born to be his comforter.

But this marriage, that cost him so much, must that be? Could she dare, even for his sake, to stand between two such fair young lives as those of Lionel and Sophy--confide to them what Fairthorn had declared--appeal to their generosity? She shrunk from inflicting such intolerable sorrow. Could it be her duty? In her inability to solve this last problem, she bethought herself of Alban Morley; here, at least, he might give advice--offer suggestion. She sent to his house entreating him to call. Her messenger was some hours before he found the Colonel, and then brought back but a few hasty lines--"impossible to call that day. The CRISIS had come at last! The Country, the House of Vipont, the British Empire, were trembling in the balance. The Colonel was engaged every moment for the next twelve hours. He had the Earl of Montfort, who was intractable and stupid beyond conception, to see and talk over; Carr Vipont was hard at work on the materials for the new Cabinet--Alban was helping Carr Vipont. If the House of Vipont failed England at this moment, it would not be a CRISIS, but a CRASH! The Colonel hoped to arrange an interview with Lady Montfort for a minute or two the next day. But perhaps she would excuse him from a journey to Twickenham, and drive into town to see him; if not at home, he would leave word where he was to be found."

By the beard of Jupiter Capitolinus, there are often revolutions in the heart of woman, during which she is callous to a Crisis, and has not even a fear for a CRASH!

The next day came George's letter to Caroline, with the gentle message

from Darrell; and when Dr. F-----, whose apprehensions for the state of her health Colonel Morley had by no means exaggerated, called in the afternoon to see the effect of his last prescription, he found her in such utter prostration of nerves and spirits, that he resolved to hazard a dose not much known to great ladies--viz. three grains of plain-speaking, with a minim of frightening.

"My dear lady," said he, "yours is a case in which physicians can be of very little use. There is something on the mind which my prescriptions fail to reach; worry of some sort--decidedly worry. And unless you yourself can either cure that, or will make head against it, worry, my dear Lady Montfort, will end not in consumption--you are too finely formed to let worry eat holes in the lungs--no; but in a confirmed aneurism of the heart, and the first sudden shock might then be immediately fatal. The heart is a noble organ--bears a great deal--but still its endurance has limits. Heart-complaints are more common than they were;--over-education and over-civilisation, I suspect. Very young people are not so subject to them; they have flurry, not worry--a very different thing. A good chronic silent grief of some years standing, that gets worried into acute inflammation at the age when feeling is no longer fancy, throws out a heart-disease which sometimes kills without warning, or sometimes, if the grief be removed, will rather prolong than shorten life, by inducing a prudent avoidance of worry in future. There is that worthy old gentleman who was taken so ill at Fawley, and about whom you were so anxious: in his case there had certainly been chronic grief; then came acute worry, and the heart could not get through its duties. Fifty years ago doctors would have cried 'apoplexy!'--nowadays we know that the heart saves the head. Well, he was more easy in his mind the last time I saw him, and thanks to his temperance, and his constitutional dislike to self-indulgence in worry, he may jog on to eighty, in spite of the stethoscope! Excess in the moral emotions gives heart-disease; abuse of the physical powers, paralysis; both more common than they were--the first for your gentle sex, the second for our rough one. Both, too, lie in wait for their victims at the entrance in middle life. I have a very fine case of paralysis now; a man built up by nature to live to a hundred--never saw such a splendid formation--such bone and such muscle. I would have given Van Amburgh the two best of his lions, and my man would have done for all three in five minutes. All the worse for him, my dear lady--all the worse for him. His strength leads him on to abuse the main fountains of life, and out jumps avenging Paralysis and fells him to earth with a blow. 'Tis your Hercules that Paralysis loves; she despises the weak invalid, who prudently shims all excess. And so, my dear lady, that assassin called Aneurism lies in wait for the hearts that abuse their own force of emotion; sparing hearts that, less vital, are thrifty in waste and supply. But you are not listening to one! And yet my patient may not be quite unknown to your ladyship; for in happening to mention the other day, to the lady who attends to and nurses him, that I could not call this morning, as I had a visit to pay to Lady Montfort at Twickenham, she became very anxious about you, and wrote this note, which she begged me to give you. She seems very much attached to my patient--not his wife nor his sister. She interests me;--capital nurse--cleverish woman too. Oh! here is the note."

Caroline, who had given but little heed to this recital, listlessly received the note--scarcely looked at the address--and was about to put it aside, when the good doctor, who was intent upon rousing her by any means, said: "No, my dear lady, I promised that I would see you read the note; besides, I am the most curious of men, and dying to know a little more who and what is the writer."

Caroline broke the seal and read as follows: "If Lady Montfort remembers Arabella Fossett, and will call at Clare Cottage, Vale of Health, Hampstead, at her ladyship's earliest leisure, and ask for Mrs. Crane, some information, not perhaps important to Lady Montfort, but very important to Mr. Darrell, will be given."

Lady Montfort startled the doctor by the alertness with which she sprang to her feet and rang the bell.

"What is it?" asked he.

"The carriage immediately," cried Lady Montfort as the servant entered.

"Ah! you are going to see the poor lady, Mrs. Crane, eh? Well, it is a charming drive, and just what I should have recommended. Any exertion will do you good. Allow me; why, your pulse is already fifty per cent. better. Pray what relation is Mrs. Crane to my patient?"

"I really don't know; pray excuse me, my dear Dr. F-----."

"Certainly; go while the day is fine. Wrap up;--a close carriage, mind;--and I will look in to-morrow."

CHAPTER X.

WHEREIN IS INSINUATED THE HIGHEST COMPLIMENT TO WOMAN EVER PAID TO HER SEX BY THE AUTHOR OF THIS WORK.

Lady Montfort has arrived at Clare Cottage. She is shown by Bridget Greggs into a small room upon the first floor; folding-doors to some other room closely shut--evidences of sickness in the house;--phials on the chimneypiece--a tray with a broth-basin on the table--a saucepan on the hob--the sofa one of those that serve as a bed, which Sleep little visits, for one who may watch through the night over some helpless sufferer--a woman's shawl thrown carelessly over its hard narrow bolster;--all, in short, betraying that pathetic untidiness and discomfort which says that a despot is in the house to whose will order and form are subordinate;--the imperious Tyranny of Disease establishing itself in a life that, within those four walls, has a value not to be measured by its worth to the world beyond. The more feeble and helpless the sufferer, the more sovereign the despotism--the more submissive the servitude.

In a minute or two one of the folding-doors silently opened and as silently closed, admitting into Lady Montfort's presence a grim woman in iron grey.

Caroline could not, at the first glance, recognise that Arabella Fossett, of whose handsome, if somewhat too strongly defined and sombre countenance, she had retained a faithful reminiscence. But Arabella had still the same imposing manner which had often repressed the gay spirits of her young pupil; and as she now motioned the great lady to a seat, and placed herself beside, an awed recollection of the schoolroom bowed Caroline's lovely head in mute respect.

MRS. CRANE.--"You too are changed since I saw you last,--that was more than five years ago, but you are not less beautiful. You can still be loved;--you would not scare away the man whom you might desire to save. Sorrow has its partialities. Do you know that I have a cause to be grateful to you, without any merit of your own. In a very dark moment of my life--only vindictive and evil passions crowding on me--your face came across my sight. Goodness seemed there so beautiful--and, in this face, Evil looked so haggard! Do not interrupt me. I have but few minutes to spare you. Yes; at the sight of that face, gentle recollections rose up. You had ever been kind to me; and truthful, Caroline Lyndsay--truthful. Other thoughts came at the beam of that face, as other thoughts come when a strain of unexpected music reminds us of former days. I cannot tell how, but from that moment a something more like womanhood, than I had known for years, entered into my heart. Within that same hour I was sorely tried galled to the quick of my soul. Had I not seen you before, I might have dreamed of nothing but a stern and dire revenge. And a purpose of revenge I did form. But it was not to destroy--it was to save! I resolved that the man who laughed to scorn the idea of vows due to me--vows to bind life to life--should yet sooner or later be as firmly mine as if he had kept his troth; that my troth at least should be kept to him, as if it had been uttered at the altar.

"Hush, did you hear a moan?--No! He lies yonder, Caroline Lyndsay--mine, indeed, till the grave us do part. These hands have closed over him, and he rests in their clasp, helpless as an infant." Involuntarily Caroline recoiled. But looking into that careworn face, there was in it so wild a mixture of melancholy tenderness, with a resolved and fierce expression of triumph, that, more impressed by the tenderness than by the triumph, the woman sympathised with the woman; and Caroline again drew near, nearer than before, and in her deep soft eyes pity alone was seen. Into those eyes Arabella looked, as if spellbound, and the darker and sterner expression in her own face gradually relaxed and fled, and only the melancholy tenderness was left behind. She resumed:

"I said to Guy Darrell that I would learn, if possible, whether the poor child whom I ill-used in my most wicked days, and whom you, it seems, have so benignly sheltered, was the daughter of Matilda--or, as he believed, of a yet more hateful mother. Long ago I had conceived a suspicion that there was some ground to doubt poor Jasper's assertion, for I had chanced to see two letters addressed to him--one from that Gabrielle Desinarets whose influence over his life had been so baleful

--in which she spoke of some guilty plunder with which she was coming to London, and invited him again to join his fortunes with her own. Oh, but the cold, bloodless villany of the tone!--the ease with which crimes for a gibbet were treated as topics for wit!" Arabella stopped--the same shudder came over her as when she had concluded the epistles abstracted from the dainty pocketbook. "But in the letter were also allusions to Sophy, to another attempt on Darrell to be made by Gabrielle herself. Nothing very clear; but a doubt did suggest itself--'Is she writing to him about his own child?' The other letter was from the French nurse with whom Sophy had been placed as an infant. It related to inquiries in person, and a visit to her own house, which Mr. Darrell had recently made; that letter also seemed to imply some deception, though but by a few dubious words. At that time the chief effect of the suspicion these letters caused was but to make me more bent on repairing to Sophy my cruelties to her childhood. What if I had been cruel to an infant who, after all, was not the daughter of that false, false Matilda Darrell! I kept in my memory the French nurse's address. I thought that when in France I might seek and question her. But I lived only for one absorbing end. Sophy was not then in danger; and even my suspicions as to her birth died away. Pass on!--Guy Darrell! Ah, Lady Montfort! his life has been embittered like mine; but he was man, and could bear it better. He has known, himself, the misery of broken faith, of betrayed affection, which he could pity so little when its blight fell on me; but you have excuse for desertion--you yourself were deceived; and I pardon him, for he pardoned Jasper, and we are fellow-sufferers. You weep! Pardon my rudeness. I did not mean to pain you. Try and listen calmly--I must hurry on. On leaving Mr. Darrell I crossed to France. I saw the nurse; I have ascertained the truth; here are the proofs in this packet. I came back--I saw Jasper Losely. He was on the eve of seeking you, whom he had already so wronged--of claiming the child, or rather of extorting money for the renunciation of a claim to one whom you had adopted. I told him how vainly he had hitherto sought to fly from me. One by one I recited the guilty schemes in which I had baffled his purpose--all the dangers from which I had rescued his life. I commanded him to forbear the project he had then commenced. I told him I would frustrate that project as I had frustrated others. Alas, alas! why is this tongue so harsh?--why does this face so belie the idea of human kindness? I did but enrage and madden him; he felt but the reckless impulse to destroy the life that then stood between himself and the objects to which he had pledged his own self-destruction. I thought I should die by his hand. I did not quail. Ah! the ghastly change that came over his face--the one glance of amaze and superstitious horror; his arm obeyed him not; his strength, his limbs, forsook him; he fell at my feet--one side of him stricken dead! Hist! that is his voice--pardon me!" and Arabella flitted from the room, leaving the door ajar.

A feeble Voice, like the treble of an infirm old man, came painfully to Caroline's ear.

"I want to turn; help me. Why am I left alone? It is cruel to leave me so--cruel!"

In the softest tones to which that harsh voice could be tuned, the grim

woman apologised and soothed.

"You gave me leave, Jasper dear. You said it would be a relief to you to have her pardon as well as theirs."

"Whose pardon?" asked the voice querulously.

"Caroline Lyndsay's--Lady Montfort's."

"Nonsense! What did I ever do against her? Oh--ah! I remember now. Don't let me have it over again. Yes--she pardons me, I suppose! Get me my broth, and don't be long!"

Arabella came back, closing the door; and while she busied herself with that precious saucepan on the hob--to which the Marchioness of Montfort had become a very secondary object--she said, looking towards Caroline from under her iron-grey ringlets:

"You heard--he misses me! He can't bear me out of his sight now--me, me! You heard!"

Meekly Lady Montfort advanced, bringing in her hand the tray with the broth-basin.

"Yes, I heard! I must not keep you; but let me help while I stay."

So the broth was poured forth and prepared, and with it Arabella disappeared. She returned in a few minutes, beckoned to Caroline, and said in a low voice:

"Come in--say you forgive him! Oh, you need not fear him; a babe could not fear him now!"

Caroline followed Arabella into the sick-room. No untidiness there; all so carefully, thoughtfully arranged. A pleasant room, too--with windows looking full on the sunniest side of the Vale of Health; the hearth so cheerily clear, swept so clean--the very ashes out of sight; flowers--costly exotics--on the table, on the mantelpiece; the couch drawn towards the window; and on that couch, in the gay rich dressing-gown of former days, warm coverlets heaped on the feet, snow-white pillows propping the head, lay what at first seemed a vague, undistinguishable mass--lay what, as the step advanced, and the eye became more accurately searching, grew into Jasper Losely.

Yes, there, too weak indeed for a babe to fear, lay all that was left of the Strong Man! No enemy but himself had brought him thus low--spendthrift, and swindler, and robber of his own priceless treasures--Health and Strength--those grand rent-rolls of joy which Nature had made his inheritance. As a tree that is crumbling to dust under the gnarls of its bark seems, the moment ere it falls, proof against time and the tempest, so, within all decayed, stood that image of strength--so, air scarcely stirring, it fell. "And the pitcher was broken at the fountain; and the wheel was broken at the cistern; vanity of vanities, saith the

Preacher."

Jasper turned his dull eye towards Caroline, as she came softly to his side, and looked at her with a piteous gaze. The stroke that had shattered the form had spared the face; and illness and compulsory abstinence from habitual stimulants had taken from the aspect much of the coarseness--whether of shape or colour--that of late years had disfigured its outline--and supplied the delicacy which ends with youth by the delicacy that comes with the approach of death. So that, in no small degree, the beauty which had been to him so fatal a gift, was once more visible--the features growing again distinct, as wanness succeeded to the hues of intemperance, and emaciation to the bloated cheeks and swollen muscle. The goddess whose boons adorn the outward shell of the human spirit came back to her favourite's death-couch as she had come to the cradle--not now as the Venus Erycina, goddess of Smile and Jest, but as the warning Venus Libitina, the goddess of Doom and the Funeral.

"I'm a very poor creature," said Jasper, after a pause. "I can't rise-- I can't move without help. Very strange supernatural! She always said that if I raised my hand against her, it would fall palsied!" He turned his eye towards Arabella with a glare of angry terror. "She is a witch!" he said, and buried his face in the pillow. Tears rolled down the grim woman's cheeks.

LADY MONTFORT.--"She is rather your good ministering spirit. Do not be unkind to her. Over her you have more power now than you had when you were well and strong. She lives but to serve you; command her gently."

Jasper was not proof against that sweet voice. With difficulty he wrenched himself round, and again looked long at Caroline Montfort, as if the sight did him good; then he made a sign to Arabella, who flew to his side and raised him.

"I have been a sad dog," he said, with a mournful attempt at the old rollicking tone--"a very sad dog--in short, a villain! But all ladies are indulgent to villains in fact, prefer them! Never knew a lady who could endure 'a good young man'--never! So I am sure you will forgive me, miss--ma'am. Who is this lady? When it comes to forgiveness, there are so many of them! Oh, I remember now--your ladyship will forgive me--'tis all down in black and white what I've done--Belles has it. You see this hand--I can write with this hand--this is not paralysed.

"This is not the hand I tried to raise against her. But /basta, basta! where was I? My poor head! I know what it is to have a head now!--ache, ache!--boom, boom--weight, weight--heavy as a church bell--hollow as a church bell--noisy as a church bell! Brandy! give me brandy, you witch!--I mean Bella, good Bella, give me brandy!"

"Not yet, Jasper dear. You are to have it every third hour; it is not time yet, dearest; you must attend to the doctor, and try to get well and recover your strength. You remember I told you how kind Lady Montfort had been to your father, and you wished to see and thank her."

"My father--my poor, poor father! You've been kind to him! Bless you, bless you! And you will see him? I want his pardon before I die. Don't forget, and--and--"

"Poor Sophy!" said Mrs. Crane.

"Ah yes! But she's well off now, you tell me. I can't think I have injured her. And really girls and women are intended to be a little useful to one. /Basta, basta/."

"Mr. Darrell--"

"Yes, yes, yes! I forgive him, or he forgives me; settle it as you like. But my father's pardon, Lady Montfort, you will get me that!"

"I will, I will."

He looked at her again, and smiled. Arabella gently let his head fall back upon the pillow.

"Throw a handkerchief over my face," he said feebly, "and leave me; but be in call; I feel sleepy." His eyes closed; he seemed asleep even before they stole from the room.

"You will bring his father to him?" said Arabella, when she and Lady Montfort were again alone. "In this packet is Jasper's confession of the robbery for which that poor old man suffered. I never knew of that before. But you see how mild he is now!--how his heart is changed; it is indeed changed more than he shows; only you have seen him at the worst--his mind wanders a little to-day; it does sometimes. I have a favour to ask of you. I once heard a preacher, not many months ago; he affected me as no preacher ever did before. I was told that he was Colonel Morley's nephew. Will you ask Colonel Morley to persuade him to come to Jasper?"

"My cousin, George Morley! He shall come, I promise you; so shall your poor patient's forgiving father. Is there more I can do?"

"No. Explain to Mr. Darrell the reason why I have so long delayed sending to him the communication which he will find in the packet I have given to you, and which you will first open, reading the contents yourself--a part of them, at least, in Jasper's attestation of his stratagem to break off your marriage with Mr. Darrell, may yet be of some value to you--you had better also show the papers to Colonel Morley--he may complete the task. I had meant, on returning to England, or before seeing Mr. Darrell, to make the inquiries which you will see are still necessary. But then came this terrible affliction! I have been able to think of nothing else but Jasper;--terrible to quit the house which contains him for an hour; only, when Dr. F. told me that he was attending you, that you were ill and suffering, I resolved to add to this packet Jasper's own confession. Ah, and he gave it so readily, and went yesterday through the fatigue of writing with such good heart. I tell you that there is a change within him--there is there is. Well, well--I resolved to give you the packet to transmit to Mr. Darrell, for somehow

or other I connected your illness with your visit to him at Fawley!"

"My visit to Mr. Darrell!"

"Jasper saw you as your carriage drove from the park gate, not very many days since. Ah, you change colour! You have wronged that man; repair the wrong; you have the power!"

"Alas! no," murmured Caroline, "I have not the power."

"Pooh!--he loves you still. You are not one of those whom men forget."

Caroline was silent, but involuntarily she lowered her veil. In an instant the acute sense of the grim woman detected the truth.

"Ah! Pride--pride in both," she said. "I understand--I dare not blame him here. But you--you were the injurer; you have no right to pride; you will see him again."

"No--never--never!" faltered Caroline, with accents scarcely audible under her veil.

Arabella was silent for a moment, and Lady Montfort rose hastily to depart.

"You will see him again, I tell you;" and Arabella then following her to the door:

"Stay; do you think HE will die?"

"Good heavens! Mr. Darrell?"

"No, no--Jasper Losely!"

"I hope not. What does Dr. F. say?"

"He will not tell me. But it is not the paralysis alone; he might recover from that--so young still. There are other symptoms; that dreadful habit of stimulants! He sinks if he has them not--they hasten death if he has. But--but--but--HE IS MINE, AND MINE ONLY, TO THE GRAVE --NOW!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE CRISIS--PUBLIC AND PRIVATE.

Lady Montfort's carriage stopped at Colonel Morley's door just as Carr Vipont was coming out. Carr, catching sight of her, bustled up to the carriage window.

"My dear Lady Montfort!--not seen you for an age! What times we live in! How suddenly THE CRISIS has come upon us! Sad loss in poor dear Montfort; no wonder you mourn for him! Had his failings, true--who is not mortal?--but always voted right; always to be relied on in times of CRISIS! But this crotchety fellow, who has so unluckily, for all but himself, walked into that property, is the loosest fish! And what is a House divided against itself? Never was the Constitution in such peril! --I say it deliberately!--and here is the Head of the Viponts humming and haing, and asking whether Guy Darrell will join the Cabinet. And if Guy Darrell will not, we have no more chance of the Montfort interest than if we were Peep-o'-day Boys. But excuse me; I must be off; every moment is precious in times of CRISIS. Think, if we can't form a Cabinet by to-morrow night--only think what may happen; the other fellows will come in, and then--THE DELUGE!"

Carr is gone to find mops and Dame Partingtons to stave off the deluge. Colonel Morley has obeyed Lady Montfort's summons, and has entered the carriage. Before she can speak, however, he has rushed into the subject of which he himself is full. "Only think--I knew it would be so when the moment came; all depends upon Guy Darrell; Montfort, who seems always in a fright lest a newspaper should fall on his head and crush him, says that if Darrell, whom he chooses to favour just because the newspapers do, declines to join, the newspapers will say the CRISIS is a job! Fancy!--a job--the CRISIS! Lord Mowbray de l'Arco and Sir Josiah Snodge, who are both necessary to a united government, but who unluckily detest each other, refuse to sit in the same Cabinet, unless Darrell sit between--to save them, I suppose, from the fate of the cats of Kilkenny. Sir John Cautly, our crack county member, declares that if Darrell does not come in, 'tis because the CRISIS is going too far! Harry Bold, our most popular speaker, says, if Darrell stay out, 'tis a sign that the CRISIS is a retrograde movement! In short, without Darrell the CRISIS will be a failure, and the House of Vipont smashed--Lady Montfort--smashed! I sent a telegram (oh, that I should live to see such a word introduced into the English language!--but, as Carr says, what times these are!) to Fawley this morning, entreating Guy to come up to town at once. He answers by a line from Horace, which means, 'that he will see me shot first.' I must go down to him; only waiting to know the result of certain negotiations as to measures. I have but one hope. There is a measure which Darrell always privately advocated--which he thoroughly understands--which, placed in his hands, would be triumphantly carried; one of those measures, Lady Montfort, which, if defective, shipwreck a government; if framed as Guy Darrell could frame it, immortalise the minister who concocts and carries them. This is all that Darrell needs to complete his fame and career. This is at length an occasion to secure a durable name in the history of his country; let him reject it, and I shall tell him frankly that his life has been but a brilliant failure. Since he has not a seat in Parliament, and usage requires the actual possession of that qualification for a seat in the Cabinet, we must lose his voice in the Commons. But we can arrange that; for if Darrell will but join the government, and go--to the Lords, Sir Josiah Snodge, who has a great deal of voice and a great deal of jealousy, will join too--head the Vipont interest in the Commons--and speak to the country--speak every night--and all night, too, if required. Yes; Darrell must take the

peerage--devote himself for a year or two to this great measure--to the consolidation of his fame--to the redemption of the House of Vipont--and to the Salvation of the Empire; and then, if he please, 'solve senescentem'--that is, he may retire from harness, and browse upon laurels for the rest of his days!"

Colonel Morley delivered himself of this long address without interruption from a listener interested in every word that related to Guy Darrell, and in every hope that could reunite him to the healthful activities of life.

It was now Lady Montfort's turn to speak; though, after subjects so momentous as the Crisis and its speculative consequences, private affairs, relating to a poor little girl like Sophy--nay, the mere private affairs of Darrell himself, seemed a pitiful bathos. Lady Montfort, however, after a few words of womanly comment upon the only part of the Colonel's discourse which touched her heart, hastened on to describe her interview with Arabella, and the melaneboly condition of Darrell's once formidable son-in-law. For that last, the Colonel evinced no more compassionate feeling than any true Englishman, at the time I am writing, would demonstrate for a murderous Sepoy tied to the mouth of a cannon.

"A very good riddance," said the Colonel, dryly. "Great relief to Darrell, and to every one else whom that monster tormented and preyed on; and with his life will vanish the only remaining obstacle in righting poor Willy's good name. I hope to live to collect, from all parts of the country, Willy's old friends and give them a supper, at which I suppose I must not get drunk; though I should rather like it, than not! But I interrupt you! go on."

Lady Montfort proceeded to state the substance of the papers she had perused in reference to the mystery which had been the cause of so much disquietude and bitterness.

The Colonel stretched out his hand eagerly for the documents--thus quoted. He hurried his eye rapidly over the contents of the first paper he lit on, and then said, pulling out his watch: "Well, I have half an hour yet to spare in discussing these matters with you--may I order your coachman to drive round the Regent's Park?--better than keeping it thus at my door, with four old maids for opposite neighbours." The order was given, and the Colonel again returned to the papers. Suddenly he looked up--looked full into Lady Montfort's face, with a thoughtful, searching gaze, which made her drop her own eyes! and she saw that he had been reading Jasper's confession, relating to his device for breaking off her engagement to Darrell, which in her hurry and excitement she had neglected to abstract from the other documents. "Oh, not that paper--you are not to read that," she cried, quickly covering the writing with her hand.

"Too late, my dear cousin. I have read it. All is now clear. Lionel was right; and I was right too, in my convictions, though Darrell put so coolly aside my questions when I was last at Fawley. I am justified now in all the pains I took to secure Lionel's marriage--in the cunning

cruelty of my letter to George! Know, Lady Montfort, that if Lionel had sacrificed his happiness to respect for Guy's ancestor-worship, Guy Darrell would have held himself bound in honour never to marry again. He told me so--told me he should be a cheat if he took any step to rob one from whom he had exacted such an offering-of the name, and the heritage, for which the offering had been made. And I then resolved that County Guy should not thus irrevocably shut the door on his own happiness! Lady Montfort, you know that this man loves you--as, verily, I believe, never other man in our cold century loved woman;--through desertion--through change--amidst grief--amidst resentment--despite pride;--dead to all other love--shrinking from all other ties--on, constant on--carrying in the depth of his soul to the verge of age, secret and locked up, the hopeless passion of his manhood. Do you not see that it is through you, and you alone, that Guy Darrell has for seventeen years been lost to the country he was intended to serve and to adorn? Do you not feel that if he now reject this last opportunity to redeem years so wasted, and achieve a fame that may indeed link his Ancestral Name to the honours of Posterity, you, and you alone, are the cause?"

"Alas--alas--but what can I do?"

"Do!--ay, true. The poor fellow is old now; you cannot care for him!--you still young, and so unluckily beautiful!--you, for whom young princes might vie. True; you can have no feeling for Guy Darrell, except pity!"

"Pity! I hate the word!" cried Lady Montfort, with as much petulance as if she had still been the wayward lively Caroline of old.

Again the Man of the World directed toward her face his shrewd eyes, and dropped out, "See him!"

"But I have seen him. You remember I went to plead for Lionel and Sophy --in vain!"

"Not in vain. George writes me word that he has informed you of Darrell's consent to their marriage. And I am much mistaken if his greatest consolation in the pang that consent must have cost him be not the thought that it relieves you from the sorrow and remorse his refusal had occasioned to you. Ah! there is but one person who can restore Darrell to the world--and that is yourself!"

Lady Montfort shook her head drearily.

"If I had but an excuse--with dignity--with self-respect--to--to--!"

"An excuse! You have an absolute necessity to communicate with Darrell. You have to give him these documents--to explain how you came by them. Sophy is with him; you are bound to see her on a subject of such vital importance to herself. Scruples of prudery! You, Caroline Lyndsay, the friend of his daughter--you whose childhood was reared in his very house --you whose mother owed to him such obligations--you to scruple in being the first to acquaint him with information affecting him so nearly! And why, forsooth? Because, ages ago, your hand was, it seems, engaged

to him, and you were deceived by false appearances, like a silly young girl as you were."

Again Lady Montfort shook her head drearily--drearily. "Well," said the Colonel, changing his tone, "I will grant that those former ties can't be renewed now. The man now is as old as the hills, and you had no right to expect that he would have suffered so much at being very naturally jilted for a handsome young Marquess."

"Cease, sir, cease," cried Caroline, angrily. The Colonel coolly persisted.

"I see now that such nuptials are out of the question. But has the world come to such a pass that one can never at any age have a friend in a lady unless she marry him? Scruple to accompany me--me your cousin--me your nearest surviving relation--in order to take back the young lady you have virtually adopted!--scruple to trust yourself for half an hour to that tumbledown old Fawley! Are you afraid that the gossips will say you, the Marchioness of Montfort, are running after a gloomy old widower, and scheming to be mistress of a mansion more like a ghosttrap than a residence for civilised beings? Or are you afraid that Guy Darrell will be fool and fop enough to think you are come to force on him your hand? Pooh, pooh! Such scruples would be in place if you were a portionless forward girl, or if he were a conceited young puppy, or even a suspicious old roue. But Guy Darrell--a man of his station, his character, his years! And you, cousin Caroline, what are you? Surely, lifted above all such pitiful crotchets by a rank amongst the loftiest gentlewomen of England; ample fortune, a beauty that in itself is rank and wealth; and, above all, a character that has passed with such venerated purity through an ordeal in which every eye seeks a spot, every ear invites a scandal. But as you will. All I say is, that Darrell's future may be in your hands; that after to-morrow, the occasion to give at least noble occupation and lasting renown to a mind that is devouring itself and stifling its genius, may be irrevocably lost; and that I do believe, if you said to-morrow to Guy Daxrell, 'You refused to hear me when I pleaded for what you thought a disgrace to your name, and yet even that you at last conceded to the voice of affection as if of duty--now hear me when I plead by the side of your oldest friend on behalf of your honour, and in the name of your forefathers,'--if You say THAT, he is won to his country. You will have repaired a wrong; and, pray, will you have compromised your dignity?"

Caroline had recoiled into the corner of the carriage, her mantle close down round her breast, her veil lowered; but no sheltering garb or veil could conceal her agitation.

The Colonel pulled the check-string. "Nothing so natural; you are the widow of the Head of the House of Vipont. You are, or ought to be, deeply interested in its fate. An awful CRISIS, long expected, has occurred. The House trembles. A connection of that House can render it an invaluable service; that connection is the man at whose hearth your childhood was reared; and you go with me--me, who am known to be moving heaven and earth for every vote that the House can secure, to canvass

this wavering connection for his support and assistance. Nothing, I say, so natural; and yet you scruple to serve the House of Vipont--to save your country! You may well be agitated. I leave you to your own reflections. My time runs short; I will get out here. Trust me with these documents. I will see to the rest of this long painful subject. I will send a special report to you this evening, and you will reply by a single line to the prayer I have ventured to address to you."

CHAPTER XII. AND LAST.

IN WHICH THE AUTHOR ENDEAVOURS, TO THE BEST OF HIS ABILITY, TO GIVE A FINAL REPLY TO THE QUESTION, "WHAT WILL HE DO WITH IT?"

SCENE--The banks of the lake at Fawley. George is lending his arm to Waife; Mrs. Morley, seated on her camp-stool at the opposite side of the water, is putting the last touch to her sketch of the Manor-house; Sir Isaac, reclined, is gravely contemplating the swans; the doe, bending over him, occasionally nibbles his ear; Fairthorn has uncomfortably edged himself into an angle of the building, between two buttresses, and is watching, with malignant eye, two young forms, at a distance, as they moved slowly yonder, side by side, yet apart, now lost, now emerging, through the gaps between melancholy leafless trees. Darrell, having just quitted Waife and George, to whose slow pace he can ill time his impatient steps, wonders why Lionel, whom, on arriving, he had, with brief cordial words, referred to Sophy for his fate, has taken more than an hour to ask a simple question, to which the reply may be pretty well known beforehand. He advances towards those melancholy trees. Suddenly one young form leaves the other--comes with rapid stride through the withered fern. Pale as death, Lionel seizes Guy Darrell's hand with convulsive grasp, and says: "I must leave you, sir; God bless you! All is over. I was the blindest fool--she refuses me."

"Refuses you!--impossible! For what reason?"

"She cannot love me well enough to marry," answered Lionel with a quivering lip, and an attempt at that irony in which all extreme anguish, at least in our haughty sex, delights to seek refuge or disguise. "Likes me as a friend, a brother, and so forth, but--nothing more. All a mistake, sir--all, except your marvellous kindness to me--to her--for which Heaven ever bless you."

"Yes, all a mistake of your own, foolish boy," said Darrell, tenderly; and, turning sharp, he saw Sophy hastening by, quickly and firmly, with her eyes looking straightward--on into space. He threw himself in her path.

"Tell this dull kinsman of mine that 'faint heart never won fair lady.' You do not mean seriously, deliberately to reject a heart that will never be faint with a meaner fear than that of losing you?"

Poor Sophy! She kept her blue eyes still on the cold grey space, and answered by some scarce audible words--words which in every age girls intending to say No seem to learn as birds learn their song; no one knows who taught them, but they are ever to the same tune. "Sensible of the honour"--"Grateful"--"Some one more worthy," &c., &c.

Darrell checked this embarrassed jargon. "My question, young lady, is solemn; it involves the destiny of two lives. Do you mean to say that you do not love Lionel Haughton well enough to give him your hand, and return the true faith which is pledged with his own?"

"Yes," said Lionel, who had gained the side of his kinsman, "yes, that is it. O Sophy--Ay or No?"

"No!" fell from her pale, firm lips--and in a moment more she was at Waife's side, and had drawn him away from George. "Grandfather, grandfather!--home, home; let us go home at once, or I shall die!"

Darrell has kept his keen sight upon her movements--upon her countenance. He sees her gesture--her look--as she now clings to her grandfather. The blue eyes are not now coldly fixed on level air, but raised upward as for strength from above. The young face is sublime with its woe, and with its resolve.

"Noble child," muttered Darrell, "I think I see into her heart. If so, poor Lionel, indeed! My pride has yielded, hers never will!"

Lionel, meanwhile, kept beating his foot on the ground, and checking indignantly the tears that sought to gather to his eyes. Darrell threw his arm round the young man's shoulder, and led him gently, slowly away, by the barbed thorn-tree--on by the moss-grown crags.

Waife, meanwhile, is bending his ear to Sophy's lip. The detestable Fairthorn emerges from between the buttresses, and shambles up to George, thirsting to hear his hopes confirmed, and turning his face back to smile congratulation, on the gloomy old house that he thinks he has saved from the lake.

Sophy has at last convinced Waife that his senses do not deceive him, nor hers wander. She has said, "O grandfather, let us ever henceforth be all in all to each other. You are not ashamed of me--I am so proud of you. But there are others akin to me, grandfather, whom we will not mention; and you would be ashamed of me if I brought disgrace on one who would confide to me his name, his honour; and should I be as proud of you, if you asked me to do it?"

At these words, Waife understands all, and he has not an argument in reply; and he suffers Sophy to lead him towards the house. Yes, they will go hence--yes, there shall be no schemes of marriage! They had nearly reached the door, when the door itself opened violently, and a man rushing forth caught Sophy in his arms, and kissed her forehead, her cheek, with a heartiness that it is well Lionel did not witness! Speechless and breathless with resentment, Sophy struggled, and in vain,

when Waife, seizing the man by the collar, swung him away with a "How dare you, sir," that was echoed back from the hillocks--summoned Sir Isaac at full gallop from the lake--scared Fairthorn back to his buttresses--roused Mrs. Morley from her sketch, and, smiting the ears of Lionel and Darrell, hurried them, mechanically as it were, to the very spot from which that thunder-roll had pealed.

"How dare I?" said the man, resettling the flow of his disordered coat--" How dare I kiss my own niece?--my own sister's orphan child? Venerable Bandit, I have a much better right than you have. Oh, my dear injured Sophy, to think that I was ashamed of your poor cotton print--to think that to your pretty face I have been owing fame and fortune--and you, you wandering over the world--child of the sister of whose beauty I was so proud--of her for whom, alas, in vain! I painted Watteaus and Greuzes upon screens and fans!" Again he clasped her to his breast; and Waife this time stood mute, and Sophy passive--for the man's tears were raining upon her face, and washed away every blush of shame as to the kiss they hallowed.

"But where is my old friend William Losely?--where is Willy?" said another voice, as a tall, thin personage stepped out from the hall, and looked poor Waife unconsciously in the face.

"Alban Morley!" faltered Waife, "you are but little changed!"

The Colonel looked again, and in the elderly, lame, oneeyed, sober-looking man, recognised the wild jovial Willy, who had tamed the most unruly fillies, taken the most frantic leaps, carolled forth the blithest song-madcap, good-fellow, frolicsome, childlike darling of gay and grave, young and old!

"Eheu, fugaces, Postume, Postume,
Labuntur anni,"

said the Colonel, insensibly imbibing one of those Horatian particles that were ever floating in that classic atmosphere--to Darrell medicinal, to Fairthorn moribific. "Years slide away, Willy, mutely as birds skim through air; but when friend meets with friend after absence, each sees the print of their crows' feet on the face of the other. But we are not too old yet, Willy, for many a meet at the fireside! Nothing else in our studs, we can still mount our hobbies; and thoroughbred hobbies contrive to be in at the death.

"But you are waiting to learn by what title and name this stranger lays claim to so peerless a niece. Know then Ah, here comes Darrell. Guy Darrell, in this young lady you will welcome the grandchild of Sidney Branthwaite, our old Eton school friend, a gentleman of as good blood as any in the land!"

"None better," cried Fairthorn, who had sidled himself into the group; "there's a note on the Branthwaite genealogy, sir, in your father's great work upon 'Monumental Brasses.'"

"Permit me to conclude, Mr. Fairthorn," resumed the Colonel; "Monumental Brasses are painful subjects. Yes, Darrell,--yes, Lionel; this fair creature, whom Lady Montfort might well desire to adopt, is the daughter of Arthur Branthwaite, by marriage with the sister of Frank Vance, whose name I shrewdly suspect nations will prize, and whose works princes will hoard, when many a long genealogy, all blazoned in azure and or, will have left not a scrap for the moths."

"Ah!" murmured Lionel, "was it not I, Sophy, who taught you to love your father's genius! Do you not remember how, as we bent over his volume, it seemed to translate to us our own feelings?--to draw us nearer together? He was speaking to us from his grave."

Sophy made no answer; her face was hidden on the breast of the old man, to whom she still clung closer and closer.

"Is it so? Is it certain? Is there no doubt that she is the child of these honoured parents?" asked Waife, tremulously.

"None," answered Alban; "we bring with us proofs that will clear up all my story."

The old man bowed his head over Sophy's fair locks for a moment; then raised it, serene and dignified: "You are mine for a moment yet, Sophy," said he.

"Yours as ever-more fondly, gratefully than ever," cried Sophy.

"There is but one man to whom I can willingly yield you. Son of Charles Haughton, take my treasure."

"I consent to that," cried Vance, "though I am put aside like a Remorseless Baron. And, Lionello mio, if Frank Vance is a miser, so much the better for his niece."

"But," faltered Lionel.

"Oh, falter not. Look into those eyes; read that blush now. She looks coy, not reluctant. She bends before him--adorned as for love, by all her native graces. Air seems brightened by her bloom. No more the Outlaw-Child of Ignominy and Fraud, but the Starry Daughter of POETRY AND ART! Lo, where they glide away under the leafless, melancholy trees. Leafless and melancholy! No! Verdure and blossom and the smile of spring are upon every bough!"

"I suppose," said Alban, "it will not now break Lionel's heart to learn that not an hour before I left London, I heard from a friend at the Horse Guards that it has been resolved to substitute the regiment for Lionel's; and it will be for some time yet, I suspect, that he must submit to be in gloriously happy. Come this way, George, a word in your ear." And Alban, drawing his nephew aside, told him of Jasper's state, and of Arabella's request. "Not a word to-day on these mournful topics, to poor Willy. To-day let nothing add to his pain to have lost a grandchild, or

dim his consolation in the happiness and security his Sophy gains in that loss. But to-morrow you will go and see the stricken-down sinner, and prepare the father for the worst. I made a point of seeing Dr. F. last night. He gives Jasper but a few weeks. He compares him to a mountain, not merely shattered by an earthquake, but burned out by its own inward fires."

"A few weeks only," sighed George. "Well, Time, that seems everything to man, has not even an existence in the sight of God. To that old man I owe the power of speech to argue, to exhort, and to comfort;--he was training me to kneel by the deathbed of his son!"

"You believe," asked the Man of the World, "in the efficacy of a deathbed repentance, when a sinner has sinned till the power of sinning be gone?"

"I believe," replied the Preacher, "that in health there is nothing so unsafe as trust in a deathbed repentance; I believe that on the deathbed, it cannot be unsafe to repent!"

Alban looked thoughtful, and George turned to rejoin Waife, to whom Vance was narrating the discovery of Sophy's parentage; while Fairthorn, as he listened, drew his flute from his pocket, and began screwing it, impatient to vent in delicate music what he never could have set into words for his blundering, untunable tongue. The Colonel joins Darrell, and hastens to unfold more fully the story which Vance is reciting to Waife.

Brief as it can, be the explanation due to the reader. Vance's sister had died in childbirth. The poor young poet, unfitted to cope with penury, his sensitive nature combined with a frame that could feebly resist the strain of exhausting emotions, disappointed in fame, despairing of fortune, dependent for bread on his wife's boyish brother, and harassed by petty debts in a foreign land, had been fast pining away, even before an affliction to which all the rest seemed as nought. With that affliction he broke down at once, and died a few days after his wife, leaving an infant not a week old. A French female singer, of some repute in the theatres, and making a provincial tour, was lodging in the same house as the young couple. She had that compassionate heart which is more common than prudence or very strict principle with the tribes who desert the prosaic true world for the light sparkling false one. She had assisted the young couple, in their later days, with purse and kind offices; had been present at the birth of the infant--the death of the mother; and had promised Arthur Branthwaite that she would take care of his child, until she could safely convey it to his wife's relations, while he wept to own that they, poor as himself, must regard such a charge as a burthen.

The singer wrote to apprise Mrs. Vance of the death of her daughter and son-in-law, and the birth of the infant whom she undertook shortly to send to England. But the babe, whom meanwhile she took to herself, got hold of her affections; with that yearning for children which makes so remarkable and almost uniform a characteristic of French women (if themselves childless) in the wandering Bohemian class that separates them

from the ordinary household affections, never dead in the heart of woman till womanhood itself be dead, the singer clung to the orphan little one to whom she was for the moment rendering the cares of a mother. She could not bear to part with it; she resolved to adopt it as her own. The knowledge of Mrs. Vance's circumstances--the idea that the orphan, to herself a blessing, would be an unwelcome encumbrance to its own relations--removed every scruple from a mind unaccustomed to suffer reflection to stand in the way of an impulse. She wrote word to Mrs. Vance that the child was dead. She trusted that her letter would suffice, without other evidence, to relations so poor, and who could have no suspicion of any interest to deceive them. Her trust was well founded. Mrs. Vance and the boy Frank, whose full confidence and gratitude had been already secured to their correspondent for her kind offices to the young parents, accepted, without a demur or a question, the news that the infant was no more. The singer moved on to the next town at which she was professionally engaged. The infant, hitherto brought up by hand, became ailing. The medical adviser called in recommended the natural food, and found, in a village close by, the nurse to whom a little time before Jasper Losely had consigned his own daughter. The latter died; the nurse then removed to Paris to reside with the singer, who had obtained a lucrative appointment at one of the metropolitan theatres. In less than two years the singer herself fell a victim to a prevailing epidemic. She had lived without thought of the morrow; her debts exceeded her means; her effects were sold. The nurse, who had meanwhile become a widow, came for advice and refuge to her sister, who was in the service of Gabrielle Desmarests. Gabrielle, being naturally appealed to, saw the infant, heard the story, looked into the statement which, by way of confession, the singer had drawn up, and signed, in a notary's presence, before she died; looked into the letters from Mrs. Vance, and the schoolboy scrawls from Frank, both to the singer and to the child's parents, which the actress had carefully preserved; convinced herself of the poverty and obscurity of the infant's natural guardians and next of kin; and said to Jasper, who was just dissipating the fortune handed over to him as survivor of his wife and child: "There is what, if well-managed, may retain your hold on a rich father-in-law when all else has failed. You have but to say that this infant is his grandchild; the nurse we can easily bribe, or persuade to confirm the tale. I, whom he already knows as that respectable baroness, your Matilda's friend, can give to the story some probable touches. The lone childless man must rejoice to think that a tie is left to him. The infant is exquisitely pretty; her face will plead for her. His heart will favour the idea too much to make him very rigorous in his investigations. Take the infant. Doubtless in your own country you can find some one to rear it at little or no expense, until the time come for appeal to your father-in-law when no other claim on his purse remains."

Jasper assented with the insouciant docility by which he always acknowledged Gabrielle's astuter intellect. He saw the nurse; it was clear that she had nothing to gain by taking the child to English relations so poor. They might refuse to believe her, and certainly--could not reward. To rid herself of the infant, and obtain the means to return to her native village with a few hundred francs in her purse, there was no promise she was not willing to make, no story she was too

honest to tell, no paper she was too timid to sign. Jasper was going to London on some adventure of his own. He took the infant--chanced on Arabella--the reader knows the rest. The indifference ever manifested by Jasper to a child not his own--the hardness with which he had contemplated and planned his father's separation from one whom he had imposed by false pretexts on the old man's love, and whom he only regarded as an alien encumbrance upon the scanty means of her deluded protector--the fitful and desultory mode in which, when (contrary to the reasonings which Gabrielle had based upon a very large experience of the credulities of human nature in general, but in utter ignorance of the nature peculiar to Darrell) his first attempt at imposition had been so scornfully resisted by his indignant father-in-law, he had played fast and loose with a means of extortion which, though loth to abandon, he knew would not bear any strict investigation;--all this is now clear to the reader. And the reader will also comprehend why, partly from fear that his father might betray him, partly from a compassionate unwillingness to deprive the old man of a belief in which William Losely said he had found such solace, Jasper, in his last interview with his father, shrank from saying, "but she is not your grandchild!" The idea of recurring to the true relations of the child naturally never entered into Jasper's brain. He considered them to be as poor as himself. They buy from him the child of parents whose they had evidently, by their letters, taxed themselves to the utmost, and in vain, to save from absolute want! So wild seemed the notion, that he had long since forgotten that relations so useless existed. Fortunately the nurse had preserved the written statement of the singer--the letters by Mrs. Vance and Frank--the certificate of the infant's birth and baptism--some poor relics of Sophy's ill-fated parents--manuscripts of Arthur's poems--baby-caps with initials and armorial crests, wrought, before her confinement, by the young wife--all of which had been consigned by the singer to the nurse, and which the nurse willingly disposed of to Mrs. Crane, with her own formal deposition of the facts, confirmed by her sister, Gabrielle's old confidential-attendant, and who, more favoured than her mistress, was living peaceably in the rural scenes of her earlier innocence, upon the interest of the gains she had saved in no innocent service--confirmed yet more by references to many whose testimonials could trace, step by step, the child's record from its birth to its transfer to Jasper, and by the brief but distinct avowal, in tremulous lines, writ by Jasper himself. As a skein crossed and tangled, when the last knot is loosened, slips suddenly free, so this long bewildering mystery now became clear as a commonplace! What years of suffering Darrell might have been saved had he himself seen and examined the nurse--had his inquiry been less bounded by the fears of his pride--had the great lawyer not had himself for a client!

Darrell silently returned to Alban Morley the papers over which he had cast his eye as they walked slowly to and fro the sloping banks of the lake.

"It is well," said he, glancing fondly, as Fairthorn had glanced before him, towards the old House, now freed from doom, and permitted to last its time. "It is well," he repeated, looking away towards that part of the landscape where he could just catch a glimpse of Sophy's light form

beyond the barbed thorn-tree; "it is well," he repeated thrice with a sigh. "Poor human nature! Alban, can you conceive it? I, who once so dreaded that that poor child should prove to be of my blood, now, in knowing that she is not, feel a void, a loss! To Lionel I am so distant a kinsman!--to his wife, to his children, what can I be? A rich old man; the sooner he is in his grave the better. A few tears, and then the will! But, as your nephew says, 'This life is but a school;' the new-comer in the last form thinks the head-boy just leaving so old! And to us, looking back, it seems but the same yesterday whether we were the last comer or the head-boy."

"I thought," said Alban, plaintively, "that, for a short time at least, I had done with 'painful subjects.' You revel in them! County Guy, you have not left school yet; leave it with credit; win the best prize." And Alban plunged at once into THE CRISIS. He grew eloquent; the Party, the Country, the Great Measure to be intrusted to Darrell, if he would but undertake it as a member of the Cabinet; the Peerage, the House of Vipont, and immortal glory!--eloquent as Ulysses haranguing the son of Peleus in Troilus and Cressida.

Darrell listened coldly; only while Alban dwelt on "the Measure," in which, when it was yet too unripe for practical statesmen, he had attached his faith as a thinker, the orator's eye flashed with young fire. A great truth is eternally clear to a great heart that has once nourished its germ and foreseen its fruits. But when Alban quitted that part of his theme, all the rest seemed wearisome to his listener. They had now wound their walk to the opposite side of the lake, and paused near the thick beech-trees, hallowed and saddened by such secret associations to the mournful owner.

"No, my dear Alban," said Darrell, "I cannot summon up sufficient youth and freshness of spirit to re-enter the turbulent arena I have left. Ah! look yonder where Lionel and Sophy move! Give me, I do not say Lionel's years, but Lionel's wealth of hope, and I might still have a wish for fame and a voice for England; but it is a subtle truth, that when a man misses a home, a link between his country and himself is gone. Vulgar ambition may exist--the selfish desire of power; they were never very strong in me, and now less strong than the desire of rest; but that beautiful, genial, glorious union of all the affections of social citizen, which begins at the hearth and widens round the land, is not for the hermit's cell."

Alban was about to give up the argument in irritable despair, when happening to turn his eye towards the farther depth of the beech-grove, he caught a glimpse--no matter what of; but quickening his step in the direction to which his glance had wandered, he seated himself on the gnarled roots of a tree that seemed the monarch of the wood, widespreading as that under which Tityrus reclined of old; and there, out of sight of the groups on the opposite banks of the lake--there, as if he had sought the gloomiest and most secret spot for what he had yet to say, he let fall, in the most distinct yet languid tones of his thoroughbred, cultured enunciation: "I have a message to you from Lady Montfort. Restless man, do come nearer, and stand still. I am

tired to death." Darrell approached, and, leaning against the trunk of the giant tree, said, with folded arms and compressed lips:

"A message from Lady Montfort!"

"Yes. I should have told you, by-the-by, that it was she who, being a woman, of course succeeded where I, being a man, despite incredible pains and trouble, signally failed, discovered Arabella Fossett, alias Crane, and obtained from her the documents which free your life forever from a haunting and torturing fear. I urged her to accompany me hither, and place the documents herself in your hand. She refused; you were not worth so much trouble, my dear Guy. I requested her at least to suffer me to show to you a paper containing Jasper Losely's confession of a conspiracy to poison her mind against you some years ago--a conspiracy so villainously ingenious that it would have completely exonerated any delicate and proud young girl from the charge of fickleness in yielding to an impulse of pique and despair. But Lady Montfort did not wish to be exonerated; your good opinion has ceased to be of the slightest value to her. But to come to the point. She bade me tell you that, if you persist in sheltering yourself in a hermit's cell from the fear of meeting her--if she be so dangerous to your peace--you may dismiss such absurd apprehension. She is going abroad, and between you and me, my dear fellow, I have not a doubt that she will marry again before six months are out. I spoke of your sufferings; she told me she had not the smallest compassion for them."

"Alban Morley, you presumed to talk thus of me?" cried Darrell, livid with rage.

"Strike, but hear me. It is true you would not own, when I was last at Fawley, that she was the cause of your secluded life, of your blighted career; but I knew better. However, let me go on before you strangle me. Lady Montfort's former feelings of friendship for you are evidently quite changed; and she charged me to add, that she really hoped that you would exert your good sense and pride (of which Heaven knows you have plenty) to eradicate an absurd and romantic sentiment, so displeasing to her, and so--"

"It is false! it is false! What have I done to you, Colonel Morley, that you should slander me thus? I send you messages of taunt and insult, Mr. Darrell! You cannot believe it--you cannot!"

Caroline Montfort stood between the two, as if she had dropped from heaven.

A smile, half in triumph, half in irony, curved the lip of the fine gentleman. It faded instantly as his eye turned from the face of the earnest woman to that of the earnest man. Alban Morley involuntarily bowed his head, murmured some words unheard, and passed from the place unheeded.

Not by concert nor premeditation was Caroline Montfort on that spot; she had consented to accompany her cousin to Fawley, but before reaching the

park gates her courage failed her; she would remain within the carriage; the Colonel, wanted in London as soon as possible, whatever the result of his political mission to Darrell, could not stay long at Fawley; she would return with him. Vance's presence and impatient desire to embrace his niece did not allow the Colonel an occasion for argument and parley. Chafed at this fresh experience of the capricious uncertainty of woman, he had walked on with Vance to the Manor-house. Left alone, Caroline could not endure the stillness and inaction which increased the tumult of her thoughts; she would at least have one more look--it might be the last--at the scenes in which her childhood had sported--her youth known its first happy dreams. But a few yards across those circumscribed demesnes, on through those shadowy serried groves, and she should steal unperceived in view of the house, the beloved lake, perhaps even once more catch a passing glimpse of the owner. She resolved, she glided on; she gained the beech-grove, when, by the abrupt wind of the banks, Darrell and Alban came suddenly on the very spot. The flutter of her robe, as she turned to retreat, caught Alban's eye; the reader comprehends with what wily intent, conceived on the moment, that unscrupulous schemer shaped the words which chained her footstep, and then stung her on to self-disclosure. Trembling and blushing, she now stood before the startled man--He startled out of every other sentiment and feeling than that of ineffable, exquisite delight to be once more in her presence; she, after her first passionate outburst, hastening on, in confused broken words, to explain that she was there but by accident--by chance; confusion growing deeper and deeper--how explain the motive that had charmed her steps to the spot?

Suddenly from the opposite bank came the music of the magic flute, and her voice as suddenly stopped and failed her.

"Again--again," said Darrell, dreamily. "The same music! the same air! and this the same place on which we two stood together when I first dared to say, 'I love!' Look! we are under the very tree! Look! there is the date I carved on the bark when you were gone, but had left Hope behind. Ah, Caroline, why can I not now resign myself to age? Why is youth, while I speak, rushing back into my heart, into my soul? Why cannot I say, 'Gratefully I accept your tender friendship; let the past be forgotten; through what rests to me of the future while on earth, be to me as a child. I cannot--I cannot! Go!'"

She drew nearer to him, gently, timidly. "Even that, Darrell,--even that; something in your life--let me be something still!"

"Ah," he said with melancholy bitterness, "you deceive me no longer now! You own that, when here we stood last and exchanged our troth, you in the blossom, and I in the prime, of life--you own that it was no woman's love, deaf to all calumny, proof to all craft that could wrong the absent; no woman's love, warm as the heart, undying as the soul, that you pledged me then?"

"Darrell, it was not--though then I thought it was."

"Ay, ay," he continued with a smile, as if of triumph in his own pangs,

"so that truth is confessed at last! And when, once more free, you wrote to me the letter I returned, rent in fragments, to your hand--or when, forgiving my rude outrage and fierce reproach, you spoke to me so gently yonder, a few weeks since, in these lonely shades, then what were your sentiments, your motives? Were they not those of a long-suppressed and kind remorse? of a charity akin to that which binds rich to poor, bows happiness to suffering?--some memories of gratitude--nay, perhaps of childlike affection?--all amiable, all generous, all steeped in that sweetness of nature to which I unconsciously rendered justice in the anguish I endured in losing you; but do not tell me that even then you were under the influence of woman's love."

"Darrell, I was not."

"You own it, and you suffer me to see you again! Trifler and cruel one, is it but to enjoy the sense of your undiminished, unalterable power?"

"Alas, Darrell! alas! why am I here?--why so yearning, yet so afraid to come? Why did my heart fail when these trees rose in sight against the sky?--why, why--why was it drawn hither by the spell I could not resist? Alas, Darrell, alas! I am a woman now--and--and this--"

She lowered her veil, and turned away; her lips could not utter the word, because the word was not pity, not remorse, not remembrance, not even affection; and the woman loved now too well to subject to the hazard of rejection--LOVE!

"Stay, oh stay!" cried Darrell. "Oh that I could dare to ask you to complete the sentence! I know--I know by the mysterious sympathy of my own soul, that you could never deceive me more! Is it--is it--"

His lips falter too; but her hand is clasped in his; her head is reclining upon his breast; the veil is withdrawn from the sweet downcast face; and softly on her ear steal the murmured words, "Again and now, till the grave--Oh, by this hallowing kiss, again--the Caroline of old!"

Fuller and fuller, spreading, wave after wave, throughout the air, till it seemed interfused and commingled with the breath which the listeners breathe, the flute's mellow gush streams along. The sun slopes in peace towards the west; not a cloud in those skies, clearer seen through yon boughs stripped of leaves, and rendering more vivid the evergreen of the arbuté and laurel.

Lionel and Sophy are now seated on yon moss-grown trunk, on either side the old grey-haired man, as if agreeing for a while even to forget each other, that they may make him feel how fondly he is remembered. Sophy is resting both her hands on the old man's shoulder, looking into his face, and murmuring in his ear with voice like the coo of a happy dove. Ah, fear not, Sophy; he is happy too--he who never thinks of himself. Look--the playful smile round his arch lips; look--now he is showing off Sir Isaac to Vance; with austere solemnity the dog goes through his tricks; and Vance, with hand stroking his chin, is moralising on all that might have befallen had he grudged his three pounds to that famous INVESTMENT.

Behind that group, shadowed by the Thorn-tree, stands the PREACHER, thoughtful and grave, foreseeing the grief that must come to the old man with the morrow, when he will learn that a guilty son nears his end, and will hasten to comfort Jasper's last days with pardon. But the Preacher looks not down to the death-couch alone; on and high over death looks the Preacher! By what words Heavenly Mercy may lend to his lips shall he steal away, yet in time, to the soul of the dying, and justify murmurs of hope to the elm of a life so dark with the shades of its past? And to him, to the Preacher, they who survive--the two mourners will come in their freshness of sorrow! He, the old man? Nay, to him there will be comfort. His spirit Heaven's kindness had tempered to trials; and, alas for that son, what could father hope more than a death free from shame, and a chance yet vouchsafed for repentance? But she, the grim, iron-grey woman? The Preacher's interest, I know, will soon centre on her:--And balm may yet drop on thy wounds, thou poor, grim, iron-grey, loving woman.

Lo! that traitor, the Flute-player, over whom falls the deep grateful shade from the eaves of the roof-tree reprieved; though unconscious as yet of that happy change in the lot of the master which, ere long, may complete (and haply for sons sprung in truth from the blood of the Darrell) yon skeleton pile, and consummate, for ends nobler far, the plan of a grand life imperfect;--though as yet the musician nor knows nor conjectures the joy that his infamous treason to Sophy so little deserves; yet, as if by those finer perceptions of sense impressed ere they happen, by changes of pleasure and of pain, which Art so mysteriously gives to the minds from which music is born, his airs, of themselves, float in joy: Like a bird at the coming of spring, it is gladness that makes him melodious.

And Alban Morley, seemingly intent upon the sketch which his amiable niece-in-law submits to his critical taste ere she ventures to show it to Vance, is looking from under his brows towards the grove, out from which, towering over all its dark brethren, soars the old trysting beech-tree, and to himself he is saying: "Ten to one that the old House of Vipont now weather the CRISIS; and a thousand to one that I find at last my armchair at the hearth of my schoolfriend, Guy Darrell!"

And the lake is as smooth as glass; and the swans, hearkening the music, rest still, with white breasts against the grass of the margin; and the doe, where she stands, her fore-feet in the water, lifts her head wistfully, with nostrils distended, and wondering soft eyes that are missing the master. Now full on the beech-grove shines the westering sun; out from the gloomy beech-grove into the golden sunlight--they come, they come--Man and the Helpmate, two lives re-betrothed--two souls re-united. Be it evermore! Amen.

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