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THE ORDEAL OF RICHARD FEVEREL

By George Meredith

1905

BOOK 6.

- XXXIX. THE LITTLE BIRD AND THE FALCON: A BERRY
TO THE RESCUE!
- XL. CLARE'S DIARY
- XLI. AUSTIN RETURNS
- XLII. NATURE SPEAKS
- XLIII. AGAIN THE MAGIAN CONFLICT
- XLIV. THE LAST SCENE
- XLV. LADY BLANDISH TO AUSTIN WENTWORTH

CHAPTER XXXIX

At a season when the pleasant South-western Island has few attractions to other than invalids and hermits enamoured of wind and rain, the potent nobleman, Lord Mountfalcon, still lingered there to the disgust of his friends and special parasite. "Mount's in for it again," they said among themselves. "Hang the women!" was a natural sequence. For, don't you see, what a shame it was of the women to be always kindling such a very inflammable subject! All understood that Cupid had twanged his bow, and transfixed a peer of Britain for the fiftieth time: but none would perceive, though he vouched for it with his most eloquent oaths, that this was a totally different case from the antecedent ones. So it had been sworn to them too frequently before. He was as a man with mighty tidings, and no language: intensely communicative, but inarticulate. Good round oaths had formerly compassed and expounded his noble emotions. They were now quite beyond the comprehension of blasphemy, even when emphasized, and by this the poor lord divinely felt the case was different. There is something impressive in a great human hulk writhing under the unutterable torments of a mastery he cannot contend with, or account for, or explain by means of intelligible words. At first he took refuge in the depths of his contempt for women. Cupid gave him line. When he had come to vent his worst of them, the fair face now stamped on his brain beamed the more triumphantly: so the harpooned whale rose to the surface, and after a few convulsions, surrendered his huge length. My lord was in love with Richard's young wife. He gave proofs of it by burying himself beside her. To her, could she have seen it, he gave further proofs of a real devotion, in affecting, and in her presence feeling, nothing beyond a lively interest in her well-being. This wonder, that when near her he should be cool and composed, and when away from her wrapped in a tempest of desires, was matter for what powers of cogitation the heavy nobleman possessed.

The Hon. Peter, tired of his journeys to and fro, urged him to press the business. Lord Mountfalcon was wiser, or more scrupulous, than his parasite. Almost every evening he saw Lucy. The inexperienced little wife apprehended no harm in his visits. Moreover, Richard had commended her to the care of Lord Mountfalcon, and Lady Judith. Lady Judith had left the Island for London: Lord Mountfalcon remained. There could be no harm. If she had ever thought so, she no longer did. Secretly, perhaps, she was flattered. Lord Mountfalcon was as well educated as it is the

fortune of the run of titled elder sons to be: he could talk and instruct: he was a lord: and he let her understand that he was wicked, very wicked, and that she improved him. The heroine, in common with the hero, has her ambition to be of use in the world--to do some good: and the task of reclaiming a bad man is extremely seductive to good women. Dear to their tender bosoms as old china is a bad man they are mending! Lord Mountfalcon had none of the arts of a libertine: his gold, his title, and his person had hitherto preserved him from having long to sigh in vain, or sigh at all, possibly: the Hon. Peter did his villainies for him. No alarm was given to Lucy's pure instinct, as might have been the case had my lord been over-adept. It was nice in her martyrdom to have a true friend to support her, and really to be able to do something for that friend. Too simple-minded to think much of his lordship's position, she was yet a woman. "He, a great nobleman, does not scorn to acknowledge me, and think something of me," may have been one of the half-thoughts passing through her now and then, as she reflected in self-defence on the proud family she had married into.

January was watering and freezing old earth by turns, when the Hon. Peter travelled down to the sun of his purse with great news. He had no sooner broached his lordship's immediate weakness, than Mountfalcon began to plunge like a heavy dragoon in difficulties. He swore by this and that he had come across an angel for his sins, and would do her no hurt. The next moment he swore she must be his, though she cursed like a cat. His lordship's illustrations were not choice. "I haven't advanced an inch," he groaned. "Brayder! upon my soul, that little woman could do anything with me. By heaven! I'd marry her to-morrow. Here I am, seeing her every day in the week out or in, and what do you think she gets me to talk about?--history! Isn't it enough to make a fellow mad? and there am I lecturing like a prig, and by heaven! while I'm at it I feel a pleasure in it; and when I leave the house I should feel an immense gratification in shooting somebody. What do they say in town?"

"Not much," said Brayder, significantly.

"When's that fellow--her husband--coming down?"

"I rather hope we've settled him for life, Mount."

Nobleman and parasite exchanged looks.

"How d'ye mean?"

Brayder hummed an air, and broke it to say, "He's in for Don Juan at a gallop, that's all."

"The deuce! Has Bella got him?" Mountfalcon asked with eagerness.

Brayder handed my lord a letter. It was dated from the Sussex coast, signed "Richard," and was worded thus:

"My beautiful Devil!--

"Since we're both devils together, and have found each other out, come to me at once, or I shall be going somewhere in a hurry. Come, my bright hell-star! I ran away from you, and now I ask you to come to me! You have taught me how devils love, and I can't do without you. Come an hour after you receive this."

Mountfalcon turned over the letter to see if there was any more.

"Complimentary love-epistle!" he remarked, and rising from his chair and striding about, muttered, "The dog! how infamously he treats his wife!"

"Very bad," said Brayder.

"How did you get hold of this?"

"Strolled into Belle's dressing-room, waiting for her turned over her pincushion hap-hazard. You know her trick."

"By Jove! I think that girl does it on purpose. Thank heaven, I haven't written her any letters for an age. Is she going to him?"

"Not she! But it's odd, Mount!--did you ever know her refuse money before? She tore up the cheque in style, and presented me the fragments with two or three of the delicacies of language she learnt at your Academy. I rather like to hear a woman swear. It embellishes her!"

Mountfalcon took counsel of his parasite as to the end the letter could be made to serve. Both conscientiously agreed that Richard's behaviour to his wife was infamous, and that he at least deserved no mercy. "But," said his lordship, "it won't do to show the letter. At first she'll be swearing it's false, and then she'll stick to him closer. I know the sluts."

"The rule of contrary," said Brayder, carelessly. "She must see the trahison with her eyes. They believe their eyes. There's your chance, Mount. You step in: you give her revenge and consolation--two birds at one shot. That's what they like."

"You're an ass, Brayder," the nobleman exclaimed. "You're an infernal blackguard. You talk of this little woman as if she and other women were all of a piece. I don't see anything I gain by this confounded letter. Her husband's a brute--that's clear."

"Will you leave it to me, Mount?"

"Be damned before I do!" muttered my lord.

"Thank you. Now see how this will end: You're too soft, Mount. You'll be made a fool of."

"I tell you, Brayder, there's nothing to be done. If I carry her off--I've been on the point of doing it every day--what'll come of that? She'll look--I can't stand her eyes--I shall be a fool--worse off with her than I am now."

Mountfalcon yawned despondently. "And what do you think?" he pursued. "Isn't it enough to make a fellow gnash his teeth? She's"...he mentioned something in an underbreath, and turned red as he said it.

"Hm!" Brayder put up his mouth and rapped the handle of his cane on his chin. "That's disagreeable, Mount. You don't exactly want to act in that character. You haven't got a diploma. Bother!"

"Do you think I love her a bit less?" broke out my lord in a frenzy. "By heaven! I'd read to her by her bedside, and talk that infernal history to her, if it pleased her, all day and all night."

"You're evidently graduating for a midwife, Mount."

The nobleman appeared silently to accept the imputation.

"What do they say in town?" he asked again.

Brayder said the sole question was, whether it was maid, wife, or widow.

"I'll go to her this evening," Mountfalcon resumed, after--to judge by the cast of his face--reflecting deeply. "I'll go to her this evening. She shall know what infernal torment she makes me suffer."

"Do you mean to say she don't know it?"

"Hasn't an idea--thinks me a friend. And so, by heaven! I'll be to her."

"A--hm!" went the Honourable Peter. "This way to the sign of the Green Man, ladies!"

"Do you want to be pitched out of the window, Brayder?"

"Once was enough, Mount. The Salvage Man is strong. I may have forgotten the trick of alighting on my feet. There--there! I'll be sworn she's excessively innocent, and thinks you a disinterested friend."

"I'll go to her this evening," Mountfalcon repeated. "She shall know what damned misery it is to see her in such a position. I can't hold out any longer. Deceit's horrible to such a girl as that. I'd rather have her cursing me than speaking and looking as she does. Dear little girl!--she's only a child. You haven't an idea how sensible that little woman is."

"Have you?" inquired the cunning one.

"My belief is, Brayder, that there are angels among women," said Mountfalcon, evading his parasite's eye as he spoke.

To the world, Lord Mountfalcon was the thoroughly wicked man; his parasite simply ingeniously dissipated. Full many a man of God had

thought it the easier task to reclaim the Hon. Peter.

Lucy received her noble friend by firelight that evening, and sat much in the shade. She offered to have the candles brought in. He begged her to allow the room to remain as it was. "I have something to say to you," he observed with a certain solemnity.

"Yes--to me?" said Lucy, quickly.

Lord Mountfalcon knew he had a great deal to say, but how to say it, and what it exactly was, he did not know.'

"You conceal it admirably," he began, "but you must be very lonely here-- I fear, unhappy."

"I should have been lonely, but for your kindness, my lord," said Lucy. "I am not unhappy." Her face was in shade and could not belie her.

"Is there any help that one who would really be your friend might give you, Mrs. Feverel?"

"None indeed that I know of," Lucy replied. "Who can help us to pay for our sins?"

"At least you may permit me to endeavour to pay my debts, since you have helped me to wash out some of any sins."

"Ah, my lord!" said Lucy, not displeased. It is sweet for a woman to believe she has drawn the serpent's teeth.

"I tell you the truth," Lord Mountfalcon went on. "What object could I have in deceiving you? I know you quite above flattery--so different from other women!"

"Oh, pray, do not say that," interposed Lucy.

"According to my experience, then."

"But you say you have met such--such very bad women."

"I have. And now that I meet a good one, it is my misfortune."

"Your misfortune, Lord Mountfalcon?"

"Yes, and I might say more."

His lordship held impressively mute.

"How strange men are!" thought Lucy. "He had some unhappy secret."

Tom Bakewell, who had a habit of coming into the room on various pretences during the nobleman's visits, put a stop to the revelation, if his lordship intended to make any.

When they were alone again, Lucy said, smiling: "Do you know, I am always ashamed to ask you to begin to read."

Mountfalcon stared. "To read?--oh! ha! yes!" he remembered his evening duties. "Very happy, I'm sure. Let me see. Where were we?"

"The life of the Emperor Julian. But indeed I feel quite ashamed to ask you to read, my lord. It's new to me; like a new world--hearing about Emperors, and armies, and things that really have been on the earth we walk upon. It fills my mind. But it must have ceased to interest you, and I was thinking that I would not tease you any more."

"Your pleasure is mine, Mrs. Feverel. 'Pon my honour, I'd read till I was hoarse, to hear your remarks."

"Are you laughing at me?"

"Do I look so?"

Lord Mountfalcon had fine full eyes, and by merely dropping the lids he could appear to endow them with mental expression.

"No, you are not," said Lucy. "I must thank you for your forbearance."

The nobleman went on his honour loudly.

Now it was an object of Lucy's to have him reading; for his sake, for her sake, and for somebody else's sake; which somebody else was probably considered first in the matter. When he was reading to her, he seemed to be legitimizing his presence there; and though she had no doubts or suspicions whatever, she was easier in her heart while she had him employed in that office. So she rose to fetch the book, laid it open on the table at his lordship's elbow, and quietly waited to ring for candles when he should be willing to commence.

That evening Lord Mountfalcon could not get himself up to the farce, and he felt a pity for the strangely innocent unprotected child with anguish hanging over her, that withheld the words he wanted to speak, or insinuate. He sat silent and did nothing.

"What I do not like him for," said Lucy, meditatively, "is his changing his religion. He would have been such a hero, but for that. I could have loved him."

"Who is it you could have loved, Mrs. Feverel?" Lord Mountfalcon asked.

"The Emperor Julian."

"Oh! the Emperor Julian! Well, he was an apostate but then, you know, he meant what he was about. He didn't even do it for a woman."

"For a woman!" cried Lucy. "What man would for a woman?"

"I would."

"You, Lord Mountfalcon?"

"Yes. I'd turn Catholic to-morrow."

"You make me very unhappy if you say that, my lord."

"Then I'll unsay it."

Lucy slightly shuddered. She put her hand upon the bell to ring for lights.

"Do you reject a convert, Mrs. Feverel?" said the nobleman.

"Oh yes! yes! I do. One who does not give his conscience I would not have."

"If he gives his heart and body, can he give more?"

Lucy's hand pressed the bell. She did not like the doubtful light with one who was so unscrupulous. Lord Mountfalcon had never spoken in this way before. He spoke better, too. She missed the aristocratic twang in his voice, and the hesitation for words, and the fluid lordliness with which he rolled over difficulties in speech.

Simultaneously with the sounding of the bell the door opened, and presented Tom Bakewell. There was a double knock at the same instant at the street door. Lucy delayed to give orders.

"Can it be a letter, Tom!--so late?" she said, changing colour. "Pray run and see."

"That an't powst" Tom remarked, as he obeyed his mistress.

"Are you very anxious for a letter, Mrs. Feverel?" Lord Mountfalcon inquired.

"Oh, no!--yes, I am, very." said Lucy. Her quick ear caught the tones of a voice she remembered. "That dear old thing has come to see me," she cried, starting up.

Tom ushered a bunch of black satin into the room.

"Mrs. Berry!" said Lucy, running up to her and kissing her.

"Me, my darlin'!" Mrs. Berry, breathless and rosy with her journey, returned the salute. "Me truly it is, in fault of a better, for I ain't one to stand by and give the devil his licence--roamin'! and the salt sure enough have spilte my bride-gown at the beginnin', which ain't the best sign. Bless ye!--Oh, here he is." She beheld a male figure in a chair by the half light, and swung around to address him. "You bad man!"

she held aloft one of her fat fingers, "I've come on ye like a bolt, I have, and goin' to make ye do your duty, naughty boy! But your my darlin' babe," she melted, as was her custom, "and I'll never meet you and not give to ye the kiss of a mother."

Before Lord Mountfalcon could find time to expostulate the soft woman had him by the neck, and was down among his luxurious whiskers.

"Ha!" She gave a smothered shriek, and fell back. "What hair's that?"

Tom Bakewell just then illumined the transaction.

"Oh, my gracious!" Mrs. Berry breathed with horror, "I been and kiss a strange man!"

Lucy, half-laughing, but in dreadful concern, begged the noble lord to excuse the woful mistake.

"Extremely flattered, highly favoured, I'm sure;" said his lordship, rearranging his disconcerted moustache; "may I beg the pleasure of an introduction?"

"My husband's dear old nurse--Mrs. Berry," said Lucy, taking her hand to lend her countenance. "Lord Mountfalcon, Mrs. Berry."

Mrs. Berry sought grace while she performed a series of apologetic bobs, and wiped the perspiration from her forehead.

Lucy put her into a chair: Lord Mountfalcon asked for an account of her passage over to the Island; receiving distressingly full particulars, by which it was revealed that the softness of her heart was only equalled by the weakness of her stomach. The recital calmed Mrs. Berry down.

"Well, and where's my--where's Mr. Richard? yer husband, my dear?" Mrs. Berry turned from her tale to question.

"Did you expect to see him here?" said Lucy, in a broken voice.

"And where else, my love? since he haven't been seen in London a whole fortnight."

Lucy did not speak.

"We will dismiss the Emperor Julian till to-morrow, I think," said Lord Mountfalcon, rising and bowing.

Lucy gave him her hand with mute thanks. He touched it distantly, embraced Mrs. Berry in a farewell bow, and was shown out of the house by Tom Bakewell.

The moment he was gone, Mrs. Berry threw up her arms. "Did ye ever know sich a horrid thing to go and happen to a virtuous woman!" she exclaimed. "I could cry at it, I could! To be goin' and kissin' a strange hairy

man! Oh dear me! what's cornin' next, I wonder? Whiskers! thinks I--for I know the touch o' whiskers--'t ain't like other hair--what! have he growed a crop that sudden, I says to myself; and it flashed on me I been and made a awful mistake! and the lights come in, and I see that great hairy man--beggin' his pardon--nobleman, and if I could 'a dropped through the floor out o' sight o' men, drat 'em! they're al'ays in the way, that they are!"--

"Mrs. Berry," Lucy checked her, "did you expect to find him here?"

"Askin' that solemn?" retorted Berry. "What him? your husband? O' course I did! and you got him--somewheres hid."

"I have not heard from my husband for fifteen days," said Lucy, and her tears rolled heavily off her cheeks.

"Not heer from him!--fifteen days!" Berry echoed.

"O Mrs. Berry! dear kind Mrs. Berry! have you no news? nothing to tell me! I've borne it so long. They're cruel to me, Mrs. Berry. Oh, do you know if I have offended him--my husband? While he wrote I did not complain. I could live on his letters for years. But not to hear from him! To think I have ruined him, and that he repents! Do they want to take him from me? Do they want me dead? O Mrs. Berry! I've had no one to speak out my heart to all this time, and I cannot, cannot help crying, Mrs. Berry!"

Mrs. Berry was inclined to be miserable at what she heard from Lucy's lips, and she was herself full of dire apprehension; but it was never this excellent creature's system to be miserable in company. The sight of a sorrow that was not positive, and could not refer to proof, set her resolutely the other way.

"Fiddle-faddle," she said. "I'd like to see him repent! He won't find anywheres a beauty like his own dear little wife, and he know it. Now, look you here, my dear--you blessed weepin' pet--the man that could see ye with that hair of yours there in ruins, and he backed by the law, and not rush into your arms and hold ye squeezed for life, he ain't got much man in him, I say; and no one can say that of my babe! I was sayin', look here, to comfort ye--oh, why, to be sure he've got some surprise for ye. And so've I, my lamb! Hark, now! His father've come to town, like a good reasonable man at last, to u-nite ye both, and bring your bodies together, as your hearts is, for everlastin'. Now ain't that news?"

"Oh!" cried Lucy, "that takes my last hope away. I thought he had gone to his father." She burst into fresh tears.

Mrs. Berry paused, disturbed.

"Belike he's travellin' after him," she suggested.

"Fifteen days, Mrs. Berry!"

"Ah, fifteen weeks, my dear, after sieh a man as that. He's a regular meteor, is Sir Austin Feverel, Raynham Abbey. Well, so hark you here. I says to myself, that knows him--for I did think my babe was in his natural nest--I says, the bar'net'll never write for you both to come up and beg forgiveness, so down I'll go and fetch you up. For there was your mistake, my dear, ever to leave your husband to go away from ye one hour in a young marriage. It's dangerous, it's mad, it's wrong, and it's only to be righted by your obeyin' of me, as I commands it: for I has my fits, though I am a soft 'un. Obey me, and ye'll be happy tomorrow--or the next to it."

Lucy was willing to see comfort. She was weary of her self-inflicted martyrdom, and glad to give herself up to somebody else's guidance utterly.

"But why does he not write to me, Mrs. Berry?"

"'Cause, 'cause--who can tell the why of men, my dear? But that he love ye faithful, I'll swear. Haven't he groaned in my arms that he couldn't come to ye?--weak wretch! Hasn't he swore how he loved ye to me, poor young man! But this is your fault, my sweet. Yes, it be. You should 'a followed my 'dvice at the fust--'stead o' going into your 'eroics about this and t'other." Here Mrs. Berry poured forth fresh sentences on matrimony, pointed especially at young couples. "I should 'a been a fool if I hadn't suffered myself," she confessed, "so I'll thank my Berry if I makes you wise in season."

Lucy smoothed her ruddy plump cheeks, and gazed up affectionately into the soft woman's kind brown eyes. Endearing phrases passed from mouth to mouth. And as she gazed Lucy blushed, as one who has something very secret to tell, very sweet, very strange, but cannot quite bring herself to speak it.

"Well! these's three men in my life I kissed," said Mrs. Berry, too much absorbed in her extraordinary adventure to notice the young wife's struggling bosom, "three men, and one a nobleman! He've got more whisker than my Berry, I wonder what the man thought. Ten to one he'll think, now, I was glad o' my chance--they're that vain, whether they's lords or commons. How was I to know? I nat'ral thinks none but her husband'd sit in that chair. Ha! and in the dark? and alone with ye?" Mrs. Berry hardened her eyes, "and your husband away? What do this mean? Tell to me, child, what it mean his bein' here alone without ere a candle?"

"Lord Mountfalcon is the only friend I have here," said Lucy. "He is very kind. He comes almost every evening."

"Lord Montfalcon--that his name!" Mrs. Berry exclaimed. "I been that flurried by the man, I didn't mind it at first. He come every evenin', and your husband out o' sight! My goodness me! it's gettin' worse and worse. And what do he come for, now, ma'am? Now tell me candid what ye do together here in the dark of an evenin'."

Mrs. Berry glanced severely.

"O Mrs. Berry! please not to speak in that way--I don't like it," said Lucy, pouting.

"What do he come for, I ask?"

"Because he is kind, Mrs. Berry. He sees me very lonely, and wishes to amuse me. And he tells me of things I know nothing about and"--

"And wants to be a-teachin' some of his things, mayhap," Mrs. Berry interrupted with a ruffled breast.

"You are a very ungenerous, suspicious, naughty old woman," said Lucy, chiding her.

"And you're a silly, unsuspectin' little bird," Mrs. Berry retorted, as she returned her taps on the cheek. "You haven't told me what ye do together, and what's his excuse for comin'."

"Well, then, Mrs. Berry, almost every evening that he comes we read History, and he explains the battles, and talks to me about the great men. And he says I'm not silly, Mrs. Berry."

"That's one bit o' lime on your wings, my bird. History, indeed! History to a young married lovely woman alone in the dark! a pretty History! Why, I know that man's name, my dear. He's a notorious living rake, that Lord Montfalcon. No woman's safe with him."

"Ah, but he hasn't deceived me, Mrs. Berry. He has not pretended he was good."

"More's his art," quoth the experienced dame. "So you read History together in the dark; my dear!"

"I was unwell to-night, Mrs. Berry. I wanted him not to see my face. Look! there's the book open ready for him when the candles come in. And now, you dear kind darling old thing, let me kiss you for coming to me. I do love you. Talk of other things."

"So we will," said Mrs. Berry softening to Lucy's caresses. "So let us. A nobleman, indeed, alone with a young wife in the dark, and she sich a beauty! I say this shall be put a stop to now and henceforth, on the spot it shall! He won't meneuvele Bessy Berry with his arts. There! I drop him. I'm dyin' for a cup o' tea, my dear."

Lucy got up to ring the bell, and as Mrs. Berry, incapable of quite dropping him, was continuing to say: "Let him go and boast I kiss him; he ain't nothin' to be 'shamed of in a chaste woman's kiss--unawares--which men don't get too often in their lives, I can assure 'em;"--her eye surveyed Lucy's figure.

Lo, when Lucy returned to her, Mrs. Berry surrounded her with her arms, and drew her into feminine depths. "Oh, you blessed!" she cried in most

meaning tone, "you good, lovin', proper little wife, you!"

"What is it, Mrs. Berry!" lisps Lucy, opening the most innocent blue eyes.

"As if I couldn't see, you pet! It was my flurry blinded me, or I'd 'a marked ye the fast shock. Thinkin' to deceive me!"

Mrs. Berry's eyes spoke generations. Lucy's wavered; she coloured all over, and hid her face on the bounteous breast that mounted to her.

"You're a sweet one," murmured the soft woman, patting her back, and rocking her. "You're a rose, you are! and a bud on your stalk. Haven't told a word to your husband, my dear?" she asked quickly.

Lucy shook her head, looking sly and shy.

"That's right. We'll give him a surprise; let it come all at once on him, and thinks he--losin' breath 'I'm a father!' Nor a hint even you haven't give him?"

Lucy kissed her, to indicate it was quite a secret.

"Oh! you are a sweet one," said Bessy Berry, and rocked her more closely and lovingly.

Then these two had a whispered conversation, from which let all of male persuasion retire a space nothing under one mile.

Returning, after a due interval, we see Mrs. Berry counting on her fingers' ends. Concluding the sum, she cries prophetically: "Now this right everything--a baby in the balance! Now I say this angel-infant come from on high. It's God's messenger, my love! and it's not wrong to say so. He thinks you worthy, or you wouldn't 'a had one--not for all the tryin' in the world, you wouldn't, and some tries hard enough, poor creatures! Now let us rejice and make merry! I'm for cryin' and laughin', one and the same. This is the blessed seal of matrimony, which Berry never stamp on me. It's be hoped it's a boy. Make that man a grandfather, and his grandchild a son, and you got him safe. Oh! this is what I call happiness, and I'll have my tea a little stronger in consequence. I declare I could get tipsy to know this joyful news."

So Mrs. Berry carolled. She had her tea a little stronger. She ate and she drank; she rejoiced and made merry. The bliss of the chaste was hers.

Says Lucy demurely: "Now you know why I read History, and that sort of books."

"Do I?" replies Berry. "Belike I do. Since what you done's so good, my darlin', I'm agreeable to anything. A fig for all the lords! They can't come anigh a baby. You may read Voyages and Travels, my dear, and Romances, and Tales of Love and War. You cut the riddle in your own dear

way, and that's all I cares for."

"No, but you don't understand," persists Lucy. "I only read sensible books, and talk of serious things, because I'm sure... because I have heard say...dear Mrs. Berry! don't you understand now?"

Mrs. Berry smacked her knees. "Only to think of her bein' that thoughtful! and she a Catholic, too! Never tell me that people of one religion ain't as good as another, after that. Why, you want to make him a historian, to be sure! And that rake of a lord who've been comin' here playin' at wolf, you been and made him--unbeknown to himself--sort o' tutor to the unborn blessed! Ha! ha! say that little women ain't got art ekal to the cunningest of 'em. Oh! I understand. Why, to be sure, didn't I know a lady, a widow of a clergyman: he was a postermost child, and afore his birth that women read nothin' but Blair's 'Grave' over and over again, from the end to the beginnin';--that's a serious book!--very hard readin'!--and at four years of age that child that come of it reelly was the piouesest infant!--he was like a little curate. His eyes was up; he talked so solemn." Mrs. Berry imitated the little curate's appearance and manner of speaking. "So she got her wish, for one!"

But at this lady Lucy laughed.

They chattered on happily till bedtime. Lucy arranged for Mrs. Berry to sleep with her. "If it's not dreadful to ye, my sweet, sleepin' beside a woman," said Mrs. Berry. "I know it were to me shortly after my Berry, and I felt it. It don't somehow seem nat'ral after matrimony--a woman in your bed! I was obliged to have somebody, for the cold sheets do give ye the creeps when you've been used to that that's different."

Upstairs they went together, Lucy not sharing these objections. Then Lucy opened certain drawers, and exhibited pretty caps, and laced linen, all adapted for a very small body, all the work of her own hands: and Mrs. Berry praised them and her. "You been guessing a boy--woman-like," she said. Then they cooed, and kissed, and undressed by the fire, and knelt at the bedside, with their arms about each other, praying; both praying for the unborn child; and Mrs. Berry pressed Lucy's waist the moment she was about to breathe the petition to heaven to shield and bless that coming life; and thereat Lucy closed to her, and felt a strong love for her. Then Lucy got into bed first, leaving Berry to put out the light, and before she did so, Berry leaned over her, and eyed her roguishly, saying, "I never see ye like this, but I'm half in love with ye myself, you blushin' beauty! Sweet's your eyes, and your hair do take one so--lyin' back. I'd never forgive my father if he kep me away from ye four-and-twenty hours just. Husband o' that!" Berry pointed at the young wife's loveliness. "Ye look so ripe with kisses, and there they are a-languishin'!--... You never look so but in your bed, ye beauty!--just as it ought to be." Lucy had to pretend to rise to put out the light before Berry would give up her amorous chaste soliloquy. Then they lay in bed, and Mrs. Berry fondled her, and arranged for their departure to-morrow, and reviewed Richard's emotions when he came to hear he was going to be made a father by her, and hinted at Lucy's delicious shivers when Richard was again in his rightful place, which she, Bessy Berry, now

usurped; and all sorts of amorous sweet things; enough to make one fancy the adage subverted, that stolen fruits are sweetest; she drew such glowing pictures of bliss within the law and the limits of the conscience, till at last, worn out, Lucy murmured "Peepy, dear Berry," and the soft woman gradually ceased her chirp.

Bessy Berry did not sleep. She lay thinking of the sweet brave heart beside her, and listening to Lucy's breath as it came and went; squeezing the fair sleeper's hand now and then, to ease her love as her reflections warmed. A storm of wind came howling over the Hampshire hills, and sprang white foam on the water, and shook the bare trees. It passed, leaving a thin cloth of snow on the wintry land. The moon shone brilliantly. Berry heard the house-dog bark. His bark was savage and persistent. She was roused by the noise. By and by she fancied she heard a movement in the house; then it seemed to her that the house-door opened. She cocked her ears, and could almost make out voices in the midnight stillness. She slipped from the bed, locked and bolted the door of the room, assured herself of Lucy's unconsciousness, and went on tiptoe to the window. The trees all stood white to the north; the ground glittered; the cold was keen. Berry wrapped her fat arms across her bosom, and peeped as close over into the garden as the situation of the window permitted. Berry was a soft, not a timid, woman: and it happened this night that her thoughts were above the fears of the dark. She was sure of the voices; curiosity without a shade of alarm held her on the watch; and gathering bundles of her day-apparel round her neck and shoulders, she silenced the chattering of her teeth as well as she could, and remained stationary. The low hum of the voices came to a break; something was said in a louder tone; the house-door quietly shut; a man walked out of the garden into the road. He paused opposite her window, and Berry let the blind go back to its place, and peeped from behind an edge of it. He was in the shadow of the house, so that it was impossible to discern much of his figure. After some minutes he walked rapidly away, and Berry returned to the bed an icicle, from which Lucy's limbs sensitively shrank.

Next morning Mrs. Berry asked Tom Bakewell if he had been disturbed in the night. Tom, the mysterious, said he had slept like a top. Mrs. Berry went into the garden. The snow was partially melted; all save one spot, just under the portal, and there she saw the print of a man's foot. By some strange guidance it occurred to her to go and find one of Richard's boots. She did so, and, unperceived, she measured the sole of the boot in that solitary footmark. There could be no doubt that it fitted. She tried it from heel to toe a dozen times.

CHAPTER XL

Sir Austin Feverel had come to town with the serenity of a philosopher who says, 'Tis now time; and the satisfaction of a man who has not arrived thereat without a struggle. He had almost forgiven his son. His

deep love for him had well-nigh shaken loose from wounded pride and more tenacious vanity. Stirrings of a remote sympathy for the creature who had robbed him of his son and hewed at his System, were in his heart of hearts. This he knew; and in his own mind he took credit for his softness. But the world must not suppose him soft; the world must think he was still acting on his System. Otherwise what would his long absence signify?--Something highly unphilosophical. So, though love was strong, and was moving him to a straightforward course, the last tug of vanity drew him still aslant.

The Aphorist read himself so well, that to juggle with himself was a necessity. As he wished the world to see him, he beheld himself: one who entirely put aside mere personal feelings: one in whom parental duty, based on the science of life, was paramount: a Scientific Humanist, in short.

He was, therefore, rather surprised at a coldness in Lady Blandish's manner when he did appear. "At last!" said the lady, in a sad way that sounded reproachfully. Now the Scientific Humanist had, of course, nothing to reproach himself with.

But where was Richard?

Adrian positively averred he was not with his wife.

"If he had gone," said the baronet, "he would have anticipated me by a few hours."

This, when repeated to Lady Blandish, should have propitiated her, and shown his great forgiveness. She, however, sighed, and looked at him wistfully.

Their converse was not happy and deeply intimate. Philosophy did not seem to catch her mind; and fine phrases encountered a rueful assent, more flattering to their grandeur than to their influence.

Days went by. Richard did not present himself. Sir Austin's pitch of self-command was to await the youth without signs of impatience.

Seeing this, the lady told him her fears for Richard, and mentioned the rumour of him that was about.

"If," said the baronet, "this person, his wife, is what you paint her, I do not share your fears for him. I think too well of him. If she is one to inspire the sacredness of that union, I think too well of him. It is impossible."

The lady saw one thing to be done.

"Call her to you," she said. "Have her with you at Raynham. Recognize her. It is the disunion and doubt that so confuses him and drives him wild. I confess to you I hoped he had gone to her. It seems not. If she is with you his way will be clear. Will you do that?"

Science is notoriously of slow movement. Lady Blandish's proposition was far too hasty for Sir Austin. Women, rapid by nature, have no idea of science.

"We shall see her there in time, Emmeline. At present let it be between me and my son."

He spoke loftily. In truth it offended him to be asked to do anything, when he had just brought himself to do so much.

A month elapsed, and Richard appeared on the scene.

The meeting between him and his father was not what his father had expected and had crooned over in the Welsh mountains. Richard shook his hand respectfully, and inquired after his health with the common social solicitude. He then said: "During your absence, sir, I have taken the liberty, without consulting you, to do something in which you are more deeply concerned than myself. I have taken upon myself to find out my mother and place her under my care. I trust you will not think I have done wrong. I acted as I thought best."

Sir Austin replied: "You are of an age, Richard, to judge for yourself in such a case. I would have you simply beware of deceiving yourself in imagining that you considered any one but yourself in acting as you did."

"I have not deceived myself, sir," said Richard, and the interview was over. Both hated an exposure of the feelings, and in that both were satisfied: but the baronet, as one who loves, hoped and looked for tones indicative of trouble and delight in the deep heart; and Richard gave him none of those. The young man did not even face him as he spoke: if their eyes met by chance, Richard's were defiantly cold. His whole bearing was changed.

"This rash marriage has altered him," said the very just man of science in life: and that meant: "it has debased him."

He pursued his reflections. "I see in him the desperate maturity of a suddenly-ripened nature: and but for my faith that good work is never lost, what should I think of the toil of my years? Lost, perhaps to me! lost to him! It may show itself in his children."

The Philosopher, we may conceive, has contentment in benefiting embryos: but it was a somewhat bitter prospect to Sir Austin. Bitterly he felt the injury to himself.

One little incident spoke well of Richard. A poor woman called at the hotel while he was missing. The baronet saw her, and she told him a tale that threw Christian light on one part of Richard's nature. But this might gratify the father in Sir Austin; it did not touch the man of science. A Feverel, his son, would not do less, he thought. He sat down deliberately to study his son.

No definite observations enlightened him. Richard ate and drank; joked and laughed. He was generally before Adrian in calling for a fresh bottle. He talked easily of current topics; his gaiety did not sound forced. In all he did, nevertheless, there was not the air of a youth who sees a future before him. Sir Austin put that down. It might be carelessness, and wanton blood, for no one could say he had much on his mind. The man of science was not reckoning that Richard also might have learned to act and wear a mask. Dead subjects--this is to say, people not on their guard--he could penetrate and dissect. It is by a rare chance, as scientific men well know, that one has an opportunity of examining the structure of the living.

However, that rare chance was granted to Sir Austin. They were engaged to dine with Mrs. Doria at the Foreys', and walked down to her in the afternoon, father and son arm-in-arm, Adrian beside them. Previously the offended father had condescended to inform his son that it would shortly be time for him to return to his wife, indicating that arrangements would ultimately be ordered to receive her at Raynham. Richard had replied nothing; which might mean excess of gratitude, or hypocrisy in concealing his pleasure, or any one of the thousand shifts by which gratified human nature expresses itself when all is made to run smooth with it. Now Mrs. Berry had her surprise ready charged for the young husband. She had Lucy in her own house waiting for him. Every day she expected him to call and be overcome by the rapturous surprise, and every day, knowing his habit of frequenting the park, she marched Lucy thither, under the plea that Master Richard, whom she had already christened, should have an airing.

The round of the red winter sun was behind the bare Kensington chestnuts, when these two parties met. Happily for Lucy and the hope she bore in her bosom, she was perversely admiring a fair horsewoman galloping by at the moment. Mrs. Berry plucked at her gown once or twice, to prepare her eyes for the shock, but Lucy's head was still half averted, and thinks Mrs. Berry, "Twon't hurt her if she go into his arms head foremost." They were close; Mrs. Berry performed the bob preliminary. Richard held her silent with a terrible face; he grasped her arm, and put her behind him. Other people intervened. Lucy saw nothing to account for Berry's excessive flutter. Berry threw it on the air and some breakfast bacon, which, she said, she knew in the morning while she ate it, was bad for the bile, and which probably was the cause of her bursting into tears, much to Lucy's astonishment.

"What you ate makes you cry, Mrs. Berry?"

"It's all--" Mrs. Berry pressed at her heart and leaned sideways, "it's all stomach, my dear. Don't ye mind," and becoming aware of her unfashionable behaviour, she trailed off to the shelter of the elms.

"You have a singular manner with old ladies," said Sir Austin to his son, after Berry had been swept aside.

Scarcely courteous. She behaved like a mad woman, certainly."--Are you ill, my son?"

Richard was death-pale, his strong form smitten through with weakness. The baronet sought Adrian's eye. Adrian had seen Lucy as they passed, and he had a glimpse of Richard's countenance while disposing of Berry. Had Lucy recognized them, he would have gone to her unhesitatingly. As she did not, he thought it well, under the circumstances, to leave matters as they were. He answered the baronet's look with a shrug.

"Are you ill, Richard?" Sir Austin again asked his son.

"Come on, sir! come on!" cried Richard.

His father's further meditations, as they stepped briskly to the Foreys', gave poor ferry a character which one who lectures on matrimony, and has kissed but three men in her life, shrieks to hear the very title of.

"Richard will go to his wife to-morrow," Sir Austin said to Adrian some time before they went in to dinner.

Adrian asked him if he had chanced to see a young fair-haired lady by the side of the old one Richard had treated so peculiarly; and to the baronet's acknowledgment that he remembered to have observed such a person, Adrian said: "That was his wife, sir."

Sir Austin could not dissect the living subject. As if a bullet had torn open the young man's skull, and some blast of battle laid his palpitating organization bare, he watched every motion of his brain and his heart; and with the grief and terror of one whose mental habit was ever to pierce to extremes. Not altogether conscious that he had hitherto played with life, he felt that he was suddenly plunged into the stormful reality of it. He projected to speak plainly to his son on all points that night.

"Richard is very gay," Mrs. Doris, whispered her brother.

"All will be right with him to-morrow," he replied; for the game had been in his hands so long, so long had he been the God of the machine, that having once resolved to speak plainly and to act, he was to a certain extent secure, bad as the thing to mend might be.

"I notice he has rather a wild laugh--I don't exactly like his eyes," said Mrs. Doria.

"You will see a change in him to-morrow," the man of science remarked.

It was reserved for Mrs. Doria herself to experience that change. In the middle of the dinner a telegraphic message from her son-in-law, worthy John Todhunter, reached the house, stating that Clare was alarmingly ill, bidding her come instantly. She cast about for some one to accompany her, and fixed on Richard. Before he would give his consent for Richard to go, Sir Austin desired to speak with him apart, and in that interview he said to his son: "My dear Richard! it was my intention that we should come to an understanding together this night. But the time is short--poor Helen cannot spare many minutes. Let me then say that you deceived

me, and that I forgive you. We fix our seal on the past. You will bring your wife to me when you return." And very cheerfully the baronet looked down on the generous future he thus founded.

"Will you have her at Raynham at once, sir?" said Richard.

"Yes, my son, when you bring her."

"Are you mocking me, sir?"

"Pray, what do you mean?"

"I ask you to receive her at once."

"Well! the delay cannot be long. I do not apprehend that you will be kept from your happiness many days."

"I think it will be some time, sir!" said Richard, sighing deeply.

"And what mental freak is this that can induce you to postpone it and play with your first duty?"

"What is my first duty, sir?"

"Since you are married, to be with your wife."

"I have heard that from an old woman called Berry!" said Richard to himself, not intending irony.

"Will you receive her at once?" he asked resolutely.

The baronet was clouded by his son's reception of his graciousness. His grateful prospect had formerly been Richard's marriage--the culmination of his System. Richard had destroyed his participation in that. He now looked for a pretty scene in recompense:--Richard leading up his wife to him, and both being welcomed by him paternally, and so held one ostentatious minute in his embrace.

He said: "Before you return, I demur to receiving her."

"Very well, sir," replied his son, and stood as if he had spoken all.

"Really you tempt me to fancy you already regret your rash proceeding!" the baronet exclaimed; and the next moment it pained him he had uttered the words, Richard's eyes were so sorrowfully fierce. It pained him, but he divined in that look a history, and he could not refrain from glancing acutely and asking: "Do you?"

"Regret it, sir?" The question aroused one of those struggles in the young man's breast which a passionate storm of tears may still, and which sink like leaden death into the soul when tears come not. Richard's eyes had the light of the desert.

"Do you?" his father repeated. "You tempt me--I almost fear you do." At the thought--for he expressed his mind--the pity that he had for Richard was not pure gold.

"Ask me what I think of her, sir! Ask me what she is! Ask me what it is to have taken one of God's precious angels and chained her to misery! Ask me what it is to have plunged a sword into her heart, and to stand over her and see such a creature bleeding! Do I regret that? Why, yes, I do! Would you?"

His eyes flew hard at his father under the ridge of his eyebrows.

Sir Austin winced and reddened. Did he understand? There is ever in the mind's eye a certain wilfulness. We see and understand; we see and won't understand.

"Tell me why you passed by her as you did this afternoon," he said gravely: and in the same voice Richard answered: "I passed her because I could not do otherwise."

"Your wife, Richard?"

"Yes! my wife!"

"If she had seen you, Richard?"

"God spared her that!"

Mrs. Doria, bustling in practical haste, and bearing Richard's hat and greatcoat in her energetic hands, came between them at this juncture. Dimples of commiseration were in her cheeks while she kissed her brother's perplexed forehead. She forgot her trouble about Clare, deploring his fatuity.

Sir Austin was forced to let his son depart. As of old, he took counsel with Adrian, and the wise youth was soothing. "Somebody has kissed him, sir, and the chaste boy can't get over it." This absurd suggestion did more to appease the baronet than if Adrian had given a veritable reasonable key to Richard's conduct. It set him thinking that it might be a prudish strain in the young man's mind, due to the System in difficulties.

"I may have been wrong in one thing," he said, with an air of the utmost doubt of it. "I, perhaps, was wrong in allowing him so much liberty during his probation."

Adrian pointed out to him that he had distinctly commanded it.

"Yes, yes; that is on me."

His was an order of mind that would accept the most burdensome charges, and by some species of moral usury make a profit out of them.

Clare was little talked of. Adrian attributed the employment of the telegraph to John Todhunter's uxorious distress at a toothache, or possibly the first symptoms of an heir to his house.

"That child's mind has disease in it... She is not sound," said the baronet.

On the door-step of the hotel, when they returned, stood Mrs. Berry. Her wish to speak a few words with the baronet reverentially communicated, she was ushered upstairs into his room.

Mrs. Berry compressed her person in the chair she was beckoned to occupy.

"Well' ma'am, you have something to say," observed the baronet, for she seemed loth to commence.

"Wishin' I hadn't--" Mrs. Berry took him up, and mindful of the good rule to begin at the beginning, pursued: "I dare say, Sir Austin, you don't remember me, and I little thought when last we parted our meeting 'd be like this. Twenty year don't go over one without showin' it, no more than twenty ox. It's a might o' time,--twenty year! Leastways not quite twenty, it ain't."

"Round figures are best," Adrian remarked.

"In them round figures a be-loved son have growed up, and got himself married!" said Mrs. Berry, diving straight into the case.

Sir Austin then learnt that he had before him the culprit who had assisted his son in that venture. It was a stretch of his patience to hear himself addressed on a family matter; but he was naturally courteous.

"He came to my house, Sir Austin, a stranger! If twenty year alters us as have knowed each other on the earth, how must they alter they that we parted with just come from heaven! And a heavenly babe he were! so sweet! so strong! so fat!"

Adrian laughed aloud.

Mrs. Berry bumped a curtsy to him in her chair, continuing: "I wished afore I spoke to say how thankful am I bound to be for my pension not cut short, as have offended so, but that I know Sir Austin Feverel, Raynham Abbey, ain't one o' them that likes to hear their good deeds pumlished. And a pension to me now, it's something more than it were. For a pension and pretty rosy cheeks in a maid, which I was--that's a bait many a man'll bite, that won't so a forsaken wife!"

"If you will speak to the point, ma'am, I will listen to you," the baronet interrupted her.

"It's the beginnin' that's the worst, and that's over, thank the Lord! So I'll speak, Sir Austin, and say my say:--Lord speed me! Believin' our

ideas o' matrimony to be sim'lar, then, I'll say, once married--married for life! Yes! I don't even like widows. For I can't stop at the grave. Not at the tomb I can't stop. My husband's my husband, and if I'm a body at the Resurrection, I say, speaking humbly, my Berry is the husband o' my body; and to think of two claimin' of me then--it makes me hot all over. Such is my notion of that state 'tween man and woman. No givin' in marriage, o' course I know; and if so I'm single."

The baronet suppressed a smile. "Really, my good woman, you wander very much."

"Beggin' pardon, Sir Austin; but I has my point before me all the same, and I'm comin' to it. Ac-knowledgin' our error, it'd done, and bein' done, it's writ aloft. Oh! if you ony knew what a sweet young creature she be! Indeed; 'taint all of humble birth that's unworthy, Sir Austin. And she got her idees, too: She reads History! She talk that sensible as would surprise ye. But for all that she's a prey to the artful o' men--unpertected. And it's a young marriage--but there's no fear for her, as far as she go. The fear's t'other way. There's that in a man--at the commencement--which make of him Lord knows what if you any way interferences: whereas a woman bides quiet! It's consolation catch her, which is what we mean by seduein'. Whereas a man--he's a savage!"

Sir Austin turned his face to Adrian, who was listening with huge delight.

"Well, ma'am, I see you have something in your mind, if you would only come to it quickly."

"Then here's my point, Sir Austin. I say you bred him so as there ain't another young gentleman like him in England, and proud he make me. And as for her, I'll risk sayin'--it's done, and no harm--you might search England through, and nowhere will ye find a maid that's his match like his own wife. Then there they be. Are they together as should be? O Lord no! Months they been divided. Then she all lonely and exposed, I went, and fetched her out of seducers' ways--which they may say what they like, but the inn'cent is most open to when they're healthy and confidin'--I fetch her, and--the liberty--boxed her safe in my own house. So much for that sweet! That you may do with women. But it's him--Mr. Richard--I am bold, I know, but there--I'm in for it, and the Lord'll help me! It's him, Sir Austin, in this great metropolis, warm from a young marriage. It's him, and--I say nothin' of her, and how sweet she bears it, and it's eating her at a time when Natur' should have no other trouble but the one that's goin' on it's him, and I ask--so bold--shall there--and a Christian gentlemen his father--shall there be a tug 'tween him as a son and him as a husband--soon to be somethin' else? I speak bold out--I'd have sons obey their fathers, but a priest's words spoke over them, which they're now in my ears, I say I ain't a doubt on earth--I'm sure there ain't one in heaven--which dooty's the holier of the two."

Sir Austin heard her to an end. Their views on the junction of the sexes were undoubtedly akin. To be lectured on his prime subject, however, was slightly disagreeable, and to be obliged mentally to assent to this old

lady's doctrine was rather humiliating, when it could not be averred that he had latterly followed it out. He sat cross-legged and silent, a finger to his temple.

"One gets so addle-gated thinkin' many things," said Mrs. Berry, simply. "That's why we see wonder clever people goin' wrong--to my mind. I think it's al'ays the plan in a dielemmer to pray God and walk forward."

The keen-witted soft woman was tracking the baronet's thoughts, and she had absolutely run him down and taken an explanation out of his mouth, by which Mrs. Berry was to have been informed that he had acted from a principle of his own, and devolved a wisdom she could not be expected to comprehend.

Of course he became advised immediately that it would be waste of time to direct such an explanation to her inferior capacity.

He gave her his hand, saying, "My son has gone out of town to see his cousin, who is ill. He will return in two or three days, and then they will both come to me at Raynham."

Mrs. Berry took the tips of his fingers, and went half-way to the floor perpendicularly. "He pass her like a stranger in the park this evenin'," she faltered.

"Ah?" said the baronet. "Yes, well! they will be at Raynham before the week is over."

Mrs. Berry was not quite satisfied. "Not of his own accord he pass that sweet young wife of his like a stranger this day, Sir Austin!"

"I must beg you not to intrude further, ma'am."

Mrs. Berry bobbed her bunch of a body out of the room.

"All's well that ends well," she said to herself. "It's just bad inquirin' too close among men. We must take 'em somethin' like Providence--as they come. Thank heaven! I kep' back the baby."

In Mrs. Berry's eyes the baby was the victorious reserve.

Adrian asked his chief what he thought of that specimen of woman.

"I think I have not met a better in my life," said the baronet, mingling praise and sarcasm.

Clare lies in her bed as placid as in the days when she breathed; her white hands stretched their length along the sheets, at peace from head to feet. She needs iron no more. Richard is face to face with death for the first time. He sees the sculpture of clay--the spark gone.

Clare gave her mother the welcome of the dead. This child would have spoken nothing but kind commonplaces had she been alive. She was dead,

and none knew her malady. On her fourth finger were two wedding-rings.

When hours of weeping had silenced the mother's anguish, she, for some comfort she saw in it, pointed out that strange thing to Richard, speaking low in the chamber of the dead; and then he learnt that it was his own lost ring Clare wore in the two worlds. He learnt from her husband that Clare's last request had been that neither of the rings should be removed. She had written it; she would not speak it.

"I beg of my husband, and all kind people who may have the care of me between this and the grave, to bury me with my hands untouched."

The tracing of the words showed the bodily torment she was suffering, as she wrote them on a scrap of paper found beside her pillow.

In wonder, as the dim idea grew from the waving of Clare's dead hand, Richard paced the house, and hung about the awful room; dreading to enter it, reluctant to quit it. The secret Clare had buried while she lived, arose with her death. He saw it play like flame across her marble features. The memory of her voice was like a knife at his nerves. His coldness to her started up accusingly: her meekness was bitter blame.

On the evening of the fourth day, her mother came to him in his bedroom, with a face so white that he asked himself if aught worse could happen to a mother than the loss of her child. Choking she said to him, "Read this," and thrust a leather-bound pocket-book trembling in his hand. She would not breathe to him what it was. She entreated him not to open it before her.

"Tell me," she said, "tell me what you think. John must not hear of it. I have nobody to consult but you O Richard!"

"My Diary" was written in the round hand of Clare's childhood on the first page. The first name his eye encountered was his own.

"Richard's fourteenth birthday. I have worked him a purse and put it under his pillow, because he is going to have plenty of money. He does not notice me now because he has a friend now, and he is ugly, but Richard is not, and never will be."

The occurrences of that day were subsequently recorded, and a childish prayer to God for him set down. Step by step he saw her growing mind in his history. As she advanced in years she began to look back, and made much of little trivial remembrances, all bearing upon him.

"We went into the fields and gathered cowslips together, and pelted each other, and I told him he used to call them 'coals-sleeps' when he was a baby, and he was angry at my telling him, for he does not like to be told he was ever a baby."

He remembered the incident, and remembered his stupid scorn of her meek affection. Little Clare! how she lived before him in her white dress and pink ribbons, and soft dark eyes! Upstairs she was lying dead. He read

on:

"Mama says there is no one in the world like Richard, and I am sure there is not, not in the whole world. He says he is going to be a great General and going to the wars. If he does I shall dress myself as a boy and go after him, and he will not know me till I am wounded. Oh I pray he will never, never be wounded. I wonder what I should feel if Richard was ever to die."

Upstairs Clare was lying dead.

"Lady Blandish said there was a likeness between Richard and me. Richard said I hope I do not hang down my head as she does. He is angry with me because I do not look people in the face and speak out, but I know I am not looking after earthworms."

Yes. He had told her that. A shiver seized him at the recollection.

Then it came to a period when the words: "Richard kissed me," stood by themselves, and marked a day in her life.

Afterwards it was solemnly discovered that Richard wrote poetry. He read one of his old forgotten compositions penned when he had that ambition.

"Thy truth to me is truer
Than horse, or dog, or blade;
Thy vows to me are fewer
Than ever maiden made.

Thou steppest from thy splendour
To make my life a song:
My bosom shall be tender
As thine has risen strong."

All the verses were transcribed. "It is he who is the humble knight," Clare explained at the close, "and his lady, is a Queen. Any Queen would throw her crown away for him."

It came to that period when Clare left Raynham with her mother.

"Richard was not sorry to lose me. He only loves boys and men. Something tells me I shall never see Raynham again. He was dressed in blue. He said Good-bye, Clare, and kissed me on the cheek. Richard never kisses me on the mouth. He did not know I went to his bed and kissed him while he was asleep. He sleeps with one arm under his head, and the other out on the bed. I moved away a bit of his hair that was over his eyes. I wanted to cut it. I have one piece. I do not let anybody see I am unhappy, not even mama. She says I want iron. I am sure I do not. I like to write my name. Clare Doria Forey. Richard's is Richard Doria Feverel."

His breast rose convulsively. Clare Doria Forey! He knew the music of that name. He had heard it somewhere. It sounded faint and mellow now

behind the hills of death.

He could not read for tears. It was midnight. The hour seemed to belong to her. The awful stillness and the darkness were Clare's. Clare's voice clear and cold from the grave possessed it.

Painfully, with blinded eyes, he looked over the breathless pages. She spoke of his marriage, and her finding the ring.

"I knew it was his. I knew he was going to be married that morning. I saw him stand by the altar when they laughed at breakfast. His wife must be so beautiful! Richard's wife! Perhaps he will love me better now he is married. Mama says they must be separated. That is shameful. If I can help him I will. I pray so that he may be happy. I hope God hears poor sinners' prayers. I am very sinful. Nobody knows it as I do. They say I am good, but I know. When I look on the ground I am not looking after earthworms, as he said. Oh, do forgive me, God!"

Then she spoke of her own marriage, and that it was her duty to obey her mother. A blank in the Diary ensued.

"I have seen Richard. Richard despises me," was the next entry.

But now as he read his eyes were fixed, and the delicate feminine handwriting like a black thread drew on his soul to one terrible conclusion.

"I cannot live. Richard despises me. I cannot bear the touch of my fingers or the sight of my face. Oh! I understand him now. He should not have kissed me so that last time. I wished to die while his mouth was on mine."

Further: "I have no escape. Richard said he would die rather than endure it. I know he would. Why should I be afraid to do what he would do? I think if my husband whipped me I could bear it better. He is so kind, and tries to make me cheerful. He will soon be very unhappy. I pray to God half the night. I seem to be losing sight of my God the more I pray."

Richard laid the book open on the table. Phantom surges seemed to be mounting and travelling for his brain. Had Clare taken his wild words in earnest? Did she lie there dead--he shrouded the thought.

He wrapped the thoughts in shrouds, but he was again reading.

"A quarter to one o'clock. I shall not be alive this time to-morrow. I shall never see Richard now. I dreamed last night we were in the fields together, and he walked with his arm round my waist. We were children, but I thought we were married, and I showed him I wore his ring, and he said--if you always wear it, Clare, you are as good as my wife. Then I made a vow to wear it for ever and ever... "It is not mama's fault. She does not think as Richard and I do of these things. He is not a coward, nor am I. He hates cowards.

"I have written to his father to make him happy. Perhaps when I am dead he will hear what I say.

"I heard just now Richard call distinctly--Clare, come out to me. Surely he has not gone. I am going I know not where. I cannot think. I am very cold."

The words were written larger, and staggered towards the close, as if her hand had lost mastery over the pen.

"I can only remember Richard now a boy. A little boy and a big boy. I am not sure now of his voice. I can only remember certain words. 'Clari,' and 'Don Ricardo,' and his laugh. He used to be full of fun. Once we laughed all day together tumbling in the hay. Then he had a friend, and began to write poetry, and be proud. If I had married a young man he would have forgiven me, but I should not have been happier. I must have died. God never looks on me.

"It is past two o'clock. The sheep are bleating outside. It must be very cold in the ground. Good-bye, Richard."

With his name it began and ended. Even to herself Clare was not over-communicative. The book was slender, yet her nineteen years of existence left half the number of pages white.

Those last words drew him irresistibly to gaze on her. There she lay, the same impassive Clare. For a moment he wondered she had not moved--to him she had become so different. She who had just filled his ears with strange tidings--it was not possible to think her dead! She seemed to have been speaking to him all through his life. His image was on that still heart.

He dismissed the night-watchers from the room, and remained with her alone, till the sense of death oppressed him, and then the shock sent him to the window to look for sky and stars. Behind a low broad pine, hung with frosty mist, he heard a bell-wether of the flock in the silent fold. Death in life it sounded.

The mother found him praying at the foot of Clare's bed. She knelt by his side, and they prayed, and their joint sobs shook their bodies, but neither of them shed many tears. They held a dark unspoken secret in common. They prayed God to forgive her.

Clare was buried in the family vault of the Todhunters. Her mother breathed no wish to have her lying at Lobourne.

After the funeral, what they alone upon earth knew brought them together.

"Richard," she said, "the worst is over for me. I have no one to love but you, dear. We have all been fighting against God, and this... Richard! you will come with me, and be united to your wife, and spare my brother what I suffer."

He answered the broken spirit: "I have killed one. She sees me as I am. I cannot go with you to my wife, because I am not worthy to touch her hand, and were I to go, I should do this to silence my self-contempt. Go you to her, and when she asks of me, say I have a death upon my head that--No! say that I am abroad, seeking for that which shall cleanse me. If I find it I shall come to claim her. If not, God help us all!"

She had no strength to contest his solemn words, or stay him, and he went forth.

CHAPTER XLI

A man with a beard saluted the wise youth Adrian in the full blaze of Piccadilly with a clap on the shoulder. Adrian glanced leisurely behind.

"Do you want to try my nerves, my dear fellow? I'm not a man of fashion, happily, or you would have struck the seat of them. How are you?"

That was his welcome to Austin Wentworth after his long absence.

Austin took his arm, and asked for news, with the hunger of one who had been in the wilderness five years.

"The Whigs have given up the ghost, my dear Austin. The free Briton is to receive Liberty's pearl, the Ballot. The Aristocracy has had a cycle's notice to quit. The Monarchy and old Madeira are going out; Demos and Cape wines are coming in. They call it Reform. So, you see, your absence has worked wonders. Depart for another five years, and you will return to ruined stomachs, cracked sconces, general upset, an equality made perfect by universal prostration."

Austin indulged him in a laugh. "I want to hear about ourselves. How is old Ricky?"

"You know of his--what do they call it when greenhorns are licensed to jump into the milkpails of dairymaids?--a very charming little woman she makes, by the way--presentable! quite old Anacreon's rose in milk. Well! everybody thought the System must die of it. Not a bit. It continued to flourish in spite. It's in a consumption now, though--emaciated, lean, raw, spectral! I've this morning escaped from Raynham to avoid the sight of it. I have brought our genial uncle Hippias to town--a delightful companion! I said to him: 'We've had a fine Spring.' 'Ugh!' he answers, 'there's a time when you come to think the Spring old.' You should have heard how he trained out the 'old.' I felt something like decay in my sap just to hear him. In the prize-fight of life, my dear Austin, our uncle Hippias has been unfairly hit below the belt. Let's guard ourselves there, and go and order dinner."

"But where's Ricky now, and what is he doing?" said Austin.

"Ask what he has done. The miraculous boy has gone and got a baby!"

"A child? Richard has one?" Austin's clear eyes shone with pleasure.

"I suppose it's not common among your tropical savages. He has one: one as big as two. That has been the death-blow to the System. It bore the marriage--the baby was too much for it. Could it swallow the baby, 'twould live. She, the wonderful woman, has produced a large boy. I assure you it's quite amusing to see the System opening its mouth every hour of the day, trying to gulp him down, aware that it would be a consummate cure, or a happy release."

By degrees Austin learnt the baronet's proceedings, and smiled sadly.

"How has Ricky turned out?" he asked. "What sort of a character has he?"

"The poor boy is ruined by his excessive anxiety about it. Character? he has the character of a bullet with a treble charge of powder behind it. Enthusiasm is the powder. That boy could get up an enthusiasm for the maiden days of Ops! He was going to reform the world, after your fashion, Austin,--you have something to answer for. Unfortunately he began with the feminine side of it. Cupid proud of Phoebus newly slain, or Pluto wishing to people his kingdom, if you like, put it into the soft head of one of the guileless grateful creatures to kiss him for his good work. Oh, horror! he never expected that. Conceive the System in the flesh, and you have our Richard. The consequence is, that this male Peri refuses to enter his Paradise, though the gates are open for him, the trumpets blow, and the fair unspotted one awaits him fruitful within. We heard of him last that he was trying the German waters--preparatory to his undertaking the release of Italy from the subjugation of the Teuton. Let's hope they'll wash him. He is in the company of Lady Judith Felle--your old friend, the ardent female Radical who married the decrepit to carry out her principles. They always marry English lords, or foreign princes: I admire their tactics."

"Judith is bad for him in such a state. I like her, but she was always too sentimental," said Austin.

"Sentiment made her marry the old lord, I suppose? I like her for her sentiment, Austin. Sentimental people are sure to live long and die fat. Feeling, that's the slayer, coz. Sentiment! 'tis the cajolery of existence: the soft bloom which whoso weareth, he or she is enviable. Would that I had more!"

"You're not much changed, Adrian."

"I'm not a Radical, Austin."

Further inquiries, responded to in Adrian's figurative speech, instructed Austin that the baronet was waiting for his son, in a posture of statuesque offended paternity, before he would receive his daughter-in-

law and grandson. That was what Adrian meant by the efforts of the System to swallow the baby.

"We're in a tangle," said the wise youth. "Time will extricate us, I presume, or what is the venerable signor good for?"

Austin mused some minutes, and asked for Lucy's place of residence.

"We'll go to her by and by," said Adrian.

"I shall go and see her now," said Austin.

"Well, we'll go and order the dinner first, coz."

"Give me her address."

"Really, Austin, you carry matters with too long a beard," Adrian objected. "Don't you care what you eat?" he roared hoarsely, looking humorously hurt. "I daresay not. A slice out of him that's handy--sauce du ciel! Go, batten on the baby, cannibal. Dinner at seven."

Adrian gave him his own address, and Lucy's, and strolled off to do the better thing.

Overnight Mrs. Berry had observed a long stranger in her tea-cup. Posting him on her fingers and starting him with a smack, he had vaulted lightly and thereby indicated that he was positively coming the next day. She forgot him in the bustle of her duties and the absorption of her faculties in thoughts of the incomparable stranger Lucy had presented to the world, till a knock at the street-door reminded her. "There he is!" she cried, as she ran to open to him. "There's my stranger come!" Never was a woman's faith in omens so justified. The stranger desired to see Mrs. Richard Feverel. He said his name was Mr. Austin Wentworth. Mrs. Berry clasped her hands, exclaiming, "Come at last!" and ran bolt out of the house to look up and down the street. Presently she returned with many excuses for her rudeness, saying: "I expected to see her comin' home, Mr. Wentworth. Every day twice a day she go out to give her blessed angel an airing. No leavin' the child with nursemaids for her! She is a mother! and good milk, too, thank the Lord! though her heart's so low."

Indoors Mrs. Berry stated who she was, related the history of the young couple and her participation in it, and admired the beard. "Although I'd swear you don't wear it for ornament, now!" she said, having in the first impulse designed a stroke at man's vanity.

Ultimately Mrs. Berry spoke of the family complication, and with dejected head and joined hands threw out dark hints about Richard.

While Austin was giving his cheerfuller views of the case, Lucy came in preceding the baby.

"I am Austin Wentworth," he said, taking her hand. They read each

other's faces, these two, and smiled kinship.

"Your name is Lucy?"

She affirmed it softly.

"And mine is Austin, as you know."

Mrs. Berry allowed time for Lucy's charms to subdue him, and presented Richard's representative, who, seeing a new face, suffered himself to be contemplated before he commenced crying aloud and knocking at the doors of Nature for something that was due to him.

"Ain't he a lusty darlin'?" says Mrs. Berry. "Ain't he like his own father? There can't be no doubt about zoo, zoo pitty pet. Look at his fists. Ain't he got passion? Ain't he a splendid roarer? Oh!" and she went off rapturously into baby-language.

A fine boy, certainly. Mrs. Berry exhibited his legs for further proof, desiring Austin's confirmation as to their being dumplings.

Lucy murmured a word of excuse, and bore the splendid roarer out of the room.

"She might a done it here," said Mrs. Berry. "There's no prettier sight, I say. If her dear husband could but see that! He's off in his heroics--he want to be doin' all sorts o' things: I say he'll never do anything grander than that baby. You should 'a seen her uncle over that baby--he came here, for I said, you shall see your own family, my dear, and so she thinks. He come, and he laughed over that baby in the joy of his heart, poor man! he cried, he did. You should see that Mr. Thompson, Mr. Wentworth--a friend o' Mr. Richard's, and a very modest-minded young gentleman--he worships her in his innocence. It's a sight to see him with that baby. My belief is he's unhappy 'cause he can't anyways be nurse-maid to him. O Mr. Wentworth! what do you think of her, sir?"

Austin's reply was as satisfactory as a man's poor speech could make it. He heard that Lady Feverel was in the house, and Mrs. Berry prepared the way for him to pay his respects to her. Then Mrs. Berry ran to Lucy, and the house buzzed with new life. The simple creatures felt in Austin's presence something good among them. "He don't speak much," said Mrs. Berry, "but I see by his eye he mean a deal. He ain't one o' yer long-word gentry, who's all gay deceivers, every one of 'em."

Lucy pressed the hearty suckling into her breast. "I wonder what he thinks of me, Mrs. Berry? I could not speak to him. I loved him before I saw him. I knew what his face was like."

"He looks proper even with a beard, and that's a trial for a virtuous man," said Mrs. Berry. "One sees straight through the hair with him. Think! he'll think what any man'd think--you a-suckin spite o' all your sorrow, my sweet,--and my Berry talkin' of his Roman matrons!--here's a English wife'll match 'em all! that's what he thinks. And now that

leetle dark under yer eye'll clear, my darlin', now he've come."

Mrs. Berry looked to no more than that; Lucy to no more than the peace she had in being near Richard's best friend. When she sat down to tea it was with a sense that the little room that held her was her home perhaps for many a day.

A chop procured and cooked by Mrs. Berry formed Austin's dinner. During the meal he entertained them with anecdotes of his travels. Poor Lucy had no temptation to try to conquer Austin. That heroic weakness of hers was gone.

Mrs. Berry had said: "Three cups--I goes no further," and Lucy had rejected the proffer of more tea, when Austin, who was in the thick of a Brazilian forest, asked her if she was a good traveller.

"I mean, can you start at a minute's notice?"

Lucy hesitated, and then said; "Yes," decisively, to which Mrs. Berry added, that she was not a "luggage-woman"

"There used to be a train at seven o'clock," Austin remarked, consulting his watch.

The two women were silent.

"Could you get ready to come with me to Raynham in ten minutes?"

Austin looked as if he had asked a commonplace question.

Lucy's lips parted to speak. She could not answer.

Loud rattled the teaboard to Mrs. Berry's dropping hands.

"Joy and deliverance!" she exclaimed with a foundering voice.

"Will you come?" Austin kindly asked again.

Lucy tried to stop her beating heart, as she answered, "Yes." Mrs. Berry cunningly pretended to interpret the irresolution in her tones with a mighty whisper: "She's thinking what's to be done with baby."

"He must learn to travel," said Austin.

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Berry, "and I'll be his nuss, and bear him, a sweet! Oh! and think of it! me nurse-maid once more at Raynham Abbey! but it's nurse-woman now, you must say. Let us be goin' on the spot."

She started up and away in hot haste, fearing delay would cool the heaven-sent resolve. Austin smiled, eying his watch and Lucy alternately. She was wishing to ask a multitude of questions. His face reassured her, and saying: "I will be dressed instantly," she also left the room. Talking, bustling, preparing, wrapping up my lord, and looking

to their neatnesses, they were nevertheless ready within the time prescribed by Austin, and Mrs. Berry stood humming over the baby. "He'll sleep it through," she said. "He's had enough for an alderman, and goes to sleep sound after his dinner, he do, a duck!" Before they departed, Lucy ran up to Lady Feverel. She returned for, the small one.

"One moment, Mr. Wentworth?"

"Just two," said Austin.

Master Richard was taken up, and when Lucy came back her eyes were full of tears.

"She thinks she is never to see him again, Mr. Wentworth."

"She shall," Austin said simply.

Off they went, and with Austin near her, Lucy forgot to dwell at all upon the great act of courage she was performing.

"I do hope baby will not wake," was her chief solicitude.

"He!" cries nurse-woman Berry, from the rear, "his little tum-tum's as tight as he can hold, a pet! a lamb! a bird! a beauty! and ye may take yer oath he never wakes till that's slack. He've got character of his own, a blessed!"

There are some tremendous citadels that only want to be taken by storm. The baronet sat alone in his library, sick of resistance, and rejoicing in the pride of no surrender; a terror to his friends and to himself. Hearing Austin's name sonorously pronounced by the man of calves, he looked up from his book, and held out his hand. "Glad to see you, Austin." His appearance betokened complete security. The next minute he found himself escalated.

It was a cry from Mrs. Berry that told him others were in the room besides Austin. Lucy stood a little behind the lamp: Mrs. Berry close to the door. The door was half open, and passing through it might be seen the petrified figure of a fine man. The baronet glancing over the lamp rose at Mrs. Berry's signification of a woman's personality. Austin stepped back and led Lucy to him by the hand. "I have brought Richard's wife, sir," he said with a pleased, perfectly uncalculating, countenance, that was disarming. Very pale and trembling Lucy bowed. She felt her two hands taken, and heard a kind voice. Could it be possible it belonged to the dreadful father of her husband? She lifted her eyes nervously: her hands were still detained. The baronet contemplated Richard's choice. Had he ever had a rivalry with those pure eyes? He saw the pain of her position shooting across her brows, and, uttering-gentle inquiries as to her health, placed her in a seat. Mrs. Berry had already fallen into a chair.

"What aspect do you like for your bedroom?--East?" said the baronet.

Lucy was asking herself wonderingly: "Am I to stay?"

"Perhaps you had better take to Richard's room at once," he pursued.
"You have the Lobourne valley there and a good morning air, and will feel more at home."

Lucy's colour mounted. Mrs. Berry gave a short cough, as one who should say, "The day is ours!" Undoubtedly--strange as it was to think it--the fortress was carried.

"Lucy is rather tired," said Austin, and to hear her Christian name thus bravely spoken brought grateful dew to her eyes.

The baronet was about to touch the bell. "But have you come alone?" he asked.

At this Mrs. Berry came forward. Not immediately: it seemed to require effort for her to move, and when she was within the region of the lamp, her agitation could not escape notice. The blissful bundle shook in her arms.

"By the way, what is he to me?" Austin inquired generally as he went and unveiled the younger hope of Raynham. "My relationship is not so defined as yours, sir."

An observer might have supposed that the baronet peeped at his grandson with the courteous indifference of one who merely wished to compliment the mother of anybody's child.

"I really think he's like Richard," Austin laughed. Lucy looked: I am sure he is!

"As like as one to one," Mrs. Berry murmured feebly; but Grandpapa not speaking she thought it incumbent on her to pluck up. "And he's as healthy as his father was, Sir Austin--spite o' the might 'a beens. Reg'lar as the clock! We never want a clock since he come. We knows the hour o' the day, and of the night."

"You nurse him yourself, of course?" the baronet spoke to Lucy, and was satisfied on that point.

Mrs. Berry was going to display his prodigious legs. Lucy, fearing the consequent effect on the prodigious lungs, begged her not to wake him. "'T'd take a deal to do that," said Mrs. Berry, and harped on Master Richard's health and the small wonder it was that he enjoyed it, considering the superior quality of his diet, and the lavish attentions of his mother, and then suddenly fell silent on a deep sigh.

"He looks healthy," said the baronet, "but I am not a judge of babies."

Thus, having capitulated, Raynham chose to acknowledge its new commandant, who was now borne away, under the directions of the housekeeper, to occupy the room Richard had slept in when an infant.

Austin cast no thought on his success. The baronet said: "She is extremely well-looking." He replied: "A person you take to at once." There it ended.

But a much more animated colloquy was taking place aloft, where Lucy and Mrs. Berry sat alone. Lucy expected her to talk about the reception they had met with, and the house, and the peculiarities of the rooms, and the solid happiness that seemed in store. Mrs. Berry all the while would persist in consulting the looking-glass. Her first distinct answer was, "My dear! tell me candid, how do I look?"

"Very nice indeed, Mrs. Berry; but could you have believed he would be so kind, so considerate?"

"I am sure I looked a frump," returned Mrs. Berry. "Oh dear! two birds at a shot. What do you think, now?"

"I never saw so wonderful a likeness," says Lucy.

"Likeness! look at me." Mrs. Berry was trembling and hot in the palms.

"You're very feverish, dear Berry. What can it be?"

"Ain't it like the love-flutters of a young gal, my dear."

"Go to bed, Berry, dear," says Lucy, pouting in her soft caressing way.

"I will undress you, and see to you, dear heart! You've had so much excitement."

"Ha! ha!" Berry laughed hysterically; "she thinks it's about this business of hers. Why, it's child's-play, my darlin'. But I didn't look for tragedy to-night. Sleep in this house I can't, my love!"

Lucy was astonished. "Not sleep here, Mrs. Berry?--Oh! why, you silly old thing? I know."

"Do ye!" said Mrs. Berry, with a sceptical nose.

"You're afraid of ghosts."

"Belike I am when they're six foot two in their shoes, and bellows when you stick a pin into their calves. I seen my Berry!"

"Your husband?"

"Large as life!"

Lucy meditated on optical delusions, but Mrs. Berry described him as the Colossus who had marched them into the library, and vowed that he had recognized her and quaked. "Time ain't aged him," said Mrs. Berry, "whereas me! he've got his excuse now. I know I look a frump."

Lucy kissed her: "You look the nicest, dearest old thing."

"You may say an old thing, my dear."

"And your husband is really here?"

"Berry's below!"

Profoundly uttered as this was, it chased every vestige of incredulity.

"What will you do, Mrs. Berry?"

"Go, my dear. Leave him to be happy in his own way. It's over atween us, I see that. When I entered the house I felt there was something comin' over me, and lo and behold ye! no sooner was we in the hall-passage--if it hadn't been for that blessed infant I should 'a dropped. I must 'a known his step, for my heart began thumpin', and I knew I hadn't got my hair straight--that Mr. Wentworth was in such a hurry--nor my best gown. I knew he'd scorn me. He hates frumps."

"Scorn you!" cried Lucy, angrily. "He who has behaved so wickedly!"

Mrs. Berry attempted to rise. "I may as well go at once," she whimpered. "If I see him I shall only be disgracin' of myself. I feel it all on my side already. Did ye mark him, my dear? I know I was vexin' to him at times, I was. Those big men are so touchy about their dignity--nat'ral. Hark at me! I'm goin' all soft in a minute. Let me leave the house, my dear. I daresay it was good half my fault. Young women don't understand men sufficient--not altogether--and I was a young woman then; and then what they goes and does they ain't quite answerable for: they, feels, I daresay, pushed from behind. Yes. I'll go. I'm a frump. I'll go. 'Tain't in natur' for me to sleep in the same house."

Lucy laid her hands on Mrs. Berry's shoulders, and forcibly fixed her in her seat. "Leave baby, naughty woman? I tell you he shall come to you, and fall on his knees to you and beg your forgiveness."

"Berry on his knees!"

"Yes. And he shall beg and pray you to forgive him."

"If you get more from Martin Berry than breath-away words, great'll be my wonder!" said Mrs. Berry.

"We will see," said Lucy, thoroughly determined to do something for the good creature that had befriended her.

Mrs. Berry examined her gown. "Won't it seem we're runnin' after him?" she murmured faintly.

"He is your husband, Mrs. Berry. He may be wanting to come to you now."

"Oh! Where is all I was goin' to say to that man when we met." Mrs.

Berry ejaculated. Lucy had left the room.

On the landing outside the door Lucy met a lady dressed in black, who stopped her and asked if she was Richard's wife, and kissed her, passing from her immediately. Lucy despatched a message for Austin, and related the Berry history. Austin sent for the great man and said: "Do you know your wife is here?" Before Berry had time to draw himself up to enunciate his longest, he was requested to step upstairs, and as his young mistress at once led the way, Berry could not refuse to put his legs in motion and carry the stately edifice aloft.

Of the interview Mrs. Berry gave Lucy a slight sketch that night. "He began in the old way, my dear, and says I, a true heart and plain words, Martin Berry. So there he cuts himself and his Johnson short, and down he goes--down on his knees. I never could 'a believed it. I kep my dignity as a woman till I see that sight, but that done for me. I was a ripe apple in his arms 'fore I knew where I was. There's something about a fine man on his knees that's too much for us women. And it reely was the penitent on his two knees, not the lover on his one. If he mean it! But ah! what do you think he begs of me, my dear?--not to make it known in the house just yet! I can't, I can't say that look well."

Lucy attributed it to his sense of shame at his conduct, and Mrs. Berry did her best to look on it in that light.

"Did the bar'net kiss ye when you wished him goodnight?" she asked. Lucy said he had not. "Then bide awake as long as ye can," was Mrs. Berry's rejoinder. "And now let us pray blessings on that simple-speaking gentleman who does so much 'cause he says so little."

Like many other natural people, Mrs. Berry was only silly where her own soft heart was concerned. As she secretly anticipated, the baronet came into her room when all was quiet. She saw him go and bend over Richard the Second, and remain earnestly watching him. He then went to the half-opened door of the room where Lucy slept, leaned his ear a moment, knocked gently, and entered. Mrs. Berry heard low words interchanging within. She could not catch a syllable, yet she would have sworn to the context. "He've called her his daughter, promised her happiness, and given a father's kiss to her." When Sir Austin passed out she was in a deep sleep.

CHAPTER XLII

Briareus reddening angrily over the sea--what is that vaporous Titan? And Hesper set in his rosy garland--why looks he so implacably sweet? It is that one has left that bright home to go forth and do cloudy work, and he has got a stain with which he dare not return. Far in the West fair Lucy beckons him to come. Ah, heaven! if he might! How strong and fierce the temptation is! how subtle the sleepless desire! it drugs his

reason, his honour. For he loves her; she is still the first and only woman to him. Otherwise would this black spot be hell to him? otherwise would his limbs be chained while her arms are spread open to him. And if he loves her, why then what is one fall in the pit, or a thousand? Is not love the password to that beckoning bliss? So may we say; but here is one whose body has been made a temple to him, and it is desecrated.

A temple, and desecrated! For what is it fit for but for a dance of devils? His education has thus wrought him to think.

He can blame nothing but his own baseness. But to feel base and accept the bliss that beckons--he has not fallen so low as that.

Ah, happy English home! sweet wife! what mad miserable Wisp of the Fancy led him away from you, high in his conceit? Poor wretch! that thought to be he of the hundred hands, and war against the absolute Gods. Jove whispered a light commission to the Laughing Dame; she met him; and how did he shake Olympus? with laughter?

Sure it were better to be Orestes, the Furies howling in his ears, than one called to by a heavenly soul from whom he is for ever outcast. He has not the oblivion of madness. Clothed in the lights of his first passion, robed in the splendour of old skies, she meets him everywhere; morning, evening, night, she shines above him; waylays him suddenly in forest depths; drops palpably on his heart. At moments he forgets; he rushes to embrace her; calls her his beloved, and lo, her innocent kiss brings agony of shame to his face.

Daily the struggle endured. His father wrote to him, begging him by the love he had for him to return. From that hour Richard burnt unread all the letters he received. He knew too well how easily he could persuade himself: words from without might tempt him and quite extinguish the spark of honourable feeling that tortured him, and that he clung to in desperate self-vindication.

To arrest young gentlemen on the downward slope is both a dangerous and thankless office. It is, nevertheless, one that fair women greatly prize, and certain of them professionally follow. Lady Judith, as far as her sex would permit, was also of the Titans in their battle against the absolute Gods; for which purpose, mark you, she had married a lord incapable in all save his acres. Her achievements she kept to her own mind: she did not look happy over them. She met Richard accidentally in Paris; she saw his state; she let him learn that she alone on earth understood him. The consequence was that he was forthwith enrolled in her train. It soothed him to be near a woman. Did she venture her guess as to the cause of his conduct, she blotted it out with a facility women have, and cast on it a melancholy hue he was taught to participate in. She spoke of sorrows, personal sorrows, much as he might speak of his--vaguely, and with self-blame. And she understood him. How the dark unfathomed wealth within us gleams to a woman's eye! We are at compound interest immediately: so much richer than we knew!--almost as rich as we dreamed! But then the instant we are away from her we find ourselves bankrupt, beggared. How is that? We do not ask. We hurry to her and

bask hungrily in her orbs. The eye must be feminine to be thus creative: I cannot say why. Lady Judith understood Richard, and he feeling infinitely vile, somehow held to her more feverishly, as one who dreaded the worst in missing her. The spirit must rest; he was weak with what he suffered.

Austin found them among the hills of Nassau in Rhineland: Titans, male and female, who had not displaced Jove, and were now adrift, prone on floods of sentiment. The blue-flocked peasant swinging behind his oxen of a morning, the gaily-kerchiefed fruit-woman, the jackass-driver, even the doctor of those regions, have done more for their fellows. Horrible reflection! Lady Judith is serene above it, but it frets at Richard when he is out of her shadow. Often wretchedly he watches the young men of his own age trooping to their work. Not cloud-work theirs! Work solid, unambitious, fruitful!

Lady Judith had a nobler in prospect for the hero. He gaped blindfolded for anything, and she gave him the map of Europe in tatters. He swallowed it comfortably. It was an intoxicating cordial. Himself on horseback overriding wrecks of Empires! Well might common sense cower with the meaner animals at the picture. Tacitly they agreed to recast the civilized globe. The quality of vapour is to melt and shape itself anew; but it is never the quality of vapour to reassume the same shapes. Briareus of the hundred unoccupied hands may turn to a monstrous donkey with his hind legs aloft, or twenty thousand jabbering apes. The phantasmic groupings of the young brain are very like those we see in the skies, and equally the sport of the wind. Lady Judith blew. There was plenty of vapour in him, and it always resolved into some shape or other. You that mark those clouds of eventide, and know youth, will see the similitude: it will not be strange, it will barely seem foolish to you, that a young man of Richard's age, Richard's education and position, should be in this wild state. Had he not been nursed to believe he was born for great things? Did she not say she was sure of it? And to feel base, yet born for better, is enough to make one grasp at anything cloudy. Suppose the hero with a game leg. How intense is his faith to quacks! with what a passion of longing is he not seized to break somebody's head! They spoke of Italy in low voices. "The time will come," said she. "And I shall be ready," said he. What rank was he to take in the liberating army? Captain, colonel, general in chief, or simple private? Here, as became him, he was much more positive and specific than she was: Simple private, he said. Yet he save himself caracoling on horseback. Private in the cavalry, then, of course. Private in the cavalry over-riding wrecks of Empires. She looked forth under her brows with mournful indistinctness at that object in the distance. They read Petrarch to get up the necessary fires. Italia mia! Vain indeed was this speaking to those thick and mortal wounds in her fair body, but their sighs went with the Tiber, the Arno, and the Po, and their hands joined. Who has not wept for Italy? I see the aspirations of a world arise for her, thick and frequent as the puffs of smoke from cigars of Pannonian sentries!

So when Austin came Richard said he could not leave Lady Judith, Lady Judith said she could not part with him. For his sake, mind! This

Richard verified. Perhaps he had reason to be grateful. The high road of Folly may have led him from one that terminates worse. He is foolish, God knows; but for my part I will not laugh at the hero because he has not got his occasion. Meet him when he is, as it were, anointed by his occasion, and he is no laughing matter.

Richard felt his safety in this which, to please the world, we must term folly. Exhalation of vapours was a wholesome process to him, and somebody who gave them shape and hue a beneficent Iris. He told Austin plainly he could not leave her, and did not anticipate the day when he could.

"Why can't you go to your wife, Richard?"

"For a reason you would be the first to approve, Austin."

He welcomed Austin with every show of manly tenderness, and sadness at heart. Austin he had always associated with his Lucy in that Hesperian palace of the West. Austin waited patiently. Lady Judith's old lord played on all the baths in Nassau without evoking the tune of health. Whithersoever he listed she changed her abode. So admirable a wife was to be pardoned for espousing an old man. She was an enthusiast even in her connubial duties. She had the brows of an enthusiast. With occasion she might have been a Charlotte Corday. So let her also be shielded from the ban of ridicule. Nonsense of enthusiasts is very different from nonsense of ninnies. She was truly a high-minded person, of that order who always do what they see to be right, and always have confidence in their optics. She was not unworthy of a young man's admiration, if she was unfit to be his guide. She resumed her ancient intimacy with Austin easily, while she preserved her new footing with Richard. She and Austin were not unlike, only Austin never dreamed, and had not married an old lord.

The three were walking on the bridge at Limburg on the Lahn, where the shadow of a stone bishop is thrown by the moonlight on the water brawling over slabs of slate. A woman passed them bearing in her arms a baby, whose mighty size drew their attention.

"What a wopper!" Richard laughed.

"Well, that is a fine fellow," said Austin, "but I don't think he's much bigger than your boy."

"He'll do for a nineteenth-century Arminius," Richard was saying. Then he looked at Austin.

"What was that you said?" Lady Judith asked of Austin.

"What have I said that deserves to be repeated?" Austin counterqueried quite innocently.

"Richard has a son?"

"You didn't know it?"

"His modesty goes very far," said Lady Judith, sweeping the shadow of a curtsey to Richard's paternity.

Richard's heart throbbed with violence. He looked again in Austin's face. Austin took it so much as a matter of course that he said nothing more on the subject.

"Well!" murmured Lady Judith.

When the two men were alone, Richard said in a quick voice: "Austin! you were in earnest?"

"You didn't know it, Richard?"

"No."

"Why, they all wrote to you. Lucy wrote to you: your father, your aunt. I believe Adrian wrote too."

"I tore up their letters," said Richard.

"He's a noble fellow, I can tell you. You've nothing to be ashamed of. He'll soon be coming to ask about you. I made sure you knew."

"No, I never knew." Richard walked away, and then said: "What is he like?"

"Well, he really is like you, but he has his mother's eyes."

"And she's--"

"Yes. I think the child has kept her well."

"They're both at Raynham?"

"Both."

Hence fantastic vapours! What are ye to this! Where are the dreams of the hero when he learns he has a child? Nature is taking him to her bosom. She will speak presently. Every domesticated boor in these hills can boast the same, yet marvels the hero at none of his visioned prodigies as he does when he comes to hear of this most common performance. A father? Richard fixed his eyes as if he were trying to make out the lineaments of his child.

Telling Austin he would be back in a few minutes, he sallied into the air, and walked on and on. "A father!" he kept repeating to himself: "a child!" And though he knew it not, he was striking the keynotes of Nature. But he did know of a singular harmony that suddenly burst over his whole being.

The moon was surpassingly bright: the summer air heavy and still. He left the high road and pierced into the forest. His walk was rapid: the leaves on the trees brushed his cheeks; the dead leaves heaped in the dells noised to his feet. Something of a religious joy--a strange sacred pleasure--was in him. By degrees it wore; he remembered himself: and now he was possessed by a proportionate anguish. A father! he dared never see his child. And he had no longer his phantasies to fall upon. He was utterly bare to his sin. In his troubled mind it seemed to him that Clare looked down on him--Clare who saw him as he was; and that to her eyes it would be infamy for him to go and print his kiss upon his child. Then came stern efforts to command his misery and make the nerves of his face iron.

By the log of an ancient tree half buried in dead leaves of past summers, beside a brook, he halted as one who had reached his journey's end. There he discovered he had a companion in Lady Judith's little dog. He gave the friendly animal a pat of recognition, and both were silent in the forest-silence.

It was impossible for Richard to return; his heart was surcharged. He must advance, and on he footed, the little dog following.

An oppressive slumber hung about the forest-branches. In the dells and on the heights was the same dead heat. Here where the brook tinkled it was no cool-lipped sound, but metallic, and without the spirit of water. Yonder in a space of moonlight on lush grass, the beams were as white fire to sight and feeling. No haze spread around. The valleys were clear, defined to the shadows of their verges, the distances sharply distinct, and with the colours of day but slightly softened. Richard beheld a roe moving across a slope of sward far out of rifle-mark. The breathless silence was significant, yet the moon shone in a broad blue heaven. Tongue out of mouth trotted the little dog after him; crouched panting when he stopped an instant; rose weariedly when he started afresh. Now and then a large white night-moth flitted through the dusk of the forest.

On a barren corner of the wooded highland looking inland stood grey topless ruins set in nettles and rank grass-blades. Richard mechanically sat down on the crumbling flints to rest, and listened to the panting of the dog. Sprinkled at his feet were emerald lights: hundreds of glow-worms studded the dark dry ground.

He sat and eyed them, thinking not at all. His energies were expended in action. He sat as a part of the ruins, and the moon turned his shadow Westward from the South. Overhead, as she declined, long ripples of silver cloud were imperceptibly stealing toward her. They were the van of a tempest. He did not observe them or the leaves beginning to chatter. When he again pursued his course with his face to the Rhine, a huge mountain appeared to rise sheer over him, and he had it in his mind to scale it. He got no nearer to the base of it for all his vigorous outstepping. The ground began to dip; he lost sight of the sky. Then heavy, thunder-drops streak his cheek, the leaves were singing, the earth breathed, it was black before him, and behind. All at once the thunder

spoke. The mountain he had marked was bursting over him.

Up startled the whole forest in violet fire. He saw the country at the foot of the hills to the bounding Rhine gleam, quiver, extinguished. Then there were pauses; and the lightning seemed as the eye of heaven, and the thunder as the tongue of heaven, each alternately addressing him; filling him with awful rapture. Alone there--sole human creature among the grandeurs and mysteries of storm--he felt the representative of his kind, and his spirit rose, and marched, and exulted, let it be glory, let it be ruin! Lower down the lightened abysses of air rolled the wrathful crash; then white thrusts of light were darted from the sky, and great curving ferns, seen steadfast in pallor a second, were supernaturally agitated, and vanished. Then a shrill song roused in the leaves and the herbage. Prolonged and louder it sounded, as deeper and heavier the deluge pressed. A mighty force of water satisfied the desire of the earth. Even in this, drenched as he was by the first outpouring, Richard had a savage pleasure. Keeping in motion, he was scarcely conscious of the wet, and the grateful breath of the weeds was refreshing. Suddenly he stopped short, lifting a curious nostril. He fancied he smelt meadow-sweet. He had never seen the flower in Rhineland--never thought of it; and it would hardly be met with in a forest. He was sure he smelt it fresh in dews. His little companion wagged a miserable wet tail some way in advance. He went on slowly, thinking indistinctly. After two or three steps he stooped and stretched out his hand to feel for the flower, having, he knew not why, a strong wish to verify its growth there. Groping about, his hand encountered something warm that started at his touch, and he, with the instinct we have, seized it, and lifted it to look at it. The creature was very small, evidently quite young. Richard's eyes, now accustomed to the darkness, were able to discern it for what it was, a tiny leveret, and he supposed that the dog had probably frightened its dam just before he found it. He put the little thing on one hand in his breast, and stepped out rapidly as before.

The rain was now steady; from every tree a fountain poured. So cool and easy had his mind become that he was speculating on what kind of shelter the birds could find, and how the butterflies and moths saved their coloured wings from washing. Folded close they might hang under a leaf, he thought. Lovingly he looked into the dripping darkness of the coverts on each side, as one of their children. He was next musing on a strange sensation he experienced. It ran up one arm with an indescribable thrill, but communicated nothing to his heart. It was purely physical, ceased for a time, and recommenced, till he had it all through his blood, wonderfully thrilling. He grew aware that the little thing he carried in his breast was licking his hand there. The small rough tongue going over and over the palm of his hand produced the strange sensation he felt. Now that he knew the cause, the marvel ended; but now that he knew the cause, his heart was touched and made more of it. The gentle scraping continued without intermission as on he walked. What did it say to him? Human tongue could not have said so much just then.

A pale grey light on the skirts of the flying tempest displayed the dawn. Richard was walking hurriedly. The green drenched weeds lay all about in his path, bent thick, and the forest drooped glimmeringly. Impelled as a

man who feels a revelation mounting obscurely to his brain, Richard was passing one of those little forest-chapels, hung with votive wreaths, where the peasant halts to kneel and pray. Cold, still, in the twilight it stood, rain-drops pattering round it. He looked within, and saw the Virgin holding her Child. He moved by. But not many steps had he gone ere his strength went out of him, and he shuddered. What was it? He asked not. He was in other hands. Vivid as lightning the Spirit of Life illumined him. He felt in his heart the cry of his child, his darling's touch. With shut eyes he saw them both. They drew him from the depths; they led him a blind and tottering man. And as they led him he had a sense of purification so sweet he shuddered again and again.

When he looked out from his trance on the breathing world, the small birds hopped and chirped: warm fresh sunlight was over all the hills. He was on the edge of the forest, entering a plain clothed with ripe corn under a spacious morning sky.

CHAPTER XLIII

They heard at Raynham that Richard was coming. Lucy had the news first in a letter from Ripton Thompson, who met him at Bonn. Ripton did not say that he had employed his vacation holiday on purpose to use his efforts to induce his dear friend to return to his wife; and finding Richard already on his way, of course Ripton said nothing to him, but affected to be travelling for his pleasure like any cockney. Richard also wrote to her. In case she should have gone to the sea he directed her to send word to his hotel that he might not lose an hour. His letter was sedate in tone, very sweet to her. Assisted by the faithful female Berry, she was conquering an Aphorist.

"Woman's reason is in the milk of her breasts," was one of his rough notes, due to an observation of Lucy's maternal cares. Let us remember, therefore, we men who have drunk of it largely there, that she has it.

Mrs. Berry zealously apprised him how early Master Richard's education had commenced, and the great future historian he must consequently be. This trait in Lucy was of itself sufficient to win Sir Austin.

"Here my plan with Richard was false," he reflected: "in presuming that anything save blind fortuity would bring him such a mate as he should have." He came to add: "And has got!"

He could admit now that instinct had so far beaten science; for as Richard was coming, as all were to be happy, his wisdom embraced them all paternally as the author of their happiness. Between him and Lucy a tender intimacy grew.

"I told you she could talk, sir," said Adrian.

"She thinks!" said the baronet.

The delicate question how she was to treat her uncle, he settled generously. Farmer Blaize should come up to Raynham when he would: Lucy must visit him at least three times a week. He had Farmer Blaize and Mrs. Berry to study, and really excellent Aphorisms sprang from the plain human bases this natural couple presented.

"It will do us no harm," he thought, "some of the honest blood of the soil in our veins." And he was content in musing on the parentage of the little cradled boy. A common sight for those who had the entry to the library was the baronet cherishing the hand of his daughter-in-law.

So Richard was crossing the sea, and hearts at Raynham were beating quicker measures as the minutes progressed. That night he would be with them. Sir Austin gave Lucy a longer, warmer salute when she came down to breakfast in the morning. Mrs. Berry waxed thrice amorous. "It's your second bridals, ye sweet livin' widow!" she said. "Thanks be the Lord! it's the same man too! and a baby over the bed-post," she appended seriously.

"Strange," Berry declared it to be, "strange I feel none o' this to my Berry now. All my feelin's o' love seem t'ave gone into you two sweet chicks."

In fact, the faithless male Berry complained of being treated badly, and affected a superb jealousy of the baby; but the good dame told him that if he suffered at all he suffered his due. Berry's position was decidedly uncomfortable. It could not be concealed from the lower household that he had a wife in the establishment, and for the complications this gave rise to, his wife would not legitimately console him. Lucy did intercede, but Mrs. Berry, was obdurate. She averred she would not give up the child till he was weaned. "Then, perhaps," she said prospectively. "You see I ain't so soft as you thought for."

"You're a very unkind, vindictive old woman," said Lucy.

"Belike I am," Mrs. Berry was proud to agree. We like a new character, now and then. Berry had delayed too long.

Were it not notorious that the straightlaced prudish dare not listen to, the natural chaste, certain things Mrs. Berry thought it advisable to impart to the young wife with regard to Berry's infidelity, and the charity women should have toward sinful men, might here be reproduced. Enough that she thought proper to broach the matter, and cite her own Christian sentiments, now that she was indifferent in some degree.

Oily calm is on the sea. At Raynham they look up at the sky and speculate that Richard is approaching fairly speeded. He comes to throw himself on his darling's mercy. Lucy irradiated over forest and sea, tempest and peace--to her the hero comes humbly. Great is that day when we see our folly! Ripton and he were the friends of old. Richard encouraged him to talk of the two he could be eloquent on, and Ripton,

whose secret vanity was in his powers of speech, never tired of enumerating Lucy's virtues, and the peculiar attributes of the baby.

"She did not say a word against me, Rip?"

"Against you, Richard! The moment she knew she was to be a mother, she thought of nothing but her duty to the child. She's one who can't think of herself."

"You've seen her at Raynham, Rip?"

"Yes, once. They asked me down. And your father's so fond of her--I'm sure he thinks no woman like her, and he's right. She is so lovely, and so good."

Richard was too full of blame of himself to blame his father: too British to expose his emotions. Ripton divined how deep and changed they were by his manner. He had cast aside the hero, and however Ripton had obeyed him and looked up to him in the heroic time, he loved him tenfold now. He told his friend how much Lucy's mere womanly sweetness and excellence had done for him, and Richard contrasted his own profitless extravagance with the patient beauty of his dear home angel. He was not one to take her on the easy terms that offered. There was that to do which made his cheek burn as he thought of it, but he was going to do it, even though it lost her to him. Just to see her and kneel to her was joy sufficient to sustain him, and warm his blood in the prospect. They marked the white cliffs growing over the water. Nearer, the sun made them lustrous. Houses and people seemed to welcome the wild youth to common sense, simplicity, and home.

They were in town by mid-day. Richard had a momentary idea of not driving to his hotel for letters. After a short debate he determined to go there. The porter said he had two letters for Mr. Richard Feverel--one had been waiting some time. He went to the box and fetched them. The first Richard opened was from Lucy, and as he read it, Ripton observed the colour deepen on his face, while a quivering smile played about his mouth. He opened the other indifferently. It began without any form of address. Richard's forehead darkened at the signature. This letter was in a sloping feminine hand, and flourished with light strokes all over, like a field of the bearded barley. Thus it ran:

"I know you are in a rage with me because I would not consent to ruin you, you foolish fellow. What do you call it? Going to that unpleasant place together. Thank you, my milliner is not ready yet, and I want to make a good appearance when I do go. I suppose I shall have to some day. Your health, Sir Richard. Now let me speak to you seriously. Go home to your wife at once. But I know the sort of fellow you are, and I must be plain with you. Did I ever say I loved you? You may hate me as much as you please, but I will save you from being a fool.

"Now listen to me. You know my relations with Mount. That beast Brayder offered to pay all my debts and set me afloat, if I would keep you in town. I declare on my honour I had no idea why, and I did not agree to

it. But you were such a handsome fellow--I noticed you in the park before I heard a word of you. But then you fought shy--you were just as tempting as a girl. You stung me. Do you know what that is? I would make you care for me, and we know how it ended, without any intention of mine, I swear. I'd have cut off my hand rather than do you any harm, upon my honour. Circumstances! Then I saw it was all up between us. Brayder came and began to chaff about you. I dealt the animal a stroke on the face with my riding-whip--I shut him up pretty quick. Do you think I would let a man speak about you?--I was going to swear. You see I remember Dick's lessons. O my God! I do feel unhappy.--Brayder offered me money. Go and think I took it, if you like. What do I care what anybody thinks! Something that black-guard said made me suspicious. I went down to the Isle of Wight where Mount was, and your wife was just gone with an old lady who came and took her away. I should so have liked to see her. You said, you remember, she would take me as a sister, and treat me--I laughed at it then. My God! how I could cry now, if water did any good to a devil, as you politely call poor me. I called at your house and saw your man-servant, who said Mount had just been there. In a minute it struck me. I was sure Mount was after a woman, but it never struck me that woman was your wife. Then I saw why they wanted me to keep you away. I went to Brayder. You know how I hate him. I made love to the man to get it out of him. Richard! my word of honour, they have planned to carry her off, if Mount finds he cannot seduce her. Talk of devils! He's one; but he is not so bad as Brayder. I cannot forgive a mean dog his villany.

"Now after this, I am quite sure you are too much of a man to stop away from her another moment. I have no more to say. I suppose we shall not see each other again, so good-bye, Dick! I fancy I hear you cursing me. Why can't you feel like other men on the subject? But if you were like the rest of them I should not have cared for you a farthing. I have not worn lilac since I saw you last. I'll be buried in your colour, Dick. That will not offend you--will it?"

"You are not going to believe I took the money? If I thought you thought that--it makes me feel like a devil only to fancy you think it.

"The first time you meet Brayder, cane him publicly.

"Adieu! Say it's because you don't like his face. I suppose devils must not say Adieu. Here's plain old good-bye, then, between you and me. Good-bye, dear Dick! You won't think that of me?"

"May I eat dry bread to the day of my death if I took or ever will touch a scrap of their money. BELLA."

Richard folded up the letter silently.

"Jump into the cab," he said to Ripton.

"Anything the matter, Richard?"

"No."

The driver received directions. Richard sat without speaking. His friend knew that face. He asked whether there was bad news in the letter. For answer, he had the lie circumstantial. He ventured to remark that they were going the wrong way.

"It'd the right way," cried Richard, and his jaws were hard and square, and his eyes looked heavy and full.

Ripton said no more, but thought.

The cabman pulled up at a Club. A gentleman, in whom Ripton recognized the Hon. Peter Brayder, was just then swinging a leg over his horse, with one foot in the stirrup. Hearing his name called, the Hon. Peter turned about, and stretched an affable hand.

"Is Mountfalcon in town?" said Richard taking the horse's reins instead of the gentlemanly hand. His voice and aspect were quite friendly.

"Mount?" Brayder replied, curiously watching the action; "yes. He's off this evening."

"He is in town?" Richard released his horse. "I want to see him. Where is he?"

The young man looked pleasant: that which might have aroused Brayder's suspicions was an old affair in parasitical register by this time. "Want to see him? What about?" he said carelessly, and gave the address.

"By the way," he sang out, "we thought of putting your name down, Feverel." He indicated the lofty structure. "What do you say?"

Richard nodded back at him, crying, "Hurry." Brayder returned the nod, and those who promenaded the district soon beheld his body in elegant motion to the stepping of his well-earned horse.

"What do you want to see Lord Mountfalcon for, Richard?" said Ripton.

"I just want to see him," Richard replied.

Ripton was left in the cab at the door of my lord's residence. He had to wait there a space of about ten minutes, when Richard returned with a clearer visage, though somewhat heated. He stood outside the cab, and Ripton was conscious of being examined by those strong grey eyes. As clear as speech he understood them to say to him, "You won't do," but which of the many things on earth he would not do for he was at a loss to think.

"Go down to Raynham, Ripton. Say I shall be there tonight certainly. Don't bother me with questions. Drive off at once. Or wait. Get another cab. I'll take this."

Ripton was ejected, and found himself standing alone in the street. As

he was on the point of rushing after the galloping cab-horse to get a word of elucidation, he heard some one speak behind him.

"You are Feverel's friend?"

Ripton had an eye for lords. An ambrosial footman, standing at the open door of Lord Mountfalcon's house, and a gentleman standing on the doorstep, told him that he was addressed by that nobleman. He was requested to step into the house. When they were alone, Lord Mountfalcon, slightly ruffled, said: "Feverel has insulted me grossly. I must meet him, of course. It's a piece of infernal folly!--I suppose he is not quite mad?"

Ripton's only definite answer was, a gasping iteration of "My lord."

My lord resumed: "I am perfectly guiltless of offending him, as far as I know. In fact, I had a friendship for him. Is he liable to fits of this sort of thing?"

Not yet at conversation-point, Ripton stammered: "Fits, my lord?"

"Ah!" went the other, eying Ripton in lordly cognizant style. "You know nothing of this business, perhaps?"

Ripton said he did not.

"Have you any influence with him?"

"Not much, my lord. Only now and then--a little."

"You are not in the Army?"

The question was quite unnecessary. Ripton confessed to the law, and my lord did not look surprised.

"I will not detain you," he said, distantly bowing.

Ripton gave him a commoner's obeisance; but getting to the door, the sense of the matter enlightened him.

"It's a duel, my lord?"

"No help for it, if his friends don't shut him up in Bedlam between this and to-morrow morning."

Of all horrible things a duel was the worst in Ripton's imagination. He stood holding the handle of the door, revolving this last chapter of calamity suddenly opened where happiness had promised.

"A duel! but he won't, my lord,--he mustn't fight, my lord."

"He must come on the ground," said my lord, positively.

Ripton ejaculated unintelligible stuff. Finally Lord Mountfalcon said: "I went out of my way, sir, in speaking to you. I saw you from the window. Your friend is mad. Deuced methodical, I admit, but mad. I have particular reasons to wish not to injure the young man, and if an apology is to be got out of him when we're on the ground, I'll take it, and we'll stop the damned scandal, if possible. You understand? I'm the insulted party, and I shall only require of him to use formal words of excuse to come to an amicable settlement. Let him just say he regrets it.

Now, sir," the nobleman spoke with considerable earnestness, "should anything happen--I have the honour to be known to Mrs. Feverel--and I beg you will tell her. I very particularly desire you to let her know that I was not to blame."

Mountfalcon rang the bell, and bowed him out. With this on his mind Ripton hurried down to those who were waiting in joyful trust at Raynham.

CHAPTER XLIV

The watch consulted by Hippias alternately with his pulse, in occult calculation hideous to mark, said half-past eleven on the midnight. Adrian, wearing a composedly amused expression on his dimpled plump face,--held slightly sideways, aloof from paper and pen,--sat writing at the library table. Round the baronet's chair, in a semi-circle, were Lucy, Lady Blandish, Mrs. Doria, and Ripton, that very ill bird at Raynham. They were silent as those who question the flying minutes. Ripton had said that Richard was sure to come; but the feminine eyes reading him ever and anon, had gathered matter for disquietude, which increased as time sped. Sir Austin persisted in his habitual air of speculative repose.

Remote as he appeared from vulgar anxiety, he was the first to speak and betray his state.

"Pray, put up that watch. Impatience serves nothing," he said, half-turning hastily to his brother behind him.

Hippias relinquished his pulse and mildly groaned: "It's no nightmare, this!"

His remark was unheard, and the bearing of it remained obscure. Adrian's pen made a louder flourish on his manuscript; whether in commiseration or infernal glee, none might say.

"What are you writing?" the baronet inquired testily of Adrian, after a pause; twitched, it may be, by a sort of jealousy of the wise youth's coolness.

"Do I disturb you, sir?" rejoined Adrian. "I am engaged on a portion of

a Proposal for uniting the Empires and Kingdoms of Europe under one Paternal Head, on the model of the ever-to-be-admired and lamented Holy Roman. This treats of the management of Youths and Maids, and of certain magisterial functions connected therewith. 'It is decreed that these officers be all and every men of science,' etc." And Adrian cheerily drove his pen afresh.

Mrs. Doria took Lucy's hand, mutely addressing encouragement to her, and Lucy brought as much of a smile as she could command to reply with.

"I fear we must give him up to-night," observed Lady Blandish.

"If he said he would come, he will come," Sir Austin interjected. Between him and the lady there was something of a contest secretly going on. He was conscious that nothing save perfect success would now hold this self-emancipating mind. She had seen him through.

"He declared to me he would be certain to come," said Ripton; but he could look at none of them as he said it, for he was growing aware that Richard might have deceived him, and was feeling like a black conspirator against their happiness. He determined to tell the baronet what he knew, if Richard did not come by twelve.

"What is the time?" he asked Hippias in a modest voice.

"Time for me to be in bed," growled Hippias, as if everybody present had been treating him badly.

Mrs. Berry came in to apprise Lucy that she was wanted above. She quietly rose. Sir Austin kissed her on the forehead, saying: "You had better not come down again, my child." She kept her eyes on him. "Oblige me by retiring for the night," he added. Lucy shook their hands, and went out, accompanied by Mrs. Doria.

"This agitation will be bad for the child," he said, speaking to himself aloud.

Lady Blandish remarked: "I think she might just as well have returned. She will not sleep."

"She will control herself for the child's sake."

"You ask too much of her."

"Of her, not," he emphasized.

It was twelve o'clock when Hippias shut his watch, and said with vehemence: "I'm convinced my circulation gradually and steadily decreases!"

"Going back to the pre-Harvey period!" murmured Adrian as he wrote.

Sir Austin and Lady Blandish knew well that any comment would introduce

them to the interior of his machinery, the eternal view of which was sufficiently harrowing; so they maintained a discreet reserve. Taking it for acquiescence in his deplorable condition, Hippies resumed despairingly: "It's a fact. I've brought you to see that. No one can be more moderate than I am, and yet I get worse. My system is organically sound--I believe: I do every possible thing, and yet I get worse. Nature never forgives! I'll go to bed."

The Dyspepsy departed unconsolated.

Sir Austin took up his brother's thought: "I suppose nothing short of a miracle helps us when we have offended her."

"Nothing short of a quack satisfies us," said Adrian, applying wax to an envelope of official dimensions.

Ripton sat accusing his soul of cowardice while they talked; haunted by Lucy's last look at him. He got up his courage presently and went round to Adrian, who, after a few whispered words, deliberately rose and accompanied him out of the room, shrugging. When they had gone, Lady Blandish said to the baronet: "He is not coming."

"To-morrow, then, if not tonight," he replied. "But I say he will come to-night."

"You do really wish to see him united to his wife?"

The question made the baronet raise his brows with some displeasure.

"Can you ask me?"

"I mean," said, the ungenerous woman, "your System will require no further sacrifices from either of them?"

When he did answer, it was to say: "I think her altogether a superior person. I confess I should scarcely have hoped to find one like her."

"Admit that your science does not accomplish everything."

"No: it was presumptuous--beyond a certain point," said the baronet, meaning deep things.

Lady Blandish eyed him. "Ah me!" she sighed, "if we would always be true to our own wisdom!"

"You are very singular to-night, Emmeline." Sir Austin stopped his walk in front of her.

In truth, was she not unjust? Here was an offending son freely forgiven. Here was a young woman of humble birth, freely accepted into his family and permitted to stand upon her qualities. Who would have done more--or as much? This lady, for instance, had the case been hers, would have fought it. All the people of position that he was acquainted with would

have fought it, and that without feeling it so peculiarly. But while the baronet thought this, he did not think of the exceptional education his son had received. He, took the common ground of fathers, forgetting his System when it was absolutely on trial. False to his son it could not be said that he had been false to his System he was. Others saw it plainly, but he had to learn his lesson by and by.

Lady Blandish gave him her face; then stretched her hand to the table, saying, "Well! well!" She fingered a half-opened parcel lying there, and drew forth a little book she recognized. "Ha! what is this?" she said.

"Benson returned it this morning," he informed her. "The stupid fellow took it away with him--by mischance, I am bound to believe."

It was nothing other than the old Note-book. Lady Blandish turned over the leaves, and came upon the later jottings.

She read: "A maker of Proverbs--what is he but a narrow mind with the mouthpiece of narrower?"

"I do not agree with that," she observed. He was in no humour for argument.

"Was your humility feigned when you wrote it?"

He merely said: "Consider the sort of minds influenced by set sayings. A proverb is the half-way-house to an Idea, I conceive; and the majority rest there content: can the keeper of such a house be flattered by his company?"

She felt her feminine intelligence swaying under him again. There must be greatness in a man who could thus speak of his own special and admirable aptitude.

Further she read, "Which is the coward among us?--He who sneers at the failings of Humanity!"

"Oh! that is true! How much I admire that!" cried the dark-eyed dame as she beamed intellectual raptures.

Another Aphorism seemed closely to apply to him: "There is no more grievous sight, as there is no greater perversion, than a wise man at the mercy of his feelings."

"He must have written it," she thought, "when he had himself for an example--strange man that he is!"

Lady Blandish was still inclined to submission, though decidedly insubordinate. She had once been fairly conquered: but if what she revered as a great mind could conquer her, it must be a great man that should hold her captive. The Autumn Primrose blooms for the loftiest manhood; is a vindictive flower in lesser hands. Nevertheless Sir Austin had only to be successful, and this lady's allegiance was his for ever.

The trial was at hand.

She said again: "He is not coming to-night," and the baronet, on whose visage a contemplative pleased look had been rising for a minute past, quietly added: "He is come."

Richard's voice was heard in the hall.

There was commotion all over the house at the return of the young heir. Berry, seizing every possible occasion to approach his Bessy now that her involuntary coldness had enhanced her value--"Such is men!" as the soft woman reflected--Berry ascended to her and delivered the news in pompous tones and wheedling gestures. "The best word you've spoke for many a day," says she, and leaves him unfee'd, in an attitude, to hurry and pour bliss into Lucy's ears.

"Lord be praised!" she entered the adjoining room exclaiming, "we're got to be happy at last. They men have come to their senses. I could cry to your Virgin and kiss your Cross, you sweet!"

"Hush!" Lucy admonished her, and crooned over the child on her knees. The tiny open hands, full of sleep, clutched; the large blue eyes started awake; and his mother, all trembling and palpitating, knowing, but thirsting to hear it, covered him with her tresses, and tried to still her frame, and rocked, and sang low, interdicting even a whisper from bursting Mrs. Berry.

Richard had come. He was under his father's roof, in the old home that had so soon grown foreign to him. He stood close to his wife and child. He might embrace them both: and now the fulness of his anguish and the madness of the thing he had done smote the young man: now first he tasted hard earthly misery.

Had not God spoken to him in the tempest? Had not the finger of heaven directed him homeward? And he had come: here he stood: congratulations were thick in his ears: the cup of happiness was held to him, and he was invited to drink of it. Which was the dream? his work for the morrow, or this? But for a leaden load that he felt like a bullet in his breast, he might have thought the morrow with death sitting on it was the dream. Yes; he was awake. Now first the cloud of phantasms cleared away: he beheld his real life, and the colours of true human joy: and on the morrow perhaps he was to close his eyes on them. That leaden bullet dispersed all unrealities.

They stood about him in the hall, his father, Lady Blandish, Mrs. Doria, Adrian, Ripton; people who had known him long. They shook his hand: they gave him greetings he had never before understood the worth of or the meaning. Now that he did they mocked him. There was Mrs. Berry in the background bobbing, there was Martin Berry bowing, there was Tom Bakewell grinning. Somehow he loved the sight of these better.

"Ah, my old Penelope!" he said, breaking through the circle of his relatives to go to her. "Tom! how are you?"

"Bless ye, my Mr, Richard," whimpered Mrs. Berry, and whispered, rosily, "all's agreeable now. She's waiting up in bed for ye, like a new-born."

The person who betrayed most agitation was, Mrs. Doria. She held close to him, and eagerly studied his face and every movement, as one accustomed to masks. "You are pale, Richard?" He pleaded exhaustion. "What detained you, dear?" "Business," he said. She drew him imperiously apart from the others. "Richard! is it over?" He asked what she meant. "The dreadful duel, Richard." He looked darkly. "Is it over? is it done, Richard?" Getting no immediate answer, she continued--and such was her agitation that the words were shaken by pieces from her mouth: "Don't pretend not to understand me, Richard! Is it over? Are you going to die the death of my child--Clare's death? Is not one in a family enough? Think of your dear young wife--we love her so!--your child!--your father! Will you kill us all?"

Mrs. Doria had chanced to overhear a trifle of Ripton's communication to Adrian, and had built thereon with the dark forces of a stricken soul.

Wondering how this woman could have divined it, Richard calmly said: "It's arranged--the matter you allude to."

"Indeed!--truly, dear?"

"Yes."

"Tell me"--but he broke away from her, saying: "You shall hear the particulars to-morrow," and she, not alive to double meaning just then, allowed him to leave her.

He had eaten nothing for twelve hours, and called for food, but he would take only dry bread and claret, which was served on a tray in the library. He said, without any show of feeling, that he must eat before he saw the young hope of Raynham: so there he sat, breaking bread, and eating great mouthfuls, and washing them down with wine, talking of what they would. His father's studious mind felt itself years behind him, he was so completely altered. He had the precision of speech, the bearing of a man of thirty. Indeed he had all that the necessity for cloaking an infinite misery gives. But let things be as they might, he was, there. For one night in his life Sir Austin's perspective of the future was bounded by the night.

"Will your go to your wife now?" he had asked and Richard had replied with a strange indifference. The baronet thought it better that their meeting should be private, and sent word for Lucy to wait upstairs. The others perceived that father and son should now be left alone. Adrian went up to him, and said: "I can no longer witness this painful sight, so Good-night, Sir Famish! You may cheat yourself into the belief that you've made a meal, but depend upon it your progeny--and it threatens to be numerous--will cry aloud and rue the day. Nature never forgives! A lost dinner can never be replaced! Good-night, my dear boy. And here--oblige me by taking this," he handed Richard the enormous envelope

containing what he had written that evening. "Credentials!" he exclaimed humorously, slapping Richard on the shoulder. Ripton heard also the words "propagator--species," but had no idea of their import. The wise youth looked: You see we've made matters all right for you here, and quitted the room on that unusual gleam of earnestness.

Richard shook his hand, and Ripton's. Then Lady Blandish said her good-night, praising Lucy, and promising to pray for their mutual happiness. The two men who knew what was hanging over him, spoke together outside. Ripton was for getting a positive assurance that the duel would not be fought, but Adrian said: "Time enough tomorrow. He's safe enough while he's here. I'll stop it to-morrow:" ending with banter of Ripton and allusions to his adventures with Miss Random, which must, Adrian said, have led him into many affairs of the sort. Certainly Richard was there, and while he was there he must be safe. So thought Ripton, and went to his bed. Mrs. Doria deliberated likewise, and likewise thought him safe while he was there. For once in her life she thought it better not to trust to her instinct, for fear of useless disturbance where peace should be. So she said not a syllable of it to her brother. She only looked more deeply into Richard's eyes, as she kissed him, praising Lucy. "I have found a second daughter in her, dear. Oh! may you both be happy!"

They all praised Lucy, now. His father commenced the moment they were alone. "Poor Helen! Your wife has been a great comfort to her, Richard. I think Helen must have sunk without her. So lovely a young person, possessing mental faculty, and a conscience for her duties, I have never before met."

He wished to gratify his son by these eulogies of Lucy, and some hours back he would have succeeded. Now it had the contrary effect.

"You compliment me on my choice, sir?"

Richard spoke sedately, but the irony was perceptible and he could speak no other way, his bitterness was so intense.

"I think you very fortunate," said his father.

Sensitive to tone and manner as he was, his ebullition of paternal feeling was frozen. Richard did not approach him. He leaned against the chimney-piece, glancing at the floor, and lifting his eyes only when he spoke. Fortunate! very fortunate! As he revolved his later history, and remembered how clearly he had seen that his father must love Lucy if he but knew her, and remembered his efforts to persuade her to come with him, a sting of miserable rage blackened his brain. But could he blame that gentle soul? Whom could he blame? Himself? Not utterly. His father? Yes, and no. The blame was here, the blame was there: it was everywhere and nowhere, and the young man cast it on the Fates, and looked angrily at heaven, and grew reckless.

"Richard," said his father, coming close to him, "it is late to-night. I do not wish Lucy to remain in expectation longer, or I should have explained myself to you thoroughly, and I think--or at least hope--you

would have justified me. I had cause to believe that you had not only violated my confidence, but grossly deceived me. It was not so, I now know. I was mistaken. Much of our misunderstanding has resulted from that mistake. But you were married--a boy: you knew nothing of the world, little of yourself. To save you in after-life--for there is a period when mature men and women who have married young are more impelled to temptation than in youth,--though not so exposed to it,--to save you, I say, I decreed that you should experience self-denial and learn something of your fellows of both sexes, before settling into a state that must have been otherwise precarious, however excellent the woman who is your mate. My System with you would have been otherwise imperfect, and you would have felt the effects of it. It is over now. You are a man. The dangers to which your nature was open are, I trust, at an end. I wish you to be happy, and I give you both my blessing, and pray God to conduct and strengthen you both."

Sir Austin's mind was unconscious of not having spoken devoutly. True or not, his words were idle to his son: his talk of dangers over, and happiness, mockery.

Richard coldly took his father's extended hand.

"We will go to her," said the baronet. "I will leave you at her door."

Not moving: looking fixedly at his father with a hard face on which the colour rushed, Richard said: "A husband who has been unfaithful to his wife may go to her there, sir?"

It was horrible, it was cruel: Richard knew that. He wanted no advice on such a matter, having fully resolved what to do. Yesterday he would have listened to his father, and blamed himself alone, and done what was to be done humbly before God and her: now in the recklessness of his misery he had as little pity for any other soul as for his own. Sir Austin's brows were deep drawn down.

"What did you say, Richard?"

Clearly his intelligence had taken it, but this--the worst he could hear--this that he had dreaded once and doubted, and smoothed over, and cast aside--could it be?

Richard said: "I told you all but the very words when we last parted. What else do you think would have kept me from her?"

Angered at his callous aspect, his father cried: "What brings you to her now?"

"That will be between us two," was the reply.

Sir Austin fell into his chair. Meditation was impossible. He spoke from a wrathful heart: "You will not dare to take her without"--

"No, sir," Richard interrupted him, "I shall not. Have no fear."

"Then you did not love your wife?"

"Did I not?" A smile passed faintly over Richard's face.

"Did you care so much for this--this other person?"

"So much? If you ask me whether I had affection for her, I can say I had none."

O base human nature! Then how? then why? A thousand questions rose in the baronet's mind. Bessy Berry could have answered them every one.

"Poor child! poor child!" he apostrophized Lucy, pacing the room. Thinking of her, knowing her deep love for his son--her true forgiving heart--it seemed she should be spared this misery.

He proposed to Richard to spare her. Vast is the distinction between women and men in this one sin, he said, and supported it with physical and moral citations. His argument carried him so far, that to hear him one would have imagined he thought the sin in men small indeed. His words were idle.

"She must know it," said Richard, sternly. "I will go to her now, sir, if you please."

Sir Austin detained him, expostulated, contradicted himself, confounded his principles, made nonsense of all his theories. He could not induce his son to waver in his resolve. Ultimately, their good-night being interchanged, he understood that the happiness of Raynham depended on Lucy's mercy. He had no fears of her sweet heart, but it was a strange thing to have come to. On which should the accusation fall--on science, or on human nature?

He remained in the library pondering over the question, at times breathing contempt for his son, and again seized with unwonted suspicion of his own wisdom: troubled, much to be pitied, even if he deserved that blow from his son which had plunged him into wretchedness. Richard went straight to Tom Bakewell, roused the heavy sleeper, and told him to have his mare saddled and waiting at the park gates East within an hour. Tom's nearest approach to a hero was to be a faithful slave to his master, and in doing this he acted to his conception of that high and glorious character. He got up and heroically dashed his head into cold water. "She shall be ready, sir," he nodded.

"Tom! if you don't see me back here at Raynham, your money will go on being paid to you."

"Rather see you than the money, Mr. Richard," said Tom.

"And you will always watch and see no harm comes to her, Tom."

"Mrs. Richard, sir?" Tom stared. "God bless me, Mr. Richard"--

"No questions. You'll do what I say."

"Ay, sir; that I will. Did'n Isle o' Wight."

The very name of the Island shocked Richard's blood; and he had to walk up and down before he could knock at Lucy's door. That infamous conspiracy to which he owed his degradation and misery scarce left him the feelings of a man when he thought of it.

The soft beloved voice responded to his knock. He opened the door, and stood before her. Lucy was half-way toward him. In the moment that passed ere she was in his arms, he had time to observe the change in her. He had left her a girl: he beheld a woman--a blooming woman: for pale at first, no sooner did she see him than the colour was rich and deep on her face and neck and bosom half shown through the loose dressing-robe, and the sense of her exceeding beauty made his heart thump and his eyes swim.

"My darling!" each cried, and they clung together, and her mouth was fastened on his.

They spoke no more. His soul was drowned in her kiss. Supporting her, whose strength was gone, he, almost as weak as she, hung over her, and clasped her closer, closer, till they were as one body, and in the oblivion her lips put upon him he was free to the bliss of her embrace. Heaven granted him that. He placed her in a chair and knelt at her feet with both arms around her. Her bosom heaved; her eyes never quitted him: their light as the light on a rolling wave. This young creature, commonly so frank and straightforward, was broken with bashfulness in her husband's arms--womanly bashfulness on the torrent of womanly love; tenfold more seductive than the bashfulness of girlhood. Terrible tenfold the loss of her seemed now, as distantly--far on the horizon of memory--the fatal truth returned to him.

Lose her? lose this? He looked up as if to ask God to confirm it.

The same sweet blue eyes! the eyes that he had often seen in the dying glories of evening; on him they dwelt, shifting, and fluttering, and glittering, but constant: the light of them as the light on a rolling wave.

And true to him! true, good, glorious, as the angels of heaven! And his she was! a woman--his wife! The temptation to take her, and be dumb, was all powerful: the wish to die against her bosom so strong as to be the prayer of his vital forces. Again he strained her to him, but this time it was as a robber grasps priceless treasure--with exultation and defiance. One instant of this. Lucy, whose pure tenderness had now surmounted the first wild passion of their meeting, bent back her head from her surrendered body, and said almost voicelessly, her underlids wistfully quivering: "Come and see him--baby;" and then in great hope of the happiness she was going to give her husband, and share with him, and in tremour and doubt of what his feelings would be, she blushed, and her brows worked: she tried to throw off the strangeness of a year of

separation, misunderstanding, and uncertainty.

"Darling! come and see him. He is here." She spoke more clearly, though no louder.

Richard had released her, and she took his hand, and he suffered himself to be led to the other side of the bed. His heart began rapidly throbbing at the sight of a little rosy-curtained cot covered with lace like milky summer cloud.

It seemed to him he would lose his manhood if he looked on that child's face.

"Stop!" he cried suddenly.

Lucy turned first to him, and then to her infant, fearing it should have been disturbed.

"Lucy, come back."

"What is it, darling?" said she, in alarm at his voice and the grip he had unwittingly given her hand.

O God! what an Ordeal was this! that to-morrow he must face death, perhaps die and be torn from his darling--his wife and his child; and that ere he went forth, ere he could dare to see his child and lean his head reproachfully on his young wife's breast--for the last time, it might be--he must stab her to the heart, shatter the image she held of him.

"Lucy!" She saw him wrenched with agony, and her own face took the whiteness of his--she bending forward to him, all her faculties strung to hearing.

He held her two hands that she might look on him and not spare the horrible wound he was going to lay open to her eyes.

"Lucy. Do you know why I came to you to-night?"

She moved her lips repeating his words.

"Lucy. Have you guessed why I did not come before?"

Her head shook widened eyes.

"Lucy. I did not come because I was not worthy of my wife! Do you understand?"

"Darling," she faltered plaintively, and hung crouching under him, "what have I done to make you angry with me?"

"O beloved!" cried he, the tears bursting out of his eyes. "O beloved!" was all he could say, kissing her hands passionately.

She waited, reassured, but in terror.

"Lucy. I stayed away from you--I could not come to you, because... I dared not come to you, my wife, my beloved! I could not come because I was a coward: because--hear me--this was the reason: I have broken my marriage oath."

Again her lips moved. She caught at a dim fleshless meaning in them.

"But you love me? Richard! My husband! you love me?"

"Yes. I have never loved, I never shall love, woman but you."

"Darling! Kiss me."

"Have you understood what I have told you?"

"Kiss me," she said.

He did not join lips. "I have come to you to-night to ask your forgiveness."

Her answer was: "Kiss me."

"Can you forgive a man so base?"

"But you love me, Richard?"

"Yes: that I can say before God. I love you, and I have betrayed you, and am unworthy of you--not worthy to touch your hand, to kneel at your feet, to breathe the same air with you."

Her eyes shone brilliantly. "You love me! you love me, darling!" And as one who has sailed through dark fears into daylight, she said: "My husband! my darling! you will never leave me? We never shall be parted again?"

He drew his breath painfully. To smooth her face growing rigid with fresh fears at his silence, he met her mouth. That kiss in which she spoke what her soul had to say, calmed her, and she smiled happily from it, and in her manner reminded him of his first vision of her on the summer morning in the field of the meadow-sweet. He held her to him, and thought then of a holier picture: of Mother and Child: of the sweet wonders of life she had made real to him.

Had he not absolved his conscience? At least the pangs to come made him think so. He now followed her leading hand. Lucy whispered: "You mustn't disturb him--mustn't touch him, dear!" and with dainty fingers drew off the covering to the little shoulder. One arm of the child was out along the pillow; the small hand open. His baby-mouth was pouted full; the dark lashes of his eyes seemed to lie on his plump cheeks. Richard stooped lower down to him, hungering for some movement as a sign that he lived. Lucy whispered. "He sleeps like you, Richard--one arm

under his head." Great wonder, and the stir of a grasping tenderness was in Richard. He breathed quick and soft, bending lower, till Lucy's curls, as she nestled and bent with him, rolled on the crimson quilt of the cot. A smile went up the plump cheeks: forthwith the bud of a mouth was in rapid motion. The young mother whispered, blushing: "He's dreaming of me," and the simple words did more than Richard's eyes to make him see what was. Then Lucy began to hum and buzz sweet baby-language, and some of the tiny fingers stirred, and he made as if to change his cosy position, but reconsidered, and deferred it, with a peaceful little sigh. Lucy whispered: "He is such a big fellow. Oh! when you see him awake he is so like you, Richard."

He did not hear her immediately: it seemed a bit of heaven dropped there in his likeness: the more human the fact of the child grew the more heavenly it seemed. His son! his child! should he ever see him awake? At the thought, he took the words that had been spoken, and started from the dream he had been in. "Will he wake soon, Lucy?"

"Oh no! not yet, dear: not for hours. I would have kept him awake for you, but he was so sleepy."

Richard stood back from the cot. He thought that if he saw the eyes of his boy, and had him once on his heart, he never should have force to leave him. Then he looked down on him, again struggled to tear himself away. Two natures warred in his bosom, or it may have been the Magian Conflict still going on. He had come to see his child once and to make peace with his wife before it should be too late. Might he not stop with them? Might he not relinquish that devilish pledge? Was not divine happiness here offered to him?--If foolish Ripton had not delayed to tell him of his interview with Mountfalcon all might have been well. But pride said it was impossible. And then injury spoke. For why was he thus base and spotted to the darling of his love? A mad pleasure in the prospect of wreaking vengeance on the villain who had laid the trap for him, once more blackened his brain. If he would stay he could not. So he resolved, throwing the burden on Fate. The struggle was over, but oh, the pain!

Lucy beheld the tears streaming hot from his face on the child's cot. She marvelled at such excess of emotion. But when his chest heaved, and the extremity of mortal anguish appeared to have seized him, her heart sank, and she tried to get him in her arms. He turned away from her and went to the window. A half-moon was over the lake.

"Look!" he said, "do you remember our rowing there one night, and we saw the shadow of the cypress? I wish I could have come early to-night that we might have had another row, and I have heard you sing there!"

"Darling!" said she, "will it make you happier if I go with you now? I will."

"No, Lucy. Lucy, you are brave!"

"Oh, no! that I'm not. I thought so once. I know I am not now."

"Yes! to have lived--the child on your heart--and never to have uttered a complaint!--you are brave. O my Lucy! my wife! you that have made me man! I called you a coward. I remember it. I was the coward--I the wretched vain fool! Darling! I am going to leave you now. You are brave, and you will bear it. Listen: in two days, or three, I may be back--back for good, if you will accept me. Promise me to go to bed quietly. Kiss the child for me, and tell him his father has seen him. He will learn to speak soon. Will he soon speak, Lucy?"

Dreadful suspicion kept her speechless; she could only clutch one arm of his with both her hands.

"Going?" she presently gasped.

"For two or three days. No more--I hope."

"To-night?"

"Yes. Now."

"Going now? my husband!" her faculties abandoned her.

"You will be brave, my Lucy!"

"Richard! my darling husband! Going? What is it takes you from me?" But questioning no further, she fell on her knees, and cried piteously to him to stay--not to leave them. Then she dragged him to the little sleeper, and urged him to pray by his side, and he did, but rose abruptly from his prayer when he had muttered a few broken words--she praying on with tight-strung nerves, in the faith that what she said to the interceding Mother above would be stronger than human hands on him. Nor could he go while she knelt there.

And he wavered. He had not reckoned on her terrible suffering. She came to him, quiet. "I knew you would remain." And taking his hand, innocently fondling it: "Am I so changed from her he loved? You will not leave me, dear?" But dread returned, and the words quavered as she spoke them.

He was almost vanquished by the loveliness of her womanhood. She drew his hand to her heart, and strained it there under one breast. "Come: lie on my heart," she murmured with a smile of holy sweetness.

He wavered more, and drooped to her, but summoning the powers of hell, kissed her suddenly, cried the words of parting, and hurried to the door. It was over in an instant. She cried out his name, clinging to him wildly, and was adjured to be brave, for he would be dishonoured if he did not go. Then she was shaken off.

Mrs. Berry was aroused by an unusual prolonged wailing of the child, which showed that no one was comforting it, and failing to get any answer to her applications for admittance, she made bold to enter. There she

saw Lucy, the child in her lap, sitting on the floor senseless--she had taken it from its sleep and tried to follow her husband with it as her strongest appeal to him, and had fainted.

"Oh my! oh my!" Mrs. Berry moaned, "and I just now thinkin' they was so happy!"

Warming and caressing the poor infant, she managed by degrees to revive Lucy, and heard what had brought her to that situation.

"Go to his father," said Mrs. Berry. "Ta-te-tiddle-te-heighty-O! Go, my love, and every horse in Raynham shall be out after 'm. This is what men brings us to! Heighty-oughty-iddlety-Ah! Or you take blessed baby, and I'll go."

The baronet himself knocked at the door. "What is this?" he said. "I heard a noise and a step descend."

"It's Mr. Richard have gone, Sir Austin! have gone from his wife and babe! Rum-te-um-te-iddledy--Oh, my goodness! what sorrow's come on us!" and Mrs. Berry wept, and sang to baby, and baby cried vehemently, and Lucy, sobbing, took him and danced him and sang to him with drawn lips and tears dropping over him. And if the Scientific Humanist to the day of his death forgets the sight of those two poor true women jiggling on their wretched hearts to calm the child, he must have very little of the human in him.

There was no more sleep for Raynham that night.

CHAPTER XLV

"His ordeal is over. I have just come from his room and seen him bear the worst that could be. Return at once--he has asked for you. I can hardly write intelligibly, but I will tell you what we know.

"Two days after the dreadful night when he left us, his father heard from Ralph Morton. Richard had fought a duel in France with Lord Mountfalcon, and was lying wounded at a hamlet on the coast. His father started immediately with his poor wife, and I followed in company with his aunt and his child. The wound was not dangerous. He was shot in the side somewhere, but the ball injured no vital part. We thought all would be well. Oh! how sick I am of theories, and Systems, and the pretensions of men! There was his son lying all but dead, and the man was still unconvinced of the folly he had been guilty of. I could hardly bear the sight of his composure. I shall hate the name of Science till the day I die. Give me nothing but commonplace unpretending people!

"They were at a wretched French cabaret, smelling vilely, where we still remain, and the people try as much as they can do to compensate for our

discomforts by their kindness. The French poor people are very considerate where they see suffering. I will say that for them. The doctors had not allowed his poor Lucy to go near him. She sat outside his door, and none of us dared disturb her. That was a sight for Science. His father and myself, and Mrs. Berry, were the only ones permitted to wait on him, and whenever we came out, there she sat, not speaking a word--for she had been told it would endanger his life--but she looked such awful eagerness. She had the sort of eye I fancy mad persons have. I was sure her reason was going. We did everything we could think of to comfort her. A bed was made up for her and her meals were brought to her there. Of course there was no getting her to eat. What do you suppose his alarm was fixed on? He absolutely said to me--but I have not patience to repeat his words. He thought her to blame for not commanding herself for the sake of her maternal duties. He had absolutely an idea of insisting that she should make an effort to suckle the child. I shall love that Mrs. Berry to the end of my days. I really believe she has twice the sense of any of us--Science and all. She asked him plainly if he wished to poison the child, and then he gave way, but with a bad grace.

"Poor man! perhaps I am hard on him. I remember that you said Richard had done wrong. Yes; well, that may be. But his father eclipsed his wrong in a greater wrong--a crime, or quite as bad; for if he deceived himself in the belief that he was acting righteously in separating husband and wife, and exposing his son as he did, I can only say that there are some who are worse than people who deliberately commit crimes. No doubt Science will benefit by it. They kill little animals for the sake of Science.

"We have with us Doctor Bairam, and a French physician from Dieppe, a very skilful man. It was he who told us where the real danger lay. We thought all would be well. A week had passed, and no fever supervened. We told Richard that his wife was coming to him, and he could bear to hear it. I went to her and began to circumlocute, thinking she listened--she had the same eager look. When I told her she might go in with me to see her dear husband, her features did not change. M. Despres, who held her pulse at the time, told me, in a whisper, it was cerebral fever--brain fever coming on. We have talked of her since. I noticed that though she did not seem to understand me, her bosom heaved, and she appeared to be trying to repress it, and choke something. I am sure now, from what I know of her character, that she--even in the approaches of delirium--was preventing herself from crying out. Her last hold of reason was a thought for Richard. It was against a creature like this that we plotted! I have the comfort of knowing that I did my share in helping to destroy her. Had she seen her husband a day or two before--but no! there was a new System to interdict that! Or had she not so violently controlled her nature as she did, I believe she might have been saved.

"He said once of a man, that his conscience was a coxcomb. Will you believe that when he saw his son's wife--poor victim! lying delirious, he could not even then see his error. You said he wished to take Providence out of God's hands. His mad self-deceit would not leave him. I am

positive, that while he was standing over her, he was blaming her for not having considered the child. Indeed he made a remark to me that it was unfortunate 'disastrous,' I think he said--that the child should have to be fed by hand. I dare say it is. All I pray is that this young child may be saved from him. I cannot bear to see him look on it. He does not spare himself bodily fatigue--but what is that? that is the vulgarest form of love. I know what you will say. You will say I have lost all charity, and I have. But I should not feel so, Austin, if I could be quite sure that he is an altered man even now the blow has struck him. He is reserved and simple in his speech, and his grief is evident, but I have doubts. He heard her while she was senseless call him cruel and harsh, and cry that she had suffered, and I saw then his mouth contract as if he had been touched. Perhaps, when he thinks, his mind will be clearer, but what he has done cannot be undone. I do not imagine he will abuse women any more. The doctor called her a 'forte et belle jeune femme:' and he said she was as noble a soul as ever God moulded clay upon. A noble soul 'forte et belle!' She lies upstairs. If he can look on her and not see his sin, I almost fear God will never enlighten him."

She died five days after she had been removed. The shock had utterly deranged her. I was with her. She died very quietly, breathing her last breath without pain--asking for no one--a death I should like to die.

"Her cries at one time were dreadfully loud. She screamed that she was 'drowning in fire,' and that her husband would not come to her to save her. We deadened the sound as much as we could, but it was impossible to prevent Richard from hearing. He knew her voice, and it produced an effect like fever on him. Whenever she called he answered. You could not hear them without weeping. Mrs. Berry sat with her, and I sat with him, and his father moved from one to the other.

"But the trial for us came when she was gone. How to communicate it to Richard--or whether to do so at all! His father consulted with us. We were quite decided that it would be madness to breathe it while he was in that state. I can admit now--as things have turned out--we were wrong. His father left us--I believe he spent the time in prayer--and then leaning on me, he went to Richard, and said in so many words, that his Lucy was no more. I thought it must kill him. He listened, and smiled. I never saw a smile so sweet and so sad. He said he had seen her die, as if he had passed through his suffering a long time ago. He shut his eyes. I could see by the motion of his eyeballs up that he was straining his sight to some inner heaven.--I cannot go on.

"I think Richard is safe. Had we postponed the tidings, till he came to his clear senses, it must have killed him. His father was right for once, then. But if he has saved his son's body, he has given the death-blow to his heart. Richard will never be what he promised.

"A letter found on his clothes tells us the origin of the quarrel. I have had an interview with Lord M. this morning. I cannot say I think him exactly to blame: Richard forced him to fight. At least I do not select him the foremost for blame. He was deeply and sincerely affected by the calamity he has caused. Alas! he was only an instrument. Your

poor aunt is utterly prostrate and talks strange things of her daughter's death. She is only happy in drudging. Dr. Bairam says we must under any circumstances keep her employed. Whilst she is doing something, she can chat freely, but the moment her hands are not occupied she gives me an idea that she is going into a fit.

"We expect the dear child's uncle to-day. Mr. Thompson is here. I have taken him upstairs to look at her. That poor young man has a true heart.

"Come at once. You will not be in time to see her. She will lie at Raynham. If you could you would see an angel. He sits by her side for hours. I can give you no description of her beauty.

"You will not delay, I know, dear Austin, and I want you, for your presence will make me more charitable than I find it possible to be. Have you noticed the expression in the eyes of blind men? That is just how Richard looks, as he lies there silent in his bed--striving to image her on his brain."

THE END

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

A maker of Proverbs--what is he but a narrow mind wit
Feeling, nothing beyond a lively interest in her well-being
Further she read, "Which is the coward among us?"
Gentleman who does so much 'cause he says so little
Hermits enamoured of wind and rain
Heroine, in common with the hero, has her ambition to be of use
I rather like to hear a woman swear. It embellishes her!
I beg of my husband, and all kind people who may have the care
Intensely communicative, but inarticulate
Just bad inquirin' too close among men
January was watering and freezing old earth by turns
South-western Island has few attractions to other than invalids
Take 'em somethin' like Providence--as they come
Task of reclaiming a bad man is extremely seductive to good women
This was a totally different case from the antecedent ones

End of this Project Gutenberg Etext of Ordeal Richard Feverel, v6
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by George Meredith

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