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# STRICTLY TIED UP.

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BY

THE RIGHT HON.

A. J. B. BERESFORD HOPE, M.P.

' In many shapes the powers mould human things ;  
In varying notes God's world-wide edict rings,  
Of elements unhopèd-for blended.  
Fruition long assured is dashed at last ;  
The dark cause wins, when heaven the lot hath cast ;  
And so this tangled matter ended.'—EURIPIDES.



LONDON AND NEW YORK :  
FREDERICK WARNE AND CO.





To  
THE DEAR LIGHT  
AND  
GUIDE  
OF  
THE AUTHOR'S LIFE.

-



## PREFACE

### TO THE NEW EDITION.

THOSE who remember this novel as it first appeared in October, 1880, will notice that a black line now surrounds the dedication. The most powerful words in the English language are wholly inadequate to express the absolute truth of the declaration therein made that She to whom it is inscribed was the dear light and guide of the author's life. Among her many merits not the least attractive was the modest genuineness of that most wise and able as well as loving wife. She never posed for reputation, so I am left to present her character to the world, while conscious that I am a witness whose impartiality will be doubted. Had the blow fallen upon me a little sooner I never should have had the courage or spirits to have completed this story, which I contrived to write, publish, and dedicate quite unknown to her, and anonymously, and then to place in her hands with the full confession of my plot of love. I joyed to think that I was thus discharging a little of a life's debt, for, beyond my serious ethical aim, my chief object was to surprise and please a wife who had, for more than thirty-eight years, endured so much and laboured so much for her husband. While she was living, modesty enforced

silence as to the endless series of toils and anxieties, private and public, recurrent yet diverse—though lightened by reciprocal love, the devotion of children, and the affectionate sympathy of many honoured friends, some of them friends from the first, and others won in the changing campaign—which gave a grave purpose to the married life of a couple who only strove to remain one and indivisible in their discharge of duty. To the world they owed cheerful faces, and they strove to pay the debt. Even now her husband shrinks from reminiscences which read like boasts, but death constrains him to speak out. Such conspicuous successes as were vouchsafed to husband and wife made them very thankful. But these were earned by labour. The girl of nineteen began to reckon her working days in 1842, and the tale of them rolled up till the summons to leave off reached her at Nice in March, 1881. This was a long spell for a woman fearless and irrepressible for truth and duty, but of a peculiarly sensitive and affectionate organization, and mother of many children. Lady Mildred Beresford Hope's inner character was of course unsuspected by strangers, and still more closed to them was that innermost life of the soul, of which, although I shall leave my picture incomplete, I refuse to speak. They could only see the bright participator of a socially prosperous career, or catch the cheery laugh and witty speech of the woman then most courageous when fighting against weary pains and weaknesses, constantly recurring, of which the secret was her own.

SIT ANIMA MEA CUM ILLA.

A. J. B. BERESFORD HOPE.

JUNE, 1881.

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# STRICTLY TIED UP.

## CHAPTER I.

### WHY SO WEARY?

DELICIA, Countess of Foulisville, yawned.

The average superficial man might excusably have inferred that weariness had grown upon the lady from her lord's town house standing in the street, of all streets, most solemn, dull and ugly, without life, without character, without mission—Eaton Place. But the reasoner would have been much mistaken in so commonplace an inference. That yawn of the languid fine lady was the involuntary confession of a life-long failure compressed into a single movement of the muscles. It was pathetic in its helplessness, but, if it had been more closely scrutinized, it might have repelled sympathy from the selfishness which so clearly provoked the action. It was a yawn independent of place, of bodily ease or physical exercise,—the abdication of energy in the latter days of a wasted life.



We shall be asked who the wearied lady was, what it was that she had attempted, and how she failed. But as she was not only a woman, but a married woman, and not a married woman only, but by marriage a countess, we can most clearly and briefly answer these reasonable questions by explaining who the Earl was to whose preference for herself she owed her coronet; and to do this effectively we must make a short excursion into a history of past generations.

The race of Foulis, ennobled in the peerage of Ireland, of which her husband was head, was quite unconnected with any other family of the same name existing in various parts of the kingdom, and was of French origin. According to a pedigree preserved in the family, and rather more than eighty years old, it boasts an unbroken descent of at least eight centuries, with more than one Crusader in the lineage, besides a Saracenic ancestress. The first of the race to come to Ireland was a gentleman who, in the words of the Peerage, 'accompanied the army of the deliverer, William III., in a post of high trust, in which he was able to render conspicuous services to that great monarch, as well as to the cause of civil and religious liberty. Since that date the family has been settled in Ireland, and has continued to enjoy much distinction.'

The unwritten tradition of all who do not trace their lineage to him adds that the special occupation of M. Pierre Foulis with William's army was not the brutal work of shedding blood, but the beneficent responsibility of purveying to the comforts and sus-

tenance of the manslayers; and it whispers that this good man had his reward for his devotion to civil and religious liberty even in this world. It is certain that, not many years after the settlement of the new dynasty, Mr. Foulis, as he was very particular to be called, became, with much ease to himself, and with an unaccountable acquiescence on the part of the outgoers, to whom the transaction seemed to bring but little good, purchaser from a fallen line of chieftains, named McSwinnny, of the mountainous domain of Ballybanaghermore, in Western Ireland. The cluster of cabins which nestled at the gate became, to the surprise of its inhabitants, a town, with the euphonious appellation of Foulisville; while the successive owners made efforts, short and rare, to reside in the ancient castle.

So unapproachable, and so destitute even of those inferior comforts which Mr. Froude might considerably allow to an Irish mansion of the last century, was this grim fortalice, that it was, perhaps, more creditable to have lived there at all, for however brief a period, than reprehensible to have been so continuously absent. Besides, it must be owned that it did not conduce to the enjoyment of one's property to be constantly, made aware, in all sorts of ingenious ways, that the graphic phrase by which neighbour and tenant alike loved to indicate the uncongenial intruder was 'French pig-jobber.' Identified as the fallen cause was with sympathy for France, the use of this nickname, as a term of reproach in the mouths of Celtic Papists, implied an unusual concentration of contemptuous hatred. Still the descendants of the foreigner were

accepted as an Irish family. Dublin was in those days, for social purposes, a real capital ; and in Dublin the line of Foulis were much greater people than they could have become if seated in London.

At length, in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, Mr. Denis Foulis, great-grandson of the original immigrant, declared himself smitten with a sudden admiration of his long-neglected property, and succeeded in reaching it after a journey only marked by broken springs, but whole bones. Not only did he go there, but he stopped on for some weeks, and when he had expended a due amount of that fidget which passes as deliberation, he ordered a large expanse of meadow to be turned into a park by levelling the ditches, and sticking in the trees, and then selected what was actually neither the best nor the worst spot for the purpose as the site of his future home. Here he constructed a long, low, two-storied mansion, coated with cement, crouching down to the ground, and boasting for only ornament a wooden porch, supported by two Doric columns painted white, with a bow at that end of the house which was turned away from the prospect ; while a little cupola was built over the servants' wing to contain a bell which never was cast.

So sweet a masterpiece of architectural genius could not condescend to perpetuate the barbarous sounds of a Celtic name. Long and grave were the consultations as to the new appellation. Foulisville Lodge, which was at first suggested, was voted iteration, and the pride of the Crusader's descendant would not brook being cribbed in a lodge. At that date it was

thought genteel in Dublin to cultivate sentimentality, and the Honourable Mrs. Foulis, who never missed a drawing-room at the Castle, was, of course, brimful of that amiable weakness. So, even before the builder had handed over the half-dry mansion, Ballybanaghmore became Fontarabia; while Mr. Foulis's return to his patrimony so stimulated the gratitude of the county electors that they enabled him to add 'M.P.' to his surname.

Those were great days in the Irish House of Commons, when Grattan and Flood, Curran and Fitzgibbon, declaimed, with a rhetoric often very far superior to the subject of the debate or the motive of the debater; when Sir Boyle Roach blundered with a witty purpose, and Sir Jonah Barrington watched the political weathercock and laughed in his sleeve as he chronicled the weaknesses of better men than himself.

Mr. Foulis, we presume, was a modest senator, for history does not record any oration which fell from his lips; and as no division lists in those days were printed, his name would have been engulfed in that most stagnant creek of Lethe, which is thick with the unknown members of Irish Parliaments, had it not been for a proceeding which marked that silent member as a man possessed of original habits of thought. Session after session, so we are told, had he steadily voted for his country's independence; while, session after session, he and his charming lady showed that to be patriotic did not involve ceasing to be loyal, by the dignified deference which they exhibited towards each successive representative of King George who appeared at Dublin Castle.

At last, the economic and political advantage to Ireland of a union with more powerful and wealthy Great Britain pressed upon the cosmopolitan mind of the county member with such irresistible cogency, that he frankly abandoned all the patriotic but fallacious prejudices which a naturalization of a hundred and ten years had nourished in the breast of an artificially genuine old Irish gentleman. Mr. Foulis's vote was given for the Union at a critical moment; and, praiseworthy as his conduct appeared to the enlightened statesmanship which then presided over the destinies of the empire, his bigoted and narrow-minded constituents so deeply resented the act as to burn their worthy member in effigy, and tumultuously to pledge themselves not to return him for the Imperial Parliament. The wind, as Sterne (and not, as so often believed, the Bible) says, was, however, tempered to the shorn lamb; and in that glorious coruscation of coronets which shed a sunset splendour over the last days of an Irish Parliament, one bright particlular star beamed above the brow of him who now became Lord Foulisville.

Denis, Lord Foulisville, did not long live to enjoy his honours; but he left a son, his father's counterpart in his views of what constituted patriotic statesmanship. The new lord had the good fortune, purchased by his own assiduity, to make himself necessary to one of those great patrons of many boroughs in England, in the fine old time, when to conciliate such a benefactor was to take a far step in the favour of the Ministry. Our younger readers will shudder at so corrupt a system, and they are masters

of their own emotions ; still, we pray them to allow us to contemplate, in pleased astonishment, the results in our own days of scientific and statistical representation, which has reached so high an excellence, and which will, no doubt, be still further perfected when the hedger and the ditcher are bidden to outvote squire and parson at the county polls. Anyhow, Lord Foulisville had too much on hand of a practical kind to waste time in philosophizing. To him the perfect system of representation was that which made him a representative ; and in the performance of his senatorial duties he had as clear a purpose before him as ever Wilberforce or Cobden.

It was a purpose, however, with a complex and flexible solution, and one of its elements involved a choice between two somewhat puzzling alternatives. The two things necessary for the salvation of the State were, as he felt convinced, first, that the country should be richer by an Earl of Foulisville ; and that, secondly, that estimable nobleman should sit in the House of Lords. To the prior of those objects there was, generally speaking, only one possible way : a man could only become an earl by being made an earl. He might, to be sure, be either an English or an Irish earl, but the difference was, as far as earls went, really not worth thinking of. But into the House of Lords two divergent paths opened to the man who was already peer of Ireland. A British baron was an appropriate appendage to an Irish earldom, but the Irish earl who gracefully and patriotically declined British honours was in a fair way to be chosen a representative by the members of a peerage who

valued the distinctiveness of their position. Either alternative had its bright and its dark side. The baron of Great Britain had acquired an hereditary tenure of the vantage-ground, but he was only a baron at Westminster. The representative earl was an earl all over, but his seat in the Upper House died with him. The English earldom *per saltum* Lord Foulisville put out of sight, as there was no precedent for such a distinction being offered to an Irish baron. On the whole, these advantages and disadvantages were so evenly balanced, that if the same policy could have been trusted as the best for running the chance of either prize, he would have certainly made a dash for the double result as successfully as he did for the rise in the Irish peerage. Such, however, was not the case; for while a single Prime Minister bestows peerages, a close corporation of Irish peers co-opts as to their representative body. The leaders of the side to which the majority of Irish peers belong have, undoubtedly, immense influence; but this is an influence which, if ridden too hard, may provoke jealousy and cause a reaction. At the time, too, of which we are speaking, the majority of the Irish peerage were suspicious of the Ministry, whom they believed to be inclined to surrender Catholic Emancipation.

It followed from this tangled condition of matters that while Lord Foulisville's operations for securing the first aim of his ambition were marked with all the hereditary tact, patience, and unscrupulousness which he had inherited from the companion of King William and from the builder of Fontarabia, it fared very differently with his other project. In scheming

for the seat in the House of Lords, he blundered and vacillated, as one alternative or the other seemed to offer more easy chances, until he had succeeded in persuading the Minister, through his intrigues to secure an election to the representative body, that he was an unscrupulous and ungrateful agitator ; and, at the same time, in leading the members of the Irish peerage to conclude that the man who could descend to such meanness in craving for an English title must be the subservient lackey of the Treasury Bench. So the first Earl of Foulisville died, discredited by all parties as one who debased considerable talents by want of principle and truth. He bequeathed his rank, his grievance, and his pursuit to a son very inferior to him in ability and perseverance, but the true heir of his selfish aspirations. It was the wife of that son whom we lately found weary and out of heart, in spite of her title and her splendour, and much in consequence of the man to whom she owed those illusory blessings.

## CHAPTER II.

### MARRIED IN DUBLIN.

FREDERICK, Earl of Foulisville, so named after the Duke of York, was a bundle of imperfect and incongruous developments, a flashy failure, and a cunning dupe. This man, in his *blasé* after-youth, blundered into being fascinated by a provincial beauty, with an equipment of ringlets, pink cheeks,



and that delicately choked brogue which is attractive when it falls from pretty lips—Delicia, only child of Sir Bryan Driscoll, whilom Mayor of Kilmallock, and knight by grace of the Lord Lieutenant. As may be inferred from the facts which we have recounted, the second Earl of Foulisville, at the date of our simple tale, was neither representative peer nor British baron. The Countess's yawn told this; but it also expressed an Iliad of those personal mortifications which to Lady Foulisville were even more galling than the frustration of the ambitious aspirations of the self-seeking lineage of a lucky French adventurer. She would, indeed, have been a remarkable woman if her collapse could have been traced to so simple and, in female eyes, so tolerable a mishap. Scotch and Irish peeresses are provokingly insensible to their husbands' exclusion from a House which hardly ever makes its members late for dinner. Their instinct is to bridge over the difference between themselves and their English sisters. The lady had, in truth, far more real causes for her forfeited cheerfulness. Lord Foulisville had in his bachelor days tried habitual play, but found the after-taste of lost money far more bitter even than the exciting nausea of seeing it slip away; so that he early contented himself with occasional whist at the club, and found even that recreation very helpful in muddling away a year's income. He trained several horses, and once ran one, which bolted, fell, and broke its back. He haunted the purlieus of the theatres, and discovered that he had been supplanted in the affections of his figurante by a very objectionable gentleman of Hebrew nationality,

who had just affronted him by a downright refusal to advance a loan on the security of his estates in a western county. He wooed and won a borough, and was then unseated upon petition, and after a scrutiny at which his own committee volunteered evidence which secured the disfranchisement of the peccant constituency. His social achievements after he had sown those wild oats which sprang up into so rank a crop of darnel, will best be understood in connection with his wife's career.

To her father the future peeress owed little beyond the fact of her existence. Swaggering towards the helpless, pompous to his equals, and obsequious to the mighty, Sir Bryan drained to the dregs the cup of pleasure proffered by his petty title. Happy would it have been for him had this been the only cup which gave him solace, but excessive colchicum completed the work of reckless whisky punch. On her mother, as wife and as widow, had devolved the chief charge of the little Delicia; and as the good lady had been the governess of many women's daughters before she became the mother of her own single one, it was not extraordinary that she should have determined to make a paragon, as Dublin understood paragon, of a girl who was really very pretty, slightly an heiress, and who owned a parent who answered to 'My lady.' Circumstances strongly favoured her ambitious dreams.

Society was unusually brilliant in Dublin when Miss Driscoll made her *début* at the Castle, for the magnificent Duke of Northumberland was then Lord Lieutenant; while Irish politics had swollen to imperial dimensions in the agonies of consummated

emancipation. So to Dublin it was that Lord Foulisville resorted for that season, rather than to London ; not only because he fancied that there were peculiar opportunities there of pushing his grand search, but because he was much embittered against England and all the associations connected with its peerage, except that visible, tangible presence of the House of Lords, of which he still hoped to become a member. The origin of his anger was personal. A duke's daughter, passably good-looking, unimpeachably fashionable, the favourite child of a mighty wire-puller, and mistress, on the day when the settlements should be signed, of forty thousand pounds, had almost been his own.

The prospect of such an alliance was the sure foretaste of much prosperity to any active man of good family ; but to one whose whole soul was rapt in self-advancement, as was that of Lord Foulisville, the anticipation was one pre-eminently hopeful. To be the relation of the Duke of Merioneth was, unless forfeited by personal misconduct, to be his friend ; and to be his friend was to stand on the steps of the staircase which led to sure and rapid promotion. With the name, the prestige, and the blood of the mighty Earl who helped to raise Salisbury Cathedral, the actual chief of the Longespees, had his bearing been haughty, would have been declared 'arrogant with extenuating circumstances' by the suffrages even of those whom he most loftily dominated. But the Duke of Merioneth was, not only a gentleman to the backbone, but a very sensible man of the world ; and he never forgot that, in the paternal line, the original surname of his ancestors was Hodgkinson. So he

reasoned thus with himself, 'If I swagger, society will avenge itself upon me by calling me Hodgkinson behind my back.' Following this rule of conduct, the Duke steadily worked out the principle that if honesty is the best policy in the first instance, good-nature is so in the second. Thus he built up for himself an influence in politics which would have put any office at his disposal which he had cared to stretch out a finger to touch, but his ambition was to continue the private adviser of his Sovereign's advisers. When the Garter came to him it seemed rather to have blossomed out like the flowers on the hawthorn, than to have been offered, accepted, and conferred.

Such was the family with which Lord Foulisville was about to have allied himself, and the prospects of a seat upon the red benches of the Upper House never had seemed so near and dear to him as when the Duke blithely patted him on the back, and said, 'Well, Frederick, my boy, we'll soon have you among us.' A word from the Duke of Merioneth to the Prime Minister would be, so thought the vain young aspirant, more than a command, and his heart swelled with greedy vanity.

The day was fixed, and the dresses ordered; the Archbishop had promised his presence; the invitations were sent out,—when the Hebrew gentleman whom the Earl had insulted during their quarrel over the light legs and lighter morals of an Italian dancer, astutely contrived to convey such intelligence of her future son-in-law's doings to the really estimable and unworldly Duchess as to make it a point of moral duty on her part to break off the match.

The malignant conspirator succeeded in obtaining, at a price which nothing but revenge could have persuaded him to offer, from his equally rapacious paramour, a letter written to the girl by the besotted lord only a few days before he had discovered her treachery and cast her off for ever. Amused at the evidence of devotion from one for whom she only felt contempt, she showed it as soon as received to her more favoured admirer. The money-lender laughed, and forgot the incident till Lord Foulisville had insulted him. Then, its possible use struck his cunning mind.

The document was neatly enclosed, and directed, in a strange but unexceptionable hand, to the Duchess of Merioneth. Besides the fatal letter, the envelope contained a slip of paper with these words only upon it, 'With the respectful compliments of a well-wisher.' The Duchess concluded it was some begging letter, and, as her methodical charity prompted her to postpone all other duties to such appeals, she read on. The note was short and clumsy, but terribly to the point, informing his correspondent, as it did, that Lord Foulisville had lately made the acquaintance of a girl, very stupid and ugly, but with lots of tin,—the daughter of those cursed humbugs, the Merioneths; and that, as very likely he and she would soon be spliced, he wished to assure his Violante that the accident would make no difference in their relations, and that he would take precious good care old mother Merioneth never sniffed it.

The Duchess was a wise as well as a good woman; so she locked up the note, and looked her usual placid

self to the visitor, whom she had been keeping waiting during the perusal. She knew Lord Foulisville was engaged to her for a family dinner that evening ; so she had it put off for a quarter of an hour, and bade that he should be shown up into her boudoir. She received him with the remark that, knowing as she too well did, that her code of morality was a different and stricter one than that of many of the young men of the day, she had made it her rule never to question Lord Foulisville as to his previous life. Never had she, as she might easily have done, set any inquiry on foot upon the matter. All she now desired was to have a promise that so soon as he was married to her daughter, of whose devotion he was so sure, he never would give Dorinda any reason to regret her choice.

The cunning man was quite thrown off his guard by her mild common-sense, and, with many and totally unnecessary invocations of the Divine name, began asseverating that, while perhaps not a paragon of strict virtue, he was, at least, a man of honour and right feeling. He begged the Duchess to believe that he had never for one instant cherished so foul a thought as the possibility of being unfaithful to the bright and pure creature who was about to make him the happiest of men. ‘I swear, dear Duchess,’ he said, kissing his prospective mother-in-law, who with difficulty restrained herself from shrinking back, ‘that from next Tuesday my hand, my heart, my every thought, and wish, and prayer, and dream, will be Dorinda’s—Dorinda’s solely, completely, unalterably, till death do us part ; and if death takes my darling

first, the sad recollection of her inconsolable widower will be of the treasure he has lost.'

The Duchess waited till this rhapsody was ended. Then she silently unlocked her box, handed to him the epistle to Violante, rang the bell, and told the servant, 'We are one less for dinner to-day, as Lord Foulisville does not dine with us.'

Ignorant as the unlucky Earl was of all foreign languages, insensible to art, and bored by all society which did not appreciate his own transcendent grandeur, he had no inclination to imitate Lord Byron and betake himself to Italy. On the other hand, to stay in London would be to provoke the animosity and incur the deserved evil-speaking of the powerful clique who looked up to the Duke and Duchess as their unquestionable social leaders. Ireland, strange to say, was the only possible refuge for the baffled and discredited Irishman. A man so balked, by his own misconduct, of a marriage of which ambitious self-seeking was the pivot, is peculiarly susceptible, for a short time, to the delusion of fancying himself made for disinterested love and the appreciation of unobscure connections.

Lady Driscoll, if stiff, never committed a solecism in her social deportment, and she had the tact to measure her conversation so as to conceal the narrow provincialism of the circle in which her ideas had so long been moving. What was still better, her daughter had, in addition to her solid education, learned to smile, then to dance, and, thirdly, to grapple with her Munster legacy of brogue. Lord

Foulisville met the pair at the best houses of the Irish capital, forgot to disabuse himself in time of the rapid conclusion that the lost parent must have been a baronet, and, before he well knew where he stood, found himself the affianced husband of the orphan of a provision merchant in a Southern country town.

### CHAPTER III.

#### FAILED IN LONDON.

As far as selfishness and mendacity would allow, the Earl was at that time not ill-natured, and having made Delicia Driscoll his own for life, he took her into the partnership of the traditionary policy of the Foulis race. She was not only an apt pupil, and succeeded in protracting what otherwise would probably have been a rapid collapse, but she opened out for herself fields of fascinating failure which he never would have dreamed of exploring. It was natural in the couple to fix upon London as their future head-quarters. The reasons which biassed Lord Foulisville in his determination are too obvious to recount; and his wife, while sharing some of these, and being totally ignorant of others, had her own complementary motives for the choice. She was imbued, even to excess, with a foible which has certainly more complete possession of Irish gentility of the second rate, and particularly of its woman-kind, than of the children of any other nationality,—the intense and almost unselfish, because



genuine, worship of rank for rank's own simple sake. It was born in her, and her mother's trumpery ladyhood intensified the passion. To Delicia Driscoll the dream of being the lowest among all countesses would have been not so much paradise as the seventh heaven. Her heart was tender by anticipation to all countesses, if only for the strawberry-leaves.

As Countess of Foulisville, her aspirations rose, and it was now essential for her happiness to be a countess among countesses. But her nature held more than merely the quality of being a countess. Daughter, as she was, of a governess, much of her patrimony had drained into the pockets of Dublin's most fashionable masters and mistresses; so she had conceived blue-stocking proclivities which her mother's prudence had jealously kept in check while she was still husband-hunting.

Once the big fish was hooked, there was no longer any reason for restraining the now great lady's harmless taste. The world was then some half-century nearer to the days of Mrs. Montague than it now is, and Lady Holland was still a living power. London clearly was the goal for such a pair, and in London a house must be procured—a house such as should not be too big for Lord Foulisville, as Lord Foulisville knew himself to be in his banker's eyes, or too little for him, as the world deemed that great nobleman to be in his material circumstances.

In truth, Lord Foulisville's fortune was regulated upon those elastic principles which had long been too familiar to Irish gentlemen of every party and creed. The traveller who scanned the broad acres of Bally-

banaghermore, with their steep coronal of encircling mountains, would have reckoned their owner among the wealthiest of the land ; but what his banker might have to say to this potentate was that banker's own business, into which strangers had no right to pry. Altogether, there were affinities between Eaton Place, then in the first crudeness of its shapeless monotony—the new spoiled child of the West End—and the Earl and Countess of Foulisville's characters. They became lessees of a house in, and were at the period of our story the oldest inhabitants of, that gruesome region.

In acquiring that mansion in Eaton Place the noble couple anticipated the possession of an instrument of brilliant triumphs, both in social life and in politics—if the great word 'politics' can be prostituted to mean the knack of personal advancement. In reality, its rooms became the dreary scene of a failure, long-creeping, progressive, and intangible. It was so unostentatious, it was so respectable a failure—a subjective, and not an objective one, as a German philosopher would say—that the prime actors in it were always imagining it to be a success until they were undeceived by some collateral incident. Yet there was no reason to have anticipated that the new bid for fashionable distinction would have failed.

Lord Foulisville's vices and follies were those which the world, in its calculating selfishness, whitewashes when a man marries ; and he had while young an Irishman's knack of making himself agreeable when he chose to take the trouble. Lady Dorinda was happily married in the country, and the Merioneths were content with silently avoiding the Earl and coldly

bowing to the Countess. His more respectable wife's prospects were even more promising, for she started in society with a pretty face, good-natured manners, and no existing enmities. Those were the days of *The Literary Souvenir*, *The Keepsake* and *The Gem*; and of their pages the charming Delicia was a congruous and popular heroine.

What was she now? Had the Foulisvilles ever sustained some great material calamity, there would have been an epic dignity about the catastrophe. Had they been adventurers, the excitement of the game would have helped to compensate them for its losses. But they had no such comfort to brighten their wasted old age. They were always Earl and Countess. The boundless expanse of boggy mountain which stretched away from Fontarabia was a never-failing text for the vehement sermons of land-law reformers. The Earl gloated over this tribute to his vanity, while the exertions of a fearless agent to do justice to his lord and show kindness to the tenantry over whom he watched were met with resistance and ingratitude. With all his faults and weaknesses Lord Foulisville appreciated and supported this worthy man, and his brutal murder was not only a grave calamity, but a severe though transitory sorrow to the generally selfish Earl. The family of Foulis was accepted as a representative of old nobility by all who expected to make any profit from the assertion; and Lady Foulisville, when her still comely matronship already counted by decades, continued the prey of all the discredited authors and unexhibited painters, the titles of whose joint works combined 'beauty' and 'aristocracy.' Her

husband, if left to himself, might not have realized the increasing weakness of their public position, but would have gone on stupidly muddling away the diminishing remnants of a fictitious respectability. But the keener wits of the woman appreciated that, somehow, nothing ever turned up quite as she had planned and hoped, and that this augmenting sum total of little defeats had long been very surely, and was now rapidly, leaving her in the lag of that delirious race of life on which she had started with the assured anticipation of a foremost prize.

Delicia's nature, with all its varnish of cleverness, was not a deep one, although it originally exhibited qualities which wear an external likeness to genuine excellence. She was high-spirited and genial, and with the world at first at her feet, as she thought, she believed herself, and was believed to be, decidedly good-natured. As year, however, was added to year, and the pile of disappointment grew bigger and bigger, these superficial graces of character became continually more indistinct, until at last Lady Foulisville's nature hardened into a cold cynicism, veiled to the world by a manner gently apathetic, yet capable, with alternate moods of elation and of despondency, of patient persistence in a set purpose. Still, underneath this repulsive after-growth, the old disposition—provincial and vulgar, no doubt, yet hearty—of the Kilmallock girl lay smothered, but not stifled by the huge load of London affectation. The fire would on rare occasions flicker up, the woman overmaster the peeress, and the brogue return to season language strangely racy in the mouth of a Belgravian countess.

archness, the irresistible affability, the diplomatic versatility of her company manners.

Pedants sometimes get on, almost as well as more brainless fools; for they are unwitting butts, and selfish man enjoys drawing out and laughing in his heart at the pretty woman whom he flatters with his lips and studies like some academic model as she reveals the material loveliness of a face animated by the excitement of her own ridiculous prattle. In this war the man of the world knows that he has the mental and social superiority, and he is therefore moderately charitable in his cruelty. But patronizing is the weapon by which folly and stupidity disarm compassion by paralyzing wit and worth. The creature who feels that he is submitting to being patronized is alike discomforted and humiliated, and in the bitterness of this thought the utmost allurements of personal grace and beauty lose all their attractive power. The victim knows that he went into the tyrant's house a Hercules, and that he has consented to put on the petticoats of a vulgar Omphale and spin at her capricious bidding.

With such drawbacks in their giver, Lady Foulisville's parties were proverbially second-rate. Lions she secured in plenty—British and foreign, of all shapes, colours, and sizes—to roar in her over-gilded, over-furnished, over-lighted, over-draped, over-scented, and over-seated drawing-room; or to batten in her dining-room, where there was too much *foie gras* to leave room for bread and butter, and where the young lady who asked for lemonade was given her choice of Steinwein or Chambertin. But the lions, like the

mistress, were second-rate, and each lion had an acute perception of the defects of his fellow-beasts, and thought himself badly treated at being asked to meet such company. The poor Countess was never happy enough even to attain to the enjoyment of that Bohemian *abandon* which so often enlivens the reunion of inferior lions when their trysting-place is not in Belgravia, and their entertainer unknown to Lodge. She herself was so respectable, and her husband's deficiencies in respectability were so stupid and selfish, that the men whose irregularities are condoned for gifts of amusing never dreamed of crossing her threshold. Her disreputables, and they were many, were all plausible hypocrites, and she was deceived by every one of them.

The affectionate sympathy of an indulgent husband might have brought some comfort to the poor woman in her weary but ineffectual pilgrimage after objects in which his advancement, no less than her own success, was engaged. Her smart speeches, which she imagined were sallies of wit, were intended to compensate for her lord's growing stupidity; and whenever she posed in her most affected attitudes as a beauty, it was to sustain the credit of a husband who possessed so lovely a wife, and not to excite the passions of a lover who longed after so voluptuous a mistress. In fact, it was one of Lady Foulisville's failures that she had just missed being a very good woman. The evil influences to which she had succumbed were innate vanity and an after-growth of selfishness, rather than any actively bad qualities; while her elevation to a social position for which she had been in no way qualified by training

or early surroundings, must be admitted in mitigation of a too harsh judgment. A wise and loving consort would have amended her faults, and developed her merits; but her choice of a husband, while it seemed to be the beginning of her fortune, was in reality the first and greatest of her failures.

Anyone who could have been Quixotic enough to look for a soft or magnanimous side to Lord Foulisville's character might be found knocking at the door of Frohsdorf for a programme of Liberal policy. Soured at the repeated failures of his wife, to which he had himself so largely contributed, he stifled any promptings of gratitude in his mean breast for her perpetual attempts—failure after failure, to be sure, but still courageous attempts—to compass his advancement. He saw that she had failed as a popular beauty, but in appreciating how anxiously she had coveted the popularity of looks, he resented the action with the sullen jealousy of a jaded man of pleasure. When he was, by comparison, tolerably good-tempered, he would expatiate on the dulness of the parties which he was always instigating her to make up; for of learning, arts, or science he had not the slightest smattering, and he looked on the eminent men who occasionally visited his house as so many wandering mountebanks. Now and then, however, his displeasure was coarse and insulting. When the evening was sacred to politics, the most voluble declaimers in Eaton Place were sometimes disappointed young men of advanced opinions, ex-members of the German Parliament of 1848, grizzled by years of exile, and fugitive Presidents of South-American Republics; or, on other occasions,

the representatives and hangers-on of fallen royalty. Then the old intriguer, full of wine and bile, would insist that, for some reason utterly beyond his ken, those detestable Saturdays were planned as conspiracies against one political party or the other, from each of which he still believed himself capable of extorting the long-deferred seat in the House of Lords. So he scowled and muttered in corners, or else betook himself to that supper-table which alone, of all the paraphernalia, was his own department, and would alone, we are free to add, have been, within its own limits, a success if he had not so far outstripped taste in the research of profusion.

Moreover, he could latterly be hardly trusted so to indulge in his own supply of wine as not to leave his wife in a continual apprehension that the guests would perceive that their host was in a condition unfitting him for any decent company. On one unlucky night, as he was leaning against the supper-table persecuting a puzzled dowager with more than questionable anecdotes, a Scotch professor, famous for his profound essay upon 'the distinction between emotional mind and mental emotion in relation to their formative and sympathetic action,' strode up to the Earl and stood before him. The fuddled old man croaked out, 'What do you want, sir?' Whereupon the subtle doctor, who was on the look-out for such a lead, delivered himself of his prepared compliment by asking his lordship whether he belonged to the family of that eminent Scotch printer, Robert Foulis of Glasgow, whose exquisite handiwork is still so prized by bibliomaniacs. The mighty man was too overwhelmed at being thus



coupled with a tradesman even to swear at his clumsy interrogator. He turned his back, and seeking out his wife, assailed her with coarse abuse in the loudest of voices for collecting the scum of the earth to insult him in his own house. The poor lady held her peace, and determined to let the matter drop; but worse was in store for her on that unlucky evening, before her guests had departed.

Much as Lady Foulisville had undergone long before their silver wedding, unfeeling as had been the behaviour of the old reprobate on many former occasions, it did not add to her peace of mind, self-respect, or waning hopes of getting on, to overhear, later in the evening, an impudent Sir Miles Brandreth, her own particular toady, from whom she expected and had hitherto received the most ceremonious deference, laughing over his lordship's outburst and the lady's discomfiture, with young Fiennes and some other pretentious youths, and calling the Earl, in tones which proved the name to be vernacular, 'Boozy Fou.' The shock of this discovery was severe, and it was aggravated by the consciousness of certain transactions between her husband and the offender, which made it expedient for the lady to be deaf to his insults, which were, besides, too well founded in truth to be met by an indignant denial. She had her revenge, however, but in a cowardly way, which punished many innocent sufferers for the offence of a single ill-doer, while it left the offender himself unconvicted of his outrage against social decorum. She announced in the *Morning Post* that her parties had come to an end for the year, and in so doing merely augmented her own

unpopularity by providing for the waifs and strays of society who fed on her ambition and credulity a disagreeable surprise at her inexplicable early closing. Society dealt with this blunder as might have been expected. Professing sympathizers spread in every direction exaggerated stories of ruin and proximate flight to the Continent. Tradesmen's bills poured in with unexampled rapidity, and were quickly followed up by visits from the dealers themselves, who vehemently averred that they had never before really known what it was to want money. Even Lady Foulisville's afternoons were made miserable from having to be constantly finding specious talk to puzzle inquisitive visitors. One audacious woman profited by the catastrophe by contriving very cleverly to insinuate that while other callers were besieging Eaton Place to gratify a selfish curiosity, she was there to comfort and support her kind benefactress. The stroke was a complete success, and the adventuress who came in visitor went out confidante.

## CHAPTER V.

### A CRUEL SON.

THE congenial sympathy of children sweetens many a bitter cup, and it might have cheered the miserable fireside of the soured grandees in Eaton Place. But even this consolation was withheld from them; for although they had an only son, he was born to cause his mother many an hour of bewilderment, and

draw from her eye many a tear, and to extract from his father's lips the repeated curse. The pair were too much alienated in feeling to talk over their common grief, but it seared either heart more deeply, because the movements of that heart were closely veiled from the sight of the other spouse.

All that father and mother had toiled for, each most precious object of either's ambition—rank, power, political position, social success, general adulation—was as the whistling of the wind to Lord Kilcormac. A living Minister was to him of no more value than a dead demagogue. He laughed at a Representative Peerage, and would not pity the peers outside that blessed company, but asked, with a great hoarse laugh, in which market, Smithfield or Covent Garden, people bought English baronies, and what was the quotation. When pressed to play his part at the family drums, he began to calculate the cubic feet of air necessary to maintain healthy respiration; and as he was computing, he used to stride the length and breadth of the drawing-room with his hands buried in his trousers' pockets. Had the youth been palpably touched in the head, these eccentricities might have been pitied and forgiven; but the man had hobbies and tastes such as, in his mother's belief, no lord before him ever thought of, and such as in ten thousand years would never raise a commoner into a lord. His whole soul was wrapt in Entomology. He was president or vice-president of societies without number, and his signature was equally well known to the *Linnean Transactions* and the outer sheet of the *Times* in the dull season. Once the unfilial wretch, when taxed by his mother

for his unnatural behaviour actually retorted that he would gladly exchange his prospective coronet for a remarkable beetle which fed upon the water-lilies growing in one of the minor affluents of the Orinoco.

No doubt, as hostess to all the arts, all the sciences, and all the politics, the Countess of Foulisville ought, if she had been disinterestedly logical, to have had her sympathetic corner for her son's favourite pursuit. But to demand that she should be disinterestedly logical would have been to call upon her to forswear her principles of action and to transmute her nature. On the contrary, the fact of the affinity which existed, with a difference, between the scientific studies to which her son had devoted himself with a single purpose, and those which she made believe to encourage for her own worldly, self-seeking ends, infuriated her against the unremunerative pursuits of her offspring. It had come to her ears that he had more than once said that, of all persons in the world, the one who ought to comfort him in his arduous labours was that parent in whose drawing-room he had first learnt to reverence men of science; and the sarcasm rankled in her soul.

The unnatural young lord did worse than indulge in scientific vagaries,—he married, at Bradford, the daughter of a gentleman who had entertained him during the famous Entomological Congress. Though the heiress of Sir Bryan Driscoll would have scintillated with divine fury if she had ever heard a word whispered against the nobility of her race, she had matured in her innermost soul a Darwinian theory of Foulisville marriage. Her own was, of course, a brilliant and

unique exception ; and granting that, she was persuaded that the coming Foulisville of each generation should only so far study variety in the type of his marriage as it consisted in selecting from equal specimens of the same exalted class. No one, of course, could be greater than a Foulisville in himself ; but greatness might not only condescend to match with other greatnesses, but even be benefited by a condescension which absorbed fresh supplies of its own quality from another source. Lady Foulisville's pet little ambition had been to become mother-in-law of some Lady Clara or Lady Elizabeth Kilcormac ; for, as she said,—by what process of reasoning it might puzzle a prelector of logic to decipher,—‘an earl's eldest son, you know, should marry a duke's or a marquess's daughter, and then she does not drop her Christian name.’ So when Kilcormac took to wife a girl whose social position was as abstractedly provincial as his mother's own, but so infinitely superior in its incidents as to provoke inevitable comparisons to her own disparagement, Lady Foulisville's jealous anger knew no bounds. Her father was what, in provincial towns, is termed a merchant ; so was the father of Lady Kilcormac ; but the transactions, no less than the reputation, of the Bradford magnate were those of a man whose name was known and respected in every market in the world, while the once Mayor of Kilmallock won his knighthood by unscrupulous electioneering, and his means of maintaining that mushroom dignity by over-reaching when young, and hoarding when old.

‘I'm sure I won't be able to stand her ; I'm sure I will hate her,’ Lady Foulisville would whimper, in her

native dialect, and with a no longer stifled brogue. All the while, however, she inwardly comforted her lacerated heart by constructing odious pictures of vulgarity, affectation, and awkwardness, and thus persuading herself that she would after all win society over to her side in reprobating so incongruous an intrusion into the privileged pale. At last Lady Kilcormac came to town, and the gloomy anticipations of her mother-in-law fell far short of the reality, although the shape which the misfortune took was very different from the anticipation. Lady Foulisville's hope and intention had been to force a grand quarrel, put the vulgar provincial openly in the wrong, and appeal to the world; then she intended to be magnanimous, and forgive; but conquer at first she must and would.

But Lady Kilcormac could not, and would not be quarrelled with. She was so gentle and equable, and she had such tact in putting on a convenient obtuseness, that the most envenomed shafts would dissolve and disappear. Besides, the younger lady never would help on a scolding match, either by asking indiscreet questions on Foulis affairs, and so inviting a quarrel, or by blabbing of her own family concerns, and thus provoking a sneer. She was always dressed well, but never so well as to encourage criticism by incurring praise. Assisting her husband as she did in all his preparations and experiments, she never allowed a technical phrase to escape her lips in the presence of her mother-in-law, to whom, since the marriage, the great men of entomology had become impossible lions. The 'h's' were all there, and the dialect absent.

It cannot be denied that in the matter of looks the

daughter-in-law, with all her attractive friendliness of face, could stand no comparison with the reigning peeress, although the difference of years was so much in her favour. But even this advantage was turned by the proud dame into a grievance. Had Lady Kilcormac, so she argued, been the beauty, and she the dowdy, there would have been reason for the social success of the younger rival; but as the facts were so notoriously in the other direction, such mysterious injustice to herself on so wide a scale could only exist as a thing to be repined at, but not to be explained. Even Lady Foulisville did not mould a complaint in words so illogical, but her vague and unformed thoughts were as *nebulæ* which declined to assume any other concrete shape.

Such were the reasons, great and small—some tragical and others trivial—which led Lady Foulisville to yawn in weariness of heart.

## CHAPTER VI.

### A DAUGHTER WANTED.

UNHAPPY Lady Foulisville! Failure as a beauty, and failure as a wit; with a tippling, unkind husband, insect-mad son, and an irreproachable daughter-in-law from Bradford! A daughter or daughters of her own might have done something to redress the wrong. People in the country have a very limited and erroneous idea of the use of daughters. They believe

that daughters delight their parents' hearts by prudent marriages, or, if still unwedded, nurse them in sickness, cheer them in health, read to them when they are sleepy, refresh their memories when they are oblivious, keep the lists, and fill the invitation cards. All these functions are undeniable advantages of the institution; but still, they only represent the surface value of daughters. Many girls are, to a mother who knows how to make an advantageous use of her possessions, alternately foils and stepping-stones. When her daughters are ugly, the comely matron steps forward in well-accentuated contrast; when they are good-looking, the mother possessed of resource and of good sense can easily devise concords of dress which proclaim her kinship, and lure the unwary on to the threadbare compliment of declaring that they had taken her for the eldest sister.

When the girls, however, are pretty, and the mother ugly, inventive genius finds its widest field for constructing brilliant success out of adverse materials. Dress is really far more intended for the decoration of the ugly than of the beautiful. Raiment on the person of the beauty only sets off nature, with considerable chances of its having a directly contrary effect. In fact, the proof is absolutely mathematical that, granting the necessary existence of the profession of dressmaker, women cannot be dressed proportionately to their natural beauty.

A dressmaker works to live. Her or his livelihood depends on general popularity; but such popularity cannot be general without being levelling in its action, delicate levelling down with the lovely, and more



ostentatious levelling up with the ugly. Such policy alike reduces to a minimum the friction of the purchaser's vanity, as well as the expenditure of thought on the part of the purveyor, and raises to a maximum that outlay on 'dry goods' (as the Americans call them) on which a principal part of the dressmaker's profits depends. These have not even to undertake the puny labour of invention, floated as they are by the crudely daubed engravings in the dress journals from Paris, over which the pure daughters of English manor-houses and parsonages gloat, little weening that they are probably admiring the effigies of women whose fame for viciousness is European.

Shortly, then, and plainly, 'Fashions,' so called, are only the introduction of wholesale principles into retail trade. As long as each fashion lasts, the dressmaker's invention is taxed to the least possible degree; and the sooner and more completely it is changed, the more brisk is her market in fresh work and in fresh material. The willingly blind fine ladies hurry to rid themselves of their still new dresses of the last ordering—so sweet a few days before, and so horrid now—and never discover how they are offering their persons and their husbands' purses a sacrifice for the benefit of trade. With some of them it is possible that the money might otherwise have been worse spent, than in filtering in notable proportions into the honest homes of industrious poverty. Only let things be known in their right aspects, and for arbitress of taste let the fine lady write herself purveyor of sustenance to needy industry.

These considerations equally apply in their com-

mercial aspects to the clothing of the ugly woman ; but, speaking artistically, dress with her should transmute and glorify, as it cannot do upon a more lovely body. It discovers for ugliness its place in the economy of things, as a link in that universal order and harmony in which its own dissight is swallowed up. The ugly mother, modestly, decorously, but richly dressed, constantly ranging herself by her lovely daughters, is a sublime spectacle. If she is clever, tactical, and agreeable, she may convert her deficiency in looks into a positive gain by the assurance which her demeanour expresses that she is not vain enough to risk a competition in which age ought not to expect to win honour. The young men of that superior class who dance, indeed, but do not confine themselves to dancing—Foreign Office clerks, with something of the diplomatic swing ; officers who intend some day to hold Staff appointments at the Horse Guards ; members who are rising into being rising men ; eldest sons who have gone into the History School ; well-born foreigners come over for the season,—all these social elements can only be caught and kept in leading-strings by the combination of daughter and mother. The girl alone is too unsubstantial, and the mother by herself too antique. With a well-regulated partnership, the mother's established reputation for beauty will often be accepted as evidence of a passably looking daughter's attractiveness. On the other hand, if the mother be ugly and wise, the child may secure a husband on the fancied inheritance of the parent's mental qualities.

Upon such obvious material considerations as the

difficulty which the daughterless matron must always experience in forcing her way into crowded ball-rooms we need not dwell. With daughters, even Lady Foulisville might have done something to retrieve herself, for at a ball the personality of the mistress of the house is far less important than at a party, and provided that her smile is amiable and her eye keen for the provincials who expect to have their hands shaken, she never need say more than 'How d'ye do?' Pedantry and patronising are alike difficult in assemblies where to spin round like teetotums, and to be ranged like jam-pots against the wall, are the respective amusements of the two distinctive classes—classes created by the eternal distinction of youth and age—which make up delighted ball-goers.

Lady Foulisville would, if better advised, have got hold of a good list, and taken society by storm with a successive couple of balls; but, with her proclivity for failure, she began with her dreary parties. As she started, so she continued with her drums, till these had got a bad name, before attempting a ball, and naturally she found no one then to help her in making it up, and very few to come to it. She tried, as it was, three balls in different years, and then abandoned the experiment, out of pocket and bitter against Society. Had she had daughters, she might have persevered in ball-giving, and at last possibly won success. People always respect the practical, and a ball-giving mother of daughters is credited with meaning business. With daughters, too, the handsome Delicia would have won a continuous entry to other people's balls, which, season after season, she failed to obtain. Her *début*

was before the days of frisky matrons ; and no one in London ever cared to know whether the Irishwoman of obscure antecedents could or would dance. Yet in Dublin Miss Driscoll had been a very popular partner even at the Castle Balls, and with the fastidious officers of that exclusive age.

## CHAPTER VII.

### CONSOLATION.

‘DEAREST Lady Foulisville, you are very tired. Poor, poor dear!’ murmured, in response to the yawn, a voice which was low, clear, and artificially gentle, but so measured and uninflected as to seem rather to proceed from some instrument than from a human mouth. The speaker was a lady of middle height and moderate plumpness, with a colourless face, handsome in the contour of the brow, and with fine, though hard, grey eyes, but coarse and heavy in the lower part, which spread out at the jaws, like the old caricatures which so annoyed Louis Philippe by figuring him as a pear.

This outburst of sympathy was clearly expected, and yet it set Lady Foulisville off into an hysterical cry.

‘Yes, yes, dear Robbins, I am very tired—very tired indeed—but I am unhappy still more ; solitary, baffled, disappointed,—and how have I deserved it? No husband, no son ; left quite alone! Splendid misery! Nobody cares for me now that I am an old woman ; and I’m sure I’ve slaved for the world all my days.’

‘Only me, dearest—me that care for you above all the world,’ was the answer dropped, as if in a mum-

ble not meant to be overheard, by the lady named 'Robbins.'

Miss Robbins, as politeness constrains us to call her, had gradually won her way into Lady Foulisville's home and heart.

Originally one of the many literary ladies who successively thronged the Saturday receptions, needy, ambitious, and crafty, she early mastered the details of the Countess's second and more artificial character, while quite unconscious of the Delicia Driscoll who lay at the bottom, smothered, yet not dead. She submitted to be patronized, and she flattered in return. The rest of her story only repeats once more the commonest of histories. She it was who paid that well-timed visit to the Countess in her great social trouble. The grand but desolate woman was taken in by the stagy fulsomeness of her flatterer. First she asked her on a visit to Eaton Place, and then, not without much brutality from Lord Foulisville, shown both to Delicia and to Miss Robbins—by which the bully only made the sympathy of the parasite more precious to his solitary wife—succeeded in converting her friend's tenancy at will of her room into a perpetual lease. Once safely installed, the adroit dame took the measure of the lord's foot, and by little attentions, never too obtrusively rendered, gradually converted his sulky toleration into a recognised acceptance of her presence as a person who might be useful to him, without expecting him in return to put himself out of the way on her behalf.

'My room, my knife, and my fork are all I expect,' she used to repeat.

'Oh, how I wish I had a daughter!' continued Lady Foulisville, as if speaking to herself, but yet anticipating Robbins's commentary.

'Providence disposes all things for the best,' sententially responded the satellite, who could not quite make out what this sudden loosening of the bitter waters portended, and had accordingly to talk in proverbs.

'Oh, yes, very likely; but I wish I *had* a daughter. It is so lonely. I *will* have a daughter!' shrieked Delicia, suddenly jumping up, and slapping herself as only an excited Irishwoman could think of doing in the sobering air of Eaton Place.

Miss Robbins, who was thoroughly English, and very decorous in her social demeanour, found her breath fairly taken away by what was to her an unprecedented and inexplicable outburst on her friend's part. Those who had known Lady Foulisville longer, had generally found cause to recollect that the Milesian blood occasionally boiled over as for a few moments the genuine Delicia Driscoll reappeared. But Miss Robbins's acquaintance was of only about three years' standing, and the extreme intimacy much shorter, and it happened that one of these comet-like visits of the old nature had never recurred in her presence. She fancied she had keys to all the chambers of her friend's mind, and she suddenly discovered that there was one closet which she could not open, nor measure its capacity. It was not, therefore, wonderful that she was thoroughly taken aback when she found, as she thought, the clue of her policy snapping in her hand. Had she really known her 'beloved Delicia,' as she

was wont periodically, but not too often, to call the Countess, she would have been aware that these outbursts, judiciously treated, were the most harmless and evanescent exhibitions possible, as a light and sneering laugh was enough to drive Lady Foulisville back upon her cold and selfish second nature. Instead of acting with this calm wisdom, the usually cautious Robbins hazarded an inquiry, in a tone in which curiosity and concern were so strongly mingled as to bring home to the now roused Countess the suspicion that she must have said something very remarkable to have provoked an approach to criticism from the woman who had never before ventured on anything but cat-like acquiescence,—

‘But, dearest, dear Delicia, how will you get a daughter?—I really do not quite understand you.’

This inopportune appeal, jerked at Lady Foulisville in the acme of her wild fit, led to a very unexpected reply.

‘Sure, and how am I to get a daughter? As if I hadn’t got a daughter already—my dear son’s wife, whom I treat like a brute baste!’

Robbins was more than staggered. Lady Kilcormac coming in would be Miss Robbins going out, for both the son and his wife distrusted, dreaded, and detested the favourite; and she knew that they did so. She rapidly gathered up her wandering wits, and said with deliberation:

‘But, my dear Lady Foulisville, consider the liabilities—the lady who is looking forward to take your place.’

These words, as she perceived at once, had all the

mischievous effect which their author intended. Had she been contented with this easy victory, it would in the future have been well for her, while the events which came crowding in upon the family of Foulis never would have taken place in the strange sequence of their actual fulfilment. But Miss Robbins's evil genius prompted her to follow up her advantage by advancing a counter-suggestion, with which she fancied that Lady Foulisville's jealous nature never would close, while her offering it would create in her own behalf, and on her friend's mind, the impression of disinterested devotedness to the comfort of one whose home was so cheerless.

'I wonder,' said she, after a little pause, 'that you have never thought of adopting some young lady. It is, you know, such an advantage to anybody, however highly placed and distinguished, however honoured and beloved, to be a chaperon. Society is so large, you know. At some houses, at some of the best, the most fashionable houses, they grudge asking any but the dancers. I have always said that it was very bad taste and improper, but they are not likely to listen to an old-fashioned body like me; and it would be too shocking, dear Delicia, if you found yourself shut out of their houses, because you are not a chaperon.'

Well did the hypocrite know that Lady Foulisville was already shut out; but, with all her cunning, she had not grasped how deeply the iron of that exclusion had entered into the lonely woman's soul, because she did not appreciate how radical the exclusion was. Her mistake arose from her having allowed herself to be too much dazzled by the second-rate splendours of



Eaton Place. She had never been in any really first-rate house, and as her own vulgar nature never resented patronage, she had been slow to enter into the feelings of other guests, or to realize that the grand lady who gave those brilliant receptions and sumptuous suppers was all the time being laughed at by the herd which she had driven into her pound. In fact, in the earlier days of her acquaintance that supper was of much material importance to the adventuress, and her thankfulness at getting the sustenance overmastered her powers of general observation. So, while she gradually appreciated her patroness's failure as a material or statistical fact, she looked on the Countess of Foulisville rather as a defeated leader than as an unacknowledged pretender to leadership. In blundering out those words she had touched a chord of which she did not suspect the existence.

'True, Robbins, every word of what you say. I have long, very long felt, long indeed before I ever knew you, that society was not doing me justice, because I had nobody to take out—no girls for the mothers to scheme after and the men to spoon. This shan't be so. I'll follow your advice, and get my girl, —by the holy poker I will!' again slapping herself; 'and my Lady Kilcormac will see that it's long she'll be waiting to step into my shoes. She won't be dancing over my grave in a jiffy, I'll warrant.'

Again Delicia Driscoll lived, and Robbins inwardly shuddered; for though the girl unnamed was not a known and open foe, as the Kilcormacs had declared themselves to be, yet she was certain to be in the present a rival, and in the future possibly a

supplanter. The parasite's only resource, if her friend—who must, she thought, have gone rather mad—further pressed the notion, would be to suggest the stupidest and most pliable creature she could think of.

She was not long kept from giving shape to her idea, for the lady, in whom the old nature kept rising higher and higher, turned quickly on her with :

‘ Well, now, who’s the girl to be ? Why d’ye stand gaping and jabbering like a big fool, and won’t tell me the girl ? ’

‘ What do you say, dear Delicia, to Mary Burton ? ’

‘ Mary Burton ! Why, she’s as tall as Goliath, and as stupid as your grandmother. She’d be grinning like a born idiot over my head, and making all the young men jeer at her ape’s tricks. ’

‘ Why not, then, Isabella Travis ? ’

‘ Pert little shrimp ! Why, my dear Robbins, your brain is addled to-day ; you do propose such horrid girls. I have it, though ; I know the girl—Meriel Foulis shall come to me. ’

‘ But would her mother ever consent ? All that you have so often told me of her convinces me what a particular and independent dame she is ; and I have heard you say, dearest, that Lord Foulisville never could get on with his brother. ’

‘ We can only see. ’

## CHAPTER VIII.

## ADOPTION.

MISS ROBBINS little knew that she had unwittingly set the match to a train long laid in the mind of Lady Foulisville, whose confidential friend she fancied herself, while she was all the time her confidante only. Her vanity had blinded her to the obvious fact that she had been raised to her present dignity by circumstances in which her own merits might have done little for her, had it not been for the accident of Sir Miles Brandreth's disgrace. So far, however, as Lady Foulisville did fondle her, this kindness—superficial and selfish as it might be—ought to have put her more upon her guard, proceeding as it did from the flickering, intermittent, but never quite extinguished craving after maternity, as the Countess understood maternity to be—namely, patronizing *in excelsis*.

Patronizing was the besetting sin of this vain Irish-woman. The seeds of it were born in her, but they might never have sprouted had not she climbed that pinnacle of what, with all her failures, was to the daughter of the Kilmallock tradesman a remarkable elevation of worldly greatness, and one for which she was quite untrained. The world appeared to her as the one great thing which, in her magnificence, she was bound in the natural order of things to patronize as an entirety. But the world was complex, and of its many elements each was patient of its own kind of subsidiary patronage.

A husband, who was not Foulisville, or else a child, who was not Kilcormac, would, she often dreamed, have been a being which she could have patronized with some additional tenderness for the object of that process. Had she been the childless wife of an affectionate husband, he would have absorbed all her available stock of domestic patronizing, and been to her child as well as spouse. But tied as she was to the sot, still more selfish than herself, whom she had taken as her lord because he was 'My lord'; mother of a son whom she could not understand nor appreciate, and against whose wife she was unreasonably and therefore irreconcilably prejudiced, and destitute of any daughter, she could only find such a makeshift as the parasite, Miss Robbins, on whom to bestow something of those attentions which she mistook for a mother's love.

Thus dimly, and in the distance, the unsubstantial phantom of an adopted daughter would more and more often float through the solitary Delicia's visions of the night. In the day-time, too, when she saw the tables of her friends strewn with big cards inviting Lady this, and Mrs. that, with daughter or daughters, to meet Highnesses Imperial, Royal, and Serene, at houses which were never open to her, and one perchance might say that she had got leave to bring a niece instead of a child, the thought of her utter loneliness would rise before the Countess with black distinctness. Still she never mustered courage nor found the opportunity to give utterance to the project till upon this memorable afternoon, when Robbins, like the Eastern fisherman, unknowingly opened the chest

from which the genie rose a vapour and hardened into a monstrous giant.

There was, in fact, a special cause at work which had notably contributed both to the Countess's lassitude and to the excitement into which she worked herself.

A slight to which she had been subjected a few days previously had raised the flame of her discontent to a white heat, and in no little degree contributed to the collapse under which she was suffering. No one who claims to be fashionable can have so soon forgotten the thrill of pleased excitement which ran through English society a few years ago, when the telegraph flashed the news that the Micado of Japan and his imperial spouse were actually upon their road to learn their lessons of civilized enjoyment in the cities of the western World.

At the same time some other distinguished personages, who were mere European Christians—the Palatine of the Rhine, the King and Queen of Yvetot, and the hereditary Prince of Neustria—found their way to England only to be subjected to the painful discovery that in competition with the tawny Asiatics they were only fit to be reserved as consolation prizes for the failures and *parvenus* of fashionable society.

These had been invited to Eaton Place, where they were fêted and petted by Lady Foulisville, with smiles on her face and envy at her heart at the unaccountable unwillingness of those who conducted the Micado to let him honour her reception with his august presence. At last the general furore reached a climax. The young Duke of Merioneth (nephew of the Earl's in-

tended father-in-law, who only left daughters) and his spritely bride, tired of the staid, old family house in Hamilton Place, had bought and thrown together the two most eligible lots in the newly laid-out Plantagenet Road. There they constructed a gorgeous palace, under the personal inspection of M. Viollet le Duc, who had been, with much difficulty, coaxed over from Paris to carry out a masterpiece of architectural pomp. Granite, brick, and terra cotta, cunningly counterchanged, adorned the exterior—for carved stone was eschewed in dread of London smoke. Inside, the carpets were Cashmere shawls, and the curtains were the work of the nimble needles of the 'Lady Associates of Noble Embroidery'—a society which the Duchess had honoured by becoming its patroness: a meritorious enterprise, and one which proved a tolerable financial success to its shareholders, although Philistine purchasers would grudgingly compare the cost of these high art productions of industrious gentlewomen with the cost of similar articles purveyed by vulgar shopkeepers. The apartments were designed and fitted so as to reproduce the history of those great races of Northmen and Franks, from whom the Longspees exultingly traced their descent. There was the Vikings' Hall, the Merovingian Staircase, lined with *fauteuils de Dagobert*, the Carolingian Gallery, arcaded in imitation of the Dom at Aachen, the Antechamber of Rollo, the Banqueting-room of Francis I., and the Saloon of Louis the Great. The Duchess was a M'Corquodale, so the Armoury of the Clans was also paraded in spite of the incongruity. All these spacious apartments led up to a mysterious decagonal sanctum

of small capacity, windowless, and closed in the daytime, but not unventilated; while at night lamps of translucent onyx half revealed panels of Russian niello, separated by malachite pilasters, encrusted with clusters of carnelian and amethystine fruit. Troublesome critics inquired what this Muscovite extravagance had to do with Franks and Northmen; but their curiosity was satisfied by a literary Queen's Counsel, who reminded them that the founder of the Hodgkinsons' fortunes had been in the Russian trade.

The completion of this extravagant pile and the visit of the Micado happened to coincide, so the housewarming was to be a fête—a ball and more than a ball—given in his especial honour, but, at the same time, intended to sweep in the Yvetots and the Palatine; all the royalties, in fact, but his Highness of Neustria. He too would have been included, but the etiquettes of London, and the results of a foolish speculation at Newmarket, proved so irksome to him that he had taken a convenient occasion to fly in the dead of the night to Paris, after posting a bundle of tradesmen's bills to his banker's, who smiled grimly, and tore them up.

The fête was not to be one of those vulgar gatherings for which the visiting-book is handed over to the domestic secretary, and cards fly abroad by the hundred. The list for this party was picked and sifted, and signified the brevet, not of the world, but of the Merioneths, whose claim to pass their censorship upon their equals was undisputed in presence of the calm assurance with which they ignored the possibility of any one disputing their right.

Society, in a spasm of selfish curiosity, decided that in respect of the entertainment, exceptional as this one was to be, pride could have no place. Invitations might be begged for, fought for, scrambled for, intrigued for. The form of these invitations denoted the unusual character of the event, for they were no common cards, but real folded notes, headed with a charming woodcut of Barmouth House, while they stated that the Duke and Duchess of Merioneth would esteem it a high favour if so-and-so would assist them to entertain His Majesty the Micado and his august spouse, with a postscript reciting the other royalties who were expected.

The matrons whom the graceful fiction of the entertainers had associated with them in the honours of the feast, were treated with distinguished honour, not to say petted and spoiled. Each found her own seat allotted to her, with the intimation that she might exchange as she pleased, for there was room for every chaperon. Each also was made happy with a bouquet of rarest orchids, contained in a holder of silver filigree; while the young ladies had to be content with tuberoses and stephanotis, encased in china. Consummate tact was shown in the distribution of the few selected old maids, some being ranked as brevet matrons, and others treated as still upon the roll of young ladies.

The greatest of the great were at the show, and came in time, and not a relation of the Longspees, however unobtrusive, was forgotten, only excepting those with whom the young couple had quarrelled. His scared wife hung on the arm of Sir Plumley Tregelles, the fortunate contractor; and Dick Reynolds,



the popular enactor of burlesque, elbowed the peerage. Only Lord and Lady Foulisville were overlooked, uninvited, absent, although they and the Merioneths left reciprocal cards upon each other, and, as the Countess spitefully recollected, she had invited both to her recent royal party. The truth was that the Duke, early left an orphan, had been tended with a mother's care by his cousin, several years his senior, Lady Dorinda, then happily married to a Suffolk squire of unimpeachable character, country tastes, and, counting in his wife's dower, of sufficient income. In her confidences the good lady had often declared herself fortunate at having escaped a degrading alliance with the profligate Foulisville; so the boy imbibed a deep prejudice against the worthless peer, which he now found an easy means of gratifying. But to Lady Foulisville the rudeness was inexplicable. Conscious as she was, when she went to the altar, of the disreputable character of her husband's bachelor life, the more scandalous features of the Merioneth engagement had never been revealed to the exulting Delicia. All she knew was that Lady Dorinda had nearly forestalled her in her coronet. So she set down her exclusion from Barmouth House to that mysterious conspiracy against her social position, which, in her angry craze, she had begun to imagine had its ramifications in every direction, and was entered into by all who called themselves her friends.

## CHAPTER IX.

## THE DECISION.

It might have been imagined that Lady Foulisville's rejection from Barmouth House would have opened Miss Robbins's eyes to the ambiguous social standing of her patroness. It did shake her belief for a short time. But her suspicions were dissipated as she fell back upon the bitterness of partisanship, to which she was incited by the way in which the Countess received the humiliation. Lady Foulisville had never yet bestowed her whole confidence upon her new intimate, and pride now largely contributed to govern her anger. So, instead of indulging in lamentations over her disappointment, she gave unbridled license to expressions of contempt at the wicked lavishness of the preposterous revel, for which, in truth, there was ample foundation.

There was nothing in all this to make Miss Robbins suspect any growing coldness; for the condescending attentions of her 'own Delicia' were still under the control of the pride and vanity of the giver, and the patroness had never yet thought it expedient to open to her thrall the cupboards in which the Foulis skeletons were kept. To say the truth, Miss Robbins was sometimes in the habit of just a little overdoing it. The Countess never consciously perceived this mistake, but she was often secretly oppressed and driven back upon herself, when a more natural demeanour would have lured her forward. Robbins had

indeed, often heard how Lord Foulisville's scampish brother had been killed soon after his marriage with an English heiress. She also knew that his widow was quietly bringing up their posthumous daughter upon her own acres in an English county; still she had never thought of ferreting out Lady Foulisville's feelings about relations whom she very seldom saw and only occasionally mentioned. Miss Robbins was sufficiently curious whenever her own interests were at stake, but it had never crossed her mind to think that any information about those buried connections would be of value. On her principle, accordingly, of keeping her memory open and strong for everything which would help her by discarding all which seemed useless lumber, she allowed the existence of Mrs. Foulis and her child to remain, as far as she was concerned, but barren facts. So the Countess's violent new mood, and the determination, which appeared as strange as it was sudden and unexpected, to adopt the girl, made the schemer feel like one suddenly called upon to fight in the dark against an unknown foe. Matters had been bad enough on the previous evening, but the situation had grown ten times more perilous when, upon the following morning, Robbins found that the Countess had not, as she had hoped, slept off a passing fancy, but was, on the contrary, more bent than ever upon proposing to her sister-in-law to lend her daughter to her for some indefinite time.

Almost before the companion had time to ask Lady Foulisville how she had slept, she was called on to assent to the advantage which it would be to the

suddenly beloved niece, that, under the chaperonage of her aunt, she might enjoy a fuller measure of gay society than her mother—confirmed rustic as she was—had made herself competent to provide. Bitterly did Robbins then recollect how, in the earliest days of her acquaintanceship in Eaton Place, at a very dull drum, Lady Foulisville had asked her to look after her sister-in-law's supper, as she was only in town for a day or two. It was as a nightmare now to her to think that just because she fancied that Mrs. Foulis must be heavy in hand, as being, by the Countess's description, a confirmed rustic, that the rebellious delegate had said as little as she could to her charge, and rid herself as fast as possible of an unwelcome encumbrance. Had she but known then what was in store, she could have cringed, she could have pumped, she could have wheedled, she could have taken possession. Vainly she sought comfort in reasoning that at that time she was young to the house and its ways, and that her blunder came of inexperience—not stupidity. At a later period of her toadyship, so unusual an attention shown by the Countess to an infrequent visitor would have aroused her suspicions, and she would have acted with due discrimination. Still, all these thoughts were poor consolation; she had had her chance, and had lost it. She had done worse than lose it, for she had misused it. Her conscience told her that she had been rude to Mrs. Foulis, and she felt sure that the sister-in-law would not have forgotten her impertinence, and had probably gone on hating her for it. Such behaviour to the family's nearest relation was, she now felt, intolerable.

All the guidance which was left to her was the conviction to which her self-interest prompted her, that Meriel Foulis, or any other girl, if an inmate of the Foulisville family, must be her rival, and ought by any means to be kept away. Her first argument in opposition to the project was well conceived.

‘I am sure, my dearest Delicia, that I should most heartily rejoice at any change which would give you additional pleasure; but are you *quite* sure how dear Lord Foulisville might take it? He is, you know, not *quite* so young or so strong as he was, and elderly gentlemen *are* apt sometimes to be a little particular, and don’t like to be put out of their usual ways; and Lord Foulisville is occasionally—forgive me for saying anything so shocking to you—sometimes a *little* trying.’

If the whole incident had been to Robbins a surprise, what she got as her answer was the climax of her astonishment.

‘Make yourself easy, my dear; I’ve settled all that. I’ve been to Lord F., and told him all, and he says he thoroughly approves. He’d seen little of, and never done what he wanted for, his poor brother Jack, scapegrace as he was,—you know, he always called him ‘Jack, though he was Augustus; so now he would be glad to make it up to the poor fellow by doing something kind to his daughter.’

This was quite true; the one kindly corner in Lord Foulisville’s heart had been reserved for the brother who was so little deserving of any affection, and who soon quarrelled with his benefactor; and on his dreadfully sudden death, Lord Foulisville, who had

shortly before refused to see him, felt that he ought to do something; but he could not think what. At that time, however, the Earl himself was much troubled with money difficulties, and in the months which elapsed between Jack's death and Meriel's birth, he had found vexations enough of his own to bother his brain, and to efface the image of Jack; so that he had, in fact, never connected Mrs. Foulis's child with his affectionate but transitory resolve.

His former feelings had not, however, escaped his wife's observation; so she judiciously began the conversation by some retrospective sentimentality, which very much astonished the Earl, over poor Jack, and so led him round to her point. Besides his love for his brother, Lord Foulisville, as an Irishman, was very clannish, and, as the head of the House of Foulis, especially penetrated with the greatness and the wrongs of his distinguished race. So he gave that ready permission to his wife to take out Meriel Foulis, over which he might have demurred had she suggested inviting one of the Ladies de Bohun, or even, under other circumstances, a Longespee.

Still Robbins did produce some effect, as she convinced Lady Foulisville that it would be more prudent, in the interests of her own scheme, not to plunge at once into what would have been a virtual offer of life-adoption hazarded to a young person of whose character and affections she knew so little. The judicious plan would be simply to begin by inviting her niece to pay a long but terminable visit to Fontarabia, whither the family intended to go at the close of the season. They had been there in the preceding sum-

mer, after an absence of two or three years, and had taken Miss Robbins with them ; so she felt that she would have the advantage of finding herself at home in a place where the young visitor would be a perfect stranger.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE CHILD HEIRESS.

AT this point we must again interrupt the consecutive current of our narrative, and go back to the days when our sovereigns were kings. We shall traverse our ground as quickly as we can ; but, without the retrospect which we shall take, it would be impossible to appreciate the respective positions of two sisters-in-law who had hitherto been living so far apart, and whose respective lives seemed to have taken very widely differing departures.

We shall have to remove the scene of our story awhile from Eaton Place and the purple mountains of Ballybanaghermore, and invite all who are interested in this simple narrative to accompany us to a country house pleasantly seated among the rolling meadows and woody hedgerows of a South Midland county in England.

The last Squire Curteis, of Yaxley, was master of an imperturbable temper, and singularly free from either ambition or jealousy. When we add to these merits that he had good health, a stately, florid presence, an unfailing appetite, and a ringing, cheery voice, while

he shook hands all round with a grip which made delicate fingers tingle, rode well to hounds, and kept up that open-door hospitality which really costs the man of limited avocations very little in money or trouble, because it is so evenly continuous, we have said enough to explain why it came about that he was in his day the best good fellow and most popular country gentleman of half a county. None of his neighbours reasoned out the fact that he was, at bottom, sluggish in intellect and weak of purpose; for, as he never had a lawsuit, and possessed a property which gave him enough to live on, with his simple tastes and natural antipathy to vicious indulgences, the more feeble side of his nature was never exposed to the temptations from which his mental powers might not have saved a differently constituted physique. Like other weak men, too, he was obstinate, and that defect passed for consistency in public life among those who thought as he did.

Besides, the Squire shone by comparison with the two preceding generations of the family of Curteis, of whom alone the neighbourhood had ever heard. His grandfather was a prosperous Turkey merchant, who invested his money in land, and by a polite marriage with a lady in not quite her first youth, daughter of the great Earl who was then Lord-Lieutenant of the county, took immediate brevet rank among the notables of his shire. But he was a hard man, who strove to conceal a deficient pedigree by a superabundance of haughtiness, and he was appreciated accordingly in social life by the squires, to whom, on the contrary, the daughter of the Lord-Lieutenant was the object of



a legitimate respect, which they balanced by politely detesting her husband.

The only son of the couple was a nonentity, who was not unpopular only because no one thought at all about him. His biography may be summed up in three monosyllables—Gout and Port Wine; Dawdle and Dress described his wife, and the only evidence that either had ever lived was the survival of sons and daughters, two of the former making their way to, and dying in, India, and three girls marrying well, as the neighbours described their choice in husbands, without knowing much of the matter, and caring less. By the side of these forefathers, the eldest son, the dear old Squire, shone in radiant contrast. The essential sluggishness of his character and the coldness of his temperament were shown in what a partial world thought the caution, but which was really the stupidity, with which he passed by beauty after beauty, fortune after fortune, great connection after great connection, sweet *ingénue* after sweet *ingénue*—one more ready than another to dare for him the troubles of housekeeping and the infliction of a silly and jealous maiden sister, in order to take the domestic reins at Yaxley.

At last, in later middle age, he stumbled into a complication of polite sentences, which, to his surprise, were taken as a proposal by a girl, estimable, no doubt, and thoroughly respectable in her connections, but far gone in consumption. He was at first unable to see the force of his expressions, but as the lady's brother, a pert officer of Militia, said that no man of honour could have two opinions about them, Mr. Curtais

capitulated, and went to church. His wife's brief married life closed within two or three years after the birth of an only daughter. Strange as it may seem, with a marriage so contracted, the poor lady's death, in no long time afterwards, was the cause of bringing down to the grave the colossal frame of her widower, in sheer surprise and blank despair at a catastrophe to the imminence of which he, of all the world, had alone been blind. Married at first by accident, his good nature and the force of habit—always so strong with him—had made him sincerely love the poor, pale, querulous invalid who was fading away by his fireside. At the last he was carried off by an illness which, although rapid, left him time to provide both for the custody of the person of his child and for the settlement of the property to which she succeeded.

For guardians he made, in the first place, the worst but the most obvious selection which it was in his power to do, by taking the only near relation then alive, with whom he had been on terms of constant intimacy, his maiden sister, Miss Harriett Curteis, a shrivelled, elderly damsel, who had been the house-keeper of his bachelor life and his wife's companion. The theoretic primness of this lady's sentiments and the suspicious jealousy with which she exacted from high and low the deference due to her distinguished position, oddly contrasted with girlish extravagance of dress, unbridled incontinence of tongue, and an insatiable spirit of flirtation. These qualities impelled her, in whatever company or under whatever circumstances she might find herself, to seize hold of and detain any unfortunate man who might be weak or

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ignorant enough to venture within sound of her piping call. Her own character, as she presented it, was the embodied 'whole duty of man;' but the stranger on whom she had cast her spell must have gone off with the suspicion that he had strayed into a land where man knew not honestly, nor more than one woman virtue.

Once upon a time, the Bishop had, upon his visitation, unwarily accepted the old Squire's hospitable invitation to meet his clergy at luncheon at Yaxley, instead of risking the very indifferent fare which the village inn could offer. There was much at that time to trouble serious minds, and the accomplished prelate had, with great painfulness, prepared a confidential word in season to offer on so propitious an occasion to his brethren, in supplement of his more formal charge. Mr. Curteis was not yet married; so, of course, the chief guest had to give his arm to Miss Harriett, and sit next to her. It was at the period of Queen Caroline's trial; and the spinster chose that scandalous event as the theme with which to entertain right-reverend ears. The Bishop at all times hated scandal, and, courteous as he was, he was no lady's man, and quite unversed in the fine art of badinage over risky ground. Above all, he felt how incongruous the topic was to what he had said and was going to say. Still Miss Harriett, as his hostess, was for the moment his commanding officer. He would be troubled with a short cough, and pull out his handkerchief, he would fidget on his seat, or deprecatorily creak the leg of his chair, and still the vivacious virgin was ready with some fresh inquiry as to his view of the credibility of the evidence, the probabilities of such shameless

behaviour on the part of a lady of such exalted birth, the sincerity of Mr. Brougham, the supposed feelings and motives of the King, the effect which the proceedings might have on public morality and loyalty, and twenty similar demands, in a low, shrill voice, which interrupted all other conversation.

His lordship could see the clergy swallowing smiles and looking at each other, and he felt more and more keenly that this was not the most wholesome after-piece to his charge. He not only dreaded that the Queen's trial might edge out the remembrance of his monitions from the ingenuous minds of the assembled flock, but he felt that the time was slipping away for his own intended supplement. So he grew scarlet in striving to parry the questions, and the more he parried the more Miss Harriett pressed, until, some time after his carriage had been announced, a glance at his watch showed that he would be infallibly late at the Lord-Lieutenant's, fifteen miles off, where a large party of the principal people of the county had been asked to meet him. All that was left to him was to jump up, and very hastily take leave of the clergy in words quite different from those which he had been meditating, chiefly consisting, as they did, in some excuses which everybody appreciated, as a flimsily veiled reference to the Duchess's known ill-temper when her company kept her exalted self waiting for dinner.

Lucy Curteis's other guardian was the Squire's second cousin and friend, Mr. Robert Featherston, known all round the country as Bob Featherston. We cannot better describe him than by saying that he

was a younger counterpart of the Squire himself, born in a later generation. The only difference was that Mr. Featherston had an occasional tang in his temper. Besides, he was not so rich a man ; and his residence, Warbury Lodge, situated a few miles off, on the outskirts of the principal town of those parts, was a villa compared with Yaxley. Between the older and the younger man there was deep and genuine, though undemonstrative, English affection ; and he received his share of the charge of the young treasure as if she were a gift from heaven. To be sure, if there was one person whom he detested more than another, it was that 'old cat,' Miss Harriett ; but he swallowed even this aversion in view of his new responsibilities. He was also trustee of the property, in concert with the family lawyer, Mr. Swettenham ; but the Squire indicated that in this he desired his professional adviser to have the ruling voice, although Featherston's name was placed first. The property, as Mr. Swettenham was wont to boast, was 'strictly tied up,' although he declined to explain that it was so by the ordinary settlement of a life interest to the young lady and to her husband, with remainder to their son or sons, if any, and failing them, to the daughters in succession.

Miss Harriett, from her thorough incompetency and distaste for the office of an educator, proved to be a less mischievous one than if she had been, with the same intellect, just a little more conscientious and less fussy. In plain English, she left her charge to run wild ; and Lucy Curteis, contrary to what might have been expected in a child so handled, proved to be not so very bad a governess to herself. She had her

father's robust constitution and equable temper ; and running about, as she did, in all weathers, she was the picture of rustic health ; and not so uncomely either with her person of medium height and plumpness ; her oval face, slightly embrowned and ruddy withal ; mobile mouth, from which issued a voice which could lead the hymn on Sunday and halloo the dogs on Monday with the same clear, incisive ring ; full eyes of a light brown hue, which sparkled under eyebrows clearly marked, without being thick ; and clustering hair unstained by any trace of red. She was a terrible slattern, and the expostulatory 'Oh, Miss Lucy !' 'What a mess for a young lady to come home in !' 'How could you get your new frock so torn, Miss Lucy ?' and similar objurgations, were daily heard, as the merry child would bounce home, her inseparable dog bounding by her side, after a cheery scramble through some half-dozen hedges, and, very likely, a quiet climb up an easy tree or two.

These hours of independence and muscular exertion were Lucy's holidays, with no companions but her own bright thoughts, sometimes inspired by the green of the earth and the blue of the sky, sometimes by fanciful reminiscences of the books which she had been devouring, and often the spontaneous growth of her innocent mind. When she made her enforced attendances upon her fretful and exacting aunt in the drawing-room, she had to adapt herself to the mien of simpering, sham-demure composure which in the superannuated coquette's eyes was the manner of high society. Sometimes Featherston would drop in, and then she dared the certainty of the old hypocrite's



scolding to laugh and talk in her own springy way. In fact, her moral training could be summed up in two words—neglect and nagging.

Partly from jealousy, partly out of dread of the contingent trouble, and partly from the stingy calculation of saving as much out of the allowance as she could for her own selfish use, Miss Harriett absolutely forbade the poor child the pleasure of any companionship. No playmate had she, either girl or boy; and when she asked whether all children were, like herself, brought up in solitude, she was pettishly bidden to hold her tongue, and not meddle with what she could not understand. A worse nature would have been irretrievably ruined by such persistent and heartless mismanagement. With Lucy, these early sufferings—petty as they may appear to us elders, in our supercilious retrospect at the feelings of childhood, but very severe to the tender victim—were a providential schooling for life's battle.

The girl was like the aromatic Eucalyptus, which, as it grows apace, imbibes health-giving properties from the deadly swamp in which it has been planted, and fills the close air with the fresh fragrance of life and sweetness. Reading, writing, and summing Lucy Curteis somehow picked up; for a village schoolmaster eked out his poor pittance by attendance at Yaxley, not minding how he left his legitimate charges in the enjoyment of holidays, the frequency of which would nowadays have much disturbed the easiest going of her Majesty's Inspectors. Luckily, too, the accident of a gentlemanly old *émigré* having settled at the neighbouring town gave her a start in French of

which her mother-wit took good advantage. It was a particular amusement of the girl, in her teasing moods, to jabber on to Miss Harriett in a macaronic tongue which she pleased to call French. The language of Paris would have been equally intelligible to the puzzled impostor, whose vanity compelled her to sham comprehension, as she nodded wildly by way of answer, and fidgeted more and more grotesquely under the hopelessness of her embarrassment. A vain little dancing-master, and his cross wife, who 'professed' music, were frequently at Yaxley, as Miss Harriett never troubled herself to attend the lessons, and Featherston paid those bills.

Meanwhile, the girl was gradually storing her mind with information, acquired in the most irregular fashion, but somehow sorted and warehoused in her head. Her prime delight was the *Morning Post*, which Miss Harriett ostentatiously took in for her own sole reading, 'as young girls should never look at newspapers,' but which the old lady invariably forgot, and left lying about. She also ran wild over a goodly store of the last century's standard authors, pompously bound in morocco, with which the first Curteis had lined the Long Gallery, thenceforward known as the Library, and which, as was commonly believed, had stood there absolutely unopened from the first day of their installation, until his graceful little descendant scrambled up the chairs which were stiffly ranged against the bookcases, to pull down the dusty volumes. Sometimes, when her newspaper told her of any new book which promised to be interesting, she would coax

Featherston to buy it for her ; and though the good man never could comprehend why his darling should press for such a purchase, when she might have chosen a trinket or a new silk dress, he was glad to assert his guardian's authority by insisting on something being done independent of Miss Harriett and her peevish jealousy.

But more than books, old or new, did Lucy seek and profit by the instructive conversation and wise counsels of her refined and scholarly, though shy, friend, Mr. Edlin, the Rector, a true representative of the best school of the genuine Church of England, embodied in that life of the country parsonage for which no other land can show the equivalent. Featherston, with all his profusion of self-forgetting affection, had not the insight into human nature which Mr. Edlin possessed ; and Lucy instinctively chose the Rector as her confidential counsellor in many little troubles, careful as she was not to let her guardians suspect any preference for the advice of the grave but gentle clergyman.

Mr. Edlin's death, which happened just as she was completing her sixteenth year, was a real misfortune, as his quiet influence had been for many months the chief obstacle to her aunt's silly determination, bounceably proclaimed, to take her charge out at that immature age. She would, by way of pretext, pretend pity at the solitude of the girl whom she had herself always restrained from companionship. Every one, however, saw that her real motive was a growing and, at last, uncontrollable hankering to procure, as chaperon, the indulgence of another term

of that dissipation from which, as she resentfully discovered, she was, on her own account, being excluded.

## CHAPTER XI.

## ONLY SIXTEEN.

LUCY, after all, was only a child, and a child, too, who had never had a playmate, who never had been allowed to join a children's party, and whose Christmas festivities had been restricted to the present which Featherston never failed to bring to Yaxley. Society was to her an unknown bliss, a fairyland close by, but of which she had never yet descried the bright reflection. A ball, as it had been described to her, was lights, music, dancing, supper, and not the marriage mart. So we must not blame the poor inexperienced girl if she fell into her aunt's trap, and seconded the unprincipled proposal with the impetuosity of her eager disposition. Featherston did not at all like what he called 'nursery gallivanting,' but before that unwonted alliance between Miss Harriett, whom, with occasional rebellions, he feared and dreaded, and Lucy, whom he loved and spoiled, he was utterly powerless. With a girl so unsophisticated, ball-going was a pleasure, not a business; and, provided a partner was chatty and active, he had no difficulty in obtaining a dance from the good-tempered damsel.

Of the successful number, one, by superior assurance

and a knowledge of the world not possessed by the home-trained youths from the surrounding parishes—Captain Augustus Foulis, the brother Jack of whom we have already heard—soon made himself conspicuous. This officer, who was quartered at the neighbouring depôt, never missed a ball, and by unwearied, equable attentions soon secured the unquestioned position of being Miss Curteis's most regular partner. Sometimes she was glad, sometimes she would have preferred more variety; but, in one way or other, Foulis was always foremost. He manœuvred more boldly than the rival beaux who fluttered round the heiress, not only because he knew the game better, but because he had a greater interest in winning it. There was nothing at that time between him and beggary except some sudden windfall; so he concentrated all the energies of a cunning, bad nature on a venture which he was well fitted to undertake. Augustus Foulis could only be described as a paragon of badness—a man in whom every evil quality kept every other evil quality so well in check, that he had hitherto succeeded in making the world content with hating him, without giving it the opportunity of finding him out. Foulis, as Foulis really was, would have been universally cut; as he contrived to present himself, he was only avoided in public, and cursed behind his back. He knew the world's ill opinion of him, and repaid it in kind as he swaggered on with his insolent laugh and noisy obtrusiveness, cringing to grandees and great ladies, jestingly familiar with girls, and bullying general society with an affectation of military hauteur.

His method of courting Lucy was one of bold simplicity—to win the niece by making love to the aunt. He soon discovered that Miss Harriett had, with increasing years, only grown into an old girl, more vain and more affected than in real girlhood; and, in spite of her conventional subservience to the world's codes of behaviour, hardly more capable, if temptation should beset her, of controlling her passions than on that memorable day when her brother was only just able to prevent her elopement with the doctor's assistant by firing the blunderbuss over their heads. To such a woman the amorous flattery of a showy, fluent dandy, with his petty title and military swagger, was irresistible; and, as he further discovered, that, next to love, rank stood most sacred in her eyes, his game was plain. Lord Kilcorinac had lately been laid up at school with an alarming attack of measles or scarlet fever; it was, therefore, very easy to insinuate that the boy was but a puny bantling, that his constitution was undermined, and his days already numbered; while Lord Foulisville's own well-earned reputation for fastness led up to the reasonable inference that neither could his life be of very long duration. It was also certain that for the few years at most, before he could take corporate possession of Fontarabia Augustus Foulis was an 'honourable,' a prefix of much dignity to Miss Harriett's vulgar mind.

In a word, Miss Harriett was fully persuaded that the Captain had been first led to fix his regards upon her niece from his appreciation of her own charms, and that the idea of becoming her nephew was a powerful inducement for him to persevere, and also that her future

loving nephew was destined soon to become an earl. Lucy, clever beyond her years in all which did not concern society, was a perfect child, even for her age of sixteen, in the hands of such a man. His swagger imposed upon a girl to whom not only fashionable society, but, until a few weeks before, even provincial gaieties were an absolutely unknown thing; and the showy novelty of his voluble and conceited tattle carried her away. He was good looking in a vulgar way, and she was too guileless and too ignorant to scrutinize his professions of devotion when she had never before heard the words of love from the lips of any man, or, indeed, had any but the most childish idea of what love meant. So pure was she that not even Miss Harriett's vulgarly suggestive tattle, dinning as it was into her ears, left a fleck upon the sweet unsuspecting innocence of her virgin mind. In fact, of man she knew absolutely nothing, except so far as she could generalise (which she never thought of doing), from Featherston, Mr. Edlin, the old abbé who taught her French, and the little Welshman from whom she learned dancing, who, together with Mr. Arlett the doctor, were the only five persons in all, claiming to be gentlemen, with whom she had ever made a real acquaintance. Mr. Swettenham she had sometimes gazed at with awe; but the old bear, with his wig, his snuff-box, and his slow, grating tone, was not a creature moulded to inspire any other feelings than fright and aversion in a joyous maiden of sixteen.

Miss Harriett encouraged the adventurer in his advances, and snappishly ordered off one or two young gentlemen of good birth but modest manners who had

the presumption to look at her ward. So, in fact, poor little Lucy had as much chance of escape as the mouse would have of parting company with the cat which was playing with it. One person only could have saved her—her guardian, Featherston; but Featherston was found wanting in the hour of need, from the very intensity of his loyal devotion and his chivalrous appreciation of duty. In fact, this frank, boisterous, unintellectual Squire, whose years could now be little short of fifty, carried about with him a secret which he would have suffered any torture rather than divulge; better have his tongue wrenched out by red-hot pincers than utter such a blasphemy. Still, there it was in his heart. As Lucy grew from a child almost to being a woman, Featherston fell silently, but desperately, in love with her. A more worldly man would have said, ‘Why not win the prize? A gentleman of general good repute, and of older lineage than the Curteises, is a match whom she has no right to refuse.’ Featherston argued very differently; and his soliloquies with his own heart, agonizing as they were, always concluded with the decision that, placed as he had been by her father in the room of a father over Lucy, and knowing as he did, better than any man, except his co-trustee, how very advantageous in the way of money a marriage with her would be, it would be dastardly and base, and, in his view of matters, almost incestuous, to seek her as his wife. This conclusion cost him many a tear, which he took much care to conceal, in the privacy of the night-watches; for to be seen crying would, as Featherston viewed matters, have been only less monstrous than to



marry Lucy. But having once reached a clear conviction, he stuck to it with the pertinacity of a hero. He resolved to carry the secret with him to the grave, and the stout old bachelor has never yet been to his determination.

But, by the strange irony of events, this very resolve of the brave, good man, so magnificently self-denying, led him to be Lucy's worst friend at a moment when, had it not been for it, he might have saved her. He, too, was deceived, though not completely, by the audacious scamp; and although in the depths of his honest heart he could not be satisfied that Foulis was the man for Lucy Curteis, he stifled his suspicions of him by arraying against them a more painful suspicion of himself. 'Am I not,' he soliloquised, 'setting myself against her marrying this man because I still hanker after marrying her myself? He has had, they say, a wild time of it; but dear little Lucy will sober any man, and I cannot doubt but that he really loves her. He can absolutely stand the old cat for her sake. He comes of a fine old family too, and so he ought to be a gentleman; and the chances are, I hear, that it won't be long before he's Earl of Foulisville. It would be cruel and selfish to deprive Lucy of such a chance, though she's only sixteen. Hang the old cat for taking her out when she ought to have been in the nursery!'

Thus crying down sense by affection and a false feeling of duty, did Featherston consent to sacrifice Lucy Curteis to Augustus Foulis. The mischief might have been prevented if Swettenham could have prevailed in making Lucy a ward in Chancery, as he

attempted to do shortly after the Squire's death. He had succeeded in convincing Featherston of the propriety of the step, but Miss Harriett, on its being broached to her, put herself into so violent a rage that the idea had to be abandoned.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE GIRL WIFE.

WHEN Mr. Featherston had, unluckily, persuaded himself to give his consent to the match, he resolved that it was a first duty to explain to the child wife-expectant her pecuniary situation. Well would it have been for the prospects of her understanding her own position if he had himself discharged the duty. Ill-luck, however, led him to confide the intention to the family lawyer, Mr. Swettenham. This gentleman, who was the soul of punctiliousness and the pink of honesty, at once drew himself up, and after swinging the gold seals which heavily depended from his fob, and taking a pinch of snuff, slowly rebuked the astonished guardian for his temerity.

‘Mr. Featherston, you astonish me. You are, no doubt, by her father's will, the guardian of the young lady. Anything that affects her character, Mr. Featherston—any warning that can save her from the abyss into which her giddy young feet may be hurrying her—is yours, Mr. Featherston, to give. But I, Mr. Featherston, am her adviser, and the adviser of yourself and of her other guardian, as I was of her lamented

father. And remember, also, Mr. Featherston, when the late Mr. Curteis appointed yourself and me as trustees, he particularly explained that mine was to be the ruling voice in the pecuniary affairs of the young lady. That responsibility I can only fulfil on the terms of that confidence which I have the right to claim being fully and freely conceded to me. On me, Mr. Featherston, devolves the duty of enlightening Miss Curteis as to her property in possession, as well as upon her reasonable expectations.'

Featherston quailed before the solemn monitor, and left the task to him, while he merely presumed to prepare Miss Curteis for the expected visitation. The poor girl heard the news with no little trepidation, for the few occasions on which she had been confronted with Mr. Swettenham had been sufficient to inspire her youthful nature with a dread for that respectable but repellent individual, in favour of whom, unversed as she was in affairs, she could recall nothing which could provoke confidence.

Mr. Swettenham duly arrived, full of his great tale, and prepared to deal it out like Rhadamanthus giving sentence from his dusky throne. Conviction, not imagination, made him an enthusiast for his profession. In his eyes the prudent laws of real estate and settlement were transfigured into the likeness of a second Decalogue, revealed on some insular Sinai for the benefit of all generations of Englishmen. So completely were they part of his own being that he could not imagine anyone, even a miss in her teens, so crass, so unpolished, or so wicked as not to appreciate the details no less than the extent of the blessing. His

conversation, when upon business, was an amalgam of legal phrases strung together without the slightest attempt to make the chaos of technical expressions intelligible to the client, in whom ignorance of what to his professional mind was the vulgar tongue was inconceivable. That a girl of sixteen was not familiar with the mysteries of tenant for life and remainder man, of a term over, and of suffering a recovery, were dark suspicions which no man had ever dared to suggest to this surly, faithful bull-dog. The neighbourhood trusted in Swettenham's probity, knowledge, and business-like capacity, while it dreaded the incubus of his presence and the obscurity of his conversation; so he had gone on managing their affairs by himself, much as he wished, in the retirement of his dusty den, into which even his old clerk, Marrable, never dared enter without first tapping at the door. To his credit, it must be added that there was no part of the country in which there were so few lawsuits, for the various controversies which ordinarily embitter neighbourhoods were all judged *in camera*, and without appeal, in a Vehmgericht, where the counsel for the plaintiff was Swettenham, the counsel for the defendant Swettenham also, and where Swettenham sat as judge and jury.

Such was the awful personage whom Lucy was bidden to confront, and to receive from him the most important communication of her life, next to, and consequent on, Captain Foulis's declaration. She implored her aunt to keep her company and assist her, but the old lady unequivocally and crossly refused; for, in fact, the awe of Swettenham was stronger in her than

in the remaining entire country-side put together, not only from the eternal antipathy which exists between ponderosity with learning, and frivolity with ignorance, but because she bore, deeply seared into her vindictive mind, the recollection of the scolding which she had received from the lawyer on the morning after she had so nearly made her escape with the assistant apothecary. Her brother, totally unable to vituperate as he felt that the occasion required, called in his adviser, and with admirable effect. Between the overwhelming array of legal terrors which Swettenham marshalled, and the excruciatingly minute references to Rahab and her profession, to the Prodigal, and to Esau's sale of his birthright, which he scattered like armour-clad parentheses, as he worked back to the stocks, the ducking-stool, and the Assizes, the solemn pedant pounded away till he succeeded in reducing the silly, crushed butterfly to a condition of screaming, kicking hysterics, from which she did not completely recover under ten days.

Perhaps his triumph was more exquisite, and Miss Harriett's mortification more acute, because, although the Squire was as ignorant and unsuspecting of the fact as a three months' old babe, the attorney, for the first and last time yielding to the promptings of Venus backed as she seemed to be by those of Plutus, had, a short time previously, proposed to the sister of his principal patron, and had been rebuffed at the instigation, as he now realized, of that good-for-nothing Mr. Leech. Mr. Swettenham was, of course, a much younger man at that time, and in the intervening years, though his energy of expression had been

dulled, his gifts of amplification became even more remarkable.

Lucy, thus left to herself, could only ask the old gentleman to sit down, and submit herself to his endless story, involved beyond comprehension in episodes and amplifications, taken up at one point, and dropped to be resumed at another, and then, perhaps, started afresh at some still earlier stage, which she had in the meanwhile quite forgotten; and all cast in a language which she irreverently called gibberish. All this flood of verbiage was so drearily illustrated by jerks of the seals, so disgustingly interlarded with huge pinches of strong snuff, that the attention which at first she endeavoured to render as a duty soon collapsed into the mechanical process of letting words drop into one ear and pass out of the other. She was just able to grasp a pleasant idea that she would have a great deal of money, and that her child, if she had one, would have a great deal after her; but that all was 'strictly tied up'—an awful condition of matters, which she hazily connected with some form of imprisonment as the punishment for the transgression of unknown and incomprehensible laws.

Dear old, affectionate Featherston lost no time in riding over to Yaxley, and asking his darling child (as he was wont to call Lucy) whether Swettenham had made everything clear and plain. 'Perfectly so,' she answered, in dread of another lecture. The honest gentleman turned round and swallowed down a big lump which he found swelling in his throat. As we have said, though he had never revealed his secret to any living soul, this noble fellow would have sacrificed

possessions untold to have stood by her side at the altar, not as father, but as bridegroom. This was a supreme moment. He was almost tempted to speak ; but he recalled the steadfastness of the promise which he had made to himself to let the secret go down with him to the grave. 'How could I,' he said to himself, 'standing, as I do, in place of her father ? And then to think of her money. Fancy Bob Featherston taking advantage of her innocence and filching her inheritance ! The whole county would kick me and spit on my worthless hide.' It was, as we have seen, the strength of these feelings which made him consent, without inquiry or conditions, to the marriage of the child with a man of suspicious antecedents, and taken upon his own account of himself. Featherston mistrusted his own steadfastness, and dreaded that by delay he would help on his own forbidden game. Need there was that he should put himself out of the way of temptation. Vanity then stepped in and suggested that it would be heroic to give to another that peerless prize whom he had self-appreciation enough to conceive he might have easily secured for himself. So did Lucy's last plank drift away. Foulis, having not a single farthing to put into settlement, and being quite satisfied with the Squire's will, declined giving Mr. Swettenham any work to do. On Lucy's side, too, little was forthcoming which was not in settlement. The annual savings were laid out in the improvement of the estate to the visible benefit of the rent-roll. In truth, the Captain sincerely dreaded anything which might possibly lead to an investigation, however superficial, of his own affairs. As he had

secured Miss Harriett to his side; and as Featherston rather sulkily declined to take the lawyer's part, Mr. Swettenham could only acquiesce, while to his brother-trustee he angrily expostulated, 'It's all very irregular. Supposing Madam Harriett were to drop dead of tight-lacing without making a will, the Captain would pouch all her savings.' But to the general world he was dumb as death, and met every impertinent cross-questioner with an unchanging 'All is right.'

We shall not describe the wedding. The chief difficulty was in finding the two bridesmaids whom social usage then required. The ceremony was handsome, but commonplace, and moderately merry to all, except those only two persons whose enjoyment was of permanent consequence. These found themselves launched on a short honeymoon, which had hardly lasted three days before the mask was dropped from the Captain's brazen countenance. As if directly accredited from below, Foulis set to work continuously and systematically to pollute the mind and undermine the faith of that tender, loving, reverential child who had so unhappily become his possession. Probably it was a physical impossibility on his part not to do so. Love her, or anyone else, he could not do; but he could appreciate the possession of a desirable property; and all that to his degraded nature was wanting to make Lucy desirable was that she should be like himself—that she should wallow with him in his foulness, and abet his rogueries. Fortunately for her soul's peace, he set to work so abruptly, and with such cynical clumsiness, that he did not succeed even in stirring up her alarmed curiosity; all that she grasped



was the shocking discovery that her husband was a very wicked man, and that his conversation turned on inconceivable topics of which she had never known anything, and with which she had no desire to make acquaintance. Soon she learned to throw herself into the stupor of a feigned attention, while her poor thoughts travelled afield over the recollections of forfeited happiness, as Captain Foulis went on dropping his devil's lessons into ears which he vainly imagined stood open to the hideous lore.

The honeymoon barely lasted a month, and they had been back some two or three days at Yaxley, when Lucy awoke one morning with strange feelings of sickness and lassitude. Foulis burst roughly into her room, booted and spurred, and announced that a steeplechase between himself and a brother-officer, which his marriage had interrupted, was coming off that day. Mrs. Foulis at that moment craved for companionship, even the companionship of Captain Foulis, and she implored him pathetically for once to postpone his pleasures to her distress. With a sneer, a laugh, and an oath, he refused, and bounced out of the room. His poor wife's day of solitude, of tears and pain, was closed in the chill eventide by his return home a corpse, with dislocated neck.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## WIDOW AND MOTHER.

A SHOCK such as a honeymoon terminating in widowhood had well-nigh proved fatal to a girl-woman so young, and at the first moment of life's most critical time. In some respects it was more terrible than if the dead man had left behind him any one lovable reminiscence. Above all the most torturing recollections of shattered felicity, the pagan poet's touching saying, 'How much better is it to be thinking of thee than to be associating with those who are left!' asserts itself with double emphasis in the Christian's heart; for at the end of the vista, distant but bright, shines the hope of re-association. But when such as Foulis was has gone away, and is no more seen, the intrusive thought, 'But where to?' stifled as it may be, and run away from, never can be exorcised.

Lucy heard the door-bell ring violently, ran to the hall, and saw, without preparation, the hideous sight, as two rough men laid upon the floor the dead body of her husband, with its face of a ghastly pallor, distorted into a horrible grin, as if the shadows of a great cloud had passed over the sufferer's mind. One of the yokels screamed, without looking at whom he was accosting, 'Where's the mistress?' She heard no more, but fell down heavily in a fit, and remained for some days insensible; then acute delirious fever supervened. Slowly brought back to life and thought,

she still had before her the long dragging months of a bad pregnancy, unrelieved by any of those sweet consolations of a husband's or a mother's love which lighten and compensate for those protracted sufferings, which go for so much in the great mystery of human life, when even the presence of pain is so sacredly delicate a confidence as the pledge and seal of the truest and most complete love. The pain was hers now most intensely, but the love had never really been bestowed upon Lucy ; while he who should have proffered it had gone away beyond the possibility of personal atonement. The conduct of silly Miss Harriett—who had worked herself into a condition of love for Foulis which was hardly so much indecent and unnatural as absolutely imbecile—was marked with such an absolute want of sense or consideration, that the quiet Featherston had to interfere and warn her not to molest the gentle sufferer. But, even in spite of his kind help, the disappointed old crone's fatuity added terribly to the unhappiness of the child with whose prospects she had so unjustifiably tampered. Of Lucy's confinement, which happily occurred after seven months, all that need be said is that it was as bad a one as was barely consistent with the absence of acute danger. She was herself practically insensible for some little time before, during, and after it ; and all through her life she declared that upon her recovery she was for some time totally unable to account for her new acquisition of a little girl. There was she, and there the infant ; and that was all she knew.

In fact, by a merciful process of compensation, her

early convulsions and insensibility, her fever, then the preoccupations of her pregnancy, and, finally, the incidents of her confinement, all conduced to a remarkable psychological result — that of blurring, in a memory otherwise clear, discriminative, and retentive, the one hideous reminiscence of Augustus Foulis. He was to Lucy ever afterwards as a nightmare which the waker cannot forget, and not a man with whom she had consorted. She recollected that she had had for a few days a husband, and that that husband, during those few days, was associated with every recollection of cynical unkindness, foul of speech, loathsome in his suggestions, an infidel, a blasphemer, and a master of mean and teasing persecution. But she could not help looking upon this tyrant and his victim in a strange *ab extra* fashion. She entered internally into the poor girl's wrong, and shuddered at the recollections of the persecutor; but still that girl appeared before her as a strange person. She knew that she was now Lucy Foulis, and had once been Lucy Curteis; but, in the continuous retrospect of her life, this was a pure and simple change of name, for she could never quite connect the girl who had been an unwedded Lucy Curteis, and who had now become Lucy Foulis, leading the life of a spinster, with this ephemeral wife. She knew all about her; she realized her sufferings, for they passed before her eyes like a moving panorama; but they seemed rather the sufferings of a being with whom she had some strange mystical relations than those of her own veritable, identical self.

Our Scotch readers, if we have any, may perhaps

stop us to ask how this could be, with the daughter there to prove the marriage. Of course her reason told her all along that this duality of existence was an hallucination. But reason is one thing, and feelings are another, and in this case the dreams engendered by Lucy's imagination were far more pleasant than the facts which her reason compelled her to accept. So she never made any serious attempt to banish them from her mind. In fact, with guileless absence of logic the widowed matron hugged the phantom of continuous spinstership, and thought on Meriel as the fairy child laid in the cradle.

Gradually, Mrs. Foulis's naturally magnificent constitution came to her aid. So, feeling strong and well again, the mother of a girl to whom she was both father and mother, and owner of a property for which she acknowledged herself responsible to God and man, she seriously determined to lay down and carry out a course of life of which the guiding principle was to be the good of that Yaxley from which she never desired to be parted, and with which, in her bright fancy, mother and daughter were to be for ever identified.

When a house has to be set in order, the first thing which the wise housewife undertakes is to sweep out the rubbish; so Miss Harriett had to be disposed of. This was, fortunately, a very easy process. Cheltenham, with its cards and gossip, had long been the earthly paradise of the gay spinster's dreams; so a generous allowance, in supplement of her patrimony, enabled the lady to pitch her tent in that happy land. As she fell at this point out of the current of the events in which we are interested, we have omitted to

inform ourselves how long her valuable life was spared to her fellow-creatures. Fortunately, she was no great scholar, and as writing letters was always a trouble to her, which she made sure would not prove remunerative by eliciting reciprocal gossip, she early dropped a correspondence with a niece whom she envied too much to care for.

Relieved, as she was, from her giggling, nagging incubus, Lucy was at liberty to regulate her own concerns in her own way. She, first of all, determined to cut—her petticoat, as we suppose we must call it—according to her cloth. She must find out what she had to spend, and then spend within its limits. A model heroine would have summoned Swettenham, and bidden him bring to her the rental, and after a learned discussion on stock, patent manures, land tenure, and the custom of the manor, have commanded him to raise the rents in compliance with the then state of the money market. But Lucy, at seventeen, was not a heroine, only a girl-woman—not only clever, good, and practical, but modest; while her modesty took the unusual form of depreciating her sex's capacity in the wider spheres of business. Law and land agency were, as she fancied, for men to understand and carry out, though women might be trusted to make a good spending use of the accruing income.

So she did what was most natural, and very ineffectual, and resolved to talk over her affairs with that trustee whom she loved, and of whom she was not afraid. We have said enough about Featherston to show that he was muddle-headed on legal matters :

although, for once in his life, at the promptings of affection, he had screwed his courage up to the point of offering, and had prepared, that which really would have been a far more useful explanation to Lucy of her situation, unencumbered with technical expressions, than the one with which she had been actually inflicted. The disappointment of having subjected himself for nothing to the mental strain of the needful preparation, added to the mortification which he felt at Swettenham's unmannerly snub, which, though more than a year old, still made him smart as if it had been inflicted on the day before. Certainly, with undiminished interest in Lucy's welfare, he felt himself rather put on one side in all that related to her money matters. Besides this, his guardianship had ceased, though not his trusteeship. It was difficult to shut up Featherston, but when the clôture was effected it was a very fast one. However, when Mrs. Foulis sent him a note on a little piece of paper, with more black margin than white centre, begging him to come over for a chat, he set spurs to his horse, little forecasting what the subject of the interview was to be.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## SELF-RELIANCE.

FEATHERSTON could have sunk into his boots, he afterwards said, at the sight of the child in its widow's cap—so calm so pale, with such bright eyes, and a voice which, with all its girlish ring, had gained a new intensity of pathetic expression. Lucy, totally ignorant as she was, alike of his life's secret and of the sore which the blundering attorney had set up in the honest fellow's heart, said, with a sweet, sad smile, 'Guardian dear, I have sent for you to ask a couple of questions.'

'Ask two thousand.'

'Well, then, question number one is, how much a-year have I got? And question two is, whether I understood Mr. Swettenham correctly when he told me that my fortune was strictly tied up; and what *does* "strictly tied up" mean?'

This was fairly taking the aggrieved old friend at his tenderest point; so he satisfied himself by replying with forced cheeriness, 'Of course, strictly tied up, as old Swettenham explained. It is all yours for life, and then dear little Merrie's—and not less than——(we forget how many) thousands a year.'

This careless assurance, given in a tone which implied that he knew everything, from the mouth of the one man to whom she really looked for counsel and information, stereotyped a misapprehension on which the widow was basing her whole prospective



plan of life. Featherston would have cut out his tongue rather than have misled the darling little woman who might have been his wife, and was now to him as a daughter; but, as we have indicated, he was, however warm-hearted and right-minded, not a profound nor a clear thinker. It did not occur to him that in Lucy's short, gently put questions a world of meaning lay concealed, and a whole catechism of further interrogatories wrapped up. Besides, he had not only been put out by Swettenham's assumption, but humbled by the intervening marriage. He reproached himself for having allowed it, and was sulky when he should have been confidential. 'How could it have been,' he implicitly argued to himself, 'that, bear as Swettenham is, and brute as that Captain turned out, they should not have made it all clear to her, when all their interests had become identical?'

So it came about that solitary, helpless Lucy was quite misled by Featherston's offhand assertion, and lived on in the undoubting idea that, come what would, Merrie, and none but Merrie, could ever succeed to her possessions. No statesman had then arisen to prove to her that, in taking property from her grandfather, Merrie would be sinning against God and nature. Had any man suggested this to Lucy, we fear that she would have fancied he was making a bad joke, or had taken leave of his reasoning powers.

It was not long before old Mr. Swettenham died, and his business passed by purchase to a young gentleman who had been educated in a first-class London firm. Mr. Musgrave stood, both socially and pro-

fessionally, on a higher level than his provincial predecessor, but he had paid his way as a stranger to his practice; while the unwritten traditions of the Curteis clientèle had ever since the Turkey merchant settled at Yaxley attached to successive Swettenhams. That family had now died out, and so had also the name of Curteis, while to the new-comer Mrs. Foulis was but one of many clients; and, on her side, she never thought of consulting the London-bred solicitor about the doings of people to whose personality she knew that he was a perfect stranger.

Stranger, however, as he was, Mr. Musgrave proved himself a far more competent and enterprising trustee of Mrs. Foulis's interests than his square-toed, jog-trot predecessor; for he was hardly in the saddle before he discovered that, under an outlying farm in a more northerly Midland county, lay a rich store of iron and coal. By opening the find to a judicious and safe speculation, as well as by general enterprise, the lawyer gradually raised the income of what had been a neglected portion of the young widow's estate to such an extent that, when the Countess was planning the adoption of Meriel, her sister-in-law was enjoying each year about half as many thousands as Mr. Curteis had reckoned hundreds, and this with the certainty of further annual increment. Previously to Mr. Musgrave's stewardship, people used to talk of 'Mrs. Foulis, the widow, you know, with that nice property;' gradually the Midland counties recognised the presence of 'the great Mrs. Foulis of Yaxley.' The distance between Mrs. Foulis and her faithful agent was not from ingratitude on her side, but simply from the

lady's habits and ignorance of the ways of business, and the gentleman's proud susceptibility. Featherston ought to have advised her better, but he hated the whole race of lawyers.

These incidents resulted in a curious anomaly. Mrs. Foulis developed into a brisk and careful woman of business, within her appointed sphere of home responsibilities, while she vaguely grasped the machinery of the transactions which lay a little beyond her familiar horizon. In all matters of account merely involving the application of the four rules, she was quick and accurate. She kept a bountiful table, but the average of meat per week, calculated by pounds and heads, was low and uniform. More lengths of gravel walks were swept by fewer hands than in the showy pleasure-grounds of her distant cousin, the Earl—now again, as his great and her great-great-grandfather had done, combining the personal dignity of Lord-Lieutenant with his peerage and possessions. But when it came to law or Bank of England work she was fairly dazed. It was not that she was stupid, but simply that she was prosperous. A week's cramming would have imbued her with all the jurisprudence which a squiress could require. But, clever, honourable, though not very companionable, Mr. Musgrave saved her all practical trouble of managing her patrimony, and never pressed her to submit to an audit. The sum totals of remittances which he made periodically to her banker, taught her nothing except her own prosperity. So she lived on, without her enjoyment of 'Paul Ferrol' being marred by the preposterous absurdity of the trial scene.

In fact, talking of herself as a young lady, and encouraging her friends to do the like, had become an habitual characteristic of Mrs. Foulis's frock-dress life, while she would laughingly say that she was sure she wanted a sheep-dog much more than Becky Sharp ever could have done. At length, some of her more matter-of-fact neighbours took this persiflage seriously ; as they observed the deepening of Mrs. Foulis's conscientious and consistent course of religious life, in accordance with the wise practical system of the Prayer Book, which she exemplified in the new church raised at her sole, unstinted cost at her gate, not without the regrets of the foundress at parting from the old mother church of the parish, very differently served as it was from what it had been in good Mr. Edlin's time. Certain village busybodies accordingly developed a myth that the Squires of Yaxley, whose tastes and principles they neither appreciated nor sympathized with, lay under some vow of spiritual obedience secretly made 'to the Cardinal,' including, of course, an obligation of perpetual celibacy. These stories sometimes amused Mrs. Foulis, and sometimes they vexed her ; but most generally she took the wise view that it was a matter of course that, as a well-governed and constitutional commonwealth, Yaxley must possess its local opposition, which in no respect fell behind the mighty oppositions of the great world in its exertions to keep the ruling powers up to their professions, by blackening their characters, impugning their motives, misrepresenting their actions, and, to speak generally, giving them the universal lie.

This opposition was created and headed by—if not,

rather, composed of—Mrs. Rees and Miss Turner. Mrs. Rees' late husband was a clergyman who had succeeded Mr. Edlin in the Rectorship. His tenure of the living did not exceed seven or eight years, but it was long enough to leave behind it a result little intended by himself; as it was his cold-blooded neglect of his sacred duties, if not of those decent conventionalities to which most clergymen, however remiss, are wont, in their own interests, to pay some respect, which finally drove Mrs. Foulis to sever her life-long connection with the mother church, and construct that beautiful district one, the development of which—with its parsonage, its schools, and its beneficent institutions—thenceforward became one of her chief occupations and most cherished pleasures.

The arrangements were made with all delicate care for Mr. Rees' feelings, and attention to his material interests; while the ostensible reason put forward—namely, the long distance of uneven ground lying between the house and the old church—was more than ample justification for the procedure, which ought, indeed, to have been taken long before, but for two reasons—that Mr. Edlin was Rector, and that Miss Harriett was guardian. None the less, however, did Mr. Rees conceive a bitter and unreasonable grudge against the Squiress, of which his widow showed herself the faithful inheritress. Miss Turner's animosity was of a rather long standing, reaching back, as it did, to Miss Harriett's retreat to Cheltenham. She had been the congenial confidante and gossip of that lady, and she resented her patroness's

departure as a personal and intended insult to herself. She was poor, and she felt the loss of the luncheons and dinners at Yaxley ; and as she was a bore, she never found any second person to seek out her company. Mrs. Rees, more clever, more malicious, and better off than Miss Turner, was ceaselessly vigilant in preventing the lonely spinster from establishing herself as her trencher-friend, while never scrupling to use her cackling tongue as a public instrument of her own animosity.

Of old, the two hated each other, and their present alliance against the common foe, Mrs. Foulis, was strictly limited to a desperate attempt to ruin her in the estimation of the neighbourhood by insinuations and misrepresentations levelled against those good works in which she was spending herself for those spiritual and material interests of all, to whom she presented herself as a missionary of peace and good-will. It must not be supposed that either lady had a natural bias for theology. If they could have ferreted out and nursed some nice little piece of scandal, they would have understood far better how to work it, and far more keenly enjoyed the sport. But Lucy was invariably and provokingly circumspect. Once, indeed, they fancied they had a great chance, when the first incumbent of the new church, a relation of Featherston's mother, whom Mrs. Foulis, in her good nature, had overpersuaded herself to appoint, abruptly resigned. To fill his place, she recalled to the neighbourhood a clergyman whom in his last days Mr. Edlin used to describe as the best curate he ever had. Mr. Lidyard was naturally a frequent

visitor at his patroness's house, and the old ladies whispered, 'The first love, you know, before the Captain cut in;' and Miss Turner would add, 'Poor dear Miss Harriett! she had her eyes about her, she had.' As, however, the demure young man spent his first holiday in a visit to his former chief in Cornwall, from whose vicarage he returned not alone, and still was as welcome as before at Yaxley, the discomfited conspirators vowed everlasting vengeance against the misleading priest, and henceforward concentrated their spite on Mrs. Foulis's religion as the most vulnerable point. Again, their hopes revived on the early death of Mrs. Lidyard, but the silent grief of the widower abashed even their impertinent inventiveness.

## CHAPTER XV.

### GROWING UP.

'DIDN'T you see it?' once asked Mrs. Rees of Miss Turner, the morning after they had both been dining with Mr. Rees' far different successor, Archdeacon Dymoke, to feast the opening of a school to which Mrs. Foulis had been a bountiful benefactor.

'See what?'

'Why, Mrs. Foulis's hair shirt! As I am a living woman, this is the third or fourth time I've seen it working and rucking up under her dinner-gown.'

'She should not wear low dresses; that's what I say. Let her muffle up like a nun, and whip herself.'

‘ Well, now, I don’t agree at all. When a lady is asked to meet ladies, she should dress as a lady ; let alone her fads and her doldrums. It isn’t civil to the company she’s in to come like a guy, and tell her beads in Christian company.’

‘ Don’t you see the difference, my dear ? You and I may expose our persons as much as we like, and no one can say but it’s quite proper,’ squeaked Miss Turner to her gossip, whose beefy skin was bursting with unwholesome fat ; ‘ but when a woman is a nun, she should dress as a nun. That’s my opinion ; and I don’t care for any Pope or any Cardinal, or for Lidyard, who’s as bad as the Pope.’

‘ Perhaps her confessor makes her dress like a lady to throw dust in our eyes. I always said there was something very sly in that Lidyard.’

‘ Then he should make her cut her hair shirt low. But these men don’t know much of women’s dresses.’

‘ Humph ! How can you tell that ? But isn’t it dreadful—Mrs. Foulis, with her pride and her money, her coals and her flannels, coming down upon us with her monks and her friars ; and that Archdeacon, who’s eating Protestant bread, backing her up ? Do you know,’ continued Mrs. Rees, in a lower voice, and with her brows sternly knitted, ‘ I’ve been told Dr. Arlett’s wife has taken to going to church of week-days ?’

‘ Poor Dr. Arlett ! To think his domestic happiness should be so broken up ; and they were so comfortable.’

‘ Well, Madam Foulis never shall make me kiss the Pope’s great toe.’

‘ Nasty old man ! I should think not !’



Mrs. Rees felt she had made a great score by her ingenious discovery of the hair shirt, and she followed with a glance of conscious triumph the unlovely figure of the soured virgin, breaking into that peculiar trot which showed when she was on any malicious errand. She was right in her guess that Miss Turner was making for Mrs. Arlett's cosy cottage, in hopes of finding her counting her beads, or flagellating herself with a knotted scourge, or kneeling before some graven image. She was much disappointed at coming upon the worthy lady in a holland undress, somewhat hot and very dishevelled, pouring out tea and spreading bread with raspberry jam, for the benefit of her chubby progeny, the youngest of whom was keeping his sixth birthday. As Miss Turner had naturally no great affection for the honest matron, and as she suddenly remembered that her account with the doctor was still unsettled, she adroitly took refuge in the extempore but plausible lie that she had just recollected it was sweet little Jemmy's birthday, and had dropped in to wish joy; and so beat a rapid retreat, leaving Mrs. Arlett considerably puzzled at the unexpected outburst of neighbourly and well-informed affection from one between whom and herself had always existed a tacit antipathy.

In the meanwhile, as the iron-works and the collieries yielded more and more income, so grew the sum total of Mrs. Foulis's pious munificence; and, hand in hand with her offerings to God, increased her gifts to man. If every labourer's child on her estate received its lessons of abstract morality in church and at the school, the practical morality of the new cot-

tages, with their three bedrooms, with which she covered the estate, duly supplemented the voice of vicar and school-teacher. Mr. Lidyard might often be closeted with her on some question regarding the choir, but he was generally followed by Dr. Arlett with his report of the cottage hospital.

All Mrs. Foulis's equable persistence in good works, no less than the malicious tattle spread abroad against her—the picture and the caricature of Lucy's calm life—combined in strengthening the general conviction that it was morally impossible that anything could stand between Miss Meriel and the succession, except her not living long enough to come into it. But the person who should have believed upon the authority of Mrs. Rees and Miss Turner that the good little young-lady widow was an austere, morose devotee would have been found ludicrously in the wrong by the evidence of the entire neighbourhood. There was but one opinion beyond the Rees-Turner coterie, and that was that Yaxley was the most cheery house to lunch at, to waste an afternoon at, or to sleep at, in all the country-side. The garden seemed always bright, with its Turkey carpet of flowers, chosen for colour, smell, and foliage, and not for the lateness of their introduction or the uncouthness of their names; and the thymey turf was always rebounding fragrantly from the passer's tread.

Luncheon with Mrs. Foulis meant house and home to acquaintances to drop in, with the certainty of a genial greeting, sufficiency of sustenance, and perfect liberty to amuse themselves or go away. A more formal garden-party now and then served as a rally ;

and the hostess's playfully confessed inability to recollect the laws of croquet, then so popular, from teatime one night till the following breakfast, was no restraint to those whose memory for that athletic sport was more robust. On one point she was stern. Whenever a neighbouring beau approached her with a pretty suggestion of the popularity which would certainly attend the institution at Yaxley of a branch of the county Archery Club, he would be commanded to go and learn, like a man, to handle his rifle. Of the poultry, and the turkeys, and the ducks, and the pigs, of which Yaxley and its lady were justly proud, it is not for us to speak ; their merit stands on record in the books of more than one Agricultural Society.

Sometimes of a winter's evening, after Meriel had gone to bed, Mrs. Foulis, sitting alone in the half-lighted expanse of her beloved library, would put her feet on the fender and ask herself whether, with all the hospitality which it was her delight, no less than her duty, to offer, and with all the impartial accessibility which she consistently cultivated, and which made her (though she hardly realized it) the first favourite of all her neighbourhood, she was not still, in some of the highest aspects of life, the same solitary, self-communing orphan as she had been in those young days when, driven back on her own thoughts, she stood on the chair to pull down the books now around her, or roamed over the fields alone, in defiance alike of nurse and aunt. She could not now even enjoy Mr. Edlin's conversation ; while, excellent as her own clergyman was, he was not the ripe scholar the old Rector, his former chief, had been.

Her mind had expanded till her appetite after knowledge was in excess of what she knew in a definite and systematic shape. She was decidedly a well-informed woman, but much of her most valuable information consisted in knowing how many things there still were with which she ought to make herself familiar. But she feared that, in order to do this, it would be even more important to make the acquaintance of men than of books. Constantly, as she read her paper or her review, she would come across the name of some one who had made a great name for himself, and whom society loved to honour, and she would think, 'Why don't I, why won't I, know him? How many hundreds are there, without a tithe of my material advantages, who find it so easy to live in constant familiarity with the powers of the earth, while I can only read of them!' The recollection of practical duties to be recorded for the morrow's tale of work would then crop up in her cheerful mind; she would resume her reading at the point where the name of note had set her wool-gathering, and her honest face would resume its habitual gentle smile. But still this orphan widow of a few days' marriage carried with her the doom of the intellectual solitude, which the stupid selfishness of her aunt and the brutality of her husband had pronounced against her. The parties in Lady Foulisville's drawing-room at which she had been present when in London gave her no comfort; and the manifest repulsion between the patronized *savants* and all who belonged to the patronizing hostess, seemed to her only to make the distance greater between intellect and the woman

who would be known as Lady Foulisville's sister-in-law.

'When I go to town,' she would reflect, 'to take Meriel out, people will ask who is that woman with the country-looking girl, and they will then hear that her mother is the widow of Foulisville's brother, and that will settle my account; though the girl's money will, I dare say, give her a start. Heaven grant it is one of which I can approve!'

So everything about Lucy Foulis continued to ~~renew~~ its cheerful youth, tenderly fostered by her gentle presence, all except her favourite animals, and upon them the hand of time pressed heavier and heavier. The Angora cat still flashed its blue eye and curved its plume-like tail; but, instead of bounding from carpet to table, and from table to bureau, would stiffly hobble about as one sore tried with rheumatism. The dear old dog, who used to gallop before pony or phaeton, now clung with increasing tenacity to the sheepskin before the fire, which everyone learned to regard as his exclusive possession. Merciful in its mystery is that dispensation of Providence which has allotted shortness of days to household darlings; for, were their span of life to run parallel with that of their masters, many a sensitive soul might be diverted from a course of manly usefulness by the dumb, irresistible fascination beaming from the ageing eye of his coeval companion. As things are, each pet—as in a few years, which may have made no sensible change in his mistress's or master's consciousness of powers, it runs through its seven ages—is a living monition of mortality, teaching a lesson often more sharp than the

dread of ridicule may lead the pupil to confess, but a lesson absolutely bearable by all but flabby, maudlin hearts. But let the man fancy his favourite dog a puppy when he was a child, frisky in his college days, mature when he was mature, and, in extreme decrepitude, dying as it feebly licked the half-paralyzed hand of its aged widower master—and then reason out, if he can, the impossible conditions of such an order of domestic life.

In the meanwhile the great inevitable change in Lucy's household had all but reached the term of its accomplishment. Meriel, the baby, had grown into the child in the nursery, then passed into the girl in the school-room, and was now on the point of bursting on the world—the young lady in the drawing-room. She was her father's child in cunning, and her mother's sad pregnancy was stamped upon her character. Of Foulis or of Curteis there was no trace in her appearance, while her thin, undersized figure and stooping shoulders recalled her valetudinarian grandmother. From her, too, she inherited the unusual combination of a long chin and a pug nose, black beady eyes, uneasily twinkling, and a querulous voice. To the same source might, no doubt, be attributed a petty, timid provincialism of aim, which marked all her ideas and actions. Solitary in the midst of apparent sociability as her mother was, her sympathies embraced a wide circle: while to her wicked father the confinement of a regular country life was that most dreadful of anticipations against which he was plotting when the horse threw him over its neck. Mrs. Foulis loved her daughter as of

duty and necessity, and Meriel was not openly stubborn or ungrateful; but between the two natures there was fixed a deep, broad gulf, of which the measure had never been consciously taken by the sanguine, loving mother. Lucy never would formulate to herself that she did not possess Meriel's confidence, but she always unconsciously acted for herself in a way which would have been impossible to so affectionate a heart which had been met half way by a confiding child.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE INVITATION.

NEITHER Lord nor Lady Foulisville, though much pressed to come, had been present at the marriage of Augustus; for the quarrel between the Earl and his brother was then at its hottest, and the Captain's letter announcing his good fortune, which he had designed to be playfully affable, appeared defiant and insolent to his jealous and irritated kinsman. Even his cynical nature had for the instant been upset by the sudden change from duns and penury to a large and assured income; and the terms in which he declared his own good luck, and gloated over the social position of his future helpmate, was taken as veiled sarcasm by the cruelly pressed lord, whose only matrimonial fortune had been a very pretty face, the charms of which were for the moment much overcast by importunate demands from a whole clan

of Driscolls, who had mustered from the farm-houses and village shops of County Limerick.

The personal acquaintance of the Countess and Lucy commenced at Meriel's christening, when, with much moral courage and abundant tears, the widow decided that, a Foulis as her daughter was, it would be right to invite a lady of unblemished character—wife, too, of the head of the family—to be one of the godmothers. It was very painful to the young and shattered recluse to have to play hostess to a strange great lady, but yet she was sure that duty compelled the exertion. Miss Harriett, only too elated at becoming co-sponsor with a countess, warmly seconded the idea; and Featherston, who was to be godfather, said that nobody but his little darling would have ever hit upon so admirable an idea. Lady Foulisville accordingly came to Yaxley, and she appeared there, at her best. She was really touched by the desolate state and sweet resignation of the lovely child-widow. The naïve inexperience of Lucy's demeanour gave proof of an inbred gentility, which extorted the unconscious respect of the better drilled but really more coarse temperament of her guest, who, in becoming a countess, had never ceased to be a Driscoll in masquerade. Even the external beauty and brightness of the surroundings, of which she had formed no definite conception, exaggerated themselves to Delicia's Irish imagination, contrasted as they were with the loneliness of the owner.

This brief meeting did not result in any close intimacy between the sisters-in-law, but it created reciprocal kindly feeling. Delicia, swayed by her



better nature, had become heartily ashamed of Captain Foulis previously to his marriage. Whatever may have been her faults, she never had any inclination to debauchery or to pecuniary dishonesty, and his infamous character stood revealed to her, while he still trafficked on the friendship of his coarse-minded and hardly half reformed brother. His quarrel with Lord Foulisville arose from no reaction of moral feeling on the part of the Earl, but simply from the discovery that Jack was swindling him, and had, indeed, so gossip said, forged his name. There was still some community of affection between the lord and the lady, and she heartily took her husband's part.

So, when she learned the particulars of the unfortunate marriage, she could not be too sympathetic or enthusiastic over the girl, so young, so lovely, so innocent, as she heard, trapped into a hateful marriage with a scoundrel, and so soon widowed in that awful manner. The christening party lasted for a very few days: and there was this remarkably fortunate circumstance about the incident, that it brightened, instead of dimming, the halo which surrounded Lucy in the eyes of her who had been Delicia Driscoll.

Some few years intervened between this event and the next meeting of the ladies, and in that interval Lucy had ripened from a child into a young woman, as her knowledge of the world, though mainly seen from the Yaxley observatory, had grown in clearness and breadth. Meanwhile, no jarring interests had sprung up to mar the reciprocal good impressions of that interesting time. Her husband's hideous confidences had revealed to Lucy what Lord Foulisville had been

in his bachelor riot; so she credited the considerate lady, who had spoken kind words of sympathy to her in the days of her blankest solitude, with having reformed the disreputable man. For a while Lady Foulisville was her heroine; but, as Mrs. Foulis's strength and spirits returned, she indulged, in her more mature age of from twenty to thirty, in short occasional visits to London; and then it was more than Delicia could do to resist patronizing her sister-in-law. For this, extenuating circumstances must be pleaded, as the presence at her parties of a widow so fresh, pretty, rich, and attractive was no doubt a great allurements.

Lucy saw through this game, and did not like it; but her buoyant nature was very forgiving. It was, after all, a study of character, and a change from the humdrum of Yaxley. So she submitted to it with a good-tempered and humorous resignation, which took her vain sister-in-law in.

Delicia fancied that she had made a conquest of Lucy, while behind her back she used to talk of her as *La Belle Sauvage*. Lucy's revenge for the intolerable and persistent patronage was, when she got back, to make Featherston roll on his chair with laughing at her stories of the town mouse and the country mouse. Sometimes, also, when she was dull, and wanted an intellectual pick-up, she would open her secret desk, and reperuse certain tender proposals of marriage, which had been made to her by swains whom she had fallen in with in Eaton Place. She took great and successful pains to keep the knowledge of these episodes of her London experience concealed from the match-

making Countess. Officious as she had been in introducing these gentlemen to Lucy, it never occurred to her that her country friend would be proposed to, and then hold her tongue. As to the rejected suitors, the replies which they received from the pen of the modern Penelope—wedded to her ideal of maidenlike independence—effectually closed their mouths.

So Delicia was deposed from her throne of heroine, but she still continued in Lucy's eyes to be a near connection, with whom there was every reason for keeping up friendly intercourse. Mrs. Foulis maintained her own independence while she was in London by claiming to be in nobody's way, but to enjoy the freedom of an hotel ; particularly as she used to bring Meriel up for the benefit of masters, and never professed to be herself taking advantage of the season. Indeed, she went so far as to make the mistake of refusing to be presented at Court. Still, she was careful to maintain her possession of the *entrée* of Eaton Place. The appearance, at rare intervals, of Lady Foulisville at Yaxley trimmed the balance of hostess and guest, and confirmed the good understanding.

For the last two or three years Mrs. Foulis's visits to London had been shorter ; and, excepting for such pleasures as an audience with the dentist, she had not brought Meriel with her, as she had secured the presence at Yaxley of the teachers whom she was at the time employing.

All the details of the friendship between Lady Foulisville and Mrs. Foulis were only known in a very vague way to Miss Robbins, and she misapprehended their scope ; for she had got hold of the vulgar, super-

ficial idea that Mrs. Foulis was like any other rustic connection whom it pleased the great lady to tolerate. Her personal recollection of Lucy, as we have seen, was of a bore whom the Countess had passed on to her, and she had shaken off. So she blundered from first to last in all her suggestions, after her one *coup* of fanning up the Countess's jealousy against Lady Kilcormac to a still more white heat. Her conceited self-assurance had led her to drop the word so fatal to her own position—adoption. The girls whom she suggested for the honour were so flagrantly ridiculous as to expose her to Lady Foulisville's contempt; and her sneer at Mrs. Foulis, when her name first fell from the Countess's lips, stirred up the old Driscoll pugnacity on behalf of perhaps the only person whom the Countess still respected.

With Lady Foulisville, worn out with the long routine of monotonous failures, the delight of a new idea was genuine, and it went on growing in her mind with incredible rapidity; and it not merely grew, but shaped itself in one definite and necessary form. The suggestion of adopting some girl gave place to the determination of adopting Meriel Foulis. The more the lady reflected on the question in all its conflicting aspects, the more clearly did she appreciate that the chaperonage of a stranger might be taken as a signal of distress. It would, as it were, have proclaimed, 'I have no daughter, and my daughter-in-law is impossible.' But with a niece of her own name and her husband's family, and that niece an heiress, what could be so natural as to hold out a hand to her, and what so kind and meritorious? All the world must

applaud. Lady Foulisville felt that, in her position, she went out of her way to give the girl the advantages which her birth and circumstances entitled her to expect, but of which her mother's pertinacious rusticity seemed likely to deprive her. Above all things, what an engine would she thereby acquire to secure and retain possession of the young men, in owning an heiress—a great and a young heiress, and that heiress so near to her in blood, under her own control, found out by herself, bearing her own name, and launched into the world by her own superior cleverness!

Clearly, not a day was to be lost in securing so great an advantage. All the trouble which had for the present to be taken was to write a short letter, cordial and spontaneous in tone, but, at the same time, not so eager as to raise any suspicion—the letter, in short, by which an affectionate aunt might invite even a penniless niece on a visit. So it ran as follows :

‘EATON PLACE, *Tuesday*.

‘DEAREST LUCY,

‘We have been reproaching ourselves for seeing so little of you for the last year or two. Dear little Meriel must, by this time, be quite grown up. Do let her come and spend the summer with her god-mother at Fontarabia. She will see a little society, and I am sure she will like the change.

‘Your affectionate sister,

‘DELICIA FOULISVILLE,’

## CHAPTER XVII.

## PERPLEXITY.

MRS. FOULIS was quite unprepared for any letter from her infrequent correspondent, and the contents of this one puzzled her exceedingly. She could not understand this sudden increment of affection, and how to answer it was a problem. Meriel was not out, and, in fact, was only just turned seventeen; and the sad recollections of her own premature marriage made her look with horror on exposing her child to the same fate. On the other hand, she felt the unfairness of rebuffing a friendly advance, which might be useful to her girl, from her own nearest relations, and people, too, who were, with all their shortcomings, of acknowledged social standing. Her own experience of Eaton Place had made her well aware of Delicia's propensity for match-making, and that recollection was dinning a loud 'No' into her ears. On the other side, however, came the thought that, little as she would relish the change of existence, she would soon have to betake herself to town, and drop Meriel into the social vortex, with the apparent certainty of the girl being taken up by Lady Foulisville.

'If it must be, it must,' Lucy reflected; 'and so, perhaps, it might be better that she should be acclimatized. There may be less risk in her beginning it in the back settlements of Ireland. There won't be the temptations and the opportunities there would be in London; and I *don't* think the dear Delicia would think of burdening herself with boys there, to run

after Meriel; and I don't think the boys would go. Meriel, too, may perhaps be better up to her after such a trial than if she made the start in Eaton Place. What can I do? I am sure I am thoroughly dazed. Bother sisters-in-law! I wish there was no civility in this world. Why can't I be left to manage my own child? I am sure I never wished to catch Lord Kilcormac. It's lucky, though, he's married, or Delicia would have been trying to make a match there.'

She then tried to comfort herself with the reflection that all Lady Foulisville's attempted matches had proved, by her own experience, failures; and then she reread the letter, which, on this second perusal, struck her in a fresh light.

Lady Foulisville's clever, because apparently casual, reference to Meriel as her god-daughter, to which she had not at first paid much attention, now puzzled Lucy not a little. In the frank simplicity of her heart, she argued that if she were to decline, and if the Countess were to complain of her as unkind and inconsistent in not trusting one on whom she had imposed so enduring and sacred a responsibility with the slight and fleeting one of chaperoning her godchild for a short time at her own country-house, she would not know what to answer.

'I cannot quarrel outright with her, after she was so kind to me at that dreadful time when I was so miserable and thought I had no friend; and she shows how she remembers it when she calls herself Meriel's godmother. I don't suppose she will ever ask Meriel her Catechism, if she remembers there is such a thing as a Catechism to ask; and she has been a precious

long time recollecting that the girl is her godchild. Still, as she now comes plump upon me with it, she makes it so difficult for me to refuse. Meriel will be sure to find the invitation out, and she may then so reasonably tax me with refusing her—who has, poor child, very little change or enlivenment, so little to amuse her—her first chance of anything a little gay. If there is any dodge about it, it beats me. But I don't think it, and I won't think it. She really means it good-naturedly. Delicia has her faults, and plenty of them, and Lord F. is a drunken pig; but the woman is not at all a bad one, after all, and she really seems when we meet to care for me. I never found her out trying to do anything malicious by me, though she has, confound her! tried to saddle me with a dozen husbands, every one a greater brute than the other.'

This was Lucy's own very confidential soliloquy to herself. But yet she was more puzzled than she owned—cross with herself, cross with Delicia, cross with the world; and the form of her thoughts followed her mental disturbance. The climax of her perplexity was that she had no one whom she could profitably consult; for although she felt that, with very few exceptions, her neighbours thought kindly of her, she had no one whom she could call a confidant, except Mr. Lidyard, to whom London society was an unopened book, and Bob Featherston, whose advice on any point involving finesse was, as she well knew, as valuable as would have been the counsels of her collie, if whines and wags could be transmuted into words. She and her cousin, the Lord-Lieutenant, were on the



footing of using reciprocal Christian names, but since that dull and pompous widower had made some advances, with an eye, as she believed, to her collieries rather than to her heart, she had become cautious in saying anything to him involving real intimacy. At last she was driven to the conclusion that her only possible course was the unsatisfactory expedient of laying the invitation before Meriel, and leaving her to please herself. Yet Mrs. Foulis fretted and kicked against this course, for her ever-present friend, Common Sense, whispered into her ear that it was not all right, but rather the abdication of her own responsibility. But the warning voice was drowned by a strident 'Can't be helped.'

In fact, the one great weakness and error in the career of Miss Harriett's ward and Captain Foulis's widow had found her out. To misunderstand and mismanage a child is grievous in any parent, but if this blunder could be characterized as an unavoidable calamity with any parent, it was with Lucy Foulis. To her neither father nor mother ever had any conscious existence, so the parental tradition of the nursery was to her a perfect blank. Marriage and motherhood, again, had been to her merely the unlovely accident of a life otherwise travelling on a line of celibate self-reliance. Roughly speaking, that life had divided itself into two long periods of (throwing in the few years of childhood) identical length—one of a self-instructed, self-amused orphanhood and a companionless girlhood, and the other of an equally companionless, self-reliant, spinster-like widowhood, full of kindly acquaintances, and with a few friends,

but no true confidants. Between these two long epochs came a dimly remembered episode, of less than a month's duration, of dismal cohabitation with one whose every word and action, once he had got his victim within his clutches, froze confidence and killed love; and then delirium. Here Meriel dropped in like a waif; and on Lucy, unassisted, unadvised, fell the burden of her training.

There was not a single married woman among her friends with whom she could take loving counsel and garner up experience. What she had to rely upon—namely, her own mental and moral growth—was misleading; for the eccentric courses which, under Miss Harriett's burlesque rule, turned out so undeservedly well in maturing the strong, pure elements of her own character, combining as it did her father's geniality and kindness with a perspicacity and courage all her own, were pitfalls when applied to forming the baser nature with which she had to deal. The loving mother was as open as the day; the beloved daughter crooked and sly.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### MISUNDERSTANDING.

THERE was quite enough in all the circumstances which we have recounted, little apparent as they were upon the surface, to create that atmosphere of unappreciated misunderstandings in which Mrs. Foulis and Meriel lived; while its indirect influence led two careers by ways—whether rough or smooth events

will show—along which they never would otherwise have travelled. On some days little Meriel was good, and on others naughty; on one morning the child would say its prayers, and on another yell and claw its nurse; and it got slaps or sugar-plums accordingly. But, slapped or stuffed, the mystery of mysteries, that world of good and evil, the human mind, growing up within those tiny limbs, was never inventoried, never grappled with, never moulded by strong discipline. Bad nurses and local masters, at cheap rates, had been provided for Lucy; the best of instructors, brought down to Yaxley at exorbitant stipends, were at Meriel's service; and in the case of teachers who would not be so engaged, she was brought up to London. But for her the old morocco-bound volumes of the patriarchal Curteis, and all her mother's subsequent and continually growing acquisitions, were as so many logs. Coaxing and scolding were equally ineffective to make her open a book except at lesson-time. Had Meriel been a vixen, very likely she would have chafed her mother's independent spirit. But though she cared in her heart no more for her mother than for any living being except herself, she had in stock kissing, coaxing, and wheedling, as well as pouting and grumbling; and although certainly the former actions came to her much less naturally than the latter, yet the exercise was so purely mechanical as to give her very little trouble, and to be well worth that trouble in view of the accruing benefits. Her nurse said she was the most 'contrayry' child she had ever had to do with, and Mrs. Foulis accordingly gave her daughter credit for honest independence

of character, and called her her dear little rough diamond.

The result of all was, that Lucy, so clear-judging in other matters, lived in a fool's paradise in her relations to Meriel. She did not really care so much as she fancied for her daughter, whose nature repelled all truest and deepest sympathy; but as she had never had any other child, and herself had never known a parent's love, she was incapable of comparing the reciprocal confidence of herself and of Meriel with that of other parents and children. But yet, somehow, Meriel never entered unconsciously into any of Lucy's schemes of duty, business, or pleasure. She had to be sought out and brought in, like an unknown quantity into an equation.

So Mrs. Foulis, without any preface, put the Countess's letter into Meriel's hand, and asked her what she would like to do. No one will be astonished to learn that our amiable Meriel jumped at a scheme which carried with it excitement, change of scene, and relief from the tedium of the lessons to which she still had to submit; and, sweetest of all, the chance of turning those talents of hers, which she rated at a value inconceivable to the remaining human race, to some personal advantage, not so much in the way of marriage as of getting on—a process as to which she had exalted though hazy notions. So Mrs. Foulis lost little time in returning a graceful and grateful acceptance, which was followed by further correspondence touching times and trains, which would be wearisome to recount.

The news of Miss Meriel's speedy departure soon

spread like wildfire round the neighbourhood of Yaxley. Featherston, Lidyard, and Arlett, who knew the facts of the case, saw nothing in them mysterious or needing any explanation, so they said nothing, and by this natural but mistaken policy left the field open to those who, knowing nothing, felt no restraint in romancing at their own sweet wills. Miss Turner, who was never afraid of grappling with a long word, and never quick at catching it, mumbled and stumbled over 'kleptymanny' and 'tipsymanny.' 'Poor young creature! to think it should be needful to send her away so soon from home—such a child, and with such prospects too. Well, I hope they'll be kind to her at the Asylum. Do you know they pretend it's her uncle in Ireland she's going to?'

Mrs. Rees, always more astute, fired her double-weighted bolt at another foe, as she would mysteriously observe, 'Such an old fellow, too, as that Featherston is. I don't wonder at Mrs. Foulis, who knows what's what, with all her pride, getting Miss Meriel out of the way till the foolish fancy is past.'

But the excitement reached its height at Yaxley School when the master, Mr. Murgatroyd, a nebe, arrival, and destined to be a speedy departure, a sentimental overtrained youth, as laden with certificates as he was unencumbered with sense, determined to present an address in verse to the departing damsel. Miss Larcom, the mistress, a steady-going body, who never pretended to be brilliant and was never caught out making a mistake, bluntly told the would-be Byron that he was a fool. An address should be written in honest prose, and if he was too magnificent

to undertake so matter-of-fact a job, she felt sure that she could manage to write a decent sort of thing.

Murgatroyd coloured up with mortified vanity, and moodily turned towards his cottage ; but he did not succeed in getting off till Miss Larcom, whose sturdy determination had often before been too much for his petulant, weak, and wavering nature, made him promise that they both should appear at the Vicarage that evening with their rival compositions, and that Mr. Lidyard's decision should be final.

Accordingly the two appeared, and Murgatroyd commenced, prefacing with the remark that he wished to tender a poetic trifle based, as far as its system of rhyming went, upon Orlando's verses to Rosalind in *As You Like It*. 'Touchstone's more likely,' muttered the Vicar ; but his remark was happily lost on the self-absorbed rhapsodist, who proceeded to recite the following address :

O graceful lady Meriel,  
In Yaxley mansion who dost dwell,  
First of its flowers of sweetest smell,  
Our loveliest, most charming belle.  
Young hermit in luxurious cell,  
By honoured mother nurtured well,  
Away from strife and murderous mell !  
Must you then go by fate so fell ?  
Must we then toll the dolesome knell,  
And rising tears and weeping quell,  
As low and sullen swings the bell,  
While you move onward in travel,  
Across the Ocean's solemn swell,  
'To seek new homes in Celtic dell ;  
Where tenants shoot and rents impel  
The fiends o'er slaughtered squires to yell ?

At least write home your friends to tell  
That you have snared and hold in spell  
A dashing Irish Colonel.

Miss Larcom, who had been fidgeting first with one foot and then with another, as the spouter mouthed each successive line, could no longer contain her contempt, but screamed :

‘Co-lo-nel, Co-lo-nel, pooh, pooh ! It’s something to live till now to learn *that* ! I never guessed before I should get any good by being schoolmistress. Co-lo-nel, indeed ! where have you been living all your days, Mr. Murgatroyd, I should like to know ? Why man, it’s “kurnel,” “kurnel,” all the world over. I should just like to see how you would be received on parade when you and your volunteers are out playing at soldiers if you were to go up to Colonel Vincent, and call him Co-lo-nel !’

‘Miss Larcom, you are very facetious, but please to recollect that our immortal Milton sang in his majestic sonnets :

‘Captain, or Colonel, or Knight-in-Arms.’

‘He did, did he ? Maybe ; but he cut the king’s head off, also. Really, Mr. Murgatroyd ! Besides, it’s so vulgar to think of Miss Meriel throwing herself away upon an Irish Co-lo-nel. Why, she must come back a duchess at least. You may be master in your own school, but I am mistress outside ; and if you go to the mansion with that doggerel, I stop here with my girls, and don’t disgrace myself before Mrs. Foulis. That’s flat.’

In her impatience she had dropped her own paper,

and Lidyard had taken it up and read it. It was singularly commonplace, and absolutely unexceptionable; but he saw that to prefer it to the moonstruck youth's balderdash would be to set up an unappeasable feud. He acted accordingly with promptitude, and turning to Miss Larcom, said:

‘While you and our good friend Murgatroyd have been arguing, I have been conning your address. It is to the point, and practical, as Mr. Murgatroyd’s verses are full of fire and imagination. But, do you know, I much doubt whether Mrs. Foulis would like any address at all. It’s as if she was going to lose her daughter for ever. Nothing but a girl getting married or lying on her death-bed justifies so solemn a way of taking matters. Why, you toll the funeral knell as if you never expected Mrs. Foulis to see Miss Meriel again, when she is only going off for a summer holiday to her uncle and aunt, as I hope she will often do again, for, pleasant as Yaxley is, it is dull never to have a change. My advice to both of you is to keep your papers till some more important occasion calls for them.’

Miss Larcom, who was properly diffident as to her literary style, cheerfully acquiesced, and the crest-fallen schoolmaster was compelled very ungraciously to submit.



## CHAPTER XIX.

## SON AND FATHER.

LADY FOULISVILLE and Miss Robbins, on the arrival of Lucy's answer, found much work cut out for them in the necessity of following up the *coup* by collecting, at short notice, the party which was to gather at Fontarabia. This was a proceeding of much importance, and not to be slurred over hastily, as the occasion was destined to give the Countess her *début* in her new character of chaperon, as to which she was resolved that there should be no ambiguity. The departure was so entirely novel and unencumbered with antecedents, that it would, she thought, be absolutely superstitious to admit failure, even as a possible contingency; still, to secure success, she had to work. Yet her first shots were misses, and as one eligible young man after another pleaded the Continent, Scotland, yachting, or duty, and two eminent savants had to read papers at the British Association, Delicia's spirits fell.

A final effort must be made, or the coronet of Foulisville would be made ridiculous in the eyes of the prosperous sister-in-law.

Anxiously and lengthily did the little conclave canvass many names, noting some and rejecting others.

Robbins at last called out, 'Dear me, we've quite forgotten that nice Eustace Brandreth.'

'Well, he'd do well enough in himself, but I don't want to get mixed up again with his father if I can help it, now that I am so happily rid of them.'

‘I said Eustace, not Sir Miles. Nobody nowadays obliges a father by courting his heir; and, besides, you can’t better snub the exemplary baronet than by doing the civil to Eustace, whom he hates.’

‘Perhaps you are right. Well, write to ask him for me, and I’ll sign the note.’

So the note was written, expressing, with the amplification dear to a literary hack such as Miss Robbins had been, when working for the pedant Lady Foulisville, the great pleasure which the company of one like Mr. Eustace Brandreth at Fontarabia would give to her and to Lord Foulisville. When it was folded and gummed, Robbins asked where she should direct it to.

‘To his club, of course.’

‘But I don’t know his club.’

‘Then, to his lodging.’

‘But the Blue Book doesn’t give his lodging.’

The visiting book was duly sent for, and it appeared that the hall-porter, who had been dismissed two days before for loving beer not wisely but too well, had systematically forgotten to enter any address for some three months.

‘Then, my dear Robbins, we must send it to his father’s to be forwarded; the old fellow won’t think there’s money in it, so I don’t think he’ll steal it.’

So the note went, and on the following morning a missive, directed in a stiff, old-fashioned, but legible hand, which made her creep, was placed in Lady Foulisville’s hand. She opened it, and to her consternation read :

THE PHLYARIUM, *June 3rd.*

HONOURED AND DISTINGUISHED LADY,

Yesternight your devoted slave was pondering, in his desolate home, as only a solitary man can do, over those happy evenings when the humblest of your servants has so often been privileged to take his place at the écarté table of the most charming mansion in Belgravia, when his domestic silently placed before him a note with a well-known monogram, directed to my dear boy, to be forwarded. Alas! my beloved Eustace has left his doating old father, and is now disporting himself in foreign lands, where I know not, for he is an infrequent correspondent. So, as his faithful friend and natural representative, I ventured to open the missive, and then learned of how great pleasure and privilege my young scapegrace <sup>to</sup> deprived himself by his vagabond ways. You <sup>be</sup> <sup>ca-</sup> descend to tell that young fellow in your own charming manner, and with more than your usual emphasis, that you are in much need of one like him to complete your party at Fontarabia; and I believe that there is no one so like Eustace Brandreth as Eustace Brandreth's father. In this emergency I feel that it is the duty of a stationary father to supply the shortcomings of his vagrant son, and in place of my lost boy I venture to tender to you and to his dear lordship the company and the services of your old retainer and faithful friend,

MILES BRANDRETH.

Had Lady Foulisville been a gentleman, we fear

that she would have had resort to a very naughty monosyllable ; as it was, she contented herself with another which was only vulgar, and exclaiming, ‘ Drat his impudence ! ’ tossed the note to Miss Robbins.

‘ What’s to be done ? ’ asked the confidante.

‘ What’s to be done ? You fool ! ’ snapped out the Driscoll-born. ‘ It’s all your dunderheaded meddling. Nothing’s to be done. Odious, insolent thing as the fellow is, we can’t afford to quarrel with him, as you’ve chosen to put me in the hole with your folly and your flummery.’

Then she cooled as the fit subsided, and she recollected that she was in her anger floundering into revelations which, with all her external confidence in her instrument, Robbins, were far too delicate for that woman’s ears. So she lowered her tone, and with forced calmness continued, ‘ You know how I hate the man. But he is on the footing of a family friend, though there has been a coolness between us ; so it would never do, you know, to be so rude as to repel him when he is clearly so anxious to make up the difference.’

Lady Foulisville did really not only hate, but dread, Sir Miles Brandreth, from her knowledge of the questionable adventures into which that brazen-faced promoter of speculative enterprises had drawn the too credulous, but not sufficiently scrupulous, Earl ; in some of which, too, she had embarked money which she could ill afford to lose, obtained as it had been by mortgaging her prospective jointure. The man was an ambitious, plausible adventurer, who made full use of an ancient baronetcy of historical fame, but

shattered fortunes. With the impudence of Thersites, a jaunty volubility which passed for agreeable conversation in some houses, and no small share of misdirected ability, Sir Miles Brandeth had, while often held at arm's length by society, always contrived to avoid the cut direct, and generally managed to reinstate himself, sooner or later, with those who had taken most trouble to shake him off.

At this time he had nearly reached the age of sixty, and still preserved a medium-sized figure, neither thin nor fat. His head, indeed, showed a large bald patch, but young blue eyes, capable of a sudden expression of extreme fierceness, were rather deeply seated under straight, slightly bushy eyebrows, and parted by a prominent nose, hooked and pinched at the nostrils. His lips were thin, and his teeth the best which science could produce; while his well-tended brown beard was beginning to turn grizzly. His great pride and reliance were in a voice, the musical flexibility of which never failed its master when he desired to obscure a fact or win belief for an invention.

Indeed, apart from some public services on which he persistently traded, Sir Miles Brandeth could only be credited by the impartial chronicler with one action which was for the benefit of his fellow-creatures, and that was of having endowed the world with so excellent a personage as his son Eustace. Even this good deed was now matter of ancient history, and only accomplished at the loss of a wife as admirable as a woman as for a man her husband was the worse; and who would have left life with the reputation of having been as wise as she was charming, but for the incom-

prehensible infatuation which led her to say 'Yes' when Sir Miles asked her to marry him.

The character of this distinguished Baronet was early summed up in an anecdote of the boyhood of one with whom, emphatically, the child was father of the man. Indeed, we believe that his conviction of his power of managing his fellow-creatures, engendered in him by the boundless self-sufficiency of his nature, was fostered by the unfortunate success of his boyish escapade, which we proceed to narrate as he was wont to tell the story.

It happened that, upon some passing occasion, his father—a staid, pompous old don—gave an entertainment to the corporation of the borough near which he was living, and for which he was in hopes of being elected. Now our friend, at that period a true mamma's darling, had been freely allowed to spoil the harmony of every social gathering under the paternal roof. At this point, however, the sluggish authority of the old Baronet asserted itself, and the young Miles was with all due precaution informed that there was no room for him at the feast, as the size of the dining-room bore no proportion to the number and dignity of the guests. Most spoiled children would have yelled and stamped at the disappointment: not so the sucking man of the world. The sweet humility with which he took the blow earned him much spoiling for many days after, and quite defeated his father's projects of tightened discipline; and yet he carried out a hideous but undetected revenge.

The Baronet had, at much trouble and expense, procured from Bristol a large supply of the richest turtle-

soup—in days when turtle-soup was always thick. The invitations had been issued for a turtle feast. Now this turtle lay temptingly accessible to the ill-used Miles, as also did the savoury bottle of catsup. The young philosopher noticed this, and, with the inspiration of genius, grasped a great idea. Turtle-soup flavoured with catsup would, as he inductively reasoned, be a nauseous delicacy, while it was possible, considering the respective darkness of colour attaching to the soup and to the condiment, and also the pronounced flavour of each, to sauce the turtle with just so much of catsup as to make it perfectly unpalatable, and yet raise no suspicions that the nasty mess was anything but turtle that had proved a failure in the Bristol purveyor's hands. For a child—and an angry child, too—to realize such sound conclusions, was no small triumph of mind over passion, and the self-control which strictly adhered to the resolution was even more commendable. A little over-zeal, a drop or two of superfluous catsup, a supplementary garnish of vinegar or mustard or snuff, would have probably ruined all and led to detection. As it was, the boy was able, from his throne of moral greatness, to witness his father and his father's guests made thoroughly wretched by the unexpected badness of the much-coveted turtle, and his hypocritical condolences were effectual in rubbing the disappointment in.

## CHAPTER XX.

## A POPULAR HERO.

SINCE his boyish adventure Sir Miles Brandreth's life might have been compendiously described as a consistent course of spoiling to his own advantage his neighbours' turtle with surreptitious catsup. Yet he was for a short time a popular hero. The interest of his wife's relations, who found it convenient thus to compromise some engagements into which his father-in-law had unfortunately entered, procured for the Baronet, after her death, a colonial appointment, and here he had the good fortune to act for the advantage of the State in a case where dexterity rather than any higher quality was requisite. His name was mentioned with praise in the newspapers and in Parliament, and on more than one occasion after his return he made good use of this stroke of fortune; the amplitude of the Colonial Secretary's eulogy approving him to the party then in power, while the scantiness of his reward procured much sympathy on the other side for the brilliant administrator whose courageous prescience had been acknowledged by a mere C.B. It is probable that some flickering reminiscences of this brief reputation were, even down to the period of the present events, serviceable in screening Brandreth from the repeated exposures which might have befallen a more obscure adventurer who had done far less to outrage and provoke society.

Another safeguard which the astute baronet had thrown up round his precious person was the avoid-



ance of any pretensions to the character of a fire-eater. He could wound deeply with barbed sarcasms, but he never flagrantly and openly insulted anyone; and brought up as he was in jovial days, before the historical cock-pheasant had made affairs of honour ridiculous, his boast was that he had never fought a duel, got drunk, or appeared either as plaintiff or defendant in any court. More than once he hovered round the outskirts of a constituency, and, while he never would make up his mind to go to the poll, his place as candidate was always taken by some man whose gratitude might presumably be supposed to be of solid texture. Yet he was as little defrauded by dishonest confederates as ever was any man in his line of life, for he never failed to hold some accomplice within his clutches, who found himself compelled to run the gauntlet of litigation for the real benefit of the modest baronet in the background. A mere esquire might often have been compelled to float risky ventures by accepting the chairmanship which an original baronet of James I.'s creation could afford to surrender, in his generosity to an untitled friend. Chairman indeed he often became, but he never trusted his weight to a seat of which the sustaining capacity had not been previously well tested by earlier and more simple occupants.

It has already been explained that the reason of Sir Miles's disgrace in Eaton Place was Lady Foulisville having overheard him talking of the Earl at one of her own parties as 'Boozy Fou.' It was creditable to her to have taken such serious notice of an expression insulting to her husband, for whom she could no longer

feel affection or respect, particularly as her own experience led her so painfully to recognise its truth. At the same time it mortified her pride, and it put her self-interest on its guard. To be the wife of 'Boozy Fou' was to fill a humiliating and ridiculous position, while the reputation of his being the boozy Earl of Foulisville would take away the last chance of any advantage which she could derive from her husband's coronet. It ought to be no derogation from her moral merit that her action was so profoundly inconsistent. She made her cognisance of the offence a profound secret, as if it carried some stain on her own reputation; and yet the course she took was not only capricious but unintelligible, except as a public protest against scandal. But she could not conceal the expression of her face when the injurious words fell on her ear. Brandreth caught it, and understood all. A bungler in the game of life would have sought an explanation or sent an apology. He felt that his strength lay in his supposed ignorance, for he could not allow himself to doubt that he would be, sooner or later, found necessary again, when it would be much easier for him to resume his place in quiet, if he could pretend that nothing had happened.

When the Phylarium was first started, and had still to content itself with renting the Duke of Merioneth's house in Hamilton Place, the provisional committee, on which Sir Miles Brandreth had managed to be appointed vice-chairman, decided that, in order to float the enterprise, it was indispensable to obtain some one of a degree not inferior to an earl to accept the offices of trustee and permanent chairman. The

provisional chairman was, indeed, a member of the diplomatic corps, and, therefore, rightly claimed his place at Court and any dinner-party above all marquesses ; but as he only represented a South American Republic, and might run home any day and pronounce as President, the representation of 'His Excellency' went for very little. 'Issachar Brothers,' gentlemen well known to Sir Miles, and whose money, in fact, contributed in no small degree to float the new club, suggested the Earl of Foulisville as the nobleman most likely to take the bait. The suggestion was joy to Sir Miles, who had long had his eye upon the Earl as a clever fool who could be moulded so as to become useful to him in his own pursuits. So he organized a deputation upon a day when he guessed that the chairman must be absent, and then, as its spokesman, played his cards so well as not only to obtain the ready consent of the vain Earl, but to lay the foundations of a friendly acquaintance. When his Lordship heard that the Club had leased the Duke of Merioneth's house, he inwardly winced at having to re-enter rooms so tragically familiar to him, but the scruple passed away in a few moments. Lord Foulisville had not yet settled down into his later condition of a helpless *bon vivant*, and the enterprising Baronet induced him to enter into several speculations more or less questionable, out of which he emerged more hit each time than he had been with the prior one. How Brandreth fared in them was a mystery, but he kept his place at Foulisville's table ; and as he had little trouble in making himself agreeable to her Ladyship, he was very soon installed as her odd man, retailer of scandal,

tout, errand boy, and honorary secretary. Meanwhile, as the lord's devotion to the claret-bottle increased, so did his restless craving after speculation dull. It was disappointment at this change which provoked Sir Miles to dub him by that opprobrious name, the incautious use of which had procured his exclusion from Eaton Place.

Brandreth's disgrace, as we have seen, had much to do with the singular exaltation of Miss Robbins. The Countess could not manage without some aide-de-camp, and Sir Miles had filled this post to perfection. He always knew what was the right thing to do or say, and he acted or spoke with consistent promptitude; so that he never found himself overtaken by any change of purpose. With Lady Foulisville herself, his manner was the perfect example of what the deportment of chief toady to a vain *grande dame* should be, combining, as it did, obsequiousness to her rank with that delicate banter which presupposed her wit. Every look, every action, every word, every tone said, 'You are clever, and I fain would engage you in the duel of wits; you are charming, and I fain would make love to you; you are capable, and I fain would win you to be my drudge: but you are sensible, you are virtuous, you are delicate, you are a lady, and I respect you.' It was a rare mortification for one who was so accomplished, and who was aware of his own talent, to be ousted, and all on account of one silly burst of quite unaccountable imprudence. It was still more cruel to be supplanted by a Robbins, whose ability he did not rate as highly as it deserved. Her powers were inferior, in the extent of their operations,

to those of the Baronet, but they were incontestable within their special area. After all, while woman-kind remains unemancipated, women cannot openly parade themselves as the ready directors of bubble companies, nor take their place with promising young heirs at the whist-tables of clubs. Had Sir Miles been a woman, and Robbins a man, their careers might have been reversed.

Miss Robbins was never more sincere in her life than when she urged the Countess to invite Eustace Brandreth to Fontarabia, and gave as the reason for showing this civility to the son of the man who had so greatly offended her patroness, that her doing this would be a genuine mortification to the old schemer. Eustace Brandreth was, in truth, worthy of all the good things which Robbins could report or invent about him; but he and she were uncongenial spirits, and in her heart she hated him only less than she did his father. Still, she knew his good looks and his social talents, and her one great object was now to get rid, as soon as possible, of the new inevitable incubus, Meriel, either by disgracing or by marrying her. It was not strange that, as he had been for different reasons the common object of animosity to both the rival competitors for the office of Prime Minister of Eaton Place, Eustace Brandreth should have been very seldom inside the house, and almost unknown to the Countess.

Under any other circumstances she would have long since put out all her tentacles to catch so promising a lion. As it was, he had been nearly as much out of her calculations as a Liberal statesman can be out of

those of his party when he snubs his Four Hundred, and will not hear of ploughman suffrage for the counties.

Not many days after his feat of forcing himself upon Lady Foulisville's party, Sir Miles was sitting in his room, when in walked his son. In truth, the Baronet might, had he been so inclined, have easily found where Eustace was by asking the porter at the Phlyarium, and have sent the invitation after him. Still, he did not reckon on the young man's return quite so soon, and having at a moment's notice to account for his recent action, he rapidly came to the conclusion that in this exceptional emergency the truth was more clever and tactical than any lie. It was an unusual experience for him, and he deserves credit for the unflinching veracity with which he explained, in all its details, the trick which he had played, chuckling over his gain and his son's loss. As he hoped and expected, Eustace walked out of the room without answering a word. His father hated him for his probity, good looks, ability, and independence of disposition; and Eustace, for his part, always anxious to avoid furnishing sport to the scandal-mongers by unseemly squabbles between parent and child, and inspired also by a wise spirit of filial reverence, saw as little as he could of his father, and, when they were thrown together, avoided conversation as much as possible. Eustace Brandreth had gone to college from a conspicuous school, the most popular and brilliant boy of his generation, and in due time, after a remarkable degree, won his Fellowship. So he ought, at the age of thirty-three, to have been a very

distinguished man, and on the road to becoming a very rich one, considering that he had been ten years called to the Bar. What he was was a man of whom everybody said that there was a great deal in him, and who had done many clever and some brilliant things, but who was allowing his direct onward course to the Woolsack or the Marble Chair to be interrupted by stoppings and sniffings at the bundles of literature, art, and journalism which bordered his way to the right hand and to the left. It was not wonderful that Lady Foulisville, who had followed up the invitation by inquiring into the young man's antecedents, regretted and resented the substitution of father for son in the party which she was toiling to make up.

'Another failure!' the Countess would go on gasping, as excuse after excuse came dropping in.

Miss Robbins felt guilty and puzzled, for she recollected all the smooth things which she had prophesied, and dreaded their being brought up against her; so she plied her fondling ways with redoubled assiduity. The young men whom Delicia did pick up were none of them eldest sons, except Fiennes, and he was heir to nothing; while Sergood's looks and Pringle's swagger were no compensation for lack of land. 'Well, she was in for it,' she said, and worked on till at last she made up a list, such as it was, and prepared for the family progress to Ireland. She and the Earl were to travel together by slow stages; while Miss Robbins, who stopped behind to finish some business, was so to time her more rapid movements as to arrive at Fontarabia twenty-four hours later from Dublin. To her was to be confided the responsibility of escorting

Meriel, who would thus meet her uncle and aunt for the first time at Fontarabia itself.

There was some risk in letting Lady Foulisville find out how well she could travel with the assistance of servants, and away from her Robbins. Still the advantage of preoccupying the ground with Miss Foulis seemed so important that the confidante gladly lent her influence to this arrangement.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### FONTARABIA.

AFTER all Lady Foulisville's exertions, the party, as it gathered on a hot summer's evening in the drawing-room at Fontarabia, did not look promising. The memorable event of Miss Foulis's *début* could only bring together, besides the Earl, Countess, Meriel, and Robbins, the small knot of self-appreciatory youths and a couple of dull married couples, one Irish and one English, with a daughter to one or the other of them, whose looks and entire bearing proclaimed that they had once been accustomed to look to an annual round of country-house visits, but that, in the evil days on which they were fallen, such treats had become rare and precious. One lady had probably once been rather pretty, and the other had taught herself to believe in her own conversation. Moreover, there were two single gentlemen of a certain age, Sir Miles Brandreth and the Count of Sant' Onofrio.

The Count was a burly gentleman, about forty-eight



years old, boisterously unctuous, deficient in tact, and constantly backsliding into admissions which betrayed him as weak in his principles, though, perhaps, not devoid of good nature, and particularly ridiculous from his persistent efforts to smother a full Munster brogue under a foreign accent. He was slow and awkward at repartee; but when the line was clear and the steam up, he could rattle on with much volubility. He was fond of posing as a master of conversation, yet he never seemed to perceive the merriment which his grotesque pronunciation was apt to produce. Persons who are clever in looking through milestones were wont to explain this inconsistency by saying that he was carrying out a theory as to what was practically advantageous for gentlemen of his profession. The character, within manageable limits, of a social butt was (he would contend) useful from its tendency to disarm undue suspicion. The summer flies, he was sure, stretched their legs and made fun of the awkward old spider. He would account for his phenomenal speech by referring with effusion to his blessed mother, who was now with the saints. He might have also thrown in his blessed father, as, in truth, he was for the earlier years of his life, Maurice Cassidy, son of a respectable distiller at Cork, where he might have wasted his days rolling up money in the cold shade of the family counting-house if some complication about a signature had not arisen, which led him to pine for the leisure of foreign haunts. He first tried the German watering-places, and, finding that they did not agree with his health, he turned southward.

Then, after sundry vicissitudes, he fell in with the

Grand Duke of Ferrara, and contrived to make himself useful and agreeable to that potentate. As sole payment for services which cost him both time and money, he obtained a patent of nobility. This was no great outlay for a Grand Duke, but the recipient never complained, for he appreciated that in the wide world one Count Sant' Onofrio is worth many Maurice Cassidys.

The Count had come down before the Baronet, and when they were both in her presence the Countess introduced them to each other. Each bowed in silence, with that odd sort of half-ashamed, half-knowing look which says that the man knows more of his new acquaintance than it would be good for either of them to betray—a truce, but not 'of God.'

When dinner was announced, his Lordship shuffled off with one of the old ladies; the other fell to the lot of Sir Miles; while, to her great disgust, Meriel found herself an Iphigenia, offered on the altar of precedence by being allotted to the older, the more ugly, and the more stupid of the two elders. The Countess was the prize of the foreign nobleman.

All through the feast, Sir Miles, whose seat was just opposite to her, kept continually looking at Meriel and saying little to his voluble neighbour, who talked for both. The girl's identity, and the legend of her assured inheritance, were familiar to him; for, among the knot of impecunious young dandies and battered old spendthrifts who were wont to gather in the smoking-room of the 'Phly,' conversation often turned upon the natural history of the heiresses and the jointured widows who sailed like planets round the orderly orbit of the British heaven, or shot like comets from the un-

known abysses of New York and Boston. In such company the widow and the daughter, both so eligible, and both keeping so dark, were, of course, objects of much interest. Meriel's country bringing up—'trained by the gardener,' as the sporting men used to say—gave a zest to her name, and added to the mystery of her mother's existence.

Sir Miles was the more bound not to lose the chance, as, from his known intimacy in Eaton Place, he used to be constantly appealed to for details about the Yaxley Foulises. He had hitherto been able to evade confessing that they were strangers to him, but he felt that he could not much longer maintain the imposture. In this respect, then, the cast of the party was most opportune; otherwise, he was sorry that his introduction to Miss Foulis should have occurred in the company of Sant' Onofrio. The two worthies had crossed each other's paths more than once, and it was only the last season that Brandeth had procured the blackballing at the 'Phly' of the *sci-disant* Italian, who, of course, knew to whom he was indebted for that good turn, and was grateful accordingly. Sant' Onofrio, much inferior, in the long run, to Sir Miles in conversational powers, was, to the first glance of even a tyro, no more than a showy pretender to the name of gentleman. He smiled, showed his teeth, and shot his linen. Still, by the fortunes of war, and owing to her own inexperience, he preoccupied the ground with Meriel, to the detriment of the Baronet. This made the Englishman very angry, not only from his previous dislike to his Bohemian fellow-professional, but because, without having any definite intention of any

sort, he resolved upon forcing upon Meriel a retaining fee which might lead to an introduction to the widow and a lodgment at Yaxley. The man who had recovered his place at the table of the Foulisvilles, and forced the stronghold of Fontarabia, might be forgiven for indulging in projects of bold, far-reaching strategy. He took occasion, accordingly, one afternoon, when they happened to be thrown together, to ask Miss Foulis, in a lowered and sympathetic tone, what she thought of Cassidy's airs and graces.

'Cassidy?' she answered; 'I don't know any Cassidy.'

'Oh, "Paddy from Cork," who swaggers as an Italian nobleman,' he replied, with a smothered laugh; and proceeded to pour into Meriel's curious ear so clever and malicious a report of the rival adventurer as effectually to put him in the young lady's bad books for three days. It was a new sensation on her part to be made the depository of any one's confidence, and the story was framed in expressions calculated to tickle her vanity, and withal magnify himself. Had she been only a visitor, the Baronet said he would not have troubled her with these details about a man for whom no one in a good position could care. But she was the niece of the house, and as her aunt's old and faithful friend he felt it was his duty to give her the opportunity of putting in a word in season with her relation. Lady Foulisville's good nature must have been abused by those who knew very little of the composition of good society when she was induced to invite a person of antecedents which so ill stood any scrutiny.

Meriel rather emphatically disclaimed any influence in a house where she was herself really only a stranger; and what she said much comforted Sir Miles, who inferred that she swallowed all his boasts, and so gave the denial to any suspicion that the Countess could have told her niece the story of his disgrace. So he smiled and said, 'No one need care to know much of such a tabernacle in the wilderness as this tumble-down Irish retreat if half of what the world says of lovely Yaxley and its popular owner be true.' This was, however, a fly to which he observed that the damsel did not rise, and he likewise inferred that his insinuation about Robbins had fallen dead. Meriel, he saw at once, was stupid and untrained both in intellect and in social lore. The Baronet had, however, established an influence over her mind, while he also unconsciously succeeded in inspiring the girl with a strange dread, which she never threw off, of himself as master of a fearful art of heaping contempt upon his fellow-creatures. In her small acquaintance with human life hitherto the country-bred girl had never before had any experience of what sarcasm really meant, and such a first sample of it was very alarming to her rustic mind. Besides, she had, on one or two occasions, desried him shooting one of his savage glances at Sant' Onofrio, and, though the action was involuntary and quite transient, the effect upon herself was deep on account of the novelty of the disagreeable experience, and she would think that if she were ever to fall into the power of that terrible man, he could make her do anything out of sheer fright. Then he would say something acute and comic which

made her laugh, feeling all the while that his amusing her was condescension which involved a visible recognition on her part. The general feeling which resulted from these moods was one of respect, rather than liking. He was, she was sure, the cleverest man she had ever met, and the most amusing, but, at the same time, the one who frightened her more than any acquaintance whom she had ever before come across.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### A PLEASANT PARTY.

BUT we are outrunning time, as the party was deep in its second week before the conversation between the Baronet and the young lady took place. Each day in the meanwhile had passed just like the one before. The young men flirted, and aired their London phrases; the old men grumbled, snorted, and prosed; the old ladies ran wild in the prodigal effusiveness of their small talk; the young lady whom one of them owned said 'Yes,' and she said 'No,' and generally said the one when she ought to have said the other. Meriel looked on much puzzled, in her inmost heart bored and disappointed, but yet rejoicing at her emancipation from a parental yoke whose very easiness and indulgence had palled upon her. She despised the old ladies' cumbrous catalogues of grievances, and their chronicle of losses and gains at cards; and, willing as she was to keep

pace with the dandies in their rattle and their slang, she was pulled up at every turn by her ignorance of their dialect, and her inexperience of their allusions and of their references, and had nothing left to her but to fall back upon a general attitude of pert silliness. She was constantly coupled with the strange young lady, and as she never could extort any reply to her gabble but 'Yes,' and 'No,' and 'Indeed,' she hated the very sight of her insipid companion. The Count bore down upon her like an alligator, and, as a cobra, lubricated her with his slimy compliments; while Sir Miles lay quietly in wait to trip up the Hibernian step-child of the sunny south—a feat which he performed several times on successive evenings with such adroitness as to leave his rival no consolation but a sulk and a cigar.

As for my lord and my lady, the former passed the bottle and made up the whist-table with the old men and one or other of the wives, while Lady Foulisville grew more and more strong in the unpleasant conviction that the married men did not appreciate her, their wives did not cotton to her, and the young men looked upon her as a bore; while Sir Miles and the Count were too full of their plots and counter-plots to mind man, woman, or child, except so far as they might be helpful towards their own ends. Delicia sighed to herself: 'What a failure that tiresome Robbins has made of it by bringing these old bores together! She must have known how they hated each other. And how could she have been such a fool as to make me ask the Italian, after old Brandreth had forced himself on me?' What she

did not know was that a few years previously, before Robbins had gained a footing in Eaton Place, and while she was earning a livelihood by translating Mazzinian effusions for the London papers, she had come across Sant' Onofrio in the character which, forgetful of his former patron at Ferrara, he had assumed of Agent-General in London of the Italian Republic, and that some love passages had occurred between the interesting pair. Now he would hardly look at the confidante; and this cruelty of the perfidious swain tended to keep the lady in a chronic condition of ill-humour, which she had much difficulty in stifling even before her patroness.

The worst of all was that the acquisition of an adopted daughter, such as Meriel proved to be, was no consolation to the unfortunate Foulisvilles as far as the probabilities of a happy conclusion to the party went. When first she arrived, the old gentleman warmed up into something like affection for his brother Jack's daughter. But his coarse ways disgusted Meriel, and she snubbed his clumsy endearments. She got on no better with Lady Foulisville, to whom flattery was the breath of life, and who unconsciously divided the world into two parties—the one, her friends, in those who did; the other, her enemies, in those who did not flatter her. Meriel thoroughly appreciated the necessity of keeping well with an aunt who had the power of giving or withholding a London season; but, with the most sincere intentions of flattering so powerful a relation, she found that the power had gone from her, even if she had ever possessed it. Mrs. Foulis hated flattery, and was peremptory, so



far as it affected herself, in stamping out the germs of it in her daughter, though she could, from tenderness of heart, stand mere coaxing of a babyish description, which presupposed no merit in the recipient; and this, for her part, Lady Foulisville hated as a stupid waste of time.

Meriel early learned that to flatter her mother would be to spoil her own game, and she schooled herself accordingly. When she liked anything, she used to throw in some silly words of endearment, and when she disliked it she was equally candid; but in either case her language was direct and unmistakable, while somehow the sum total of things which she did not like was far in excess of those which she was pleased to approve. When she got to Fontarabia, and realized how Robbins made her way by flattery, her attempts in that direction resembled the efforts of a man who has lived from childhood among savages, and has, upon his rescue, to recall the language of his civilized youth. The genuine brusqueries which she always began by blurting out (perhaps seasoned by an 'auntie dear,' which made matters worse), and the obtrusive ill-adjusted compliments with which she tried in vain to catch up her unlucky preludes, were a constant irritation to the much-tried Countess. Nor did Meriel in company atone for Meriel *en robe de chambre*; for, with all the money which had been spent on her accomplishments, Miss Foulis played without expression, sang out of tune, and did both sulkily; and at the tea-table she was equally useless, for while the talk of the young men was all of London, her talk was all of Yaxley.

Lady Foulisville at last began very seriously to think that she had made another mistake, and had incurred a fresh failure; and, with all Christian charity, she wished Meriel back with her mother, and the party at Jericho, particularly as—gloss it over as she might in public—she still cherished in her heart a warm indignation against Sir Miles for the shameless trick by which he had again succeeded in thrusting his distasteful company upon her.

The speculations into which he had lured her to embark had turned out so irredeemably bad that she had not even the inducement of common pecuniary interests to persuade her to keep on civil terms with him. At the same time, she had the mortification of feeling that she had forfeited, for the term of her natural life, a wife's privilege of standing out against an offensive husband; for, with the reversion of her jointure squandered, she had only the bequest which might be found in my lord's will to look to in the probable event of her surviving him; and she knew his suspicious jealousy too well not to be more than careful.

After a few days' watching, Brandreth felt his power, and was sure that the Countess dared not revert to their quarrel. Till he had reached his conclusion, his manner to her had been deferential, and he neither sought nor avoided her company. Now, however, he assumed that half-sarcastic, craftily courteous tone of badinage which compels the best of friends to keep his eyes wide open when it is taken up by the most trusted of comrades, but which is simply intolerable in the mouth of the man whom

you distrust and dislike. The poor Countess was revolted at the constant humiliation, and felt how powerless she was. She made one last effort—very strange to her, after so many years' coolness—to awaken her husband's sympathy and stir up his pride, only to discover how completely alcohol had eaten away the small amount of self-respect with which he started in life. The Earl listened to her with a very bored expression, and then, with a hoarse laugh, chuckled out:

'So Brandreth chaffs you, does he? Cool hand, Brandreth! He amuses me, do you know, with his confounded impudence. Why don't you make up a match between him and mother Robbins? I'll give her away, and Meriel could be bridesmaid.'

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE FOULIS CUP.

No wonder that, with such guests, and with the hosts so entirely put out, the party should grow more and more stupid, and the failure glare in more and more apparent ugliness. Lady Foulisville was in despair. Robbins, who was not in the best of tempers since her blunder with Delicia about the Italian Irishman, and the discovery, which she bitterly resented in her own behalf, of his infidelity, was disconcerted as she had never before been since she entered Eaton Place—bored and puzzled, and very sulky. Meriel was a vexation and a mystery both to lady and to satellite. The Count and the Baronet were too busy

stalking and taking pot-shots at each other to concern themselves with the amusement of their hostess and the company. The young men made bad jokes to show their own cleverness, and avenged their *ennui* by depreciating the efforts made for their enjoyment; while all that Lord Foulisville did was more vehemently than ever to push the claret backwards and forwards to the two fat-headed patriarchs, till the three hippopotami used to waddle into the drawing-room, winking and blinking, till they stumbled, with a snore, into the nearest armchairs. As for the gabble of the wives, or the silence of the daughter, it was difficult to say which was the more exasperating.

Whispers passed of surprised inquiry, between the men why, with the grouse mountains so near, and August well past its middle, the party had never been sent out shooting; which, as they were meant to do, reached the sharp ears of Miss Robbins, who duly reported them to the Countess. This happened to be a very sore subject with the noble family. Time had been when the shootings of Ballybanaghermore were the admiration of the whole country; but a few years previously, during an acute crisis of Lord Foulisville's affairs, and when Lord Kilcormac was more than usually out of favour, the shooting had been let on a lease, which had still some time to run. Since that day Lord Kilcormac had never set foot in Fontarabia, although the wild ground near it was famous for some almost unique specimens of coleoptera.

Her ladyship at first stormed, but she was soon brought to see that some explanation was due; and so Miss Robbins was duly primed with a long, incom-

prehensible story, in which Lord Foulisville's respect for the wishes of his lamented father and the grouse disease were hazily amalgamated, as the reason for the denial of the expected amusement. The fiction was clumsy, so that it was generally laughed at, and increased the universal discontent.

At last, in spite of the distance between them which late events had caused, Delicia was driven pitifully to exclaim to Robbins, 'What can we do, Robbins? I shall go mad!'

'Supposing you try a picnic on the mountains?'

'Well, but supposing it rains?'

'The glass is keeping up nicely. But, anyhow, try it. If it does fail, it can't be a worse failure than this horrible death-alive, with all these frumpy men and frowzy dowagers.'

'Very well, then; let us try it. Where shall it be?'

'On the far side of the lough facing Diana's Island,' suggested the companion, keenly remembering the one pleasant day of the dull visit to Fontarabia which she had endured a year before.

'But it is so far off, and such a road, and the boat and all! Do think of some nearer and easier place.'

'The very reason why. Desperate evils need desperate remedies; and nothing but a little adventure can lift this beastly party out of the Slough of Despond.'

The Countess could but yield to such sound logic, and it was decided that the picnic at the lough should come off at three days' distance, so as to give time for reasonable preparations. It was to be announced at luncheon on the following day, but at breakfast Lady

Foulisville received with much inward satisfaction the regrets of the couple who were blessed with a daughter, and of Captain Pringle, at being compelled to depart on the following day. They had been very stupid, and given themselves airs, and there would have been difficulties, had they stopped, in arranging the conveyances to the picnic. Lady Foulisville, however, had a misgiving lest the knowledge of what was in store might influence their movements and lead them to beg grace; so she put off the public announcement till they were safely gone, so this made a day's delay in the event itself.

Commissariat arrangements cost less trouble than they usually occasion, for as the French cook had insisted on bringing to Ireland a totally unnecessary store of cold *pâtés*, potted good things, and so forth, the picnic proved a happy accident for consuming some of the costly encumbrance of viands. Neither was there any need to trouble about wine, for the cellar at Fontarabia was famous throughout Ireland. The only difficulty arose with the person who was usually most passively acquiescent over pomps and gaieties, Lord Foulisville, and his objection was merely as to a detail. The plate-chest, which held the forks and spoons necessary for the banquet, was also so arranged as to contain the Foulis Cup, a heavy and tasteless chalice of the early seventeenth century, the workmanship of some inferior goldsmith at Augsburg, but intrinsically valuable from its material, which was solid gold, and from the jewels which were stuck over it like currants in a bun. This sacred vessel caught the attention of the great founder of the Foulis

fortunes, the Commissary-General, on one of his foraging excursions in Bavaria, while hospitably entertained at the wealthy Abbey of Ettal, so well known to all who have made pilgrimage to the Ammergau Passion Play. A valise in the seventeenth century was a convenient article, and in due time the chalice reached Ireland, where it gradually became the nucleus and visible evidence of that legend of Saracenic blood to which the Foulis line was wont to appeal in defence of any action on their part more than usually outrageous. Archæology was not the forte of Irish squires in the days of George III.; so it lay on the soul of no guest at Fontarabia to avoid the predicament of a duel by corroborating the family boast that this was the veritable Cup which the renowned Crusader, Sir Lionel de Foulis, bore off from Saladin's own table while hundreds of Saracen javelins hurtled round him, and laid it at the feet of the Emir's lovely daughter, Narjali. She had promised him her hand on condition of his succeeding in the exploit, and the gallant Saladin, in admiration of his prowess, sanctioned their union, and did not reclaim the goblet. So the Cup would appear on high days filled full with punch of extra strength, which the revellers would toss off to the glorious pious and immortal memory, and to the charitable wish that the Bishop of Rome might be deported whither we decline to indicate.

Lord Foulisville, who had little faith in anything in heaven or earth, did believe in the Cup. It was the apple of his eye, the Palladium of the prosperity of his line. If anything befell it, he was sure that his glory (whatever that might be) would soon depart,

and a stranger call his broad lands his own. So, when he first heard of the chest being put into requisition for the picnic he was furious. 'Then leave the Cup at home,' interposed his wife; 'it will be safe in the plate-closet.' This was even worse. Never in the memory of man had the Cup left its chest, except for use. 'Why not, then, take out the forks and spoons, and leave the Cup where it is?' This was no better, and the Earl stormed at the idea of his beautiful plate, in which he took so much pride, being knocked about by a lot of lubberly gossoons. 'What do you want with forks and spoons?' At this question even Lady Foulisville, whose sense of humour was none of the keenest, could not help smiling. At last the ever-ready Robbins happily solved the dead-lock by suggesting that solemnly to drink prosperity to Foulisville and Fontarabia from the sacred Cup on the sacred spot might bring the old prosperity back to its shootings when they returned into the hands of their rightful owners. The idea was quite new to Lord Foulisville, and so captivated was he by the suggestion that he became the most ardent advocate and promoter of the picnic.



## CHAPTER XXIV.

## DIANA'S ISLAND.

FONTARABIA owed its reputation for beauty to the views which might be obtained from its grounds, and to the fine growth of its trees, rather than to the conformation of its park, which is very flat; and even for its second merit it is mainly indebted to the prescience of that old agent, to whom Mr. Dennis Foulis entrusted the original plantation. This wise man contrived to mistake his orders, and eschewed oaks to put in beeches and limes. 'The oaks,' he would say, 'will be sure to fall before the first blast from Judea.' At a short distance from the entrance-gate the tumbled ground begins, which stretches out as the advance-guard of the higher mountains beyond. The boundary between hill and mountain is a river, which issues, already a considerable stream, from a deep black lough, and, after running for some miles between steep banks, without bridge, ford, or stepping-stones, makes a rather sudden turn as it enters into the open country, and spreading out into a broader and more shallow bed, affords opportunity for that 'Great Ford' from which Ballybanaghermore derived its name, and which was for unknown generations the only means of transit between two large adjacent baronies, until Lord Foulisville's grandfather built the handsome bridge which now spans the river hard by.

The further side of the lough was the appointed scene of the picnic, and one more lovely for such a

purpose could not be dreamed of. It seemed like nature's *cul de sac*—a little amphitheatre scooped out of the encircling heights, with a carpet so green that to pretend the emerald could vie with it would be absurdly to repeat stock phrases of old comparison, although persons may have seen streaks in some choice piece of malachite which might be placed in competition. A few alders shielded the pleasure-seekers from the summer heat, and the little sanctuary was closed in by the shadowy mountains which ran down to the water's brink, purple in every aspect, purple at a distance, in the soft Irish haze, and purple close by, in the rich expansiveness of heather blossom. By horse or wheel this dainty spot was wholly inaccessible, and those who used their feet had but the choice of going many miles round over the bridge, and then taking a long mountain path, with a steep at either end, and intervening ranges of rolling moorland, or of gaining the near side of the lough, and then availing themselves of a handy boat which lay in readiness for the sole use of Lord Foulisville and his friends—a restriction, by the way, very sternly insisted upon by the lessee of the shooting, who had no fear of poachers sallying from Fontarabia, but who would have been very uneasy at his fastness being invaded by the mixed multitude of professed tourists.

The conspicuous feature of the lough was Diana's Island, as the bad taste of the same superfine generation which conjured over Fontarabia from the Bay of Biscay renamed Iniscormac, the retreat, centuries back, of an old ascetic, of much local reputation for sanctity, but no connection of the more famous Cormac, Bishop-

**King of Cashel.** The almost obliterated ruins of his little church, or cell—Kilcormac—were still to be traced on the island, and, in fact, they gave his second title to the peer, more because it sounded so well than from any regard for the holy man whose name it perpetuated. Diana's Island, as we must call it, lay nearer to the far shore than to the other side, in front of, and completely masking, the amphitheatre; thus adding to the mysterious solitude of that exquisite nook. On its outer side its aspect was that of a low line of gnarled and richly tinted rock, crowned with the profuse vegetation of a copse, at the time of the picnic red with countless berries of the mountain-ash, and soon to be still more bright with the ripening fruit of the holly, while the undergrowth of shrubs was stifled under a wild jungle of gigantic osmundas. On the inner side and facing the amphitheatre, the rocks broke in the centre and gave place, for a length of some seventy yards, to a shelving bank of pure white sand, sparkling in the sun like diamond-dust. Some rough foundations on the crowning plateau were commonly pointed out as the remains of the hermit's cell. This had been, in the days of the McSwinnys, a place of popular pilgrimage, and the suppression of the annual gathering by the first Foulis largely contributed to its unpopularity. It became the traditionary conviction of the people that some doom would sooner or later overtake the intrusive family in connection with the desecrated island. St. Cormac was too much of a gentleman, they would say, to stand by and not see the outrage which had been put upon his children duly avenged.

All round the island the black, calm water was of

great and, as vulgarly supposed, of fathomless depth, and, of course, that submerged palace of the wicked king and his still more wicked daughter, with the fatal well hard by, which belong to every Irish lake, were, in local legend, placed at that spot, with the special addition that the punishment had been incurred by the princess trying her unholy wiles on good St. Cormac, whose cell then stood upon a rocky knoll close to her father's palace walls, and was alone spared when fortress and city sank under the avenging wave.

Miss Robbins, whenever conversation began to flag with strangers, would sometimes gently murmur confidential speculations whether the island owed its lovely name to its crescent shape, or was so called because the poet might well dream that sweet Dian and all her nymphs would love to bathe from 'those yellow sands' (which happened to be peculiarly white), where no Actæon could disturb the innocent revels of the virgin huntresses. She was, however, never lucky enough to find anyone with sufficient imagination to follow up her day-dream, until, at a recent dinner-party in honour of the Rector and his demure family, an honest young squireen, who had fallen to the share of Miss Robbins, holloaed out, to the great surprise of the other guests, who were not troubling themselves to listen to her ponderous conversation, 'Sure, and the ladies would come out like blackamoors, washing thimselves stark naked in the filthy bog-water!'

The poor fellow paid dearly for his inconsiderate exclamation. Miss Amy Blake, prim indeed, stiff,

and easily prejudiced, but rosy and plump, with blue eyes, silky hair, and a small mouth, happened to sit next him. Between this young lady and the squireen mutual tender feelings had begun to grow up, and he counted himself happy at having her as his dinner companion. His good fortune proved his bane. Miss Amy was not prepared to have the non-costume of personages, whom she believed to be no heathen goddesses, but real flesh and blood, described in such plain language; and she declared that she never could have anything more to say to a man who indulged in such coarse language before ladies. Happy would it have been for Mr. Marum if he had left matters in that condition, for he would only have been a negative sufferer, in having lost that which was dear to him. His temerity led him on, and he had to endure the painful calamity of obtaining that which he learned by experience to abhor. He sought an interview with Mr. Blake, and found the gentleman affable, considerate, and very affectionate. He was full of concern for the disappointment of Mr. Marum, and for the rude disillusionment of poor dear Amy. But, as he went on to remark, all things are ordered for the best if only we could view them in their right light. Amy was indeed a priceless treasure, and a great part of her charm resided in her sensitive organization—perhaps too sensitive. Her elder sister Susan, intrinsically as honest, good, affectionate, and virtuous as dear little Amy, was of a more robust type, and made allowances for foibles which cut Amy to the quick. He was sure that Susan and his honest but somewhat rough young friend whom he saw before

him were made for each other. Marum had only to say the word, or only not to say anything to the contrary, and Susan was his. Warned by the trouble into which he had got by speaking at Fontarabia, Marum held his tongue, and Susan did become his ; and in a few weeks he was lawfully joined to a shrew and a screw, whose natural inability to be cheerful herself made cheerfulness in others hateful to her acid soul.

No pleasure-seekers ever started with happier prospects than the party which left Fontarabia on the appointed morning. The season was midway between summer and autumn, the day voluptuously warm, the sky intensely blue, but flecked with quick-floating, ever-changing clouds of dazzling whiteness. The ground still glowed with the heather, which, thanks to the fineness of the weather, preserved its bloom even in days when the bilberry leaf was here and there assuming its richest autumn red. Their road lay over broken ground, and from each elevation more and more conspicuously rose in front of them the compact mass of mountains towards which their course was tending, higher and bigger than the remaining hills, but heavier and less impressive in outline. The forms on which the eye rested with greater pleasure were those of outlying heights compactly built, pyramidising, buttressed with apparent rock, and rising sheer from the flat plain of surrounding bog, just as if they were the surviving summits of Matterhorns which had in the sequence of ages gradually sunk into the half-solid earth, leaving only their scarped tops to tell the world what mighty mountains once had been.

But did any of the party from Fontarabia feel this magic of home scenery, the illimitable grace and sublimity which can be extracted from heights of only two or three thousand feet in altitude? Certainly the noble couple did not, nor Meriel, nor Robbins, nor the two old adventurers; but one man did—the most flippant of the dandies, under whose superficial mask of levity lay the true artist's soul, and who has often said that the impressions of this day gave the impulse to his wavering resolutions, and so placed him, in spite of the protests of a foolish, fashionable mother, foremost among our rising landscape-painters.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE PARTY SORTED.

THE party had been conveyed in a landau and a break, each accompanied by a footman; while a light van followed, convoyed by a stable-boy, containing the plate-chest and the luncheon-hamper. The orders to the drivers were to take out the horses and put them in a neighbouring shed, afterwards these were to be harnessed and the carriages ready again in three hours. On their arrival at the lough, there was a good deal of delay, for the lock and key of the boat-house were equally rusty, and the door itself hung on its hinges in a loose, dissipated kind of way. After much kicking and cuffing, however, seasoned with very expressive language, the rickety old thing was forced open, and the big, dirty, splay punt lugged out.

It was calculated that two voyages would carry over the whole party, the gentlemen undertaking to act as Charons. The Count offered to make the double voyage, and to reconduct the punt. The first lot comprised Lord and Lady Foulisville, that one of the old gentlemen who was still stopping with them, and his wife. To this were also told off the two remaining young men, to look after the matrons and help them out, as well as that footman who was to attend upon the luncheon party. These personages having been duly deposited on the further shore, the punt put back again, managed by Sant' Onofrio, and received its second load—Miss Meriel, chaperoned by Miss Robbins; the Baronet, with the Count himself; the hamper with the food, wine-glasses, knives, tablecloths, and so forth; and the plate-chest, with the forks and spoons, and the precious Foulis Cup. The two gentlemen prepared to take the oars, but Miss Robbins, grasping one, and looking Sant' Onofrio very straight in the face, declared her determination to make herself, for once in her poor little worthless life, useful to her fellow-creatures. The loss could only be that of a few more minutes, so Sir Miles, who had hold of the other, assented with some half-sarcastic compliment; and the Count, with his hands on his hips and his legs stretched out, made a salutation of withering politeness. He was determined not to give her any opportunity of attempting to renew their old intimacy, which he found had cost him far more in material outlay than it had brought in profits by her literary contributions to the cause of Italian revolution. The attachment had, on his part not a spark of true



love about it, and, before he broke it off from sordid considerations, he had got thoroughly wearied of the lady's effusive endearments, and took care after the rupture to give her a wide berth. So little did he know of her movements that it was a complete surprise to him to find her grafted upon the Foulisville family. He had been the acquaintance and fellow-speculator of the Earl, and not of the Countess; who was, however, easily persuaded by Robbins to invite a gentleman with so high-sounding a title, and about whom she invented a very plausible story. The poor creature was prompted to this experiment by a vain hope of perhaps winning back her adored one. Sant' Onofrio was soon satisfied, to his relief of mind, that this romance of their two lives was totally unknown to the remaining company, even to Sir Miles; and he knew very well that, unless he chose to own her as one for whom he had once cared, she must keep silence, in dread of the too veracious revelations which it was in his power to make. He felt how far she must have committed herself by inducing the Countess to invite him. So he resolved to let Robbins buzz about him without shrinking at the rustle of her gossamer wings. But he was equally on his guard not to give her a pretext for accusing him of any rudeness of behaviour. It was to be no cut, but the politeness of a strange gentleman to a strange lady whom he meets in a country house, never having seen her before and never caring to see her again. The picnic put this artificial courtesy to a severe strain in a way which he little expected.

Miss Robbins' style of punting was slow and devious, and at last the boat, wobbling as it did,

with a somewhat uncertain course, under the eccentric pulling of the fair dame, bumped rather unexpectedly against the bank, and at a few yards from the steps at which it was bound to have touched. At that spot the bank shelved down to the water rather abruptly for a height of not more, indeed, than a yard, but a yard of very slippery grass. Miss Robbins was all at sea, for she felt that her last shot had glanced off the stone which the Count carried in lieu of a heart, and that what to them would seem her purposeless vanity must have made her ridiculous to Brandreth and Meriel. Her back was aching, her hands were chafed with the rough oar, and her brow was streaming with the exertion. Moreover, the bump shook her, and very nearly sent her sprawling into the bilge-water which had collected at the bottom of the punt. So, half in rage, half in scare, and wholly clumsy, she started up, quite forgetting to leave hold of her oar, and, floundering on shore, caught the hem of her gown in the dilapidated side of the boat.

She might have met with a very ugly accident had not the Count, whose hands were disengaged, jumped forward, and by main force lifted her up, leaving a long streamer of her dress pendent from the punt. To save himself from reeling round again, he had to throw himself forward on to the land, still grasping his burden, while the poor scared creature clung unconsciously to her useless oar. The bank was steep, and the grass exceeding slippery ; so that it was not wonderful that, instead of alighting in a graceful and statuesque attitude, he should have fallen prone on his stomach, and, as men are apt to do who find

themselves in that humiliating posture, he should have kicked out violently behind. His kick had a result little anticipated by him, for it fell full upon the punt, causing it to drift away from the land with its precious freight of Meriel, Brandreth, plate and food. The Baronet had carelessly left his oar in the rowlock, and the unexpected jerk sent it into the water, when the boat was caught by the imperceptible current which worked down the apparently stagnant lough. Meriel and he stared at each other for a few seconds, reciprocally realizing their inevitable fate of either drifting on to Diana's Island, or back again to the other side, and hoping that the latter might be their lot, so as to secure the assistance of the men who were left with the carriages, when suddenly the girl, with an uncontrollable paroxysm of acute terror, screamed out, 'It's filling! it's filling!' 'What's filling?' 'The boat! the boat!' Sir Miles looked down, and saw that she was speaking truth. With the happy-go-lucky recklessness of their race, the keepers, first of the lord and then of the lessee, had allowed the punt to go on for year after year unpainted, unmended, and unexamined. In the course of time the wood shrank, and a small leak was sprung. During the transit of the earlier batch the influx of water was not sufficient to arrest the attention of such town-folk as the Countess and the remaining party. With the second voyage, however, it was becoming serious, and the weight of the plate-chest and the hamper, foolishly put down on a very weak part, was too much for the crazy barque, while the final damage was done by the too impetuous kick of

the Cork-born nobleman. Now the inky waters of the lough were rising fast in the doomed punt.

‘Please Heaven!’ exclaimed Sir Miles, ‘we may be saved by drifting on to the Island;’ and, suiting action to exclamation, he worked away with the stump of a broken oar which was lying on the bench.

Meriel was too stupefied with fear to speak, or think, or pray. But in a few moments, which seemed to the almost demented girl to be hours, the punt did impinge upon the island, but not upon the bank of sand, where, at all events, it would have sunk in water shallow enough to allow of the hamper, with its contents and the all-precious plate-chest being recovered. But it struck, instead, against a rock which bounded the bank to the right, rising about four feet above the water, with a flat surface, while below it went perpendicularly down to an indefinite depth.

Sir Miles soon satisfied himself that the boat would reach the island before it could sink, and with the quick eye of a great man, he saw and, determined to take advantage of a marvellous opportunity. To be Meriel’s saviour might lead to—who could tell what height of good fortune? Unluckily, for him, her fears for herself nearly spoilt his plans for his own advancement; for, with the speed of a scared gazelle, she was taking the earliest possible instant for jumping ashore. With an effort, however, for which he could hardly afterwards account, he dashed before her, pulling her to where she would have, by her own exertions, sprung, as if she had been a bundle, and exclaimed in an aside, meant to be

overheard, 'Thank Heaven, I have saved her! but how near!' Meriel, with all her activity, was so terrified and demoralized by the apprehensions of death, that she was actually taken in by this *ruse*, and fancied that she owed her life to the elderly impostor.

This last thud was fatal to the crazy old tub, now rapidly sinking as the black fluid kept rising. The weight of the water in it and of the fatal chest was too great to be counterbalanced by the relief caused by the departure of its passengers; it turned half round with the impact of the rock and the propulsion of the escaping fugitives, quivered like a palsied invalid, and subsided into the abyss of the deep, dark lough, just at the spot where tradition placed the mystical well, the outburst of which had drowned the city of Cormac's tempter. Pasties, chickens, plates, glasses, champagne, knives, spoons and forks of silver, embossed salt-cellars, and the Foulis Cup, all sank down into the gulf, and the silent waters closed over the irrecoverable loss of a treasure which never could be replaced or substituted.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

## HELPLESS.

DIANA'S Island was distant some two hundred yards, in a straight line, from the mainland; so the party, who were just re-settling after the Robbins scare, were near enough to see all that was occurring, while absolutely impotent to help, and out of practical earshot, even if anyone had had presence of mind to speak when all were preoccupied with thinking of their own safety. They could see Sir Miles looking round at the disappearing punt, and they then perceived that he held Miss Foulis by the hand, and was leading her beyond a thicket which intercepted any further view of the pair.

Open-mouthed, dumb amazement fell upon all the party; only the Earl gasped, with a sob of anguish such as had never escaped him on the death of either of his parents, 'The Cup!' The Count uneasily conscious that he had, somehow, had a principal share in bringing about a catastrophe which he confusedly felt to be most serious, sidled up to Lord Foulisville, and muttered some suavely polite platitudes about his extreme regret. At this, the Earl, whose savage nature, now unchained, was chafing to relieve itself by saying or doing something violent, wheeled round with a gesture of rage, and concentrating his well-matured proficiency in swearing into one prolonged climax of horrible profanity, ordered the unfortunate man, as he valued his salvation, to run up a low

point of rocky ground which rose from the meadow about a hundred and fifty yards off, and see if any hope of human help were visible from any quarter within the horizon.

Saint' Onofrio, now thoroughly scared, started with all speed on his errand. The shortest line lay across a flat of deliciously fresh grass; so he naturally chose this course, and, bounding upon the verdant carpet, he found himself rapidly sinking in a caldron of filthy, stinking, black ooze. His yell of terror was so genuine and so strident as momentarily to divert the attention even of the Foulisvilles and Miss Robbins from their already overwhelming anxiety.

Fortunately, the footman and Mr. Fiennes, the future painter, preserved some presence of mind, and were just able to reach the spot and drag out the spluttering wretch before he had swallowed more than three or four gulps of nauseous fluid, all glistening as he was in his cuirass of noisome mire. The spectacle was most ludicrous, but the party were all too frightened to laugh. The Countess had dropped on the ground, regardless of the charming promenade dress which had first appeared on that very morning, and was sitting, her legs wide apart, in scared bewilderment, as Robbins, half stooping, fondled her hand; while the matron clutched hold of Mr. Ser-good's arm, and kept time to a widely diversified string of 'Oh, Lords!' and 'Oh, gracious's!' by pinching the suffering youth with a rapidity and vehemence which effectively diverted his thoughts from his neighbours' misfortunes. His lordship snorted like a spent volcano, and the old gentleman

stuck his hands into his trousers pockets as if he would rive the garment.

Fiennes, out of breath as he was with his feat of rescue, was the first to speak, or rather gasp, some words of common sense. The predicament, as he pointed out, was one from which nothing could extricate them but their own unaided personal exertions, in which the most infirm must share alike with the most vigorous. Diana's Island concealed not only themselves, but the accident to the punt, from the carriages, and ere now the servants would have obeyed their instructions by taking the horses away to the prescribed shelter, from which they were only to emerge after a rest of three hours, with no guarantee then of an immediate return of the pleasure-seekers. There was nothing to make them suspect any accident for many hours, nothing to lead to the supposition, after they had made the discovery, that they could be of help for many more hours. Again, what help could the party even then forecast? Night would be falling, and now that the passage by the punt had been cut off, the only possible expedient by which they could extricate themselves from the wilderness would be to climb the precipitous mountain which, as they all too well saw, hemmed in that woful valley, and then, after a rough walk of, he dared not guess how many miles over the uneven moorland, they would reach the bridge, distant, as he had heard, three miles from Fontarabia. It was a dismal prospect at the best, as it involved a night-long march by delicate ladies on fasting stomachs; but otherwise there was no possible hope of rescue.



'But the coachman will send another boat,' Robbins ejaculated.

'Where is there one that he can?' replied the young man; and she could only answer she knew of none. With much patience he explained again that the stablemen would not guess that the punt was lost, and it was not, therefore, to be expected that they would think of getting a boat, even supposing that the country contained another, as to which no one knew anything. If some extraordinary inspiration led to such a lucky thought, he could not calculate how many hours it would take to bring so bulky an article to that desolate spot, at night and over rough roads. The choice, in fact, was absolute and simple, —a night-long walk for old and young over mountain and morass, or the prolonged and very likely fatal agony of chill and starvation both to themselves and to the still more helpless castaways.

The alarmed old lady, with a pinch of Sergood's arm more excruciating than any previous one, wondered why the ladies could not stop till the gentlemen—if they were gentlemen—came back with the needful help.

'Because,' quietly rejoined Fiennes, 'the only help which would in that case be of any use would be four hearses (taking in the young lady over there), with coffins to match.

The party shuddered at the terrible picture of their situation so graphically brought before them, but as no one could deny its truth, they all united in pressing their Mentor to become their guide.

Fiennes was well suited for the post from youth,

strength, activity, a quick eye, and good sense, which he had the habit of concealing under a mask of affected and supercilious flippancy; but he was a stranger to the road. So, with a modesty which no one expected from him, he promised to do his best for the general safety, provided that Lord Foulisville—who, he presumed, knew well his own mountains—would promise to contribute his local knowledge.

This claim, reasonable and natural as it was, put the unlucky Earl into an immense perplexity. Loudly as he used to boast in London of his magnificent shooting, he was well known in Ireland for personally shirking the sport; and he could have shown the way over the Himalayas as easily as over the mountains of Ballybanaghermore. But it was more than ever necessary now to keep up the imposture; so he acquiesced in silence, with a ceremonious bow and a forced smile.

Robbins, elated by her unusual success in making things pleasant with the Earl, simpered out, 'Of course, dear Lord Foulisville, we all know you know every inch of your mountains,' and got in reply so emphatic and gruff an objurgation to mind her own business, and not waste precious time, that she shivered as she tucked up her skirt, and asked herself whether he really did know the way, followed as that doubt was by the reflection that if he did not, no one else did.

This interlude was not, however, observed by the remaining party, and Mr. Fiennes, according to promise, arranged the order of march.

Miserable as were the three women, none of them

young, and helpless as were the gouty old gentlemen, there were three others still more truly objects of pity: the London footman, whose chief exercise was wont to have been getting off and on the footboard of a chariot; the Count, stiff in his armadillo-like coating of greasy black mud; and 'Beauty Sergood,' who had turned out like an Adonis of the mountains, in varnished boots and heather-coloured tweed. The first spurt was the stiffest part of the whole march, being a sheer scramble up the precipitous mountain, which shut in the amphitheatre, by a scarcely discernible track, in which slippery grass, stunted heather, unexpected stones, and greasy earth alternated to vex the foot of the wanderer. No one had had the forethought to provide himself with a walking-stick, and the ladies' parasols soon split. When this ascent had nearly been achieved, with, as he felt, a waste of time which would bring nightfall ominously near, Fiennes, from his general knowledge of mountain conformation, concluded that the remaining journey would be over a rolling expanse of moorland, with many ups and downs, but no conspicuous precipices, until they fairly descended upon the lowland near the bridge. At the same time he saw the hopelessness of hurrying his unwieldy troop, and proclaimed a short halt before the final spurt.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

## A NIGHT'S WORK.

WHO can attempt to delineate the scrambling, the slipping, the grabbing, the slithering, the stumbling, the jarring, the reeling, the clutching of each other's clothes or of one of the heather tufts, the moaning, the sighing, the vague prayers, the blaspheming and the screaming which had filled up the tale of an ascent more full of real anxiety than many an Alpine exploit?

The summit was almost reached, and the party entered one of those little gullies, bestrewed with stones, the course of a winter torrent, which are so often found in mountains as the summit-level is being reached. Here the first occasion occurred to Mr. Fiennes to put Lord Foulisville's knowledge to the test.

It was the good lord's custom to drink at luncheon sometimes a pint and sometimes a bottle of Cante-merle, and if by any mischance he failed to imbibe that or some equivalent restorative, his perceptions as the afternoon melted into evening would be apt to become somewhat confused. Such was his fate on this unhappy day, and the strain upon his wits was much intensified by the unwonted toil of that sharp ascent. This blind gully was a spot where the man with the keenest instinct of locality might, if destitute of local knowledge, pardonably go wrong. Two paths diverged at a most acute angle right and left of a

rather big stone which stood up in the waterless channel which then formed the tract. So Fiennes, turning to the proprietor, asked, 'Which way, my lord?' 'To the right,' gasped his lordship, without taking the trouble even to look at the competing paths.

It is much to be desired that Mr. Jowett, or some other accomplished Platonist, might explain why the man who does not know his road always answers, 'To the right.' In this case the advice led the party frightfully to the wrong. Had they followed the left-hand path, they would, after several miles of straight though very rough walking, have reached the bridge, while the right-hand one led them literally back into the wilderness.

The party, let us again note, which was so fatally misled, was composed, besides its guide, of three women, two old men, a footman, a mud-cased Count, and of young Reginald Sergood—known in London as 'Beauty Sergood'—who exhibited himself as inferior in pluck to anything which might have been expected from so comely a creature calling itself man, as Fiennes had soared above all reasonable expectations which could have been formed of his character and resources.

We have spoken of that terrible night as if it had been one continuous tramp. It really was a tramp, broken by many short rests. There was one particularly distressing interval, due to the weakness of Lady Foulisville, who had all along shown herself the least capable in bodily powers to perform her task, with, perhaps, the exception of Sergood.

In the middle of the night, Delicia, who had been for some minutes leaning heavily on Miss Robbins, after reeling, like a drunkard, stumbled against a treacherous piece of rock, and, falling prone on her face, made no effort to rise. Her companion gently turned her over on her back, and drew her on to a comparatively soft patch of bilberries which happened to be near. She was still alive, that was certain, but she seemed to be little more, and the cavalcade had nothing to do but proclaim a halt. They could not desert her, and yet they felt that every moment of delay, by prolonging the time before which help or food could be reached, only increased the peril to the whole party. At last she recovered, and the march was resumed ; while Fiennes charged himself with the extra labour of supporting her on one side, and on the other she was helped, in spite of his unpleasant condition, by the brawny Count. Sergood and the footman were respectively assigned to the two other ladies, and the old gentlemen allowed to take care of themselves. During this frightful time of suspense, Lord Foulisville was heard more than once to mutter, ' My Cup ! ' No one, however, noticed his uttering, ' My wife ! '

Such a wilderness, too, as it was ! The agonies of mind and body which they had suffered, and the many hours of wandering still in store for them, contrasted as they were with the usual comforts of daily life, made the period seem like forty years.

It would be sad if there were anyone among those whom these adventures may interest who is such a stranger to the delights of wild nature that he or she

has never set foot upon the open moor. There is then little need to recapitulate the twigs of heather, slippery as glass, or matted so as to snare the incautious foot, the hypocritical patches of green that mask the mud-holes, the hidden stones that twist the ankle. All these and the heavy drag of walking over a perpetual mass of vegetation, are to the tourist or the sportsman, cheerily tramping in well-nailed boots, but the little excitements which add zest to the health-giving walk. But when the walk is not alone for a whole afternoon, but for a whole afternoon and all night after, and much of the day following that night—a walk performed by persons most unfit for even much less severe exercise, the women's wretched feet shod in flimsy French boots, already torn to rags, and the poor flesh blistered and bleeding at every step—all this endured upon stomachs empty, at first, with a five hours' fast, and empty at last, with one of nearly a whole day—we have given a glimpse of misery which it would be cruel to dissect or enlarge upon.

Strangers as all the party were to the mountains, they had not appreciated, during the night's march, that they had strayed away from the road leading to the bridge; and as day broke, they eagerly strained their eyes in hopes of descrying that eagerly coveted structure, or, if not the bridge, at all events the low country beyond it. But they were met with a very different prospect—that of desolate, rolling moorland on every side; and they instinctively guessed that they must have lost their way, and were probably still some miles distant, though none of them could guess how many, from their destination. But Fiennes,

with his sharp eye for locality and form, rapidly concluded that the false turn in the gully must have made the mischief, and after scanning the horizon, which now glowed with the rising sun, and computing the points of the compass, gave it as his decided opinion that if they struck off to the left, they would at last find themselves on the road leading to the bridge. The best he could promise to them was a very long walk over quite as trying ground as that which they had been traversing all night. But there was no choice between that effort and starvation. As for poor old Foulisville, no one thought of consulting him now, for all regarded him as the author of the last crowning misfortune; so he sheepishly and silently followed their invaluable guide like a whipped dog.

The ground was, in itself, just as difficult to traverse as that which they had been painfully measuring all night, for any vestige of path had long been lost; but they could see their way, and, in spite of augmented fatigue and growing hunger, the party was buoyed up with a new feeling that escape was becoming every minute more near. So several miles were traversed, on a regular system, devised by Fiennes, of alternate progress and rest; while, as there were three ladies among them, he decided that the Countess only needed the support of a single arm, and insisted on Sergood, the middle-aged and mud-cased Sant' Onofrío, and the footman, as the three most capable hands, each respectively devoting himself to his particular charge, while he himself was free to act as pioneer; whereby Robbins, to her disgust, not only because the



odour of the mire still stuck to him, but for reasons deep hidden in her secret breast, fell to the share of the Count. Still, she could not openly rebel at the assignment, as her patroness and the strange lady had the obvious right to the most savoury supports. The Earl and his boon companion were bidden to take care of each other.

At last they unexpectedly bore down at right angles upon a path so buried in heather that it was unseen till actually reached. Fiennes, without hesitation, declared this to be the long-lost road from which they had wandered in the fatal gully after they had accomplished the first ascent. By his orders they advanced along it in single file, over a weary stretch of rolling ground, until at last it ascended a rather longer and more conspicuous elevation than those across which they had for some time been striking. Its crest once gained, their eyes were delighted by a landscape which at any time would have detained the passer-by by its harmoniously contrasted beauty as it shone in the glory of that delicious autumn morning, but which to that spent and sickened band was even as the Pacific to Cortez (or more correctly Balboa) and his crew as they stood 'silent upon a peak in Darien.' The mountain range—which, as to their cost they knew, stretched to their right and behind them, in long, monotonous swellings—to the left and in front ended in a sheer steep hill, hugged by the folds of the sparkling serpentine river hundreds of feet below them; while across it the rolling lowlands grew flatter and flatter as they spread out into the wide plain of central Ireland. Just beyond the last and

lowest hill, wreaths of early smoke from a tuft of trees indicated the place where Fontarabia nestled; and sheer at their feet, but oh! how dizzily deep below, two parapets and a narrow road appeared. This was the longed-for bridge.

The descent was one to try any but professed mountaineers, and all which any one of that exhausted crew but Fiennes had to say of it afterwards was, that they did get down, Heaven knows how. His memory was more specific, and the details of that episode—veracious he solemnly averred them to be—which he would reveal in the safe sanctuary of his club's smoking-room, were such as to send many a man off aching with irrepressible laughter.

Lady Foulisville had a wild idea, which was, of course, disappointed, that she would find the carriages at the bridge. She made sure that they would come round on finding that the punt never returned, and she could not be made to understand that the coachman must be under the belief that the punt was still safe. The ladies had effectually parted with all pride and high-life manners, and Fiennes was afterwards heard to express his belief that they would not have disdained the ease of a manure-cart had the driver of such a vehicle offered to convey them home. But in that rough, wild country not even a manure-cart presented itself, and they had to complete the entire circuit from the lough to the hall-door of Fontarabia upon their own feet.

It was not pleasant to the lord and the lady to find their household in a condition of blank, purposeless, unreasoning puzzlement. No coherent idea of

what had become of them had apparently been formulated, and no scheme of rescue as much as thought of; nor had the carriages come back so very long before themselves. It seems that when the time had arrived for again putting to, the horses were duly harnessed, and the drivers duly took their seats. Hour after hour went by, and no punt appeared. Were they to go home, or to stop? was the question. To go home would be palpably to disobey orders, and 'get the sack,' as the second coachman observed. If the party were all dead or dying, they could no more bring them to life by returning to Fontarabia than contribute to their decease by stopping there. What casuists call probabilism unanswerably persuaded them to stop. But how were they to stop, on their boxes, and all the horses harnessed; men and beasts alike perishing with cold? This was preposterous. So the horses were unharnessed and taken back to the shed, while the men picked some handfuls of grass wherewith to allay the hunger of the beasts. For themselves, the aliment which had been provided from the larder and the beer-cellar had been so abundant, that out of the leavings of the mid-day dinner they were able to make a very substantial supper. Then they shut up the landau, and got in, four of them sitting on the seats—two coachmen, the footman, and the driver of the van—and the groom-boy, stretched along at the bottom, and so composed themselves to sleep. 'Why keep a watch?' they said; 'we shall be called fast enough when "Boozy" comes back.' It is not surprising that the night's rest of these faithful domestics was long, and their sleep sound. It was high day when they

roused themselves, and then they felt that they, for their parts, had sacrificed enough to duty, while the horses would seriously suffer by a prolonged detention. Not to return then to Fontarabia would be insanity; and as the groom observed, 'I believes they's cut from their debts the back way, and gone to 'Mericky.'

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### A MODEL HOUSEHOLD.

THE reader familiar with the methodical, ship-shape ways of an English country-house will hear the details which we have just given with incredulity, and ask why scouts were not immediately sent out to make for the bridge and explore the mountains in every direction. In the first place, this country-house was Irish, and not English; the only English element among the authorities of the basement who had been left at home being Ruddock, the butler—a fat-witted Cockney, whose every thought and idea was centred in London. The cook and the lady's maid were French; while the under-butler and his aunt, Mrs. Finnegan, the housekeeper, incomparable in preserves, were true Milesians. But even if practical English sense had ruled at Fontarabia, there was an insuperable obstacle to giving effect to the idea. Since the shooting had been let, the keepers, who alone knew the mountains, were no longer the servants of Lord Foulisville; and no one of the present establishment, all of them engaged after that event,

had ever cared to learn who the rough men were, where they lived, or what were their names.

Stupid as the household had been before the return of the family, that return, with its mysterious and, as given by the sufferers, unintelligible story, tended to make it more stupid. The Irish portion of it, indeed, appeared hardly glad to see them safe and sound; so generally had they hugged the conviction that the fairies must have got them, and that they had gone down to the submerged palace, with its wicked king, that it was far from pleasant to see so charming a day-dream thoroughly dissipated.

‘Sure, an’ they’re gone to the likes of thimselves,’ grunted a cynical old housemaid; ‘gone to the ould bad father who starved and oppressed the poor. Maybe, with the help of the saints and the blessin’ of St. Cormac, the rale lords of Ballybanaghermore will come back agen, and the McSwinnys reign in glory. They were the people that cared for the poor.’

‘Sure, and I heard the Banshee myself, I did, last night,’ chimed in a pert kitchen-maid, who soon rued her interference, for ‘Hould your clatterin’, ye fool! who ever heard of English rubbish havin’ a Banshee?’ was the encouragement she got for her officiousness from the elderly dragoness. Mr. Ruddock, sole representative of the sister island, had no convictions at all, and no initiative.

The fact was, that the general household was suffering from too much of zeal on the preceding evening. Anxious and alarmed as they had grown when the failure of the party to return had become remarkable, they had sat up so long canvassing the inexplicable

puzzle, and had imbibed so many jugs of whisky punch to aid their speculation, that when they got up on the following morning—all of them much after their appointed time—the symptoms of intellectual collapse all round were unmistakable. Still, the return of the majority of the party safe, though not altogether sound, gradually galvanised the establishment into something like rational action. The ladies' maids all declared that the first thing to be done was to get their mistresses to bed, after which the unresisting victims were compelled by the zealous Abigail to swallow successive potions of sal volatile and water, tea, and water-gruel, seasoned with peremptory orders to go to sleep, and not presume to move till dinner-time.

Meanwhile the gentlemen instinctively mustered in the dining-room, to which Ruddock had, by a sudden concentration of thought, brought in the apparatus of whisky punch. Greedily did they gaze upon the glasses and covet the enticing compound presented to them, according to custom, in its constituent elements; but no one had the energy to stretch out a hand and brew the blessed beverage. For the first time since a Foulis had reigned at Fontarabia did it devolve upon the butler to mix the whisky punch. As successive tumblers were poured out the other men sipped and nibbled biscuits, but Lord Foulisville wildly tossed a couple down, with hardly time enough between them to take his breath. As Ruddock went on brewing and helping the party, he noticed the absence of Sir Miles; and he also recollected that Miss Foulis's maid alone had not been summoned when

the half-conscious women were hurried up to their bedrooms. As one thought begat another, he dimly recollected that the van was back, but that no plate had appeared ; and that even the Foulis Cup, with which he somehow connected the tenure of his place, had not appeared. Yet, he thought again, the van was really back, and the stablemen were back, and the vehicles and horses. All, in short, was perfectly unintelligible ; and his previous questions had elicited little more than moans from the half-fainting ladies, and curses from the Earl ; while the strange gentlemen had been prudently mute. Inquiringly, he half whispered to the Earl, 'The Cup, my lord ?'

The muddled peer, turning scarlet, and with eyes savagely glaring, could only gasp, 'The Cup, by—— ! gone—at the bottom—ruined !'

This oracular information apprised Ruddock of some weird calamity, involving the loss of the Foulis Cup, and probably of the entire family-plate chest, which was connected with the inexplicable delay and the pedestrian journey. So, by way of coming at any information, he ventured, in a sheepish way, further to inquire when Sir Miles and the young lady might be expected home.

This question made the Earl furious. In the imbecility of his fuddled rage, he held them to be the cause of the Cup being lost.

'They are on Diana's Island, you fool ! They drifted there in that infernal boat before it went down. They've been all night there, and they'll stop there till the Day of Judgment, for all I care.'

'Would it not be well, my lord,' meekly interposed

Mr. Ruddock, 'to take steps to rescue them, supposing they are not already dead of cold and hunger?'

This state of matters, thus bluntly put, somewhat recalled Lord Foulisville to decency, though not to sense.

'By Jove! I never thought of that. Of course it would. Send the keepers at once, and order them to bring them off in the boat; and send the car down to the strand to fetch them.'

'But, my lord, how is the keepers to take them off when there is no boat? I can't send the keepers, neither, as they are no longer your lordship's, but are gone to the gentleman as takes the shooting.'

This difficulty fairly nonplussed Lord Foulisville, as it might have done a wiser and more sober man. The emergency was so extreme, and the danger so acute, that the ordinary rules of etiquette, so jealously asserted in that high and mighty establishment, were all forgotten, and the entire household trooped together to a free conference over the unique and almost hopeless calamity.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### A LUCKY THOUGHT.

THE deliberation was lengthily and crossly protracted. At last, when the conclave was on the point of breaking up in despair, a bright-eyed, draggle-tailed, wild filly of a housemaid, vociferated, 'I have it, my lord! I have it!' The girl was regarded with envy by her



fellow-servants, as she had for some time been suspected of a secret tenderness for a burly, red-haired miller's man in the next parish. Many eyes accordingly glared upon her in angry surprise.

Unabashed, the damsel, with a great poke in Ruddock's ribs, shrieked out that old Mr. McSwinnny, at the big water-mill, some two miles off, kept a punt on his pond—which, in fact, he did, for the use of gentlemen who cared for fishing. 'Sure, an' the ould gntleman would just be proud to lend his boat to the lord.'

The boat was a recent addition to the stock-in-trade of that thrifty old gentleman, and it was not extraordinary, considering the relations between the two establishments, that its acquisition should have been unknown at Fontarabia, except to the one personage who had special and private means of hearing what went on at the mill.

As the name of the Pope was to the late Mr. Whalley, or as that of M. Gambetta is to a Breton Legitimist, so was that of Mr. McSwinnny to the Earl of Foulisville, or of Lord Foulisville to Mr. McSwinnny. In truth, the old miller had few or no friends. But there are enemies and there are enemies; and the grounds for the animosity which reigned between him and the Earl were such as to throw into the shade all the other minor quarrels of two savage natures, one of them varnished over by the conventionalities of high life, but the other rough with all the grain and knots of its constituent timber.

The miller lived on his own freehold patch; so, as he had never received either kindness or justice from

any landlord, he was able to hate and to abuse with perfect impartiality and equal ignorance the whole race of landlords. If he had been poor, he might have contracted obligations somewhere which would have hampered his malevolent tongue. On the contrary, he was very prosperous. His mill was the result of a natural phenomenon not infrequent in hilly countries—the presence of a spring which bursts full-sized from the earth in a strong, clear, irresistible stream. As nature had left this affluent of the river, it had been very lovely; as adapted for a mill by McSwinnys's ancestors, it is very hideous. The McSwinnys were hereditary millers, and had by cunning, shown in bullying and money-lending, succeeded in monopolizing the custom of a large area of country, giving, it must be owned, fair satisfaction to their independent customers. But in the McSwinnys there was, behind the grasping, thriving tradesman, something much deeper and stronger, which moulded their characters.

The old line of Irish gentlemen whom the first Foulis ousted, by devices which hardly bore too close a scrutiny, from the wide demesnes of Ballybanaghmore, were named McSwinnny, and the millers, with no solid evidence to confirm the brag, gave themselves out as being, and believed that they were, the representatives of the ancient line. We need run into no further detail to explain the feeling which existed between Lord Foulisville and Nicholas McSwinnny. The perfect independence of each other intensified the hatred. Had the miller held under the lord, there was, of course, a short and sharp expedient to which he would not have had the slightest scruple in resort-

ing; but nowhere was it laid down that one land-owner was to shoot another, and not even take to revenge on a Foulis would the man who was to himself the Lord of Ballybanaghermore abase that exalted personage to the low level of an evicted tenant. The abhorred intruder should live a monument of his clemency.

In truth, McSwinnny was an eccentricity. He was exceedingly haughty, and possessed as he was of much humour, it always broke out in some impish and malicious shape; while, thoroughly Celt as he was in his prejudices and antipathies, he was yet unlike many of his countrymen in being not only cunning, but long-headed and patient in working out his calculations. He was as avaricious as he was grasping; and, vehement Roman Catholic as he was, the priest used to say there was no man from whom he had so much trouble to extract a shilling for any good object as from the opulent miller. His habitual excuse for his greed in getting, and his meanness or cruelty in hoarding money, was that he was laying up a treasure which would one day enable the McSwinnys to outshine and humiliate those dogs, the 'Foolses,' as he pronounced it. When we add that, in professing to act for his neighbours in a friendly way as their banker, he had drawn them all round into his net of usury, and that every fat beast or ripe ear of corn over several baronies meant gold in McSwinnny's coffers, we shall have completed the picture of a man universally feared, but loved by no one. It was, indeed, generally believed that on one occasion of exceptional difficulty the Earl, badgered on every side

by lawyers and lenders, made a great gulp of his pride, and approached McSwinnny with suggestions of an advance. In trouble as he then was, still the security he had to offer was notably sounder than that of the many needy farmers whom the miller used to help. But, yet, with all his hoarding and greed, McSwinnny considered that the loss of a good investment was a cheap price to pay for the pleasure of mortifying, inconveniencing, and perhaps indirectly impoverishing a Foulisville; so he rejected the request in terms of studied insolence and insult.

This was the man to whom a dirty little minx of a serving-girl openly proposed that the great Earl should humble himself. No, by every name supernal and infernal, never. Let them starve or drown, or fish up his Cup; he never would grovel before the cursed miller. Fortunately, Sant' Onofrio came in, having with a clean suit of clothes resumed his rôle of superior man of the world, and, hating Sir Miles as he did, he yet loved his own reputation better. If the Baronet and the young lady had perished of hunger or bog-water, the Count might personally survive the loss; but he had sense enough to see that it would be a very ugly blot on the fame of all who were then collected under the roof of Fontarabia that they had allowed two guests—one a man of a certain social standing, the other the host's own niece, and a girl upon whom so much depended—so miserably to perish, with no really energetic effort made for their rescue. Meriel was, at all events, worth keeping alive in the general behalf of all who were, like himself, unmarried men of spirit and enterprise. Besides,

looking at his own particular interests, he was shrewd enough to realize that, mixed up as he was (however innocently) by his first unlucky tumble with an adventure which none of the eye-witnesses could probably report with accuracy, or garnish with identical incidents—while all would undoubtedly give rein to their imaginations, their predilections, and their piques—the consequent death of a man whom he was known not to love might bring him under an ugly cloud of vague suspicion, out of which, considering his ambiguous antecedents, he might be puzzled to emerge.

It would not be agreeable to know that people talked of him as the man who pushed off the boat which sank when Brandreth and Miss Foulis died. Accordingly, prompted by a mixture of motives, some of them not altogether selfish, he pleaded the impolicy of recollecting old scores against the one only man who could give them the needful apparatus of rescue. Fiennes then entered into the discussion and, with much tact backing the Count, urged so earnestly and cogently upon Lord Foulisville that at such an awful moment, when life and death were no doubt trembling in the balance, all grievances, however deeply rooted, and however defensible, just, and aggravating, must be laid aside in face of the black danger ahead, that he succeeded in winning his host's unwilling but full assent to soliciting the loan of the punt from the miller in language framed so as to make a refusal impossible.

The Count and Fiennes accordingly retired into the smoking-room with the semi-sober Earl, where they were closeted for some half-hour. Fiennes volunteered

to beard the dragon ; but it was thought that a man like Ruddock, who could better afford to bear foul language with impassibility, would be a more serviceable emissary, while Fiennes could do useful work in accompanying the carriage which was to take the captives off. So Ruddock was summoned, and a letter placed in his hands directed to ' N. McSwinnny, Esq.,' and duly fastened with the big family seal. The Earl further ordered him to proceed with the farm waggon, and three or four of the steadiest labourers, to the mill, for the purpose of carrying off the boat. Fiennes took care to find the opportunity of giving Ruddock his cue that, on reaching the mill, he was to present the letter with all courtesy, while he was not to mind any abuse either of himself or of the Foulisvilles, but persist with his entreaties and his assurances of the good-will of all at Fontarabia, until the miller should consent to lend the precious punt. Extortion, too, was probable, and could not be resisted ; so he must be well provided with money. Ruddock, mindful of propriety, asked Fiennes if he was speaking with authority from his lordship, and the young man, considering the procedure covered by his general commission of guide, answered affirmatively, and was relieved, on returning to the smoking-room, to find the footman dragging, more than leading, his master off to bed. It would be at least two hours—probably a good deal more—before the waggon could return with the boat to the lough, and the labourers be prepared to row it over to Diana's Island ; so he had time for a short nap on the sofa before proceeding in the car to the water-side, when, with the labourers

he would row to the Island, and there look for Sir Miles and Miss Meriel, alive or dead—an alternative which made him shudder. For what then should be done, and for bringing back the couple to Fontarabia, he held himself responsible.

As ill-luck would have it, the farm horses had been sent on some fatiguing errand, from which they would not return till mid-day. At that hour, however, the cavalcade started for the mill, at a pace only to be excused by the condition of the horses and the badness of the roads.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### THE EMBASSY.

ON reaching their goal, Mr. Ruddock craved admittance into the miller's office, with fear in his heart and the letter in his hand. The grim old man was fumbling some dirty papers which he had taken out of his desk in the desolate room, once whitewashed, in which he did his business, with a malignant smile flickering over his face, which showed that he had got some unhappy debtor into his clutches.

Ruddock was a well-known figure to him, and one which was detested accordingly, generally as that of an Englishman, and particularly as that of Lord Foulisville's factotum. So, almost before the poor man had well passed the doorway, McSwinny shrieked out, 'Bedad, and what brings ye here, uninvited,

darkenin' an honest man's threshold, who'd as lief greet the dhivil as ye, or any o' yer breed ?

Ruddock, by way of answer, held out the letter, at which the old man clutched, and when he had well studied the superscription and seal, he pulled down his spectacles, looked suspiciously round the room, and then slowly opened it, taking care not to break the wax ; again and again he looked at the signature, and then deliberately read and reread the flowing and fulsome periods which made up the epistle, with an expression in which surprise and vindictive exultation were equally blended.

'And so the ould bloodsucker humbles himself before me, Nicholas McSwinnny ! He does, by the powers ! The doom of St. Cormac has come on him at Inniscormac, an' the saints be praised. Tell your master, d'ye hear, that it will be a long day before he stretches out finger to help Nicholas McSwinnny's kith and kin when they are in peril of their lives. Why should I do for him what niver, niver has he thought o' doin' for me or mine—one as he prays, night an' mornin', to his master, the dhivil, to sweep off the face of the earth ?

'Oh, sir, be merciful ; consider the poor young lady in peril of her life ! And really, sir, his lordship has no spite against you, and never prays no harm to come to you.'

'Man, I hate ye and yours, and all the English spawn, with a hatred as deep as the pit of hell. But why should I peril me sowl to feed me hate ? Maybe that silly man and that girl hate your master as I do, only they fatten at his board, and will not



say so ; and maybe, if I save them, they'll live to plague your man with the fool's name. Ye shall have the boat.'

So saying, he went on fumbling over his papers till he found a dirty blank scrap, which he tore off, and then drew a broken teacup half full of ink before him, and taking a gnawed-down stump of a pen, bent over the paper, like a cat watching a mouse-hole, for some quarter of an hour. All was silence, except the harsh scratching of the pen or the occasional oaths of the savage as he had to pause and rub with his thumb some ill-timed splotch of ink. At last he ended quite suddenly, and, thrusting the paper with defiant energy into Ruddock's hands, shouted imperiously, 'Read that, and sign.'

Ruddock, as he afterwards said, was all of a tremble, and the handwriting might have baffled a better scholar. However, he managed to puzzle out this form of agreement :

'I Ruddock serving man to the person called by Englishmen and process-servers Lord Foolsvill engage on behalf of that individdual to pay ten pound of sterling money to Nicholas MacSwinny Esquire lord if every man had his one of Ballybanaghermore for the lone of his bote during the inside of this present day to use upon Lord Ballybanaghermores riteful lake of the blessed Cormac for the some of ten pound aforesaid provided that if I or Foolsvill fails to restore the boat to me Nicholas MacSwinny Esquire before the hour of ten to night he shall pay another ten pound to me Nicholas MacSwinny Esquire.

'Witness NICHOLAS MACSWINNY.

'— the —, 18 ,'

The old man sat inwardly chuckling, and looking like one of Cruikshank's goblins, till Ruddock, with immense difficulty, had taken in the document, and then called, 'Now thin, honey dear, that's what ye must jist sign, or there's no boat for you to-day, Ruddock love.'

Ruddock appreciated too well the paper, and, vain as he was, felt as much mortified by the miller's ridicule as if his tormentor belonged to his own set of intimates. His deference for Lord Foulisville did not much stir his indignation at the contemptuous handling of the Earl; but to be Ruddock simple, with neither prefix nor Christian name, and for a house-steward to be designated a serving-man, were insults hard to stomach. On the other hand, he felt like an ambassador accredited to Turkey or Burmah. Success was the thing indispensable, even at the sacrifice of dignity. He was ready to sign; but the dreadful thought then flashed on him—'How can I show this paper to my lord and my lady? They will be glad enough to get them back to-day, but they'll kick me me out to-morrow for signing such ribaldry.' On second thoughts, however, he recollected that it would be the miller who would keep the paper, so he would be safe to sign, and could then fearlessly suppress the story of the paper. When he got back there would be neither difficulty nor untruth in merely saying that the wicked old man refused to give his punt before he had got ten pounds. So he put his name to it, saying, 'I suppose, sir, I may now fetch the boat.'

'Ye fetch the boat, ye spalpeen! None but me

bhoys shall fetch me boat off me pond. Here, Mike, Pat, Terry, what will ye put the boat on the waggon for this man for ?'

At this call three shock-headed rustics shuffled up, and on his repeating the question they at once apprehended, with the quick-witted cunning of their race, that the master did not want them to sell their services cheap. Mike, stepping forward, said with a grin, 'Sure, sir, jist to oblege the jintleman, I'll help for five shillins.' 'And I,' 'And I,' chimed in the other two.

Ruddock could only groan and disgorge fifteen shillings. With some trouble the boat was hoisted upon the waggon, and ready to be started, when the old miller, with a diabolical leer, piped out, 'And what d'ye mean to give me for the oars ?'

'The oars, sir ; aren't they included ?'

'Dhivil a bit ye'll see of oars in the dokiment. A golden sov'rin' down, or the oars don't go. Take them out, bhoys.'

Ruddock groaned still more deplorably at this fresh exaction, and pulled out the golden bit, signing to the waggoner to touch up the beasts.

'Me bhoys, drive as far as me own gate,' said the miller. So there was nothing for it but to submit to this fresh sample of capricious eccentricity.

The horses would barely listen to unwonted voices as the lumbering waggon creaked under its clumsy load, followed by the crestfallen butler and the sulky rustics from Foulisville, who could not understand why they had been ousted. Hardly had the cavalcade made its new start, when it was brought to another

dead stop, which nearly threw the badly fed beasts upon their haunches. A loud 'Halloa!' was heard from the old miller, who thrust his wicked head out of his den with an expression of elfish merriment on his wrinkled features.

'Sure, bhoys,' he screeched, 'the way is long, the roads are heavy, the sun is hot. Maybe ye'd like a jug o' punch, or maybe ye'd prefer the undaluted liquor?'

'Yes, indeed, sir,' ceremoniously responded Ruddock, mollified by the unexpected prospect of hospitality; 'we should all be truly grateful for such seasonable refreshment.'

The miller's men, astonished as they never had been before, responsively exclaimed, 'Bless the masther!'

'Bedad, then, sorry it is I am, bhoys, that I iver took the pledge from the blissed Father Mathew. Dhivil a drop of whisky since, and very little before, has any Saxon drawn out of Nick McSwinny's cupboard.'

So saying, he slammed to the door with a burst of derisive laughter, almost more provoking than the disappointment itself.

Again the whips cracked, again the door opened, and the old buffoon, bouncing out, screeched more loudly than ever, 'Stop in the name of St. Patrick; stop, I say!'

Ruddock now really thought he should faint. The miller then ceremoniously summoning his men, one after another, by full Christian and surname, as if he was an officer going through the roll call, ranged them on one side, and afterwards with a sharp call

to 'Foolsvill's fellows' to 'come up, ye spalpeens!' posted on the opposite one, in some uncleanly mire, Ruddock and his satellites. After this he apologized to his own ragged 'gintlemen' for his forgetfulness in not explaining to them more fully the errand for which he had unwillingly lent their services; and then very deliberately read the document, giving the right emphasis to every cutting phrase and insulting designation, with a comic power worthy of Buckstone in his prime, and concluded with a ringing 'God save the Green!'

'Now then, bhoys,' he resumed, 'we'll give three cheers for the Pope and the Fenians, and Mr. Ruddock will be proud to assist us.'

Seeing, however, that Ruddock did not assist, but kept his mouth closely pursed up, the old man held up the agreement by the right top corner between the thumb and finger of his right hand, and then, taking hold of it at the top middle between the other thumb and finger, made a motion as if he were going to tear it up.

'Now thin, friend Ruddock, jist look here; if ye don't cheer the Pope and the Fenians, and cheer thim till your ugly voice cracks complately, by the holy poker! here goes the agreement, and may the blissed St. Cormac look after the sowls of your riffraff cooling their heels on Iniscormac!'

Mr. Ruddock, so appealed to, did cheer, round after round, as long as it pleased the vagabonds to keep up the fun, with a stentorian voice, but a rueful countenance.

He was then called on for another five shillings

apiece in consideration of the extra trouble, and had perforce to disgorge. So the shameless traffic in calamity, with its aggravating accompaniment of burlesque torture, was at last concluded; for even the aged ruffian felt that it would not quite do to prolong it till the victims of his heartless malice had perished of exhaustion.

The afternoon was far spent before the waggon could reach the lough, where they found Mr. Fiennes long arrived with the car, and seriously alarmed at the possibility of some fresh mischance equal to, or perhaps exceeding, the misfortunes of the previous day. He afterwards confessed that, while he was thankful to say that all which he had gone through on that terrible night had permanently deepened and strengthened his character, he was, during this interval of waiting, the victim of the strangest superstitions, the most distressing forebodings. He was overstrained, mind and body; so his ears tingled with goblin voices, and impossible forms of ghastly suffering—corpses nibbled by rats, and dying wretches vainly trying to beat off the bloodthirsty beasts—danced before eyes which could hardly keep themselves open. The sighing of the wind was transformed into groans of agony, and the hum of insects was as the death-watch.

‘It was worse,’ he owned, ‘than all the rest of it; and when I reached the Island, I hardly dared to land, in fear of what I might see. It was with an effort that I could forbear from shouting, when I found them looking like wretches under the gallows, but alive and in their sane senses.’

## CHAPTER XXXI.

## CASTAWAYS.

BUT what had become of the castaways during those terrible twenty-seven hours ? Meriel was so thoroughly prostrate that to have pressed her with any questions would have been no less impossible than cruel ; and Sir Miles, after snatching some hasty refreshment, disappeared. When Miss Foulis was sufficiently restored to make her appearance on the following day, she was, contrary to her wont, profuse in her declarations of gratitude to her deliverer. Sir Miles's presence of mind, courage, and dexterity had saved her life, while he had imperilled his own, at the frightful moment of the crash and the sinking. Nor, as she added, did his services end there ; for all through that protracted agony, his delicate kindness, his tact, his Christian resignation, his forethought, his unflagging hope, had sustained her ever-sinking spirit and more and more enfeebled body. But for Sir Miles, she never would have been back and alive that day ; to the end of her life he would be for ever associated with her wonderful preservation.

As Meriel thus ran on with a profusion of words and a warmth of expression very unusual in her, Sir Miles stood by and said very little, and that only modestly to deprecate the praises heaped upon him by the girl, and the compliments of the remaining party. He had merely done his duty, and his one sufficient reward was to see Miss Foulis safe.

The true history of that wretched experience of life on a desolate island was this:—It will be recollected that the last which was seen of the pair after the accident was Sir Miles leading Meriel out of sight behind a thicket. He did so from the benevolent motive of enabling her to sit down in some sheltered spot till the faintness which he saw coming over her face should have passed off. She fell, however, huddled up in a heap, and continued so long without moving that he became rather uneasy. He was not, however, losing his time, for during his span of enforced watching, he matured, scrutinized in every aspect, balanced and balanced again that which he resolved should be the great *coup* of his life, the capital achievement of fifty-eight years of scheming. ‘She thinks that she owes her life to me,’ said he to himself; ‘and she shall give me that life before we are rescued. A living Lady Brandreth is a better thing for any woman to be, than a dead Miss Foulis at the bottom of this stinking mere. As she escaped one fate, she must learn to endure the other.’

As soon as Meriel had sufficiently recovered to be able to comprehend conversation, Brandreth began the siege. At first his language was a delicate tissue of compliment and commiseration. He was very careful to say nothing which should sound like a brag of his own achievements, but everything which he dropped led to the inference that the girl had with difficulty escaped death, and that in saving her he had incurred great risks. So long as the conversation ran on in this strain, she drank in his sentences with greedy ears; but when he approached the second head of his



discourse, and hinted at the reward which he was entitled to expect, covertly alluding to the gratitude which he felt certain she entertained, and the lifelong devotion which he was prepared in return to render, he found that his pleadings were being wasted on a sullen and callous hearer. Meriel was not, and never had been, in the least degree in love with him any more than with any other man, and he had often inspired her with considerable terror whenever the savage look was on him. She never had, in fact, melted to any human being, and she had long resolved upon enjoying to the full her maiden liberty. Her secret boast was, 'I'm not going to take up with the first man that runs at me, as silly Mater did with my disreputable father.'

For a moment, Sir Miles lost his self-control, and shot one of his savage glances at the shrinking but peevish maiden. Instantly conscious of his imprudence, he smoothed his brow; and in another instant saw that he had not, after all, made a mistake; but that this momentary imprudence had, perhaps, done more to advance his cause than all his laboured pleadings, for the glaring eye visibly revived the dread which the raw country girl had conceived of the terrible man of the world. She shuddered, and Sir Miles comprehended that in playing with her fear of him he possessed an engine of power which would be very useful if used with extreme discretion, and only in the last resort.

So he attuned his voice to its sweetest, most insinuating tone as, with wicked ingenuity, he brought his argument round to the considerations which

naturally grow out of that most dangerous mimic of virtue, and therefore most subtle temptation of the evil one, false shame. He was inwardly certain his cunning insinuations would tell with a character like Meriel's, which was weak and vain as well as obstinate, and which hugged plausibility in mistake for principle. They two might stand up, he emphatically declared, before the entire world, and tell every incident of that unhappy day, and they could assuredly come out not only unabashed and unassailable, but triumphant over their slanderers in or out of Fontarabia. He noted with pleasure that the girl winced at the suggestion, new to her raw nature, of slanderers so near to her. So he continued with increased confidence and a fresh instalment of hypocritical sympathy to urge that, still, stories could be so distorted, and the world was so malicious that even caution, which was only caution, was next door to rashness. Unfortunately there were no witnesses of how they had got upon the island, except persons, some of them no doubt most respectable, but at the same time not very accurate, and also—well, very possibly, one person, one black sheep in that innocent flock—of whose chivalrous determination to see Sir Miles righted, he, Sir Miles, with all the obligations of Christian charity pressing imperiously upon him, could not be quite certain. Irish vivacity, he added, mated to Italian craft was capable of strange romances. 'What weighs, however, most heavily upon my mind is the thoughts of what your poor mother will feel if she hears these terrible calumnies.' Then he rolled a savage eye at their absent maligners, and Meriel inwardly quaked.

The Baronet, with an instantaneous change of countenance and the benevolent manner of some wise but tender uncle not quite so familiar as a father's, but something more than that of a mere old friend, reiterated that he felt more than he could express for her awkward position, which must so much aggravate her physical sufferings. He had called his conscience to account to see if he could fasten any responsibility on himself, and he was quite unable. If anyone was to blame it would be his old friend Foulisville, for letting the boat go out of repair. Still, he felt just as if he were really guilty of the misfortune, and he would say or do anything to repair it. Then he was ready with the story of the lady of rank who had married a man who afterwards rose high in the public service on account of a misadventure in which both had been perfectly innocent, but both found themselves in a most vexatious predicament.

Night was closing upon them as he was pleading, and Meriel was every minute becoming more faint, more cold, more hungry, more exhausted, or—to put it plainly—more imbecile. At length, as everything in the thickening darkness was swimming round before her aching eyes, and the sickness grew more and more oppressive, rather with an immediate desire of stopping Sir Miles's oppressive volubility than from any deliberate motive, but withal under the fascination of the glaring eyes, which ever and anon lightened as the turn of the conversation enabled the man to simulate virtuous indignation, she ejaculated, 'Well, if it must, I'll marry you. Don't go on that way; and, oh! don't look so!'

Very soon after she said so, she went off into a dreadful sleep—a sleep which was as much a swoon as a sleep. Sir Miles sat for some time at her head, pondering whether his first act as her promised spouse might not be to walk as chief mourner behind her coffin. But a more calm examination of the affair led him to see that, if she were to die, the only evidence of their betrothal would be his own assertion, and that, under all circumstances, that would be a secret which had better go down to the grave with him. If he managed it well, her deliverer from the wave would probably get the run of Yaxley, and who could tell what then might not come of his obtaining a lodgment in that fortress with such credentials? Her daughter's saviour from drowning could not fail to be an object of interest to any mother, while, at all events in a widow's eyes, he would not be, as he flattered himself, so very old or unattractive. But if any idea should unhappily get wind that he had taken advantage of the girl's defenceless condition for his own object, and forced his suit upon her, the report would for ever set a black mark against his name. So he got up, took off his coat, and spread it over Meriel's feet, so as to keep her a little warm, and then jumped about at intervals to keep his own blood flowing, until the morning twilight began to break. Then he set to work assiduously picking berries of the mountain-ash, some of which he ate, and compelled Meriel to eat the remainder as soon as she awoke, which was not till the sun was standing high. It is probable that this food, unsatisfying as it was, saved her from a severe, if not fatal, illness.

By a very fortunate coincidence, a fine haunch of red-deer venison had been given at Fontarabia on the previous Sunday, and the noble joint had been seasoned with jelly of the mountain-ash. Had it not been for this happy accident, Sir Miles, who had no claim to be considered a botanist, would not have had the slightest notion that the little bright bunches which hang upon the rowan were fit for human food. Miss Foulis would in that case have probably succumbed to exhaustion; and how far in the mysterious chain of events the world's history for all coming time might have been altered is of course impossible to conjecture. Yet Meriel's safety, humanly speaking, turned on a wrangle, between the Countess and the cook, whether the Sunday joint was to be roast beef or venison, which was finally decided in favour of the beef, and only overruled on the discovery that the venison could not keep any longer.

Meriel still continued too weak to speak; so Sir Miles flowed on with a rippling current of tender endearments, all framed so as to keep alive the recollection that she was his affianced wife. He was much comforted to find that, although she said nothing, she showed no sign of demurring to his pretensions; for he was afraid, considering the state of prostration in which she was when she accepted him, and her subsequent collapse, that the recollection of the all-important consent might have been erased from the tablet of her mind. So he continued till the rescue came, as to which, and as to the return to Fontarabia nothing occurred worthy of commemoration.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

## A DOOR OF SAFETY.

THE situation of affairs after the rescue of the shipwrecked pair was most critical for Sir Miles's project. He had, by an unscrupulous use of an opportunity, wrung a reluctant consent to marriage from the helpless and immature girl whom he ought to have protected and not coerced at that moment of misery. Neither he nor Miss Foulis dared come forward and divulge their secret, and neither of them knew how to comport himself, or herself, towards the other. To speak and not to speak was equally difficult, and to answer the various questions, some put in kindness and some in curiosity, was, for Meriel at least, a perpetual martyrdom. At length she put a stop upon her new volubility, and got into a way of meeting any question with a sulky 'Well, I believe I was off my head.'

Sir Miles, as soon as ever he could catch a quiet *tête-à-tête*, expostulated with her on the impolicy of making an assertion which, if credited, might invalidate all which had taken place. The answer he got was an ill-tempered 'Then tell me what I am to say, for I was off my head.' He had to betake himself to an extra savage glance, which brought on an outburst of crying and a promise not to do so again; in the midst of which Lady Foulisville came into the room, and it taxed all the Baronet's ready wit to preoccupy her so as to enable the weeping damsel

to escape. In all other respects, beyond the unmanageable promise, everything had still to be done which Brandreth required for the accomplishment of his fraudulent marriage, and his temerity rose before his eyes in all its bigness and its blackness.

Not to go further than Fontarabia itself, he would have to explain and palliate his behaviour to his host and hostess, already prejudiced against him, and, as he knew, proud to blindness of Foulis greatness. It then occurred to him how demented he had been to have acted since his arrival at Fontarabia as a conqueror rather than as a pardoned penitent. He had done nothing to conciliate the Lord or the Lady, or to win over his unscrupulous and successful rival, Miss Robbins. Even that reptile, Sant' Onofrio, might do him a mischief, and he shrank from Fiennes's ridicule and the probable competition of so self-possessed and impecunious a youth.

Worse even than his difficulties with the Foulisvilles was his knowledge of Meriel's fickleness and selfishness. He had no means of compelling her to stick to her promises so ruthlessly extracted, and, for once, fickleness and selfishness would stand out to the world in the guise of prudence and self-respect. If she did repudiate an engagement contracted when she was in a state, as she had herself already hinted, bordering on physical and mental incapacity, the world would hold her justified in her behaviour, and laugh at him as a discomfited schemer. Outside of Fontarabia stood Meriel's mother, so totally a stranger to him that he could not even reckon on her ignorance of his history. She must be managed, and how this

was to be done was as yet inscrutable. Meriel would have to be pumped, but could he rely on her silence in the meanwhile? Obloquy hemmed him in on every side. Success, by its material advantages, would compensate for the obloquy; but obloquy and failure would be social extinction.

As in carrying out his evil project he would have to face a world whose good opinion he had despised, and had therefore contracted its hatred, conscience, half awakened for once, had nearly made a coward of him, and he was seriously facing the necessity of a retreat while, as a prudent general, he was planning the advance. The circumstance which would, as he feared, be his weakness in an onward movement would come to his aid in a retrograde operation. If he could hardly depend upon Meriel for sticking to her promise, he believed, from his silent but searching study of her character, that he could rely upon her querulous and suspicious temper for doing anything which she determined on in the worst conceivable way and with the least possible grace. So he set himself to consider how, in the probable case of having to drop the adventure, he could lead up to being jilted by Meriel in some way which should ensure her silence no less than his own. But fortune, in a most unexpected manner, came to the succour of her beloved adventurer, and opened for him a door of safety which no scheming of his own could ever have discovered.

The cold, the wet, the fatigue, the exposure, the anxiety of that night-long tramp produced its natural effect on the frame, no longer young nor strong, of Lady Foulisville. She complained for a day or so of



being sick and heavy and stupid ; everything swam before her eyes ; she could not think, neither could she eat, although her cook was a man of such genius that he could have made an appetising dish out of the Countess's discarded gloves, and she had to leave dinner abruptly and go to bed. The doctor came on the following morning, and announced that his noble patient was unquestionably suffering from brain fever, adding that, if she was to be pulled through, extreme quiet for many days was more than imperative.

On this, the other guests departed. Sant' Onofrio thought himself lucky to get off, after the humiliating figure which he had cut ; the old gentleman and his wife, none the better for their walk, slunk away for a long spell of coddling and doctoring ; and Fiennes not only thought it delicate to leave, but forced Sergood, who could not see that, to accompany him. Only Meriel, as a near relation, stayed on ; and Sir Miles discovered that his presence would be invaluable as an established intimate of the family, to cheer up his dear old friend Foulisville, who must be in sore want of some companion. That excellent nobleman was so much overcome that he found himself compelled to give the sad current of his affectionate thoughts another turn by a scientific and protracted investigation of his historical cellar, visiting, bin by bin, that matchless and still extensive store of many wines with which his father and his grandfather, and he too, in his humble way, had stored Fontarabia. Claret had to follow claret, burgundy trod on the heels of hock, and priceless champagne gave place to madeira, more oily than attar of roses, or sherry and port delicious

enough to turn the current of public taste. This grave occupation gave the Earl little time for seeing, thinking of, or speaking about other people's business, and mightily facilitated Brandreth's projects, as, in his extemporised function of approving taster, he soon reinstated himself in the Earl's highest favour, and was commanded not to think of leaving.

Miss Robbins, too, was left, by the natural devolution of duties, vicegerent of the family and household ; for ' Boozy Fou ' was perfectly useless except with the cellar-book, and in her sudden and solitary responsibility she was really glad of the company of a man—a man of title, too, as she said to herself, and one who knew the world, and who had better be the friend than the enemy of that disordered family at Fontarabia. She reckoned on her charms of conversation to keep Sir Miles in the right line, so that her persuasions were added to the Earl's injunctions to the Baronet not to abridge his visit.

Sir Miles Brandreth appreciated the change of front, and bore with much apparent meekness his sudden transformation into the cherished and indispensable friend of the Foulisville family ; while he conceived a further scheme, equal in audacity to his *coup* upon the island, but far transcending it in breadth of conception and artistic ingenuity of detail, while in no way inferior in its total want of moral principle.

We have explained how thoroughly Sir Miles, like everyone else, believed in Meriel's irreversible succession to the great and growing inheritance of the Curteis family ; he also recollected that he and his affianced were at the time in Ireland, and, without being an

accurate lawyer, he was yet well aware that that country enjoyed a marriage law very different from that of England, and admirably suited in its differences for the promotion of all kinds of clandestine, irregular, and undesirable unions. His imagination had been much struck by reading the romantic details of a trial which resulted in declaring that the heroine of the tale which it disclosed was wife to some clergyman from the accident of a stranger happening to overlook from a window of an adjacent house a *tête-à-tête* between the reverend gentleman and the lady, which he employed in reading the marriage service with her. The Baronet knew, indeed, that subsequent legislation had forbidden a repetition of this especial form of marriage, but enough of glorious matrimonial liberty remained in Ireland to suit the purpose of Sir Miles Brandreth, and he had means, without raising suspicion, of ascertaining the exact condition of the legal question.

Sir Miles speedily found out, and without much difficulty, that no tidings of the eventful picnic had been posted to Yaxley. Meriel's chief concern was the dread lest the untoward accident should involve a 'recall home, and thus shorten her holiday ; so she was in no hurry to report the incidents of a day which would so probably bring about that calamity. The Irish papers, too, and the correspondents of the London journals were at the time preoccupied by a very sensational trial, in which fair ladies and high-sounding names were involved in disagreeable complications ; so that the event obtained publicity in a very curt and unimpressive form, and with no names mentioned, but

merely as an accident which had nearly befallen a picnic party in the West of Ireland. Sir Miles felt that facts were still his own to marshal as he judged most expedient.

### CHAPTER XXXIII.

#### STRIKE QUICK, STRIKE STRAIGHT.

STARTING from the premisses which we have indicated, and studying the situation with the eye of an old campaigner, Brandreth came to the conclusion that if he struck quick and struck straight, forestalling Lady Foulisville's recovery, and making the marriage irrevocable before any active steps could be taken by Mrs. Foulis, he should only require the help of two confederates. Of Meriel's ultimate co-operation he felt certain, in spite of her visible coldness, now that her aunt's illness and her uncle's toping had left her practically as solitary as when she was on Diana's Island; for, as we have seen, he had divined her dread of him, and used it to keep alive in her mind vague terrors of breach of promise, and he did not think it would be very difficult to secure the assistance of Miss Robbins. He had taken advantage of her advances to him, and his semi-amorous tone of philandering began to fall upon a vain heart lacerated by the perfidy of the cruel Count. In this he had been helped by some incautious phrase which Miss Robbins had dropped at the break-up of the party, and of which he took silent note. At the same time, it was so veiled as not to

attract the attention of Meriel, the jealousy of whose nature was happily attempered by abundant stupidity. The London-bred companion was visibly getting wearied with a banishment to Ireland, which the illness of her patroness seemed likely to prolong for an indefinite period, unless, indeed, the death of the Countess—which was far from impossible—should bring this profitable connection with the family to a sudden close, or throw Robbins on the capricious favour of the besotted widower. Besides, the strain of a sick-room was clearly and acknowledgedly irksome and unfamiliar to her, and she was continually making mistakes in her management of the invalid which jeopardised a life very valuable to her. On the other hand, to strike and leave with no other asylum open for her would be to exchange affluence for beggary. Taking her in this mood, thought Sir Miles, and dangling before her eyes the prospect of exchanging her actual restraint and uncertainty for the enviable post of principal companion at Yaxley, he could easily mould her to his will.

His device for making use of Meriel was audacious. Treating her as his own betrothed in the sight of heaven and of their consciences, he expatiated on the miseries of their ambiguous situation and the impropriety of a clandestine engagement, and urged the girl to terminate so fatal a state of things by a frank and free confession to a mother to whom she owed so much gratitude, respect, and love.

Meriel, who had never heard him talk in that strain before, was somewhat taken aback. In truth, the girl—who, with all her selfishness, was not hardened

in evil ways—had felt some rather intrusive qualms of conscience about the propriety of what she had been so strangely led to do, and, well fed as she now was, she was tempted still more than at first to treat the words and deeds of her frozen, half-starved self upon Diana's Island as the utterances and actions of one not in her sane mind. She was sure that, whatever being in love might mean, she was not in love with Sir Miles. In short, had she been well counselled at the moment, she might have taken up a safe and sure position, and asserted her unforfeited freedom of action, in spite of the half-delirious language of those exceptional hours. She meant to say all this to her would-be lover, but she had by nature no fluency, and, at the same time, she was anxious to make her explanation as courteous as she could to one in whose power she was, who held himself out to her as her affianced husband, and to whom she believed that she owed her life. Added to this perplexity was her inextinguishable dread, and the constantly recurring question, 'If I thwart him and make him my enemy, what will he not do?'

The natural result of these conflicting feelings was not only that the puzzle-headed child totally failed in shaping in words the sentiments which were dancing in her brain, but that, on the contrary, she blundered in confirming, though in other words and from a different point of view, the very arguments with which the Baronet was plying her. Both he and she started from the premiss that she was 'in a mess,' as she graphically termed the situation. On this he met her more than half way with agreement, and, after a

transitory glare *in terrorem* at those who dared speak disrespectfully of her, modestly pleaded that the object of his remarks was to point out to her the way by which she might escape from the mess which, with her inbred delicacy of feeling, she felt so keenly. He, and he alone, could really extricate her from the annoyances which, situated as she was, her enemies could always inflict upon her with their slanderous tongues; while she, feeling precisely as he did, and with the same real end in view, could in reply only offer inconsistent and inconclusive lamentations with not a trace of method about them. She tried to take up the ravelled thread of her discourse, and only more completely found herself entangled in his ingenious arguments, and forced, contrary to her own inner knowledge of her own mind, to acknowledge that, with feelings and intentions so very similar to those of Sir Miles himself, she had no alternative but to defer to his superior knowledge of the world in the choice of her practical action. His advice was that she should write to her mother, and write quickly.

‘It will be such a difficult letter to write,’ she helplessly whimpered.

‘Will you allow me to assist you in its composition?’

‘Yes.’

By wheedling that short ‘Yes’ from Meriel, Sir Miles had obtained the advantage which he coveted. His plan, in the rough, was to transmit, in Meriel’s name, a double-faced letter to Mrs. Foulis, placing the island adventure before her in lights which would

most enhance her own and her daughter's obligations to him, as the man to whom the girl owed her life. This would naturally lead Meriel to declare their consequent engagement in terms which Lucy might read as only inviting from her some expression of her general and preliminary good-will, but yet such as should lure her on to be so incautious in that expression as to leave it open to Brandreth and Meriel to interpret her language as conveying permission for the marriage itself. Finally, the letter was to contain a promise from Meriel to introduce Sir Miles to her mother at Yaxley in terms which Mrs. Foulis would probably understand as proposing to her the prior inspection of a would-be son-in-law, but which the conspirators could, without too flagrantly blundering on purpose, persistently treat as the offer, from them, of a post-nuptial visit.

Such a letter, written by Meriel's hands, with full consciousness of its double meaning, and so worded as to reveal Brandreth's share in the authorship, would have been no mean evidence of an average first-class capacity for intrigue. There are several members of the 'Phly,' recognised professors of the science, who would have produced artistic specimens of such a document. Augustus Foulis, too, in his day would, without doubt, have gained credit for his performance. But there are heights of the gay science of deception which Foulis's feet had never trodden, and labyrinths in which he would have sat down in bewilderment and perished. He may, in his boyhood, have greased the floor at Fontarabia to make priest and parson tumble over each other, but



he never dreamed of seasoning the turtle soup with catsup. So the refinement of tactics which Sir Miles Brandreth put into execution was one which neither Foulis nor all the remaining 'Phly' in conclave assembled could have extemporised, with any chance of success, where the instrument was a Meriel Foulis.

What are we to say of the genius which planned making the girl herself an unconscious scribe of thoughts infinitely transcending her capacity, and converting her into a conduit-pipe of high diplomacy, while she thought herself indulging in the silly duplicity of an undutiful girl to an over-fond mother? In her own credulous blindness, she imagined that Sir Miles was only helping her to word her own commonplace fears and longings. He had, therefore, not only to think as a silly, inexperienced girl would do, but write as only an illiterate girl could do. Her letter had to be worded with a profusion of ungrammatical expressions, and to be stamped with an incoherence of style, all effectually masking a crooked and ruthless purpose; yet neither Mrs. Foulis, nor anyone else reading it, could be allowed to imagine that this rambling, blundering scrawl could have come from any brain but that of such a creature as Meriel.

Lastly, the mysterious person so to be deceived was Meriel's own mother, a clever and educated woman by reputation, and one to whom every form of expression in which her child was wont to indulge must have been familiar since the first days of that child's infantine lisplings, and which he, an acquaintance of

days, had to elicit from a suspicious dolt, and then to assimilate and to embody. The only possible process was the tedious and delicate one of keeping in front of Meriel in the suggestion of topics, and yet lagging behind her in embodying them not only in isolated words but in consecutive sentences. The letter must be fundamentally and ungrammatically hers, not only in the phrasing, but in the sequence of its topics, and yet those topics must owe their origin to the prompting of Sir Miles.

He was successful, but as, in surplusage of necessary pains, he had to deal with a girl slow of pen, barren of imagination, curt of expression, and sullenly obstinate in sticking to the first clumsy words which it gave her the least trouble to suggest, it was not a single hour only which the task cost him, while it called into play his whole stock of patience and entire artillery of wheedling and coaxing.

The fractious child's impatient rage reached its climax when Brandreth insisted on the necessity of keeping a copy of so important a paper, and yet refused to be himself the scribe. Only a very rapid movement and a sharp grip of Meriel's wrist saved the precious document from premature destruction.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

## A CHILD'S LETTER.

As finally sent to the post, Meriel's letter to her mother ran as follows:—

‘FONTARABIA, *Monday.*

‘DEAREST DEAR OLD MOTHER,

‘I am only just enough myself to tell you what a dreadful thing had nearly been happening. How you would have been grieving over your poor drowned Meriel and never to have kissed darling mammy again! For Lord and Lady Foulisville who are the kindest people that ever was had got up a delightful picnic at a beautiful place up in the mountains and you can only get there you know in a boat for the lake is very deep. And so the rest of the party had got over safe and our lot was me and two gentlemen and Miss Robbins. And as Miss Robbins and a gentleman got out they somehow gave the boat a push and it went off with I and Sir Miles Brandreth in and there was a hole in the bottom and the filthy black water came in and the boat went on sinking so awfully fast—but Sir Miles found it out and kept us floating till it ~~raped~~ <sup>crashed</sup> against the desolate island that stands you know in the middle and I scrambled out and had just gone to the bottom. But how he saved me and got me on the rock I never could understand it was so very dreadful and he was in such great danger in saving my life. And poor Lord Foulisville to think his

precious cup had gone to the bottom and the plate and all the lunch with them to walk home all night over the mountain before the boat could be got to take us off. But I had quite lost all count of time and the only thing I can remember was how kind and brave he was. And he was so cheerful telling me to trust in God and then I would see you again and without him I must have sunk clean away as I was so hungry for the lunch had gone down before we had any of us eat anything and nobody took much breakfast we were all in such a fidget. When I lay perishing with cold he took off his own poor coat and put it on my feet and he scrambled though he was so tired and got me wild fruit or I should have died with hunger. Lady Foulisville says she never knew such a perfect gentleman and poor thing to think she should have had that long walk over the mountains when the boat was lost and she never knew what had become of me and the cup too. And Lord Foulisville does feel it so. Dear Miles must not I call him my own when I owe my life to him and he says he will be a son to you and longs to go to Yaxley to kiss your dear hand. And you will love him dearly won't you darling mamma as he will be your own all his life and strive he says to make you happy. You must not mind that horrid County Families says Miles is fifty-eight. He is quite the youngest man of his age I ever saw so active so bright so jolly. His wife is dead a long time and he has only one son who never troubles him for he is a lawyer and has got a fellowship or something on which he lives he is so clever. He is a very old

baronet and his title is a very old one of James I.'s lot he says and he told me his ancestor was a general of Marlborough and married Queen Anne's maid of honour and fought the French.

‘Your most loving child,  
‘MERIEL FOULIS.’

Those who remember the intentions of the real author of this letter will see that there were sufficient reasons, well thought out, not only for everything which appeared, but for everything which was suppressed in it. Its one principal end, of course, was to magnify Sir Miles and to conciliate Mrs. Foulis to him as her daughter's saviour and a complete gentleman. The danger to that daughter was to be magnified, and the reward she felt herself bound to give to her preserver to be taken as a matter of course, and not ostentatiously hammered at. The kindness of the Foulisvilles was to be placed in a prominent light, and by assuming much friendship on their parts for Sir Miles, he was, as it were, to receive an indirect testimonial of character. This would lead to the supposition of their approbation of the match, the inference of which was to be raised without committing the writer to a direct falsehood. With this view, it was necessary to minimise what the hardships of the adventure proved to be to them, so as to give no presumption of Lady Foulisville's illness. That illness would have been a fatal fact, for an insensible woman can hardly consent to a match. Above all things, however, the letter must appear to be the unprompted effusion of Meriel's affectionate heart and cultured brain

The Baronet's own feelings, on the completion of the memorable epistle, were akin to those of the painter who at last dispatches to Burlington House the picture on which heart and hand and mind had so long been concentrated with the glowing presentiment that by it he will live. So long as he could make sure of his material booty, Sir Miles was philosophically indifferent to any of that discredit which he knew that he would incur both among men of conscience and men of honour—the drivellers and the humbugs, as he used distinctively to call them. Moreover, his instinct taught him that if he could only succeed, as he felt sure he would, in extracting anything from Mrs. Foulis which could be tortured into an assent, her mouth would be sealed, and he would be master of the girl, the money, and the story. He had not plied Meriel all these days without having probed the secret of her mother's isolation, with no other counsellor than that well-meaning but *borné* Featherston and a lawyer whom she never saw. But he felt keenly that, if Mrs. Foulis should get on the track of his history before he had secured his prize, he would be mercilessly shown the door.

Thus Sir Miles had every counsel of hope on one side and of fear on the other for striking a bold, quick blow. Successful, he would become famous, while his defeat would hardly become notorious, as none would have more interest in keeping the incident dark than his chief antagonists. In short, audacious as the game was, it was in reality not only a promising but a safe one for a player to whom the judgment of the present and of the next world were equally matters of pro-

found indifference, and who could only see pitted against him, as his possible foe, a lone woman, tongue-tied by the regard which she owed to her daughter's reputation. In his exultation, he actually set to persuading himself that the strictness of the entail was an additional advantage to himself. The fire of youth and the allurements of dissipation had, as he complacently thought, died out in his mature breast; so that it was a merciful dispensation which would be pouring into his lap, year by year, an income far in excess of what in any one year his ablest machinations had ever earned for him. To be sure, he would only fill the place, for the present, of husband of the heiress-apparent, but with the collieries and the iron-works extending as they promised to do, and a sufficiently salaried post of manager-in-chief of the works ready, as he had determined, to be created on his behalf, even this secondary position would be a noble acquisition.

One little private gratification did the kind father also allow himself, as a sort of dessert after the rich banquet of material good things which Meriel's husband would enjoy. This was to gloat over the mortification of his well-hated son at the prospect of being edged out of social estimation and the sedulous attentions of emulous dowagers by some enormously opulent half-brother. 'His would be the bloody hand,' said the Baronet to himself; 'but the other one will have the hand in the breeches pocket, and if he does not pick a coronet out to put Sir Eustace to shame, he will not be my son, after all.'

Having seen Meriel's letter despatched, the next care of Sir Miles was to make sure of Miss Robbins.

In setting to work upon this branch of his campaign he did not quite show his usual finesse, from under-rating the capacities of the woman with whom he was dealing. The somewhat indelicate exultation with which she had received advances, which were on his part intended to test her character, naturally misled him to her disadvantage. She, too, had not been at her best as a tactician, for she was both knocked up mind and body by the terrible night on the mountains, and still more piqued and disappointed by Sant' Onofrio's mean duplicity. Sir Miles should have approached the lady armed with all those resources of his most exquisite courtesy, with which only two or three days before he had been plying her; but, instead of doing this, he opened his game to her so bluntly, and with so evident a contempt for her moral sense, as to provoke an outburst of indignant virtue.

'Did he think her the woman, at the time when the reason, if not the life, of her dearest friend was in her hands, to betray and sacrifice a young girl, the niece and under the protection of her friend's roof; and for whom, on Lady Foulisville's recovery, she, the humble Robbins, would be responsible to that friend no less than to her own conscience?'

He was puzzled, but not daunted; and, after resuming the assault in a more guarded way, gradually discovered that the adventuress's unexpected display of virtue was really a cunning little inferior to his own. He wanted to buy her cheap, and she to sell herself dear. His idea was to make her his tool,



while she was resolved on becoming his confidante or else his betrayer.

At last she made a suggestion which would involve a consideration excessive even for services such as she was quite unable to render. Sir Miles demurred, whereupon she remarked, 'As you please, Sir Miles. You are beginning to make me think that it is my duty, as standing in the shoes of my poor dear friend, so long as she continues incapacitated, to write a line to Mrs. Foulis, and tell her how matters really stand with her daughter.'

So Robbins triumphed, and obtained the promise of a reward, contingent on matters falling out as both she and Sir Miles believed they must do, which would have been lavish even had it involved a breach with Lady Foulisville. But to break with her Delicia was the last thing she dreamed of. A town house in Eaton Place, and a country house at Yaxley, although with the drawback of an occasional purgatory at Fontarabia, was her day-dream. Sir Miles and Meriel would be well off the Foulisvilles' hands—husband and wife irrevocably, before the Countess could possibly be allowed to listen to business.

On that still uncertain day it would be an easy task for the ever-present, beloved, confidential Robbins homœopathically to drop into the weakened patient's ears sugary globules of the story, into the belief of which the reawakening invalid would be too carefully educated to allow any other, even if more true, impression to gain later possession of her credulous mind.

‘And you may trust Boozy Fou to me,’ she added with a sinister smile.

‘Even if your friend die, will your ladyship then condescend to become my patroness?’

A playful box on the ear was the answer rendered to Brandreth for this sally, and it sent him away rejoicing, for he made sure from it that the alliance was sealed between him and his old rival. After all, he reflected, in great emergencies the wise men of the earth have recourse to coalition governments.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### STRANGE TIDINGS.

THE arrival of Meriel’s letter at Yaxley caused much searching of heart. The record of a fatal accident only just avoided has always a strong after-taste of the bitter. None but the dullest imagination can resist the fascination of picturing what it would have been but for the blessed interposition, and of living through the alternative event, with its grim accompaniments of pain, death, and mourning.

Lucy Foulis, moulded as she had been by her life-long solitude, was peculiarly susceptible of this mood of mind. In the solitary rambles of her childhood into the sunlight, and away from Miss Harriett, day-dreams and self-evolved pictures were her companions and her consolers. After Featherston had ridden over, with his pockets stuffed with story-books,

she would often see gorgeous, quickly changing fairy scenes, though the personages who acted for her amusement had, somehow, strange proclivities for borrowing the attributes of the few human beings with whom she had been allowed to come in contact. The fairy prince, younger no doubt, and of nobler mien, as he was, oddly recalled Featherston himself; and we are ashamed to say that the meddling, spiteful witch more than once bore an unaccountable likeness to Miss Harriett; while the imps of mischief who capered round borrowed the features of the nursery-maids whose acrimonious lessons of tidiness were so sore an affliction to the glorious sloven. There was one grand scene which she never forgot, in which the fire-king himself swooped down, with the lineaments and the voice of Mr. Swettenham.

In the seven months of her miserable pregnancy, chronic day-dreams became a real source of danger to her mental organization, of which her medical adviser bade her very seriously beware; so that, while they would constantly insist upon recurring in the sequel of her life, she had what was not only the moral courage, but the self-denial, to resist, to the best of her power, the gratification of her facile imagination. Still, the proclivity was fast rooted in her nature; so that it was not wonderful that the sudden shock of Meriel's escape should have let loose the tightly chained tendency. Meriel, the island, the boat, all rose before her, as if illuminated by some electric light, and in action as if by exquisite clockwork. There was something more, too, which rose, although to this one figure she was puzzled how to assign its appropriate mien. / The

man of whom, indeed, she had never before heard, but who, as she could not doubt, had, under Providence, been the instrument of saving the life most precious to herself,—he played the first, the noblest part in the perpetual recurring drama which presented itself to her inward vision. Still Mrs. Foulis was never false to her otherwise intensely practical nature. Visionary she might be, by way of episode, but the main chronicle of her life told of sense and business. At bottom, she was not quite satisfied with the whole story as it came to her in Meriel's uncorroborated narrative. She made inquiries in her household, and she found that it had not even been hinted at by any letter of the lady's-maid to any of her fellow-servants. Meriel had, in fact, forbidden the woman to write, first in her own dread of being recalled, and then, under Sir Miles's prompting, for fear of some of the facts which he meant to keep dark oozing out. The girl was a Swiss, hastily taken for the emergency, nearly a stranger to the family, and unprovided as yet with any followers, besides her English was queer and came with difficulty, so the order was one which was readily obeyed; although, in the absence of such a warning, her natural passion for having a horrible story to tell might have made even this illiterate young woman spoil a sheet of paper.

The anxious mother would puzzle herself for many hours with asking why Lady Foulisville, who had insisted on bringing Meriel over to Ireland, and who, in professing a mother's interest in her, had earned a good character as aunt, should not have condescended a word of explanation, of comfort, and of sympathy on so alarm-

ing an occurrence. This silence was less easy of explanation, as about a week previously Lady Foulisville had inflicted a long scrawl upon her about nothing in particular, and in this, although she had mentioned the married couples who made up the party at Fontarabia, she had been reticent over the single gentlemen. Still, on the other hand, there stood the irrefragable evidence of Meriel's own letter, slipshod and blundering as only she could have written it. It had no specific dates, which made Mrs. Foulis justly angry, for Meriel's heedless negligence in this respect was a quarrel between them of a long standing; but as to the facts, there they were, marshalled in incoherent language, but yet hanging on together. Did Meriel really imply that—unimpressible girl as her mother knew her to be—she had given her heart to her preserver? and was Mrs. Foulis to understand the letter as placing Sir Miles's direct suit, no less than Meriel's hopes and affections, at her feet? Sometimes she thought that this was a meaning too precise to be deduced from the gushing phrases of the scared child, but on careful re-perusal she came to the conviction that, at all events, she, the mother and recipient, was bound to affix that interpretation on the ambiguous words, while it would be open to Sir Miles, if he pleased, to disavow the supposition.

What chiefly led Lucy to this conclusion, and in no small degree tended to give her a favourable impression of the baronet, was his desire, as conveyed through Meriel, to pay his respects to her at Yaxley. This, she thought, was straightforward and considerate. 'He will not let Meriel commit herself too far till he has

given me the direct opportunity of judging. To be sure, this proves that he has serious intentions, but it is, I hope, equally conclusive of his good feeling and good sense in deferring to me as the real authority in the marriage of such a child. I wonder whether he knows that all my money is strictly settled upon her? If he does, so much more creditable is his deference to the person of whom, in the long run, he will be independent. Long run! To be sure, he *is*, on his own showing, twenty-four years older than me; but I dare say he has never reflected that my chances of life are so much better—active old men are always so vain. Well, I won't think so ill of him.'

Those before whom the personality of Sir Miles Brandreth can never come except as accompanied by all the unsavoury associations of his unabashed cynicism may think poor Lucy weak, but they ought not to forget that his name conveyed absolutely no idea to her mind except that of a gentleman of ancient lineage, and preserver, too, of Meriel's life. He had, as we have seen, put Mrs. Foulis on a false scent by his promised visit, and had placed her in the dilemma of possibly frustrating what would have been, in spite of the disparity of years, a desirable match for her daughter, if the answer seemed to imply distrust, suspicion, or even hesitation. The incidental reference to the quaintty of his patent as baronet, with which Brandreth prompted Meriel to conclude her letter, was a master-stroke. No one was less of a tuft-hunter than Lucy; but she had the healthy English liking for established honours and traditionary order. A James the First baronet is presumably a gentleman, while the

man who risks his own life to save your daughter's is certainly a hero. But when the man who proves himself a hero in action is in station a presumable gentleman, the prejudice must certainly be strongly in his favour.

At the bottom of Lucy's perplexity lay that lonesomeness of which Sir Miles had so cunningly taken stock when he arranged his master-stroke. The entire country—with the solitary exception of that small nebulous body of which the nucleus was the Rees-Turner partnership—were her friends; but a nutshell would have held her confidants, and have been empty. She turned over the same names whom she had canvassed when the original invitation to Fontarabia reached her, and again rejected them. Featherston did not deteriorate in goodness as he grew older, but neither did he improve in finesse and worldly knowledge, and Lucy felt that he would be totally useless as a counsellor upon so delicate a question. Society was to Lidyard a sealed book, and it would have been nothing less than cruel to put such a decision upon him. Musgrave was, like Shelley's Demogorgon, 'a tremendous shade;' and although Lucy and her cousin, the Lord-Lieutenant, had not abandoned the hereditary practice of accosting each other by their Christian names, her rejection of his suit was not sweetened by his consequent second marriage with another lady.

What, then, followed in this case? Meriel had reported actions of a man which seemed to denote him as endowed, in the most true sense, with the qualities of a gentleman; and she also added that the social status of that man, according to the system—artificial

it might be, but long established, universally recognised, and working for the best—which existed in England, was one to which the reputation of gentleman unquestionably attached. Mrs. Foulis argued with herself that the inference from these facts must be self-evident. She could not return a rebuff, in spite of the dreadful disparity of years, which sorely tried her, when, as she imagined, all that was asked for was no definite acceptance, but only leave to pursue his suit, favoured as that was by her daughter, and with the precautionary safeguard of a promise to come and be looked at by herself at Yaxley. Still, she would be cautious and under-write her own feelings, excitable as her own consciousness told her that they were. So the following reply was posted to Miss Foulis at Fontarabia :

*‘ Yaxley,*

*‘ ———of——18—*

*‘ MY DEAREST MERIEL,*

*‘ Heaven be praised for your deliverance from such imminent danger, and for your escaping from the agonies of such a terrible night with so little injury to your health. Why don't you tell me when it happened? Our deepest gratitude is for ever due to the gallant gentleman to whose kindness and devotion you tell me that your safety is owing. I cannot be surprised at your heart being warmed to such a friend. Tell him, with my love, that I am anxiously looking forward to the day when I shall have the promised opportunity of forming his acquaintance in our own home. When do you return, and when may I expect*



the visit of Sir Miles Brandreth? Best love to your aunt. She must have been dreadfully anxious about you.

‘Your most affectionate Mother,

‘LUCY FOULIS.’

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### HONOURED MATER.

MERIEL was alone with Sir Miles when she got her mother’s rejoinder, and at once handed it to him.

‘This is what you wish, is it not, dearest Meriel?’ he inquired, with even more than usual of his insinuating smoothness.

‘It’s all very nice, but she don’t say I may marry you; and she tells me to come home. And you made me put about our going to Yaxley so clumsily that she thinks it means no more than a bachelor visit of yours—to be trotted out, I suppose, like those Yorkshire horses over which Mater and old Feathers lay their wise heads together like a couple of grooms. I wish I had not let you meddle in my letter. There would have been no mistake about it with Mater if I had written my own way.’

Sir Miles had, on principle, been chary of personal endearments. You never know, he thought, when you may want them. They are such capital ready money, and it’s foolish extravagance to discount and spend the store on which you may perhaps have to

draw in a hurry, and when you least expect it. This occasion proved the wisdom of his policy, for after he had taken up Meriel's hand, stretched the fingers as if he was measuring it for a new pair of gloves, kissed it, and then softly touched both cheeks with his lips, and wound up with a more impressive salutation of her forehead, the wrath of the froward miss gradually smoothed down. He was quick in continuing the conversation before she could have the opportunity of resuming it with one of her own unlucky observations.

'That's just like you, love—so innocent and unsuspecting. You don't see how sly your honoured Mater is. No offence, I hope, in talking openly of her, when you and I are already really one. She won't say "Yes," y-e-s; but it runs through every word. Don't you see how? She more than tolerates me; she more than approves me; she gives me her deepest gratitude for ever; she bids your heart warm to me. Your heart, dearest Meriel! that's what she gives me. Not your hand only; your heart as well as your hand. If she did not mean you to marry me, she would have said so. But she says nothing of the sort, and she means not to say it, for she knows that not saying that is saying the contrary. What she means to say, and what she means that we should puzzle out of her letter, is that she hopes to make the acquaintance of your husband in her own home. She calls me Sir Miles Brandreth, but you know it is not the husband who changes his name at the wedding. You would not have her call me dear Miles before she has seen me. If she meant to give me the sack, she had twenty ways of choking me off. Still, love, you know your

mother as I cannot pretend to do ; and it is not right that at the most important crisis of your life you should be guided by my necessarily partial judgment and imperfect information. Take the opinion of some one whom you may trust, and who has no personal interest in the matter. There is, for instance, Miss Robbins, who is a most sensible person, and loves the family truly and deeply ; or very likely you would not be willing to open so very delicate a confidence to so new a friend. Forgive me for suggesting it, and let me withdraw it. You must soon return home, with or without me ; and if you return without me, you have other friends whom you can consult besides the indulgent Mater. There is that fine old chip of John Bull's block, of whom you are so fond of speaking — your godfather and Mater's guardian, Bob Featherston, the great and good. Take him into counsel, and confront Mater, and she'll pretty soon confess what was in her clever little head when she wrote this statesmanlike letter.'

This advice proceeded from a very scientific analysis of Meriel's foibles. Sir Miles had found out that the antipathy between her and Robbins, though masked by every form of punctilious courtesy, was genuine and entire. He had not, indeed, traced it to its source, but he knew enough for his own purpose. It had, in fact, begun on Robbins's part when the first suggestion of adoption was made, consequent on Delicia's ill-omened yawn ; while with Meriel it may be said to have dated from the moment of her introduction to the companion in Eaton Place, and to her being consigned to that companion's rather oppres-

sive surveillance during the journey from London to Fontarabia.

An accident that occurred on board the steamer fomented the young lady's ill-feeling. Meriel, who had never even seen salt water before, was disgustingly sea-sick, and perpetually calling with indelicate insistence for help. Robbins was apprehensive of being taken for the lady's maid, and feared that her own strong stomach might be turned. So in directing a deaf ear to her charge's pathetic appeals, she both kept quite well, and, by way of pastime, occupied herself in a rather noisy flirtation with Captain Pringle close to, but with her back turned away from, the sufferer's head. The most angelic nature, when sea-sick, resents continued prattle on the part even of husband or wife, parent or child, and Meriel was not quite an angel. Such behaviour, from a woman to whom she was looking for deference, towards a personage so well endowed with self-appreciation as Miss Meriel Foulis, confirmed and intensified the aversion. His knowledge of this state of feeling had more than once puzzled Brandreth in working the Robbins side of his great plot. Now, however, it gave him satisfaction. As to the second suggestion, Brandreth was well aware that to remain, for however short a time, a spinster was no longer Meriel's intention, whatever it might have been previously to the adventures of Diana's Island. So stupid in expedients as he had found her to be, he was absolutely certain that she would fall back upon his stronger judgment, and accept his reading of Lucy's letter.

Meriel did not belie her lover's anticipations by the

way in which she took the suggestions; the more so as, in her frivolous heart, she was clinging to the Irish marriage right off as 'great fun.' Sir Miles, thus more than master of the situation, was so grave and yet so urgent, so convincing in his arguments—he pressed so earnestly upon her the duty of the highest decorum and of the greatest circumspection at this, the most solemn moment of her life—that she was absolutely silenced, and capitulated to that most fatal argument which had done her such an ill turn on the island—the false shame of slanderous tongues.

Still, the difficulty of keeping his promise with Miss Robbins loomed before Brandreth in all its intensity. So he took a diversion upon another line, and urged that, while, as he had anticipated, Meriel would naturally not consult the companion before coming to her conclusion, yet she ought, now that she had decided, out of personal duty and respect, confide in so trusty a family friend, who happened at the instant to be representing the disabled aunt and hostess. If she did not do this, Miss Robbins would have just cause to complain of some discourtesy, and even she, if angered, might make representations at Yaxley, which would be troublesome and unpleasant.

After all, then, the poor girl had to seek out Miss Robbins, full of misgivings as to the prudent counsels which that model of cold propriety—for as such, in spite of the steamboat flirtation, she had palmed herself off—might inflict upon her, merely, as she thought, with the malicious intention of baffling and disappointing an unwelcome interloper.

She was infinitely surprised, and still more delighted, to find that, after a sufficient interval of judicial hesitation, Miss Robbins fully came to that view of Mrs. Foulis's letter which Sir Miles had originally taken.

'Your mother wants you to be married,' she said, 'and she don't want the bother of marrying you off herself. She knows that if you suit yourself she can always find fault afterwards.'

Meriel actually forgot the steamer, and kissed Robbins.

Robbins's clever but unprincipled shot told. She saw that the leverage by which to move Meriel was jealousy of Lucy, and she was unscrupulous in using it. It was a wild and vulgar insinuation against a woman of Mrs. Foulis's character and position, but the article was meant for immediate consumption, and Robbins had not misjudged the credulity of the girl to whom it was addressed. Meriel was sufficiently not in love with Sir Miles to leave open one little cranny into which common-sense and maidenly modesty might enter. Pique her against her mother, and that cranny was closed.

So the Baronet and heiress were married. But the astute Robbins at the last moment found, to her sorrow, that she was unable to illuminate the ceremony with her presence. 'Poor dear Delicia is still in so critical a state that I cannot leave the house for a few hours, even for *this*.' No document, not a scrap of paper, existed as evidence of her complicity in the transaction.

If Sir Miles, she reflected, was not a scoundrel,

she had won Yaxley. If he was, she still kept Eaton Place. She stirred her fire, sank into an armchair, put her feet upon another seat, and slept a sleep of gratified self-approbation.

Meriel, of course, insisted upon a honeymoon, and her husband was all smiles and fondling. Sir Miles had obtained a provision for making a present appearance somewhat in proportion to their supposed brilliant prospects through the prompt kindness of his old friends, 'Issachar Brothers,' to whom he had, in strict confidence, imparted his good fortune in having obtained the affections of a young lady so charming, and heiress also to so improving a property. These good brothers had, of course, heard of Miss Foulis, and hastened to comply with the requisition of their esteemed correspondent.

Poor Lady Foulisville all the while lay between life and death, unconscious of Sir Miles's and Meriel's existence; so their stopping and their leaving were alike unknown and indifferent to her. As for his Lordship, though he was told of their wedding, he simply absorbed it as one of all the events, public and private, passing about him, as to which he had ceased to have the will or the capacity to form any reasonable opinion.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

## A FOOL'S PARADISE.

FOR a few days after she had sent her unfortunate letter to her daughter, Lucy lived on in a fool's paradise of contentment at her own charitable cleverness. So she wondered when the reply would come, and whether the Baronet's visit would soon follow on Meriel's return.

At last Featherston's groom came cantering over on a steaming hunter with a note, in which the good gentleman informed his little treasure that he was suffering under the unusual infliction of a visitor in the shape of a cousin from town, and prayed her to take pity and allow him to bring Colonel Mordaunt over and show him Yaxley. 'Of course,' she sped the answer back; come to-morrow, both of you; at least dine and sleep, if you will not stop longer.' So charged, the gentlemen came, and Mrs. Foulis found that the Colonel was an amusing rattle, who had something to say about everybody in London, and would not be baulked of his gossip. It would have been manifest *laches* in Lucy to have neglected such an opportunity of picking up the information for which she was yearning; so she took a politic occasion of dropping this question:

'My daughter tells me she has been meeting an agreeable Sir Miles Brandreth; have you ever heard of him?'

'Brandreth! I should just think so. And all



London too! Most unscrupulous dodger in England! and so confoundedly cunning! No fellow can catch him out. But his son is a trump; he's one of my greatest chums. Nobody can understand how such a fellow can have such a son; and it is a crying shame that his son's good example don't teach the old scoundrel better. There is Eustace, the jolliest fellow living, slaving away for his bread as a lawyer, and writing for the papers, while his father is making and spending fortunes by his swindling and his extravagance! Foulisville could tell you a thing or two about him, if he dared. Why, Skillicome came to the 'Phly' only two days ago, full of a letter he had got from old Brandreth, very cock-a-whoop at having caught a rich girl by pretending he had saved her from drowning, and——' Here something in Lucy's eye made him wind up with—'a deal more nonsense, which I don't believe.'

Featherston—who was, to say the truth, considerably bored by his cousin's incessant torrent of talk about men, women, and things, of which he knew little and cared less—was puzzling over the newspaper, and neither listened to the words nor scanned the looks of his companions. Mrs. Foulis abruptly found out she really did not know it was so late, and moved off to bed, merely remarking to her guardian that he knew where the smoking-room was, and that she hoped he and his cousin would stay there as long as they liked. Mordaunt had found out by Lucy's look and quick departure that the conversation had taken an awkward turn, and a little thinking led him to appreciate that the coincidence of the heiress of

Yaxley meeting and liking Brandreth, and of Brandreth's own story of catching a rich girl, involved something more behind, which stamped the Colonel an ass for letting his tongue so incontinently wag. However, to his great relief, he discovered that Featherston had heard nothing, so he judged it most prudent to stifle the claims of his abundant curiosity, to keep his own counsel, and to forego the coveted cigar.

Lucy had never recollected for many years having spent so wretched a night. Thinking and tossing, tossing and thinking, consumed the dreary hours. Had she, then, in her vain folly and self-sufficiency, sacrificed her only daughter, her own peace of mind and respectability, and the magnificent inheritance of her father, which she held, strictly tied up, as a trust for that daughter, to an adventurer and a scoundrel? Charity demanded the utmost abatements to be made in the offhand assertions of a chatterbox such as Featherston's cousin clearly was; but, after all deductions, the ugly fact remained that a man who was neither badly principled, as far as Lucy could judge, nor ill-tempered had so little hesitation in summing up in colours so dark the reputation of a man whom she had gone so far in accepting as her son-in-law. She never could forgive herself, she thought, for such imprudence. Sir Miles talked of coming to Yaxley, and that had thrown her off her guard. But if he really was the cunning and unscrupulous dodger whom Mordaunt described, how could she depend upon any professions of his, and, what was possibly worse, how could she depend upon herself hereafter? Her dreadful life-long solitude recurred to her, and she could not

hold herself guiltless for acting with a self-reliance which only intimate converse with the world could have justified.

Her old evening's musings now rose as pictures, and she asked herself why she had never done her duty to her position by making the plunge and bringing men of intellect and experience to her side. Here she was, as great a child as her daughter, having to confront a cunning and audacious man of the world, and not even her own lawyer her friend! Brandreth would see through her in a moment, as he had seen through Meriel.

Then she would ask herself what evidence there was to support Mordaunt's confident assertions; and the reply was crushing. There were no means of explaining away that dreadful letter which Colonel Mordaunt overheard somebody read at the club, except to suppose he had told a deliberate falsehood, if not of jumping at an impossible coincidence. How was Mordaunt or his friend to have conceived so improbable an incident as that of the old gentleman saving a girl from drowning? How could she disbelieve such positive evidence? She struggled hard, but it was too much for her. Sir Miles's exertions in saving her daughter's life were his one claim—ostentatiously put forward—upon the regard both of herself and of her daughter, and here he was himself detected as coarsely boasting of that obligation as only a pretence for getting possession of the girl. Could it, she asked herself again, have been an invention of Colonel Mordaunt; for Sir Miles was clearly unpopular? Yet, as she again answered herself, how was he to have heard

of the adventure on the lake? Besides, it was most unlikely that a gentleman—the cousin, too, of her old guardian, and so a distant connection of her own, a gallant officer, distinguished in the Crimean War, of whom she had often heard, though she had never met him before—would dare to utter a falsehood which was sure of speedy detection. Yet the other story would involve an equal falsehood on Brandreth's part. There was this difference, however, as she was forced to admit, between the two suppositions: Sir Miles's falsehood had the acquisition of Meriel's fortune as a motive, while that of Colonel Mordaunt would be purposeless malice. Besides, she knew about one of the men, and she was quite ignorant about the other.

Then another thought, which made her almost sick, darted in with lurid distinctness. Never in her life had she kept any important secret from Featherston till now, and she had failed in telling him of Meriel's letter. Would he ever forgive this breach of confidence? Yet this reflection led her to a conclusion. There would be time in the morning to detain her old guardian; she would send a message to him not to go till he had seen her. He was not cunning, but he was loyal, true, and high-principled; and his acquaintance with Mordaunt would enable him to say whether, considering his cousin's personal acquaintance with the Baronet, it would be wise to bring him into counsel.

Once closeted with him, she felt sure of her influence with him to make him appreciate her present trust in him, and so think lightly of her previous reticence. Her plea should be that she had been

thinking too exclusively of the secrecy which a daughter had the right to expect from her mother. She had been too delicate towards an unworthy child, for fear that child might hereafter turn upon her and allege her mother's breach of confidence for any act of undutiful retaliation. Featherston was a bachelor, and he must allow a parent to be the judge of feelings of which he never had had any personal experience. There would, of course, be but one thing which could now be thought of—to put an end to the possibility of any engagement as quickly and as completely as possible. She refused, as things turned out, in her vain snatches at sustaining straws, to face Meriel's letter as involving anything like a settled project of marriage, and yet she was for practically treating the complication as the most entangling of engagements. But what was to be the machinery? A telegram was the quickest, but—as Lucy, in her old-fashioned way, thought—not the safest communication; besides which, it was not at all likely that, with the inexperienced girl in the power of that bad, dangerous man, she would obey a telegram. A letter was slower, but safer; but safest of all would be some human messenger, who could insist and persist. Who should it be? Featherston? But Featherston had never crossed the sea, so he often boasted; and she feared both his temper, if Brandreth—no doubt an expert duellist—were to call him out, and his kind-heartedness if Meriel should cry. Englishwoman as she was to the backbone and well read in Sir Jonah Barrington, she fancied that the duel must still survive as a living thing in barbarous

Ireland along with landlord-shooting, and being a stranger to Sir Miles she never had had any occasion to realize his aversion to gunpowder.

As she rolled and tossed, all at once her mental fog rose, and she beheld her duty with absolute clearness, which left her in amazement at the time which she had taken in reaching her conclusion. How could she be beating about the bush so long, when all along the only possible course was so plain? Here she was, thirty-four in years, twenty-four in constitution, as strong as a horse, and though a big fool, as she now esteemed herself, resolute and fearless when once her pluck was up.

She would go herself, carry off Meriel, and, if need be, punch Brandreth's head. Anyhow, though, she would tell all to the dear old man.

Having reached this conclusion, she dozed away from sheer exhaustion, and was, after an hour or two of restless sleep, awakened by her maid bringing her morning tea and letters. One was in a very familiar hand, and she tore it open to read :

*'Bray, near Dublin,*

— 18—.

*'MY DEAREST DEAR MOTHER,*

*'My darling Miles was overjoyed at your approbation, and we agreed we could not too soon do what you had so lovingly sanctioned. We are man and wife, and I am longing to bring my husband to obey your summons to Yaxley. You will love him I know, for you said your heart would warm to him with gratitude for me. Mine has done so,*

and I rejoice that in loving him I am obeying my darling Mater.

‘Your most affectionate child,  
‘MERIEL BRANDRETH.’

A violent ringing of the bell startled the servants at their breakfast, and Mrs. Foulis's maid ran up with unwonted activity. Lucy was sitting up in bed, staring round with an expression of agony such as the girl had never before witnessed on her face. She collected herself as the maid entered the room, and bade her have the gentlemen informed, with her kind regards and sincere regrets, that, owing to a sick headache which had come on during the night, she was unable to dress and wish them good-bye. So she lay musing over the inevitable; and it was not till near mid-day that she rose and placed herself at the writing-desk which stood in her bedroom.

Meriel's declaration that Brandreth and she were man and wife was assurance enough to Lucy of the fact. Disillusioned as she was as to Sir Miles's estimate of truthfulness, such a statement as this must stand upon the basis of fact. There might be a dispute over the share a man had in saving the girl who was his partner in a common accident, but marriage was a public action before the world, and witnesses must be forthcoming. Mrs. Foulis, with a woman's feelings, never turned her thoughts to legal questions dealing with considerations of which she was to a fault ignorant and regardless. Her daughter, it seemed, was living with Brandreth as his wife, and they declared that there had been a marriage between

them. A marriage, to Lucy, was a marriage. She knew nothing of Irish peculiarities as to such things.

A daring solicitor from the Liffey would very possibly have urged upon her that it might still be quite possible, if means could be taken, to bring the legality of the ceremony to trial. If Mrs. Foulis, in tears, but not disfigured by crying, could be put into the box, it was conceivable that a Dublin jury, directed by a susceptible judge, might be induced by the influence of a witness so comely and so attractive to declare the ill-starred union illegal. This was, however, a contingency which never for an instant presented itself to her. Not for a single instant did she contemplate a course in which her own victory would have been fatal to the reputation of her child, whom she would thereby reduce to a discarded wife, if not also mother; and in which victory was not quite sure for her side, with Meriel opposed to her, only seventeen years old, and the susceptibilities on which she had to depend so uncertain, when she was herself at best a matter-of-fact Englishwoman.

All that was left to her was to weep and bear the blow; so she sat down, and, with as much speed as was consistent with repeated bursts of hysterical crying, composed the answer to her misguided daughter.

The letter was incoherent in construction, but it spoke with all the eloquence of deeply lacerated feeling and the calm logic of a right cause. It passed from sorrow to indignation as it exposed the flimsy and palpably hypocritical misinterpretation of the invitation which she had, at his own instance, given to the



man to come to Yaxley and be looked at; and it melted again into tenderness as it pointed out to the unhappy, misguided girl the misery which she had laid up in store for her later years in yoking her life to one so sure to use her for his own selfish ends, and if he did not fling her away when she was no longer useful, only tolerate her for her money's value:—

‘Was it not enough in one family’ (she pleaded) ‘to have had the daughter and heiress of the house throw herself away in her earliest immature womanhood by a wretched marriage with a plausible fortune-hunter? Why would my daughter emulate her foolish mother in the one unhappy act of her life, which ought to have been her child’s warning; because my excuse, such as it was, was this, that my infatuated aunt, the only woman whom I ever knew as filling for me the place of a mother, coaxed, bullied, and coerced me into taking Captain Foulis? I have never been so cruel to you, dearest Meriel. I have always urged on you the greatest circumspection in making your irrevocable choice, not sparing to blame myself to you, and humble myself before my own child, for your own good. I have never even seen Sir Miles Brandreth, and it is impossible to suppose that you and he did not very well understand my letter, though it may have suited him to misread it, and to pervert your understanding of it. He knew that I could only have intended it to convey an invitation to him to come to Yaxley, before matters had gone any further. The ability which you tell me he possesses contradicts the supposition that he could have mistaken my meaning; and I am, there-

fore, left with that estimate of his character which I forbear to give you, because, unhappily, he is your husband. I see much to excuse in the stupid pliability with which you accepted his ingenious misreading of my expressions ; but I can find no excuse for the want of confidence, I must add the duplicity, you have shown to your unhappy mother, whose every thought and action have always been for your happiness.'

The composition of this appeal was the safety-valve of Mrs. Foulis's excited feelings. The pretence of sitting at a luncheon at which she hardly touched a morsel, and a canter on her pony, brought back an appearance of external calm ; and for the letter to Lady Foulisville, which Lucy conceived herself bound to write, in ignorance of the illness which had incapacitated her sister-in-law, she sat down, not at the desk in her bedroom, but at the table in the library. To those who knew Mrs. Foulis's domestic ways this difference would have been significant. This missive was as concise and balanced in its composition as it was temperate in its tone. She dwelt upon the confidence which she had shown in a sister-in-law, with whom personally she had had small acquaintance, and of whose country life she was quite ignorant, in leaving to her, at her own request, what was really nothing less than the responsibility of introducing into the world her own only daughter, at a considerably younger age than that at which she had intended Meriel to have come out, or would have allowed her to do, but for this invitation. She appealed to Lady Foulisville's own sense of justice to say whether she had not put herself

under very sacred obligation, not merely in accepting, but in soliciting, this charge; and she invited her as a mother to answer for it before God, her own conscience, and her heart-broken correspondent and sister, as to the manner in which she had fulfilled that trust.

Little did Lucy think that these words, just and temperate as they were, and well deserved if the case had been that which was present to her mind, were really addressed to an invalid, tossing on the sick-bed, vibrating between life and death, and totally unconscious of the grim comedy which had been enacted under her roof.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### DISILLUSIONED.

DURING the earlier period of Delicia's illness Miss Robbins took upon herself to open and answer all her patroness's letters. Some she wrote in her own name, dwelling on the incapacity of the patient in colours as strong as the fact, and in others she manufactured plausible directions from 'my beloved and honoured chief.' She saw the inconsistency, and was amused at it, as it was evidence to herself of her own powers. Had Lucy's letter arrived during this time, it would no doubt have been answered in the second form and then destroyed; and as Robbins would probably have found it convenient to have forgotten all about it when the Countess got well, and asked about her letters, a

crop of complications not less perplexing than those which really occurred might have resulted.

But at last even Miss Robbins's tough constitution began to give way under the incessant strain of a nursing which was the more trying because bestowed from selfishness, not love; and a sharp bilious attack compelled her to keep her bed for some days. Just at this time, somewhat unexpectedly, Lady Foulisville's malady took a favourable turn, and when Robbins was next able to glide into her room, she found that the doctor had allowed the Countess to sit up, eat a little chicken, potter over the newspaper, and open her own letters. Still she was weak, nervous, and excitable, susceptible about the incidents of her sick-room, sometimes inquisitive, for a few moments, with febrile suspicion, but more generally apathetic as to the whole world beyond. With difficulty, the diplomatist induced Lord Foulisville to pay his wife a short visit, and she hardly noticed him when he came in. She was told that all the company had left, and she took that as a matter of course, not seeming to discriminate between them, or to care for one person more than another. Robbins's spirits rose as she opined that the craze of adoption had passed off, and that when it should suit her to tell, in her own way, the strange news of a match between Brandreth and Meriel, Delicia would take it with the same unconcern with which she now received intelligence of her various acquaintances.

Convalescent as Robbins was, she was still very weak, and entered Lady Foulisville's room at uncertain hours, sometimes before and sometimes after the arrival

of the post. It happened to be on one of her worse mornings that Lucy's letter reached Fontarabia, and schooled as the French maid had been by Robbins to keep back suspicious correspondence, this particular épistle, in a lady-like but not remarkable hand, had failed to attract her attention. Robbins had shown her the handwriting of Meriel, Brandreth, Sant' Onofrio, and one or two others, and warned her to keep these back for her own delivery, but she had no manuscript of Lucy's to show, and, indeed, had never thought of her writing. So Lucy's letter, just as it was—a remonstrance, terrible in its calm truthfulness, if written to one really privy to Brandreth's villany—reached the poor, nervous, trembling, excitable invalid, hardly yet in possession of her full consciousness or responsibility of word and action, with the hideous tale which it unfolded, of the outrage against honour, truth, and decorum perpetrated under Lady Foulisville's own roof, in the case of her own niece, responsibility for whom she had officiously, unnecessarily, and inconsiderately assumed. The perusal of this appeal stimulated the awakening faculties without bracing in proportion the nervous powers. Lady Foulisville took it all in perhaps more keenly than she would have done in her natural health; she was white with rage, and trembling with humiliation. The old spirit lived in her, and she was again Delicia Driscoll; while Lucy, as she appeared in her weeds at Meriel's christening, rose clear before her eyes, and scathed her with mortification. Her pride, her honour, her last forlorn hopes of an adopted daughter, were all crushed; and, knowing all that she did, the sickening conviction intruded

itself that it involved the connivance and the duplicity of her trusted companion.

Robbins, at the moment, swam in with her stereotyped, 'What letters this morning, dearest Delicia?'

The Countess, not caring to look up, tossed Mrs. Foulis's communication at her breast, and positively shrieked, 'What do you think of that?'

Robbins, with consummate calmness, read it all, folded it up, returned it, and then replied, 'I think she has got hold of some strange version of the affair.'

'Strange version! And what affair? You shameless woman! Can you deny before God and before me that you hadn't a hand in it? If you hadn't, and as you value your soul at the day of judgment, why have you kept me blind? You told me the fellow had gone, and the girl too. Why did you hide their being married?'

'A hand in it, my dearest Delicia!'

'Don't Delicia me; answer, as you are an honest woman, had you a hand in it?'

Miss Robbins had not calculated on the excess of nervous excitability, consequent on the fever, resulting as it did in the temporary development of a passion, which simulated moral courage. She played with the demand as she would have done with one of the old tiffs in Eaton Place.

Lady Foulisville, shattered as she was by her illness, and no longer mistress of herself, gave vent to all that deep reserve of genuine Munster nature which had for so many years been kept under by the restraint of artificial gentility—a burning lump of turf hidden under a coronet—and she let fly at the unprepared

Robbins with a volley of abuse, recrimination, objurgation, and, if we must tell the real truth, highly seasoned words, more fit for Ballinasloe than Belgravia, barbing sneers such as can only be dropped from the elevation of a prosperous worldly position upon a baffled and exposed subordinate.

Delicia knew she was a countess, and Robbins a confidante, and she made Robbins feel it to her very marrow. If Lady Foulisville had only had the self-restraint to have been short as well as strong, she might have come off conqueror, but she ran on so long, and repeated herself so often, that she handed the advantage over to her adversary, who checked her rising choler with a magnificent effort; and as during the remaining strife, while Lady Foulisville herself burned with real rage, the passion of the confidante was only clever acting, Robbins naturally obtained the advantage in the contest. The insults of the irate lady might have ruffled a far sweeter temper than hers, but she took good care not to be disconcerted, and yet to sustain the part of a provoked and indignant gentlewoman. This was the supreme crisis of her career. Her eyes were opened to the gravity of the incident, and she had to make her choice in a moment; but a moment was sufficient for her. Her calculations for the future, indeed, miscarried, but they were sufficiently plausible to entitle her to the praise of being a consummate strategist. Lady Foulisville—with her social failure, her stupid old house in the wilderness, the ambiguous condition of his lordship's fortune, and her own shattered and doubtful health—was, so Miss Robbins believed, a sucked orange. To become the indis-

pensable friend and adviser of the young heiress of delightful Yaxley, with its improving collieries, was to step, she thought, into a new, more powerful, more brilliant future. Sir Miles, she was sure, would square it with his mother-in-law, while she herself, so she fancied, had it in her power to expose him if he did not keep his promise.

She acted accordingly. Poor, feeble Lady Foulisville fell into a chair, absolutely collapsing with the effort of such a burst of passion. A few of the old fondling words, some pity for her really invalid condition and evident suffering, might have lulled the sudden storm. Miss Robbins willed the contrary, in the conviction that a present reconciliation with the Countess would embarrass her new great game, on which she was bending all her energies. Let her go forth, she thought, driven out, as she would represent, for standing up for Meriel and Sir Miles, and these could hardly refuse to take her by the hand, and make up sevenfold for what she had lost in their cause. So she drew herself up, and met the vituperations of Lady Foulisville with sarcasm so cutting, because elaborated in cold blood, as to leave an incurable sore. At the same time, like a prudent general, she covered her retreat. Ill words, even from Lady Foulisville, might be prejudicial to her prospects, while an explanation between the Countess and Lucy would be fatal.

Miss Robbins, knowing that she could no longer rule by love, resolved on doing so by fear; so, with that look habitual to her when addressing persons of a lower social station, she answered, 'Very well, my lady; you are pleased to discard your faithful friend,



who would have sacrificed her life for you, because she has committed one error of judgment, as you are pleased to consider, and as perhaps, in the eyes of worldlings, it may be. Good! but please, my lady, have a care what you say of me, or how you represent my conduct to others. In Ireland, as well as in England, the most humble is sure of justice, even against the brother of Augustus Foulis and the patroness of Sir Miles Brandreth.'

Miss Robbins had calculated correctly on the cowardice of her former friend, and her shot took effect. Lady Foulisville was no great lawyer, so her dread of the consequences of an action for slander was excessive; and, even if she could be spared such a calamity, she knew how much she was at the mercy of her 'dear' Robbins. A woman of her character could not have lived in the intimacy of such a toady without having stripped her moral nature bare before her, and endowed her with infinite means of retailing and exaggerating every petty motive and mean or sly action of her patroness. No doubt, in Lady Foulisville's inward estimate of her own character much would have been extenuated which, in the hands of even friendly critics, would have appeared indefensible. Still, even she—a woman whose conscience never was of a fine fibre—had ugly suspicions of what the world would think of her in connection with the Brandreth affair, as to which she could hardly prove herself guiltless, without leaving it in her enemies' power to say she had been blind and stupid.

The upshot of all was to drive her from the most straightforward and praiseworthy resolution which

she had ever conceived since the day on which she first heard herself addressed as 'My lady.' She had intended to have written a full and clear explanation to Lucy as to a near relation who had the right to be satisfied on a matter of such interest and importance. She would have explained the accident, and dwelt on its unfortunate result in having so long incapacitated her, owing to the dangerous illness which supervened, from even knowing what was going on; she would have dwelt on the unjustifiable marriage having been forced on while she was in a condition of incapacity through the deplorable intervention of one of whose sense and good feeling she had thought better; and she would have asked Lucy to forget and forgive.

Terrorised by the cunning insolence of Robbins, and with the fear of slander before her eyes, Delicia shrank into a bewildered, cowering, weak woman. She was not the least softened towards the detected hypocrite. Rather, she hated her the more from feeling that she herself was being played with and humiliated by the upstart Robbins. But as she hated, so did she also fear; and fear was the ruling impulse.

Not to mix up Robbins with the business in answering Lucy was, she thought, her indispensable precaution. But she could only not mix up Robbins by herself swaggering through her letter. So, instead of the excellent statement on which she had resolved, she penned a short, stiff, clumsy, arrogant missive, as unreasonably haughty in its language as it was grovelling in the spirit which prompted it—asserting, with no corroborative evidence, her own innocence in

the whole affair, and blaming, with an asperity due to her own insufficient knowledge of the value of words, Mrs. Foulis's suspicions that she could have played so unworthy a part.

After every excuse is made for Lady Foulisville's ill-health and shattered nerves, it must be owned, not only that she was acting very wrongly, but that she was conscious of her own misdeed. She was intentionally behaving in a very cowardly manner, when she had so nearly trodden with courage the right way; but she trumped up an excuse in that very cowardice of her nature, and told herself that, because she was so weak, she felt herself constrained to do that which was wrong; and all the while she excused herself for what she was doing on the score of that very illness as to which she took care to keep Lucy in the dark. In short, she acted again—though the circumstances were more solemn and the results more disastrous—as when she broke up her parties to punish Sir Miles for an offence the knowledge of which she all the time laboured to keep from those who suffered from her caprice. Then, to be sure, she only did a foolish thing to satiate a righteous indignation; now she was consciously doing a wrong to avoid denouncing an outrage which, in her eyes, was crying before Heaven for vengeance. She knew that what she was doing must provoke a quarrel with Lucy — perhaps the only person in the world for whom she still felt any lingering respect—but she flattered herself with the miserable illusion that she would find means some day of making it up and explaining all, when Robbins was well out

of the way. So she achieved another failure, worse than all her failures in fashionable life—the failure of self-respect.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

## DISCARDED.

WRITING her letter to Lucy, without the assistance on which she had learned habitually to lean, was to Lady Foulisville, in her prostrate condition, a lengthy and fatiguing task. So the morning was far spent before she had completed it. To Miss Robbins the time was like weeks, as she awaited the Countess's summons. In silence, and on tiptoe, she entered the sick-room at the sound of the summoning bell, and strove by a hasty glance to ascertain the character of her patroness's feelings.

She had had time to cool and to think, and the advantages of her bold policy no longer seemed incontestable to her. Still, she had gone so far, that, unassisted, retreat was quite impossible. She believed that the breach was, as she had so lately intended it to be, irreparable. At the same time she was graciously prepared to accord her pardon to the repentant Countess, in case the great lady should duly humble herself at the feet of the confidante. She had, indeed, gone so far as to settle, in her own mind, the pecuniary and residential conditions of a reconciliation.

Even the words in which she was to accept it had been conned over and framed in her mind. But no opening was vouchsafed to the discomfited schemer.

Lady Foulisville, still quivering with excitement, indicated silence by a deprecatory gesture, and signed to her to sit down. Then she cleared up—speaking in short, cold terms—an account which had long been running between them, and gave Miss Robbins £50, nominally as a slight memorial of a friendship unhappily interrupted, but not quenched. Her pride forbade her to say that this was really intended as hush-money, while no honourable feeling stood in the way of the recipient clutching what was to her the wages of treachery. She felt that it was incumbent on her to say something, and she began, ‘If a life’s devotion, Lady Foulisville,’—when she was interrupted by a feeble cry, and, looking round, she saw that the Countess had fainted. The maid was near at hand to take charge of the invalid, and Miss Robbins stepped out. Nevermore in this life had the two women speech or sight of each other.

So did Lady Foulisville part with her once-beloved Robbins, baffled in all her projects of greed and ambition—an exile from Eaton Place and Fontarabia, and a stranger, as it turned out, to Yaxley. The woman made her way to London, and then wrote without delay a joint letter to Sir Miles and Lady Brandreth, but she received no reply. The fifty pounds were soon dissipated in clearing small debts, and Miss Robbins shivered in her cold autumnal lodging, more destitute and more desperate than upon that memorable morning when she spent an amount which she could ill spare of her hard-earned pittance in making herself tidy to present to Lady Foulisville that sonnet  
‘one who had long observed and admired her

from her unknown retreat,' which first procured for her an entrance into the house in Eaton Place. In her distress the desperate woman actually took a step from which, under less urgent circumstances, the vanity which she mistook for pride would have made her revolt, and she wrote a beseeching letter craving for an interview with Sant' Onofrio. Her request was at once granted, and the place named was some coffee-house in the neighbourhood of Holborn.

The man had preceded his suppliant, and was quietly smoking a cigar when Miss Robbins entered. The jaunty familiarity with which he nodded to her, and muttered between two puffs, 'Sit down as we used to do in the jolly old times,' considerably disconcerted Miss Robbins. But a little fanning with her handkerchief enabled her to collect her thoughts, and as she had schooled herself well in the part which she intended to play, she began, in somewhat stilted but well-chosen English, to objurgate the faithless man for his cruel demeanour at Fontarabia. But she was not well through her first sentence before she found a material obstacle placed upon her oratory in the shape of the big brown hand of the Irishman placed upon her mouth, and accompanied by a furtive kiss on her cheek, as he whispered quite prettily :

'Well, my dear, and did not you see why? There were lions in the way, and spies in every cranny. Brandreth, bad luck to him! was bent on unearthing me. Now we are free, my love; and I am here again, your own true cavalier to command.'

Robbins, astonished and overjoyed at so unexpected a confession, poured out a voluble tale of a very

different kind from that which she had been purposing. With all her crafty selfishness there was a womanly fibre in her nature, and the schemer had galvanised it. The Count waited till she had done ; then, drawing her close to himself, whispered in a very subdued tone :

‘ There’s wealth before us—untold wealth ! A mad old girl—Baroness von Presterkranz—living at Prague, believes she can make her fortune on the English turf, and she trusts your humble servant and some other friends to make it for her. She has given out she is coming to England, when she has no more idea of leaving Bohemia than I of going to Paradise. Anyhow, she is wanted and expected somewhere to-morrow, and, with my dear beauty’s magnificent knowledge of foreign languages, I cannot conceive a more efficient deputy Baroness than a certain fair lady. And perhaps before you went you would make me the proud possessor of your autograph on these few scraps of paper—“ *Amalia von Presterkranz* ” ?’

Robbins was an adventuress, alike mendacious and unscrupulous, but she was, upon calculation, an adventuress within the limits of the law. She would cringe, she would fawn, she would equivocate, and she would lie. An open letter to her was common property, and a keyhole an acoustic instrument of rare capacity. But forge or personate ! No, never ! It was wicked ; so, too, was listening at a keyhole. But it was something more—it was dangerous, and possibly disastrous—that was a very serious consideration. Wherever she might go, she was determined that the Old Bailey should not be one of the places.

For one instant she vacillated, for the temptation was very strong—not of wealth easily earned by the daring confederate and shared with him, but of the society of that confederate. The mine which love sprung in her nature had been so unexpected that it was almost successful. But the vacillation was only momentary. The spirit which had captured and thrown over Lady Foulisville, and met Brandreth on equal terms, reasserted itself. The voice was firm, though sorrowful, with which she answered, ‘Never.’

Saying no more, she rose and walked away—a monument of rigid, tearless despair—her latest of love-dreams shattered and dispersed. The unfortunate creature is, so it is said, still alive, in much destitution, hardly scraping together a miserable livelihood as a daily governess in a large provincial town.

Mrs. Foulis interpreted Lady Foulisville’s answer as any other straightforward person would have taken such a communication. It left no doubt in her mind that her treacherous sister-in-law had really been privy to the designs of Sir Miles, and swaggered because she could not deny. Self-respect and her placable indisposition to prolong strife made her abstain from offering any answer, though not to answer was, as she well knew, to renounce all future intimacy with her sister-in-law. It was a great grief to her to have to drop that one near relation with whom, though faintly and intermittently, she had always kept up friendly intercourse, but her duty bade her make the sacrifice, and she imagined that the last letters between herself and Lady Foulisville would now have passed.



## CHAPTER XL

## THE REVISING BARRISTER.

HIS disreputable father has usurped so much of our attention since he forced himself upon the party at Fontarabia, that we have strayed away from the proceedings of Eustace Brandreth. Fortune had her gifts in store for him as well as for Sir Miles this summer. As the older man got a wife, so the younger one, to his great delight, found that craving for public occupation which is apt to come upon a barrister of ten years' standing, gratified by a revising barristership, where the work promised to be exciting and amusing, from the certainty of a sharp fight at the coming general election which would, in several counties and in still more boroughs, be much affected by the state of the register. The young lawyer had decided politics of his own, but he had the good fortune, rather than the prudence, to have kept his occasional connection with party newspapers rather dark while his reputation as a society writer in magazines was well known. Had the case been otherwise it is probable that he would not have obtained his present position from the hands which bestowed it.

His father, who had not heard of this stroke of luck, did him the honour of announcing his marriage in a letter of elaborate irony, summing up every particular of the incident in language of old-world courtesy so framed as to sting his son at each point where the cunning writer thought him most vulnerable; and

concluding with the gratuitous falsehood that, in all probability, he never should have thought of domestic felicity in a second marriage if the offspring of his first alliance had studied to make his home bright and cheerful. In that case, he said, his search after an heiress might have been directed to the advantage of his successor, who had only lost the chance of meeting Miss Foulis at Fontarabia by his unkindly absenting himself from the paternal hearth at the time when the invitation arrived. 'It is,' the wily cynic added, 'the catsup in my rich portion of turtle, as I coo to my own sweet turtle, Meriel, to think she might have fallen to the lot of one who is not yet double her own age by an entire year. But she is very kind indeed to her poor old husband, and she often promises me that when I am gone she will, for my-sake, not forget my learned but truant boy.'

Eustace was deeply ashamed at his father's escapade, which his scrupulous nature painted in its darkest colours. He was conscious of being wholly guiltless, yet he had not sufficient faith in the justice of the world to be sure that the verdict of society might not be that the son of such a father must certainly be the object of a suspicion against which he had no right to complain, for his conscience pricked him with the recollection of several occasions when he had himself done a similar injustice to his neighbour. Still, his new stepmother was a reputable woman—girl rather—and it was needful, so as not to lavish the small stock of respectability still left to the family, to keep alive the knowledge of that fact, which otherwise might easily have been disputed.

As to her mother, all that he had heard of Mrs. Foulis was that she had been quite out of the affair, and, indeed, highly disapproved of it, although, for motives similar to his own feelings, she had offered condonation.

Balancing all things, then, he wrote a coldly civil reply, in the key of his father's own letter, congratulating Sir Miles on having found in a closer tie that domestic felicity which he had himself been unable to minister, and trusting that he might have the honour of making Lady Brandreth's acquaintance. Work comes to a man in Eustace's frame of mind like a sweet balm, and when, as in his case, it reaches him accompanied by pay, it is indeed twice blessed. For a few days after his appointment shadowy forms in ermine and full-bottomed wigs danced round the elated junior's chambers. Journalism was Bohemian, and light literature a flimsy nothing. He was still in the glow, though perhaps the cooling glow, of his new professional ambition when he entered upon the discharge of his somewhat tiresome duties.

One day, with some amusement but more perplexity, he found himself seated on the tribunal, a lumpy old arm-chair, in a stuffy inn parlour, with the agents round him, very much on the *qui vive* over the claim of a tenant farmer whose case had elements of perplexity about it which were likely to reappear in a good many more, so that the decision in this case might not improbably turn the scale at the coming election, besides being pretty certain to come in the interim before the Court of Common Pleas. It was a

case which the newspapers would get hold of, and which would make or mar Eustace's reputation for legal acumen and judicial impartiality. He would not only have to decide, but to give his reasons for the decision. So in order to gain a little time, he inquired of the puzzle-headed hero of the embittered fight: 'Where do you live, sir?'

'At Yaxley; I hold under Madam Foulis.'

'Yaxley, indeed! Is Yaxley in these parts?'

'Think it was, sir,' replied the farmer, proud to know one thing, at all events, of which the barrister was ignorant. 'Four miles off; leastways, if——'

'Silence, man! What has the distance of Yaxley to do with your vote? What were you saying, Mr. Pounceby?'

Mr. Pounceby, to the intense relief of the Revising Barrister, charged into the enemy's ranks with a technical irregularity which he had been quietly nursing, and which effectually put the objection to the vote, and to all those which were depending upon it, out of court, without in any way involving the merits of the tangled case. This sudden collapse of what everyone expected would have been a protracted wrangle, left the court without any more work for the day, and Brandreth found himself in the unexpected enjoyment of a half-holiday. Meditating how he could most profitably employ it, curiosity whispered to him to walk over to Yaxley and introduce himself to its owner.

'Not that the old lady will care to see the transmitted phiz of the Brandreths. But Madam is step-

mamma's mamma, so it will be only filial to spoon the dowager, and see what sort of a parent my good old dad has got himself. It's funky all the same, though I want to see the old dragoness.'

It was naughty of Eustace to shape his thoughts in words partaking of the nature of slang, but he took care not to speak it; and, indeed, his respectful deportment when he reached Yaxley could not have been improved had Lucy been his own mother. When the servant announced Mr. Eustace Brandreth, Mrs. Foulis was lolling in her American chair, thinking of nothing in particular, which means chewing and turning over in a sort of topsy-turvy fashion all manner of disagreeable topics, as the events of past years kept crowding in upon her memory. Her first impulse was to refuse the unwelcome and unexpected visitor; her second, to obey the laws of courtesy and bid him be shown in. The conversation which ensued is not one which is worth preserving in a *verbatim* report, for the lady was gracefully circumspect and reticent, while Eustace was irreproachably and stupidly commonplace. He could not, as he explained, find himself so near Yaxley, in the discharge of a public duty, without paying his respects to a lady of whom he had heard on all sides nothing but good; particularly as he was now in an indirect way connected with her. It was not his business to inquire how far his father's marriage had taken place with Mrs. Foulis's approbation, but he could well imagine that she might have desired less disparity of age between her daughter and her son-in-law, and she would at least do him the justice to believe that

he had no share in bringing about the match. Now that the families were so connected, his object would be to do his duty to all parties, and promote a harmonious, good understanding. Eustace was quite sincere in all these statements, for he was an honest, good fellow, but yet he uttered them with no great forethought of the effect which they might make upon his auditor. No sooner was he ushered into Mrs. Foulis's presence than he felt into how delicate and difficult a position his curiosity had led him; from which he could only make a safe escape by setting a watch upon his tongue. Fortunately for him, his mouth spoke out of the abundance of a good heart, and trivial as he intended his observations to be, they were the trivialities of a fine nature.

Mrs. Foulis, for her part, was surprised and pleased. She naturally held the Brandreths all round to be a bad lot. She had never seen Eustace, and although the little she had been told about him by Mordaunt was good, it had only left a slight impression, coming as it did in the middle of his frightful revelation of Sir Miles's treachery; so that at first there was little to lead her to distinguish between the reprobate father and the respectable son. But his character was stamped on his face, his words, and his whole deportment; and, as the interview went on, Colonel Mordaunt's words rose to her mind.

With the recollection of them came the reflection that, tied for life as she was to the Brandreth family, she had better make friends with its one white sheep. So, after a turn upon the lawn, and a gracefully re-

fused offer of tea and muffins, Mrs. Foulis screwed herself up to a great effort, and begged Mr. Brandreth, so soon as the registration was closed, to pass a few days at Yaxley and to arm himself against the fogs of the Temple, at which he pathetically reported himself as shortly due, by walking through her covers, bad as had been—she apologetically added—the breeding season that spring. Hares and rabbits she had but few, for as her reason bade her keep the killing of them in her own hands, so her duty to her tenants made her spare neither the time of her keepers nor her own money in keeping them down, and withal furnishing the tables of her farmers, to whom the absolute extirpation of their favourite luxury would have been the most woeful of all consummations.

Eustace, on his side, was equally surprised, both at his reception and at the juvenility of his receiver. But for his own stupidity he would have been thoroughly pleased. He had heard, in various quarters, of Mrs. Foulis's self-reliance and abundance of resource; so he had in his own mind constructed her presentment as an awful woman, a spectacled dragoon in petticoats, like the scraggy 'Anglaises,' all teeth and ringlets, with whom Cham delighted to adorn the *Charivari*. At the first moment, indeed, of being ushered into Lucy's presence, he took for granted that the attractive young lady by whom he found himself confronted was a companion or visitor; and all through the interview he was haunted by an awkward suspicion that he had said something which had not only betrayed his blunder, but had revealed the clumsy anticipation behind it. The peccant speech was something in which

youth and bright companionship, so he fancied, were referred to with an emphasis which irresistibly led up to the antithesis of maturity and heavy patronage. He was right in his shocking surmise, and clever, quiet Lucy had taken in the entire misapprehension with much inward amusement. Still, she could not fail to be pleased with what was an unintentional compliment to her unexpectedly tolerable person, and as she pitied the floundering stranger so she set him right with apparent unconsciousness. So gracious an invitation, so tactfully put, when he was least expecting any courtesy, and most particularly after his woeful blunder, fairly carried the lawyer off his legs; so, instead of referring to his memorandum-book, as a man of business ought to have done, and there discovering that he was hopelessly entangled in a coil of imperative engagements, Brandreth blundered out, 'You really are too kind—so unexpected—I shall be so pleased—no, I mean, so honoured,' and took his leave of the widow.

The turn had now come for Mrs. Foulis to be startled at the result of her impetuous civility. The conversation with her new connection had taken a shape which seemed at the instant to be imposing this compliment upon her; so she had propelled an invitation as from a mental catapult. But that in Eustace's awkward position towards his father he would accept her bidding she never for an instant imagined. Otherwise, as she regretfully recollected when too late, she had visits which she was much bound, and half intended, to pay, and to which she could have, with perfect politeness, referred, as precluding her from offering the otherwise



agreeable invitation for the season. An invitation for next year, her after-thought told her, would have quite done the business. She was in for it though, she felt, and she would make the best of her imprudence. But she did not dare to think of inviting any neighbour to meet the stranger, and she particularly dreaded even to tell Featherston of her impetuosity, and much more did she shudder at the idea of bringing the two together, since her guardian, justly irate with Sir Miles, had protested to her that he would kick even the puppy-dog of any Brandreth if he happened to come across the animal.

A little quiet time would have been particularly acceptable to her, as for other reasons, so because things were not going comfortably in Yaxley school. Murgatroyd, poet and schoolmaster, was a conceited and touchy fool; and, as fools are often wont to do, he allowed the accounts for which he was officially responsible to drift into a state of confusion, which made it impossible for those who felt most indulgently towards him to say whether his conduct rather showed imbecility or dishonesty. Miss Larcom, methodical and good-tempered as she was, and clear-headed in her narrow way, could not abide to be connected even indirectly with so slippery a partner, and never let a day pass without telling Mrs. Foulis frankly that unless Murgatroyd were at once got rid of she insisted on resigning. But this quarrel in her favourite school, vexatious though it was, was at that time with Mrs. Foulis only a minor home trouble, let alone the ever-present gloom, combining apprehension and self-reproach, which had settled upon Lucy's mind since

## CHAPTER XLI.

## THE WOES OF TASTE.

EVERYONE knows that the close of the registration nearly corresponds with the commencement of the planting season, when squires bent upon landscape improvements most mightily bestir themselves. Mrs. Foulis was at the time suffering under an acute access of the disease. She had for years been maturing great plans, and always delaying their execution, in a pleasant day-dream of saving up money for a magnificent wedding present to Meriel. Now, however, that the events of the season, which had been far from comfortable either to her judgment or to her feelings, and the loss of Meriel's society, such even as it was, left her very solitary, she craved for some countervailing excitement. So she drowned thought, and helped to dispose of her now unappropriated savings by plunging headlong into the dissipation of her long-cherished scheme of landscape-gardening. She had a deep-seated dread of professional improvers, while, with good natural taste and considerable experience in small experiments, she was quite strange to the big engineering exploits which she was meditating. Her table groaned under the accumulation of patiently collected books — Repton, Gilpin, Uvedale Price, Loudon, Kempe, Thompson, Robinson; every chair was littered with plans, sketches, dabs, and daubs. She wanted to begin in twenty places at once with fifty things—mounds, ponds, paths, bridges, lawns,

shrubberies, holes, hillocks, vistas, clumps—and she could not settle on any one as her best first start. Worst of all, she had permanently taken on a power of extra hands, and, as her bailiff and gardener were always dinning into her ears that she must give work to the fellows who were eating off their heads at her expense, she began to think herself in the condition of Michael Scott when he sent his unpleasant familiar devils to make ropes of the sea-sand. ‘But then,’ as she regretfully reflected, ‘I have no sand and no sea, and my folks are not devils.’

Eustace happened to arrive at Yaxley on the afternoon on which the tohu-bohu with the labourers had reached its climax, and Miss Larcom had got unmanageable; while Mrs. Foulis, in her despair at the crisis in her favourite institution, and at herself being for the first time consciously and hopelessly out of her depth in a question of taste within her own special department, was walking up and down the room, muttering that had it not been for the obligations of hospitality which she had so recklessly contracted, she would run off at dead of night, and leave her subordinates to break each other's heads. Eustace was escorted to his room, and met his hostess for the first time, just before dinner—a meal which, as he heard with much dismay, would be a *tête-à-tête*. This circumstance was just as embarrassing to the lady; but to ask Lidyard, and not ask Featherston, would have been impossible, and to ask any third person, to the exclusion of both, would, in her view, have been absolutely outrageous. All through the meal Lucy, preoccupied with her various troubles, was grave and silent, or, if she spoke at all, it was

sure to be at cross purposes. The visitor naturally jumped to the conclusion that Sir Miles's son, in taking his invitation literally, had committed a social offence; so he blushed, fidgeted, and became a little more awkward even than the lady of the house. Fortunately he had not engaged himself at Yaxley for any definite period. This was the 'dressed day;' to-morrow would be the 'rest day,' and he felt sure that he would not be confronted with the offer of the 'pressed day.' After two nights he would be able to deliver his entertainer from his oppressive presence, and pick up the threads of his own imperative occupations, which a longer truancy would have brought into a condition of hopeless entanglement.

At last the servants left the room, and then Mrs. Foulis, anxious to break a silence which was worrying her, particularly as its effect on her guest had not escaped her keen eyes, opened her whole budget of gardening troubles to the visitor, of whose sympathy she felt instinctively sure. Eustace, much relieved by this very unexpected turn in the conversation, was able to reciprocate not only with sympathy, but with solid, pertinent advice. It came out that, among the various desultory pursuits which he allowed to cross and hamper his steady professional career, both surveying and the study of the picturesque had asserted their claims upon his attention. He could draw plans, and sketching in water-colours was a favourite idleness; while upon the growth and coloration of trees he had plenty to say which was well worthy of being listened to, even by a lady to whom such advice was apt to imply outlay. As he spoke he warmed with his sub-

ject, and rattled on more for his own satisfaction than for the instruction of his auditor.

When he paused, Mrs. Foulis observed, 'Really, Mr. Brandreth, you are a godsend. Do take pity upon a poor lone woman, and stop and help me with your advice in the peck of troubles which I have brought upon me by my own folly, in attempting works far too big and complicated for me to carry through with my want of experience. I am really serious. If I find no friend to advise me, I must send for some professional, and I should dread meeting him as I do my dentist. He would upset all I had done, cut and slash away all my plantations, and force me to swallow his crude first thoughts about a place which he would not take the trouble to walk over—me who know and love every old tree like a brother, and every young one like a child.'

There was, of course, but one answer to make to so genuine an appeal, though the avenging ghosts of outraged engagements rose grim before the eyes of the reckless barrister. The bailiff and the gardener at first looked askance at the interfering visitor, but they soon learned to think themselves lucky at the unlooked-for arrival of one who showed that he had both the will and the power to introduce order and method into their desultory and hitherto lavishly expensive operations; and if the former did not exactly exclaim to his sister Anna, Lucy's trusty maid,

'Quis novus hic nostris successit sedibus hospes?'

or complain of being frightened by bad dreams, he certainly gave a character of Eustace in his racy Mid-

land Doric which even Dido would have accepted as no inapt description of Æneas. There was but one voice ever raised in abatement of his merits in the little parliament which used to debate in the steward's room at Yaxley. Excellent Mr. Halwell, the old keeper, would stretch out his legs, and solemnly say :

'It's all very well a-cryin' up the young fellow, but, with his trapsin's, and trampin's, and diggin's, and plantin's, the shootin' is a-goin' to Old Nick. The birds are gettin' as wild as hawks, and the poachers are a-loafin' about that owdacious that it's a dozen snares I've taken up if it's one: and here he's been a fortnight and more, and only twice out; and what makes the matter a tarnation shame is that he *can* shoot when he likes !

'In fact,' he slowly continued, stroking, as was his wont, his left legging, and looking round with that furtive glance which had led Lucy, with whom the old fellow was a great favourite, to dub him the wild cat of the forest; 'in fact, I can't help a-suspectin' there be somethin' between the young chap and the lady. They be so tender like.'

'Then you'll just keep your suspicions and your somethings and your tendernesses to yourself, you will, Mr. Halwell. It is positively disgusting to hear you talking of an old lady such as Mrs. Foulis is, and so many years an honest widow, throwing herself away on a young ne'er-do-well, and the son of the gallows-bird who's stole Miss Meriel! I'm ashamed of you, Mr. Halwell; and I'll just ask Mr. Williams to turn you out if you don't keep your filthy tongue

a little bit more in order in Mrs. Foulis's own steward's room.'

This vigorous champion of Mrs. Foulis's freedom of fancy was Mrs. Kershaw, the cook—'Mrs.' by brevet rank. She was the latest recruit of the Yaxley establishment, and, except for her singular professional capacity and personal steadiness, the least congenial member of it. Tall and sour, glib of tongue, and never losing the opportunity of spitting out something to the disadvantage of all who might find themselves within the range of that tongue, Mrs. Kershaw was feared, not loved, by her fellow-servants, and feared by no one more than by that good, old-fashioned, easy-going soul, Williams, whose butlership dated from the days when his mistress was still Miss Curteis. A word from him might at any time have rid the family of its unwelcome member. But that word he never would speak, for, in truth, with all his fear another feeling was mixed. Whatever else the cook was, she was thrifty, and wise in her investments, and rumour declared her, for her station in life, wealthy. This Williams, some two years a widower, well knew, and in his secret heart the expectation flickered of some day sharing that wealth. Mrs. Kershaw saw through his game, and, inwardly resolved as she was never to gratify Williams's ambition, she used the influence which her discovery had given her, to maintain the rule of iron with which she dominated the steward's room. The keeper so insulted began rubbing both leggings with either hand, and those who knew him well were aware that this action on his part always presaged an outburst. So Williams hastily proposed

a rubber of whist, he and Lucy's maid against Halwell and Mrs. Kershaw. The ruse succeeded, and, as usual, the astute capitalist won many penny points.

## CHAPTER XLII.

### DETENTION.

DINNER at Yaxley was usually a silent meal, for, in truth, lady and gentleman were equally tired with the afternoon's employment, and equally shy before the servants; but once Lucy's darling library was gained, then study, not play, would be the order of the day. The table was swept of books and trifles, and Eustace, ceremoniously ensconced in an arm-chair would, with a grave frown and squared lips, set to making and tearing up, and making again, little plans on sheets of foolscap paper, and dabbing in effects of light and shade (colour by candlelight being impossible), in which queer blotches of Indian ink, which might be clouds and looked more like spills, or the casual effects of a brush carelessly tossed down, were said to represent trees.

Whatever he did was piously accepted by the much-engrossed lady, who would stand by the table till standing became rather tiring, and then would perhaps lean on the back of his chair—'because, sitting down, one can't make one's self high enough to judge properly.' Drawing plans and sketching effects is not what, in the general estimation of gay society,



would be thought a cheerful way of spending the evenings in a country house; but, somehow, the occupation is apt to be much enlivened when a pretty woman is leaning over your chair, gently laughing in your ear, and interrupting the current of your thoughts and the course of your pencil by criticisms, all of which imply some half-expressed compliment to the amateur artist.

Eustace was always proposing to leave, and something would always occur which compelled Mrs. Foulis to request, as a particular favour, that he would put himself to the inconvenience of stopping just a little longer. She would plead at breakfast, 'I know I am very troublesome indeed, and you must hate the sight of me; but they are just at work on the new mound by the East Approach, and I can't help thinking it will want a little more rounding at the top, and the hollow at the side is surely hardly scooped enough; it is so formal, and shows like a trench, and not a natural coomb.' At another time she was in sore bewilderment whether to place a group of variegated *Wellingtonias* on the top of Bilberry Bank, where they would make a landmark, or, to dispose them at the bottom of the new glade, in contrast with some copper beeches, 'which I must, I think, order. Don't you agree, Mr. Brandreth?'

One morning Mrs. Foulis appeared at breakfast more distraught than was her usual wont, and before she had well poured out the tea she said, in a rapid tone, curiously combining decision and perplexity, and looking Eustace straight in the face, 'I can't palter

any longer. The decision must be reached now, at once and irrevocably.'

The young man had not the slightest idea what the matter was which gave such evident trouble to his hospitable hostess ; so he could only answer by tendering his poor assistance if it were acceptable.

'Of course it is. You are the only man who can help me, and upon whom I rely as a friend who will not deceive me.'

Eustace felt very odd, and believed that he was trembling, but contrived to blunder out, 'Am I really ?'

'Of course you are. Don't you know the decision we must come to ?'

'I have not the slightest idea.'

Lucy bit her lip in vexation, but went on :

'Why, of course, don't you see, then ? I must decide by return of post, so Weekes tells me, or it will be too late for the plants next season, whether I stick a conservatory on to the house ; and the choice is so perplexing. I should have the creepers, and the bananas, and the palms to go to, wet or dry, and open after dinner ; and Chinese lamps among the branches would be so lovely. But then I fear the big new thing would spoil the lines of the dear old house, and that would kill me with vexation ; and it would be so garish next the brickwork with its weathering and its lichens. I might, to be sure, paint it Indian red—certainly not white paint ; but even then ?'

Eustace was reassured, and plunged into the controversy. At length the lady was brought cheerfully

to abandon a project which would have ruined the antique charms of her picturesque abode. But Messrs. Weekes had to wait more than one post before the order was countermanded.

A time at last was reached when even plans had not always to be made and remade; and the evenings became more and more frequent on which the good-natured hostess insisted on Eustace giving a holiday to his overworked fingers. The lawyer at this began some conventional compliments, concluding with the commonplace, that he was sure that one so accomplished as Mrs. Foulis must be equally devoted to, and accomplished in, music. He had not, indeed, noticed the piano, but no doubt it was in some room not usually opened; and then if——Lucy, half taken aback and half amused, burst into a loud laugh, and confessed that her childish music lessons had so bored her that she had dropped, and by this time clean forgotten, the accomplishment. She could, to be sure, sing hymns without an instrument; and would Eustace join her in this delightful pastime?

Choir practice was twice a week at the school, and the presence of an accomplished critic would give a wholesome fillip to the boys. It was now his turn to be abashed, and he did not carry off the exposure half so well as the lady. Yet the reciprocal confession—deficient music—was a comfort to him, as it let in his favourite foible. With a smirk, meant to be modest, and called by Lucy shy, the self-conscious scholar would beg permission to be allowed to read just a little poetry, merely to send Mrs. Foulis asleep; the truth being that reading aloud was an

accomplishment of which he was more vain than of the more solid gifts with which he was so abundantly provided.

Lucy would then place herself in her much-loved rocking-chair on the other side of the table, at which, with an air and a grace very different from his usual unconstrained and manly gesture, Eustace would somewhat ceremoniously arrange himself, the book in his right hand, while with his left he kept up a running accompaniment between beating time and playing the devil's tattoo. The knowing little woman had entered into the plan with a roguish intention of provoking Eustace's evident vanity. But, alas! her tender heart betrayed her critical soul. She sat down to tease the reader, and she sat on to be pleased by the reading.

Eustace laboured like a man who had taken the assembly-room of a South-Coast watering-place for a Shakspearian course, and he was rewarded by Mrs. Foulis declaring that she had never before properly understood Tennyson's 'Princess.' Nay, his rendering of 'Romeo and Juliet' was in the opinion of his indulgent critic, quite an original version of a piece which required a poetical insight, such as he possessed, to unlock its treasure of pathos and diction.

Sometimes, indeed, these more intellectual pursuits would be varied by a game of backgammon; but such was the unwonted and inexplicable proclivity of either player to make blots or mistake the tables, that the game used imperceptibly to transform itself into one of those general conversations which most easily grow up when they are unpremeditated. It

was by casual hints and half-confidences unintentionally dropped during these chats, and pieced together by the alert mind of Eustace, that he learned to read the character of his hostess as he had never done before.

When at first the shy barrister began his visit at Yaxley, the widow (as he kept on calling her to himself) was a charming woman; young for her age, clever and cheery, full alike of good spirits and good principles. Now she gradually revealed herself as one who had been much wronged, and nobly bore herself against those wrongs, without the help of that sympathy which the world is so stupidly or so jealously apt to withhold from rich sufferers, under a sort of heathen prepossession that person who seem to be prosperous in worldly advantages owe a sacrifice to Nemesis.

Casual hints which fell from Lucy led the young man to appreciate that she was a woman who had in tender years been schooled by a training which would have spoiled most characters; so that her receiving benefit, not harm, from it, proved the superiority of an exceptional nature. Her faults, to which he was not blind, would have been more and greater in most people with a training like hers, and her merits far less genuine. He left off calling her the widow to himself, as he could no longer bear to think of her in connection with other and baser natures. She was now Lucy to his thoughts—a creature standing by herself, in the paradise of her own high intentions robed in her own vesture of unequalled purity.

With deepened sympathy for Lucy's character, and

a more clear insight into its elements, Eustace's tone naturally grew more grave and intense. She, too, instinctively felt the change, and in response unconsciously and gradually unlocked to him the more secret chambers of her confidence. Lucy, for the first time in her life, was led to ask another's pity for her solitude as a child without playmates, and as a woman without intellectual companionship; and the scar of her aunt's tyranny again became livid in her struggle to excuse it as the unintentional cruelty of an idiot. At last she found courage to speak openly of the hideous episode of her ephemeral marriage, as she never had done to human being before, and even to drop words about the unutterable anguish of an ungrateful child. Eustace, in receiving these confidences, felt himself almost charged with spiritual responsibilities towards one whose motive in laying bare the secrets of her guileless heart was neither vanity nor discontent, but the unalloyed desire of self-improvement; and as he offered the conclusions from them which made for Lucy's comfort, his own moral nature grew in purity and power.

Mingling with these higher feelings, another, of which he was half ashamed, and which he was always endeavouring to stifle, would go on intruding itself into Eustace's brain, and confounding all his most magnanimous conclusions. He had been so often and so intimately consulted about the spending and the withholding of large sums of money upon Mrs. Foulis's property—he had, in fact, so completely drifted, in reference to what the gardener sententiously designated the 'amenities,' into a position, if not of co-

proprietorship, at least of all the trouble and all the enjoyment to which improving proprietors are heirs—that he was continually catching himself out as thinking of Yaxley as if it were somehow his own. Mrs. Foulis stupidly helped on the temptation, as she would continually accost him upon ‘our last improvement,’ ‘our walk up here,’ ‘our mound down there,’ ‘the effect which I hope we may succeed in enjoying,’ and so forth. Eustace would, when the lively lady had run on in this strain, interpose—too laughingly, it must be owned, to secure the serious attention at which he was aiming.

‘You mean, which you will enjoy, my dear Mrs. Foulis. Next spring you will be revelling in the hills and dales, the forests and the lakes, which your creative genius has called into being; while I, poor wretch! in my dingy den at the Temple, expect no happier fate than to pore over briefs, or spin out my wits’ work for greedy editors.’

On this Lucy would smile a silent inscrutable smile, pitiful and gracious, but secretive and self-reliant; and Eustace would detect himself twaddling, and perhaps propose to the already tired lady to make a fresh pilgrimage to some spot which they had already visited two or three times that very morning.

Generally speaking, Lucy submitted with much good humour to the superfluous toil, but upon one occasion she flatly refused to leave the house again, and said with some bitterness, for in truth she felt twinges of a toothache which pride forbade her to confess, ‘Really, Mr. Brandreth, your occupation in life seems walking with me.’

'Life's walk with such a companion would be indeed an enviable occupation.'

'What a blind, poor creature you must be not to be able to walk alone.'

'So saying she speeded to her room, where she sought and found comfort in a bottle of creosote.

Eustace, thoroughly snubbed, sought the comfort he could not find in a volume of South's Sermons which he casually took from the shelves.

## CHAPTER XLIII.

### ADAM'S WEATHER-GLASS.

AUTUMN kept closing in as the days grew shorter and colder, but the intrepid pair went labouring on, cheering or chiding the obedient hands, till the mounds and the pools had assumed something of their intended effect of woody banks and half-hidden streamlets. At last, a November day came, such as the English climate sometimes produces, intensely calm, hot as summer, but with a damp close heat, which makes the recollection even of a north-east wind tolerable. No clouds were visible, nor yet blue sky, but a sort of compromise between the two, in a grey transparent vapour, not soaring upwards like a vault, but hanging like a canopy over the face of the earth.

In short, the day was so stifling that even Mrs. Foulis and Mr. Brandreth, with all their activity and enthusiasm in improving, discovered that it was impossible to run about in such oppressive air; so



after some abortive attempts at stepping out a proposed new path, they sought rest in a summer-house which stood in a spot already so lovely that it had been specially and emphatically exempted from any scheme of improvement. Yet its beauty was very simple, and was perhaps the result of accident, in the remarkable gracefulness of form and happily contrasted gradations of colour of a little group of trees bounding the view on one side, with which the eye was refreshed, in combination with the rounded outlines of an expanse of turf of that softest and most intense green which can only be found where the growth is of moss, and not of grass. Some days earlier the spectacle would have been even more entrancing, for the lime-trees which now stood naked were arrayed in the bright pale gold into which the foliage of that provoking tree is transmuted in the few days of its premature autumn, leaving regrets for its speedy departure, which is ill compensated for, even by the rich purple of the buds. But the famous liquid ambar of Yaxley was in the fullest fire-glow of its transcendent glory, thrown out as that was by the contrasted velvet of an adjacent silver fir.

‘How hot it is!’ gasped Eustace.

‘Dreadfully hot!’ murmured Lucy.

‘The glass, too, was rising this morning,’ he continued, with the air of a man communicating a valuable secret.

‘The glass is a humbug, I believe.’

‘Well, now, you remind me of my old tutor at college, who used to get quite angry when anybody talked of the weather-glass.’

'Stupid old man!'

'But you, yourself, have just been calling it a humbug.'

'Does the weather-glass being a humbug prove your tutor clever?' she asked, with true feminine logic.

'Perhaps not. But it's unnatural to garden without looking at the weather-glass. I wonder whether Adam had a weather-glass in Eden.'

'What makes you think of Eden now?'

'Your garden, of course.'

Mrs. Foulis was half vexed at the triviality of his talk, while her conscience told her that her own remarks were no better; so she rather pettishly answered: 'Indeed, Mr. Brandreth, we must leave off bandying these stupid conjectures about Adam and weather-glasses, or we shall begin proving that my untidy wilderness is Paradise.'

'Without a peradventure, this is Paradise; and it can claim its Eve as lawful tenant of its glades,' responded Eustace, with a half-ironical intonation, which aptly set off the grand-seigneur reverence with which he concluded his sententious compliment.

Mrs. Foulis never could resist a friendly tournament of wit when she was under the excitement of good spirits; so, with much precipitancy and conspicuous, though momentary, confusion as to Biblical facts, she rejoined, 'An Eve perhaps, but, happily, no Adam to beguile her.'

The words were hardly past her lips before she felt how absurdly she had put her foot into it, and she turned as red as a turkey-cock, and laboured with vain thoughts after some second sentence which could turn

the edge of her own terrible suggestion. Eustace saved her the trouble by quietly replying, 'I don't see why that deficiency should go on.'

So saying, with the switch in his left hand, he flicked the outstanding toe of his boot, and with his right he grasped the hand of Mrs. Foulis. She let him take it without a trace of displeasure or resistance, but neither by word, look, nor responsive squeeze did she acknowledge his loving advance. After some moments' delay, Eustace resumed, in a lower and graver tone :

'What is the use of going on with this purposeless dawdling? Heaven knows that neither of us ever expected this when you invited me here; but it has come to pass, and we must face facts. Can't you say "Yes," and put an end to it?'

Mrs. Foulis did not say 'Yes,' but still less did she say 'No.' She did not withdraw her hand, nor did she by the slightest quiver of a single finger seem to recognise that it was within Eustace's grasp. Another silent interval occurred, and then again he spoke :

'Won't you answer me?'

'Have not I been answering you all the afternoon, and setting right your stupid muddle about the weather-glass?'

'Yes; but you have not answered my last question.'

'How could I? You don't want me to throw myself at your head. We are not on a desert island yet, and my way home, at least, is quite clear.'

Mrs. Foulis uttered these words with just a little too much of artificial indignation for success, and

jumping up, strode towards the mansion with so quick a pace as to leave her lover quite distanced and breathless before they reached the door. Her five o'clock tea was taken to her bedroom, and she came down to dinner with unwonted unpunctuality. That evening hostess and visitor were both seized with a desire to play backgammon, and for once they were so intent over their hits, badly played as these were, that conversation was banned.

'Good night,' at last said Eustace, as he handed the flat candlestick to the lady of the house.

'Better night, I hope, than day,' answered Lucy; and added, 'Law! how you are spilling the wax and spoiling everything, and all was so nice with me before you came.'

This was enigmatical, but said so archly as not to be crushing.

'Better night than day,' Eustace muttered when he got up on the following morning. To him the day before had been the best of days he had ever passed. It had been one of exquisite happiness; for although Lucy still kept herself free, he fancied that a little more persuasion would leave him the affianced husband of that peerless woman. Next morning all seemed different. She was cold, shy, awkward, silent; she avoided speaking, or if she spoke, it was to contradict, to snub, or to take offence. He asked her at breakfast in the deferential accents of his earlier days at Yaxley, what were her plans for the morning, and she merely jerked out, 'How can I tell?' He remarked in a tone of genuine concern that she was looking pale, and she caught him up with 'Well, and if I am,

what's that to you ? You don't want me to put on rouge, I suppose.' Eustace talked of leaving, and she never told him to stay.

A man less deeply in love, or more versed in woman's character, would have drawn comfort from these visible struggles of a strong but excitable and much-tried nature with a late-awakened love, of which she was beginning to feel the strength more than she had ever believed herself capable of feeling, or even thought it right to own. The pride of consistency, the pride of position, and the pride of solitary power were all seething in her perturbed mind, and struggling to stifle the quick growth of her new pure affection.

Had her first husband left her any legacy of regret or respect, they might have prevailed. But her never yet satisfied yearning after a marriage of the heart, of which she was for the first time becoming conscious, came in aid and turned the scale. Much as she had gone through, the monotony of her healthy, useful, occupied pilgrimage had wiped out the count of years, and left her, for all essential purposes, midway between twenty and thirty, with the long vista of a fresh life suddenly open.

Of all this struggle Eustace was blankly ignorant, and only saw a peevish, capricious woman, who encouraged him one day in order to mortify him on the morrow ; and who would, he felt sure, follow his departing figure with a mocking laugh. She had, he said to himself, sucked his brains over her confounded improvements, and that was all she had ever really wanted of him. To Eustace, the bachelor, the smiles which came from her in spite of herself were the

death-warrant of all his yesterday's expectations, for to his distempered eye they only told of cold-blooded ridicule. He felt himself like the rash traveller who had toiled all the night, and through the following morning, and who in two or three more paces would have placed his foot on the peak of some glorious and untrodden Alpine summit, when a single false step sends him rolling and bounding down black rock and cruel snow till he lodges, thousands of feet below, in some dark gully, a gory, shapeless mass of crushed-up bone and muscle. If he could only turn to the wall and blubber like a whipped child, he might bear it; but to sit wearing that false face of calm unconcern was intolerable. He would rush out of the house; he would run to the station; he would quit at once, and for ever, Yaxley and its heartless mistress.

While Eustace was making up his mind to this valorous resolve, the servant came in with the second delivery of letters. The first he opened was from his clerk, speaking, with all the sharpness of which their relative positions admitted, of the delay and inconvenience which his protracted absence from chambers occasioned. The faithful dependant had too much reason to believe that a brief after which Eustace had long been hankering was at last sent by the solicitor on whom he mainly leaned for advancement, to that pert son of an enormously rich member for a Yorkshire borough whose unrestrained chaff had long been the chief of Eustace's minor miseries. He opened a second letter in a wild hope of finding comfort there, and it was from the editor of *Tyburnia*, reminding his truant writer, with that courtesy which

preludes a rupture, that his contribution to the next number was long overdue.

Now, indeed, the blackness of darkness had gathered completely round him. *Judico me cremari*, he thought. He had entered Yaxley poor, but a hero; this heroism had been sacrificed at the foot of a widow and a fortune, and she had spurned him so soon as she had spoiled him of his nobility. Now he was departing, not only poor, but a pauper; his pleasurable means of fame-winning livelihood cut away by his own reckless conceit. So engrossed was he in his own troubles that he never perceived that Lucy was bending in tearless amazement over another letter, as, with her disengaged hand, she twitched her gown, and with one foot dealt quick continuous kicks to the footstool. Had he listened, he might have heard her muttering, 'It can't be hers, it can't be hers, though the writing is hers; too clever, too cruel, too devilish! Oh, the man into whose hands my poor child has fallen victim is there in every word of it! And I let her go—I sent her to Ireland! Oh, my folly! oh, my sin!'

Sir Miles, with all his cunning, had misread the character of Mrs. Foulis, and fancied, from the proneness with which she ran into the trap baited by him in the letter palmed by him upon Meriel, that she was a fond, pliable creature.

'Once we are tied, and can't be untied, she'll be whistling us back to herself,' was his prophecy; and although he was somewhat surprised at the tone of Lucy's reply to Meriel after the marriage—ignorant as he was of the turn which Mordaunt had so uncon-

sciously done him—he set it down as pout, and, waiting till ‘Mater’ should mollify, forbade Meriel to answer. It is but fair to say that she did not acquiesce in this heartless advice without a fight, but it was the last in which filial affection took any part. After weeks of waiting, Lucy wrote again, more urgently, more sadly, and more reproachfully; and then Sir Miles told his wife that they must make a stand, and show a little firmness.

Accordingly he proposed for her a letter, framed by calculation to be cold, hard, and unfeeling, in which he made her lay down the categorical conditions on which alone she would condescend for the future to recognise her mother. The principal features of this proposal were free quarters at Yaxley for the couple and any family they might have, and an allowance upon selves and family, amounting to some thousands a year, during the lifetime of Mrs. Foulis, to be irrevocably secured by deed.

Sir Miles thought his way more clear for claiming these concessions now that he had shaken off Miss Robbins and repudiated the promises, confiding in which, that worthless but unhappy woman had forfeited all the benefits of her Delicia’s patronage. He was prepared, had she called him to account, to have justified himself by pleading that his promises to her had been made in her character of confidante to Lady Foulisville, and in consideration of the influence which that position gave her; so that with its loss, which he must impute to her own misbehaviour, the promise equally lapsed.

Happily for the honour of human nature, the



discarded favourite never gave him the opportunity of urging this base excuse, for she crawled away, crushed and impotent, from Fontarabia, and slunk into her own hole, nor ever, after her one letter to the Baronet, did she attempt to address either Brandreth or the Foulisvilles.

At last Eustace made a spasmodic effort to shake off the stupor which he felt growing upon him, and tear himself away from the ill-omened house and the fickle coquette who had befooled him. He had forgotten, in his reverie, everything, even where the door stood; so he glanced round the room for the means of escape, and then, for the first time, he appreciated that he was in company of a woman evidently in deep, silent agony of mind over some unexpected communication.

Lucy's expression, as she conned over Meriel's letter, made Eustace pause in his resolution of running away. Had she been his declared enemy, and not the frivolous creature who was trifling with his heart, he could hardly retreat at that moment without some explanation; so he turned his eye on Lucy as she read and re-read the fatal writing. She finished her third or fourth perusal of the hateful words, and then looking at him, but not in anger, handed him the epistle and gasped, 'What am I to do after this?'

Preoccupied as he was with his own troubles, he read it at first somewhat mechanically, but for the second time with a knitted brow and a scowling face. Then he looked at Lucy, and perceived that she had sunk upon a chair quivering in every limb and

drinking his expression with a sad intensity which spoke of love and confidence and longing blended with an outside sorrow; so he returned the letter to its owner, and said, in a calm, low, slow voice, 'After this you can say "*Yes*" to my question of yesterday.'

Mrs. Foulis seized his hand, and gave the squeeze which he had vainly expected the afternoon before, and then burst into a long, hearty fit of hysterical crying. So likewise did Eustace.

## CHAPTER XLIV.

### LEGATUS NATUS.

EVEN lovers, so absurdly doting as Lucy and Eustace suddenly discovered themselves to be, must talk of business, particularly when the lady counts thirty-four years, and the gentleman is only one year younger, and looking his age, while she would have been taken to be several summers on the right side of thirty. All persons who cared to think in any way upon the matter had formed the opinion that upon Lucy Curteis's marriage with Captain Foulis she had acted under some provision of her father's will, and had tied up her property, exclusively and irrevocably, upon the issue of that marriage; otherwise how could she assert that, come what may, it would be Meriel's?

There was no one to contradict the report. Swettenham, who had presumably made the settle-

ment, was dead; Musgrave kept to himself, and never gossiped; Featherston was no lawyer, and hated to talk on legal matters; while to Lucy not only were any references to her ill-starred marriage repulsive, but her recollections of its incidents were permanently blurred and distorted, owing to the mental and bodily shock of her sudden widowhood and her daughter's quickly following birth. So Mrs. Rees had it all her own way, and was able, to her heart's content, to abuse Mrs. Foulis, her father, Featherston, 'whom all the world knows to be a humbug,' and 'that old fool, Swettenham,' for having allowed the patrimony of the Curteises to fall into the clutches of a penniless adventurer.

Mrs. Rees's special line of evil-speaking took this form, as from the day that Featherston's relation, who afterwards turned out so badly, was named first incumbent of that new church which made the quarrel, she vowed supplementary vengeance against that most inoffensive man. She might have relented on the downfall of the clergyman, by which Featherston himself was severely hit, if the partner of his disgraceful swindle of a sham agency office had not been a discarded clerk, whose appointment as schoolmaster of the old church had been a particular job of her own, and who was the only man who ever evaded repaying money borrowed from Mr. Rees. Miss Turner's position was a different one, as her central wrong had always been old Miss Harriett's banishment, from which she had really suffered severely in material comforts; and, as Captain Foulis had been that silly woman's spoilt darling, she was bound to

think more tenderly of the insinuating scamp than it suited her robust confederate to do. So, while she would condemn the settlement as all wrong, she would add her feeble regrets that Miss Harriett's advice had not been attended to. When people asked her what that advice was, she would only answer, 'It was a burning shame it wasn't taken. Think of my poor dear friend, hounded to death, when she might have saved the family!'

Outside of the Yaxley country the same delusion prevailed. Lady Foulisville had no doubt about the settlement, and loudly praised it, as due to an overruling Providence, which had thus poured the wealth of the Curteises into the lap of a Foulis. Above all things, to Sir Miles and Meriel it was, as we know, a foregone conclusion. So Eustace, who had heard the gossip before it had become a matter of personal interest, never dreamed of questioning the fact, while, with his punctilious sense of honour, he dreaded acting or thinking as a fortune-hunter. Still, it was the duty of a Revising Barrister to proceed according to rule and order: -so, as soon as Lucy's paroxysm of laughing and crying was calmed, he led her to serious conversation, and asked her, in language which he made intelligible to her non-legal mind, if it were true that, as Captain Foulis's widow, she had only a life-interest in her father's patrimony, and that after her death it would all vest absolutely in Meriel.

'It is quite true,' she answered.

'What an odd fellow your father must have been to suppose you would only marry once and to let you put all your eggs in one basket!'

‘There is only one egg, and that’s Meriel.’

‘But are you really quite sure?’

‘More than sure. Have not both Swettenham and Featherston told me so?’

‘Then there’s nothing to settle, for sure I am that my father has not a brass farthing to give me, and would not let me have it if he had one.’

‘Let’s settle ourselves, and be happy,’ she responded, with such a tone and such a smile that his only possible answer was a kiss, which effectually addled all further business talk.

‘After play comes work,’ thought Eustace on the following morning, as the couple buckled to to arrange about the marriage. The first question, ‘put off, or at once,’ was by acclamation decided in favour of ‘at once.’ ‘How’ followed upon ‘when,’ and then divided counsels appeared, and, we are sorry to say, some inconsistency, in the little senate. Lucy urged reverential considerations, which are now, happily, as common as they are laudable. The banns should be published in the face of the congregation alike for rich and poor. There should be arches, flowers, music, clergy in the plural, a breakfast for the rich, and merry-making for the poor.

Eustace was the last man in the world to gainsay opinions with which, as a general principle, he heartily agreed; but, situated as they two were, he felt it his duty calmly to point out the peculiar difficulties of their position. Could she ask those objectionable Foulisvilles, after their behaviour regarding Meriel, as to which both Lucy and Eustace were still misled from their ignorance of Delicia’s illness, and confirmed

in their displeasure by her infatuated letter? Was she, on the other hand, prepared to make open enemies for life of Meriel's uncle and aunt by leaving them out? Again—and that was the most serious consideration—how could she open her house to Sir Miles and Lady Brandreth, after her daughter's atrocious letter? and if she did, how would she ever get them out again?

Lucy felt the force of these objections, but, like a true woman, still wished to show a little fight before she openly surrendered. So she began feebly defending her position with a series of petty admissions, inconsistent with the premisses which they claimed to support. In her innocent craftiness she meant Eustace to take advantage of her faulty reasoning, so as to rescue her from her own false position. But the simple fellow, little versed as yet in women's ways, and terribly in earnest over his new sensation of love, instead of appreciating and playing Lucy's game, got seriously angry at what he thought was her stupidity and weakness. Actually the man got angry whose fame as a writer of sparkling romance in no small degree rested on the success with which he could hit off womanly caprice. In fact, he had so schooled himself in this accomplishment as to have blunted his native intuition into character. Instead of analyzing from the incidents revealed to him, he would build upon them without recollecting how incomplete and fragmentary the foundation was. So the demon of suspicion made a lodgment in his mind, and whispered to him that Lucy was a fool. To be sure, he was too much in love to admit the terrible charge himself,

Still he was rather scared at this peep into his life's prospect with his chosen yoke-fellow ; and, as angry men will do, he began himself to play the fool, by turning his back upon his own wise counsels, and declaiming about shaming their enemies (and somebody else) by a public and splendid wedding. There must be this, he argued, and that, and the other, to make it all worthy of the lady of Yaxley, and a dozen bridesmaids, even if as many counties had to be beaten up for them.

At this burst, poor Lucy meekly dropped, 'But I'm a widow, Eustace dear, and can't have bridesmaids at all.'

This remark, commonplace as it was, brought the angry racer sharply up upon its haunches. For bridesmaids in themselves Eustace cared as little as for wedding-cake ; but it recalled to a memory which was willingly wandering the real condition of matters. Captain Foulis, to him, was prehistoric, and he had never seen Meriel, and she had been, except on special occasions, virtually out of his recollection ; while Lucy was in appearance, in deportment, and in freshness of mind some seven or eight years younger than her legal age of thirty-four. So in his rambling imagination there had grown up a charming picture of a wedding—all veils and orange-flowers, Brussels lace and bridesmaids, such as he had seen in Mr. Kempe's and Mr. Liddell's churches. Suddenly the appalling fact was revealed that the central object for which all the arches would be built, the grandees assemble, the archdeacon assist the vicar, and the organ peal the Wedding March, would be a lady attired, not in a veil,

but in a bonnet, walking in solitude up the church, with no obsequious *cortège* of parti-coloured damsels.

‘A widow’s wedding should be a quiet wedding,’ he said to himself, but to Lucy he put it more gracefully. ‘Of all women, of course you least need the fictitious *éclat* of any bridesmaids. And while I do not agree in all you have been saying, there is a good deal in it so, on the whole, I have, while we have been talking over the matter, come to the conclusion that, as we stand, the more quiet we keep it the better it will be. You know there are those who would take a malicious advantage of any *contretemps*.’

Lucy and Eustace were neither of them persons to be content with half-measures, and having thus agreed upon the necessity of keeping the wedding quiet, they ran a race as to who could suggest the most entire quietness, and completely cut off display and publicity, till at last they reached the determination of making it what Eustace in later days laughingly described as an experiment in legal clandestinity. Matter-of-fact people may reasonably think them somewhat silly for having reached this conclusion, and we fancy that, after the first enthusiasm of what was to both of them, in spite of their respective ages, the day-spring of young love was over, Mr. and Mrs. Brandreth themselves owned that they had been a little fantastic. But they were then both of them at a high pressure of excitement, for each had, for the first time in their respective lives, an assured prospect of happy home companionship.

Eustace had never known the meaning of being at home, except in the coveted days of residence at his



beloved college, where the pleasure of companionship, though taken genially, was at the bottom a selfish one. With Lucy the revelation of domesticity in all the width of its mysterious sweetness was even more overwhelming. Now, at last, in her soul and in her heart, the great clear spring of true, unselfish love, smothered by Miss Harriett, outraged and dissipated by Augustus Foulis, reduced to common-place by Featherston, and frozen by Meriel, was welling up with irresistible impetuosity. She was longing for a romance—pure, laudable, lovely in the sight of men and angels—still a romance; and as the one which had come to her was essentially so innocent, who could grudge to the woman whose whole life had been so good, the gratification, before youth had quite passed away, of one eccentricity? No one likely to hold communication with Yaxley; neither servants nor retainers, with one exception, was to have any inkling of the coming event, with the indispensable exception of the clergyman; and no one, except the clergyman and the witnesses, was to know that the marriage had taken place until the couple were safely on the road to the station. Mrs. Foulis, as we have said, entertained at first strong scruples about banns; there was something, she said, ostentatious, irreverential, about a license. Eustace quite shared in this feeling, but pointed out that a license was one thing, and a special license another. What could be so ecclesiastical or so solemn as the direct permission of the Primate of All England and Metropolitan, *Legatus Natus* of the Holy See, granting that gracious indulgence in direct exercise of his legatine authority — an indulgence

which the combination of a thousand Archbishops of York would be powerless to concede ?

The picture amused and dazzled the good little woman, and she replied, 'So let it be;' particularly as Eustace explained that he was absolutely compelled to run up to London to conciliate his irate clerk and break with his editor, and that, by actively using a very short absence in town, he could easily procure the awful document and bring it back, without a soul at Yaxley, by any possibility, divining what he had been after.

'You must not mind the expense, however,' he added; 'luxuries are never cheap. Archbishops charge archiepiscopal prices.'

## CHAPTER XLV.

### CONSEQUENT ARRANGEMENTS.

ONCE the great question was solved, consequent arrangements shaped themselves with inconceivable precision, subject always—a matter of nervous apprehension to Lucy—to the Vicar's approbation. Mr. Lidyard was wont on every Wednesday morning to have an early celebration. The attendance of herself and of Eustace there could not possibly cause any surprise, for it was an incident which had already occurred more than once. Let Wednesday week, then, be the day. The communicants went quickly away and they two could easily linger about till the ground was quite clear, and then, if only Mr. Lidyard was propitious, a quarter of an hour more would make

them one. They would walk home by the diggings, as a plausible reason to the servants for the slight delay in coming back to breakfast; and after that, Lucy—who would previously have given out that she was going to London for a few weeks' absence, and therefore required to take up with her the maid, the footman, and considerable luggage—would drive to the station to catch that precious express which was the pride and solace of the neighbourhood. Eustace, of course, would have to leave Yaxley, so there would be nothing odd or indecorous in the lady allowing him to take advantage of her carriage and luggage-van down to the station. As for the journey to London, he charged himself with securing the 'engaged' compartment.

The unknown quantity still was Mr. Lidyard. If he blabbed, all was up; if he refused, they must seek for other combinations, as statesmen making ministries express it. So Lucy asked him to luncheon, and after the meal called him up to the library, where they were soon joined by Eustace. First she begged him to promise silence as to the communication which she was about to make.

'Certainly,' he replied, 'provided only it is touching some matter which is lawful and of good report. But from you, Mrs. Foulis, I cannot anticipate anything

Lucy blushed from top to toe, in dread lest a few minutes might compel him to reconsider his good opinion of her; but, with a desperate effort, she collected herself, and unfolded the story. To their infinite relief, Mr. Lidyard, with his mild unworldliness,

saw nothing to object to in the notion. All that he had seen or heard of Mr. Brandreth had impressed him with a conviction of his worth; and why should not Mrs. Foulis and he seek the occasion of that early celebration which was so dear to him, and the permission of their Metropolitan, to contract a marriage so true and laudable in the sight of God and the Church? It was, he observed, a much more solemn way of plighting their troth than a fashionable wedding, with all its paraphernalia of worldly pomp, its etiquettes and jealousies, eating, drinking, laughing, crying, speech-making, old shoes, and grubby rice.

In truth, there was a latent and much unappreciated spice of humorous romance in the quiet little man's character. In his heart of hearts, he rejoiced at the thought of the monotony of his daily existence, permanently saddened as it had been by his own bereavement, being so unexpectedly varied by this summons to act as prime agent in an adventure so interesting and yet so blameless, on behalf of one for whom his silent affection and respect had gone on year by year increasing, as the tale of Lucy's deeds of hidden charity—the days and nights of weary and often dangerous watchings by the squalid, the loathsome, and often the infectious sick-beds of his suffering and dying parishioners—went rolling up in a bright account of good works. Moreover, he had a quite personal and unsuspected reason for rejoicing. It had fallen to him, as curate in charge of the mother church, between Mr. Edlin's death and Mr. Rees's induction, to officiate at the marriage of Augustus Foulis and Lucy Curteis, and the cold shock which the bridegroom's bearing had

given to him still haunted his thoughts. 'It never can be happy,' he then said. It was most unhappy, and he had been the official instrument of that unhappiness. Now, by the blessing of God, he saw himself called upon to preside at what he trusted would be a happy marriage of reparation. No, certainly, when there could be no objection to the proposed arrangements beyond some strained prejudices (as he thought) of conventionality, he would not cut himself off from so strangely vouchsafed a privilege.

He was now fairly on one of his favourite topics, and he ran on. 'Second marriages are, without doubt, not heroic things, and I cannot severely blame the many pious men who have condemned them, though often, it must be owned, with intemperate language. But crass generalisation is always wrong and always foolish. No one marriage was ever quite like another, any more than one person can be just like another. There are second marriages—if I am right, in speaking of such unions, to profane that sacred word—which are distinctly, without exception, blameworthy in the eyes of God and in those of society—marriages such as those where a widower cannot bring their aunt home to look after his orphans who are her own nephews and nieces without hankering after the possession of that woman, and so, with his eyes open, making her the stepmother and the rival of her own charges;—alliances,' he added with growing earnestness, 'which make my gorge rise when I see those opulent self-seekers, with all the world to pick wives out of, and their sisters-in-law—I warrant—willing enough to stop on with them as sisters-in-law, for the

sake of the home and the keep, upsetting all established ideas of right and wrong, and shocking good people without remorse, merely to gratify their uncontrolled personal fancy, at what risk they neither think nor care. Again, there are second marriages which are neither one thing nor another. But, besides all these, there are those which are obviously desirable, neither forbidden by divine law nor repugnant to social decorum, and leading up to some obvious benefit, and we should therefore declare praiseworthy; and among them I reckon this present one, as an alliance highly to be commended, and likely to be of much general advantage.'

'I suppose,' interposed Lucy, 'you expect I shall otherwise wax wanton?'

'Do not, my dear patron, trifle with Scripture, or I shall withdraw all my commendations,' replied the Vicar somewhat gravely. 'You know what I mean. Your peculiar and great responsibilities, and, if you will pardon the reference, your history, your opportunities, and, on the other side, your peculiar want of opportunities owing to your solitary state, all indicate marriage, if undertaken in the fear of God, as your happiest condition of life. It all depends upon the choice, and I believe you have made a good choice. If I should be deceived, I trust to ban Mr. Brandreth with bell, book, and candle.'

Thereupon Eustace jumped up, took the Vicar by both hands, nearly shook his arms out of their sockets, and shouted, 'I tell you, Mr. Lidyard, if I ever show myself unworthy of that most dear and excellent creature who has made me so undeservedly the

happiest man in the world, that you have my full leave to curse me with bell, book, and candle, to pull my nose, and to kick me down the great stairs of Yaxley, and into the horse-pond. But what about witnesses?' he continued, 'and how will you tie their tongues till we are off?'

'Make yourself quite easy, my dear sir. I have a pupil who always comes early to church on Wednesdays—he sha'n't escape out of my sight for half the morning; and I will keep the old clerk bothering over his accounts, which are always in a mess, till I know his breakfast is as cold as a stone; he will then have to run home two miles the other way and make his peace with his shrew of a wife, who will be ready to break his head with the broomstick for spoiling the meal; so he will be as safe as the Bank of England till you are well on your road to town.'

Of course the indoor servants had no more overlooked the warm friendship which had sprung up between their mistress and the pleasant young lawyer than had the gardener, the bailiff, and the keeper; and the circumstance gave rise to many interesting conversations at dinner and in the evening. But Mrs. Kershaw had determined that Lucy was to continue to the end of her days a soured celibate, and with Williams the edict of Mrs. Kershaw was that of a supreme tribunal. Bright little Anna, the lady's maid, would occasionally venture to interpose with some such meek remark as 'Really, Mrs. Kershaw, do you see any such great harm?' and the answer was, 'Of course I do, and so would you if you had any sense of delicacy.' On the whole, however, the cook pe-

formed a useful service in her disagreeable way by stifling gossip and surmise. When Williams used to hint that his position with Mrs. Kershaw in the house was difficult, she would always silence him by observing that Mrs. Foulis and Mr. Brandreth were a difficulty, and she hoped Williams had not a word to say against *them*. By good luck, no chance tattle spread further than the neighbourhood of the house, for a change of ownership in the village shop had led to many complaints as to the quality of the articles and the punctuality of delivery; so Mrs. Foulis was just giving a trial to a dealer of higher standing in the county town, and the great reciprocal channel of gossip was for the time cut off. Mrs. Rees's and Miss Turner's attendants had no acquaintance at Yaxley, and the servants at the Vicarage and Dr. Arlett's had neither time nor propensity for scandal-mongering. The verdict of the steward's room, however, had to change for the last two or three days, as the announcement of Mrs. Foulis's visit to London had completely thrown the downstairs party on a false scent. Sounds of an eager conversation had been heard by deaf Mr. Williams, as he passed by the end door of the secluded library, and on his thickened tympanum they fell as the accents of quarrelling. This story, coupled with the unexpected news of the speedy departure of mistress and of visitor, was sufficient to lead to the universal supposition that Mr. Brandreth's visit had come to an unpleasant and sudden ending. Accordingly, as no effect could be left without a cause, it quickly and easily surmised that the agreeable man was really in partnership with his father,



and had sought out Yaxley with the intention of extorting money for his father and his stepmother, and had been exposed, and his wicked venture frustrated. Eustace, on his side, was puzzled at the sudden change to coldness, if not almost rudeness, in the manner to him of Mr. Williams, with whom he had hitherto been a favourite. Sometimes he feared that the secret had been discovered, and that Williams was working up to giving or taking warning; at other times he comforted himself with the idea that such impolitic behaviour towards a future master proved the want of any suspicion. In any case, it was impossible to remonstrate; for the old man's neglect of personal service, though highly inconvenient, was quite intangible to one whose cue was to continue in the ostensible character of visitor.

## CHAPTER XLVI.

### ONLY TWO LETTERS.

BUT the loving pair were not yet out of their perplexities, even after they had secured the services of Mr. Lidyard. As soon as the day was named, there arose upon their horizon the ugly question of announcements—that fruitful source of heartburnings—involving the decision of who the persons might be to whom the marriage was to be notified, how soon, if ever, and in what form. After infinite siftings, casuistry worthy of Escobar, and most ridiculous vacillation, it was finally settled that only two letters were essential. sense  
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even desirable—one to the Brandreths and the other to Featherston.

‘Ought you not also to write to Mr. Musgrave?’ meekly asked Eustace. ‘Old frump!’ Then another difficulty cropped up: was he to write to his father, or Lucy to her daughter? Ultimately it was decided that between conflicting objections the balance lay on the side of the announcement passing between the ladies, as a more familiar style and less compromising details were possible than if the Baronet’s heir had to communicate with the Baronet. It was further settled that the posting of this letter should be so timed as to ensure its reaching Lady Brandreth on the Friday morning after the marriage. Writing to Featherston was a very different matter, and by no means an easy one. In truth, Lucy felt that she had been culpably neglectful of her oldest friend of late. She knew that she ought to have invited him to Yaxley to meet, and be made known to, Eustace. She ought to have done so when her impulsive civility to the Revising Barrister had landed her in his most embarrassing visit. There were, to be sure, reasons at the time which persuaded her that it would be wise to refrain from the duty. But these excuses of cowardice became continually more weak. She ought still more to have opened her heart to her guardian when she found herself every day taking more and more interest in her self-introduced visitant. It was useless now to plead that there had been many obstacles, felt or unfelt, some grave, others merely tiresome, which had stood between Lucy and this duty, till it now seemed too late; the black fact was there,

that her own sophistry had created a position for her of painful difficulty.

Her troubles on this score had begun with the visit which Featherston paid to Yaxley in company with his cousin, Colonel Mordaunt, on the eve of the day when Meriel's announcement of her ill-starred marriage arrived. Lucy had, of course, no alternative except to send back for him, and, when he reached Yaxley, to tell him the whole story, as far as she knew it from her daughter's original beguiling letter; and as she went on she could see that though the dear, affectionate old man said nothing, and was as sincerely considerate in his sympathies as even in the far-off days of her great trouble, he felt something in which sorrow and disappointment were blended with a trace even of pique, at having been taken so late into a confidence which he felt he had a claim to have shared all through. It may have been a surface feeling only—it was certainly one which he had not shaped in definite words, and which did not, as he took good care, derogate from his affectionate effusiveness of consolation. Had it been more pronounced, and led to an explanation, the cloud would probably have quite passed away; as it was, it left him mortified and Lucy uncomfortable, with these last words of Featherston's tingling in her ears: 'If ever I meet that scoundrel Brandreth, or his son, or any of their rascally lot, I'll insult them; and if they ask me why, I'll break every bone in their bodies.'

Even when Eustace was only a name to her, this state of things gave Lucy genuine distress. Her sense, indeed, told her that she had nothing then to

reproach herself for. A daughter's well-being must be a mother's first concern, and in the matter of Meriel's letter this was the only point important to Mrs. Foulis, and to which she really turned her thoughts. Now it was certain that on this special matter Featherston's advice would have been without value ; so she could only have taken it as a formality, or else with the intention of following it, however misleading it might prove itself to be. In one case she would have affronted her friend, and in the other have wronged her daughter as well as herself. Yet, after all this was granted, the look-out was dismal ; for to an affectionate heart there is nothing so distressful as the conflict between reason and affection. Such conflicts are more than usually difficult when one of the parties feels that he has a complete answer, but that the answer involves some imputation on the sense of the person whom he has not only to answer, but to conciliate.

Duty towards her daughter's feelings or interests could not now avail Lucy as any excuse. Her reckoning was with Featherston alone, and a sorry one she felt it likely to be. The practical result of the Baronet's treachery had been to set up in Featherston's mind a perfectly outrageous hatred of the very name of Brandreth in any possible conjunction. Lucy was so well aware of this, that she had never dared so much as announce Eustace's visit, to Featherston ; and now she had both to declare her marriage with him and also to construct plausible reasons for her antecedent conduct.

But even on the happy, though very improbable,

supposition that Featherston could have been brought to see that Eustace Brandreth was, for all practical purposes, as unconnected with the Baronet of the same name as if he had been born and brought up in Vermont or Arkansas, Lucy had come to the conviction that a rencontre, however friendly, over her dinner-table would have bristled with difficulties even during those earlier days when her love for Eustace Brandreth was still embryonic, although running through every vein and mingling in all her thoughts like a malady which the doctor says has not yet come out. Featherston was not the man to take a hint readily and in silence, and she shrank from the anticipation of his boisterous old-world jokes and the manifestations of an affection which she believed to be quasi-paternal, but which must to Eustace appear somewhat singular.

Had the secret of Featherston's earlier life ever been revealed to Mrs. Foulis, her perplexity would have been much greater. The thought had never crossed her mind that he had been in love with her in the days of her budding womanhood, nor that it was only his very scrupulous interpretation of a guardian's responsibilities which had held him back from declaring that love. On and after her marriage with Foulis, a curious revulsion of feeling took possession of Featherston. He loved Lucy more rather than less, for it was a love into which pity entered, and never once did he blame her. How could he, when, talked over by silly, tuft-hunting Miss Harriett, he had himself consented to the alliance with the plausible aristocrat? But, somehow, she was unsexed to him.

She was still his very dear child, just as a high-spirited, affectionate schoolboy might have been the possible recipient of a man's most exclusive and constant affections; as a possible wife, however, she no longer existed to him. But, in the meantime, we are leaving Mrs. Foulis in the agonies of composing a most difficult letter.

Lucy, before sitting down to her task, took up the almanack, and, computing the days which had elapsed since Featherston had last ridden over to Yaxley, she discovered that so long an absence had never been known while both were resident in the country. She felt sure that her worst fears were not exaggerated. Her guardian had heard of Eustace's visit. He was angry to the pitch of silence, and, perhaps, would never forgive her, never again speak to her. She was mistaken, however, in her supposition. True, he was a little angry for her silence about Meriel's letter, but his absence and silence were more due to a cause of which she had not the slightest conception. The fact was, that he had just made his first, but long-deserved, experience of gout, and he made certain that Dr. Arlett must have been to Yaxley and reported to Lucy the extraordinary mishap, not knowing that the doctor's visit to him was on the last morning before a short and hardly earned holiday.

So he went on every day expecting a visit, or at least a message, from her, but, getting none, he worked himself up into a gouty fury. His only comfort was to persuade himself that he had discarded Yaxley for ever, and to tell himself, with much internal emphasis, 'If the young woman cares so little for her worn-out

old servant in his day of suffering, the old servant will let her follow her own fandangles. Women are Jezebels—all, even Lucy.'

When the colchicum gave him some comfort, he relented, and resolved to go to Yaxley the next day. So, on the following morning, he very much astonished his servant by calling for his boots. On the first impact of the still swollen feet with the stiff leather, Lucy became Jezebel again, and the gouty temper resumed its sway. Worse or better, he continued haughty and huffy, and absolutely prohibited his household from holding any communication with Yaxley.

'Whether she knows it or not, she shall hear it from me.'

With all her disagreeable surmisings, and her total ignorance of the real state of matters, Lucy had to consider not only how to word her letter, but to settle what that letter should be in substance.

Was it not too late for Lucy Foulis to think of introducing Eustace Brandreth as her intended to her old guardian, and must she not wait till the wife could present her husband to her dearest old friend?

This course slurred over the present crisis, and adjourned the most vexatious difficulties; so it was at first the favourite expedient. But a little fidgeting and pen-biting led to the conclusion that, easy as it might be now, it would probably be an affront to, and life-long coolness with, her father's old friend and the playfellow of her own childhood, to whom she owed so much, and whom she loved so dearly. Eustace gave it its death-blow by remarking, 'As he means to break

my bones when he meets me, he had better do it while it will not cost you anything in mourning, for crape is very expensive.'

Clearly there was nothing left to her but to plump the fact that she had fallen in with, had fallen in love with, and was going to marry, that Eustace Brandreth whose bones Featherston had so recently promised to break; and to make the most obstinate old gentleman in the county retract all his prejudices against a man whom he hated solely and simply for Lucy's own sake. Yet she had, by way of excuse for so absurd a request, nothing better to urge than that, in her infatuation, as he would think it, she had fancied this particular man for her husband when she had all the world to choose from, with the certainty (as, in the little secret vanity of her inmost heart, she made sure old Bob, at least, would think) that there was no one so high, so handsome, so clever, or so young, who would not, provided only he was not burdened with a living wife already, throw himself at her head, on her doing the like at his.

This was, of course, not Lucy's estimate of herself, but what she knew from experience her foolish, old, loving guardian would think of her. This, then, was the unlucky standpoint from which she would have to direct all her artillery of pleading, coaxing, entreating, flattering, admonishing, and coercing, to recover the man whom, up till now, she could have sent to the end of the world by lifting up her little finger.

How many sheets of paper were begun and then torn up, how wofully the blotting-paper was defiled



with scribblings, how many furlongs paced up and down the carpet of the long library, are computations more easily imagined than worked out. The mere statement of facts was a task of unusual delicacy, and, after they had been scheduled, the not less delicate work supervened of saucing them with diffusive explanation and effusive tenderness, crossing dry details and streaking every paragraph; while the entire story had to be ballasted with vehement and repeated injunctions to maintain absolute secrecy. After all, in naming the day to Featherston, she forgot to specify the hour or to refer to having obtained a special license.

The topics took their places, not in their hard chronological order, but as each seemed most likely to tell upon Featherston's susceptible heart, and the whole composition went on meandering like Lucy's conversation in her brightest and most witty mood. At every turn, she implored and prayed him, above all things, to come over with the least delay, and make the acquaintance, the friendship, of the best of men—son of Sir Miles, indeed, but the direct reverse of Sir Miles in every conceivable respect. He was, above all things, himself most desirous to be known to one for whom, from general report, he had so true and deep a respect. Let Featherston only ask Mordaunt, and he would learn what society thought of Eustace. All this could not, under the most favourable circumstances, have been embodied in the concise phraseology of a lawyer's bill; while the belief on Lucy's side that she had put herself in the wrong made her dread passing over any possible argument which could help

to right her. She had, she felt sure, to bring Featherston's eyes back to their own genuine focus, and to place herself on her own old pedestal, before she could invite him to judge her in her new attitude.

The task at last was ended, when Eustace observed, 'Of course you are going to keep a copy.'

'O dear!' sighed Lucy. So he good-naturedly undertook to take it. But as he made her sit by him, and as at every turn she was asked to decipher some gracefully illegible word, she began to think that the relief of his clerkship was more formal than real.

At the very last, tired and confused, Lucy folded it up, placed it in its envelope, and sealed it with that old family seal, with the big Curteis crest, which it was the Squire's rule, in spite of heraldry, to apply to every letter of superior importance. There was nothing left but to direct it. But at this last and most mechanical stage her sorely tried wits fairly collapsed, and when she ought to have superscribed—

'ROBERT FEATHERSTON, ESQ.,  
' Warbury Lodge,  
' Hinderton,'

she wrote instead,

'ROBERT FEATHERSTON, ESQ.,  
' Hinderton Lodge,  
' Warbury.'

Now Warbury, as all Europe and America know, is a rich, bustling, dirty manufacturing town in Lancashire, where the name and fame of Featherston are utterly unknown. So its intelligent postmaster, after

sending the letter travelling over every street of the place, was forced to open it, and there only learned that it was written by one Lucy, dating from 'you know where,' to 'My dear old Magistrate.' Mrs. Foulis, be it explained, had kept up with Featherston, in deference to his affectionate conservatism of nature, a foolish style of writing first adopted towards her guardian when she was painfully working out round-text letters in her copy-book under Miss Harriett's snappish superintendence. She asked herself whether in so important a communication she ought not to adopt a more sensible style and a distinct signature, but her instinct answered her that her doing so would be taken by Featherston to imply cooled affections. So the letter was perforce sent to the Dead Letter Office, in St. Martin's-le-Grand. The acute official into whose hands it came observed that it bore the post-mark of Hinderton, while reference to the County Directory revealed the fact that at Warbury Lodge, nigh that town, dwelt Robert Featherston, a magistrate. The clue was thus complete, and the letter was re-sealed and sent again on its travels, with 'Try Hinderton' scrawled upon it. Safely it did arrive at last, but not till the wedding morning itself. So Lucy had had to dress herself for the early service in a fever of helpless remorse, penetrated with the idea that she had really alienated her dear guardian, and that his previous silence, and then absence, were the just rebuke and punishment of her heinous misdeeds. With this exception, all the arrangements prospered. The special license had been obtained, and the pupil and the clerk went to church; so that Lucy and

Eustace were united, as pre-arranged, upon the selected Wednesday, walked home by the diggings, and ate an early breakfast, so as to be in time for the London express.

## CHAPTER XLVII.

## CLEARED UP.

AFTER all, the loving pair nearly lost their train. Lucy was full dressed and ready to start, when she recollected that she had left her keys in the library, and ran there to fetch them. The room was in much confusion, and as she was leaning over the table, fishing for them among a heap of papers, and Eustace stood first on one foot and then on the other, as the man does who has *Bradshaw* on the brain, they heard a noise behind them. The door burst tumultuously open, and in hobbled dear Bob Featherston, helping himself along with a stick, his face red with excitement and the winter air, followed by Mr. Musgrave, as grim as the executioner in a serious opera. 'Try Hinderton' had found Featherston that morning just as he was shaving, and on reading the epistle he pulled himself up, banned any suggestion of breakfast, and ordered his groom to bring round the waggonette. Half shaved, unwashed, and quite untidy, he scrambled in with much pain and difficulty, for the gout was still about him, and screamed to the lad to drive with the utmost expedition to Mr. Musgrave's office. Till he found himself safely there, anger and surprise had

frozen his thoughts not less than his words, but once on a wooden chair by the fire, he thawed, like Munchausen's horn, with a cataract of complaint. The wrong that had been done to himself, deeply as he felt it, was subordinate in his expostulation to his well-founded solicitude for Lucy's happiness, firmly convinced as he was that young Brandreth must be the counterpart of old Brandreth, and that, by some terrible hereditary doom, the mother had fallen victim to the wiles of the son, even as the daughter had to those of the father.

Musgrave was, both by profession and temperament, cautious and wary, and nothing had ever occurred to give him a good opinion of Lucy's judgment, but much to set him against her; and while he had heard many things of Sir Miles, and all of them evil, the son's character was quite unknown to him; so he capped Featherston's alarms with fresh and more soundly founded apprehensions of his own. They agreed that it was their duty, without a moment's delay, to drive to Yaxley and join in an earnest appeal to the lady to suspend proceedings until titles had been examined and settlements drafted. At the same time they resolved to speak in terms which should convey a politely sharp rebuke for so unwarrantable a neglect of decent and usual confidence. It was decided that Featherston should be spokesman, and Musgrave coached him in his lesson. But when they found themselves in the library at Yaxley, and the flustered old Squire was beginning his harangue, a courteous 'Are you addressing my wife or myself?' from Eustace, soon led to the revelation that any plea for delay had,

through the Archbishop of Canterbury, become an anachronism.

So nothing was left for the guardian but to vent his thoroughly chaotic feelings in a mingled skein of expostulation and prediction, full of innuendoes about 'the gentleman there,' which would have been pathetic had it not been almost grotesque. Mrs. Brandreth let the alarum run down, and then, touching Featherston's forehead with her lips, gently whispered, in the old, soft voice, 'Dear, dear old darling guardian! and have you been ill, and I never knew of it, and you, naughty old love, never would let me know?'

Demosthenes never won a more complete victory of eloquence, although his successes involved a much larger expenditure of words. Musgrave inwardly cursed his weakness for having given place to the soft old dolt, who had so thoroughly spoilt the conversation on which he had relied for righting or else breaking his professional connection with the wayward dame.

Still, Lucy felt desperately awkward, and was proportionately conscious of the duty of seeming at her ease; so, with an effort, she exclaimed, 'Poor, dear Merrie! I hope she won't hate us for keeping her out of her inheritance; for, after all, it will go to her just as soon, whether I am married or single.'

'Her inheritance!' jerked out Featherston, looking sideways at Musgrave to see that he did not go astray in his law. 'I hope she'll get none from you, little as you deserve the luck.'

-. 'Get no inheritance from me! What do you mean

my dear guardian ? Isn't it strictly tied up upon her, as you yourself told me when I sent for you just at that dreadful time to ask the question ? You know how I asked it, to shape my life upon your answer ; and you know how I have acted on that answer of yours ever since.'

'Go to the little 'un. Please Heaven, the boy'll come and settle Merrie's hash for her.'

Angry as Featherston was, these words came from his heart ; for, in truth, Lucy's sudden revelation to him of his old stupidity and carelessness fell like a thunderbolt.

'What boy ? What can this have to do with poor Merrie's succession ? She has not done what she ought by me, but she is my child ; and I have never forgotten that the property is strictly tied up, and that if I would—which God knows I don't—I could not deprive her of her inheritance.'

'Bless the woman, is she daft ?' yelled out Featherston ; and then, as if suddenly recollecting that a gentleman owed social duties of politeness to a lady, even if she had been a few years previously his ward, and still more acutely realizing that her blunder was due to his own old unpardonable trifling with her question, just from a stupid pique about that Swettenham, he continued, in a slow and measured key, and with a self-possessed dignity which he very seldom assumed, still eyeing Musgrave as if his company brought peace and safety, 'Strictly tied up ? Yes, to your eldest son—if you have any sons ; failing sons, and only failing sons, then to your eldest daughter. Does Mr. Brandreth, then, learned in the law as he is,

consider his stepmother as so unquestionably your successor? Ain't I right, Mr. Musgrave?

'Most strictly so,' said the family adviser, with the tone and manner of an undertaker; 'but you have forgotten the husband's life interest.'

The effect upon Mrs. Brandreth of this strange revelation was, in the most literal meaning of the phrase, crushing. Swettenham's dry-as-dust exposition of her father's will had run off her young memory like water off a duck's back, and, in the first wretched years of her girlish widowhood, she had, as she fancied, been told by one whose word was then to her infallible, that the daughter's succession was irrefragable and inalienable. The general belief of all around her had confirmed her in her error; Meriel had traded on the supposition; and now Eustace and she had, like two big boobies, innocently courted and wedded without ascertaining their legal rights and expectations.

These few words of her guardian awakened her torpid memory, and, without fully grasping the complications of the situation, she appreciated the main fact. Even Swettenham's long harangue came back to her like the distant echo of the far-off chimes. She could only squeeze Featherston's hand, bow to Musgrave, and rush into the carriage, Eustace following her with a solemn mien of assumed deference. Of course, no servant was present during the interview, which took place, moreover, in the safe seclusion of the library; and as the gentlemen departed in silence, no one in the house was the wiser for their intervention, only that the lawyer's unwonted appearance at the



instant of the visitor's departure confirmed the idea of Eustace's exposure and downfall.

As Lucy was stepping into the carriage, she handed a scrap of paper to Williams, the butler, saying, 'There are the directions for letters till you hear again.' Mr. Williams knew well that Mrs. Foulis always stopped at the Grosvenor Hotel, where, in fact, he had frequently accompanied her, and, indeed, he had heard her saying that she was now going there. There was nothing, therefore, about the paper to provoke curiosity, or, indeed, to require it to be consulted till there were letters to be posted. Moreover, Williams's mind was at that time much preoccupied with a long and difficult job of bottling a hogshead of madeira which Mrs. Foulis had ordered some time before at Featherston's earnest entreaty, and which required to be finished before the cold weather set in. He had been lazy over it, and now the fruits of his negligence were staring him in the face. So he pushed the paper into his pocket, and went to his bottling; while the coachman, by violent and unwonted whipping of the precious coach-horses, was just able to gallop to the station as the last scrap of luggage was put into the van, and the guard, inwardly fuming at the trouble which fine ladies gave him, was prepared to sound his whistle.

The confusion at the station was so great, and the ill-tempered impatience of the guard—a new servant, not yet educated by Yaxley tips—so emphatic, that Eustace had to snatch up Lucy, as a nurse might do with a big child at a crossing when a hansom was bearing down upon them, and pitch her into the car-

riage with much indifference whether she alighted on her head or her feet. There was a witness of this unceremonious proceeding whom neither of the newly wedded couple had perceived—a stout woman in rusty black—no other than Mrs. Rees, who had gone to enjoy the rare treat of greeting a guest of her own due by that train.

The expected arrival had failed, and the old lady was standing upon the platform to blow off her vexation before returning homewards, when her prying eyes descried the woman, who was Mrs. Foulis to her, in Mr. Brandreth's arms. Bursting with the great discovery, she waddled homeward in the joy and pride of having at last established a clear case, on personal evidence, of open, indelicate levity against her avowed and prudish enemy. In her preoccupation she absolutely cannoned against Mr. Lidyard, who was stepping out of a cottage full of a sad tale of rustic folly and too-late repentance which had been poured into his ears.

Without so much as apologizing for her rude clumsiness the dame exultingly screamed, 'Pretty doings in your parish! pretty doings, indeed, Mr. Vicar! I advise you to look after your womankind a little sharper than you do, or there will be scandal, Mr. Lidyard—there'll be scandal which you won't like to hear!'

The good man had been left by the morning's events in a rather excited and nervous state, and now he was completely taken aback, for the words of Mrs. Rees left no doubt upon his mind that, in some unaccountable manner, and perhaps by the girl's own blabbing, in spite of her assurance, the ill-natured old busybody

had got wind of the secret of which he believed he alone, besides the parties implicated, were cognisant; and which he had determined should never go beyond his own breast.

So he was for once completely thrown off his guard, and blurted out, 'I fear you have too much cause for your reflection; but you should be forbearing, and consider how much there is to extenuate the fall, grievous as I own it to be. She is so young, you know, and inexperienced, and through the carelessness of a silly aunt, by whom she was brought up, she is so unaccountably ignorant.'

It was now Mrs. Rees's turn to be surprised, both at Mr. Lidyard so readily catching her meaning, and at the inexplicable line of defence to which he betook himself.

'But,' she rejoined, without stopping to draw breath, 'really, I did not expect this from you, Mr. Lidyard, who are, we all know, no respecter of persons. I grant the ignorance, and I blame the aunt as severely as you can do, but I never found much inexperience at that shop; and I never thought of calling a woman, who is rising forty, young.'

'Jenny Worsfold rising forty?'

'Jenny Worsfold, man! Why it's Lucy Foulis. Haven't I just seen with my own eyes the Honourable Mrs. Foulis allow herself to be jumped up like a baby, and hugged, and pawed, and hustled into a railway carriage by a strange man, who tumbled in after her,—that young dandy, I believe, who has just been stopping in that odd way at Yaxley? There was nobody else in their compartment; that I saw with

my own eyes, Mr. Lidyard—only Mrs. Foulis and her beau.'

Lidyard now perceived the situation, and, as his wits returned to him, the necessity of obliterating his imprudence about Jenny Worsfold by startling the old backbiter shone out distinctly as he quietly answered with a touch of jauntiness not usual in his demeanour, 'Quite right too. I am glad to hear it.'

'Glad to hear it! Glad to hear that your patroness, the woman you are always cramming down our throats as Sarah, and Rebekah, and Rachel, and Susanna, and Dorcas, and, and '—and then making a desperate shot at some other Scriptural name—'as Delilah, has been so grossly misconducting herself in a public place! Mr. Lidyard! Mr. Lidyard!'

'I said I was glad, and I say still that I am glad. I am always glad to hear that a woman is not ashamed of receiving the attentions of her husband, even in the presence of Mrs. Rees.'

'Woman, husband—who *do* you mean?'

'I mean, Mrs. Rees, that upon this very morning, empowered to do so by the special license of the Archbishop of Canterbury, I joined in holy wedlock Eustace Brandreth and Lucy Foulis. You saw them proceeding to London to spend their honeymoon, and upon their return they will, I am sure, be much honoured to receive your visit of congratulation.'

For, we believe, the first time in her life Mrs. Rees was absolutely dumfounded. Usually speaking, the crafty lady expected her faithful drudge, Miss Turner, to attend upon her and take her lofty pleasure. This, astounding intelligence, however, created an emergency

such as was never before recollected to have occurred since her declaration of war against Yaxley. So she turned her back upon the Vicar without so much as the pretence of any good-bye, and hurried off to the spinster's humble lodging, bursting with her big news. The two were long closeted together, and when at last their cabinet broke up the only conclusion which they could reach was one which was laid down with statesmanlike decision by Mrs. Rees: 'Well, we must wait and see.' 'That's very true,' was the response; 'for so many things will be sure to turn up.' The crones would have been much comforted had they been told that they had actually stumbled into the knowledge of the great event before Mrs. Brandreth's—as we must now call her—own household in her own home of Yaxley.

Williams, once at work in the cellar, and forgetting that it was November, took off his coat, and so caught cold as he loitered in that drafty place. It was natural that he should have imperatively required at dinner to blow his nose, so he pulled out his pocket-handkerchief in a hurry, and with it the paper, which fell on the floor. As he picked it up his eyes fell upon these words:

*'Directions for Letters till further orders.*

*'Mrs. Brandreth's letters to be sent to the Grosvenor Hotel.*

*'Mr. Brandreth's the same.'*

'Lor'!' he holloaed; 'I knew it was coming; but to think it's come this way! No breakfast, nor favours,

nor nothing! Did they go to the Register's Office, I wonder?

'More likely going,' snapped Mrs. Kershaw, the cook. 'And not before it is wanted, too, I warrant.'

Williams, a friendly and loyal soul, was really shocked at this coarse imputation upon his mistress's character, but he had not lost hopes of Mrs. Kershaw's savings, and could not risk an open breach; so he had to content himself with an admonitory, 'Oh, Mrs. Kershaw, how can you?'

'I mean what I say, and I say what I mean, and I'll not stand your putting me down as you always do, Mr. Williams. Mrs. Foulis may be Mrs. Foulis, or Mrs. Thingimbytight, but I'm an honest woman, you know I am, Mr. Williams, in spite of all your sneers and your insolence.'

Williams did not expect such an avalanche of scorn. One more incautious word, and the Kershaw savings might be gone beyond recall, so he contented himself with a half-gasped 'Good gracious!' and broke up the party with cheese half eaten and the scarcely tasted beer still creaming in the tumblers.

Thus did the faithful household of Yaxley observe their lady's wedding-day in fasting and sullen discontent.

## CHAPTER XLVIII

## UNMASKED.

As soon as they were settled in the railway carriage, Lucy fell upon her husband's neck in a paroxysm of tears, and sobbed, with much iteration, 'Dear, poor Meriel! how I have wronged her!'

Eustace let her passion run down, and then answered, in the tenderest tone, and very calmly:

'No, my dearest love, you have not wronged Meriel at all. You have only respected your father's intentions. If we have no son, the inheritance will still be Meriel's. If we have—please God—a son, it will go where I am sure your father would best have wished it to go. It is clear, by what those men said, that he hoped you would have a son to be his heir, and that he only put in any possible daughter, failing that son, as a *pis aller*. No man of your father's views could have wished such a break of continuity in the Curteis line as two successive females.'

'You really think so?'

'I am perfectly certain: and I say more—you are to-day fulfilling your father's wishes as you never did before.'

On this, the excitable woman redoubled her tears, though now they were tears of joy—tears such as she had never before shed in all her lifetime—and sobbed:

'I am so happy, then—so relieved. We can live happy now, and not think we have wronged my poor child.'

All things have an end, even crying; and so, when Mrs. Brandreth got calm, she said, 'Ought not Meriel to know this? It will make such a change in all her prospects.'

'Certainly, if my worthy father has not ferreted it out already. If he has, though, he's not likely to tell her. He won't trust a woman's tongue, with all the Jews ready to pounce on him.'

'But, dearest, I told her it was not so in my letter, which she will have only got this morning.'

'That was very awkward, my love; but you really must not mind writing another letter, and putting the thing straight.'

'But that would be still more awkward, would it not?'

'More awkward, most awkward—awkward in every degree of comparison, *Lucia cara mia*, but absolutely and indispensably necessary. Our characters would be irretrievably damaged in the eyes of all the Phlyarium, and Rees and Turner would cut us, if we were to leave our dutiful Meriel for a single day longer under the delusion that she had only to bury you to become Marchioness of Carabas. It is very disagreeable, I know, and I pity you so much for the job; but the first amusement of our wedding-day, when we find ourselves in town, must be for you to write to Meriel, and explain very prettily how matters really stand.'

'Well, then, you must compose the beastly letter, and I'll copy.'

'*Convenu.*'

• The letter was accordingly written at the Grosvenor



Hotel, and, like the former one, directed to the watering-place on the South Coast of England, whither Sir Miles and his bride had betaken themselves. But the footman, a Yaxley lad unversed in London ways, and much perplexed at suddenly finding himself at the beck of a master, forgot to put, as ordered, upon the after-time epistle a second stamp, and so it was kept back till the morning mail. On the following day, as the Baronet and Meriel came down to a late breakfast, she saw a letter lying upon the table, and called out :

‘I declare, here’s Mater’s answer. She has written pretty quickly. I wonder what she says.’

‘Capitulates at discretion. Invites her dear son to her bosom, and gives him free quarters at Yaxley for the rest of his days.’

‘Amen!’ replied Meriel, and then read :

‘YAXLEY, — of —, 18—.

‘MY DEAREST MERIEL,

‘It is due to my great, though little appreciated, love for you, and it is also due to the connection now subsisting between Sir Miles Brandreth and myself, that I should inform you that I am about to be married on Wednesday, the day preceding the one on which you ought to receive this communication. The gentleman whom I am going to marry is Mr. Eustace Brandreth.

‘As my property is strictly tied up upon you, this event can make no difference in yours or in Sir Miles’s future prospects. This is the consideration to which,

as far as I can gather from your last letter, you and he attach the most importance.

‘Your most affectionate Mother,

‘LUCY FOULIS.’

She stared, and he stared; he stared, and she stared. Neither of them had heard of Eustace’s visit to Yaxley, and it had never come into either of their heads to conceive the possibility of an acquaintance between him and Mrs. Foulis. At last Sir Miles broke silence.

‘The last sentence in Mater’s letter shows her to be a woman of the world. The thing in itself cannot affect our prospects, and with you working on Mater, and me on Filius, we may do something yet.’

The town at which they were staying was one in which the second post followed quickly upon the first delivery, and at this point their conversation was interrupted by the maid tramping in, and putting another letter into Lady Brandreth’s hand.

‘Mater again, I declare! I wonder whether the match is off?’

So again she read:

‘GROSVENOR HOTEL, LONDON, S.W.,

‘— of —, 18—.

‘MY DEAREST MERIEL,

‘I take the earliest opportunity of correcting a misapprehension which I make no apology for having led you into, as I entertained it myself, and as Mr. Brandreth married me under it. After our marriage, we had an interview with my trustees, Mr. Featherston and Mr. Musgrave, and they have explained to

me that the reversion of my property upon you is contingent upon my having no son. In case I have one, it would come to him. Under either alternative, my husband, supposing him to survive me, will have a life-interest in the property.

‘Your affectionate Mother,

‘LUCY BRANDRETH.

Meriel fell upon the nearest chair, gasping for some moments, and then burst into a long, wailing, despairing cry. Who shall attempt to penetrate the thoughts of that wretched woman at this moment? She had already lived long enough with Sir Miles to see through the selfish hypocrisy of his pretended love, and though her feelings were not active enough for hatred, she was already thoroughly indifferent to him; and now all that she had thrown aside, her mother’s love and that delicious home at Yaxley, had passed away—for ever, probably, passed away—from her. Had she stuck to her mother, very likely that mother never would have married again. She was well aware that her husband had only married her for her expectations, and she dreaded some brutal revenge for his disappointment.

Sir Miles for some minutes leaned in silence against the chimney-piece, and then said, ‘A nice mess, young madam, you have brought me into, with your pretences and your lies, you and your precious Mater! My curse on the old hag, and on your simpering, sniggering fool’s face! But, my fine madam, you’ll have to work to earn your bread! You can’t sing, and you can’t act, and you can’t dance, and you’re not strong enough to turn a mangle. I think you had

better sweep a crossing, and I dare say Mr. and Mrs. Eustace Brandreth will give you a broom, if Mr. Featherston and Mr. Musgrave assure them it's in old Curteis's will to do so, and I'll give you a halfpenny whenever I go by. The crossing by the "Phly" is just now vacant, and there's plenty of errands there to run for the young men—to the opera-dancers; d'ye understand? And perhaps you may be taken on at the opera at last, as candle-snuffer.' There the old ribald's rage actually choked him, and he paused, panting, with glaring eyes and burning cheeks fingering the poker, as if in doubt whether he should not throw it at the head of the terrified woman.

In dread of personal injury, she stammered :

'Oh, don't be so violent, Sir Miles; I suffer equally with you from this cruel deception. And perhaps it may not be so bad; if there is no son, it will come back all the same.'

'All the same, my Lady Brandreth! I am infinitely obliged to you for your consideration. All the same, after I am under the sod, and after Sir Eustace Brandreth has had his enjoyment of it! It will come back, I dare say, all the same to that venerable dowager, Meriel, Lady Brandreth, with her false teeth, and her false front, and her painted cheeks, and her palsied old head shaking on her shrivelled shoulders. And Meriel, Lady Brandreth, I dare say, will find some fine young fellow to lead her to the altar, and then put her in her coffin with the least possible delay, for the pickings he expects to get when she lies in the earth by the side of her dearly beloved and ever-lamented Sir Miles. Lady Brandreth, I

owe you my gratitude for your considerate consolation.'

There are some friends who overwhelm you with their verbose correspondence when you are in prosperity, but leave you unnoticed in the days of adversity. 'Issachar Brothers' did not belong to this unfeeling class. They communicated with Sir Miles on seeing the announcement of Mr. Brandreth's and Mrs. Foulis's marriage; and though the experienced dodger fenced with them awhile, he had at last to confess to the real state of matters, and ere long the Baronet, under their guidance, had to tread the way which leads into the Bankruptcy Court, which he had for so many years, by so many marvellous escapes, avoided.

Meriel, now thoroughly crushed, wrote to her mother a letter of abject remorse, detailing her wretched situation, not only from her destitution, but from the unfeeling treatment of her husband, who paid off the frustration of his scheme upon his less guilty accomplice—less guilty because she had been more tool than partner of his roguery.

Mrs. Brandreth was fairly overcome, and Eustace was touched. So far as her determination went to help her daughter, he thoroughly sympathized with her benevolence, but he insisted upon arrangements which should protect Meriel alike from Sir Miles and from herself. At last it was settled that the offer should be made to Meriel that, on the conditions of her separating from a husband who was only too anxious to be rid of her so long as she represented no money value, and of her waiving the claim to return

to Yaxley, which she had rather importunately urged, she should be allowed a pension of 600*l.* a year, paid quarterly, to her separate use.

The intimation was added, that supposing she conducted herself for a sufficient time to her mother's satisfaction, and in the case of the birth of a son, the borrowing powers which existed might be used in order to secure to her a capital sum, settled on trusts, such as Mrs. Brandreth might direct, which should represent that income.

In consideration of the disagreeable fact that Sir Miles was her son-in-law, and to buy his consent to Meriel separating from him, Lucy further insisted on letting him have three hundred. Eustace heard the suggestion with little inward pleasure, for his reason told him that it would be certainly ill spent, but filial piety forbade him to dissent; only he stipulated that the gift should be revocable, and conditional on the Baronet living out of England, and also that the payments should be quarterly.

The cringing gratitude with which the wretched old man received the bounty showed how low he had fallen. He assured his 'dear boy' that in requesting him to live abroad, his excellent lady had but forestalled his own deliberate intention, and that he had formed plans for earning an honourable subsistence, if not of retrieving his fortunes, and possibly even repurchasing his patrimony; only the first step was the difficulty, from the want of the smallest sum to start with, and that this most seasonable generosity enabled him to take it. Eustace appreciated his father's ever-green assurance, but was silent.

It is certain that for a short time some of the most villanous sherry with which public-houses of the lower grade were able to poison their customers was supplied by a new Spanish firm of Sant' Onofrio and Brandreth. Then came a smash, and the discovery, due to the treachery of the Irish Italian, that Sir Miles had made such an unjustifiable use of the names of his son and that son's wife, that the discontinuance of the pension was very seriously threatened. Mercy, however, prevailed over justice at Yaxley. But of the pension the larger part had been, in spite of all Eustace's precautions, pledged to creditors. The broken-down adventurer was just able to save enough to secure what was, according to Spanish notions, a bare subsistence, and crawling off with this to Majorca, died at Palma of a fever caught from causes which would be no mystery to an English physician conversant with sanitary science.

## CHAPTER XLIX.

### THE MIGHTY FALLEN.

It was not to be expected that the death of Sir Miles could very deeply afflict her who had now become Lady Brandreth. But she said to her husband :

'I am sorry that I never once had the opportunity of seeing your father in all my life, just for curiosity's sake.'

'You did better than seeing him,' answered Sir Eustace ; 'you kept him alive by your generosity.'

when I was, I fear, tempted to be harsh and unfilial.'

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." Poor Meriel! what will she do now, I wonder!

Separated as they were, Meriel still felt that being the wife of such a man as Sir Miles Brandreth was an intolerable burden. A better and a braver woman would have asserted her personality, and made the world forget him in remembering her; but such a being as Meriel could only sulk and blink. At length, set free as she was by that fierce outbreak of malarious fever, she resolved, in a fretful, selfish sort of way, to do something to reinstate herself in the world's respect. She had been informed that Lady Foulisville, in her widowhood, had betaken herself to a small lodging in Bath, where she depended upon the grudging services of a succession of slatterns whom a stingy and nagging landlady was always hiring and then discharging. It was a lodging in which a lady's-maid who had saved a little money might ensconce herself, and then very reasonably complain that she was starved by a grasping curmudgeon, and worried to death by the insolence and the dirt of a lot of grimy sluts. Yet the once-magnificent Countess felt that she had escaped greater calamities when she reached this squalid asylum.

In fact, by a strange coincidence, the sinking of that punt and the submergence of the cherished cup in the black Lough had presaged the downfall, with ominous rapidity, of all the Foulisville fortunes. Her scene with Robbins, and the loss of a companion who



had been, with all her faults and her treachery, very useful to Lady Foulisville, threw the nervous invalid back with a dangerous relapse, and it was many weeks before she could be moved, and that under the eye of professional nurses, to Eaton Place. All display, all gaiety, during the following season was quite prohibited.

The Earl, crapulous, dyspeptic, objectless, more and more helplessly abandoned himself to drunkenness. At last, one evening, he rolled into the Phlyarium, and there, in spite of the friendly expostulations of Colonel Mordaunt, who offered to accompany him home, he insisted on sitting down at an écarté-table, at which he was soon joined by Captain Pringle. The other members present looked at each other—more they could not do. At the moment when an unlucky trump left him loser of a sum which it would have been inconvenient to advance in his brighter days, he fell senseless on the table in a fit from which he never rallied, although he lingered to be carried home, and to die in Eaton Place. Suddenly and irresistibly the crash came, both upon that house and upon Fontarabia. The Countess, in the days of her splendid folly, had, as we know, mortgaged the reversion of her jointure, while of the ready money and extra allowance which her husband bequeathed to her not one shilling could be realized. All that she had to keep her alive was a small annuity purchased by the sale of the trinkets which the mercy of the creditors left in her possession.

The enterprising brewer, who already rented the shooting, and was first mortgagee, foreclosed, and is now sole owner of the Irish property. By his muni-

ficence, the once wretched town of Foulisville has become one of the neatest and most comfortable villages in all Ireland ; and as he is a man of enlightened taste, he is working up the remains of the old castle into a worthy mansion of Ballybanaghermore, at once archæological and comfortable. Of Fontarabia, or Diana's Island, no man speaks, except, in moments of absence, Mr. Ruddock, who has retired to the village inn, having married the housemaid who gave such timely advice about McSwinny's boat. The miller's man, after all, proved faithless to her charms, and the kind butler could not bear to see her in such distress.

The 'Foulis Cup' is a very model hostelry, and the proud brewer boasts that he is certain that if the Bishop of Peterborough were to see it, he would say that in providing so respectable a place of refreshment for high and low, he had done more to promote the cause of temperance than if he had staved his vats in, and stumped the country at the back of Sir Wilfrid.

With Ruddock only one fault can be found, and that is, a persistent and growing habit of inaccuracy, which has caused the legend of Sir Miles Brandreth and the love-lorn damsel to grow in his mouth to mythical dimensions as he retails it to the tourists, to whom the island and its comfortable quarters are equal attractions. The new owner and his family much affect the Lough, which is now traversed by a fairy-like screw steamer, which his lady, famous as the best amateur steerswoman in the United Kingdom, insisted on naming the *Meriel* ; while a tablet, set up at Iniscormac, on a spot where it does not spoil the landscape,

records in a spirited sonnet the protracted trials of the shipwrecked Baronet and his future wife. Flavoured as these lines are with irony, and intended for the initiated, they would lead an ignorant and prosaic stranger to imagine virtues in the couple with which only poetry could endow them. But the rhythm is smooth, the style epigrammatic, and the idea graceful; and, after all, Sir Miles Brandreth is not the first adventurer whom a sonnet has raised into a hero. The author is Mr. Fiennes, who happened to revisit that part of Ireland on one of his sketching tours, and being invited to Ballybanaghermore, fell in with, wooed, and won the brewer's pretty second daughter.

The new Lord Foulisville has to earn his own livelihood, and he does so without complaint. He wrote to his father-in-law at Bradford to ask if there were any opening in his business or elsewhere for a clerk, and compelled the confession that things for the present were not going on as the old gentleman could wish. So the brave young man and his trusty wife retired to America, on the plea of pursuing the study of natural history in the still wild tracks of the great 'lone land,' but really in the expectation of his being chosen Principal of that institution which has been founded at Simcoe, Canada W., in rivalry of Mr. Cornell's stupendous creation in the neighbouring Republic. He pressed his mother to accompany him, but she feared to encounter the Atlantic, and betook herself to Bath, in a vain search after cheap comfort.

Plausibility had always been with Meriel a cardinal virtue, and as she believed that the world looked coldly,

upon her, she felt an inward summons to retrieve herself. She was now a model of staidness in her deportment, and, indeed, much inclined to be shocked indiscriminately, and to moralize without respect of the society she was in. But the memory of her escapade haunted her like a household goblin. Satisfactorily as the story could be explained to anyone who had the patience to listen, it was a long one, and the whole affair, coupled with Sir Miles's own reputation, had thrown a Bohemian hue over her. Now, as if by a special interposition, the way seemed open to her to retrieve herself on the very lines of her aberration, and by the instrumentality of the one person who could from authority speak up for her. The total wreck of the Foulisville fortunes was the gossip of every club and every dining-table, and in face of so great a calamity society showed itself good-natured, and pitied when it might have moralized. She had also been told that the unhappy dowager, whose health had never been restored since the dreadful night upon the mountains, and upon whom the shock of the ruin had come quite unexpectedly, could not be expected to last more than a few months longer. It would therefore be, she reasoned, a remunerative sacrifice of time if, still so very young, she devoted herself for that short period to earning the reputation of having been the friend in need, the generous consoler, the guardian angel of her affectionate aunt, the once-proud Countess of Foulisville, in this day of her deep distress.

Full of her artful scheme, Meriel went to Bath, and there put up at the White Lion, Ensconced in that

well-known hotel, she set to work writing a letter of hardly less importance than her former letters to her mother, and with no Sir Miles to help her. It was ceremoniously directed to Delicia, Countess of Foulisville, and couched in the deferential third person. In it Meriel, Lady Brandreth, begged to recall herself to the recollection of her dear and much-injured relative. She would gladly have paid her respects in person, but she could not be sure how far her presence would be acceptable. She felt most deeply her conduct in past times to her dear aunt—more, however, from weakness than from intentional ingratitude, but still most culpable. If her aunt would only forget and forgive, and allow her penitent niece to constitute herself her companion and helpmate, it would be her life's duty to repair the wrong which she had committed. She scarcely knew how to add what she was going to say, but her aunt would understand her meaning when she told her in strict confidence that her dear mother's generosity had made her more than comfortable in her solitary condition.

The offer was one which it required much moral courage in a person brought down like Lady Foulisville to reject. She was very lonely, and a companion would have been acceptable. She was poor, ailing, and frequently in want of the commonest comforts, which her previous habits of life, her age, and her very feeble health, had made necessities to her. But she felt compelled to decline the temptation when it came before her in the shape of Meriel Brandreth. Meriel's conduct to her might be, and she felt it was, forgiven; but—although soft-hearted people are very apt to

make the mistake—forgiveness is one thing, and companionship another; while, as Lady Foulisville knew, the constant presence of Brandreth's widow could not but bring back recollections which she had neither the strength to face nor to reject. The old, kindly, straightforward Delicia Driscoll seemed to come to life again, after many years, in that feeble, trembling woman, so prematurely aged. She answered Meriel very affectionately, but very decidedly, declining the offer, although she felt sure that it had been made from the best and kindest of motives.

Shortly after Meriel's advance, Lady Foulisville received very pressing offers of assistance from Lucy. The communications were most delicately worded, and accompanied by the strongest assurance that when she had written so sharply to her sister-in-law she had been wholly unaware of her dangerous illness, with which she had recently and casually become acquainted—confessed, in fact, by Meriel—and had, therefore, naturally concluded that Lady Foulisville must have been privy to Meriel's unjustifiable behaviour, while it gave infinite pain to be compelled to add that the tenor of the answer which she received did not clear up the misunderstanding.

The poor, humiliated lady felt on reading these kindly, truthful words, that but for Miss Robbins's terrorising, following on her malign counsels, she would have written the explanations which the trust which had been reposed in her by Lucy required from one woman of honour to another, even if she had not been her sister-in-law. But her having been weak, cowardly, and mean was to her startled conscience no

excuse—rather it made the offence worse. No, Delicia Driscoll could not take favours from, and owe her bread to, the sister whom she had so grievously wronged. ‘As I made my bed,’ she thought, ‘so must I lie.’ So she refused Lucy’s assistance as persistently as she had done that of Meriel, though with very different feelings.

Her time was drawing near its close. She was a woman much to be pitied, with many good impulses and the germs of some fine qualities, marred and distorted by faults, of which vanity was the chief. She had been early confronted with characters and events which she was not clever enough thoroughly to understand, while just sharp enough to form superficial impressions. She was not brave or true enough to grapple with the difficulties which her husband’s temper, extravagance, and intemperance were always heaping round her ; and, unpopular as she personally was, society did her less than justice for her weak, though well-intended, endeavours for its amusement. Placed in a less showy position, and married to a man whom she could have loved and trusted, she might have led a useful, an honoured, and a happy life. Her list of failures was now complete, and in the cold, squalid solitude of her gloomy lodging she found that time for looking beyond self which she never could grasp in her giddy days of prosperity. She profited by her misfortunes, and in the months still vouchsafed to her she learned to fix her desires on the land where there is no failure, but life and light and love ineffable.

## CHAPTER L.

## GREAT GRIMSBY AT LAST.

AFTER all, Meriel did not make her journey to Bath in vain. The next room to her at the White Lion was occupied by an hypochondriacal old couple from North Lincolnshire, who had come for the benefit of the waters, and who would not be content without bringing with them their own doctor. An inn staircase is an excellent introducer, and Meriel soon made acquaintance with this gentleman, Mr. Gilderdale, who had arranged, so soon as the present engagement was over, to step into a respectable old practice which he had just purchased at Great Grimsby, having saved money for the speculation by a long and laborious career at Epworth. This practice carried with it a roomy house, and Mr. Gilderdale had made up his mind that the house needed a mistress to make it cheerful. Mr. Gilderdale, a confirmed bachelor, as his friends at Epworth used to think him, was a simple, old-fashioned man, such as can now be only found undiluted in Lincolnshire, so much of Norfolk as lies outside royal influence, Suffolk, and the eastern parts of Essex, and over considerable portions of Cheshire, Salop, and Herefordshire. He was kind, but stiff, with that independent, middle-class English character which, in the seventeenth century, equally thought itself conferring a favour on King Charles and on the Lord General by taking the respective parts on one or the other side of the Civil War. In a word, he was intensely aristocratic and he was intensely democratic.



He respected the aristocracy (which, in his eyes, included not only baronets, but knights) with his whole heart, but he could not love beings who were to him as the gods of Epicurus (had he even heard of them), removed far above sympathy with, or knowledge of, their fellow-mortals. It was, therefore, nothing short of a revelation to find a real 'My Lady' familiarly accosting him, inquiring after his health, prosing about the health of patients, for whom he cared more than he did for his own, and who never failed to season her talk with some moral maxims, which, absolutely commonplace as they were, sounded in the ears of the pleased practitioner, when falling from Lady Brandreth, like the words of the Son of Sirach. He declared, as he sipped his evening tea with his worthy patrons, that he could not have fancied that a lady with such high connections as her ladyship could have been so affable, or could take so real an interest in all which affected the welfare of her fellow-creatures. They chuckled benevolently, and observed that, as Mr. Gilderdale had confided to them that he was on the look-out for a wife, he might as well try his chance with her ladyship. At first he was incredulous, and even shocked at the idea of his addressing one so highly placed and still in weeds; but after the conversation had been repeated two or three times, he mustered a desperate courage, and opened his heart to the young widow. To his great surprise, he was readily accepted, but upon one condition, over which there was to be no parleying nor compromise. She was well aware, she said, that in all legal documents she would have to sign herself Meriel Gilderdale, and

she knew that when she was to be presented at Court upon her marriage, it must be as Mrs. Gilderdale, but at all times, and in all places else, she must be, without cavil or equivocation, Lady Brandreth. Mr. Gilderdale was proud of his own name, but he thought that 'a lady' would not be a bad professional investment, so he consented without demur.

Lucy was on this occasion informed of the coming marriage without delay, and it gave her an opportunity of carrying out what had long been a secret desire of her heart. Badly as Meriel had behaved, she was still her child, and she believed that Meriel was as sorry for her misconduct as it was in her nature to be sorry about anything. So long as Sir Miles lived, there had been a material objection to the ostensible reconciliation, involving, as it did, visits which must either have been extended to him or have given him plausible excuses for complaint and intrigue. If the mother could receive the daughter, the son should have received the father. But now he had gone to his account.

So Lucy wrote, not without inward amusement, to 'dearest Merrie,' to say she hoped she was not too late on this occasion in asking her to bring her intended to Yaxley, and that she trusted the sight of Mr. Gilderdale would induce her to give her assent to a marriage with the first son-in-law whom it would ever have been her good fortune to have seen in the flesh. Meriel jumped at the invitation, which Mr. Gilderdale declared was exceedingly polite.

Samuel Gilderdale duly reached Yaxley, and for some weeks the visit was an endless source of quiet

amusement to the courtly Eustace and to Lucy, who could hardly restrain the impetuosity of her spirits over her happy lot. She felt that she was at last living a complete existence. The void of which she had all along been only half conscious was now filled up, and she appreciated what had been wanting. Now there was no longer any want; love, all compact of sympathy and respect, at last was hers. To come to details, she felt that under Eustace's protection she was on the highway to repairing the intellectual isolation which had weighed so heavily on her. The ungrateful daughter, too, had come home, and could look forward to at least a quiet and prosperous, though homely life—a life, in short, of as good a quality as Meriel was fit for. In such a mood Lucy was predisposed to enjoy the burlesque of a Gilderdale alliance. Better laugh than cry over the go-down of the once heiress of Yaxley subsiding into the apothecary's wife at Great Grimsby.

Meriel's lover was as respectable as he was priggish, while the self-complacent denseness with which he was always blundering out observations most inappropriate to the history of the family with which he was about to be connected increased as he got more at his ease with geometrical progression. In vain would Meriel pout, stamp, frown, wriggle, and mutter. In measured, quacking tones would he prose about the excellence of widows who kept their first estate, the infatuation of engagements on short acquaintance, and the perils of men who dared, with grey hairs on their heads, to join themselves to youth and folly. This solemn repertory of platitudes had so completely

become part of the good man's nature, that it would keep coming out, like water running along a leaky pipe, in spite of the incongruity between his language and the time and place of its utterance. Meriel, too, was a sight to have made the most austere of men laugh, and the most stolid of women jest, struggling to be at her ease—light, airy, and irresistible—in the presence of her mother and of Eustace, and swathed in crape and bombazine. At last the time arrived when those whom with a sneer she learned to call 'the parents' had to make their decision known.

'Very odd,' quoth Lucy, 'but we know that every Jack has his Jill.'

'And every Jill her Jack,' answered Eustace.

There was nothing more to be said; but Lucy was fierce and inflexible on one point. Heaven and earth might come together, but not one farthing of her money should Meriel see if she dared to commit the atrocious indecency of marrying before her year's mourning was out. The bereaved one sulked and muttered under breath about Mater's ridiculous, old-fashioned prejudices; but in such cases the contributor of six hundred a year has the powers of the master of forty legions, and all resistance was a transparent sham, without even the moral support of the bride's beloved, for in a difference of opinion upon a matter of etiquette between their two 'ladyships,' for both of whom he had such unlimited deference, Mr. Gilderdale could only hold his tongue. So the half-promised settlements were finally made; and when the twelve-month and a little over had run out, Mr. Lidyard

officiated for the third time at a family marriage from Yaxley.

Meriel was, after all, very happy with her grey-headed husband. Her house at Great Grimsby was of red brick, and built in the year of the battle of Blenheim ; so she painted the outside woodwork white, and the inside olive green, gave Mr. Morris a large order for papers, cut her own hair short, very laboriously compelled it to frizzle, put on a sacque, declared herself artistic, and instituted weekly tea-parties. It is something, after all, to be Lady Paramount, even of Great Grimsby.

## CHAPTER LL

### RIGHTED.

IT may be supposed that the credit of the very business-like arrangements carried out by Lucy, both in regard to Meriel and Sir Miles, and then upon her daughter's marriage with Gilderdale, must have been exclusively due to the legal acumen of Eustace ; so we must, in justice to that very quick-witted woman, explain that the suspicion is baseless. The fact is, that Lucy took the earliest opportunity after her return from her wedding trip to invite Mr. Musgrave to Yaxley to luncheon, or to dine and sleep, as he preferred, alleging her desire to speak to him about important matters. We have seen how justly affronted Mr. Musgrave was at Mrs. Foulis's persistent neglect of his many years' faithful and successful services. Of

receiving the note he sought his wife in their cosy little drawing-room, and read it to her in a tone of concentrated contempt, adding, 'The woman, after humiliating me for years, and throwing herself away upon the son of that notorious fellow, finds out her mistake, and expects me to trot over like a poodle dog, and pull her out of the mess which she has made for herself. She shall write her commands, and her Majesty's post shall bear my reply to her.'

Mrs. Musgrave was a meek but a courageous woman, and her husband respected her straightforward honesty. So she simply answered, 'Then all I can say, Musgrave, is, that after having been in the right these many years, you will at last put yourself in the wrong if you send any such message to an employer who has the right to claim your personal attention. I should despise you if you broke bread at Yaxléy, but I never could defend you if you refused to go to Yaxley.'

So, overruled by the court above, the sulky lawyer had no alternative but to sit down and write a note in solemn language, expressing no regret, but only inability for refusing Mrs. Brandreth's hospitality, and appointing himself for the following Wednesday, at eleven o'clock.

Musgrave comported himself formally and answered haughtily at the commencement of the interview, but Lucy contrived gradually to lead the conversation into the consideration of her personal position, and compelled the lawyer to put her upon her own defence, a task which was not difficult with a man who was  
• angry, and who looked on the woman before him as a

fool. Thus mistress of the situation, she apologized so gracefully, referred with such touching delicacy to those early misfortunes of education, association, and unblessed marriage, which had left her exceptionally unversed in the details of business, but which she knew now she ought to have mastered, and expressed with such evident sincerity her high appreciation and gratitude for his ability, probity, and zeal, so successfully shown in furthering her interests, that the kind heart which really beat under his stern exterior was mollified. On reaching home again, he threw himself into the arm-chair by the fireside of his drawing-room—a luxury in which he never indulged except upon some rare occasion of good humour—and actually confided to Mrs. Musgrave, with many thanks for her sound advice, that he had never before understood Mrs. Brandreth. So near an approach to a compliment Musgrave had on no previous occasion been ever known to lavish on a client; and from that day his communications with Yaxley became confidential, and ultimately ripened into cordiality in proportion as his fair client showed herself an apt pupil in the law of real and personal property.

For about two years after Lucy's marriage it seemed probable that Sir Miles's amiable forecast to his crushed wife on the morning of the great disillusioning might come true. At last, however, the arrangements had to be made for the christening of the child, who was thenceforward to be Robert Curteis Brandreth. His first name came from his godfather, Featherston, who had in the meanwhile become Eustace's nearest and dearest friend, and who was at the time much elated

at having been selected to propose the candidate when he so unexpectedly walked over the course on a chance vacancy for the county. The other sponsors were the Lord-Lieutenant and the elderly wife with whom he had comforted himself after his rebuff by Mrs. Foulis; in fact, they and Featherston were the only relations with whom either of the Brandreths had any acquaintance. Young Lord Foulisville was out of the question, particularly as the child was born to supplant the Earl's own cousin in lands and minerals. Sir Miles had long since quarrelled with his first wife's family, who were not so much as known by sight to Eustace; and Lucy's uncle, the officer of militia who had forced her father into his marriage, found it convenient shortly after that event to sail for America, after which he was lost sight of.

The news of the birth of the heir to Yaxley was received with universal congratulation through all the country which lay within the influence of that house. All persons who were old enough to remember more than his bare name said, according to their temperaments that it was so lucky, or so happy, or so providential, that Squire Curteis had time and strength, during the sufferings of his last short, sharp illness, to tie up that noble inheritance for his daughter's son.

There were only two dissentients. Miss Turner trotted about and turned up her eyes, croaking posthumous regrets over the wrongs of the long-forgotten Miss Harriett Curteis. Her poor dear friend would have felt is so; she who had always watched with such tenderness and wisdom over her charge, and who had • been so happy when the marriage with poor Captain



Foulis was settled. And people would talk so bad of him when he was gone and could not stand up for himself. He was a rough diamond perhaps, but he had a very kind heart, and oh ! so in love with Lucy Curteis. He was ready to fight every man at a ball who dared ask her to dance. Miss Harriett would turn in her grave if she heard how Captain Foulis's daughter had been disinherited for the son of a briefless barrister and the grandson of a swindler. The ingratitude shown to her poor dear old friend had been shameful, drummed out as she had been, and banished, for having so faithfully and fearlessly done her duty, and fulfilled the charge her own brother had put upon her with his dying lips. Miss Harriett, she was sure, would have been a living woman now if she had not been hustled out of her home by, she might say, her own child, neglected and left to die in misery ; and she'd have prevented what had happened. It was shocking to think of one so young having been that unnatural to the dear soul, who had been like a mother to her, and brought her up from her cradle like her own child ! For her part, she always had said, and she always would say, that there was more behind it all than people would see, with the facts staring them in the face. Why did that Featherston wait till the poor silly young thing was not herself—as everyone knew she was off her head when Miss Meriel was born—to spirit away Miss Harriett, just as if she had been forced into a post-chaise in the dead of the night, like those ladies in romances ? And who could tell who was put round her at Cheltenham, where very queer doings went on, as everybody knew ? Besides, she always had seen, and she

wondered folks were so blind they never would see, how odd Mr. Swettenham was, dying just when he did. Not as she could stand up for Mr. Swettenham's rudeness and want of common feelings, but, leastways, he was old Mr. Curteis's friend, and knew what he meant. And then for that Musgrave to come in—nobody knew from where, nor what he was. Nobody had got round him; nobody knew what he thought or did or meant. He never would even go to Yaxley—the haughty, ill-conditioned old wretch he was. She wondered how much fingering of her own money from the coal-shop and the iron-shop King Musgrave allowed Madam Eustace Brandreth. A precious picking of it went, she'd warrant, to that old viper, Featherston, and to Musgrave's stuck-up wife. And how much Lidyard fingered anybody could see with half an eye, with church, and parsonage, and schools, and hospital, and all that trumpery.

Mrs. Rees was wiser and more circumspect. She took a simple, statesmanlike view of the situation, relying on general principles, and keeping clear of personal insinuations which might lead to awkward recrimination. She was utterly at a loss, she said, to justify the proceedings of that over-praised old Squire on any principles of religion or morality. He had exhausted his duties to his Maker and his country, as husband, parent, and citizen, by leaving the world which he was quitting possessed of a daughter. Mrs. Rees could defend, indeed—or, rather, she should have demanded it—the Squire endowing that daughter with his worldly goods; but there her approbation ended, and his subsequent conduct raised in her the strongest

feelings of aversion and indignation. It was violating the order of nature, it was transgressing the decrees of Providence, it was rebelling against the law of the Almighty, it was blaspheming the Ten Commandments, and the Beatitudes, and the Creeds, and the Thirty-nine Articles, to say that that daughter should not have the power of using her own according to her own responsibility, even of wasting Yaxley with riotous living if she pleased. Heaven frowned on the notion of there being any excuse for a man who was only a grandfather to take any steps to prevent his child from performing a mother's part to her children, even if that mother's part were leaving them to die on the dunghill. She would like to know what a man's grandchildren were to him, compared with their parents. God never meant a man to care for his grandchildren more than for the rest of mankind. It was absurd to say a man had any right to protect the grandchild, even if that grandchild honoured him, and kept within his balance, against that middle generation who were the child's own parents. She said so, for she knew what principles were, and she meant to stick to principles even when they were troublesome, although the man of that middle generation might be dragging his father to the grave and sending his son to the workhouse by his debaucheries. Every generation was meant to cut the one above it off with a wall of brass. This was a general principle, and not to be interfered with to meet particular cases. Then, supposing the grandchildren were the black sheep, and their father the respectable Christian, how could principles stand it? They might spit on their grand-

sire, and kick their father ; or, in the other case, what principle was there that would be strong enough to prevent their father or their mother, either or both, from turning them out of doors, for undutifully and unfilially loving and respecting their grandfather ? But, in every alternative, Providence had said that grandfathers were only created to stand by and see fair play and no favour for the squabbles on both sides of the next generation and of their children.

The neighbours were so ill instructed in the principles of political philosophy that they were at first unable to grasp the scope of the lady's criticisms, and when some glimmerings of their meaning dawned upon those rustic minds, more in pity or in boredom than with any deliberate intention of bringing Mrs. Rees to a saner mind, they parried, rather than grappled with, her fantastical assertions. The most common answer which she received was that if her principles had unhappily been the law, Captain Foulis might, during his month of marriage, have smashed up the Curteis inheritance, and left his poor wife a beggar ; and they were told, in reply, that perhaps it would have been better if he had been able to do so, rather than that so monstrous a perversion of the laws of creation should have taken place as the Brandreth baby profiting by old Curteis's will.

At last Lidyard had the temerity to suggest that it seemed to him that a father, in restraining his own son from doing wrong to his offspring—which was absolutely the case propounded by Mrs. Rees, only regarded from another point of view—was most completely, and for the most practically useful ends,

exercising that very liberty of a parent over the next generation to him which was the fundamental principle of her theory.

Nothing could be more meek than his manner, or more deferential than his words; but his daring not only to differ from her omniscience, but to offer reasons for differing, put the Pythoness into an ungovernable fury, and she declared that the existence of men apparently religious and honourable, but holding such opinions as those of Lidyard, was, in her eyes, one of the most inscrutable mysteries of Providence. The Vicar beat as hasty a retreat as he could, and the neighbourhood instinctively took the hint not to add fuel to the flame by noticing the rhodomontades of one who was generally supposed to have a twist in her reasoning powers.

At last, on the Sunday afternoon but one after her rencontre with the Vicar, Mrs. Rees rushed full cry at Dr. Arlett as he was walking home from church with wife and family, chewing the cud of the sermon by Mr. Lidyard, which had struck him as peculiarly sensible and well reasoned. In it the preacher had drawn the lesson of the folly of purposeless change from the Divine anathema pronounced upon the man who removed his neighbour's landmark, showing that the prohibition had a moral no less than a purely legal application. Serenity was not the most apparent of Dr. Arlett's virtues, and he was unconventional enough to lose what little temper he might have then possessed at one, lady though as she was, whom he always detested, thus rudely interrupting his engrossing thoughts. So he turned round upon the old gossip,

and called her, without circumlocution, a mischievous, meddlesome chatterbox, who was ready for any fandangle of her own to destroy what thousands of wise heads could never in hundreds of years set up again.

‘That’s all very fine of you, Dr. Arlett, whom everybody knows to be first toady of the grand people up there. Much you think of us, poor inferior creatures. We’re the dirt of the earth under your feet. But I tell you what, Dr. Arlett, the people wont stand this insolence and this tyranny much longer; they’ll show what they’re made of. And when England is really roused, and a policeman or two is shot, and a prison or two blown up, as I have been told they did in America when they wanted to put down the Mormons, your spick-and-span new member of Parliament there, who owes his bread to the fancy of Foulis’s widow, and has to pay for every guinea with a kiss, will have to think a bit more than he now cares what he’s voting for.’

‘What *is* she saying?’ inquired Mrs. Arlett, rather terrified, as her flagging attention was arrested by the vehement gestures and strident scream of the infuriated vixen.

‘She is talking, my dear, of killing the policemen and wrecking the prisons.’

‘Good gracious!’ gasped the kindly lady, whose store of available historical references was mainly confined to a well-thumbed set of the Waverley Novels, ‘what can have put her on such horrid thoughts? She must be in the thick of the *Heart of Midlothian*.’

‘Never mind her,’ chimed in the Vicar, who joined the couple as the fuming dame bounced off. ‘She really does not know what she is saying from one day to the other. The fact is that she likes to be top-sawyer, and can’t abide being left so many years in opposition. If the gracious lady up there were to send for her, I’ll be bound she would kiss her hand in gratitude, and declare as vehemently as she now declaims, that she never really meant anything. It was all said to storm the fortress; and once inside of it, Mrs. Rees would forget and forgive all round, and perhaps write apologies to the persons she had most insulted.’

Dr. Arlett shook his head, and replied :

‘It is very charitable in you, my dear Mr. Lidyard, to say all this; but, in being so charitable to Mrs. Rees, you are rather uncharitable to all of us whom she has been rubbing up the wrong way by her unbridled tongue. The scars of unjust accusations are not washed away by rosewater, and the world treasures the injurious imputation which its author might be too glad, if he could, to obliterate at the sacrifice of his too little prized consistency. When a man, or a woman either, has caricatured and misrepresented me, and then comes smiling to say that she or he never really meant all those unpleasant reflections, which were only risked in order to filch from me some stool of advantage, I am apt to think, in the pride of my heart, that this confession only makes matters worse by stripping the injury to myself of even the colourable excuse of sincerity on the part of my adversary.’

The christening of the young heir, partly by accident,

and partly by arrangement, fell on the third anniversary of the day when Eustace and Lucy talked nonsense about Adam and Eve in the old summer-house. The weather was very fine for the season, and an outdoor fête was adventured without anyone being the worse for the indiscretion. Friends and neighbours, rich and poor, were all bidden, and all entertained with a hospitality, a tact, and a heartiness which more than wiped away any residue of sore feelings which might have survived from the recollections of the hasty and all but clandestine wedding. Lidyard, after all, proved a true prophet, for even Mrs. Rees and Miss Turner were for a moment mollified, as Lucy, following the happy promptings of a sudden inspiration, had sent to each a beautiful silk gown, with a charming note expressing the hope that nothing would deprive her on so happy an occasion of the company of so old a friend.

‘Well,’ said Bob Featherston, as he lazily subsided on the bench in the memorable summer-house, between the Vicar and the lawyer, and glanced at Punch performing under the liquidambar-tree, ‘scandalously ill as the dear little woman treated us about the wedding, it has all turned out for the best.’

‘I agree,’ replied the man of law, with a solemn inclination of his wise head; ‘but she did not know the good she was doing.’



## POSTSCRIPT.

I MUST take leave of my readers in a few words of personal reference. Public criticism has been very friendly to this, my maiden novel. Still some opinions have been advanced regarding it, upon which I desire to offer a respectful explanation addressed to those who have perused the story. I have been called cynical, but this is an imputation to which I must, in all good humour, demur. A cynical writer, as I understand the phrase, is one who does not believe in goodness, and accordingly leaves the victory to the powers of worldliness and selfishness. My scope was to show worldliness, selfishness, and fraud, not victorious, but, on the contrary, doing their worst, only to be worsted in the long run, not by the counterplotting of goodness, but, in spite of my good people's own blunders, by that which some will call natural causes, and others the finger of God. For this end cynics had to exult upon my panel, as demons in pictures of St. Anthony's temptation. But surely this exhibition and dissection of that evil being, a cynic, no more makes me a cynic myself than prosecuting an assassin makes the counsel a murderer. Perhaps the charge means that I do not sufficiently mix my characters, so that my cynics are too salient. But surely like gravitates to like, and if they were very worldly at Fontarabia, and in Eaton Square, they were very much the reverse at Yaxley, between which places the story is approximately divided. By

way of key to the plot, I translated, for motto, those well-known lines of Euripides, which stand upon the title-page.

Again, I have been told that I linger too long over the pedigrees of my characters, but this misdeed is kindly attributed to the inexperience of a novice. I cannot accept excuses for what I am conscious was an act of wilfulness. One of the objects of my composition was to point to the existence of what I may call moral atavism as a key to human action. I dare say my story has in consequence suffered in liveliness, but I should not have been true to the convictions which made me choose the vehicle of fiction, if I had not presented my theory in an early place and a conspicuous form.

There is one more feature of the novel to which, at the risk of seeming egotistical, I must refer, as the machinery necessary to work it out occupies much of my available space, besides having notably influenced the story. I proposed to myself, in relation to the remaining plot, to present a widow who should, while clever and practical in situations calling for both qualities, preserve the freshness, if not some of the inexperience of maidenhood — one who should after marriage and motherhood have reverted to her girlhood, and out of girlhood have developed into that *grande dame* who in most cases carries matron stamped upon her brow. It was, I hope, not an unworthy literary ambition to study originality, and yet adhere to probability, by constructing a natural sequence of events which should lead a widow and a mother up to being wooed with the feelings on her side of a girl's first love, yet with no derogation from the morale of her first marriage, so far as her conduct was concerned.

**BILLING AND SONS, PRINTERS, GUILDFORD.**





