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HARRY COVERDALE'S COURTSHIP

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AND ALL THAT CAME OF IT

BY

FRANK E. SMEDLEY

Author of "Frank Fairlegh," "Lewis Arundel," "The Fortunes of the Colville Family," etc., etc.

LONDON
RICHARD EDWARD KING, LIMITED
106, 108, 110, TABERNACLE STREET, E.C.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY RICHARD EDWARD KING,
TABERNACLE STREET, E.C.

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CHAPTER I.

TREATS OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE.

HARRY COVERDALE stood six feet one in or out of his stockings, rode something over eleven stone, was unusually good, or, as young ladies term it, interesting-looking, numbered six-and-twenty years last grass, and lived at Coverdale Park when he was at home, with five thousand a-year to pay for his housekeeping, of which he spent about two. At the happy moment in which we have the pleasure of introducing him to our readers, he was not at home, at least not literally, though figuratively he appeared to be making himself so very decidedly.

He had arrived in London that morning, and had dined at his club, and strolled down to the Temple afterwards, where, finding that his friend, Arthur Hazlehurst, was expected to return every minute, he had taken possession of his vacant chambers, lighted a cigar, laid hands on a number of "The Sporting Magazine," and flinging himself at full-length on the sofa (sofas do occasionally appear in the chambers of the briefless), looked, and was, especially comfortable. He was not, however, allowed to enjoy his position long in peace; for scarcely had he established himself, when a man's footstep was heard running hastily up the interminable staircase, while a quick eager voice, addressing the small boy who did duty for clerk, exclaimed,

"Eh! a gentleman whom you don't know lying on my sofa and smoking my last cigar! that's coming to the point and no mistake; cool though—I wonder who the deuce it **can** be—not a client, of course.—Ah! Harry, my dear old boy, this is an unexpected pleasure; why, I'm as glad to see you as if you were a client almost. I thought you were in the Red Sea, man, dredging for defunct Egyptians, or chipping old blocks with Layard, or some such slow thing; when did you return?"

Arthur Hazlehurst, the originator of the foregoing speech,

was an old college chum of Coverdale's, who, when his friend had taken his degree (a highly respectable one) and started on an enlarged edition of the grand tour, had gone to read with a special pleader. Having by a special slice of luck contrived to acquire a knowledge of the law from that process, instead of the more usual result of learning how to spend five hundred per annum out of an allowance of two, and possessing, moreover, an acute intellect, and a fair portion of industry, Arthur Hazlehurst was looked upon as a rising young man. In appearance he was, for a fair man, rather handsome than otherwise, but if his talent for rising could have been exercised bodily, as well as professionally, it would have been as well for him, for his friend had the advantage of him in stature by some three inches; his manner and way of speaking were quick and eager, and he had altogether a wide-awake look about him, as though he regarded society at large as perpetually in a witness-box, and was always prepared to cross-examine and be down upon it.

"I returned to England some three weeks since," replied Coverdale, abstracting the cigar from his mouth, and lazily flipping off the ashes from the lighted end with his finger; "but I went quietly down to the Park, and have been plodding over accounts with the agent ever since. Shocking bad tobacco they make you put up with here; you shall try the glorious stuff I've brought back from Constantinople—your Turk is the boy to smoke. So you've become learned in the law, I hear, since I went abroad."

"Eh! Yes, I believe I've picked up a thing or two," returned Hazlehurst, modestly; "I've found out the great secret of life; the next move is to make the knowledge pay, and that's not so easy."

"I didn't know there was a great secret to find out," observed Coverdale, stroking his curly black whiskers; "the rule of life seems easy enough to me—make up your mind what you want to do, and then quietly do it—that's my recipe."

"A very good one for you, my dear fellow; you've only to put your hand in your pocket, and, as your money rattles, difficulties disappear; but we're not all born to £5,000 a-year, worse luck; fathers have flinty hearts, and even the amenities of the nineteenth century have failed to macadamise them—'I've given you an expensive education, sir, and I expect to see you turn it to account.' That's about the style of blessing we inherit now-a-days; however, my secret of life is this: everything has a culminating point, and the dodge is to hit upon it yourself, and bring others to it, with the least delay possible; in these four words—come to the point, is embodied the whole philosophy of existence."

"Well, yes, I daresay there is something in it," returned Coverdale, meditatively; "it never exactly struck me before,

but there's a beautiful simplicity about it that I rather admire —a little too railroadish, perhaps, unless a man's in an awful hurry; you lose the bright sunny peeps and the jolly old road-side ale-houses of life, by rushing so straight to your object."

"Sunny nonsenses," was the uncourteous rejoinder—"none of your old slow-coaching days for me; life's not long enough for dreaming—Parr's life pills are a swindle, and Methuselah died without leaving his recipe behind him; so come to the point, say I."

"Though I won't promise to adopt your philosophy for a permanency, I'll act upon it for once, at all events," replied Coverdale, smiling (and a nice, genial, pleasant smile it was too, showing a white, even row of teeth, and lighting up a pair of large, dark, intelligent eyes, and making the "smiler" look particularly handsome). "So to come to the point, I'm here to enlist you in my service for what the women call a 'day's shopping' to-morrow: I've no clothes to my back, no horses to ride, no dog-cart to knock about in—in fact, none of the necessaries of life; then, having benefited by your advice and experience, I mean to carry you off to Coverdale for a crack at the rabbits; thank goodness! they've got the game up and the poachers down, since I've been abroad; that was the only thing I made a row about when I came into the property. Why, there are no preserves like the Coverdale woods in the county, and yet my poor uncle never had a pheasant on his table. Things are rather different now, my boy, and my only real sorrow at the present moment is that there are two whole months to be got rid of before the first of September; well! what do you say to my proposal?"

"Done, along with you," replied Hazlehurst; "but on one condition only, viz., that when we've polished off the rabbits, you'll come with me to the Grange, and make acquaintance with those members of the worthy family of Hazlehurst whose virtues are as yet unknown to you."

"You're very kind; but you've a lot of sisters, or she-cousins, or some creatures of that dangerous nature, haven't you? Of course I mean no disparagement to the ladies of your family in particular! but 'pon my word, my dear fellow, I cannot stand women; in Turkey they shut 'em up, you know, so that I'm not accustomed to them; I've given up flirting and dangling, and all the rest of it, long ago; it's very well for green boys, but at my time of life a man has something better to think about." And, as he spoke, Coverdale flung the end of his cigar into the empty fireplace, pitched "The Sporting Magazine" unceremoniously on the table, and, looking at his watch, continued, "It's eight o'clock; I took a couple of stalls for the 'Prophète' this morning, on the chance of catching you; so jump into a pair of black trousers and let us be off."

"Not a bad move," replied his companion, "I'll adorn and be with you in——"

"'Einem augenblick,'" suggested the grand tourist, philologically.

"If that's German for the twinkling of a bed-post, yes!" was the rejoinder, and in less than ten minutes the friends descended the staircase arm-in-arm, Hazlehurst leaving strict directions with the small clerk to inform anyone who might ask for him that he was summoned to attend a very important consultation.

The next day was devoted to the purchase of Coverdale's necessaries of life. Owing to Hazlehurst's perseverance in bringing all the tradesmen to the point, a vast deal of business was transacted, and before nightfall Harry was the fortunate possessor of a spicy dog-cart, a blood mare to run in it, who could trot fourteen miles an hour, and really did perform ten miles in that space of time, equally to her own satisfaction and to that of her new master—two showy saddle-horses, the best being up to fifteen stone with any hounds—a double-barrelled gun, by a famous maker—a brace of thoroughbred pointers—and a whole host of the minor "necessaries," animate and inanimate, all of which, put together, made a considerable hole in a thousand pounds; but, as Harry sapiently observed, "a man could not live in the country without them, so where was the use of bothering."

On the following morning the two young men and all the purchases, horses included, started by the Midland Counties Railway, and dinner-time found them safely deposited at Coverdale Park, a fine old place, which with its picturesque mansion, beautiful view, and goodly extent of wood and water, field and fell, was as desirable a property as any English gentleman need wish to possess. After dinner the gamekeeper was summoned; he was a sturdy, good-looking fellow, who had filled the post of under-keeper in the time of Admiral Coverdale (Harry's deceased uncle, an old bachelor, to whose invincible hatred of matrimony his nephew was indebted for his present position). Harry, before he went abroad, had discovered the head-keeper to be in league with a gang of poachers, receiving a percentage on all the game they sold; he had accordingly dismissed him, and elected his subordinate to fill the vacant situation—an experiment which had proved eminently successful.

"Take a glass of wine, Markum; this is my friend Mr. Hazlehurst. We mean to have a slap at the rabbits to-morrow; so be here at eight o'clock, and then we shall get a good long day: any more poachers since we caught those last fellows?" And as Coverdale spoke he filled a large claret-glass to the brim with splendid old port and handed it to the keeper, who received it bashfully, and then, scraping with his

foot and ducking his head twice with an expression of countenance as of a sheep about to butt, replied,

"Your 'ealth, Mr. Coverdale, sir—your 'ealth, gents, both," tossed it off at a draught—"there ain't been no reg'lar poarchin' a-goin' on, sir," he continued, setting down his glass as if it burned his fingers, and then jibbing away from the table as though he had shied at it; "but that 'are young Styles has been a shootin grabids on Wild Acre farm, and seems to say as he considers he's a right so to do."

"Styles? who is he?" inquired Harry, quickly.

"Well, he's the son of old Farmer Styles, and he used to shoot just when and where he liked in the Admiral's time, and that's how he fancies he's got a sort of right, do ye see, Mr. 'Enry—that is, Mr. Coverdale, sir."

"Rabbits are not game, so you can't touch him on the score of poaching, Harry; but, to come to the point, if he's on your land without your permission he's trespassing, and that's where you can be down upon him," interrupted Hazlehurst, sententiously.

"Then I shall have the law o' my side in pitching into him, I suppose, sir?" inquired Markum, eagerly.

"No, no, my good fellow; I don't wish to quarrel with any of my tenantry about here," exclaimed Coverdale, hastily; "they'll be breaking pheasants' eggs, and playing up all sorts of mischief—no: we must have nothing of that kind—I'll speak to the young man myself; there's a quiet way of doing these things, as I must teach you all. Good-night; remember eight o'clock to-morrow": and Markum, looking sheepish and rebuked, quitted the room, to tell the tale in the kitchen, with the following reflection appended: "And if that 'are young Styles happens to be as cheeky to master as he is to other folks, it strikes me the quiet dodge won't pay."

CHAPTER II.

AFFORDS A SPECIMEN OF HARRY'S "QUIET MANNER" WITH HIS TENANTRY.

By two o'clock next day Coverdale and Hazlehurst had walked for some six hours, and conjointly taken the lives of seven couple of rabbits, ten unfortunates having fallen victims to the new double-barrel, while Hazlehurst had disposed of the remaining four. A sumptuous luncheon, with unlimited pale ale and brown stout, awaited them at the gamekeeper's cottage, to which repast they did ample justice.

"I tell you what it is, Harry," exclaimed Hazlehurst, setting down an empty tumbler, "if I eat any more luncheon you will have to send me home in a wheelbarrow, for to walk

I shall not be able; as it is, I feel like an alderman after a city feast."

"In that case you'd require a very capacious wheelbarrow, and I should pity the individual who had to trundle it. Come, finish the bottle—you won't? then I will. And now we'll be off. It strikes me fatigue has something to do with it as well as the luncheon; you've been smoke-drying in London, young man, till you're out of condition," returned Coverdale, laughing, as he remarked the stiff manner in which his friend rose and walked across the cottage.

Another hour's striding through high grass and fern proved the correctness of this assertion; for Hazlehurst, unaccustomed to such severe exercise, began to show unmistakable symptoms of knocking up. His friend observed him with attention. "You really are tired, Arthur," he said, good-naturedly; "you'll be fit for nothing to-morrow, if you walk much farther. Go back, Markum, and send one of your boys for the shooting-pony; let him bring it to us at the bridge foot. I am going over Wild Acre farm next: I shall try through the spinney and round the large meadow, so you can cut across and join us again in half an hour; and, Markum, wait one moment: What sort of a person is this man Styles? How should I know him if I should happen to run against him?"

"Well, he be a tall, broad-shouldered, roguish-looking chap, rather an orkard customer for to tackle, Mr. Coverdale, sir, and he generally have a sort of cross-bred, lurcher-like dog along with him, if you please, Mr. 'Enery, that is, Mr. Coverdale, sir"; and so saying, Markum started at a swinging trot to execute his master's wishes.

"The fellow looks as if he could go on at that pace for a fortnight without turning a hair," observed Hazlehurst, pausing to wipe his brow; "I never saw such a cast-iron animal."

"He's at it every day, and that keeps him in good order," replied Coverdale; "but I've walked him down before now, and should not wonder if I were to do so to-day; I'm just getting what the jockeys call my 'second wind,' and am good for the next four hours at least. Ha! there's a rabbit sitting; pull at it when I clap my hands."

"It's too long a shot for me," replied Hazlehurst; "bag him yourself."

Thus urged, Coverdale brought his gun to his shoulder and drew the trigger, but the cap was a bad one, and would not go off, and his second barrel being loaded with small shot, in the hope of picking up a landrail (of which Markum had reported the probable whereabouts), the rabbit skipped away uninjured. It had not proceeded ten paces, however, when it sprang into the air, and rolled over dead. At the same moment the report of a gun rang out from behind some low

bushes, and a lurcher dog dashed forward and picked up the defunct rabbit. Coverdale's face flushed with anger, and hastily exchanging the defective percussion cap for a sound one, he raised his gun with the intention of shooting the dog; but, though quick-tempered, Harry was a thoroughly kind-hearted fellow, and a moment's reflection caused him to relinquish his purpose; recovering his gun, he muttered, "Poor brute, why should I kill it?—it's not his fault, but his master's."

As he spoke a tall figure rose from behind the bushes whence the shot had proceeded, and, whistling to the dog, took the rabbit from him, and put it in the pocket of a voluminous-skirted shooting-jacket.

"That's the redoubtable Mr. Styles, 'in propriâ personâ,' I imagine," observed Hazlehurst.

"And a cool hand he seems, too," returned Coverdale, scowling at the delinquent, who stood quietly reloading his gun, as though he were "monarch of all he surveyed"; "however, I'm not going to lose my temper about it; it's a great object with me, just now, to conciliate all the neighbouring farmers."

"Then are you going to give him 'carte blanche' to spifli-cate rabbits when and where he likes?" inquired his friend.

"Not a bit of it," was the reply; "I mean to put a stop once for all to such practices; but there is a quiet way of managing these matters quite as effectual as putting oneself into a rage."

"Don't be a week about it, that's all—come to the point at once, there's a good fellow, for I want to knock over another rabbit or two before my Bucephalus arrives," rejoined Hazlehurst.

Thus urged, Coverdale advanced towards the stranger, and, slightly raising his wide-awake as he approached him, said with an air of Grandisonian politeness: "Mr. Styles, I presume?"

"Yes, young man, my name's Styles. What's yourn?" was the unceremonious reply.

"He does not know me," thought Harry: "now for astonishing him—rather! My name, sir, is—ahem!—Harry Coverdale, of Coverdale Park, at your service." He paused to watch the effect of this announcement. "Ha! I thought so, he trembles, he is—why, confound the scoundrel! I do believe he's grinning—he can't have understood me. My name is Coverdale, I say, sir."

"Well, then, Mr. Coverdale, if that's your name, the sooner you take yourself back to Coverdale Park the better I shall be pleased, for I'm a shooting rabbits, and your jabbering scares the creeturs," was the astounding rejoinder.

Coverdale could scarcely believe his ears; however, he contrived by a strong effort to subdue his rising passion, as he

answered, "If, as I imagine, you are the son of old Farmer Styles, of Wild Acre, you must be aware, sir, that the farm your father rents is my property, and that the rabbits you are shooting are my rabbits; I must, therefore, trouble you to hand over the one you have just killed, and to abstain from shooting entirely, except on any occasion when I may invite you to join me, or otherwise give you permission."

"I knows this, that father and I have got a thirty years' lease to run, and that when I want a day's rabbiting, I means to take it, whether you likes it or whether you doesn't. Why, the old Admiral never said a word agen it; but he was something like a gentleman, he was!" was the surly answer.

Harry's eyes flashed fire. "Do you mean to insinuate that I am not one then, fellow?" he asked in a voice that trembled with passion.

"And suppose I does, what then? feller!" returned the other, insolently.

"This!" was the reply, as, springing hastily forward, Coverdale struck Styles so violent a blow on the cheek with the back of his open hand, that he staggered and nearly fell; recovering himself with difficulty, and holding one hand to his injured jaw, he muttered with an oath, "If it wasn't for the confounded guns, I'd give you the heartiest thrashing ever you had in your life."

"Or get one yourself," replied Harry, now thoroughly roused; "but, if you're at all inclined that way, don't disturb yourself about the guns; if you will discharge yours, I and my friend will do the same by ours; it's only wasting a charge or two of powder"—and, as he spoke, he fired both barrels in the air. Styles paused a moment to assure himself that no stratagem was contemplated, and then discharged his gun also, while Hazlehurst, having glanced at his friend with an expression of the deepest astonishment, hastened to follow their example. At this moment the clatter of a horse's hoofs was heard, and Markum, the keeper, cantered up on the shooting-pony. "Ah! that's right!" exclaimed Coverdale, who appeared suddenly to have regained his good temper; "tie the pony up to a tree and come here. Hazlehurst, you will pick me up if I require it; and Markum will do the same kind office by Mr. Styles, and I don't intend him to have a sinecure either," he added, "sotto voce."

"You don't mean seriously you're going to fight the fellow?" inquired Hazlehurst.

"Indeed I do; and, what's more, nobody shall prevent me, unless he shows the white feather," was the positive answer.

"But—but you'll get knocked about so: besides, the brute's a bigger, heavier man than you, and as strong as an elephant. Suppose he should injure you," remonstrated Hazlehurst.

"He may if he can," was the confident reply; "why, Arthur,

you're as nervous as a girl; this is not the first time you've seen me use my fists, and I've taken lessons from Ben Caunt since the old Eton days."

"Go in and win, then, if you will make a fool of yourself," rejoined Hazlehurst, moodily, as he helped his friend to divest himself of his shooting-jacket and waistcoat.

"Now, Mr. Styles, I am at your service," remarked Coverdale, addressing his antagonist politely.

"So you mean fighting, do you?" inquired Styles, half incredulously.

"I mean to try and give you the thrashing with which you have threatened me," was the reply.

"And if you do, I'll promise never to shoot another rabbit without your permission; but if I'm best man, blest if I don't smash 'em when and where I likes," was the rejoinder.

"It's a bargain," returned Coverdale; "so come on." As his antagonist bared his brawny arms and muscular throat, Harry felt that, if his skill were at all commensurate with his strength, he had cut himself out a somewhat troublesome task, and he began to own, in his secret soul, that Hazlehurst was right, and that he was about to do a very foolish thing. However, he had great confidence in his own skill and activity, and to these qualities did he trust to relieve him from his difficulties. If those amiable philanthropists, whose ranks, once numbering a large majority of the aristocracy and gentry of the land, have, as civilisation has spread, grown "small by degrees and beautifully less" (we allude to the "Patrons of the Ring")—if these humane and enlightened individuals expect a detailed account "à la 'Bell's Life,'" of the "stunning mill between the Coverdale Cove and the Stylish Farmer," they must be doomed to the pangs of disappointment; for unfortunately neither our taste nor our talent lies in that direction. Suffice it then to relate that Mr. Styles' science proving an article of the very roughest country manufacture, while his antagonist went to work with the skill and composure of a finished artist, Coverdale soon perceived that he had only to stop or avoid his opponent's blows, to keep cool, and to abide his time, in order to insure him an easy victory; and the event justified his expectation. After six rounds—in the course of which the farmer acquired two beautiful black eyes, while Coverdale had not got a scratch—time was called, and the seventh round commenced. Styles, smarting from the punishment he had received, and irritated to the highest degree by his adversary's coolness, rushed on so furiously, and hailed such a shower of blows upon his opponent, that Coverdale found it would be impossible entirely to ward them off; and, not wishing to be disfigured by a black eye or flattened nose, was forced to exert himself in real earnest to endeavour to bring the battle to a conclusion. Watching his opportunity, therefore, he drew back, stopped a terrific

hit cleverly with his left hand, and then, flinging out his right arm straight from the shoulder, and bounding forward at the same moment, he struck his antagonist a crashing blow, which, catching him full on the side of the head, sent him down like a shot.

"That has terminated the case for the defendant, I expect," observed Hazlehurst, sententiously, as, breathless and with bleeding knuckles, his friend seated himself on his extended knee; "he had had nearly enough before, and he has got rather too much now. You hit him an awful crack."

"It was his own fault," returned Coverdale. "I did not want to hurt the man if he would have fought quietly and like a civilized Christian, instead of a raging lunatic. But he's only stunned; see, he's reviving already. Confound the fellow, his head is as hard as a cannon-ball, to which my knuckles bear witness." So saying, Coverdale rose, and resuming his coat and waistcoat, approached his fallen foe, who, with his head leaning against Markum's shoulder, was staring vacantly at the sky.

"He's as unconscionable as a hinfant, Mr. Coverdale, sir; you've been and knocked his hintellects slap out of him, which only sarves him right, and is what all poachers 'andsomely desarves," remarked the gamekeeper, cheerfully.

"I know what will be the medicine to cure him," exclaimed Hazlehurst, producing a pocket-flask and applying it to the lips of the vanquished Styles. At first the patient seemed inclined to resist: but as soon as he tasted the flavour of the contents of the pocket-pistol, he raised his hand, and, pushing aside Hazlehurst's fingers, drained it to the bottom.

"Gently, my friend," remonstrated the young barrister, "that's Kinahan's best whisky; fortunately I supplied the vacuum created at luncheon with spring water. Ah, I thought as much; that the true 'elixir vitæ,'" he continued, as Styles, relinquishing the flask, sat up and began to stare wildly about him.

"Styles, my good fellow, how do you feel now? You were stunned, you know; but I shall be very sorry if I've hurt you," observed Coverdale, good-naturedly. As he spoke, Styles turned and regarded him attentively, measuring his tall, active figure with his glance from top to toe. At length he muttered, "Well, I didn't think he had it in him, that I didn't": he then rubbed his head with a look of thorough perplexity, once more fixing his eyes on his late opponent, as if he were some strange monster wonderful to behold. Having apparently satisfied himself that he was a real flesh and blood man, and not some new-fangled, cast-iron boxing-machine, he turned to the gamekeeper, observing "Markum, lend us a fin, old man, for I feels precious staggery-like, I can tell you. Your guv'nor hits hard." On obtaining the required assistance, he rose, not without difficulty, approached Cover-

dale, and holding out a hand somewhat smaller than a shoulder of mutton, said, "Shake hands, sir; you're a gentleman; and, what's far more in my eyes, you're a man every inch of you, and I humbly begs your pardon for insulting of you."

"Say no more about it, my good friend," returned Coverdale, heartily shaking his proffered hand; "we did not understand each other before, but we do now, and shall get on capitally for the future I don't doubt."

"I shan't disturb your rabbits again, sir," continued the penitent Styles, entirely subdued by Coverdale's hearty manner; "and if the creeturs should do any damage to the crops, why I know a gentleman like you will bear it in mind on the rent-day."

"Certainly," was the eager reply; "my object now is to get up the game, and no tenant who assists me in this will find me a hard landlord."

And so, after an amicable colloquy, they parted the best friends imaginable; Styles observing, as he turned to go, "I did not think there was a man living who could have sewn me up in ten minutes like that; but you are unaccountable quick with your fists, to be sure, Mustur Coverdale."

"Pray, Harry, is this to be considered a specimen of your 'quiet manner' with your tenantry?" inquired Hazlehurst, dryly, as he bestrode the broad back of his shooting-pony.

His friend coloured as he replied with a forced laugh, "Well, I must confess that for once in my life I a little lost temper;—but you see, old boy," he continued, bringing his hand down upon Hazlehurst's knee with a smack which caused that delicate youth to spring up in his saddle—"but you see, I managed to conciliate him after all."

CHAPTER III.

HAZLEHURST PLEADS HIS CAUSE AND WINS IT.

"AND the worst of it is the fellow's right—what a bore life is—confound everything!" As he gave utterance to this sweeping anathema, Harry Coverdale lifted a shaggy Scotch terrier by the ears out of an easy chair wherein it was reposing, and flinging himself on the seat thus made vacant, waited disconsolately till Hazlehurst should have finished a letter which, with unwontedly grave brow, he was perusing.

Having continued his occupation till his friend's small stock of patience was becoming well-nigh exhausted, Hazlehurst closed the epistle, muttering to himself, "Well, they know best, I suppose—but I don't admire the scheme, all the same"; then, turning towards his companion, he continued

aloud, "I beg your pardon, my dear fellow! but the governor's letter contains a budget of family politics which is, of course, more or less interesting to me, especially as, in the event of certain contingencies, he talks of increasing my allowance. But you're looking sentimental—what's the matter?"

"Oh! nothing," was the reply, "only that fellow Markum has been boring about the rabbits; he says we've worked them quite enough, and that the foxes will be pitching into the pheasants if they can't get plenty of rabbits to eat, and that so much shooting will make the birds wild before the 1st. I know it as well as he does—there ought not to be another gun fired on the property till the 1st of September. But then what is a fellow to do with himself? I might go to Paris—but I've been there and done it all—besides, I hate their dissipation, it bores me to death; London is empty, and if it wasn't, it's worse than Paris—more smoke and less fun. I'd start to America, and do Niagara, and all the other picturesque dodges, only, if the wind were to turn restive, or anything go wrong in the boiler-bursting line, I might be delayed and miss the first day of partridge-shooting, so it would not do to risk it."

"By no means," rejoined Hazlehurst, shaking his head with an air of mock solemnity; "but luckily I've a better plan to propose; I must make my way home at once—you shall come with me, and stay till we are all mutually tired of each other."

"But your father and mother?" urged Coverdale.

"Are more anxious than I am on the subject. Read that, you unbelieving Jew?" So saying, Hazlehurst turned down a portion of his letter, and handed it to Coverdale; it ran thus—"Mind you bring your friend with you; independently of our desire to become acquainted with one who has shown you such unvarying kindness, Mr. Coverdale is just the person to make up the party."

"Yes, they're very kind," began Coverdale, returning the letter, "very kind, but——"

"But what, man?" rejoined Hazlehurst, quickly; "we want you to come to us; you have not only no other engagement, but actually don't know what to do with yourself, and yet you hesitate. However, to come to the point at once, I ask you plainly, and expect a plain answer—where's the hitch?"

"Well done, most learned counsel, that is the way to browbeat a witness, and no mistake," replied Coverdale, laughing at his friend's vehemence; "however, I won't provoke any farther display of your forensic talents by attempting to prevaricate. The fact is, I know you've a bevy of sisters, she-cousins, and what not, very charming girls, I daresay; but you see I'm not fit for women's society, and that's the truth of it—I've chosen my line—I know what suits me best—and

I daresay I shall live and die a bachelor, as the old Admiral did before me. I know what women are, and what they expect of one; if a fellow happens to be a little bit rough and ready, they call him a bear, and vow he's got no soul; 'gad, that's what the Turks say of them, by-the-bye!—Poetical justice; eh?"

"My dear boy, you'll excuse my saying so, but you really are talking great nonsense," interrupted Hazlehurst. "You're a thorough gentleman in mind, manners, and appearance, if I know the meaning of the term, and neither my sisters, nor my cousin (there is but one), have such bad taste as to prefer a finical fop to a fine manly fellow like yourself—no, they're more likely to fall into the other extreme."

"And that would be the worst of the two by long odds," exclaimed Harry, aghast; "only fancy me with a wife in the shooting-season—bothering me to stay at home with her, or to drive her out in a four-wheeled arm-chair with a pair of little hopping rats of ponies, that the best whip in the three kingdoms could not screw above six miles an hour out of, if he were to flog their hides off; or, worse still, to take me boxed up in a closed carriage to call upon somebody's grandmother, and I breaking my heart all the time to be blazing away at the partridges. I know what it is—I was staying down in Leicestershire, before I went abroad, with poor Phil Anderton, as staunch a sportsman, and as thoroughly good a fellow as ever drew trigger, before he married Lady Mirvinia Bluebas. Well, they hadn't been coupled six months, before she'd got him so tight in hand that he daren't smoke a cigar without a special licence. The first season she let him shoot Wednesdays and Fridays, and hunt Thursdays and Saturdays. The next year she made him sell off his guns, dogs, and horses, and carried him over to the Continent. What was the result?—why the poor fellow became so bored and miserable, that he took to gambling, lost every farthing he had in the world at roulette, and—didn't blow his brains out; so my lady has the pleasure of keeping him, and living herself, upon five hundred a-year pin-money."

"Verdict, served her right," observed Hazlehurst, judicially; "but you forget, my dear boy, that Anderton, though a good fellow enough in his way, was made of such yielding materials that anybody could do what they liked with him—rather soft here," he continued, tapping his forehead; "now you have got sterner stuff in you, and if a woman were to try it on with you in that style, it strikes me she'd find her master."

"Ah! I don't know," sighed Coverdale, reflectively; "it's easier to talk about managing women than to do it—they've got a way with 'em, at least the pleasant ones have, of coming over a fellow somehow, and making him fancy for the moment (it doesn't last, mind you—and there's the nuisance of it)

that he'd rather do what they wish him than what he wants to do himself. Then again, if a man offends you, you can quietly knock him down, and if he feels aggrieved, he can have you out (not that I admire duelling); but if you quarrel with a woman, there's no 'dernier résort,' you can't knock her down, poor weak thing, and so you're reduced to growl like a dog, and she to spit like a cat, and you leave off as you began, without having attained any definite result."

"I have heard of such a thing as moral force," suggested Hazlehurst, ironically.

"That's one's only chance," returned Coverdale, "though it is one that, to speak seriously and sensibly, I've tolerably strong faith in. A fellow must be wanting in manliness of character if he cannot contrive to manage a woman by moral force, as you call it; there's a quiet way of doing that as well as everything else, only it's such a confoundedly slow process."

"No making 'em to come to the point, eh?" rejoined Hazlehurst; "well, I have my own ideas about it; how they would work remains to be proved; but as you've such splendid theories on the subject, don't pretend you're unfitted for woman's society. Why, man, you're equal to a whole seminary of young ladies—your 'quiet manner' would prove as irresistible with them as it did with the redoubtable Mr. Styles."

By way of reply to this impertinent allusion Coverdale shook his clenched fist (which still bore traces of his late encounter) in his friend's face with a pseudo-threatening gesture. Hazlehurst sprang back in pretended alarm, with so sudden a movement as to arouse the Scotch terrier from his nap, who, waking up in a fright, immediately recurred to his leading idea that there were thieves in the house, and rushed to the door, barking furiously. When the laughter, which this little incident excited, had in some degree abated, Hazlehurst resumed —

"But seriously, Harry, I want you to come home with me, and I'll tell you in confidence why. You and I have known each other from the time we were schoolboys together, and though, as in 're' Styles, you act a little hastily sometimes, there is no man on whose clear judgment and high principle I've greater reliance than on yours. I've received a letter from home this morning which has annoyed me more than I can tell you. To come to the point at once, the case stands thus:—My father's pet weakness (rather a creditable one) is family pride; now the Grange has belonged to the Hazlehursts for the last three hundred years, but in my great-grandfather's time the estate became wofully diminished—the old scamp was a regular wild one, and not only made ducks and drakes of everything he could lay his hands on, but as soon as my grandfather came of age, induced him to cut off the entail,

and sold the best half of the family property; some of this my grandfather contrived to redeem in his lifetime, and my Governor has been scheming and screwing all his days in order to buy back the rest. In an evil hour he was induced to invest his savings in a railroad, hoping to attain his object sooner; of course it paid beautifully at first; of course in due time a crash came, and the Pater not only lost all his savings, but was forced to sell a farm of five hundred acres, dear to him as the apple of his eye. The individual who purchased it, and who owns the property my great-grandfather sold, is a certain millionaire cotton spinner, as rich as Crœsus; the fellow is said to have £20,000 a-year. Well, since the railroad affair, a jolly old aunt has died, and left the Governor some tin, and he's breaking his heart to buy back the farm, but cotton spinner refuses to sell. Now, at the last Hunt Ball my eldest sister came out—she is very pretty, and a nice, taking sort of girl in society—and said cotton spinner came, saw, and was conquered! so much so, that having offered serious attentions ever since, he has ended by offering himself. Thereupon arose a difference of opinion between Alice and the Governor—Alice pleading that she didn't love cotton spinner one bit, and didn't expect she ever should do so, and Governor declaring that it was all sentimental bosh, and that if she married the man, as much love as it was at all proper for a young lady to feel would come afterwards. At last they made a compromise—Alice was to consent to see more of Mr. Crane, and do her best to like him, in which case, said Crane would allow her to postpone her decision till a future period: to this Alice was fain to consent, and now the suitor is coming to the Grange, on approval, and the Governor's asked a party of people to meet him."

"And how do you stand affected towards the proposed alliance?" inquired Coverdale, lifting the Skye terrier into his lap by the nape of its neck, and then curling it up like a fried whiting.

"Not over favourably," returned Hazlehurst, "which, by the way, is very disinterested of me; for if the affair comes off, and the Governor buys his farm back again—which of course is what he is looking to—he promises to settle the residue of the aunt's legacy upon me, by which I should be some £200 a-year the better; but it would not be a match to please me. I'm very fond of Alice; she is a dear good girl as ever lived, and I don't admire the cotton spinner: in the first place, he's nearly, or quite forty, while she was nineteen last term; in the second place, he's a slow coach, good-natured enough, and all that, but nothing in him."

"No soul," suggested Harry.

"Not enough to animate a kitten, I should imagine," was the reply; "not that the man's a fool—indeed, in his own line he is said to be clever. He invented some dodge to simplify

his machinery, by which he nearly doubled his fortune."

"That was decidedly clever," remarked Harry, busily engaged in dressing the "Skye" in a muslin "anti-macassar," placed clean upon the sofa that morning.

"To come to the point, however," continued Hazlehurst, "I want you to see the man, and try and find out what he's made of."

"Fool's-flesh probably," suggested Coverdale, "sotto voce."

"I wish you would try and be serious for five minutes," returned Hazlehurst testily; "nothing is more provoking than small attempts at wit, when one wants a man to give his attention sensibly to that which one is saying."

"I stand, or more properly sit, corrected: so continue, most sapient and surly brother!" was the mocking answer.

Hazlehurst tried to look angry and dignified, but a glance at his friend's handsome, merry, and, withal, slightly impudent face, disarmed his wrath, and muttering, "Confound you for a stupid, provoking old humbug," he burst into a fit of laughter. As soon as he had recovered his gravity, he resumed: "As I said before, I want you to come and make your observations on the cotton spinner, and if your opinion agrees with mine, you must back me up in making a serious remonstrance with the Governor. I know the old gentleman well, and am sure he'll think twice as much of what I say when he finds that you, a man of the world and a large landed proprietor (that'll tell with him immensely) look upon the matter in the same light. And now you know my reasons, what do you say?"

"Say! what can I say but that I—ahem!—respect the sacred call of friendship, and am prepared to sacrifice myself upon its altar: that's the correct phraseology, isn't it? I tell you what, though," continued Harry, gravely, "I make one condition, without which I don't stir a peg: I'm at your service and that of the cotton spinner as much as you please; but beyond the requirements of society, I'm not to be expected to concern myself about the women; I'm not to be forced into 'tête-à-tête' drives in pony-chaises, or set to turn over music-books at the piano: I know what all that sort of thing leads to well. Is it a bargain?"

"Of course it is," returned Hazlehurst eagerly; "come to please me, and I leave you to please yourself when you get there?"

"Then, as Sam Weller says, 'You may take down the bill, for I'm let to a single gentleman,'" was Coverdale's reply—and so the affair was settled.

CHAPTER IV.

CONTAINS, AMONG OTHER "EXQUISITE" SKETCHES, A PORTRAIT OF A PUPPY (NOT BY LANDSEER).

HAZLEHURST GRANGE was a picturesque old mansion, modernised out of all resemblance to its moated namesake which Tennyson has immortalised, by the addition of gay flower-beds, closely-shaven lawns, judiciously-planted shrubberies, and other appliances of landscape gardening. It was situated about eighteen miles from Coverdale Park, a distance which Harry's trotting mare, who had grown plump and saucy upon rest and good keep, accomplished, to her owner's intense satisfaction, in less than five minutes over the hour and a half.

"Pretty fair travelling that, eh! Master Arthur," he observed, replacing his watch in his waistcoat pocket, "and what I particularly like about it is that the mare did it all willingly and of her own accord, took well to collar at starting, and kept it up steadily, and in a business-like manner, till her work was done."

"In fact, behaved as utterly unlike a female throughout the whole affair as if she had belonged to the nobler sex," returned Hazlehurst, sarcastically.

"'Infandum renovare dolorem!'—why will you remind me of my coming trials, and not suffer me to enjoy the pleasures of forgetfulness while I may?" was Coverdale's desponding rejoinder.

"Simply because, unless I am greatly mistaken, they literally are coming trials," was the reply. "Look through that belt of trees on the left; don't you see the flutter of something white?"

"Muslin, by all that's flimsy, frivolous, and feminine!" exclaimed Harry, aghast. "I say, Arthur, can't we turn off somewhere?"

"By all means, if you wish it; there's a gravel-pit on the right hand, and a precipitous bank sloping down to the river on the left; which will you prefer?" was the obliging rejoinder. As he spoke, a turn in the road disclosed to their view a group of three figures, slowly advancing in the same direction as that in which they were themselves proceeding.

"My cousin, Kate Marsden, my sister Alice, and a gent, name unknown," observed Hazlehurst, as his eyes fell upon the trio. "Why, surely it is—no, it can't be—yes it is, Horace D'Almayne."

"Allowing, merely for the sake of argument, that it is the individual you mention, who may he happen to be?" inquired Harry, taking up the whip which had hitherto reposed innocuously between them, and performing rash feats with it over the ears of "My old Aunt Sally" (for so, in honour of the Ethiopian Serenaders, then in the zenith of their popularity, had Harry named his new favourite).

"My dear fellow, you don't mean to say that you never heard of him? Not to know Horace D'Almayne argues yourself unknown; why, man, he is a noted wit, a successful poet, the greatest dandy, and the most incorrigible male flirt about town; knows everybody, has been everywhere, and done everything."

"What is he like across a stiff line of country, and how many race can he bag to his own gun?" inquired Harry drily.

"Not knowing can't say," was the rejoinder; "but that's not at all in his way. He affects, if it is affectation, the man of sentiment; however, just now he is believed in to the fullest extent, and considered a regular lion."

"A regular tiger, I should have fancied rather," was the cynical reply. "Why, the brute actually wears moustaches."

"He has served in the Austrian Army, and sports the mouse-tails on the strength of his military pretensions," was the reply.

After a minute's pause, Coverdale observed, inquiringly, "I suppose we must needs pull up and do the civil by these good people."

"Why, considering that I have not seen my sister for the last five months, family affection (to say nothing of the duties of society) demands the sacrifice," returned Hazlehurst.

"Cut it short then, there's a good fellow, the mare's too hot to be allowed to stand long, and I would not have anything go wrong with her after the splendid manner in which she has brought us to-day, for three times the money I gave for her."

As he spoke, Harry again impatiently flirted the whip over the ears of "My old Aunt Sally," an indignity which excited the fiery disposition of that highly-descended quadruped, who, throwing up her head and tail, flinging out her fore feet, as though she were sparring with the distance her speed must overcome, and altogether looking her very handsomest, dashed up to the group of pedestrians so suddenly as to cause the two ladies to draw back in alarm; while even the redoubtable Horace himself sprang out of the way with a degree of alacrity which evinced a stronger regard for his personal safety than might have been expected from so heroic a character. For this sacrifice of dignity to the first law of nature, self-preservation, he endeavoured to compensate himself by stroking his moustaches, and staring superciliously at the new comers.

While Hazlehurst, who sprang down the moment the dog-cart stopped, was exchanging greetings with his cousin and

sister, Harry was left undisturbed to make his observations on the trio to whom he was about to be introduced. The elder of the two young ladies, who responded to the definition, "My cousin, Miss Kate Marsden," was above the middle height, and of a singularly graceful figure; her features were delicately formed and regular, her complexion pale, but clear, her hair and eyes dark, the latter being large and expressive, her hands and feet small, and her whole bearing and appearance refined and aristocratic in the extreme; but her features bore a look of proud reserve, which interfered with the effect which her beauty would otherwise have produced—an inscrutable look, which seemed to say, "I have a peculiar and decided character, but I defy you to read it."

It is of no use to attempt to describe Alice Hazlehurst, for the simple reason that no description could convey an adequate idea of her. Not that she was anything particularly wonderful; she was not even a miracle of beauty—she was only about the best thing this fallen world of ours contains—a bright, high-spirited, pure, simple, true-hearted, lovely, and loveable young girl, just emerging into graceful womanhood; very shy, slightly romantic, full of kindly sympathies and generous impulses, which she concealed as carefully as bad men hide unpopular vices, and with all the deep and noble qualities of her woman's nature, as well as, alas! its faults and foibles, lying dormant within her, either to be developed in their full completeness, or dwarfed into comparative insignificance, as the hands into which she might fall should prove fitted or unfitted to the great, yet enviable, responsibility of forming her character. As Hazlehurst leapt down, she sprang forward to meet him; then drew back from his hearty embrace with a smile and a blush, which very unnecessarily made her appear prettier than before, to acknowledge, with a bow, her introduction to her brother's friend.

The third member of the party, Horace D'Almayne, had been well fitted by nature to sustain the character of "exquisite"—tall, and with a graceful, slender figure, his well-formed and regular features, soft dark hair, and brilliant complexion, gave him an undoubted right to the epithet handsome, although it was in a style suited rather to a woman than to a man. The expression of his face, cynical and supercilious when in repose, or when he spoke to one of his own sex, relaxed into a smile of sentimental self-confidence when he addressed a woman. He appeared very young, probably not above two or three and twenty, and was dressed up to the "ne plus ultra" of refined dandyism.

"Why, D'Almayne," exclaimed Hazlehurst, "how is it that we come to be honoured by your company? I was not even aware that my father possessed the pleasure of your acquaintance."

"Nor did he a week ago; but the matter came about thus." was the reply. "During the London season, I was introduced, at one of the Duke of D——'s parties, to an opulent individual of the name of Crane, learned his opinion prospective and retrospective in regard to the weather, bowed adieu, and straightway forgot him. About a month since, being in a 'café' at Baden-Baden, my attention was attracted by an awful 'charivari'; and on attempting to investigate the cause thereof, discovered Friend Crane lamenting himself pathetically in bad French and worse German, and surrounded by a mob of foreigners. Having in some degree appeased his polyglot passion, I soon contrived to make out that, his pocket having been picked by A., he had accused innocent B., and denounced unoffending C.—a vicarious system of reprisals which those victimised individuals appeared, not unnaturally, inclined to resent. Understanding somewhat better than our irascible friend the language and customs of the natives, I contrived to extricate him from the dilemma; for which act of good Samaritanism I have been, from that time forward, more or less the victim of his indefatigable gratitude. Your worthy father finding me a few days since located in the Château Crane, politely included me in his invitation. I arrived this morning, and under the able tuition of your cousin and sister, was rapidly becoming acquainted with the beauties of Hazlehurst, when you drove up."

As he insinuated this skilfully-veiled compliment, the exquisite Horace pointed its application by favouring Alice with a languishing "œillade," which was certainly not without effect; for it excited in the breast of Harry Coverdale a sudden, intense, and unreasonable desire then and there heartily to kick the talented originator of the compliment. This impulse he was only enabled to check by a powerful effort, which caused him to twitch the reins so suddenly as painfully to compress the delicate mouth of "My Aunt Sally," to an extent which justified that outraged quadruped in converting herself for the time being into a biped, by standing erect on her hind legs, and pawing the air with her fore feet.

"Soho, girl! gently, gently!" exclaimed Hazlehurst, who, not having perceived the exciting cause of the manœuvre, attributed the mare's unmannerly behaviour to an outbreak of inherent viciousness. "Why, Harry, what on earth is the matter with the creature?"

"Probably nothing more than a reasonless caprice natural to her sex," was Harry's ungallant reply. "Possibly she may have the bad taste to prefer the creature comforts of a cool stable and a good feed of corn, to remaining in the broiling sunshine, even with the opportunity of becoming acquainted with the beauties of Hazlehurst"; and as he made this sarcastic remark, Harry glanced carelessly round over wood and

field, so that anyone not well acquainted with the play of his features would have been puzzled to decide whether he was himself aware of the full meaning of his words.

"A pretty broad hint that I am not to keep the mare standing any longer," returned Hazlehurst, turning to his cousin and sister. "That fellow cares for nothing in the world but his horses, excepts his dogs and his double-barrel. Well, I suppose you girls will be coming home soon."

"Quite as soon as we are wanted, if your amiable and complimentary friend has any voice in the matter," returned Alice, "sotto voce."

"Nonsense," was the reply in the same tone; "you know nothing about him, you silly child. Harry is the kindest-hearted, best-tempered fellow in the world, as you'll find out before long."

Alice's only reply was an incredulous toss of her pretty head, and the parties separated.

"Of all the puppies I ever beheld, that creature D'Almayne is the most insufferable—the very sight of him irritates me. What business has he to pay his absurd compliments to your sister, when he has only known her for a few hours? If I were you, I should not stand it."

"At all events, his compliments are of a more civil nature than yours," returned Hazlehurst with a smile; "why, Harry, you are becoming as peppery a character as your namesake Hotspur himself."

"I am like him in one particular, at all events," was the reply, "for I cannot abide a coxcomb."

"It strikes me, that is not the only point in which you resemble the 'gunpowder Percy,' as old Falstaff calls him. By the way," he continued, "what in the world was the matter with 'Aunt Sally' a minute ago? she seems to go quietly enough now."

"I rather fancy something must have hurt her mouth," replied Harry, turning away his head to conceal a smile. As he spoke, they drove round the gravel sweep leading to the hall door of Hazlehurst Grange. Beneath the porch stood two gentlemen—in one of whom, corpulent and elderly, Coverdale had little trouble in recognising, from his likeness to his friend, Mr. Hazlehurst senior; while the other, tall, thin, and cadaverous-looking, he rightly conjectured to be the opulent and amorous cotton spinner, Jedediah Crane.

CHAPTER V.

PROVES THE ADVISABILITY OF LOOKING BEFORE YOU LEAP.

NEARLY a week had elapsed since Harry Coverdale had first become an inmate of Hazlehurst Grange, during which period he had contrived to win the good opinion of the elders of the party, pique the young ladies by his "brusqueric" and neglect, annoy Hazlehurst by his insensibility and determination not to make himself agreeable, and finally to have provoked the enmity of the fascinating Horace D'Almayne, which last piece of delinquency was a source of unmitigated satisfaction to its perpetrator. The day on which we resume the thread of our narrative was to be devoted to a picnic party, the object being to devour unlimited cold lamb and pigeon pie amongst the ruins of an old abbey, some eight miles from the Grange. The morning was lovely, everyone appeared in high spirits, and the expedition promised to be a prosperous one.

"Now, then, good people," exclaimed Arthur Hazlehurst, "what are the arrangements—who rides, who drives, who goes with who? Come to the point and settle something, for the 'tempus' is 'fugit'-ing at a most alarming pace."

"I am desirous," observed Mr. Crane slowly and solemnly, "of soliciting the honour of driving Miss Hazlehurst in my phæton, if I may venture to hope such an arrangement will not be disagreeable to that lady"; and as he spoke, the cotton spinner, whose tall, ungainly figure, clad in a dust-coloured wrapper, white trousers, and white hat, gave him the appearance of a superannuated baker's boy run very decidedly to seed, bowed appealingly to Alice, who, perceiving her father's eye upon her, was forced unwillingly to consent.

"Mr. Coverdale, will you drive a lady in the pony-chaise?" inquired Hazlehurst "père." "My niece will be happy to accompany you, or my saucy little Emily here," he continued, gazing with paternal fondness on his younger daughter, a pretty but slightly pert girl of sixteen.

"I should have much pleasure," muttered Harry; "but—but—I contrived to hurt my right hand a few days ago, and a-ar—not being used to the ponies, I could scarcely feel justified in undertaking the charge."

"Indeed," was the rejoinder; "I noticed you always wore a glove—how did the accident happen, pray?"

"I hit—that is—I struck my hand against something very hard," stammered Harry, actually colouring like a girl, as he caught Hazlehurst's suppressed chuckle, and observed Alice's bright eyes fixed upon him inquisitively.

"Kate, if nobody else will drive you, I suppose I must take compassion on you myself," remarked Arthur "sotto voce," to his cousin.

"Ah! but here comes somebody who intends to relieve you of the trouble," was the reply, in the same low tone; "do not make any objection," she continued, quickly, "you will only annoy my uncle to no purpose; he would not have even a feather of the Crane's tail ruffled on any account."

As she spoke she glanced meaningly towards Horace D'Almayne, at that moment engaged in drawing on a pair of kid gloves too small even for his delicate hands. Coming forward, he languidly, and in an absent manner, volunteered to drive Miss Marsden—an offer which that young lady quietly accepted, either not perceiving, or disregarding, the look of annoyance with which her cousin turned and left the spot.

"Oh, you are going to ride, Mr. Coverdale; here comes Sir Lancelot, looking like a picture," exclaimed Tom Hazlehurst, a fine handsome lad, "anno ætatis" fourteen, an Etonian, and (need we add?) a pickle. "Oh! do let me go with you; Alice will lend me her pony—won't you, Alice? I'll take such care of it, and you don't want it yourself, you know. Ask her to lend it to me, Mr. Coverdale, do please."

If Harry had a weakness, it was that he could never say no, when his good-nature was appealed to in any matter in which another's pleasure was involved. Tom, moreover, had conceived for him one of those violent friendships which boys feel towards men a few years older than themselves who realise their "beau ideal" of perfection; and Harry, pleased with his undisguised admiration, responded to it by indulging the young scapegrace in all his vagaries.

"I'm afraid my voice is not so potential as you imagine, Tom," was his reply; "but if my assurance that I will use my best endeavours to keep you and the pony in good order will have any weight with Miss Hazlehurst, I am perfectly willing to give it."

"If papa has no objection, Tom, you have my consent," replied Alice, blushing and smiling, while, at the bottom of her heart, she wished both Mr. Crane and Harry safely located at Coventry, Jericho, or any other refuge for bores, that might be suitable for putting those who are in the way out of the way; in which case she would herself have enjoyed a canter with Master Tom.

"Oh, the Governor won't say no—will you, Daddy?" was Tom's confident reply; and Mr. Hazlehurst, who, being a dreadful autocrat to his elder children, made up for it by weakly indulging his youngest born, having signified his consent, the cavalcade proceeded to start—a close carriage and a barouche conveying the remaining juveniles, and all the elders of the party, with the exception of Mrs. Hazlehurst, who, being a confirmed invalid, remained at home, in com-

pany with a weather-wise old maid, proprietress of a meteorological corn, which having given warning that a change was at hand, led her to mistrust the brilliant sunshine.

"Can't we find our way across the fields somehow, Tom, without riding along the dusty road the whole distance?" inquired Harry.

"To be sure we can," was the reply; "don't I know a way that's all? Turn down the next lane to the right, and then there are lots of jolly grass fields and a wide common, so that we can gallop as much as we like, and get there before them —won't they be surprised to see us, just? What a lark!"

Tom's topographical knowledge proving correct, they cantered away merrily over field and common, till they had ridden some five or six miles.

"You really have an uncommonly good seat, Tom," observed his friend; "only remember to turn your toes in, and keep your bridle hand low, and you'll do—you've plenty of pluck, and when you've acquired a little more judgment and experience, you'll be able to 'hold your own' across a country with some of the best of 'em."

"Ah, shouldn't I like to go out hunting, that's all?" exclaimed the boy eagerly.

"Have you never done so," inquired his friend.

"No; I tried it on last winter, but the Governor cut up rough, and wouldn't stand it."

"Can you sit a leap?" asked Harry.

"I believe you, rayther, just a very few," was the confident reply.

"Well, you must come to Coverdale, in the Christmas holidays, and I'll mount you and take you out with me; I mean to get up a stud, and hunt regularly this season," observed Harry.

"Won't that be jolly, just?—I'll come whether they'll let me or not, depend upon it; but now this is the last grass field, let's have a race for a wind up." So saying, master Tom laid his whip smartly across his pony's shoulder, and dashed off, while Coverdale, gradually giving his spirited but perfectly broken horse the rein, soon overtook him. A brushing gallop of five minutes brought them to the border of the field, which was surrounded by a ditch and bank, with a sufficiently high rail at top to constitute an awkward leap.

"How are we going to find our way out?" inquired Harry.

"Get off, pull down a rail, and then jump it," was the reply.

"Yes, that will be the best way for you and the pony to get over," returned Coverdale, "but I'll take it as it stands. I've never yet had a chance of trying Lancelot at a stiff fence, and I want to see how he'll act: don't you attempt to follow me; as soon as I am over, I'll dismount and pull down the rail for you."

As he spoke Harry put his horse in motion, cantered him up to the fence, and faced him at it. Sir Lancelot did not belie the character that had been given him. As he approached the bank he quickened his pace of his own accord, gathered his legs well under him, and then rising to the leap, sprang over with a motion so easy and elastic that his rider appeared scarcely to move in his saddle. The descent on the farther side was steeper than Harry had expected, and the leap altogether might be considered a difficult one. Delighted with his horse's performance, Harry pulled up, and turned, with the intention of alighting, in order to remove a rail of the fence, and thus facilitate the transit of Tom and the pony; when, to his alarm and vexation, he perceived that the boy, deceived by the apparent ease with which he had accomplished the task (a delusive appearance, produced as much by the coolness and address of the rider as by the power and excellent training of the horse), had determined to display his prowess by following him; nor could Harry interfere to prevent him, for at the moment he turned, Tom was in the act of galloping up to the fence: all that remained for him, therefore, was to shout, "Give the pony his head, and hold tight with your knees," and to await the result. The pony, excited by seeing its companion on the other side, faced the leap boldly, and cleared the ditch and bank, but catching his hoofs against the rail, fell, pitching its rider over its head into the field beyond, where he lay as if stunned. In an instant Harry had sprung from his saddle and lifted him in his arms. "Thank Heaven!" he exclaimed as the boy opened his eyes, and, perceiving Coverdale bending over him, smiled to evince his gratitude.

"You don't feel as if you were seriously hurt anywhere, do you?"

"All right," was the reply. "I feel a little bit shaky and confused; rather as if somebody had gone and kicked me into the middle of next week, that's all."

"Then you've escaped more easily than you had any right to expect, you heedless, impetuous young monkey," returned Coverdale, sharply. "You must have been mad to suppose that a half-bred, thick-headed beast like that pony would carry you over such a fence as that. Why, I know men, who call themselves good riders, who would refuse it, unless they were very well mounted."

"If the pony did not carry me over, he shot me over, and that did just as well," was the careless reply. "But I say, Mr. Coverdale only look at his knees? Oh, shan't we get into a jolly scrape just."

Thus appealed to, Harry turned to examine the pony, which, in his anxiety for the safety of the boy, he had hitherto forgotten. The result of his scrutiny was by no means satisfactory.

"He has broken both knees!" he exclaimed; "the right one is cut severely, and however favourably it may go on, there will always remain a scar; you've knocked ten pounds off the pony's price by that exploit of yours, Master Tom, besides rendering the animal unsafe for your sister to ride."

"You've put your foot in it as well as I, Mr. Coverdale," returned the young imp, grinning. "You promised Alice you would do your best to keep me, and the pony too, in proper order, you know!"

"Why, you ungrateful scamp, I'm sure I told you not to attempt the leap," replied Harry, restraining a strong inclination to lay his horsewhip across the young pickle's shoulders.

"Yes; and then you and Lancelot went flying over it as lightly as if he had wings, like that fabulous humbug Pegasus, that old Buzwig is always bothering us about. The copy-book says, 'Practice before precept,' and so say I. Why, you did not expect I was going to be such a muff as to stay behind,' did you?"

"I was a fool if I did, at all events," muttered Harry, "sotto voce"; then, turning good-naturedly to the boy, he continued, "The copy-book also says, 'What can't be cured must be endured,' does if not, Tom? So we must get out of the scrape as best we can. We'll leave the pony at the nearest farm-house, and I'll send my groom to doctor him, so lead him by the rein and come along."

Of course, when they joined the rest of the party and told their misdeeds, Alice lamented over the pony's troubles after the usual fashion of tender-hearted young ladies. Of course Hazlehurst senior, discerning a long farrier's bill in prospective, with the possibility of being coaxed out of a new pony as a not unlikely contingent result, was grumpy, as governors usually are when they foresee a strain upon their purse-strings; and of course, although these lamentations and threatenings were launched at the curly head of Master Tom, they yet glanced off that unimpressible substance, only to fall upon and overwhelm with shame and confusion Harry Coverdale, who began mentally to curse the day when, false to his own presentiments, he had yielded to his friend's importunities, and suffered himself to become an inmate of Hazlehurst Grange.

Bent on avoiding young ladies, and having no taste for the society of old ones, Harry wandered about disconsolately, until, attracted by a dark archway and a worm-eaten winding staircase, which, as Master Tom expressed it, looked jolly queer and ghostified," he made his way up the mouldering steps until he found himself at the top of a battlemented tower, where he was repaid for the trouble of the ascent by a beautiful and widely-extending view. Having contrived to get rid of the voluble and restless Etonian, Coverdale seated himself on a projecting fragment of masonry, and glancing

round to see that he was not observed or observable, lit a cigar, and, his ruffled feelings being soothed by its mollifying influence, remained lazily watching the movements of the pleasure-seekers, his reflections running somewhat after the following fashion:

"There's old Crane maundering about after Alice as usual —don't think he gets on with her, though, rather t'other way— decided case of jibbing, I should say. She looked awfully bored and frightened too, up in that phæton with him; and no wonder either, for the old boy is nothing of a whip. I should be sorry to trust a cat of mine to his driving. Ah! she's given him the slip, and that Miss Marsden has taken him in tow. I can't make that woman out, she is so civil to him; perhaps she thinks the affair with Alice may miss fire, and she is looking out for the reversion of the cotton spinner herself. Arthur says she's very poor, and that there are a large family of them; if so, it's not a bad dodge, and, supposing she plays her cards well, one by no means unlikely to succeed. There's that confounded puppy, D'Almayne, swaggering up to Alice, stroking his stupid moustaches—yes, and she smiles and takes his arm, of course—believes all his lies, and thinks him a hero, I daresay. Oh, the poor silly fools of women, that can't distinguish a man from a jackanapes; I should have fancied Alice had more sense; but they're all alike. Look at the idiot simpering; that's only to show his white teeth now: the brute has no idea of a real joke—hasn't got it in him. Well, thank goodness, it's no concern of mine: but if I were Crane, I'd interfere with his flirting, rather. The fellow talks as if he were a dreadful fire-eater; I should like to try what he's made of: but I expect it's all talk and nothing else. I wish I could coax him into putting on the gloves with me some day: I'd astonish his moustaches for him. Well, he has walked her off, at all events. I wonder where they're going to. Are they? Yes—no—yes, by Jove, if he isn't going to take her across that field which Tom and I rode through, where the bull was grazing. The brute is mischievous too, or I am much mistaken. Confound the fool, he'll go and frighten the poor girl out of her senses, and, perhaps, get her hurt into the bargain; for if the bull really is vicious, ten to one Moustaches loses pluck and bolts, or something ridiculous. I've a great mind to follow them; it can do no harm, and may do some good—'gad, I will too. Alice is far too pretty to be gored by a bull; besides, for Arthur's sake, one is bound to take care of her. Luckily I've just finished the cigar, so off we go."

Having arrived at this point in his meditations, Harry rose from his seat, ran lightly down the stairs till he reached a ruined window about six feet from the ground, through which he leaped, then settling into a long, swinging trot, he ran, at a pace with which few could have kept up, in the direction

taken by Alice and D'Almayne; they had, however, obtained so greatly the start of him, that they had already entered the field occupied by the dangerous bull ere he had overtaken them.

It was a remarkably warm day—the field in which pastured the alarming bull was distant from the abbey ruins half a mile at the very least. Now, to jump through a window six feet or thereabouts from the ground, run at the top of one's speed half a mile, leaping recklessly over two gates and a stile in the course of it; and to do all this in a state of anxious excitement on a day when the thermometer stands at 70deg. in the shade, naturally tends to make a man not only hot, but (if his temper be not semi-angelic) cross also. At all events, Harry Coverdale was in the former, if not the latter, condition, when, panting and breathless, he overtook Alice Hazlehurst and Horace D'Almayne, half-way across the dangerous field.

CHAPTER VI.

JEST AND EARNEST.

"MR. COVERDALE, is anything the matter?—why, you are quite out of breath with running!" exclaimed Alice, starting as she beheld him.

"Uncomfortably warm, too, I should say," drawled D'Almayne, glancing significantly at Harry's glowing cheeks, which were certainly too red to be romantic; "really now, do you consider it judicious to overheat yourself so?—of course, I merely ask as a matter of curiosity."

Harry magnanimously repressed a strong inclination to knock him down; but he felt that to answer him coolly was both literally and metaphorically out of his power, so he confined his reply to Alice's question.

"There is nothing the matter, Miss Hazlehurst," he said; "but seeing you take this direction, and thinking that Mr. D'Almayne might not be aware a bull was grazing in his meadow, I thought it advisable to follow and put you on your guard, even at the risk of making myself unbecomingly hot"; and as he pronounced the last two words, he looked at D'Almayne as though he wished he had been the bull, and would oblige him by evincing an inclination to attack them.

"How very kind and thoughtful of you!" returned Alice, bestowing on him one of her brightest smiles; "but is there any danger?—what had we better do?"

"Eh, really, danger! not the slightest; am not I with you?" interposed D'Almayne, majestically bending over her. "A bull did you say, Mr. Coverdale?—ar—really, I don't per-

ceive such a creature. Are you quite sure he exists anywhere but in your vivid and poetical imagination?"

Harry's reply, if reply it can be called, to this impertinent question, was made by grasping D'Almayne's elbow so tightly as to cause that delicate young gentleman to wince under the pressure. Having thus attracted his attention at a moment when Alice's head was turned in an opposite direction, he pointed towards a group of trees, under the shadow whereof might be discerned a large brindled individual of the bovine species, who stood attentively regarding the trio with a singularly unamiable, not to say vicious expression of countenance. Placing his finger on his lips as a hint to D'Almayne to keep the knowledge thus acquired to himself, Harry answered Alice's inquiry by saying—

"It is always the safest policy to mistrust a bull; so I would advise you to turn and make the best of your way towards the stile over which I came; walk as quickly as you please, but do not run, as that would only tempt the animal to follow you."

"Yes, really, Miss Hazlehurst, we must not risk the chance of frightening you merely because we men enjoy the excitement of a little danger—take my arm," hastily rejoined Horace D'Almayne, and suiting the action to the word, he drew Alice's arm within his own, and marched her off at a pace with which she found considerable difficulty in keeping up. Harry, ere he followed them, remained stationary for a minute or so, to reconnoitre the movements of the bull. That animal, having apparently satisfied his curiosity in regard to the intruders on his domain, was now assiduously working himself up into a rage, preparatory, no doubt, to instituting vigorous measures for their expulsion. The way in which he signified this intention was by tossing his head up and down, tearing up the turf with his fore-feet, and uttering from time to time a low angry roar, like the rumbling of distant thunder. When Harry turned to leave the spot the animal immediately followed him, though only at a walk. As soon as he became aware of this disagreeable fact, Coverdale paused, and faced his undesirable attendant; which manœuvre, as he expected, caused the bull to stop also, though it was evident it had the effect of increasing the creature's rage. In spite of this discovery, Harry waited till his companions had reached the stile, and D'Almayne had assisted Alice to get over it—a piece of chivalry by which he very materially lessened his own chances of safety, as, the bull's small stock of patience being exhausted, it became evident he was preparing for a rush. Trusting to his swiftness of foot, Harry was about to make an attempt to reach the stile before the bull should overtake him, when suddenly the yelping of a dog was heard, and a terrier belonging to Arthur Hazlehurst, which had followed them unobserved, ran forward and dis-

tracted the bull's attention by barking round him, taking especial care to keep out of the reach of the animal's horns. This diversion in his favour enabled Coverdale to rejoin his companions unmolested.

"Oh, Mr. Coverdale, what a savage-looking creature! I was so afraid it was going to attack you. I do not know how to thank you properly for having saved me from at least a terrible fright," exclaimed Alice, as Harry ran up to them.

"Ar—from alarm possibly; but really I don't conceive there was the slightest danger; the animal was a very mild specimen of his class; even a little dog, you see, was sufficient to turn him," observed D'Almayne, slightingly.

"I'll bet you fifty pounds to one you don't walk across that field while the bull remains there," exclaimed Harry, eagerly —"Miss Hazlehurst shall be umpire, and I'll promise to come and do my best to help you if you get into any scrape—what do you say, is it a bet?"

"I never bet, and—ar—never do useless and unreasonable things on a hot day, in order to establish a fast reputation. Such little excitements may be all very well for a sporting character like yourself, my dear Coverdale; but—ar—a man who has shot bison on the American prairies does not need them; so really you must hold me excused. Shall we rejoin the rest of the party, Miss Hazlehurst? they seem assembling for luncheon. Let me recollect, we were talking of that charming soul-creation of Tennyson, 'Locksley Hall,' I think, before this absurd interruption occurred; what an unrivalled picture does it not present of the spirit-torture of a proud despair?"—and chattering on in the same pseudo-romantic and grandiloquent strain, the man of sentiment fairly walked Alice off, leaving Coverdale in the unenviable position popularly ascribed to virtue, viz., that of being its own reward. Having waited till the pair were out of sight, he flung himself down at the foot of an old beech-tree, and indulged in the following mental soliloquy:—

"Well, Master Harry! you've been and done something clever—you have, certainly; run like an insane creature more than half a mile, on by far the hottest day we've had this summer, and placed yourself in a situation where nothing but a lucky accident saved you from being run at, and possibly gored, by rather a mad bull than otherwise, only to be poohpoohed by an insolent coxcomb, and have a cold-hearted, ungrateful girl lisp out a missish inquiry, 'Whether there was any danger,' forsooth! 'gad, I almost wish I'd left her and her swain to find out for themselves."

He paused, removed his hat to allow a slight breeze which had sprung up to cool his heated forehead, and then, stretching himself, resumed:—

"I hope I'm not really becoming morose and ill-tempered, as Arthur hinted the other day. I must take care, or I shall

be growing a savage old brute, and have everybody hate me. It's all that puppy D'Almayne; he keeps me in a constant state of suppressed irritation with his affected airs of superiority;—but puppies will exist on the face of the earth, I suppose, whether I like it or not, and must be endured; so we'll endeavour to look upon him as an appointed trial, and see if we can turn him to good account in that way. There's always the possibility of horsewhipping him as a 'dernier ressort,' that's one consolation. Now I'll go to luncheon, and try whether I can put some of my good intentions into practice. Heigho! life's hard work, and no mistake; particularly in warm weather." Thus cogitating, Harry slowly gathered himself up, and betook himself to join the luncheon party, actuated thereunto, amongst other reasons, by the discovery of a serious attack of appetite. In the meantime, a scene of a very different character was being enacted between two others of our "dramatis personæ."

Arthur Hazlehurst, foiled in his attempt to secure a "tête-à-tête" drive with his cousin, Kate Marsden, having, after his usual habit, bustled about, settled everything for everybody, and made himself very generally useful and agreeable, had contrived on arriving at the ruins to withdraw himself from the rest of the party, and having watched the proceedings of his cousin and Mr. Crane, waited until she separated from that gentleman, when he joined her, and induced her to stroll with him along a shady, serpentine, romantic-looking pathway leading through a wood. Agreeable as were external circumstances, however, neither the lady nor the gentleman appeared to be in a sympathetic frame of mind; for a cloud hung on Arthur's brow, while his cousin's features wore a cold, uncompromising look of defiance. They proceeded for some little distance in silence; Hazlehurst was the first to speak.

"You found your companion amusing, I hope; pray what might he be talking about so earnestly?"

"Do you réally care to know?" was the reply; "he was making me his 'confidante' in regard to Alice. The poor man is at his wits' end—if a quality which he does not possess can be said to have an end; at all events, he is 'au désespoir.' Even his obtuseness cannot be blind to the fact that she dislikes him, and the worthy soul is now beginning to grow mildly jealous of D'Almayne."

"And what advice did you give him?" inquired her cousin, sternly; "tell me the truth."

As he spoke, the girl's eyes flashed, and a slight colour burned for a moment in her pale cheeks.

"How dare you say such a thing to me!" was her indignant rejoinder; "have I ever attempted to deceive you?—you know I have not; but let it pass. You ask me what advice I gave him: I told him to persevere, reminded him that a faint heart never won a fair lady, which I believe he took to be an

and loves me as a brother; he will advance me money; I will work day and night to repay him."

"My husband destroy his health to support my family!—is this the prospect of happiness you would offer me?—are these the arguments you would bring forward to induce me to agree?" was the reply. "No, Arthur, I can never be your wife; you must from this moment forget that such an idea has crossed your mind."

"But, Kate, only hear me!——" he exclaimed, passionately.

"I have already heard too much for your happiness, or for my own," was the mournful reply; then, by a powerful effort, resuming her usual manner, she exclaimed, "Come, no more of this folly, our paths in life lie separate; it is inevitable—therefore repining becomes worse than useless; we are not boy and girl, to stand rehearsing romantic love-scenes together; let us rejoin the others."

For a moment Hazlehurst remained silently gazing on the cold, immovable expression of her features; then, coming close to her, he said in a low, hoarse whisper, "I read your heart, and perceive the wickedness, for such it is, you contemplate. I will give you till to-morrow morning to reflect on what has passed between us; if then you adhere to your determination, I leave you to the fate you have chosen;" and, as he uttered the last words, he turned and quitted her.

Kate Marsden gazed after him with the same cold expression of defiance on her features till his retreating figure became no longer visible, then, sinking back upon the rustic bench, she covered her face with her hands and wept bitterly.

CHAPTER VII.

WHEREIN SYMPTOMS OF HARRY'S COURTSHIP BEGIN TO APPEAR ON A STORMY HORIZON.

THE humours of a picnic have been too often described to need repetition; suffice it to say that the picnic in question was decidedly a favourable specimen of its class. Of course, everybody voted it to be the summit of human felicity to sit in an uncomfortable position upon something never intended for a seat, beside a table-cloth spread upon the grass, which, being elastic and uneven, caused everything that should have remained perpendicular to assume a horizontal attitude. Of course, when the inevitable frog hopped across the table-cloth, and losing its presence of mind on finding itself so unexpectedly launched into fashionable life, sought refuge in the pigeon-pie, the ladies screamed little picturesque screams, which were increased twenty-fold when Tom Hazlehurst fished

it out with a table-spoon, and surreptitiously immersed it in the jug of beer, which liquid he artfully incited Mr. Crane to pour out, thereby landing the frog, decidedly inebriated and most uncomfortably sticky, upon the elaborately embroidered shirt-front of Horace D'Almayne. Of course, the salt and the sugar had fraternized, and the cayenne had elicited new and striking effects by mingling indiscriminately with things in general, and the sweets in particular; and of course all these disasters irritated the few and delighted the many, and added immensely to the liveliness and hilarity of the party.

"Tom, you're drinking too much champagne!" exclaimed an elderly maiden sister of Mr. Hazlehurst, decidedly like a hippopotamus in face and figure. "Mr. D'Almayne, may I trouble you to hand me his glass; the boy will make himself poorly."

Thus appealed to D'Almayne languidly extended his arm in the necessary direction, but the Etonian was not to be so easily despoiled of his beverage.

"'Mille pardons, mounseer!'" he exclaimed, mimicking the affected half-foreign accent with which the exquisite Horace usually spoke; "'mais c' est tout à fait'—out of the question; 'ne souhaitez-vous pas que vous pouvez l'obtenir?' —don't you wish you may get it? Equally obliged to you, but I'd rather do my own drinking myself. Why, my dear Aunt Betsy, how dreadfully ungrateful of you, just when I was going to propose your health, too! Silence, gentleman, for a toast! Come, Governor (to his father, who, delighted with the young pickle's ready wit, was vainly endeavouring to preserve an appearance of majestic disapproval), fill up; D'Almayne, my boy, no heeltaps; are you all 'charged? 'My Aunt Betsy, and the rest of her lovely sex!—hip! hip! hip! hurrah!'" So saying, and with a knowing wink at Coverdale, who, if the truth must be told, encouraged him in his inclination to be impertinent to D'Almayne, Master Tom tossed down his glass of champagne amidst the general chorus of laughter. And thus the "déjeûner" passed off to all appearance merrily enough; though in two, if not more, of the company a smiling exterior hid an aching heart.

"Have you seen the rabbit warren yet, Mr. Coverdale? Do come, there are such a lot of the beggars jumping about! I found my way there before luncheon, and it won't take long," exclaimed Tom Hazlehurst, grasping Harry's arm imploringly.

"It strikes me I shall be considered especially rude if I again absent myself," was the reply.

"Who by?—the women?" inquired Tom, scornfully. "Never mind them—poor, weak-minded, fickle things; there is nothing I consider a greater nuisance than to have a pack of silly girls dangling about one, that won't leave a fellow alone; there, you needn't toss your head and turn up your

nose about it, Emily, beneficent Nature's done that for you sufficiently already. Now will you come, Mr. Coverdale? there are some black rabbits among them, such rum shavers!"

"Are there!" exclaimed Harry, eagerly. "I wonder whether I could contrive to buy a few couples of them; I want to get some black rabbits at the park excessively: come along, for our time is growing short, I expect." And as he spoke, Coverdale strode off, entirely forgetful of the pretty Emily, with whom, on the strength of her juvenility, he had considered he might safely allow himself to laugh and talk, and to whom he had, therefore, been unconsciously rendering himself very agreeable.

The warren was further than he had expected it would be, and the black rabbits were so long before they chose to show themselves, that Harry began to grow sceptical as to their existence; even when they did appear, a gamekeeper had to be routed out, and terms for the transfer of ten couples to Coverdale Park agreed upon; so that by the time Tom and his companion rejoined the pleasure-seekers, there were but few left to rejoin. These few consisted of the old maiden-aunt; a time-honoured female friend of the same—older, uglier, still more like a hippopotamus, and with a double portion of the vinegar of inhuman unkindness in her nature; and, lastly, a plain young lady, the daughter of nobody in particular, who lived with the time-honoured friend as companion, in a state of chronic martyrdom, for which perpetual sacrifice she received thirty pounds a year, and permission to cry herself to sleep every night, in misty wonderment why so sad a creature as she was should ever have been born into the world. Besides this uncomfortable trio, who composed the cargo of a brougham, and were rather a tight fit, there remained Mr. Crane and Alice, who, it seemed, were waiting for the phæton, which had not yet made its appearance.

"Upon my word, Miss Hazlehurst," began the sour friend, addressing the acidulated aunt, "this is very provoking, ma'am; it's six o'clock, and it's growing cold, and will be quite dusk before we get home; and I really believe Miss Cornetoe was right this morning, and that we shall have a wet night after all."

"Shall I run down to the inn and see what causes the delay? I must go there to get my horse," inquired Coverdale, good naturedly.

"If you would be so kind, we really should be extremely obliged to you," returned Miss Hazlehurst senior, with her most gracious and least hippopotamic smile; and thus urged, Coverdale hurried off.

In the meantime, poor Alice, who by no means admired the position of affairs, and had moreover been considerably alarmed in the morning by Mr. Crane's unskilful driving, whispered a pathetic appeal to her aunt to be allowed to accom-

pany the brougham party,—"she could sit on the box; Wilson, the coachman, was so inconceivably respectable, and she was almost sure it would not rain";—but her aunt was a strong-minded woman, and a warm advocate of the Crane alliance, and she would not hear of such a change of plan. As soon as Coverdale arrived within sight of the inn, he perceived the missing phæton standing in front of the doorway, the horses ready harnessed, and the groom seated on the driving-seat; accordingly he made signs to him to come on, of which, for some unaccountable reason, the man took not the slightest notice. Surprised at this, Harry made the best of his way to the spot, and on reaching it discovered, from the swollen, heated look of the fellow's features, and the stupid, obstinate expression which characterised them, that he had been drinking to excess.

"Why the man is intoxicated!" exclaimed Coverdale, turning to the ostler, who, with one or two hulking village lads, stood staring at the coachman with a grin of amusement on their vacant faces; "why did you not make him get down, and bring the carriage yourself?"

"A did troy, but a woldn't budge a inch—a be properly drunk to be zure!"

"Oh, he would not, eh?" inquired Coverdale; then, turning to the groom, he continued, "Get down directly, my friend; I want particularly to speak to you."

To this the groom contrived to stammer out an insolent refusal, accompanied by a recommendation to Coverdale to mind his own business, and give orders to his own servants.

"My business just at present is to make you get down from that phæton," returned Harry, his eyes flashing.

"Oh! it is, is it?—I should like to see you do it, that's all!" rejoined the other, with a gesture of drunken defiance.

"You shall," was the concise reply, as, directing the ostler to stand by the horses' heads, Coverdale, ere the fellow was aware of his intention, or could take measures to prevent him, sprang lightly up, forced the reins from his uncertain grasp, twisted him suddenly round, then placing his hands under his arms lifted him by sheer strength, and dropped him to the ground. Having performed this feat with the neatness and celerity of some harlequinade trick, he glanced round to see that the fellow had fallen clear of the wheels, and taking the reins, drove off.

While this little affair had been proceeding, the sky had become overcast, and a few large drops of rain came pattering heavily to the ground; alarmed by these symptoms, the brougham party no sooner perceived the phæton approaching than they scrambled into their vehicle and started. As their road lay in a direction opposite to that by which Coverdale was advancing, they were nearly out of sight by the time he reached the spot where Alice and Mr. Crane awaited him.

Jumping down with the reins in his hand, he was explaining to the owner of the phaeton the plight in which he had found his servant, when a faint flash of lightning glanced across the sky, followed after an interval by a clap of distant thunder, at which the horses, which were young and spirited, began to prick up their ears, and evince such unmistakable signs of alarm that their master, fearing they were about to dash off, ran to lay hold of their heads. Misfortune often brings about strange associations. If any one had that morning told Alice Hazlehurst that before the day should be over she would have appealed for protection to, and confided in, "Arthur's cross, disagreeable friend," she would have utterly disbelieved the statement — and yet it was to be. The moment Mr. Crane left her side, she turned to Harry, exclaiming—

"Oh, Mr. Coverdale, I am so frightened! He will never be able to manage those horses: he could scarcely hold them in this morning, and the groom was forced to get down to them twice—he does not know how to drive a bit!"

Poor little Alice! she was trembling from head to foot, and looked so pretty and interesting in her alarm that Harry felt peculiar, he didn't exactly know how, about it.

"I'll speak to Mr. Crane, and persuade him to let me drive you home," he replied eagerly. (He would have knocked him down without the smallest hesitation, if Alice had in the slightest degree preferred it). "I've been accustomed to horses all my life, and have not a doubt of being able to manage these, even if the thunder should startle them; so please don't look so frightened."

And as Harry said this with his very brightest, kindest smile, Alice wondered she had never before noticed how handsome he was, and began to think he could not be so very cross after all.

When Harry urged his request, Mr. Crane was considerably embarrassed as to the nature of his reply. In his secret soul he was delighted to be relieved from the danger and responsibility of driving Alice and himself home through a thunderstorm; but, on the other hand, he could not disguise the fact that by allowing himself to be so relieved, he should detract from the heroic style of character he wished Alice to impute to him. Had it been D'Almayne instead of Coverdale who sought to become his substitute, he would probably, at the hazard of breaking his own neck and that of his lady-love, have refused to permit him; but he had observed, as indeed he must have been blind if he had not done, Harry's marked avoidance of the young lady, and trusting to these his mysogynistic principles he, with many excuses and much circumlocution, agreed to Harry's proposal that he should ride his horse, and allow him to drive the phaeton.

"Ahem!—if the storm should come on violently," ob-

served the cotton-spinner, as a second growl of thunder became audible, "I shall wait till it has subsided; so don't let them expect me till they see me: getting wet always gives me cold."

"All right, sir," returned Harry, as he wrapped Alice carefully up in his own macintosh; "take care of yourself by all means—good people are scarce. We shall see nothing more of friend Crane to-night," he continued, as he drove off; "the old gentleman is very decidedly alarmed—that is, I suppose I ought not to call him an old gentleman," he stammered, suddenly recollecting with whom he was conversing.

"Why should you not when he is so?" returned Alice, innocently.

Harry turned his head away to conceal a smile which the "naïveté" of the reply had called forth, muttering to himself as he did so, "Poor Crane!"

After a few minutes' silence, Alice began abruptly, and apologetically,—

"I'm sure I ought to feel very much obliged to you, Mr. Coverdale—and indeed I do; this is the second really good-natured thing you've done by me to-day."

The tone in which she spoke so completely betrayed that surprise was the feeling uppermost in her mind, that Harry, slightly piqued, could not help replying—

"You did not, then, give me credit for possessing the least particle of good-nature?"

Alice smiled as she answered—

"If I had had a proper degree of faith in Arthur's representations, I need not have felt surprised."

The delicate irony of this reply was not lost upon Coverdale; but he knew that he had deserved it, and, with the ready frankness which was one of his best characteristics, he hastened to acknowledge it.

"I certainly have done little towards practically vindicating the character your brother's partiality has bestowed upon me," he said; "but I must be allowed to plead in justification, that I am quite aware of my own deficiencies, and told Arthur that I had been roughing it abroad so long that I was totally unfitted for ladies' society. He would not admit the excuse; but it was a full true, and sufficient one, nevertheless."

As he uttered the last words a dazzling flash of lightning appeared almost to envelop them, followed instantaneously by a deafening peal of thunder. Half blinded by the blaze of light, the frightened horses stopped abruptly, then, terrified at the prolonged thunder, tried to turn short round; foiled in this attempt by the skill and promptitude of their driver, they began rearing and plunging in a way which threatened every moment to overturn the phæton. Fortunately the road happened to be unusually wide at this point, and Harry, who

never throughout the affair in the slightest degree lost his presence of mind, deciding that whatever might most effectually frighten the horses would create the impulse they would eventually obey, determined to try the effect of a little judicious discipline. Accordingly, standing up, he began to administer the whip to their sleek sides with an amount of strength and determination which, from the contrast it afforded to the mild and timid driving to which they were accustomed, so astonished the animals that bounding forward with a snatch which tried the soundness of their harness, they dashed off at a furious gallop, at the same moment, a second peal of thunder, even louder than the preceding one, increased their alarm to such a degree that Coverdale, despite his utmost efforts, found it completely beyond his power to hold them in.

CHAPTER VIII.

HARRY CONDESCENDS TO PLAY THE AGREEABLE.

"MISS HAZLEHURST!—Alice! are you mad? Only sit still, don't go and scream or anything, and all will come right."

Thus appealed to, or rather commanded—for the tone of the speaker's voice was unmistakably imperative—Alice, who when the horses bolted had half risen from her seat, and in an agony of terror glanced round, as though she meditated an attempt to jump out, shrank down again, and covering her eyes with her hands, remained perfectly still and motionless, thus enabling Coverdale to devote his whole attention to the horses. The terrified animals, after galloping nearly a mile, their fears being kept alive by repeated flashes of lightning and peals of thunder, while a perfect deluge of rain converted th dusty road beneath their feet into a morass, at length began to relax their speed. As soon as Harry perceived this to be the case, he turned to his companion, saying, "There, Miss Hazlehurst, I have got them in hand again, they're quite under command now, and the worst of the storm is over too, so you needn't be frightened any longer; you have behaved like a"—(regular brick was the simile that rose to his lips, but he refrained, and substituted)—"complete heroine, since you overcame that slightly insane impulse to commit suicide by jumping out."

Reassured by his manner, Alice ventured to open her eyes, and the first use she made of them was to fix them upon the countenance of her companion, striving to read therein whether the hopes with which he sought to inspire her were true or false. But Harry's was a face about which there could be no mistake; truth and honesty were written in every fea-

ture so legibly that the veriest tyro in physiognomy could not fail at once to perceive them.

"How fortunate it was that you were driving, and not Mr. Crane!" were the first words Alice uttered; "we should have been overturned to a certainty if the horses had behaved so this morning. I'll take good care not to let him drive me again. How cleverly you managed the creatures when they were plunging and rearing! I should never have dared to whip them while they were in that furious state, but it answered capitally."

"You observed that, did you?" inquired Harry in a tone of surprise.

Alice favoured him with a quick glance, as she replied, half archly, half petulantly, "Of course I did; what a stupid, silly little thing you seem to consider me!"

Harry paused for a minute ere he rejoined, laughingly, "You know nothing about what I consider you, Miss Hazlehurst, and therefore I advise you not to form any theories whatever on the subject, as they are tolerably certain to be wrong ones."

"I dare say you have never given yourself the trouble to reflect at all on so frivolous a topic," returned Alice; "I know your heterodox notions in regard to our sex; you consider us all simpletons."

"I'm sure I never told you so," was all the denial Harry's conscience permitted him to make.

"Not 'vivâ voco,' perhaps," replied Alice; "but I have heard it second-hand from Master Tom: the boy was uncomplimentary enough before you came, but he has been fifty times worse since you've been here to encourage his impertinence."

"A young cub!" muttered Harry, aside, "I'll twist his neck if he tells tales out of school in this way"; turning to Alice, he continued, "it is never too late to mend, is it? If I confess my sins, promise never to do so any more, and throw myself on the mercy of the court, is there any chance of my obtaining forgiveness."

"As far as I am concerned, yes," was the reply; "in consideration of your services this afternoon, I graciously accord you a free pardon for all past offences, and for the future we will try and be friends." As she spoke, she half playfully, half in earnest, held out her hand. Harry took it in his own, and shook it—even in a glove it was a nice, warm, soft little hand, a kind of hand that it was impossible to relinquish without giving it a squeeze, at least such was Harry's impression, and he acted upon it, although to do so was by no means in accordance with his principles; but he did not happen to be thinking about his principles just then. By this time the storm, which had pretty well exhausted itself by its vio-

having come to the conclusion that they had thoroughly disgraced themselves, and behaved with an equal disregard of principle and propriety, trotted steadily along under Coverdale's skilful guidance, like a pair of four-legged penitents, anxious to retrieve their character. And Harry and Alice suddenly found a great deal to talk about, and were quite surprised when they perceived themselves to be in sight of the Grange; and the gentleman felt moved by a sudden impulse to declare that, despite its unpropitious commencement, he did not know when he had had such a delightful drive, to which the lady replied that it certainly had been very agreeable, an admission which she endeavoured to qualify by attributing her pleasurable sensations to the influence of the setting sun and the delicious coolness of the evening air—a transparent attempt at deception that only rendered the truth more obvious.

The next morning a groom brought back Sir Lancelot, together with a note from Mr. Crane, saying that he had contrived to get wet through on his way to the inn, that he feared he had taken cold, and therefore considered it most prudent to return home for a day or two; adding that he should hope to be sufficiently convalescent to rejoin the party at the Grange that day week, when a dinner was to be given by Mr. Hazlehurst to some of the county magnates. His note wound up with an elaborate inquiry as to whether Alice had experienced any ill-effects from the "atmospheric inclemency," as he was pleased to style the thunderstorm, accompanied by an infallible specific against all sore-throats, colds, hoarsenesses, and rheumatic affections, which that young lady straightway committed to the waste-paper basket. There was also a note for Horace D'Almayne, from which dropped an inclosure that, as the exquisite stooped to pick it up, looked marvellously like a cheque.

"A—really I find I must go to town—a—business of importance—can I execute any little commissions for you, Miss Hazlehurst? I've excellent taste in ribands, I assure you."

"There, do you hear that!" observed Tom "sotto voce" to Coverdale. "I always thought he'd been a counter-jumper!"

"Kate, must I accompany him?" inquired Arthur of his cousin, "sotto voce"; "remember, if you send me from you now, we meet again as strangers!" There was a moment's struggle, and her colour went and came—then in a cold, hard voice she answered, "Yes, go!"

Arthur looked at her; her features might have been sculptured in marble, so fixed and immovable was their expression. That look decided him; and with set teeth and lowering brow, he rose and quitted the room.

In less than half an hour he returned, prepared for a journey; and beckoning Coverdale aside, began, "Harry, I have

a favour to ask of you. I am obliged to go to town suddenly, in consequence of an affair which has caused me some annoyance; but I shall come back for the dinner-party on the —th. Crane will also return then; and from what I can make out, Alice's affairs will be definitely settled one way or other. The more I see of Crane, the more I perceive how thoroughly he and Alice are unsuited: but my father appears obstinately bent on the match: and if Alice is to refuse him, she will require all the support that can be given her. My poor mother's health is, as you are aware, so delicate that although she is as much averse to the match as any of us, we cannot expect her to exert herself; indeed, our chief anxiety is to prevent her attempting to do so. The whole thing will, therefore, fall upon me: and your support and assistance will be invaluable. My father has taken a great fancy to you; and your opinion weighs with him more than you will believe. I am sorry to perceive that you are bored to death here: but I trust to your friendship to remain till after my return. Am I taxing your kind feeling too far?"

"My dear boy, don't make pretty speeches; for I can stand anything but that," was the reply. "As to staying here, I had no thought of going away till you had done with me. In regard to being bored, I'm getting over that beautifully. Your family are charming people. I'm becoming used to women's society, and, in fact, find it's not by any means as bad as imagination painted it; and when D'Almayne is fairly out of the house, I really shall not care how long I remain in it; so will that satisfy you?"

"My dear fellow," rejoined Hazlehurst, warmly, "there's nobody like you in the world! I've always said so, from the day that I first set eyes on you at Eton, when you thrashed the bully of the form for striking me, and then boxed my ears because I took a blow from a boy less than myself, without returning it. I shall never quite turn misanthrope while I've you for a friend."

"Misanthrope! no, why should you?" was the surprised rejoinder. "What ails you, man?—you look ill and unhappy. It's nothing in the money way, is it? I've got a few odd thousands lying idle at my bankers, that I should really be obliged to you to make use of."

Hazlehurst shook his friend's hand heartily. "God bless you, old fellow! I know you would," he said; "but money can't help me: I must fight it out alone. I shall be myself again by the time I return—till then, good-bye," and wringing Coverdale's hand once more, he turned and was gone.

"Alice, here's a treat! everybody going away except that horrid Harry Coverdale!" exclaimed Emily, in a tone of despair; "we shall have him on our hands, talking stable, and wishing we were dogs and horses, for a whole week! What are we to do with the creature?"

Alice turned her head to hide her heightened colour, as she replied, in a tone of voice that was almost cross, "Really, Emily, you should be careful not to carry that absurd habit of yours of laughing at everybody too far. People will begin to call you flippant. Mr. Coverdale is so good-natured that he is the easiest person in the world to entertain. Surely, Arthur has a right to ask his friend to remain here without consulting you or me on the subject."

"Phew!" whistled Emily, and a droll little parody of a whistle it was; "the wind has changed, has it? I suppose that was the thunderstorm yesterday; not to mention a certain 'tête-à-tête' drive. Take care, Ally: recollect that sweet bird the Crane! what does the song say?" and popping herself down at the pianoforte, she ran her fingers lightly over the keys, as she sang with mischievous archness:

"'Tis good to be merry and wise,
'Tis good to be honest and true,
'Tis good to be off with the *old* love
Before you are on with the new."

The party which sat down to dinner at Hazlehurst Grange on that day was a very select one. Mr. Hazlehurst had driven over to the neighbouring town on justice business, and having sentenced certain deer-stealers to undergo divers unpleasantnesses in the way of oakum-picking, solitary confinement, and other such amenities of prison discipline, had stayed to reward virtue by dining with his brother-magistrates upon orthodoxly-slaughtered venison. Accordingly, Mrs. Hazlehurst and the three young ladies, Harry Coverdale and Master Tom, sat down to what Mrs. Malaprop would have termed "quite a 'tête-à-tête' dinner" together; a tame and docile curate, invited on the spur of the moment to counterbalance Harry, having missed fire, owing to the untimely repentance of a perverse old female parishioner, who being taken poorly and penitent simultaneously, had sent her imperative compliments to the Rev. B. A. A. Lambkin, and she would feel obliged by his coming to convert her at his very earliest possible convenience; to which serious call he felt obliged to respond.

Coverdale had found himself in an unusual and peculiar frame of mind all day; for perhaps the first time in his life he had felt disinclined to active exertion; and had positively gone the length of abstracting from the library a volume of Byron, and spent the afternoon lying under a tree, reading the "Bride of Abydos." Now his peculiarity took a new turn; and, freed from his incubus, D'Almayne, a sense of the domestic and sociable suddenly sprang up within him, and throwing off all reserve, he appeared for the first time during his visit in his true colours—that is, unaffected, courteous, kind-hearted, amusing, and well-informed. In consequence

possibly of this change, the dinner went off most agreeably; and the absence of the Reverend Lambkin was mentally decreed to be a subject of thanksgiving by more than one member of the party.

In the evening there were certain wasps'-nests to be destroyed, about which Harry had expressed much interest; but now he discovered that he had blistered his heel on the previous day, by running in a tight boot; and Tom, mightily discontented at his defection, was forced to invade the enemy's country without the assistance of his ally. When Coverdale rejoined the ladies, Emily was reading Tennyson's "Princess" aloud, and the moment he appeared, she declared she was tired, and handed the book to him, begging him to proceed; her mischievous intention being thereby to overwhelm him with confusion, and derive amusement from his consequent mistakes. But she met her match for once, as Harry, coolly replying that he should have much pleasure, took the book and began reading in a deep rich voice, with so much taste and feeling, that her surprise soon changed to admiration. After tea, music was proposed, and the moment Alice began to sing Coverdale, for the first time since he had been in the house, approached the piano, and actually turned over the leaves for her!

"That lovely 'Là ci darem!' Ah, Alice! if we had but a gentleman's voice to take the second! Why don't you sing, Mr. Coverdale?" exclaimed Emily, turning over the pages of the duet.

"I'll try what I can do if you wish it," was Coverdale's quiet reply.

Alice, to whom he spoke, glanced at him in speechless surprise; but Emily, at once making up her mind that he was attempting a hoax, and eager to turn the tables upon him, resumed—

"Bravo! give me your seat, Alice, I'll play the accompaniment for you both."

Now the truth was, that Harry had been gifted by nature with a rich, powerful voice, and excellent ear, qualities which the admiration of his "set" at Cambridge had induced him to cultivate. When he first started on his grand tour, he encountered at Florence the mother and sisters of an old college friend, and those being the days before he had forsworn young ladies' society, he was let in for a mild flirtation with one of the daughters. The "emphatic she" happened to be "fanatica per la musica." Accordingly for three months Harry took lessons of the best master in the place, and sang duets morning, noon, and night; at the end of which period the "loved one" bolted with a black bearded native, who called himself a count, and was a courier. Since which episode, Harry, disgusted with the whole affair, and all connected with

it, had chiefly confined his singing to lyrical declarations that he would "not go home till morning." It will therefore be less a matter of surprise to the reader than it was to his audience at the Grange that Coverdale performed his part in the duet with equal taste and skill, and very much better than Alice did hers—that young lady pronouncing her Italian with rather a midland-county accent than otherwise, although her sweet fresh voice in great measure atoned for this little peculiarity.

"Why, Mr. Coverdale, what a charming voice you have, and how beautifully you sing!" exclaimed Emily, looking at him as if she could not even yet believe that it was possible he should have so distinguished himself. "I thought you were hoaxing us, and I sat down to play the duet for the amiable purpose of exposing your ignorance."

"How did you acquire such a pure Italian accent?" asked Mrs. Hazlehurst; "it will be of the greatest advantage to my girls to sing with you."

"I learned of an Italian fellow when I was at Florence, and I suppose he taught me to do the business all right," was the careless reply.

"And you have been here more than a week," continued Mrs. Hazlehurst, "and allowed Mr. D'Almayne to monopolise both the reading and singing department, though he cannot fill either one quarter as efficiently as you are able to do. You really are too diffident."

"I don't imagine diffidence to have had very much to do with it," observed Kate Marsden, quietly raising her eyes from her work (a crochet purse with steel beads), and fixing them on Coverdale.

Harry laughed slightly as with heightened colour he replied, "You are too clever, Miss Marsden. I by no means approve of being subjected to such subtle 'clairvoyance'; however, I may as well honestly confess that you are right, and that a feeling more akin to pride than to humility has prevented my seeking to rival Mr. D'Almayne."

"We have found you out at last though," returned Emily, "and I for one will do my best to punish you for your idleness, by making you sing every song I can think of. I don't believe it was either pride or humility which kept you silent—it was nothing but sheer idleness."

"Judging of her principles from her practice, I can readily believe Miss Emily Hazlehurst must consider silence to result from some reprehensible cause," replied Coverdale, with a meaning smile.

Of course Emily made a pert rejoinder, and of course Coverdale was forced to sing half a dozen more songs, which, as he had by this time got up the steam considerably, he did in a style which won him fresh laurels; but it was a remark-

able fact that from the moment in which Harry began to read aloud, Alice, although her attention had never flagged, had scarcely uttered a single word—perhaps it was because she thought the more.

CHAPTER IX.

CONTAINS LITTLE ELSE SAVE MOONSHINE.

MRS. HAZLEHURST was so confirmed an invalid as to be unable to walk, even so short a distance as from the drawing-room to her own bedroom whither she was usually carried by either her husband or her son. She was in the habit of retiring at nine o'clock, but on the evening referred to in the last chapter the clock chimed the half-hour after nine, and Mr. Hazlehurst had not returned.

"Mamma, dear, you are looking tired—you ought not to sit up so late!" exclaimed Alice, who had been observing her mother attentively for some minutes. "Do allow Evans to carry you up: papa is sometimes kept till eleven o'clock at these magistrates' meetings, you know."

One great charm which Alice possessed in Harry's eyes was her devotion to her mother, for whom she entertained an affection which was, perhaps, one of the strongest feelings of her nature.

"I had rather wait, dear," was the patient reply: "the worthy Evans is growing fat and old, and I am always afraid of his falling; and James is very willing, poor lad, but he is so awkward that he rubs me against all the corners we pass, and only escapes knocking my brains out by a succession of miracles."

"If you would allow me to assist you, Mrs. Hazlehurst," began Coverdale, in a hesitating voice, as though he were about to ask rather than to confer a favour—"I am sure I could carry you safely; I have observed exactly how Arthur holds you, and it would give me so much pleasure to be of use to you."

"You are very kind," returned Mrs. Hazlehurst, while a glow of grateful surprise coloured her pale cheeks; "but I cannot bear to give you the trouble—you do not know how heavy I am."

"You do not know how strong I am, my dear madam," was the good-natured rejoinder; "allow me—that I think is right," and raising the light form of the invalid in his powerful arms, he carried her, as easily and tenderly as a mother would her child, to her room, where, carefully depositing her in an easy-chair, he wished her good-night, and left her without waiting to receive her thanks.

"Alice, love, Emily will stay and read to me—go down and tell Mr. Coverdale how much obliged I am; he carried me as comfortably as if he had been in the constant habit of doing so for years. The kindness of heart and delicacy of feeling with which he made the offer have gratified me exceedingly; depend upon it he is an unusually amiable, excellent young man."

"He certainly appears in a new character to-night," returned Emily, laughing; "hitherto he has performed the modern Timon most naturally and successfully. I wonder what made the creature take it into his head to act the man—or rather the woman—hater! You'd better ask him, Alice; perhaps he will tell you!—What gone already!" she continued, glancing round the room. "Well then, mamma dear, as there seems to be no more fun forthcoming, let me give you your dose of Jeremy Taylor; that is your present good book, I believe."

A reproof for the levity with which Emily spoke rose to her mother's lips; but Mrs. Hazlehurst was a sensible woman as well as a good one, and so, being able to distinguish between the exuberance of high spirits and a scoffing turn of mind, she only murmured, "Silly child," and shook her head, with a reproving smile.

When Alice returned to the drawing-room she at first imagined it to be tenantless; but on looking more attentively she perceived the tall figure of Harry Coverdale standing with folded arms in the recess of one of the windows. So noiselessly did she enter that Harry, whose face was turned away from the door, was not aware of her approach until she was within a few yards of him. As with a sudden start he looked round, she was surprised to observe the traces of deep emotion visible on his features, which were usually characterised by an expression of so completely opposite a nature. With a murmured apology for intruding on him, Alice was about to withdraw, when Coverdale hastened to prevent her.

"Do not run away," he said quickly, then continued, "You are surprised to see me look sad; I think I should like, if you will permit me, to tell you the cause. It is so seldom I meet with anybody to whom I can talk about such things—people in general would not understand me, but I feel an instinctive certainty that you will. It is such a lovely night, would you object to come out? Your cousin, Miss Marsden, is already enjoying the moonlight." As he spoke, he pointed to a white figure pacing, with bent head and measured steps, along a terrace-walk on the further side of the lawn. Throwing a shawl over her head to protect herself from the night dew, Alice signified her consent, and opening one of the French windows, they descended into the garden. For some minutes they strolled on side by side without speaking; the silence at length became embarrassing, Alice broke it by observing—

"I must not forget to deliver mamma's thanks for your kindness. You carried her so easily and carefully, she says, she could almost imagine you must have been accustomed to such an occupation before."

Harry smiled a melancholy smile. "That was what I was going to tell you about," he said, "only when it came to the point, I felt as if it were impossible to begin. Carrying Mrs. Hazlehurst to-night brought back such a flood of recollections!" He paused, then in a low tone continued: "For many months before her death my own poor mother became perfectly helpless, and I used to carry her like a child from room to room. I was only seventeen when I lost her, and, except your brother, I have never had anyone to love since; and though Arthur is as good a fellow as ever breathed, and all that one can wish a friend to be, yet somehow, whether it is the difference between a man's mind and a woman's, or what, I cannot tell, but there are things I've never talked about with anybody since my mother died, because I've felt that nobody else could understand me. Perhaps, if she had lived, I might have been more what I sometimes wish I were —less rough, and—but I do not know why I should bore you with what must be singularly uninteresting to you."

"Pray go on," replied Alice; "I have heard so much of you from Arthur, that I always hoped I should some day know you myself, and that we might become friends; but——" here she stopped, apparently embarrassed how to proceed.

Harry came to her assistance. "But when I did appear, I made myself so disagreeable that you naturally repented ever having wasted a thought upon such an unamiable savage. Is not that what you would have said? Well, you are quite right, I deserve that it should be so."

There was a degree of regretful earnestness in his voice and manner which touched Alice's gentle heart, and she hastened to reply:

"Nay, it was only that you did not know us; and—I think that silly Mr. D'Almayne annoyed you with his airs and affectation; but I am sure you will never be so—so——"

"Brutish!" suggested Harry.

"So unjust to yourself again," resumed Alice.

"You are very kind—kinder than I deserve by far," replied Coverdale. He paused, then continued, "I don't think I was naturally such a bear; but from childhood I have had to battle with the world on my own behalf. Did Arthur ever tell you any of my earlier history?"

"No; he often alluded to it as curious, but said we ought to see you first, and then we should understand you better and care more to hear it," was the simple reply.

Harry smiled. "The only romantic episode in my career occurred when I was a very young boy," he said, "so young,

that if I had not heard the story over and over again from the mouth of my late uncle, the old Admiral, I should scarcely have remembered it. To enable you to comprehend the situation properly, I must trouble you with a few family details. My grandfather had two sons—the Admiral the elder, and my father the younger. My father, when a lieutenant in a marching regiment, fell in love with a very pretty, amiable, but portionless girl; my grandfather desired him to marry an heiress; my father refused, and urged his affection for another; my grandfather grew imperative, my father recusant; my grandfather stormed, my father persisted; and the affair ended by my father marrying his lady-love, and my grandfather disinheriting him for so doing. The natural consequences ensued: my grandfather devoted his fortune and influence to my uncle's advancement, and at the age of fifty he became an admiral; at the same age my father found himself a captain, existing on half-pay, with a microscopic pension and an incurable wound in his side, as rewards for having served his country. 'England expects every man to do his duty,' and occasionally recompenses him for it with honourable starvation. As my father's health decreased his expenses increased, unpaid doctor's bills stared him in the face, and butchers and bakers grew uncivil and importunate.

"At my grandfather's death he left every farthing he possessed to his eldest son. Angry at the injustice, my father refused his brother's offer of an allowance, and unwisely determined to dispute the will. Accordingly, he not only lost his cause, but irritated my uncle to such a degree that all communication ceased between them. When I was approaching the august age of ten years, and affairs seemed to be coming to a crisis, by some chance I, playing with and apparently absorbed by a regiment of tin soldiers, happened to be present at a family committee of ways and means. During this colloquy, the unfortunate disagreement between the brothers was talked over and lamented by my mother; who exerted all her eloquence to persuade my father to write to the Admiral and inform him of his failing health and ruined fortunes, and trust to his generosity to forget and forgive the past. But my father's pride stood in the way. He would willingly have been reconciled to my brother, if he had not required pecuniary assistance at his hands; but the consciousness of this necessity rendered him inexorable. So finding his wife's arguments unanswerable, he adopted the usual resource in such cases—viz., he talked himself into a rage, and flinging out of the room, slammed the door behind him, leaving my mother and me 'tête-à-tête.'

"After a minute's silence, I surprised her by asking, 'Papa's very poor, and my uncle's very rich; and papa would ask

uncle to give him some money, only they quarrelled when grandpapa stopped papa's pocket money: isn't that it, mamma?'

"'Yes, my dear,' was the reply; 'but you must not talk about it to anybody remember.'

"I nodded assent, then resumed, 'Uncle's a good, kind man, isn't he?"

"'Yes, my love; a good man I know him to be, and he was kind once,' was the reply.

"'Then why don't you go and tell him that papa's very sorry he was naughty, and wants to make friends again: and if uncle is good and kind, he will say yes; and when they are friends again, uncle will be sure to give him some of his pocket-money without being asked, because they are brothers. Won't that do, mamma?'

"My mother rose with tears in her eyes, stroked the hair back from my forehead, imprinted a kiss on it, and murmuring, 'Your papa would never allow me to do so, darling,' quitted the room.

"Well, I sat and cogitated the matter: even as a child I was of a fearless nature, and confident in my own resources; and at last a plan occurred to me. At that time we lived in London, and I attended a public school as a day-scholar. At this school I had a friend—a boy of some two or three years older than myself. To him, in strict confidence, I imparted my scheme, which he was pleased graciously to approve of, and in which he volunteered to aid me. Accordingly, on the following morning, when my parents imagined I was declining 'hic hæc, hoc,' I was, under the able guidance of my schoolfellow, making my way to the office of a coach which passed within half a mile of Coverdale Park. Having seen me set off in high health and spirits, my friend after school hours left the following note at our house:—

"'DEAR MAMMA,—I have gone to see my uncle Coverdale, as you could not do it. Papa never told me not to—so he won't be angry with me. Thompson saw me off, and will leave this, so no more at present, "'From your dutiful son,

"'H. C.'

"I reached Coverdale Park without adventure, and greatly astonishing a solemn butler by demanding to see my uncle forthwith, was ushered into a large oak-panelled apartment, wherein sat a fine, portly-looking gentleman, eating his dinner in solitary dignity. As soon as his eyes fell upon my features he started, exclaiming—

"'Bless my soul, boy! who are you?'

"'Your nephew, Harry Coverdale, uncle,' returned I, looking him full in the face. My gaze seemed rather to embarrass

him, for his lips moved convulsively ere he was able to frame a reply. At length he exclaimed angrily—

"'And pray, sir, what do you want here?'

"Feeling by no means inclined to enter abruptly upon family affairs in presence of the servants, I paused. But certain inward cravings, aroused by the sight of the good things before me, soon furnished me with an idea, and with a decidedly suggestive emphasis, I answered, 'I have not had any dinner yet.' My uncle again looked at me, to see whether my observation was the result of impudence or simplicity—deciding apparently in favour of the latter, he desired the servant to place me a chair, and give me a knife and fork. Fortified by a good dinner, and encouraged by a kind twinkle in the corner of my uncle's eye, which belied all his attempts to look angry, I soon began to chatter away freely, and enlighten my newly-found relative as to my opinion of things in general. After the cloth was removed, and I had volunteered grace, at which my uncle appeared first surprised and then edified, he began—

"'Now boy, tell the truth—but first, you shall have a glass of wine; which will you take?'

"'I always tell the truth, uncle, even if it gets me a thrashing; and I'll take port, for that's the only wine fit for a gentleman,' answered I, which reply so delighted my uncle, that he poured me out a bumper, and patting me on the back exclaimed—

"'Bravo, my boy! stick to truth and port wine through life, and you'll be a credit to your name!'

"That speech of mine won the day. I explained the object of my visit, and that it had originated wholly with myself; and succeeded so well that on the following morning my uncle accompanied me home, was reconciled to my father, to whom, till the day of his death (which occurred within the next year), he showed every kindness, and after that event took my dear mother to reside with him at the Park, provided for my education, and eventually made me his heir."

To this recital, followed by a detail of many of those pure thoughts and deep feelings which lie hidden in the breast of every generous-hearted man till heaven blesses him with a female friend worthy to receive such sacred confidence, did Alice listen with growing interest and sympathy; and when, two hours afterwards, Mr. Hazlehurst returned home in a great state of universal vinous philanthropy, Harry and his companion could scarcely believe they had been walking together for more than half an hour.

The week passed away like a dream. Harry walked, and drove, and sang, and read poetry with the young ladies, and found himself especially happy and comfortable. Moreover, he contrived to institute a system of romantic rambles

with Alice, during which they talked about all those peculiar subjects which can only be discussed comfortably in a "tête-à-tête"—thoughts and feelings too delicate to be submitted to the rough handling of a crowd. And Alice, after three days' experience, told Kate Marsden, in strict confidence, that she had formed the highest opinion of Mr. Coverdale's principles; that he was so good and sensible, and in every way superior to the young men one generally meets, that it was quite a privilege to possess his friendship—didn't Kate think so? To which Kate replied in the affirmative; adding that girls were usually so frivolous and empty-headed that they are not worth cultivating. "Where was the good of making friends of people, unless one could look up to them?" Alice responded, "Where indeed!" and considered that Kate took a very proper and sensible view of the matter.

One small incident occurred, however, which somewhat ruffled the smooth surface of Alice's tranquillity. Two or three days after the picnic there arrived from Mr. Crane a note, together with a slim and genteel quadruped, possessing a greyhound-like outline, shadowy legs, and a long tail, and purporting to be a thoroughly-broken lady's horse, with which the cotton-spinner begged "Miss Alice would allow him to replace the pony injured by the furious riding of her brother and Mr. Coverdale"—an association in iniquity which delighted Tom as much as it provoked Harry, and, secretly, Alice also. This horse Mr. Hazlehurst insisted upon it Alice should not refuse; and he became so angry when a faint remonstrance was attempted that the poor girl quitted his study in tears—a melancholy fact, which Emily, in a truly feminine and injudicious burst of virtuous indignation, revealed to Coverdale, thereby laying in him the foundation of a deeply-rooted aversion to the animal, which led to results that would have been better avoided.

The morning following the arrival of this undesirable addition to the family, Mr. Hazlehurst announced his intention of riding over to call upon and inquire after Mr. Crane, and his wish (which meant command) that Alice should accompany him on her new horse. "Mr. Coverdale, will you ride with us?" continued the head of the family, graciously; "I do not think you have seen Crane Court yet. The scenery in and around the park is very rich, and the view from the terrace most extensive."

Harry in his secret soul disliking Mr. Crane and all that appertained to him, and fancying, moreover, that the presence of Mr. Hazlehurst would effectually neutralise the pleasure of Alice's society, as their conversation would be thereby restricted to unmeaning commonplaces, was about to invent some polite reason for declining, when, happening to glance at the young lady in question, he read—or imagined he read, something in the expression of her countenance, which in-

duced him to alter his determination. Accordingly, Tom was made happy by obtaining permission to go to the village-inn, where Coverdale's horses were put up, order the groom to saddle Sir Lancelot, and ride that exemplary quadruped back, as a reward for his trouble.

"How do you like Mr. Crane's present to my daughter? In my opinion it is one of the most perfect lady's horses I have ever seen," complacently remarked Mr. Hazlehurst to Coverdale, as they stood at the hall door, criticising the horses which a groom was leading up and down.

"I dare say the old gentleman"—(Mr. Hazlehurst's brow darkened)—"paid a high figure for the animal," was the reply; "it has its good points, and is very well fitted for a park hack; but it's a weedy, straggling sort of beast—showy action, but badly put together;—and there's something queer about its eyes—it has an uncomfortable way of leering round at you, and showing the whites, that I don't like. You can see it's been fed under the mark, and I shouldn't wonder if, now it's on full allowance, it were to turn out skittish."

"I can't say I at all agree with you, Mr. Coverdale," was the hasty reply. "I flatter myself I know something of horses, and I consider this as perfect a lady's hack as I ever beheld, and a most valuable animal into the bargain. As to temper, it's as quiet as a lamb—a child might ride it. I must beg you will not say anything which might tend to alarm my daughter, or prejudice her against it."

Harry turned away to hide a smile, as he replied, "Never fear, sir; Miss Hazlehurst shall form her own opinion of its merits, without my attempting to bias her judgment."

When Mr. Hazlehurst assisted his daughter to mount, Harry, who really doubted the temper of the animal, watched it closely, and his previous opinion was confirmed by observing that it laid back its ears, glanced viciously round, and at the moment when Alice sprang up, made a faint demonstration with its mouth, as though it coveted a sample of Mr. Hazlehurst from the region of that gentleman's coat-tails, and was only restrained from attempting to obtain one by a recollection of former punishment. The preliminary arrangements being safely accomplished, the trio started, followed by a mounted groom, Coverdale keeping close to Alice's bridle rein.

They had proceeded some distance, without anything occurring to justify his suspicions: and, in spite of all drawbacks, Alice was really beginning to enjoy her ride, when her father proposed a canter; and on quickening her pace, the odd manner in which her horse tossed and shook his head in some degree alarmed her.

"Loosen the curb-rein a little," suggested Harry, "and try to hold him entirely by the snaffle. I will keep close to you, so do not be afraid, lest he should bolt." Alice complied, and

the horse appearing to approve of the alteration, ceased to shake his head; but as it became warm to its work, it pulled so hard against the snaffle that Alice's delicate hands were unable to prevent the canter from increasing into something very like a gallop. Sir Lancelot kept pace with him, stride for stride; but Mr. Hazlehurst's short-legged cob—the "dray-horse-in-miniature—warranted-equal-to-sixteen-stone" style of animal, which elderly gentlemen ride for the benefit of their digestions, not being calculated for such fast work, was very soon distanced.

"What has become of papa?" exclaimed Alice, glancing round; "we ought to wait for him, but I can't make this creature go slower—it pulls dreadfully. May I use the curb?"

"I had rather you did not," was the reply; "the brute seemed so uneasy when you tried it before—perhaps its mouth is tender; I will examine it when you dismount. Canter on to the next hill, and then we will stop for Mr. Hazlehurst." And they did so accordingly, though Alice was unable to pull in her horse until Harry leaned over and gave her the assistance of his strong arm.

CHAPTER X.

"EQUO NE CREDITE TEUCRI."—Virgil.

"WHY didn't you hold in your horse, Alice, and ride at a proper lady-like pace, instead of tearing along in that extraordinary manner?" inquired Mr. Hazlehurst, coming up very red in the face, hot, and discomposed; both himself and the cob being entirely out of that useful article, breath.

"I could not contrive to make him go slower, papa," replied poor Alice, timidly; "even now you see he is very fidgety, and keeps continually pulling." This was perfectly true; for the horse, excited by its gallop, began to demonstrate its real character, and refusing to walk, sidled along, tossing its head impatiently, pricking up its ears at every sound, and looking as if it were prepared to shy upon the very slightest provocation.

"Pulling!—yes, of course it does," rejoined Mr. Hazlehurst, angrily; "you can't expect to hold a fine, high-courageo animal like that with the snaffle only—tighten the curb-rein directly. Take care what you are doing!—steady! horse, steady!—touch him with the whip on the shoulder. Bless me! she'll be thrown!"

While Mr. Hazlehurst was speaking they had, in turning a corner, come suddenly upon a wheelbarrow, in which were deposited two jackets and a hat, belonging to some men who were mending the road. The moment Alice's horse caught

sight of this object it stopped short, and as, in obedience to her father's directions, the frightened girl jerked the curb-rein, and struck the animal with her whip, it reared, and at the same time plunged round so suddenly as to unseat its rider. Fortunately, Coverdale had kept as near to her as possible, and by a quick motion of the bridle-hand and touch with the spur, he caused his horse to turn at the same moment as did that on which Alice was mounted; he was thus enabled to pass his arm round her waist and prevent her from falling.

"Is your foot clear of the stirrup?" he inquired, hastily. Perceiving that it was so, he continued, "Let go the rein, then, and trust yourself entirely to me." As he spoke, the groom came up, and catching the bridle of the plunging horse, led it away, while Mr. Hazlehurst, descending from his saddle with a greater degree of celerity than might have been expected from a man of his age and stoutness, received his daughter in his arms, and lifted her to the ground for which feat of agility, Harry, who was by no means impatient to be relieved of his lovely burthen, mentally anathematised him. Then ensued a great confusion of tongues; Mr. Hazlehurst, being himself chiefly to blame, evinced his penitence by accusing everybody else, especially the groom—an old favourite retainer, who held and expressed a strong ungrammatical and illogical opinion, diametrically opposed to his master's, on all subjects, divine, moral, and physical. At length, in utter despair of attaining any practical result, Harry, muttering to himself his surprise that people would not adopt his system, and strike out for themselves a quiet way of doing things, coolly took the matter into his own hands, by shifting Alice's saddle to the back of the cob; when he had completed this arrangement, and assisted the young lady to mount, he politely held Sir Lancelot's stirrups for the accommodation of Mr. Hazlehurst, observing—

"He will carry you just as quietly and easily as your own horse, sir; he is a hand or two higher, certainly; but if you should take a sudden fancy to leap the next stiff fence you come to, he'll carry you over it like a bird; so you must set the good against the evil."

"You're very kind, sir. Ugh! what a height the brute is!" —(these words accompanied the effort of literally climbing to the saddle)—"But—but—I've dropped my pocket-handkerchief—thank you. What are you going to ride yourself?"

"I am going, if you have no objection, to find out why Mr. Crane's purchase dislikes to pass that wheelbarrow, and to convince him that there exists a strong necessity for his so doing," returned Harry, with his head under the flap of a saddle—he being engaged in securing with his own hands the girt around Alice's discarded steed, despite sundry futile attempts at kicking and biting instituted by that unamiable quadruped.

"Oh, Mr. Coverdale—please—pray do not attempt it!" exclaimed Alice, eagerly; "I'm sure the creature is vicious! you will be thrown and hurt, to a certainty!" Harry, thus apostrophised, emerged from beneath the saddle flap, and tossing back his dishevelled hair, and replacing his hat, which for the greater convenience of strenuous buckling he had taken off, crossed over to Alice's side.

"You are holding the reins twisted, Miss Hazlehurst," he said; "let me arrange them for you." As he restored the reins properly placed to her grasp, somehow their fingers became interlaced, and Harry appeared unable to disentangle his for some seconds; during which space of time, Alice, blushing and turning away her head, murmured imploringly—

"You will not ride that creature!"

"Your father will never be convinced that the brute is unsafe for you unless he sees it in its true colours; besides, I dare say I shall have no trouble in getting it past the barrow—there is a quiet way of doing these things," was the confident reply. Alice still sought to remonstrate, but in vain; for pressing her delicate fingers as though he were loth to relinquish them, Coverdale turned away with a gay smile, and placing his toe in the stirrup, vaulted lightly to his saddle.

Having waited till Mr. Hazlehurst and his daughter had ridden on a short distance, Harry put his horse in motion, and prepared to follow them; but the moment it caught sight of the alarming wheelbarrow it again stopped short, and attempted to repeat its former manœuvre. Willing to try mild measures first, Coverdale, although he prevented the animal from dashing round as it had done when it unseated Alice, allowed it to turn, and riding it back a few paces, gave it time to compose its excited feelings, ere he again brought it up to the object of its fear. As it approached the spot he kept it tightly in hand, and, when it began to waver, stimulated its flagging resolution by the most delicate hint imaginable from his "armed heel." The instant it felt the spur, it swerved aside, dashed round, and as soon as its head was turned in a homeward direction, evinced an unmistakable desire to bolt. Harry's brow grew dark. "Lend me your whip," he said, approaching the servant, who sat grinning with the satisfaction usually displayed by a professional horseman on witnessing the discomfiture of an amateur rider—more especially if the amateur happen to be a gentleman.

"You be too good-natured with him, Mr. Coverdale; you should give it him hot and strong, sir. But la! the hanimal ain't fit for ladies and gentlemen; he wants a reglar sharp rough rider on his back, that'll take the nonsense out of him, he do."

"Your whip is too light; get down and cut me a good, tough ash stick out of the hedge there. I will hold your horse," was the only reply Harry vouchsafed.

The man glanced at his face in surprise, and seeing that he was in earnest, hastened to execute his wishes, returning in two or three minutes with a couple of plants of ground-ash, about the thickness of a finger. Having carefully examined these, Harry selected the one he considered the most serviceable.

The groom watched him narrowly. "So you really mean business, eh, sir?" he said.

"I do," was the concise reply, as, with compressed lips and flashing eyes, Harry turned and rode off.

Probably, from some instinctive consciousness that he was not to be allowed his own way without more serious opposition than he had yet encountered, the horse, as he drew near the dreaded spot, displayed stronger signs of fear and ill-temper than before, staring from side to side, with his ears in constant motion, arching his neck, and tossing the foam-flakes from his mouth, as he impatiently champed the bit. The moment he caught sight of the wheelbarrow, he swerved aside with a bound which would have unseated any but a first-rate horseman, and attempted his usual manœuvre of turning round. In this he was foiled by an unpleasantly sharp stroke on the side of the nose from the ash sapling, which, obliging him to turn in an opposite direction, brought him again in sight of the wheelbarrow, while a stronger application of the spurs caused him to bound forward; thereupon he reared, but a crack over the ears brought him down again; then he set to kicking, for which he was rewarded by finding his mouth violently sawed by the snaffle-bit, while a perfect tornado of blows from the ash stick was hailed upon his flanks and shoulders. Finding this the reverse of agreeable, he, as a last resource, reared till he stood perfectly erect, pawing the air wildly with his fore feet. But he had overshot the mark.

At the conclusion of the previous struggle the ash stick had broken off short in Coverdale's hand; consequently, he was prevented from applying the counter-irritation principle as before, and was only able, by great quickness, to extricate his feet from the stirrups, ere the horse overbalanced itself, and fell heavily backwards. Fortunately for his own safety, Harry was unusually prompt and active in all situations of danger; and, in the present emergency these qualities stood him in good stead. Although, of course, unable entirely to free himself from the falling animal, he contrived to slip aside, so that it should not fall upon him; and almost as soon as the frightened creature had regained its legs he also had sprung up, apparently unhurt, and leaped upon its back. But the fight was won. Completely cowed by its fall, and wearied out by the pertinacity of its rider, the conquered animal permitted Coverdale to ride it backwards and forwards past the dreaded wheelbarrow, approaching nearer at each turn, until at length he made it pause, with its nose within half

a yard of the alarming jackets, and discover for itself that they were made of fustian, of the most innocent quality, and flavoured with the usual cottage smell of bacon and wood smoke.

Elated with his success, he rejoined Alice and her father, saying as he did so, "Well, Miss Hazlehurst, I told you there was a quiet way of taming the dragon, and you see I was right."

Alice, who was very pale and trembling, murmured something about her "rejoicing that he was not hurt." But Mr. Hazlehurst, who appeared unusually cross and grumpy, replied, "If that's what you call a quiet way of enforcing obedience, Mr. Coverdale, all I can say is, I pity any poor creature that happens to be under your control!"

CHAPTER XI.

POST EQUITEM SEDET ATRA CURA.—Horace.

MR. HAZLEHURST, in his position of father of a family, had been so long accustomed to consider his will law, that the possibility of his being in the wrong was one which he never contemplated; the fact, therefore, of anyone having proved him to be so constituted in his eyes a high and unpardonable misdemeanour. Of this capital crime had Harry Coverdale, on the occasion just described, been guilty; and Mr. Hazlehurst, albeit outwardly he resumed his usual manner towards his guest, could not in his secret soul either forget or forgive his offence—more especially as the circumstance of Mr. Crane's present being demonstrated to be unsafe for a lady to ride (and that it was so, even Mr. Hazlehurst's power of self-deception could not conceal from him), was at that particular juncture of affairs singularly embarrassing. Of this change of sentiment straightforward, unsuspicious Harry never dreamed; accordingly, he continued to behave towards the old gentleman as freely as he had hitherto done, maintaining his own opinions, even when they entirely differed from those of his host, courteously, indeed, but with the sturdy independence natural to his character—a sturdiness which, until it was exerted in opposition to his sovereign will and pleasure, Mr. Hazlehurst had particularly admired. So for the rest of the week affairs (with this single exception) went on most agreeably and satisfactorily to all parties.

Harry, having once broken the ice, contrived speedily to win the good opinions (to use no stronger term) of all the female portion of the community. From the kind attention he paid Mrs. Hazlehurst, he soon acquired so much influence over that amiable lady that, to please him, she consented to various schemes devised for her benefit and amusement,

which her daughters had previously urged upon her in vain; for instance, when Harry, instructed by Alice in regard to times and seasons and the like minor particulars, came at the very moment when she was going to decide that she did not feel equal to going out at all that day, to tell her that the pony-phaeton was waiting at the door, and that he should really think her unkind, and imagine he must have done something to offend her, if she refused to allow him the pleasure of carrying her to the chaise, and driving her just far enough to do her good, and not tire her, what could she do but consent? "Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte." This point gained, it was easy to persuade the invalid to take a short excursion daily; and as her complaint was in some degree on the nerves, the beneficial effects of the fresh air and exercise soon became apparent. Moreover, as Alice knew how to drive a little, and wished to improve in that useful accomplishment, Harry could do no less, when he had brought Mrs. Hazlehurst safely home from her daily drive, than take out the young lady, and give her a lesson; and as these lessons usually lasted some two hours at a stretch, the fat ponies began to get into excellent working condition, and considering themselves put upon, wondered why the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals neglected to interfere in their behalf. Emily, too, had quite altered her opinion of their guest, and entirely sympathised with Tom's declaration that he was "a stunning good fellow, and no mistake!" Kate Marsden said little, but observed the progress of events with calm approval; for she perceived that to be going on which would greatly facilitate the execution of certain schemes which she had devised.

At length arrived the important day of the dinner-party. Were we called upon to define the meaning of the term dinner-party, we should denominate it an awful immolation of mind to matter, a wanton sacrifice of the head to the stomach. Why, on a hot summer's day, eighteen individuals, supposed to be in their proper senses, who might dine at home if they chose, should agree of their own free-will to victimise themselves and each other by congregating together in one room, for the space of two mortal hours to eat—and, in the case of the lords of the creation, probably to drink also—a great deal more than is good for them, is one of those social problems of which we expect to arrive at the solution about the time when mankind is thoroughly regenerated by Miss Martineau's atheological views (to coin a word), but not before.

If there were no other argument against this insane system of monster dinner-parties, the frightful state of discomfort into which the family of the giver of the feast is thrown by the coming event would alone be sufficient to prove our case. Unless the establishment be on a scale proportionable to that of the individual who, on finding the number of his guests

exceed the means of conveyance provided for them, coolly ordered round "more phaetons!" anarchy and confusion reign predominant throughout the devoted mansion for at least four-and-twenty hours before the affair comes off. In the first place, the servants, male and female, all go mad; if you give an order, the recipient stares you vacantly in the face, and does something else immediately; if you lay down a book, or any similar article, in its proper place, somebody instantly removes it and hides it in an improper one, where you are fortunate if you stumble upon it by accident in the course of the following six months. The lunacy of the servants re-acts upon their betters—everybody is a little out of temper, everybody is over-officious, and has a way of his or her own for doing everything diametrically opposed to the variously diverging ways of everybody else. From the earliest dawn the very garrets are redolent of "making soup," which odour remains in possession of the house till about the time at which luncheon should be, but of course is not, forthcoming, when it is superseded, and retires vice the venison put down to roast, which we would rather decree should be "put down" as a nuisance—at least, as far as regards our olfactory nerves. But it were an endless task to attempt to sum up all the miseries incidental to the preparations for celebrating one of these "feasts of un-reason," nor do we expect very many of the gentle public to sympathise in our views; for in every society which we have as yet frequented, "L'Amphitryon où l'on dine," though he be heavy as his own dinners, is certain to be a popular man.

However this may be, one thing is certain, that Harry Coverdale on the morning preceding the dinner-party at the Grange, experiencing in his proper person many of the inconveniences alluded to, and having made several attempts to improve his position, by seeking to induce somebody to do something sensible or agreeable, all of which proved abortive, by reason of the impossibility of extracting even Alice from the vortex of preparation—Harry Coverdale, thus victimised, "faute de mieux," mounted his good steed, and set off to ride away from the blue devils; but the remedy did not succeed—the devils followed him, and grew bluer and bluer with every mile he passed over, and, at last, the bluest of them all assumed the likeness of Mr. Crane!

"Confound Mr. Crane!"—thus ran Harry's thoughts—"confound the old fellow! he's coming to marry Alice—my nice, warm-hearted little friend, Alice! I don't by any means approve of it. He's old enough to be her father, or anybody else's, for that matter: the thing is ridiculous—quite absurd! Besides, the dear little girl dislikes him—naturally she does: there's nothing to like in him. Why, she cares more about me than she does about him!" He paused in thought, removed his hat, pushed back his thick, clustering hair, put

his hat on again, and continued: "I declare, if I'd not entirely made up my mind against marrying, I'd enter for the stakes myself, and see if one couldn't jockey the old fellow and governor Hazlehurst too. Alice is a prize well worth winning; but it's too late to change one's mind! I ought to have behaved differently to her at first, if I'd wanted her to fall in love with me—though I think I've got over all that pretty thoroughly, too. Ah! well, I've chosen my line, and must stick to it; and as the shooting season isn't so very far off now, thank goodness, I shall contrive to make it out somehow, I dare say. And, by Jove, there's a whole pack of birds sunning themselves in that great field—five or six coveys all got together—and stunning good coveys they must be, too! There's a gap in the hedge; I'll leap over and see if I can get near enough to count them. Now, Lancelot—steady, sir!—you must do it—over we go! Famously cleared! I wouldn't take five hundred guineas for you, you beauty! that I wouldn't. We'll show some of 'em the way across country when the hunting begins; won't we astonish their weak minds for them, rather!" and so, patting and caressing his horse, Harry made a wide circuit, and availing himself of the shelter of a belt of trees, contrived to get near enough to the partridges to count them; by which process he arrived at the interesting discovery that there were exactly thirty brace, with one bird over; which ornithological irregularity rather distressed and provoked him, though why it should have done so neither he nor, as we imagine, anyone else, could possibly conceive.

But the partridges being counted, back came the blue devils in greater force than ever: and his thoughts grew so troublesome, not to say unbearable, that Harry began to imagine he must be bewitched—a supposition in which, perhaps, he was not so very far wrong after all. As a last refuge against his persecutors, he resolved on a good gallop; and so made his way across country, a distance of some eight miles, as straight as the crow flies, leaping gates and crashing through hedges in a very reckless and steeple-chasing kind of manner, which obtained for him a more than sufficient amount of hard British swearing from sundry irate members of the Agricultural Association, who, for once in their lives, had a real grievance to complain of. As he cleared the last fence leading into the park in which the Grange was situated, the village clock struck six, and he could perceive a carriage, with the Crane liveries (green turned up with yellow), winding slowly through the trees. Three minutes more found him in the stable-yard, and flinging the bridle of his reeking steed to his groom, while he uttered the hasty caution, "You see the state he's in! take proper care of him," he made his way to his bedroom by a back staircase, overturning a water-can, and running into the arms of a pretty housemaid (to whom he apologised by men-

tioning that he was sorry he was in too great a hurry to give her a kiss), in the course of his rapid career. And so, very hot, very dusty, considerably tired, and with a most unromantic appetite, he set vigorously to work to (as servants inelegantly, but graphically term it) clean himself.

When, some twenty minutes afterwards, Coverdale reached the drawing-room he found all the guests assembled. Many of them, to whom he was personally known, immediately claimed acquaintance, recognising him in spite of the improvements which his residence abroad had wrought in his manners and appearance. Some two or three of the younger men were old college chums, who were really overjoyed to see him again, and who immediately gathered round him and besieged him with questions. Glancing round the circle, he perceived D'Almayne bending tenderly over Alice; but the sight no longer annoyed him—he had got over that. Alice saw the exquisite in his true colours: Alice had laughed at him—poor D'Almayne! But on her other hand sat the cotton-spinner and he was more formidable; for he did not (fortunately for himself) depend on his personal attractions alone—there were twenty thousand solid good reasons per annum why he should not be refused: reasons which rendered his alliance with Mr. Hazlehurst's family so desirable that all that gentleman's paternal authority was certain to be stretched to its uttermost limit to enable Mr. Crane to carry his point. Moreover, as Harry entered the drawing-room Tom had given him the following note:—

"DEAR HAL,—I have written to tell the governor that I shall be detained in court so late that it will be impossible for me to get away to-night (the truth, you heretic!). I shall start by the first train to-morrow, and be with you to breakfast. Keep a sharp look-out upon the cotton-spinner; and if at any moment he appears as if he were preparing to pop, throw a book at his head without hesitation! So will you continue to deserve the good opinion of

"ARTHUR H."

At dinner, Coverdale was seated next a fast young lady, who rather made love to him than otherwise; but she did not take much by her motion, for Harry had a good deal of business on his hands. First, there was his appetite to satisfy, and the monster was very insatiate after his gallop across country; next, he felt it incumbent upon him to keep a strict watch over Mr. Crane and Alice, who were seated nearly opposite to him; and he seriously debated in his own mind whether a finger-glass might not be considered a legitimate substitute for a book, on one or two occasions, when the cotton-spinner appeared to be attempting the excessively tender. Good eating requires good drinking; thirst demands Pale

Ale, etiquette obliges Champagne, and the mixed duties of society necessitate Port and Sherry; Hock is very refreshing in hot weather; it is no use to hand round Curaçoa, if people won't drink it; Hermitage and Lunel are so nice that everybody takes them; Claret is a necessity in all properly ordered establishments; and if your host produces a bottle of good old Burgundy, he must be a fool who refuses to taste it. But for a man to do all this, and at the same time to think, feel, and express himself as coolly and prudently as he would after a mutton-chop and a glass of table-beer, would require him to possess a brain made of cast-iron, and no heart at all; and such was by no means the physical conformation of our hero. Harry, however, possessed a good strong head of his own; and although, as dessert proceeded, his eyes grew brighter, and he involuntarily emulated D'Almayne by smiling frequently, and unconsciously displaying an even row of white teeth, these peculiarities only served to make him look especially handsome. But the wine did something else; for, as the ladies rose to leave the room it inspired him with a determination to jockey D'Almayne, who usually usurped the privilege of opening the door on such occasions—a "cutting-out" expedition which Harry conducted with equal skill and success. As Alice, who came last, passed him, some spirit (whether of wine or another equally favourite theme for minstrel's lay, we cannot tell) urged him to bend his head and whisper the inquiry, "Have you been happy with your delightful companion?"

A contemptuous smile, and a slight negative motion of the lips answered the question; and, for a moment, their eyes met. Alice's must have been a singularly expressive glance, for Harry read therein that she was anxious and dispirited, but felt a vague and general reliance on his willingness and ability to afford her comfort and protection.

Had Mr. Crane known the exact feelings with which Coverdale grasped a finger-glass, and mentally calculated the amount of force it would require to launch the missile against the chinchilla-crowned head of his opposite neighbour, that worthy man would scarcely have ventured to continue his mild and meaningless prosing so contentedly.

CHAPTER XII.

HARRY PUTS HIS FOOT IN IT.

THE moment Harry reseated himself at the dining-table two of his old college friends placed themselves beside him, and plunging at once into recollections of "auld-lang-syne," completely monopolised him. The sound of his own name

eagerly pronounced, roused him at length from an interesting reminiscence of how gloriously drunk Jones of Magdalen had been at Tippleton's wine-party (when he would sing a pathetic ballad, beginning, "There's a wail on the mountain!" and was stopped by a roar of laughter, chorusing the inquiry, "how the deuce it—the—whale—got there?") The speaker was Mr. Hazlehurst. "Excuse my interrupting your conversation for a few minutes, Mr. Coverdale," he began, "but we want your opinion. You've travelled and seen the working of different tariff regulations, and had opportunities of comparing the prosperity of other nations with that of our own, while at the same time you are a sufficiently large landed-proprietor to give you a stake in the country, and to induce you to feel a strong interest in the general prospects of the agricultural population. I am sure you must agree with me in considering protection a most essential and salutary measure."

"If I might be allowed to make just one observation before Mr. Coverdale favours us with his views on this important question," insinuated Mr. Crane, in the mildest and most affectionate tone of voice imaginable—wine always reducing this excellent man to a state of weak and inappropriate philanthropy—"if I might observe that, with the highest respect for, and admiration of, the agricultural population of this great country, I feel it incompatible with my feelings as a Protestant, and therefore, so to speak, in a general way as a brother, not to say as a man also, and more particularly as a mill-owner, to forget the thousands of operatives who crowd our large cities, and who, when satisfied with cheap bread, add to the dignity and prosperity of the nation; but, on the contrary, when deprived of this means of support, object to resign themselves to the dispensations of a beneficent Providence, and fly in the face of society as chartists, levellers, red-republicans, and all that is dangerous and subversive of morality and security of property. If I may so far presume as to call Mr. Coverdale's attention to the desirableness of providing food at a rate which will enable the manufacturing classes to exist without constantly working themselves up into a state of illegal desperation, I shall feel that I have, if I may be allowed the expression, unburthened my conscience." Thus saying, Mr. Crane cast a timid and appealing look from Harry to his host, and sipped a glass of Burgundy with the air of a man apologising for some misdeed.

"It is not a subject upon which I have ever expended any vast amount of consideration," began Coverdale, wishing in his secret soul that he might have the feeding of Mr. Crane for the ensuing six months entrusted to him; in which case he would have afforded that gentleman an opportunity of practically testing the merits of very cheap bread indeed, and of nothing else—except, perhaps, cold spring water; "but the

common sense of the matters appears to lie in a nutshell: the two great divisions of the poorer classes are the manufacturing poor and the agricultural poor, the manufacturers being the most numerous—to sacrifice one to the other is unfair, but to offer up the greater to the less is ridiculous. Free-trade has had a fair trial, and has been proved to benefit the masses, though it lies heavily on the land-owners. Well, then, relieve land of its burthens, and make the income-tax permanent to re-imburse the Exchequer. That's the line I should take if I were Premier, which, thank heaven, I'm not."

As Harry concluded, two or three men began to speak at once, but Mr. Hazlehurst, by a solemn wave of the hand, immediately silenced him. That excellent magistrate had drunk more wine than was by any means good for him; his constitution was gouty, and he had not had a fit for some time; before such attacks he was usually as irritable as though his brain were a hedgehog, and society at large a pack of wire-haired terriers attempting to unroll it. Claret was the most unwholesome wine he could take, and on the evening in question he had imbibed nearly a bottle thereof; but of all this "dessous des cartes" Harry was innocently unconscious.

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen," began Mr. Hazlehurst, solemnly, "but the right of reply at present rests with myself. Moreover, if my ears did not deceive me, Mr. Coverdale has made an observation which I must call upon him either to explain or retract; but, in the first place, let me express my surprise and regret, sir," here he addressed himself politely to Harry, "that a young man in your position, a large landed-proprietor, a lover of field sports, possessing a practical knowledge of land, and a personal acquaintance with the habits and customs of the agricultural poor—the bone and sinews of our country, should thus turn against and betray the interests of the class to which he belongs, and league himself with those who would, in their short-sightedness, sap the vitals of that free and independent character which has made us the great nation that we are. With regard to the observation to which I alluded, I believe, that having stigmatised the opinions I hold as a sacrifice of the greater to the less, you deliberately pronounced those opinions ridiculous. Have I not repeated your words correctly?"

"I certainly said that to sacrifice the greater number to the less would be ridiculous," returned Harry, completely taken aback at this sudden and unexpected accusation; "but I only meant——"

"You meant what you said, I presume?" interposed Mr. Hazlehurst, in the magisterial tone of voice in which he was accustomed to cross-examine and be down upon equivocating poachers.

"Of course I did," returned Harry, his eyes flashing as he [illegible] sarcastic smile upon the face of Horace D'Al-

mayne. "I always mean what I say; but my remark related solely to general principles, and had not the smallest reference to you personally, sir."

"Which is equivalent to saying that I do not understand the common meaning of words," returned Mr. Hazlehurst, in the same irritating tone of voice. "Really, Mr. Coverdale, your explanations do not tend to do away with the unfavourable impression your observation forced upon me."

"It is equivalent to nothing of the kind, sir," rejoined Harry, losing his self-command as a second glance at D'Almayne revealed the fact that he was hiding a laugh behind an elaborately-worked cambric handkerchief: "but if you choose to put a wrong construction upon every word I utter, it is useless for me to discuss the matter further with a man so—a —so——"

At this critical moment, Tom Hazlehurst, who had been listening with a countenance of blank dismay to the altercation between his father and his friend, contrived, either by accident or design, to throw down and break a valuable china plate. This incident created a diversion by calling forth an outburst of parental wrath, under cover whereof Harry regained sufficient self-control to enable him to suppress the word "wrong-headed," with which he had been on the point of concluding his sentence. At the same time, Mr. Crane, having a mortal antipathy to anything like quarrelling, which, as he said, produced "an insalubrious agitation of his nervous system," or, in plain English, frightened him out of his wits, suggested that they should join the ladies—a proposal which led to a general move. Five minutes' reflection, in an atmosphere less oppressive than that of the heated dining-room, caused Harry to perceive that, by having allowed himself to be provoked by the obstinacy of a pig-headed and slightly tipsy old gentleman into even a momentary forgetfulness of the respect due to Mr. Hazlehurst's years and position, he had acted wrongly and foolishly. It moreover occurred to him, now that it was too late to be of the slightest use, that owing to this unfortunate disagreement he must have completely neutralised any influence he might have possessed with his host, and thus, in fact, frustrated the whole purpose of his visit: by which means Arthur would be vexed, and the possibility of Alice's marriage with Mr. Crane rather increased than otherwise. Just as he was about to exchange the cool air of the garden (whither on leaving the dining-room he had betaken himself) for the less agreeable temperature of a crowded drawing-room he was patted on the shoulder by one of his college acquaintances.

"Ah, Knighton! what is it, man?" observed Harry, wishing his dear friend at Jericho. "I took you for the stem of a tree, you stood so motionless."

"Why the fact is, my dear fellow," returned Knighton, a

well-disposed goose, who, when Harry first commenced his college career, had formed an enthusiastic attachment for him, in return for which he expected his friend to advise him how to act and what to say upon every occasion, trifling as well as important—a tax which even Harry's good nature found somewhat oppressive, "the fact is, I consider it quite providential, if I may say so, finding you here to-night: you know I always like to have your opinion before I make up my mind; there is nobody with such good sense as you, at least, nobody that I've ever met with. My dear Coverdale, I'm going to take the most important step—that is, if you see no reason against it, which I can scarcely feel a doubt of; but I'll tell you the whole affair, beginning properly at the beginning. When I was down in Hampshire three years ago——" But we will not inflict Mr. Knighton's amiable prolixity on the reader, suffice it to say that, having linked his arm within that of Coverdale, he paraded his victim up and down a gravel walk for the space of at least three-quarters of an hour, while he poured into his ears as dull a tale of true love as ever ran smooth: true love of the very mildest quality, which, from the beginning, was certain to end simply and naturally in a stupid marriage, about the whole of which affair there could not by possibility be two opinions. At length, when Harry had agreed with everything and to everything at least twice over, and strongly advised his tormentor to act as he felt certain he would have done if his advice had been just the other way (for this young man although he eagerly sought counsel, by no means considered himself bound to walk thereby), it suddenly occurred to Mr. Knighton that he was doing an unkind thing by his friend, and a rude one by his host, in not sooner joining the ladies; accordingly, at (literally) the eleventh hour, he exercised thus much self-denial, viz., having nothing more to say, he said it.

When Coverdale entered the drawing-room, he cast round his eyes to discover what might have become of Alice and Mr. Crane, and failing to perceive them, was about to find some excuse for making his way into the boudoir beyond, when Emily pounced upon him to entreat him to sing for the edification of some dear Mary Jane or other, who was dying to hear him; and the very identical Mary Jane herself seconding the request in a mild, insinuating, blatant tone of voice, as of some bashful but persuasive sheep, there remained nothing for him but to consent, which he did with a very ill grace indeed. Having dashed through a tender and sentimental Italian love-ditty in a ferocious, not to say sanguinary, style, he declared he was so hoarse that he could not sing another note, and again made an attempt to enter the boudoir, which he succeeded in reaching just in time to see Alice quit the room with a heightened colour, and in a manner which betokened hurry and agitation, while Mr. Crane remained

gazing after her with a countenance indicative of the deepest and most helpless bewilderment. From these symptoms Harry rightly conjectured that while he had been off duty the cotton-spinner had popped; but whether his offer had been accepted or rejected he was utterly unable to divine. Mr. Crane looked stupid and puzzle-pated—but that he was sure to do in any case. For the rest of the evening Coverdale was in a fearful state of mind; people stayed late, and it seemed to him as if everybody had entered into a league to worry and torment him. First, the young lady who had sat next him at dinner got at him again, and flirted at him so violently that (his thoughts running entirely on marrying and giving in marriage) he became possessed of a nervous dread lest she should be going to make him an offer; this idea gaining confirmation from it suddenly occurring to him that it was Leap-year, he grew desperate, and pretending that Emily had made him promise to sing again, astonished that damsel by crossing over to inform her that his hoarseness had entirely departed, and that he should have the greatest pleasure in favouring her friend with the song she had wished to hear; for which piece of inconsistency Emily bestowed upon him a glance so penetrating and satirical that he longed to box her pretty pert little ears for it. When the song was over Knighton emerged from behind a broad old lady, somebody's mother-in-law, very far gone in Curaçoa, which she had concealed behind a pious zeal for clothing the female natives of Barleyaragon (an unknown island, discovered by Juan de Chuzacruz in the sixteenth century, and forgotten ever since) in the cast-off garments of the Bluecoat-School boys. The moment Knighton got clear of this philanthropic elder he pounced upon Coverdale, and carrying him off to a recess, then and there related to him an additional episode in his amatory career, which was not of the slightest importance either to himself or to anybody else, but which took nearly as long to communicate as the original history. During this infliction Harry's attention was occupied by observing the behaviour of Mr. Crane. Almost as soon as Alice quitted the boudoir, Kate Marsden had entered it, and begun a long and apparently interesting conversation with Mr. Crane, during which that gentleman, who at the commencement appeared rather low and desponding, gradually brightened up, and, under the influence of his fair companion's society, grew quite lively and animated; in fact (if by any stretch of imagination the reader can connect two such antagonistic and incongruous ideas as Mr. Crane and flirtation), an uninitiated spectator, beholding the pair, might legitimately have come to the conclusion that Kate Marsden and the cotton-spinner were very decidedly and unmistakably flirting.

The longest evenings come to an end at last, and Coverdale having seen Knighton safely deposited in a dog-cart, with

nobody to bore but a sleepy groom, was making his way to the spot where the bedroom candlesticks were usually to be discovered, when he suddenly encountered Mr. Hazlehurst. Standing aside to let him pass, Harry, in his most polite and conciliatory manner, wished him good-night. The only reply vouchsafed was the slightest and stiffest possible nod of the head, and with a countenance as dark and lowering as the most viciously-disposed thunder-cloud, the offended autocrat passed on.

CHAPTER XIII.

"DEEPER AND DEEPER STILL."

WHEN Coverdale reached his own room his first act was to lock the door his next to fling open the window; he then untied his neck-cloth, pulled off his coat and boots, and substituting for them a dressing-gown and slippers, cast a long, lingering glance at his cigar-case. Shaking his head negatively, he muttered, "I daren't risk it; old Hazlehurst has a wonderful nose for tobacco—if it were but as good for partridges and pheasants he'd make an invaluable retriever!"—he paused, sighed deeply, partly for want of a cigar—partly because, though he was not at all aware of it, one of the great realities of life was for the first time dawning upon him; then drawing a chair to the open window he seated himself, and gave way to thought.

"I've made a pretty mess of it this evening, and no mistake!"—thus ran his ideas—"gone and offended the governor, and rendered him as cantankerous as an old rhinoceros, so that the more I want him to do anything the less likely he'll be to do it. Then, in my confounded good-nature, I've allowed that ass Knighton to detain me with his stupid prosing, so that I lost sight of the cotton-spinner, and gave him a chance of making Alice an offer—a chance of which the old fellow was inspired with wit enough to avail himself, I'm almost certain. Arthur will be preciously savage! and enough to make him—the notion of sacrificing Alice to such an old anatomy as that—a yellow-skinned brute like a resuscitated mummy, without more than two ideas in his head, and two such ideas—cash and cotton! he thinks of nothing else, asleep or awake. I wonder what answer Alice gave him? but there isn't much doubt of that, the poor girl daren't disobey her father—besides, women don't refuse £20,000 a-year. Well, I wish old Crane joy of his bargain. She'll soon get sick of him, and be miserable, of course; then she'll take to flirting with every young fellow she meets, to get rid of her "ennui"; choose out one to establish a platonic friendship

with, perhaps!—I've seen all that sort of thing in France and Italy often enough. D'Almayne very likely, he's just the sort of puppy to lead a woman on—she laughs at him now, but it may be different when she's only old Crane to contrast him with. By the way, I'll give Arthur a hint on that score." He rose, paced up and down the rooms several times, then continued—"I wonder what the deuce is the matter with me! I feel most absurdly and unpleasantly miserable." He re-seated himself by the window, tossed back his hair, and sat silently watching the moon, just then emerging from behind a bank of clouds. It was a time and scene to elevate and refine man's nature; and Harry was not insensible to the influence. He thought of his boyhood, and his mother's tender love; he recurred to the moonlight stroll in which he had confided these cherished memories to Alice, and the warm and ready sympathy with which she listened to the recital; then minute points in their subsequent intercourse forced themselves into his recollection—smiles, words, and glances, trifles in themselves, but when collected, suggestive of a definite idea; and lastly, her look when she quitted the dining-room that evening flashed across him, and, with a sudden start, he pressed his hand to his forehead as he resumed—"Fool that I am, I see it all now—now when it is too late! I love her, and I might have won her love—It only required to tell her of my own feelings, to change the affectionate interest she had conceived for me into a warmer sentiment; and now, perhaps piqued by my apparent indifference, she has accepted this man, and sealed her own unhappiness—and mine too, for that matter; but I deserve it! Why did I let this chance of a bright future escape me! To fancy that the mere physical excitements of hunting and shooting (pastimes for a thoughtless boy) could content a being endowed with reason and feeling!—though really I doubt whether I deserve such a title. I must have been blind—stultified, not to see all this before!" Burying his face in his hands, he remained for some time in deep and self-upbraiding thought; rousing himself at length by an effort, he continued—"Well! it's no good sitting here tormenting myself all night long; I'll go to bed (though, of course, I shall not sleep a wink), and in the morning I'll walk over to the station, meet Arthur, tell him how I've mismanaged everything he expected me to do, and find some excuse for leaving this place to-morrow. I should go mad if I were to stay here longer! Heigho! I wonder what will become of me; it will be no pleasure to look forward to the shooting season now! I don't believe I shall ever care to hit a bird or mount a horse again. I'll go to India, and join the army as a volunteer, or start off to look for the north pole, or something. I shall hang myself if I stay at home, and do nothing but think about Alice and that detestable old Crane!" By the time his meditations had

sufficiently violent to show that her nervous system was unusually excited, she turned and beheld him. Reassured by finding that the alarming sounds had been caused by the approach of a friend, rather than by that of a wild beast or an ogre (plagues so common in the midland counties of "England in ye nineteenth century," that of course her imagination had instantly suggested them), Alice waited till he came up, and received him with her customary bright smile, although her heightened colour, and an unusual degree of consciousness in her manner, proved that for some reason the meeting rather embarrassed her also.

"You walk betimes, Miss Hazlehurst," began Harry, anxious to break the ice, but not knowing in the slightest degree how, when it should be broken, he was going to proceed. "You are really a pattern of early rising; but I have a notion we are both bound on the same errand, namely, to meet Arthur—am I wrong?"

"Quite right," was the reply; "I got up at a wonderfully early hour; I suppose I was too much excited by such an unaccustomed event as a dinner-party to be able to sleep at all soundly."

"You look fagged and weary even now," returned Coverdale, regarding her anxiously, "and you will fatigue yourself still more by walking to the station and back. Are you prudent to take so long an expedition before breakfast?"

"Oh, yes," was the reply; "it will refresh me and do me good; besides, I want particularly to see and talk to Arthur."

"I will accompany you as far as the station, if you will allow me," returned Harry, "and, as soon as your brother arrives, leave you to talk to him in peace: the few words I have to say to him will do equally well after breakfast."

Alice signified her consent, and the conversation continued for several minutes to turn on indifferent subjects, though the burden of sustaining it fell chiefly upon Alice, Harry's observations becoming shorter and less coherent at each reply. At length, however, Alice's stock of small-talk failed her, and Harry, in despair, was about to hazard some such original observation as that the grass was looking remarkably green, when his companion suddenly addressed him.

"I am afraid that you will think that I am interfering very unnecessarily and impertinently, Mr. Coverdale, but I must trust to your kindness to make allowance for me."

"She is actually going to confess the cotton-spinner to me, and tell me I'm in the way, I do believe! Cool hands women are, and no mistake!" thought Coverdale; he only said, however, "Pray go on."

"The fact is," resumed Alice, with a faltering voice, "my brother Tom informed me (you must not be angry with the poor boy, for he did it out of regard for you) that you—that

is, that my father and you differed about some political question after dinner yesterday, and that my father was so carried away by the subject as to become injudiciously warm, and, from Tom's account, personal, and that his observations annoyed you. Now, I am so very sorry that this should have occurred, for he had formed such a high opinion of you, and Arthur was so much pleased to see how well you got on with him—a point on which he appeared particularly anxious." (Coverdale bit his lip, and cut off a thistle's head viciously with his cane.) "But if you could be so very good as to overlook anything my father may have said, it would make me—I mean it would make Arthur, and—and all of us so much happier."

"My dear Miss Hazlehurst," began Harry, vehemently, "how very kind of you to trouble yourself about me! I can assure you I am most anxious to say or do anything to regain Mr. Hazlehurst's good opinion. I know I made him rather an impertinent answer; but really I was so unprepared for such an attack; and then, to make matters worse, that old idiot, Mr. Crane—that is," he continued, suddenly recollecting to whom he was speaking, and turning crimson as he did so, "I beg your pardon for speaking so disrespectfully of him to you; I really forgot—I am certainly losing my senses!" With a blush as bright, though not quite so deep-coloured as that of Coverdale, Alice, turning away her head, replied:

"Mr. Crane's only claim on my respect is that he is my father's friend; if I must own the truth, I do not myself consider him very wise."

"His only claim did you say!" exclaimed Harry, earnestly. "Oh, Miss Hazlehurst—Alice—pardon me if I ask you to deal openly with me; am I indeed wrong in supposing that you are engaged, or about to become so, to Mr. Crane?"

"Oh, yes!" was the hurried reply; "such a fate would render me most miserable."

Upon this hint Harry spoke; the reality and strength of his feelings imparted an earnest dignity to his manner, and an unwonted eloquence to his speech, which would have deeply affected his fair auditor, even had her own heart not pleaded warmly in his favour. As it was, before they arrived in sight of the railroad station Harry had somehow come to the conclusion that the communication he should have to make to his friend Arthur would be very much more satisfactory, though perhaps little less embarrassing, than the one he had originally designed. It certainly was a considerable change in the tenor of his report to be forced to explain that, instead of considering himself the most miserable being in the world, he felt convinced he was by far the happiest; for that Alice—resolved not to marry the cotton-spinner—had given her heart, and promised her hand, to him.

And thus, short, sharp, and decisive, began and ended "Harry Coverdale's Courtship"; all the results, good and evil, "that came of it," may be learned by any reader sufficiently persevering to peruse that which remains to be told of this veracious history.

CHAPTER XIV.

DECIDEDLY EMBARRASSING.

ALICE and Harry were so deeply engrossed with each other, and so absorbed in the interchange of those mysterious but delightful nothings which form the staple of lovers' communications, and which, deeply interesting to the happy pair, appear to the unsusceptible public the veriest nonsense imaginable, that they were still some distance from the station when the train rushed up, sneezed out a few passengers, and, snorting and coughing, dashed off like a well-disposed fiery dragon, warranted quiet to ride and drive. Walking on rapidly, they soon discovered Arthur, embarrassed by a carpet-bag and a mackintosh, making the best of his way to meet them; the moment he came within speaking distance, he exclaimed:

"What do I behold! Harry Coverdale with a young lady on his arm! Surely the age of miracles is returning! Well, I never did! did you ever? And Alice looking so deliciously self-satisfied and unconscious, too! Why, you stupid little owl (you're very like one, with your hooked nose and great eyes), don't you know you're boring him to death? He cares for nothing but horses, dogs, and guns; and, above all, perfectly abominates women."

Alice smiled, and attempted to make a playful rejoinder, but in vain—her heart was too full; had she spoken at that moment she must have burst into tears. The speech affected Harry differently.

"I do nothing of the kind," he said, angrily; "Arthur, how can you be so absurd!" Pausing for a moment, the ludicrous nature of the situation occurred to him, and, with difficulty restraining a laugh, he turned the conversation by seizing his friend's carpet-bag, exclaiming, as he did so, "Come, give it up; of course I'm not going to let you carry it; you're looking horridly thin and pale, as Londoners always do: is he not, Al—a—, Miss Hazlehurst? What! you refuse; give it up this instant, or I declare I'll carry you and it too."

During the playful struggle which ensued for the possession of the carpet-bag, in which contention Harry was soon victorious, Alice, glad to obtain a few minutes in which to com-

men hastened to re-

join her, Hazlehurst, laying his hand on Coverdale's arm, inquired, "How has it all gone off? Crane hasn't ventured to offer yet, of course?"

"Yes, by Jove, he has, though!" was the reply; "the old muff contrived to pop last night—confound him!—when I was out of the room, and hadn't a chance of throwing anything at his head."

"And Alice?" inquired the brother, eagerly; but his eagerness frustrated its own purpose (no common case by the way), for, pronouncing the name in a louder key than he was aware of, the fair owner thereof stopped short, and thus prevented the possibility of further explanation. As they continued their homeward walk, Arthur, who was a quick observer, soon detected a change in Harry's manner towards his sister; for which, at first, he felt excessively puzzled to account. A respectful tenderness was apparent in his tone when he addressed her, and he exhibited a degree of eager, almost affectionate, solicitude for her ease and comfort, in all the minor incidents of a country walk, such as Hazlehurst, during the whole of their intimacy, had never before seen him evince towards a young lady.

"What has come to Harry now, I wonder?"—thus ran his reflections; "if it were anyone in the world but him, I should say he was flirting with Alice; but Harry never flirted in his life, so that is impossible." He pondered for a moment, then an idea struck him. "I see it now; my father has forced the poor child to accept old Crane; Harry knows it, and the pity his kind, warm-hearted nature leads him to feel towards her influences his manner. They were each coming to tell me all that has occurred, and have met by accident; yes, that must be it." In order, however, more fully to satisfy himself of the correctness of his theory, he observed, in his usual light, jesting manner, "I think, Mr. Coverdale, it behoves me, as 'a man and a brother,' to inquire how you happen to be marching about the country, 'tête-à-tête' with my sister, at this unconscionably early hour?"

Harry, who between his desire to enlighten Arthur as to the new and transcendently delightful, but especially embarrassing turn affairs had taken, and the impossibility of doing so before Alice—the overpowering nature of his feelings towards that young lady, and his extreme happiness at finding them reciprocated—the great and imminent danger "in re" Crane, and the humiliating confession regarding his lost influence with Mr. Hazlehurst, together with the awkward position in which he stood towards that outraged and obdurate elder—was in a tremendous frame of mind, merely started and stared vacantly at his interrogator.

But Alice, having by this time regained, in some degree, her self-possession, replied quietly, "Mr. Coverdale and I

were both coming to meet you, and encountering each other accidentally, walked on together."

As she spoke, Arthur, striving to read her countenance, fixed his eyes upon her. Unable to meet his glance, she turned away with an April look, half tears, half smiles. "It must be as I thought," reflected Arthur; "but if anything is to be done to save her, no time should be lost. I'll not waste the present opportunity. My dear Coverdale," he continued, aloud, "I wish to have a few minutes' private conversation with my sister; you and I are too old friends to stand upon ceremony; so you will not be offended if I ask you to walk on, and wait for us at the stile at the end of the path."

This direct appeal brought Harry to his senses, but not feeling sure whether Alice would approve of having the whole burden of explanation thrown upon her, he glanced inquiringly towards her ere he ventured to reply. Now, Alice, fond as she was of her brother, was also (from their difference in point of age, as well as from the fact that Arthur's nature was more firm and resolute than her own, and his manner quick and abrupt) a little afraid of him. Thus, being aware how very highly he esteemed Coverdale—an estimation which she was inclined to transcend rather than to depreciate—a sudden fear seized her lest Arthur, deeming her a mere silly child, should consider his friend had done a foolish thing in choosing her for a wife, when he might have selected, at the very least, some strong-minded peeress, and that he might be angry with her for her presumption in having accepted him. This feeling, overpowering for the moment every other, induced her to respond to Harry's look of inquiry by a slight shake of the head, and a glance which would have kept him by her side if a whole regiment of brothers, armed with Minie rifles and Colt's revolvers, had attempted to separate them. But Arthur, being totally unarmed, and having simply asked a civil question, the answer which Harry, appropriately quoting Walter Scott, might have made to the hypothetical regiment, "Come one, come all, this rock" (not that there was a rock, but that is a trifle) "will fly from its firm base as soon as I," was unfitted for the present emergency, and no other, equally good, suggested itself. What he did say was this:—

"A—really—of course I'd do it in a minute, my dear fellow—but—a—I'm not quite sure,"—here he glanced at Alice—"that is, I'm positively certain that—a—in fact, the thing's impossible."

"You're certain that it's impossible that you can walk on to the stile before Alice and me! My dear Harry, what are you talking—or rather (for the truth is, you're pre-occupied), what are you thinking about?" inquired Arthur, in amazement, seeing from the expression of his friend's countenance that he was really anxious and excited. Coverdale was again

hesitating how to reply, when Alice relieved him from his difficulty by saying, hurriedly, "I will walk on, and leave you to talk to Mr. Coverdale."

As she spoke they reached the rustic bench before alluded to, and Arthur, completely mystified, seated himself, and made a sign to Coverdale to follow his example.

"One moment, and I'll be with you," replied Coverdale, springing to Alice's side; "then I may tell him everything?" he continued.

"Oh, yes," was the unhesitating answer.

"And you will wait for us at the stile? I won't detain him five minutes."

"If you wish it."

"Can you doubt it?" were the necessary lover-like rejoinders; and Coverdale returned to his friend, who looked especially puzzled and slightly provoked.

"Now be silent!" exclaimed Hazlehurst, as Harry was about, with the greatest volubility, to plunge at once "in medias res." "You have lived amongst women till you've learned to chatter like them, I think. I shall never bring you to the point, unless you will let me cross-examine you."

"Fire away, then; only look sharp, for your sister must not be kept waiting," was the reply.

"You've grown wonderfully polite and attentive all of a sudden," returned Arthur, sarcastically. "But now listen to me. Has Crane made Alice an offer?"

Harry replied in the affirmative.

"Did she refuse him?"

"Of course she did," was the disdainful rejoinder.

"I don't see any of course in it," returned Hazlehurst, moodily. "My father is resolved on the match: Alice has been brought up to obey him implicitly, and the habit of obedience is very strong in such a gentle, yielding nature as hers."

"If she is gentle and yielding I'm not!" exclaimed Harry, vehemently; "and with your support, and the knowledge that his daughter's happiness is at stake, Mr. Hazlehurst must listen to reason."

"My dear boy," returned Arthur, earnestly, "what a warm-hearted, thorough-going friend you are! you really take as much interest in the affair as if it were your own. I see you naturally reckon on the extent of your influence with my father, and I have reason to believe you do not overrate it. Why, what is the matter now? Have you taken leave of your senses?"

This inquiry referred to a sudden and alarming outbreak on the part of Coverdale, who, when his influence with Mr. Hazlehurst was mentioned, sprang to his feet, uttering what mild mammas, engaged in the moral instruction of their tender offspring, term a "naughty word."

"You are enough to drive one mad!" he exclaimed, angrily; "saying, and making me say, all sorts of absurd things at cross-purposes, because you won't listen to the explanation I'm remaining here on purpose to give you; keeping Alice waiting, too!"

"Well, let her wait," returned Arthur, testily, worried by Harry's constant reference to this point; "anybody would think you were Alice's lover instead of old Crane!"

"And so I am," was the unexpected rejoinder; "and what is more, old fellow, her accepted lover also! Oh, Arthur," he continued, seating himself by his friend's side, and laying his arm on his shoulder, "I'm the happiest, luckiest dog in existence! To think that she should be able to love such a rough, uncultivated—but you are not displeased, are you?—surprised, of course, you must be."

"Surprised, indeed," was the reply; "so much so that even yet I can scarcely believe it; it has almost taken my breath away! But displeased!—why, my dear Harry, I'd rather she married you than any man breathing, be he prince, duke, or what not. It is the most charming, glorious, wonderful thing that ever happened! But even now I can't conceive how it has come about: and yet, when I begin to reflect, I fancied that Alice was growing shy and conscious in regard to something or somebody, before I went away. It's natural enough that she should fall in love with you; but that you should take a fancy to her, or indeed to any girl, does, I own, surprise me. I had so thoroughly made up my mind that you meant to be an old bachelor."

"You could not have done so more completely than I had," rejoined Harry; "but the fact is that from the first moment in which I saw your sister I fell in love with her, though I had not the most remote idea of it at the time. I can trace it all now; hence my dislike of D'Almayne and the poor old cotton-spinner. I was afraid the fascinations of the one might win her heart, or the fortune of the other obtain her hand—in fact, I was unconsciously jealous of them both. But now come on, we are really keeping Alice an unreasonable time. Aye, you may laugh; I don't care a 'sous' now that you know all about it. Why, Arthur, old boy, you will be my real bona fide brother one of these days!—that is a contingent advantage which has only just occurred to me."

Seizing his friend's hand as he spoke, he pressed it with such good-will that Hazlehurst was enabled to give a shrewd guess at the sensation produced by that interesting mediæval amenity, the thumb-screw. And thus mentally pleased and excited, the young men proceeded, both talking volubly, and generally at the same moment, till they reached the stile, where they found Alice awaiting them, looking very timid, very conscious, but exceedingly pretty. She need not have been

kind feeling to laugh at her at that moment; on the contrary, he hastened to set her mind at rest by whispering, as he imprinted a kiss on her glowing cheek—

"My darling child, you have made me almost as happy as you have rendered him."

The walk home was a very delightful one. Alice leaned on Harry's stalwart arm, and felt the most perfect and irrational confidence in his power to shield her from the effects of her father's anger, Mr. Crane's despair, and all other uncomfortable consequences of the act of filial disobedience which she meditated. Harry, already experiencing a sensation of delicious proprietorship in regard to the sweet girl beside him, felt himself exalted in the scale of humanity, and held his head a good inch higher on the strength of it; from which moral and physical elevation he looked down upon all field-sports as soulless and ignoble pastimes, and despised them accordingly. Arthur, hoping that his sister's attachment to a man in every way so worthy of her would inspire her with the firmness requisite to withstand successfully his father's possible opposition to the match, and that the matter would eventually end by securing her happiness and that of his friend, "forgot his own griefs," to rejoice in their bright prospects. And so they reached the pleasure-grounds, where Alice, separating from the two gentlemen, ran in to compose her excited feelings before appearing at breakfast.

"Arthur, wait one moment," exclaimed Coverdale, laying his hand on his friend's arm to detain him; "I have something important to say to you—isn't she an angel, my dear boy?"

"Why, really, my good fellow, between friends, and seeing that you appear to attach so much importance to the fact, I should say, taking into consideration the evidence in the case, and coming to the point without any unnecessary prolixity, that she was by no means an angel, but simply a very pleasant little female mortal, and—ahem! my poor sister, sir."

"Psha! you stupid old humbug!" returned Harry, giving him a playful push, which caused him involuntarily to leap over a flower-bed; "do just listen to me for a minute, and give me a sensible answer if you can. It's all very well for my darling Alice, and you and I, to settle this matter so sweetly and easily; but remember, there's the governor to bring round, and Crane and his confounded £20,000 a-year to beat out of the field; it strikes me we're in an awful fix, and about to become an interesting young couple. What is to be the next move, eh?"

"Oh, the affair lies in a nutshell," returned Hazlehurst. "Fortunately, my father has always appreciated you properly, and now the unusual degree of influence you have acquired

annoyed at first, when he finds he must relinquish his favourite design of purchasing old Crane's farm; but he is very fond of Alice, and very proud of her.'

"He'd be a most unnatural old heathen if he wasn't," muttered Harry, "sotto voce."

"Consequently," continued Hazlehurst, not heeding the interruption, "when he perceives the immeasurable advantages to be obtained by allowing her to marry a man she loves, and who is in every way deserving of her affection, instead of an old scarecrow, who will be in his dotage (I believe he is so already, more or less!) while Ally is still quite a young woman, he cannot hesitate for a moment in giving his consent. You had better speak to him the instant breakfast is over; depend upon it you'll find him all amiability."

"Depend upon it I shall find him nothing of the kind," returned Coverdale, snappishly; then, seeing the look of surprise that spread over his friend's countenance, he continued, dejectedly:—"Ah, my dear boy, you little know the extent to which I've been putting my foot in it since you went away. Tom tells me I annoyed your governor three or four days ago, by taking the nonsense out of that beast of a horse old Crane had the stupidity to give Alice; a brute which would have broken her sweet neck, if I hadn't luckily been at hand to catch her as she was falling. Then, to improve the matter, last night we all drank wine enough, and the Head of the Family got a little too much into it to be good for its proprietor; accordingly, he forced me to give my opinion about Free-trade, and then pitched into me for so doing, and declared I'd insulted him: upon which I lost my temper, and said something rude; and, to come to the point, as you call it, he is now as savage as a bear with me, and all the blessed influence you've been paying me such pretty compliments about, if it ever existed, is scattered to the winds. I dare not speak to him, it would be worse than useless; he'd be only too glad to refuse me at once, lest he should lose such a good opportunity of paying me off for last night. Ah!" he continued, "you may well look puzzled—you would not like to have many clients with such a talent as I possess for unconsciously cutting their own throats! What's to be done?—divide the wires of the electric telegraph at King's Cross Station, and then take Alice along the Great Northern to Gretna Green—though Gretna Green has been done brown by some recent act, has it not, and the harmonious and hymeneal blacksmith retired into private life? Come, advise, for I can hit upon nothing; only remember one thing—since Alice is good enough to say she will have me, married I must and will be, if all the fathers in England were to set themselves against it!"

CHAPTER XV.

RELATES THE UNEXPECTED BENEVOLENCE OF HORACE D'ALMAYNE.

ARTHUR HAZLEHURST, with an aspect graver than his wont, replied to Harry's appeal—"It certainly is very unfortunate that you should have selected last night, of all others, to displease my father; because, owing to the Crane offer, time is of the greatest importance; but for that I should not have cared; you would only have had to wait for a week or two, taking pains to be especially polite and deferential in the interval, and he would have totally forgotten his anger. As it is, perhaps I had better speak to him—he is sure to tell me about the cotton-spinner, and I can avail myself of that opportunity to come to the point; and now, if you have nothing better to propose, we'll go in to breakfast. Love may possibly destroy the appetite, but a railroad journey has a directly contrary effect."

Harry had nothing better to propose—for a vague suggestion in regard to punching old Crane's head, if he (Crane) did not mind what he was about, could scarcely be considered in the light of a serious, practical amendment—so they went in to breakfast accordingly.

This meal appeared to be a most unsatisfactory one to "all who assembled within those walls"; for, despite the presence of every delicacy of the season, and a few over, each individual seemed labouring under some secret sorrow, and a general wet blanket damped, and hung heavy on, the spirits of the whole party, with the exception, perhaps, of Horace D'Almayne, who was unusually animated, and watched the proceedings with a look of quiet penetration.

When the ladies quitted the room, Mr. Crane called Mr. Hazlehurst aside, and informed him that he wished for the honour of an interview; to which request that gentleman acceded in his most gracious manner, and they adjourned together to the library.

Harry, with a significant glance to Arthur to remain on the look out and watch proceedings, strolled off with Tom on some horse-or-dog-inspection pretext, but really to keep himself out of harm's way till he was wanted, so low an estimate had he now acquired of his own diplomatic abilities. D'Almayne and Arthur being thus left "tête-à-tête," the former accosted the latter after the following fashion:—

"Hazlehurst, 'mon cher,' I shall die of 'ennui' if we have

just partaken. Now, without being more inquisitive than my neighbours, you cannot suppose I have remained entirely in the dark in regard to the little amusements your friends and relations have devised to vary the monotony of life withal."

"And the result of these your observations?" inquired Arthur, coldly.

"Is, that the various interests clash, and that delicate dilemmas innumerable must, ere long, present their horns. Now I, being an easy-tempered fellow, like to be happy myself, and to see every brother man and sister woman happy also. I shall, therefore, have much pleasure in doing 'mon petit possible' to smooth away these difficulties—an endeavour in which my influence with our good friend Crane will greatly assist me; but to enable me to do this, you must, of course, take me so far into your confidence as to tell me whether I am right in my preconceived ideas—'che dice, Signor?''

Arthur reflected for a moment—he knew D'Almayne to be quick-sighted, clear-headed, and fertile in expedient; at the same time he believed he was designing and self-interested; in the present emergency, however, he might, from his influence with Mr. Crane, be possibly of some use, while he could scarcely, with the worst intentions, render the aspect of affairs more complicated and unsatisfactory than it now appeared.

Accordingly, he replied, "It cannot involve any alarming stretch of confidence on my part merely to tell you whether your 'guesses at truth' have hit the mark, or flown wide of it. So you have only to propound your queries, and I will answer them as clearly and concisely as in me lies."

"'C'est bon!'" was the reply. "A—to begin with—I am correct, am I not, in supposing that last night my worthy friend Crane offered his hand and £20,000 per annum (in which latter item his heart is, of course, wrapped up and included) to your amiable and accomplished sister?" Hazlehurst nodded assent, and D'Almayne continued, "The young lady, however, or I am much mistaken, greatly prefers your excellent and energetic friend Mr. Coverdale (who, you must pardon me for saying, reminds me of a well-intentioned, enthusiastic bull in a china-shop), which preference the gentleman returns to such a degree that I am inclined to believe he has told, or in some other manner rendered the fair Alice aware of his love. Her manner at breakfast this morning was compounded of such an elaborate endeavour to conceal the conscious and confiding behind the most transparent 'eidolon' of indifference, that no one at all acquainted with woman's nature could doubt about the matter."

"You are indeed a close observer!" exclaimed Arthur, surprised out of his caution. "Coverdale's attachment was a thing I never even suspected till—a—till this:

purchase one of his farms adjoining your estate, which he (Crane) is unwilling to part with," resumed D'Almayne; "thence, I imagine, proceeds your respected progenitor's anxiety to bring about the match. To finish the catalogue of my observations up to the present time, I conceive Mr. Crane to be now in the act of urging his suit to Mr. Hazlehurst, and complaining that 'Miss Alice,' as he calls her (he always talks on such subjects like an underbred greengrocer, or second footman), rather kicked, than jumped, at him when he offered her—ahem—his income and his affections."

"Your surmises are so wonderfully correct," rejoined Arthur (determining to make a merit of necessity, and appear open with one who seemed thus well acquainted with all the family secrets), "that in telling you that, as soon as Mr. Crane leaves the study, I mean to appeal to my father in my friend's behalf, I shall, probably, only forestall you in expressing another of your judicious anticipations."

"I rather imagined that would be the next move," was the easy, self-satisfied reply. "Mr. Coverdale, with all his surprising freshness and 'naïveté' of character, could scarcely propose to urge his suit in person, after having quarrelled with your father over his wine last night; for which reason, by the way, it requires no very great tact to divine that Mr. Crane's proposal will find favour in Mr. Hazlehurst's eyes, and Mr. Coverdale be rejected."

"And the remedy?" inquired Arthur, eagerly.

D'Almayne paused, then a meaning but disagreeable smile passed across his handsome features, as he replied, "If I can induce Mr. Crane to withdraw his suit of his own accord, yet continue his amicable relations towards this family, and be willing to sell the farm to your father at his own price, and by these means lead Mr. Hazlehurst to regard your friend's offer favourably, shall I be acting in accordance with your wishes?"

"Nay, my dear D'Almayne, if you can indeed persuade Mr. Crane to perform so magnanimous a part, I shall consider you the best and cleverest fellow in the world. As to my wishing you to do so, I should as soon have thought of wishing you to appoint me First Lord of the Treasury—one only wishes for such things as one, in some degree, expects to obtain. But surely you over-calculate your powers of persuasion," returned Hazlehurst, scarcely knowing whether D'Almayne might not be amusing himself at his expense.

"I will remain here and await the result of your interview with your father, and if it terminates as I predict, I will attempt my little bit of diplomacy; the result will prove to you whether or not I overrate my Machiavellian talents," was the confident reply—and so they parted.

Mr. Hazlehurst senior was by no means in an amiable frame of mind when his son entered the library—the gout

considerably increased by the wine-bibbing of the previous evening, pervaded his entire system, mental and bodily; and through the atrabilious medium of a disordered stomach, he looked back upon his disagreement with Coverdale till it became magnified into a serious quarrel. Mr. Crane had just informed him that, on renewing his offer to Alice on the previous evening, the young lady muttered a few words, incoherent indeed, but, as he conceived, of a negative tendency, and instantly conveyed herself away without affording him an opportunity of obtaining an explanation. Whereupon Mr. Hazlehurst, waxing wroth, declared she should accept him that very morning; begged him to retire until he should have seen his daughter, and, as he was pleased to term it, brought her to her senses; and having just despatched a summons to the poor girl, was waiting her arrival to perpetrate an act of parental tyranny, when his son entered. The consequences may readily be imagined:—Coverdale was angrily and unceremoniously refused; Alice anathematized, excommunicated, and ordered magisterially to be imprisoned in her own room till further notice; and Arthur severely reprimanded for having introduced Coverdale to the family (which, be it remembered, he had done at his father's particular request), and cautioned against venturing to countenance Alice in her disobedience, or ever again to refer to the subject in his (Mr. Hazlehurst's) sovereign presence, on pain of being cut off with the trifling patrimony of one shilling sterling. Arthur attempted a mild remonstrance, whereby he obtained a particular request instantly to leave the room, and a general order in regard to the entire alteration of his conduct, and abnegation of his present opinions on all subjects, human and divine. Returning to the breakfast-room in the frame of mind naturally consequent upon such a reception, he discovered D'Almayne comfortably lounging in an easy-chair, and perusing a handsomely bound copy of the "Pleasures of Memory."

Glancing up as Hazlehurst entered, he observed coolly, "I need not ask you how it has gone, 'mon ami'; your face tells me."

Hazlehurst strode impatiently up and down the apartment; then stopping short in front of his companion, he exclaimed abruptly, "Try your plan, whatever it may be, for common sense is thrown away upon a man so prejudiced and positive as my father has shown himself to be; and common patience cannot bear the irritating speeches he makes, when all the time one feels that one is striving for the right, and that he is totally and entirely wrong."

"You are warm, 'mon cher,'" was the calm reply. "Papas have been wrong-headed time out of mind, and will probably continue so till time shall have passed away, together with all other sublunary weights and measures; so why afflict yourself

at the inevitable? But I will now proceed without delay to try my eloquence upon the dear, rejected Mr. Crane—a—by the way, you must give me one promise. 'On their own merits modest men are dumb'; now my modesty is so outrageously sensitive, that I am not only dumb myself, but require my friends to be so likewise; in plain English, if I do this thing to oblige you, you must promise me to keep my share in the transaction a secret; the change must appear to emanate from the united kind regards and amiable self-sacrifice of your father and Mr. Crane." Seeing Arthur hesitate, he continued, "Without this assurance, you must excuse my declining to interfere."

"Be it as you will then," began Arthur.

As he spoke the door flew open, and Alice, eager and tearful, hurried in, exclaiming, "You have seen my father! Can it be true that he is so cruel as to refuse his consent? He has just written me such a dreadful note, ordering me not to quit my room!"

Here catching sight of D'Almayne, she stopped short in confusion and alarm. That individual hastened to relieve her by walking to the door; but as he passed Arthur he whispered, "You may make an exception in your sister's favour. I absolve you from your vow of secrecy as far as she is concerned? I am a tender-hearted fellow, and beauty in tears is always too many for me." As he spoke, he left the apartment, and closed the door behind him.

Alice heard Arthur's account of D'Almayne's unexpected access of benevolence with surprise; but not having witnessed the quiet confidence with which he asserted his power of influencing Mr. Crane, she put little trust in his assurances, merely setting them down as the vain boasting of a conceited youth, who was actuated by a good-natured desire to help them out of their difficulties. That she did him injustice may be gathered from the fact that, later in the day, Mr. Crane sought a second interview with Mr. Hazlehurst, after which the latter gentleman summoned Harry Coverdale to his august presence; and when that happy but much confused young man entered the "sanctum sanctorum" of the library, sent for his daughter Alice likewise, and having pronounced a strongly acidulated, not to say crabbed, benediction upon their youthful heads, dismissed them in time to write by that day's post to his man of business, to prepare the purchase-money for the Hazlecroft farm, then the property of Jedediah Crane, Esq. The dinner-party that evening passed off much more agreeably than the breakfast had done. Coverdale sat by his lady-love, looking the picture, or, better still, the reality of happiness; but Arthur Hazlehurst wore a gloomy brow when he perceived that his cousin, Kate Marsden, had paired off with the cotton-spinner, and that they appeared mutually satisfied with the arrangement.

CHAPTER XVI.

TREATS OF THINGS IN GENERAL.

IT must be confessed that Harry Coverdale was of a somewhat impetuous disposition. No sooner had he obtained Mr. Hazlehurst's consent to the match, than he commenced a system of alternate petting and persecution, whereby he contrived to render the lives of Alice and her mother scarcely endurable, until he had induced them to fix an early day for his "execution," as Tom irreverently paraphrased the solemnisation of the marriage ceremony. This object happily accomplished, a journey to London was proposed, whereat Mr. Hazlehurst looked very black; but when Alice seated herself on his knee, and, stroking his bald head, called him a dear, good, kind papa (on speculation, probably, for at that moment he did not in the slightest degree look the character), his heart softened, and he consented to the plan. Then somebody told Arthur of a wonderful doctor, who had found out a new system of curing everything, and especially complaints analogous to that under which Mrs. Hazlehurst laboured, accordingly, he determined his mother should form one of the London party, and consult this fashionable fee-taker; and when Arthur had determined on a thing, it generally came to pass. Therefore, after considerable proing and con-ing, and macadamizing of difficulties, the matter was finally arranged by Mrs. Hazlehurst, her son, and her two daughters, taking up their abode at Cherr's Hotel, in Jermyn Street, while Coverdale established himself in his old quarters at the Tavistock in Covent Garden.

Then they began to be overwhelmed with business. First, the infallible doctor was to be consulted; so poor Mrs. Hazlehurst was dragged out of bed some three hours sooner than usual, breakfasted in a nervous tremor, which rendered the ceremony a most unreal mockery, was transported from her carriage to a stately dining-room, where some twenty fellow-victims were already incarcerated, whence (having waited two hours, because, in her ignorance of London rascalities, she had omitted to fee the noble creature in plush and powder who had admitted her) she was at length (his nobleness not being able longer to exclude her) ushered into the presence of the potentate of pills himself. This erudite individual was a short, stiff man, with a short, stiff appearance—the result of the most severe application of starch and hair-brushes—and a short, stiff manner, assumed, as are the stare and swagger of Van Amburg and other tiger-tamers, for the

purpose of browbeating and mentally subduing refractory or sceptical patients. Seeing at a glance, however, that poor Mrs. Hazlehurst was already subdued, he obligingly let off a little superfluous starch, slightly disarranged his hair, smiled, to show a fine set of false teeth, put in at trade-price by a friendly dentist, and having thus brought himself somewhat nearer the limpness of average humanity, added (as he would have probably expressed it) a couple of drachms "syrupi saccarinis" to his manner, ere he proceeded to catechise his patient as to her symptoms, and the remedies that had been applied to remove them. To each fact thus elicited he replied by frowning portentously, screwing round his mouth, and muttering, "I knew it," in a gloomy and mysterious manner, as though he had acquired the knowledge by some awful and supernatural course of study; and, indeed, as Mrs. Hazlehurst's confessions involved her having had a dangerous fall from her horse at a period when he, the doctor, must have been about five years old, and that she had been laid up with a bilious fever exactly two calendar months and four days before he was born, he can scarcely be supposed to have come by his information honestly and lawfully. In fact, to a logical mind, the question resolved itself into the following hypothesis—that he must either be a true prophet, or a lying doctor.

Having elicited all the facts he cared to learn (which, if he knew them before, he might as well have saved himself the trouble of doing), he drew himself up to his extreme altitude, which was nothing very tremendous after all, got his starch up to high-pressure pitch, judiciously tempering its stiffness with soothing syrup, and delivered himself of the following opinion:—

"Madam, you have told me nothing that, the moment I beheld you, I was not prepared to hear. I do not in the slightest degree impugn the judgment and skill of Mr. Smithers" (the Hazlehurst general practitioner), "but the instant I glanced at his first prescription I saw he had taken a wrong view of our case. Superacetate of Euroclydon and bi-carbonate of Hydrocephalus would never remove the pain and palpitation on our right side——"

"The left is the side on which I usually feel the pain," began Mrs. Hazlehurst, mildly.

"Eh! left—yes, of course; I said left, didn't I? I believe I observed to you before, madam, that the moment I set eyes on you I became aware of—in fact, I felt (if I may so express myself) that pain and palpitation on our left side; and I said to myself, if that very talented practitioner, Mr. Smithers, has administered Superacetate of Euroclydon and bi-carbonate of Hydrocephalus to that pain of ours—with the highest respect for Smithers (he was walking St. Bartholomew's when I was dresser to the late celebrated and

lamented Flayflesh), I must say he has mistaken our case. Now, I shall just—I make no secret of my practice—I shall just throw in three grains of extr. Borealis Auroræ, with equal proportions of Astri caninis, Geminorum siamesiæ, and sesqui-carbonate (mind that), sesqui-carbonate of Pantapolion, and our pain will lapse (as Byron so beautifully expresses it) into 'a happy memory of the past.' You will take the mixture six times in the twenty-four hours, and the pills immediately before dinner. With regard to diet, everything you have been accustomed to eat is wrong; your appetite is weak, and you like delicacies, as they are called, better than substantial joints, I daresay?"

Mrs. Hazlehurst acknowledged that his penetration had not failed him, and he resumed sharply—

"Madam, we mustn't touch them! they are poison in such a case as ours. No; we must restrict ourselves to plain beef and mutton, very much underdone; stale bread, no vegetables, no fruit, no nice things, very bitter beer, with plenty of the camomile in it (that's the brewer's secret, strychnine's all a delusion), and stick to the sesqui-carbonate of Pantapolion, and we shall be a different woman in a short time. Let me see you again on Friday. Good morning." And so, pocketing his guinea with less respect than many men pay to a fourpenny-piece, the fashionable quack allowed his victim to escape.

Then there was shopping. There are a good many shops in Regent Street, and those that are not there are in Bond Street, at least a fair sprinkling of them; but Harry solemnly declared (after his marriage) that during the fortnight the party were in London, they went into them all, and every man knows what that involves. Give a woman her head, so far as to allow her to put it into a shop, and he must indeed be a clever fellow who can coax or coerce her out of it under half an hour. But Harry was in love, and love is blind (though it has an awkward trick of recovering its eyesight after marriage and making up for lost time, by spying out all kinds of things to which it had far better have remained blind); besides, Alice was not more "exigeante" than a lover generally desires his mistress should be: too much independence of character in a young girl being by no means an attractive quality.

Then there was a good deal of sight-seeing to be got through. Emily had never been in London before, and Alice only once for a week. So they "did" Westminster Abbey, which they really enjoyed; and St. Paul's, which they pretended to admire, and didn't; and the Tower, where Emily called the figures in the horse-armoury a set of quizzical old things; and the Polytechnic, where they saw a man go down in a diving-bell, to pick up nothing at the bottom of a large wash-hand basin, and come up again half-suffocated, which

they considered curious and highly satisfactory, as no doubt it was to everybody but that unfortunate martyr to popular science himself, who (taking the most cheerful view of his amphibious occupation) can scarcely be regarded in the light of a jolly young waterman. Then they went to the National Gallery to see the pictures, which, as it was not an unusually bright and clear day, of course they were unable to do; but they had the pleasure of seeing the building itself, and the fountains in Trafalgar Square, which they all agreed they had never beheld anything like before; and Harry added that in his travels he had not met with anything to equal the whole affair in its peculiar style, and that he thought foreigners must be very strongly impressed by it, and that it must at once give them a clear idea of English taste; which remarks it was a pity the architect was not there to hear, as they might possibly have been of use to him. Emily had never beheld a play, so they went to the I-see-um Theatre, where they witnessed the performance of a very long melodrama, adapted from the French (that is, all that was national and peculiar—without which the plot became a mere silly tissue of improbable events and impossible situations—omitted, and the place supplied by the worn-out and conventional clap-traps). This "pièce de résistance," which was to last the play-going public for some four or six months, according to the degree in which it suited their appetites, was so well put on the stage, and so well acted, that the false sentiment and worse morality which pervaded it were for the time forgotten, and it was not till Arthur called his attention to the fact, that Harry recollected this un-English jumble of crimes and follies was played night after night to crowded houses, while the masterpieces of Shakspere, the greatest dramatist who ever lived, were banished to an obscure theatre in the outskirts of London, or were forced to be translated into a foreign language, and acted by a foreign company, "ere the ears polite" of London fashionables could be persuaded to listen to them. The two young men argued the question in all its bearings, and arrived at this conclusion, viz., either that if Shakspere were better acted it would be better attended, or that if Shakspere were better attended better actors would soon be found to perform the characters; though which of these statements might be regarded as the cause, and which as the effect, they could by no means agree. And by that time, the play being concluded, Emily declared that it was perfect, really charming; and that, as to Shakspere, he was an obsolete old slow-coach, and very wicked too—or else, why did they want a family edition of him? Whereas, if there had ever been any harm in this play, which she did not believe could have been the case, dear Mr. Kingsby Florence had translated it so beautifully that it might have been acted anywhere—in a

holes about it, and all sorts of jolly pockets in original places; but, don't fret, you shall see it. Well, to return to our mutton, as the French say: very few showed at early breakfast, sensibilities superseding appetites in a general way, though I can't say I perceived much difference as regarded number one: yet, when I come to think of it, I recollect I only eat three eggs; but then the ham was a real brick. Nothing particular occurred till we were to go to church; but when the traps came round, you may fancy there was something to look at. My brother-in-law, Coverdale—oh, Tips, he really is a fine fellow, as handsome as fun—can ride anything you like to put him across—a dead shot—A1 with his fists ('gad, I should be sorry to get even a left-hander from him), and as good-tempered and jolly as a cock; but you shall see him some day: well, he came up with his own horses, a pair of blood bays, he gave £350 for 'em, and they're dirt cheap at the money; he is a first-rate judge of a horse; but I'll tell you all about the traps when we meet. Then down came the girls; Ally (that's my eldest sister) was smothered with veils, and flounces, and pearls, and that sort of nonsense; and looked precious pale and interesting, and like to blub; so we bundled her into the family-coach, and Coverdale jumped into his own trap, and away we all scuttled to church. We've got a good, sharp parson, that can go the pace slap up when he likes; and, knowing that the champagne was waiting for him, he put the harness on 'em in no time; and the women did the water-cart business in style—where all their tears come from I can't think—but they laid the dust beautifully. Then there was signing names in the vestry, and a lot of chaff about kissing the bride, which so upset the muff, Lambkin, the parson's apprentice (curate, I suppose, is what they call the chap), that he fairly turned tail and bolted. Next, we all bundled home again; Ally in Coverdale's trap this time (and precious handsome he looked, as he handed her in, I can tell you); and then came the 'crowning mercy' (as Lambkin said in his sermon last Sunday), the wedding breakfast. The governor had done the thing well for once in his life, I will say that for the old boy. There were all the delicacies of all the four seasons (one only wished one had four stomachs, like a camel, to pay them proper attention; though I didn't do badly, in spite of my monostomachic conformation). Then the champagne—my dear Tips, I am not using a mere figure of rhetoric when I say the supply was unlimited—how much I drank I literally cannot tell, but, in mentioning the affair to inquiring friends, you had better restrict your statement to half a dozen bottles—as a general rule, a gentleman should not take more on such occasions—it is not every man who possesses my strength of head and self-control. I sat next to one of the bridesmaids—

"'A little, laughing fairy thing,
Just like an angel on the wing;
A rosebud 'neath the moon's pale ring:
A playful zephyr, whispering
Some secret to the early Spring.'

As Tennyson has it—stunning poet, Tennyson! At first my modesty prevented my getting on with her quite as fast as I could have wished; in fact, till after my fourth glass of champagne, I had not gone beyond asking if she liked roast chicken, and saying 'Bless you,' when she sneezed; which I have since thought might not be quite etiquette, for she certainly looked surprised. However, 'in vino jollitas,' as Cicero says; after imbibing the 'rosy,' I went ahead like beans, and I flatter myself—ahem!—made a very considerable impression; but then recollect the expense with which I was got up! the woman who could look on that bang-tail coatee with indifference must be a heartless tigress. At all events, Juliana Georgina (sweet, poetical name! ain't it, Tips?) didn't; and if my mother invites her here during the Christmas holidays—which, betwixt you and me and the post, is not impossible—I should not be surprised if the affair were to assume quite a serious complexion. It is some time since I have experienced what the mounseers call a 'grande passion.' When the party generally had pitched into the grub, till the powers of nature were forced to cry 'Hold, enough!' (though, for my part, I don't think one's bread-basket does by any means hold enough on such occasions), everybody drank everybody's health, and everybody returned thanks. My brother-in-law, Coverdale, made a stunning speech, the best that was made, by long odds; though Master Arthur didn't disgrace his profession in the jawing line either. The governor did the pathetic and paternal; but it was precious slow, and all his jokes old ones. Mr. Crane (he's a rich old buffer that was nibbling after Ally, but it wasn't likely she'd have anything to say to him when she'd a chance of taking such a trump-card as my brother-in-law, Coverdale, into her hand) followed in the benevolent and philanthropic line; but he made a regular mull of it, worse than the daddy; and when they'd done making fools of themselves, the sitting broke up, and my brother-in-law and Alice started for the Continent. And the last thing before they went off, Coverdale, while he was waiting in the hall for his wife (women are always too late for everything), tipped me a flimsy to the tune of ten pounds, and told me not to forget I was to come to the Park in the hunting season, and he'd take care to find me a good mount; but if ever there was a real brick, my brother-in-law Coverdale is the identical article, and no mistake. And that this is a full true, and particular account of this wonderful wedding, sayeth and attesteth,

"Yours, in the bonds of jollity,

"TOM HAZLEHURST.

"P.S.—Advice to cricketers! Mind your batting, old fellow; for I've put up to some first-rate bowling dodges by my brother-in-law, Coverdale (he's one of the top-sawyers at Lord's), that will send your stumps flying about your ears, if you don't mind your eye. 'Verbum sat. slow-coachici!'"

CHAPTER XVII.

PLOTTING AND COUNTER-PLOTTING.

THE same post-bag in which Tom Hazlehurst despatched his letter to his schoolfellow, conveyed also two other epistles written by inmates of the Grange. For the reader's benefit we will take the same liberty with them which we have already taken with the Etonian's literary effusion. The first was from Kate Marsden to Miss Arabella Crofton, a lady some three or four years older than herself, who had been one of the teachers at the school at which Kate had been brought up, and was now governess in a German family. Miss Crofton was a woman of unusual mental ability, and having in a great degree moulded Kate's character, was now her sole "confidante" and mentor. It ran thus:—

"DEAR ARABELLA,—Since I finally determined on following your advice, fate seems to have played my game for me, and I now consider it as secure as anything which has not actually come to pass can be. I told you, when I wrote to you at Baden-Baden, that his friend, Mr. Coverdale, and my cousin Alice, were evidently becoming attached; you will therefore be the less surprised to hear that they were married yesterday; the matter came about thus:—Soon after I wrote to you, Mr. Crane, by my advice, offered; Alice of course refused him, but so equivocally (she is quite a child in such things) that the poor, dear, dull creature scarcely caught her meaning. I immediately took him in hand, and, availing myself of the situation, flattered his vanity to such a degree that, ere the evening finished, he believed not only that Alice would accept him, but that I, Kate Marsden, was hopelessly in love with him. Accordingly, when he learned unmistakably next morning that Alice meant to refuse him, my good taste stood out in very favourable contrast. In the meantime, Mr. Crane's offer brought Mr. Coverdale to the point, and Alice gladly accepted him, in doing which she acted wisely, for he is a good, amiable, sterling man! and when the romance has worn off, and they have got over the bore of awakening from 'Love's young dream,' I believe they will settle down into a very happy couple. My uncle at first refused his consent, for Coverdale has only five, instead of twenty thousand

a-year; and Mr. Crane sulked in a corner; but that strange Mr. D'Almayne, about whom I told you before, and who possesses a degree of influence over Mr. Crane of which I by no means approve, went to him, and persuaded him not only to give up Alice good-humouredly, but actually to play a generous part, and talk my uncle over to give his consent to my cousin's union with Mr. Coverdale. Thus, you see, as I began by saying, my game was played for me, and I had only to sit still and avail myself of the moves as the others made them.

"I am much puzzled by this Mr. D'Almayne. He is, unless I am much deceived, a complete adventurer, scheming for his own advantage (I ought to be able to recognise such a character); but what his object can have been in this affair I cannot possibly conjecture. Pure philanthropy had nothing to do with it, of that I am certain. Again, how he contrived to influence Mr. Crane to behave so amiably I cannot conceive. Sometimes I fancy he has divined my intention of marrying the millionaire; but, if so, why should he aid me in my project?—for I know by his manner (although he is very cautious) that he admires me himself. Certain it is, that since the conversation I have alluded to, Mr. Crane has been at my feet, and is only waiting to offer till he imagines time enough shall have elapsed to prevent the transfer of his affections (?) from Alice to me appearing too ridiculous. However, the affair will unravel itself some day. And now that my plans are likely to be crowned with success, you will ask me how I feel on the subject. Determined as ever! that which I have begun I will carry through; but, Arabella, I am most miserable! For myself alone I should not care; to rescue my family from poverty, I should be happy to sacrifice my personal hopes and wishes; but to see Arthur suffer is indeed bitterness, and that he does suffer frightfully, I, who can read his every look and gesture, cannot for a moment doubt. Oh, that I had known the depth and reality of his affection sooner, or that the necessity were less cogent! Then he bears it with such manly endurance; his manner to his family is exactly the same as usual; not one of them suspects that anything has occurred to pain him. Again, it is such an aggravation of my sorrow that he blames me so deeply! Sometimes, when I am talking to Mr. Crane, I catch his stern, penetrating glance fixed upon me with a calm earnestness of rebuke, which affects me more deeply than could the most vehement reproaches; and when I have acted my part for the day, and, in the solitude of my chamber, I recall all that has passed between us, and reflect that it is I who have brought this sorrow upon him—I who even now feel that I love him better than my own soul—I who would gladly have died for him, I sit, night by night, like a cold statue of despair, or lie sleepless, shedding such tears as I trust God's

you know, you cannot doubt for a moment, it is my duty—you could never have dared to counsel such a sacrifice of the only thing which can make the burden of life endurable—a real, deep, true affection—if you had not felt certain it was my duty.

"You have set me a cruel task, Arabella, but I do not flinch from it; you shall find your pupil worthy the trouble you have bestowed upon her. I shall write again when anything conclusive is settled. If all goes well, I shall be in a position to fulfil my old promise, and offer you a home on your return to England. Would to God it were likely to be a happier, though a humbler one! But that is past now. Farewell.

"Yours, in many senses of the word,

"KATE MARSDEN."

The third epistle was from Horace D'Almayne to a friend and ally in Paris. We transcribe it verbatim:—

"ALPHONSE, MON CHER,—I enclose you a draft for 3,000 francs, wherewith I beg you to satisfy Carreau, the tailor, 'et tous les autres brigands' who render Paris an unsafe residence for me. You will naturally ask how I have obtained the money; not at the gaming-table, nor on the highway, like Claude Duval. Railroads and police have freed England from highwaymen. No; I have for the present filled my purse by studying the great game of life; in which, like all other games, you must either pillage, or be pillaged. You and I, men of wit and of action, naturally belong to the former class, and have meritoriously laboured to fulfil our destiny. Since I have been in England this time I have sedulously cultivated the millionaire I introduced to you last season, whose pocket you so obligingly relieved of £500 at piquet. I made a bad bargain there in only claiming one-third of the spoil; I should have demanded half, for without my assistance you could have done nothing with him; but I understand them, these cautious islanders, some of their blood runs in my veins—my mother, as you know, having been an Englishwoman. However, the time spent on my millionaire has turned out a more profitable investment than I at all calculated upon. He is a weak, vacillating character, one of those feeble-minded mortals who always require some intelligence stronger than their own to lean upon. This support he has found in your humble servant; and so convinced has he become of my diplomatic powers, that just at present he can do nothing without my approval and sanction. His great object in life is to marry, and it is to assist him in obtaining a wife that my counsel is required. When I first arrived here, I found he was dangling after a charming little country girl, the daughter of a landed proprietor, in these

could do nothing. I gave her the full benefit of my eyes, which, as you know, are not wont to look in vain; but it was no use—even 'les petites moustaches noires,' usually so irresistible, were thrown away upon her; nor had friend Crane's £20,000 per annum ('mon Dieu, Alphonse, quelle somme merveilleuse!') any more effect upon her. But I soon found a clue to her obduracy—the silly child was enamoured of her brother's friend, a fox-hunting squire, a true speciment of young John Bull. I saw how the game would go: John Bull returned her affection; he is a real type of his class. Rich, obstinate, and impetuous, he was resolved to marry the pretty rustic; she was equally determined; her brother befriended him; the thing was to be, so I arranged my hand accordingly. There is in the family a 'belle cousine'—such a splendid creature, Alphonse!—beautiful as an angel, the 'contour' of a Juno, the port of an empress. She has tact and talent; a soul of fire beneath an exterior of ice; she is poor and ambitious. I could not have hoped to find one better suited to my purpose. She shall marry Crane; his purse will be in her hands; he will become her slave; and, Alphonse, she shall be mine! Do you doubt my success 'mon ami?' Bah! the game is as simple as child's play. She is young, ardent: she will marry an old man to satisfy her ambition—she will despise him. Her heart will pine for an object on which to lavish its tenderness; I shall present myself, become her friend, her counsellor—and, the result? Oh, you cannot doubt it. So I have pulled the strings, and my marionettes have danced, and are dancing. My millionaire offered—the little rustic refused him. While he was smarting from this insult, I suggested to him that 'la belle cousine' pined for love of him; praised her wit and beauty; and advised him to revenge himself by transferring his attentions to her. The bait took; I worked out all the minor incidents admirably; the young fox-hunter has married the pretty rustic, and took her out of my way yesterday. The lovely Kate, playing her own game, labours indefatigably for my interest also. My friend Crane is delighted, and shows his gratitude by urging me to borrow money of him—(I have mortgaged my farm in Brittany to him for six times its value; when the three prior claims upon it are satisfied, and he brings forward his, this fact will surprise him, and teach him prudence for the future) —I avail myself of his liberality with caution, for I must not cut up my golden goose too quickly. But it is well to have more than one source to rely upon; so if your rich young German countess should resolve on visiting England, send me timely notice. I feel that my star is in the ascendant. 'Cher Alphonse,' wish your friend the success which should reward talent, in the use of which you have so well instructed

your devoted

CHAPTER XVIII.

ALICE'S FIRST INTRODUCTION TO HER HUSBAND'S "QUIET MANNER."

If our readers, gentle or simple, will obligingly stretch their imaginations sufficiently to depict for themselves the happiness of Alice and Harry during the first month of their married life, popularly denominated the honeymoon, and be content to permit us to resume our office of chronicler at the termination of that mellifluous (though, to all but the parties concerned, especially insipid) season, the readers aforesaid will merit our eternal gratitude, which we hereby beg to present them with.

Alice and Harry, then, having been married one calendar month, during which period they had been "up" the Rhine, and one or two of the Swiss mountains—having seen a great many strange things and strange people—having talked a vast amount of bad French and worse German, and narrowly escaped an attack of cholera from listening to the dissonance of that arch-delusion the "Ranz-des-Vaches"—having eaten such wonderful articles, cooked in such wonderful fashion, that if the genus Bimana were not providentially omnivorous, they would infallibly have been poisoned—having travelled over land and water by every species of conveyance known to the annals of locomotion, except perhaps a balloon, or the back of an elephant—had at length made their way to Paris; and as the inhabitants of that skittish and inconstant capital were then figuratively patting each other on the back, by way of congratulation on the fortunate accident which had preserved those that remained alive after the latest revolution from having shot each other through the head, our bride and bridegroom, established in a comfortable hotel, had determined to remain there till such time as they should mutually agree upon for their return to England. For, be it observed, that enough of the halo of the honeymoon yet lingered around this young couple to keep them in the misty delusion that they possessed but one "will of their own" between them. They had yet to learn that there is a higher, truer, nobler state of association to be arrived at, even here on earth—a state in which we recognise the deep happiness of being privileged to sacrifice our own desires to those of the being we love better than ourselves. A logician may stigmatise this as merely a refined phase of selfishness; but it is such selfishness as might cling to us in heaven, and we yet remain sinless. Be this as it may, Alice, who had never been abroad

before, found every pleasure enhanced by the charm of novelty, and was in a perfect Elysium of happy excitement. Harry had seen and done it all, and a great deal more besides; and would have found it a bore, only it was sufficient amusement to him to watch his young wife's delight at all she saw and heard. Whether this amusement of watching, petting, and spoiling Alice, was at all beginning to lose its charm, may be gathered from the following conversation:—

"Harry, you sleepy old thing, this is the third time I've asked you whether Madame de Beauville is certain of getting us an invitation to Lord N——'s picnic at Versailles; do rouse yourself and answer me!"

Thus apostrophised, Coverdale—who was stretched at full length on (and beyond) a brocaded sofa, and had been lazily watching his wife, as, with a vast deal of unnecessary energy, she stitched away at a button, which, according to button-nature, had "come off" her husband's glove the very first moment he attempted to draw it on—half raised himself on his elbow as he replied—

"There is nothing certain under the sun; except that my little wife has the prettiest hand and arm of any woman (I don't care who she may be—Jew, Turk, infidel, heretic, or Christian) in the known world. But that old humbug, Madame de Beauville, promised me faithfully to do her best for us—not that I'd believe her on her oath; she tried to book me for one of her scraggy daughters, the last time I was here; but it wouldn't act—the trap was too visible, and the bait not sufficiently tempting. What very high action you have with that needle-hand of yours! you'll overreach yourself, or get sprained in the back sinews, some of these days, if you don't look out."

"I will not allow you to 'talk stable' in that way, sir," returned Alice, playfully shaking her finger at her recumbent spouse; "you shall not go to the picnic at all, you naughty boy, unless you behave better. Come, get up," she continued, "if you lie down again you'll be asleep in a minute; you're so idle, you're actually growing fat!"

"Nonsense, you don't really mean it!" exclaimed Harry, springing up with a bound which shook the room, and startled Alice so much that she dropped the glove, needle, thread, button, and all, pricking her finger into the bargain. "By Jove," he continued, regarding himself anxiously in a large pier glass, "so I am! I tell you what, Mrs. Coverdale, this is getting serious, and must be put a stop to."

"My dearest Harry, how dreadfully impetuous you are!—you've made me jump so, that I've dropped my work, and been and gone and pricked my favourite finger, as you say in your horrid slang—look!" So saying, the pretty Alice pouted like a spoilt child, as she then most assuredly was, and held up the injured finger to excite her husband's com-

misfation. When a proper degree of pity had been shown, and the necessary amount of matrimonial felicity transacted, Alice resumed: "What a dreadfully conceited fellow you are, to be so alarmed at growing fat! Are you afraid of losing your beauty?"

"My how much?" was the astonished reply. "What funny ideas do come into a woman's head to be sure! Why, you silly child, do you think I ever set up for a 'beauty' man? or care two straws what I look like? Such follies are very well for got-up puppies, like Horace D'Almayne; but they're not in my line."

"I'm sure you're fifty times as handsome as Mr. D'Almayne," was Alice's eager rejoinder; "but," she continued, reflectively, "if you are not afraid of your good looks, why are you so horrified at the idea of growing fat?"

Harry coloured slightly, and tried to evade the question; but his wife's curiosity, being by this time excited, was not so easily baffled, and Coverdale had nothing for it but to confess the truth, which he did thus:—

"Well, if you must know, little wife, I've a bay colt by Fencer out of a Harkaway mare, and a chestnut filly by Hercules out of Bulfinch, both rising five (I refused 600 guineas for the pair of 'em a year ago), which I expect to do most of my work next hunting season; but as they're both young unmade horses, I would not ride over twelve stone for anything; nothing cows a young horse more than overweighting him at starting."

"Oh, Harry!" exclaimed Alice, reproachfully, "I thought you meant to give up hunting now—I'm sure you said so when you were—— that is, before we were married. Why, you would be away from me more than half the day every time you went out! besides, it's so dangerous! Oh, no; you may go shooting sometimes, and I can ride a pony and mark for you, as I used to do with papa and Arthur, but you must not hunt."

"And can't you ride and see the hounds throw off, darling? It's one of the prettiest sights in the world. The first thing I mean to do when we get back, is to buy you a perfect lady's horse; something rather different from that brute poor old Crane gave you."

"Then you won't promise to give up hunting, you naughty boy—not even when I ask you to do so to please me?"

And, confident in her own power, the young wife cast a look, half-imploring, half-commanding, on her lord and master, which he would have found it no easy matter to resist to a degree which should vindicate his right to such a title, when the opportune entrance of the valet, with a packet of letters, extricated him from his dilemma.

"A note from Madame de Beauville, containing an invitation to the picnic!—how delightful!" exclaimed Alice, ap-

pealing for sympathy to her better half; but he was engaged in perusing the following epistle, which, owing to the peculiarities both of diction, writing, and spelling, it was not too easy to decipher:—

"HONOURED SUR,—I remain your humbel servunt and gaimkeepur as wos, John Markum, whech I would not 'ave intruded on you injoying of yourself in furring parts as is most fit, having married a beutiful English lady, as they do tell me, and the darter of Squire Hazlehurst likewise; which having caused a many things to go rong at home, I thort you would be glad to hear on it, and so rite, which I ope is no offence, the same being unintenshonal on my part; but the new stewart is agoin on oudacious, a ordering of me to kill gaim for him to sell, which, refusing to do, agin your ordurs, Honoured Sur, and he putting the money in his durty pocket, savin your presents, am discharged with four small childring, and a little stranger expected, which would have been welcome, but now must be a birding on the parish with his poor mother; which, knowin Honoured Sur, as injustice to unborn innocents is not in your line, nor in that of any gents, but dishonest stewarts spoken agen in Scriptur, I umbly takes the liburty of trustin in Providence, which supports his poor mother agen the thorts of workous baby-linen, that hangs heavy on a woman accustomed to wash for the family and keep herself repectabul; so do not give up all hope of seeing you home, Honoured Sur, before every hed of grain is destroyed, in which case Mr. Stewart may lurn that honesty is the best politics arter all; and so remain,

"Your humbel survunt to commarnd,

"JOHN MARKUM.

"P.S.—The rabbids is agoin to town in the carriur's cart, frightful, likewise the peasants."

"My dearest Harry, there is to be a 'bal costumé' after the picnic, and that kind Madame de Beauville sends us tickets for both! How charming!" exclaimed Alice, so engrossed in her pleasant anticipations that she had not observed the gloom gathering upon her husband's brow, and was, therefore, quite unprepared when he broke out suddenly—

"'Pon my word, it's enough to drive a man distracted; the moment one turns one's back everything goes to——Ahem!—Here's a scoundrel, who lived eight years with Lord Flashipan, and who came to me with a character fit for a bishop, and now he's not only selling my game by cartloads, but has actually dared to discharge Markum!—as honest, trustworthy a fellow, and as good a keeper as man need require. Oh, if I was but near him with a horsewhip, I wouldn't mind paying for the assault! I'd give him something to remember. Harry

Coverdale by—he might thank his stars if I didn't break every bone in his skin And that poor fellow Markum turned out, and all his little curly-headed brats, too—that makes me as mad as any of it!" He strode up and down the room angrily, his wife watching him in terrified amazement. At length he exclaimed abruptly, "Alice, my dear, we must start for England to-morrow morning."

"But the picnic and the 'bal costumé,' Harry dearest, do not not come off till the day after that; and Madame de Beauville has just sent me tickets for them both!" urged his wife, timidly.

"I'm sorry, my love, that it should have happened so, but go we must," was the unyielding reply.

"But Madame de Beauville has taken so much trouble, and been so kind," murmured Alice.

"The devil fly away with the old hag and her kindness too!" was the angry rejoinder. "I wish to heaven she'd attend to her own affairs, and not try to inspire you with a taste for dissipation. However, there is a quiet way of settling this question: if you choose to stay and go to this party, stay; and when I've been to Coverdale, and settled scores with that rascal Cribbins, I'll come back and fetch you; so please yourself."

Poor Alice! this was her first experience of Harry's "quiet way"; the implied indifference was more than she could bear, and murmuring, in a broken voice, "Do you wish to leave me already!" she burst into a flood of tears.

Of course, that settled the question. Harry called himself a brute, and thought he was one, and felt as if he could have cried too, when he saw the bright drops glistening in Alice's soft, loving eyes, and so set himself to work in earnest to console her; and succeeded to such an extent that, ere a quarter of an hour had elapsed, Alice pronounced herself to be a silly child, and wondered how she could have been so foolish as to cry because Harry, the kindest and most affectionate of husbands, had evinced his just indignation on learning how the miscreant Cribbins had tyrannized over the faithful and unfortunate Markum, and his dear little, interesting, curly-pated family. Then, as a personal favour to herself, she begged Harry would let her give up the picnic, and start for England next morning; she would be quite ready to go at five a.m., or earlier, if he wished it. To which Harry replied that nothing should induce him to deprive her of a pleasure he knew she had set her heart on; that a French picnic and "bal costumé" were things she could never see in England, and that as they were there it would be really a pity not to avail themselves of so good an opportunity; and he begged she would instantly sit down and write his thanks, as well as her own, to that thoroughly friendly, kind-hearted woman, Madame de Beauville.

While Alice was thus engaged, Harry took pen in hand, and dashed off a hurried epistle to Arthur, begging him to run down to Coverdale Park by the next train, and in his name cashier Cribbins, and reinstate the ill-used Markum and his much-enduring wife, if possible, before the arrival of the expected little stranger should add another small item to his embarrassments.

The picnic was a very gay one, and the "bal costumé" all that Alice's "fancy had painted it," and a few over, as her slang husband was pleased to express it. The young couple went dressed as Romeo and Juliet. Harry, if left to himself, would have chosen a clown's suit of motley; but Alice considered the romantic preferable to the ridiculous, and so he yielded; though it must be confessed that he afforded the most stalwart, robust, and cheerful representation of the forlorn Veronese lover that can well be imagined. Alice (although she also would have looked the part better if her damask cheek had not glowed quite so brightly with health and happiness) made an extremely fascinating little Juliet, and produced a sensation which delighted her husband, and bid fair to turn her own pretty head.

The "bal" and picnic being safely accomplished, and Alice perceiving that, although he did not again openly broach the subject, Harry's thoughts were continually wandering to Coverdale Park, pretended (like a loving little hypocrite as she was) that she also began to feel home-sick; and that, although Paris was all very charming and agreeable for a little while, she should be very sorry to stay there long. Thus, the day of their departure was fixed, so that Harry should be enabled to reach home before the first of September—as Alice (choosing the lesser of two evils) meant to encourage his shooting (occasionally for a few hours), as a bribe to induce him to give up that senseless and dangerous pastime, hunting; and she actually believed that her influence could accomplish all this—dear, innocent little Alice!

On the morning before they were to start, a letter arrived from the Grange. Alice read it eagerly.

"Oh, Harry!" she exclaimed, "what do you think Emily tells me? What a strange, extraordinary, wretched thing!—it seems quite impossible!"

"What is it, little wife?" returned Harry. "Has your father turned free-trader, and invited Messrs. Cobden and Bright to stay with him? or has Arthur been made Lord Chancellor?"

"Something almost as wonderful," was the rejoinder. "Mr. Crane has proposed for my cousin Kate's hand, and she has positively accepted him!"

"And a very sensible thing, too," replied Harry, who, leaning over the back of his wife's chair, was wickedly and surreptitiously attaching an ornamental pen-wiper to the end

of one of her long, silky ringlets; "I daresay, now, you're bitterly repenting your own folly in having allowed her the chance."

Alice, turning her head quickly to administer condign punishment for his speech, by a tug at her lord and master's ample whiskers, became aware of the scheme laid against her unconscious ringlet by reason of the twitch, which Harry, unprepared for her sudden movement, was unable to avoid giving it.

"You silly boy! what are you doing to me? oh! you've tied a horrid thing to my pet curl; take it off directly, sir! But seriously, now, about Kate; dearest Harry, do be sensible, please, and let me talk to you." This exhortation was called forth by the fact of the incorrigible Coverdale having placed the pen-wiper—which was a sort of cross between a three-barrelled cocked hat and an improbable pyramid—on the top of his wife's head, just where the cross-roads in the parting of her hair occurred.

"Talk away, darling; I'm about as sensible as it's at all likely you'll ever find me," was the reply.

"Well, don't you really and truly think it very shocking that such a girl as Kate—so clever and handsome, so unusually superior in every point—should throw herself away upon that silly old man, whom she cannot even respect?" rejoined Alice.

"If I must speak the plain truth," replied Harry, "I should say that a girl who could make such a sacrifice of her own free will isn't worth pitying for it; she must be both mercenary and ambitious—serious faults in a man, but positive vices in a woman, because in yielding to them she is sinning against all the better instincts of her nature: for such a character I can feel no sympathy."

"But indeed, Harry, she is not such a dreadful heartless creature as you imagine her; at least, she never used to be. On the contrary, when we were all children together, she was rather high-flown and romantic. It was during the time that she was at school, and under the care of a horrid woman, a Miss Crofton——"

"A Miss how much?" inquired Harry.

"Miss Crofton."

"What was her Christian name?" continued Harry.

"Arabella," was the reply.

"By Jove! did you ever see her? Was she a tall, dark-looking creature, with great flashing eyes like a gipsy's?"

"Yes, that is an exact description of her," returned Alice, in surprise; "but why do you ask? What do you know of her?"

"No good," returned Harry, mysteriously, shaking his head; "but never mind, go on."

"I was only going to say that I feel sure Kate must have

some better reason than a mere wish to become a great lady to induce her to marry Mr. Crane. You know her father and mother are very poor, and she has several younger brothers and sisters; perhaps she wishes to help them."

"I daresay she does," replied Harry, turning away to conceal a yawn; "nobody is all bad, any more than they are all the other thing. Characters are like zebras—alternate stripes of black and white; the only difference is, that in some one colour predominates, in some the other."

There was a pause, then in a lower voice Alice resumed—"Harry, did it ever occur to you (of course, I do not want you to betray confidence even to me), but did you ever suspect that Arthur was attached to Kate?"

"Never in my life," was the unhesitating reply. "Arthur always laughed the tender passion, as he used to call it, to scorn."

"I felt almost certain it was so," continued Alice; "but I most earnestly hope, for his sake, that I was mistaken; if not, only conceive how wretched this engagement will make him!"

"Judging by my own feelings, when I fancied you had accepted the irresistible cotton-spinner," returned Coverdale, "I should say that Prometheus, who had a perennial vulture making 'no end' of a meal on his liver (which I take to be simply a metaphorical method of stating that the unfortunate Titan was afflicted with hepatic disease), was, by comparison, 'a gentleman who lived at home at ease.'"

"I used to fancy sometimes," pursued Alice, "that Kate returned his affection; but she was so reserved, and her manner was always so calm and self-possessed, that it was impossible to judge, with any degree of certainty, what her feelings might be. However, this settles the point so far as she is concerned; if she had really cared about him, she could never have consented to marry Mr. Crane."

"Hum! well, I don't know that," returned Harry, meditatively. "It is not all women who have such simple, true, loving hearts as you, my own darling; and a pupil of Arabella Crofton's may very well be capable of loving one man and marrying another."

"Why, how came you to know anything about Miss Crofton, Harry?" exclaimed Alice, her curiosity being thoroughly roused by her husband's second allusion to some previous acquaintance with her cousin's "ci-devant" governess.

"I met her in Italy, if you must know," returned Coverdale. "She lived as governess in a family where I visited, and I saw a good deal of her at one time."

There was something so odd and conscious in his manner of speaking, that Alice exclaimed, "She fell in love with you, I am certain of it. Come, confess now that I am right."

"Do you think that every woman must needs be as foolish

as yourself, you silly child?" was the uncomplimentary reply. "I can assure you, Miss Crofton is as utterly unlike you in tastes, habits, and opinions, as she is in person; and that is a pretty considerable assertion, I take it. And now it is time for you to get ready for our last drive in the Bois de Boulogne, and I must go out and buy a clean pair of gloves; so for ten minutes I shall wish you an affectionate farewell."

Thus saying, Harry quitted the apartment; and Alice, going to prepare for her drive, forgot, for the time, her husband's mysterious intimacy with Miss Crofton; it occurred to her afterwards, indeed, when——, but we must not anticipate. The next morning saw them en route. As they were about to embark at Boulogne, a sensation was created, at the hotel at which they waited till the tide served for the packet to start, by the arrival of a travelling carriage drawn by four horses, with a lady inside, and her "soubrette," and an outlandish, courier-like creature in the rumble.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Harry, who, ensconced behind a window-curtain, had been examining the turn-out with all the interest with which a position of enforced idleness invests every trifle. "By the powers, there's a foreign coronet on the carriage, and ditto on Don Whiskerandos' buttons! I wonder what she is like! Young and pretty, by all that is interesting and romantic! I daresay she is going to cross in the same boat as we are. Yes! Whiskerandos is gesticulating and explaining, and the landlord waves his hand in the direction of the pier. Now comes the bore of being a married man: what a splendid adventure I am shut out from! If I were but single, an opportunity now offers of captivating a lovely and accomplished foreign Countess, with a dowry of diamonds in her dressing-box, and a gold mine in her precious pocket; there's a good opening for a nice young man!"

"Pray avail yourself of it," returned Alice. "Don't let me be any obstacle; carry off the Countess, and I will remain behind with that noble creature whom you style Don Whiskerandos. I prefer him infinitely to you, he is so like a very well-trained baboon."

Harry's conjecture that the mysterious Countess meant to cross in the same vessel with himself and his wife proved correct; for scarcely had he seen Alice comfortably established on a snug bench, where, if the sea-fiend should be so uncourteous as to attack her, she could on an emergency lie down, when daintily tripped along the human chicken-ladder which connected the vessel with the shore, the graceful "bien chaussé," little feet of the Countess. Then ensued a grand scene. Whiskerandos either did not comprehend, or refused to comply with some demand of the hotel commissionaire who had taken upon himself the charge of the baggage, and who accordingly resisted his conveying his mistress's luggage

on board. Whiskerandos grimaced and chattered in a polyglot jargon, apparently compounded of every language under heaven, and utterly incomprehensible to the deepest philologist extant: the commissionaire was immovable. Whiskerandos implored—the commissionaire was deaf to his entreaties. Whiskerandos stormed—the commissionaire was inexorable. Whiskerandos, unable to endure his fate with calmness, went raving mad—he swore oaths so replete with improbable consonants that it is only a wonder they did not smash every tooth in his head; he stamped, shrieked, clenched his fists, and shook them in the face of his adversary—in vain; the commissionaire remained adamant, and prepared actually to carry off the offending luggage.

"Look at that ape," observed Harry to his wife, who was watching the scene, half in amusement, half in terror; "he's going into sky-blue fits apparently: of all absurd sights an angry foreigner is the most ridiculous. Do you see his moustaches?—they actually stand on end with fury, like the hairs on the tail of an excited cat. But see, the Don appeals to his mistress; the Countess will have to settle the affair 'in propriâ personâ.'" This affair, however, was not to be arranged so easily; for the inflexible commissionaire proved as deaf to the entreaties of the mistress as he had shown himself to the threatenings of the man; and the Countess, if countess she was, having remonstrated to no purpose in a gentle, timid voice, looked helplessly round, as though she would appeal to society at large to aid her in her difficulty.

"Poor thing! those men have frightened her; she looks ready to cry!" exclaimed Alice. "Harry, dear, do go and see if you cannot assist her—you understand how to manage those people so well; besides, they always attend to a gentleman."

Thus urged, Harry crossed the deck, and Alice saw him take off his hat and address the interesting foreigner; she bowed her head, and was evidently making a grateful answer; then Harry turned to the disputants, who both assailed him with a volley of words, upon which he first silenced Whiskerandos, then he exchanged a few cabalistic sentences with the commissionaire, and slipped a talisman into his hand, whereupon, with the celerity of some harlequinade trick, he changed into an amiable, obliging creature, only too anxious to please everybody, and went off, patting Whiskerandos on the back, and calling him a brave "garçon," to assist with his own silver-absorbing fingers in conveying the Countess's luggage on board. Then the Countess overwhelmed Harry with thanks, and Harry smiled benignantly upon the Countess, and they "talked conversation" for a few minutes; after which they both looked at Alice, and Harry, with his best company manner on (which was merely his own natural manner brushed smooth), crossed over to her.

"She is really a Countess," he began, "and a very charm-

ing, refined style of young woman too. She wants to be introduced to you, so come along."

"But, Harry, dear, I shall break my neck, or tumble into the sea, if I attempt to walk; just look how it's rolling about!" remonstrated Alice, whose essentially terrestrial education had given her rather a horror of all nautical matters.

"We'll fall in together then," returned Harry, laughing; "at all events, don't let us fall out about it. Come along, little wife, and trust yourself to me; I've paced a vessel's deck when the sea's shown rather a different sort of surface from that which it wears to-day."

As he spoke, he placed his arm round his wife's slender waist, and half supported, half led her across the deck in safety.

"What is her name, Harry?" inquired Alice, as they were effecting the transit.

"Bertha seems to be her Christian name—of course her surname is something unpronounceable and appalling; but if you call her Countess Bertha that will do; at all events, as long as our acquaintance with her is likely to last," was the reply.

Alice having never before encountered a real live Countess, felt a little shy at first; but the young foreigner's manner, which was perfectly easy without being too familiar, soon reassured her, and the two girls (for the Countess appeared little older than Alice) chatted away, at first in French, but when it came out that the stranger likewise understood English, in that language, to their mutual satisfaction. But in about half an hour a breeze (not metaphorical, but literal) sprung up, and the Countess signified her wish to retire to the cabin, upon which Coverdale summoned her maid, and then assisted her to effect the desired change of locality.

CHAPTER XIX.

A COMEDY OF ERRORS.

"THERE now, I consider I've done the polite in the first style of fashion and elegance," observed Harry, self-complacently, as he rejoined his wife; "Horace D'Almayne himself could not have polished off the young woman more handsomely, for all his moustaches."

"How you do hate that poor Mr. D'Almayne!" returned Alice, laughing. "Do you know, I think you are jealous of him."

"I was once, and that's the truth—very savage it made me too; for if you could have been fascinated by such a puppy as that, I felt I had mistaken your character in toto, and

that the Alice I loved was a creature of my own imagination, not a reality—but I soon saw my error."

Alice glanced at him archly. "Are you quite sure you did not fall into a greater mistake when you fancied yourself so certain of my indifference?" she inquired.

Harry fixed his eyes upon her with a look of inquiry, which, when he saw that she was joking, changed to an expression of tenderness; "I could not look in that dear face, where every thought can be read as in a book, and remain jealous for five minutes," he answered.

Alice made no reply, unless placing her little hand in that of her husband, with a confiding gesture, can be called so.

The wind continuing fresh, the unfortunate Countess did not reappear; but Coverdale and his wife, being so happily constituted that the tossing produced no ill effects on them, remained upon deck till the vessel reached Dover. Amid the scene of confusion attending the arrival of a steamer, Harry, having secured his luggage, was standing sentinel over a moderately-sized pyramid, which he had caused to be erected of the same, when Alice, then seated upon a large black trunk, which she had seduced her husband into buying in the Rue St. Honoré, and which would very easily have held her, bonnet, cloak, and all, suddenly exclaimed:

"Oh, Harry! do look at that young exquisite who has just come on board; why, he's the very moral, as the old women say, of the person we've been discussing—Mr. D'Almayne!"

"By Jove, he's more than the moral!" returned Coverdale, as the individual thus alluded to advanced towards them bowing and smiling, "it's the veritable Horace himself, I vow —talk of the devil——. My dear fellow, how are you? who'd have thought of seeing you here! You've not turned Custom-house officer, have you? I've nothing contraband about me, except this morning's 'Galignani'; if you are inclined to make a seizure of that, you're very welcome."

"You're nearer the mark than you imagine, my dear sir," was the reply; "though not exactly a professional 'attaché' to the Customs, I must own that I am here as an amateur in that capacity—my object being to facilitate the transmission of a lady's luggage."

"Yes?—how interesting! I hope she's young and pretty," observed Alice. "Come, Mr. D'Almayne, having let us so far into the secret, it's no use to affect the mysterious, so tell us who and where she is."

"Where she is, perhaps you may be able to inform me, my dear Mrs. Coverdale," replied D'Almayne, smoothing his moustaches. "The object of my search is a young German lady, the Countess Bertha von Rosenthal, to whom I have promised my friend, the Honourable Mrs. Botherby, to act as 'preux chevalier.' Accordingly I came down by train this morning, provided with an order from the Board of Customs

to the people here to pass the Countess's luggage unexamined, and show her every attention which may facilitate her transit; thence I am to escort her and her property to Park Lane; by all which 'double, double, toil and trouble,' I secure an early introduction to, and confer a favour upon, a young and lovely heiress."

"That's my Countess, as sure as fate!" exclaimed Harry. "She said her name was Bertha"—and then he related to D'Almayne the circumstances with which the reader has already been made acquainted. "And," he continued in conclusion, as a female figure, leaning on the arms of the "soubrette" and Don Whiskerandos, emerged from the ladies' cabin—"and here she comes, looking rather poorly still—nothing of the water-witch about her, at all events. Have you met before, or shall I introduce you?"

"Do, by all means, 'mon cher'; we are total strangers to each other," was the reply. And with an injunction to Alice to remain where she was till he should return, Harry seized D'Almayne's arm, and hurried him away. Before two minutes had elapsed, Coverdale returned alone.

"It's all right," he said: "but come along; D'Almayne's order will clear our luggage also, and we can all get away together."

Then ensued a grand "scena" of bustle and confusion, during which, supported by her husband's stalwart arm, Alice caught glimpses of D'Almayne smiling to show his white teeth, and striving vigorously to enact the part of guardian angel to the rich young heiress.

"That puppy is in his glory now," observed Coverdale, snappishly; "I daresay that silly woman will take him at his own price, and believe in him to any extent to which he may like to lead her—perhaps marry him after all, and make him Count von Rosenthal: that would suit his complaint exactly, the fortune-hunting young humbug!"

"My dear Harry, what words!" exclaimed Alice. "You are really quite savage to-day; I shall be obliged to take Mr. D'Almayne under my protection, if you go on so."

"No need to do that, my dear," returned Harry, his face resuming its usual bright, kind expression, as his glance fell upon his wife; "your 'protégé' is quite certain to take the best possible care of himself—now come along"; and in another five minutes they had left the vessel and entered a railroad-carriage, in which the Countess and D'Almayne had already established themselves.

The journey to London was a very agreeable one; the Countess, having recovered with marvellous celerity the moment she placed her pretty little foot on "terra firma," exerted herself to make up for lost time, and succeeded so well that D'Almayne, who became more and more "empressé" and devoted every moment, determined, if he should be able

to ascertain beyond a doubt that her fortune was as large as it had been represented, to give up every other speculation, and devote all his energies to secure the hand and purse of this fascinating foreigner. As they approached the London Bridge terminus, the Countess, turning to her new guardian, inquired whether it was very far to Park Lane.

"About half an hour's drive. The carriage will, I trust, be there to meet this train; though, owing to our having avoided all delay at the Custom-house, we shall be in town some two hours sooner than the other steamboat passengers. However, if we arrive earlier than is expected, it will only be an agreeable surprise to our kind friend, Mrs. Botherby."

"'Mais oui!'" returned the Countess, with a look of innocent perplexity; "and who may be 'cette chere' Madame Bodairebie?"

"Mrs. Botherby, my dear Countess," returned D'Almayne, who began to think his charming friend must be slightly insane, "Mrs. Botherby—the Honourable Mrs. Botherby—is the lady who obtained for me the pleasure of rendering you this slight service."

"'Quelle drôle de chose.' I shall not know some Mrs. Bodairebie no veres," was the astounding reply.

"But—but—" stammered D'Almayne, as an idea occurred to him sufficiently alarming to surprise him out of his usual 'sang froid," "excuse me—but surely you are the Countess Bertha von Rosenthal!"

A peal of silvery laughter was the only reply the unhappy exquisite was at first able to obtain; but, as soon as she could recover herself, the mysterious lady began: "'Milles pardons!' I am so rude to make a laugh at you, but I am so gay I alvays must laugh ven I see a ridiculous thing in front of—bah—vot you call before me. 'Mon cher Monsieur,' you have, I know not how, tumbled into a delusion. I am not at all zie Countess Bertha von Rosenthal, but zie Countess Bertha Nasimoff, 'en route' to stay viz my friend, Lady St. Clare, in Park Lane, London, till my hosband shall capture zie permission of zie Czar to leave Petersburg and transport himselfs after me."

Coverdale, Alice, and the Countess Nasimoff glanced first at D'Almayne, then at one another, and then—but if they were heartless enough to laugh consumedly, we will draw a veil over such unfeeling conduct.

CHAPTER XX.

THE MORNING OF THE FIRST OF SEPTEMBER.

THE first of September! We wonder if we were a covey of partridges what we should think about the first of September, and how, generalizing from that idea, we should feel towards the race of men—sons of guns, as in partridge parlance we should, doubtless, metaphorically term them! We wonder from what point we should regard pointers (disappointers, as a witty friend of ours called a couple of "wild young dogs" who ran in upon their game, and cheated him of a promising shot), or how we should look upon a setter making a "dead set" at us! Reasoning by analogy, and not supposing partridges to be better Christians than Christians themselves, we fear we should consider sportsmen (the very name is an addition of insult to injury) greater brutes than their four-footed allies; and that the idea of standing fire (either kitchen or gun), the notion of the roasting we must undergo after we have been plucked, of the way in which we should be cut up by a set of blades, who are, after all, ready enough to pick our brains, and avail themselves of our merry thoughts, would put us in such a flutter that it would be a mercy if we were not to show the white feather, and refuse to die game after all.

Such, however, were by no means the sentiments with which Harry Coverdale looked forward to the first of September. On the contrary, although he endeavoured to disguise the fact from his wife, and indeed from himself, as far as in him lay, the truth was that he was as much delighted at the prospect of a good day's partridge shooting as the veriest schoolboy released from the drudgery of dictionary and grammar. Markum, that trustworthy custodian of game, and original specimen of a polite letter-writer, who had been safely reinstated in his office, and received such handsome presents of baby-linen and other infantry accoutrements that the illustrious "little stranger," who had wisely postponed his arrival till the evil day had departed, bid fair to be clothed in a style befitting the heir-apparent to a dukedom rather than to a double-barrelled gun—Markum reported that although the hares and pheasants (which he persisted in calling peasants) had suffered some diminution from the practices of the dishonest steward, yet that he'd never "in all his born days seen such a blessed sight o' partridges." Stimulated by this information, and by the recollection that on the preceding first of September he had been kicking his heels and cursing

his evil fortune, as he performed quarantine in a red-hot port of the Mediterranean, Harry—having greatly amused Alice by the earnest zeal with which, on the 31st of August, he examined and re-examined his "Joe Manton," and the exact and stringent orders he gave in regard to the feeding of his dogs, than which the most fastidious invalid could not have been more delicately and precisely dieted—awoke at four o'clock on the eventful morning, and, without disturbing Alice, who was sleeping as calmly as a child, rose and dressed himself in a thoroughly workmanlike shooting-costume. Having accomplished this feat without waking Alice, he wrote on a bit of paper, "Good morning and good-bye, dearest. As I intend to have a glorious day of it, do not expect me till near dinner-time, when I hope to return with a full bag and an awful appetite. Yours ever, H. C.," and placing it on his wife's dressing-table, stole on tiptoe to the door, closed it noiselessly after him; and when, three hours afterwards, Alice opened her eyes, he was striding through stubble on the farther side of the estate, having bagged four brace of birds and a well-conditioned and respectable jack hare.

Mrs. Coverdale was some few minutes before she was, literally, awake to a sense of her situation; and the lady's-maid entering while she was still between sleeping and waking, she half-unconsciously asked the not unnatural question, "What has become of your master?"

"If you please, Mem, Master's been out shooting partringers ever since five o'clock, Wilkins says. If you please, Mem, there's a note for you, Mem, lying on your dressing-table, in Master's handwriting."

Rousing herself, Alice read it eagerly. The contents did not seem particularly to please her, for, as she refolded the paper, she looked grave, and gave vent to a mild sigh. "Do not undraw the curtain," she said; "come again in an hour, Ellis; I feel sleepy, and there is nothing to get up for," she added, in a slightly pettish tone. Falling asleep the moment she laid her head upon the pillow, Alice dreamed that when she came down to breakfast she found Harry had returned, saying that he could not bear to leave her alone all day, and so had come back and wished to drive her to call upon that agreeable woman, Mrs. Felicia Tabinette (a name with which she was inspired for the occasion, as no such neighbour existed), to which proposition she gladly assenting, they had gone out in a pony-chaise made of coral and mother-of-pearl, and drawn by two lovely little sea-green ponies with lilac manes and tails, and harness made of the best point lace. And she was just advancing the unanswerable proposition that, as lace was the fittest material of which to make a lady's collar, it must be the most proper fabric for that of a horse, when the inexorable Ellis appeared for the second time, and dispelled all her bright visions by awakening her to the dull

reality. Alice, however, took her revenge upon that "disillusioning"—as a Frenchman would have called it—lady's-maid, for she was more fastidious and difficult to please, and almost snappish, than Ellis had ever known her before, insomuch that the excellent Abigail afterwards propounded her opinion in the servants' hall, that "Missus was 'tuter fay' outer sorts," which disheartening fact she accounted for by the hypothesis that she—Mrs. Coverdale—must have got out of bed with the wrong foot foremost.

While the tea for her solitary breakfast was drawing, Alice, having no one else to look at, amused herself by regarding her own natural—no term could be more appropriate—face in a large pier-glass, and was quite startled to behold the unmistakably cross expression which characterized it. Taking herself to task for this, she, sipping her tea, which did not taste nearly so good as when Harry was at home, mentally decided that she was very unreasonable, and childish, and ridiculous—that when Harry had been devoting himself for the last month to her pleasure and amusement, going to balls and all sorts of places which he did not care a pin about, solely to please her, it was horribly selfish in her to grudge him a few hours to devote to a favourite pursuit, though how men could find delight in killing those poor birds, she could not tell. She did not so much wonder about other people; she believed men were generally cruel; but Harry was so unusually kind-hearted. She supposed it must be the excitement and the beautiful scenery, and the interest in watching those dear, clever dogs stick out their long tails to point at the partridges with—which, looking at it in a Chesterfieldian point of view, was decidedly impolite, if not positively rude, of them; and yet she had heard gentlemen talk about their sporting dogs being so well-bred.

Having thus reasoned herself into a wiser frame of mind, she resolved to make the best of it; and suddenly recollecting she had at least a thousand things to do, which she was continually putting aside till some time or other when Harry should be out, she decided that this was the time, and that now or never must they all be done. Accordingly, she set vigorously to work, and wrote three letters one after another, to three former school-fellows, wherein she described her husband as a species of modern demi-god, compounded of equal parts of Solomon and Adonis, with a dash of Achilles thrown in to do justice to his heroic qualities; and depicted matrimonial felicity in such glowing colours, that the richest and prettiest of her correspondents eloped the next week with her music-master; and one of the others, who was neither rich nor pretty, turned pious out of spite, and went into a sort of High Church Protestant nunnery-and-water, to punish the men, who, it must be confessed, appeared to submit to the trial with the most cheerful resignation. Then Alice brought out

a large roll of bills, and a thick housekeeping-book, ruled with blue lines, and having a business-like smell of new leather about the binding, which Alice flattered herself would impress even the stately housekeeper (who was old enough to Alice, in her secret soul, stood very much in dread) with a be her mother, and stiff enough for anything; and of whom deep sense of her being a very dragon of housewifery, prepared to be down upon the slightest attempt at peculation like an avenging fury. But the bills were so complicated, and never would add up twice alike, and the butcher was so inconsistent and slippery about his prices, sometimes charging 7d. and sometimes 8d., as "if once a pound of mutton, always a pound of mutton," were not an incontrovertible axiom; and the baker was as bad, besides choosing to spell dough, d.o.e., which at first made her think that he was the butcher and sold venison; and the hams seemed always to come from the tallow-chandler's with the candles, which wasn't by any means an agreeable association of ideas; and the footman was evidently of Esquimaux descent, and lived sumptuously upon lamp-oil at 8s. the gallon; and the coachman appeared to feed the carriage-horses with sponges, wash-leather, and rottenstone, which she was sure could not be good for them; and she thought the under-housemaid had ordered herself a "Turk's-head" dessert-cake, for her own private eating, but it turned out to be a particular species of broom; while the amount of hearthstones and house-flannels that girl consumed would have served to build an "Albert pattern" model cottage once a quarter, and furnish the pauper inhabitants thereof with winter clothing: so that, by the time luncheon arrived, poor Alice, tired and confused, with inky fingers and an aching head, had come to the conclusion that she had nothing in common with Joseph Hume, M.P., and that for the future she should resign the glory of managing the housekeeper's books to Mrs. Gripples, and restrict her department to the equally dignified, but less onerous, duty of making Harry sign the cheques, and handing them over to that august domestic to pay the bills with.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE EVENING OF THE SAME DAY.

LUNCHEON—a dreadful hot luncheon—luncheon enough for four hungry men, at least; and Alice had a headache. Of course she could not touch a bit, so she listlessly nibbled a biscuit, and sipped half a glass of wine, and felt very lonely and uncomfortable, and sat down to think—which was just the very worst thing she could have done under the circumstances,

for it brought on a second attack of the "neglected wife" state of feeling; and she had actually proceeded so far, that she was about mentally to convict Harry (that matrimonial phœnix) of positive selfishness, when the enormity of the idea horrified her, and produced an instantaneous reaction, and she told herself, roundly and sharply, that she was ungrateful in the extreme, and weak, and childish, and vacillating, and altogether unworthy of such a blessing of a husband as Harry Coverdale. And thus having taken herself severely to task, and repented and confessed, and promising amendment for the future, yet refusing herself absolution, she recovered sufficiently to determine that she would do something energetic to dissipate reflection, though of what nature the deed was to be she had not the smallest conception. Should she order the carriage, and pay visits?—no, impossible! they were all first visits to a set of total strangers, and she could no more call upon them alone than she could fly: besides, she would be lost in that great carriage all by herself, and the horses would be sure to avail themselves of the opportunity to shy and run away, if Harry were not there to protect her. She knew the white-legged horse had a spite against her, for when she wanted to pat his nose one day, he tried to bite her—what a wonderful thing instinct was, to be sure! No, she would go and take a brisk walk, that would rouse her, and do her headache good; besides, she could have the dear dogs for company—oh, yes! a walk by all means. Where should she go?—why, across the fields to visit Mrs. Markum, and see how the little stranger looked in his gorgeous apparel, and learn whether mother or son wanted for anything. Harry would like her to do that; he was so fond of Markum. Ah, Alice! had you no mental reservation?—did not a hope lurk in the bottom of your heart that at the gamekeeper's cottage you might possibly catch a glimpse of his master calling in for dry shoes, or a relay of powder and shot? Poor, loving little Alice, ashamed to confess, even to herself, the depth and strength of her affection!—silly little Alice, jealous even of her involuntary rivals, the partridges, who would gladly have dispensed with the attentions her husband was paying them!—weak, foolish, little Alice!—and yet more truly wise in such loving folly, stronger in the weakness of such tender, womanly devotion, nearer the Divine ideal, whence God, who made man in his own image, formed woman as a helpmeet for him, than the most self-engrossed "esprit fort" who ever confused herself and others by prating of things above her comprehension.

So Alice set out for her solitary ramble, taking with her Pepper and Ginger, which (although the former was often found in a pretty pickle, and would have been wholly inappropriate in a cream tart; and the latter, judging by the appearance of a very red tongue, was decidedly "hot i' the

mouth") were not a couple of spicy condiments, but a brace of Skye terriers. The dogs were in charming spirits, which they displayed by running after and barking at respectable blackbirds seeking their frugal "diet of worms"; coming back in eccentric and violent circles, to twitch the ends of Alice's boa and the corners of her shawl, only to dash away again and lose themselves, by forcing burglarious entrances into forbidden rabbit-burrows, with the vicious intention of worrying the timid inmates, in their little brown coats with practical jokes of tails. And here be it observed parenthetically, that of all the freaks of nature, the unexpected way in which she has seen fit to turn up rabbits' tails, and to line them with white, to the great disfigurement and personal hazard of the owners, has always appeared to us one of the strangest, and only to be accounted for by the hypothesis of a chronic practical joke. Whether this idea enhanced the fun Pepper and Ginger had with the rabbits during that expedition, or whether it never occurred to them, is more than we can tell; but the extent to which those dogs persisted in burying themselves alive, and harassing their mistress by a succession of these amateur extramural interments, almost justifies us in supposing it must have done so.

Having at last succeeded in reducing her four-footed torments to such a measure of obedience that, when thoroughly tired of scampering and scratching, they condescended to follow her, Alice entered a grass field, and had walked half across it ere she discovered the alarming fact that there were some cows grazing in it; one of which she, to her intense discomposure, immediately decided to be a bull, because, as she afterwards graphically described it, "it moo'd so low down its throat that it almost growled at her." Of course, all bulls being mad, and a mad bull being enough to frighten anybody, Alice began to run; which feat of activity (or activity of feet, if any reader should prefer the phrase so transposed) charmed the dogs—who thought she did it for their express delectation—to such an extent, that they began to bark furiously, which frightened the cow (for despite her bass voice she was a "very" cow after all, and fortunately a quiet one into the bargain), so that, exalting her tail, and twisting it like a corkscrew for the greater effect, she also set off running, thereby adding to Alice's terror to such a degree that, if a providential stile had not mercifully rescued her, the consequences might have been serious. This last "spirt," however, brought her to Markum's cottage, where she found the baby in a great state of slobbering splendour—very red, ugly, and promising, and altogether (as an assistant old lady, not to say hag, rather the worse for something that had dropped into her tea out of the gin-bottle, and who, from the accident, [illegible] condition of maudlin and inappropriate

Having done her duty by this young child—that is, having said it was very pretty, which, to speak mildly, was untrue—and a very fine child, which, as far as regarded its dress, it certainly was—and exactly like its father, which was an awful——well, never mind, pious fraud we'll call it—Alice tipped the inappropriate Christian half-a-crown (in exchange for which she received a tipsy blessing), and took leave, having obtained geographical instruction by which she might, on her homeward route, avoid the proximity of the "basso profondo" cow.

The walk back (with the trifling exception of an episode wherein Ginger disturbed the tenants of a wasps' nest) proved singularly uneventful, and Alice, in her secret soul, pronounced the whole expedition a failure—which, as it had cured her headache, was very ungrateful of her; but she was so engrossed by a little pain about the heart, which nothing but her husband's return could cure, that she had entirely forgotten her headache.

The hall clock struck four as its mistress entered; four o'clock, two long hours to dinner-time! the time when Harry would, that is, ought to, return; for she daresay'd he would be late, and that they should not sit down to table till half-past six, at the very earliest. What should she do to fill up this unharmonious interval? Why, as she had worked so hard all the morning, surely she had a right to amuse herself now. She would read some entertaining book, which would make her laugh and raise her spirits; for, despite her best endeavours, she was getting decidedly miserable. So to this end she opened a parcel of books from the library, and began upon a new novel, by that very talented lady, Mrs. Bluedeville, and read how a "fair and gentle girl," brought up by a select coterie of fiendish relations, and subjected from infancy to a series of tortures, sufficient to have expended the stoutest negro, developed, under these favourable circumstances, into a perfect Houri of Paradise, with the "additional attraction" of possessing the mind, manners, erudition, and phraseology of an old Divine of the Church of England. This interesting young martyr, released from her educational Bastile, and turned out to grass for a brief space in a pleasant meadow, wherein pastured a gallant, but very moral officer of dragoons, naturally falls in love with the same, who, fortunately, does not resent the liberty. Angelica, taken up from her month's run, and put to work much too heavy for her, becomes better and better, until, as might have been expected, she overdoes the thing, and getting too good to live, has nothing left for it but to die, which she accordingly does on the arrival of the post which brings an account of the bold dragoon (in whom, from a fancied resemblance to Harry, Alice had taken the deepest interest) having fallen a victim to his [illegible] course, which [illegible]

from the vindictive fury of the seventeenth evil-disposed survivor. Strange to say, this talented work, delightful as it was, failed to render Alice much more cheerful; but it succeeded in occupying her till it was time to go and dress for dinner, and for this she was grateful to the genius of Mrs. Bluedeville.

By six o'clock, Alice, ready for dinner in more senses than one, betook herself to the drawing-room, where she waited patiently for half an hour, reading up sundry parts of Mrs. Bluedeville, which, in her rapid flight through that lady's instructive romance, she had failed to peruse. At seven o'clock she rang the bell, and inquired of the butler whether his master had come in, or whether, if not, anything definite was known of his whereabouts. The reply was unsatisfactory in the extreme.

Master had not returned; he (Wilkins) could form no idea where he was likely to be; but, as a general maxim, considered shooting to be a highly dangerous amusement. Would Mrs. Coverdale obligingly condescend to ring the bell when she wished the dinner to be brought up?

Shooting a dangerous amusement! Yes, of course, so it was—guns constantly went off of their own accord, and shot those who were carrying them. How was it she had never thought of this before? and she had been blaming Harry, when, perhaps——the idea was too horrible to clothe in words, but it had occurred to her, and for Alice now there was no peace.

Mrs. Bluedeville was thrown aside with no more ceremony than if she had been a penny-a-liner; and, with flushed cheeks and a beating heart, the anxious young wife began to pace up and down the apartment. As the minutes crept by (so slowly!) Alice's fear increased, until, at half-past seven, the suspense grew intolerable; and, ringing the bell, she was just giving incoherent orders for two mounted grooms to set off in utterly useless directions, when bang! bang! went a double-barrelled gun in the stable-yard, and Wilkins (an amiable but timid London servant) and his mistress nearly jumped into each other's arms.

Still haunted by the conviction that something untoward must have happened, Alice hastened to meet her husband as he entered the hall. "Oh, Harry dearest, how glad I am you are safe!" she exclaimed; "but tell me," she continued, referring to the mysterious cause of his prolonged absence, "tell me—what is it?"

"Sixteen brace of birds, three hares, two couple of rabbits, a landrail, and a wood-pigeon; and a very fair bag I call it for one gun," was the unexpected reply.

Relieved, yet slightly provoked, Alice resumed, "But what has made you so late? I have been dreadfully frightened

"Frightened! what at? oh, you silly child! But come, let us have dinner; I shall be ready in less than ten minutes. The idea of being frightened!" and with a smile of compassionate derision, Harry marched off to dress, humming—

"A southerly wind and a cloudy sky
Proclaim it a hunting morning."

And this was Alice's recompense for a lonely day spent in looking forward to, and longing for, her husband's return, ending in half an hour of breathless anxiety for his safety! She felt decidedly cross, and we think she had a right to be so. During dinner she was silent and dignified on principle—her husband should see that she felt his neglect. But Harry didn't see it one bit, bless him! He was very hungry, so for some time kept strictly to business, and he was very happy; so when his appetite was appeased, he rattled on about anything and everything, and was so pleasant and cheerful that Alice felt dignity would be quite out of place, had a little struggle with her feelings, and then mentally forgave him.

To prove that she did so, she laid herself out to entertain and amuse him, and with this view, when the servant had left the room, she treated him to a comic account of her day's adventures, and having talked herself into a great state of communicativeness and sociability, had just reached the bass cow episode, when a slight sound, not very unlike the voice of the cow itself, reached her ear—Harry had fallen fast asleep!

CHAPTER XXII.

KATE SOWS THE WIND.

So Kate Marsden married the cotton-spinner, and old Mr. Hazlehurst repurchased his farm on very easy terms. We wonder which of the two was best pleased with the bargain! Kate turned very pale when she promised to love, honour, and obey a man whom she disliked, despised, and intended to rule; nor do we wonder at it, for, with all her faults, Kate perceived the intrinsic beauty of truth, and loved it, as she did *everything* beautiful. But though she loathed herself for what she was doing, though her *bitterest enemy* could not have taken a harsher view of her conduct than she herself took, she had gone too far to retract, and having swallowed the camel of crushing her own heart and that of Arthur Hazlehurst, she could not stultify herself by straining at the gnat of swearing falsely in the service for the solemnization of matrimony. Kate's was one of that peculiar order of con-

sciences which can commit a sin knowingly, on an emergency, but dare not be guilty of a blunder. In the one case, the end appears to justify the means; while in the other, the entire transaction is unworthy. Sophistry, Kate, sophistry! which, while you think it, and act upon it, fails to satisfy even your warped and distorted sense of right and wrong.

Kate Marsden married Mr. Crane—there was a union! On the one side youth and beauty; intellect, lofty enough to have aimed at any achievement which the mind of woman had accomplished; energy, sufficient to have gained the object striven for; ambition, that when all was won would have despised the trophies at her feet, and sighed for more worlds to conquer; and a deep, passionate nature, combining the fiery elements of a southern temperament with the steady perseverance and inflexible resolution characteristic of a daughter of the sturdy north; on the other side, advancing age, mental weakness, timidity, and its natural concomitant—suspicion, together with a general paucity of ideas, centred in a vulgar pride of wealth. All Kate's friends congratulated her, and many envied her good fortune; and Horace D'Almayne smiled on his future victim, as he surely reckoned her; and Arthur Hazlehurst sat alone in his dusky chambers, with bitter thoughts busy at his heart, struggling like a brave and good man, against the tempting fiend that bade him rise up and curse her who had thus rendered desolate his young existence; and the minister of religion stood before the altar, and pronounced his blessing over this hollow mockery of marriage, which no amount of blessing could hallow; and the happy pair drove off to some fool's paradise to enjoy the honeymoon.

Poor Mr. Crane! if he had dreamed of the volcano of feeling that smouldered at his side beneath that cold, calm exterior, he would assuredly have flung open the carriage-door, sprung out (albeit not accustomed to such feats of activity), and never ceased running until he had reached Manchester. Fortunately, however, his wife's mind was a sealed book to him, and so he reached the end of his journey in peace and safety.

Having borne the honeymoon with resignation, Kate endured her bad bargain "tête-à-tête" at various watering-places, and amongst innumerable lakes and mountains of tourist notoriety, until she had taught him the only accomplishment she cared to inculcate, viz., obedience, which he learned very readily, seeing that it relieved him from all trouble and responsibility. This point accomplished, she took him to a fashionable hotel in St. James's Street, where she wrote to her friend, Arabella Crofton, to join her. However, before that excellent young woman of the world had time to wind up the ends of a few trifling skeins of policy,

with which she had been constructing nets for small birds at Baden-Baden, Horace D'Almayne found out the residence of the happy couple, and proceeded to call upon, dine with, and make himself generally useful and agreeable to them. Kate did not like him, but she had been for two months "tête-à-tête" with Mr. Crane; and Horace possessed this advantage over that devoted husband, that he was not a fool, and Mr. Crane was. Horace was not a fool; on the contrary, he was such a clever knave that it was really a pity that he was not something better: he saw the game he had to play, and he resolved to play it as skilfully as his faculties and experience would enable him. He possessed considerable insight into character, and sufficient tact to accommodate himself to the peculiarities, and avail himself of the weaknesses, he might thus discover. Accordingly, his first move was to endeavour to lull Kate's suspicions of him, which he saw had been aroused; his next to make himself by degrees useful to her—necessary to her; then, let him win her confidence on any subject (he would have been delighted if she had told him the day of the month, or that she had dropped a pin, in confidence, for it would have been a beginning), until by word, look, or sign, she admitted her indifference towards her husband, and then the game would be his own.

With Mr. Crane, D'Almayne's course appeared very simple. The millionaire's one clear idea was the omnipotence of wealth; he knew D'Almayne was poor, and that he had lent him money which he never expected to be repaid. He considered him in the light of a sort of Master of the Ceremonies, who could guide him in the ways of fashionable life, whereof he felt his ignorance—a kind of upper upper-servant—the Vizier to his Caliphship, and he lent him money as a delicate way of paying his wages. At present D'Almayne was in high favour with Mr. Crane; his wife was looking very handsome, quite a gem of a wife—equal to his pictures or his port wine; D'Almayne had negotiated his marriage for him, and the speculation had been a successful one; he lent D'Almayne £500 before he had been in town a week. Horace saw it all, but he was not proud; as he would have said, "It suited his book too well," so he pocketed his wages meekly.

"My dear Kate, can you amuse yourself for a couple of hours or so alone? D'Almayne and I are going to look at a pair of carriage-horses—a—I shall bring him home to luncheon, and—a—now I think of it, I asked him to dine here, and go to the concert at the Hanover Square Rooms with us afterwards"; and having thus unfolded his programme for the day, Mr. Crane glanced timidly towards his wife, to learn whether it would receive her sanction and approval. There was a moment's silence, and then in a low, musical voice, Kate replied, coldly:

"I have letters to write this morning, so the arrangement will suit me perfectly. If the horses are fine ones, I hope you will buy them."

Mr. Crane stroked his chin (a habit in which he indulged when anything pleased him) and smiled. His wife was satisfied with him—happy man! But he had stroked his chin rather prematurely, for, in the same cold tone, Kate resumed—

"There is one point on which I am anxious clearly to understand you. Is it your wish that Mr. D'Almayne should virtually live with us? because, that he will do so, unless some decided measures are taken to discourage him, is self-evident."

This was a straightforward and uncompromising way of putting the case which slightly discomposed poor Mr. Crane. D'Almayne was, as we have said, eminently useful to his patron; so much so, that at that precise epoch the good gentleman would have been sorely puzzled how to get on without him; but the more he acknowledged this in his secret soul, the less did he desire that anyone, and especially his young wife, should perceive it.

"Well, my dear Kate," he began, "you see Mr. D'Almayne has turned his attention to points which, engaged as I have been for many years in commerce, I have never found time or opportunity to render myself acquainted with."

"In fact, he has made himself necessary to you," interposed Kate.

"No, my dear, no—by no means necessary—not at all so; but that he is useful, very useful to me, I confess. I am sorry to perceive that you have taken up a slightly unreasonable (if I may be permitted to say so) prejudice against this young man."

"You are mistaken," returned Kate, calmly. "I am perfectly indifferent to him. If it is your wish to make use of him, he will, of course, be here constantly; but as you have so kindly yielded to my desire that my friend, Miss Crofton, should reside with us, his presence or his absence will make little difference to me—only, if at any future time you should hear comments on the intimacy, you will remember that I have admitted it solely to gratify you."

Mr. Crane, propitiated by this concession, and by the grounds on which Kate had placed it, was endeavouring to stroke some form of thanksgiving out of his chin, when the door opened, and the subject of their conversation was shown in. After a few desultory remarks, Horace, turning to Mr. Crane, observed:—

"I called at the house-agent's in my way here, and have obtained the particulars of two houses, which it will be quite worth your while to look at; one is in Belgrave Square, the other in Park Lane."

As he spoke, Kate raised her head and fixed her large eyes upon his face; but he appeared unconscious of having deserved her scrutiny, and was quietly examining some memoranda he had written on the back of a card, regarding the number of rooms and other particulars respecting the houses. So perfectly unconscious was his manner that for once Kate's penetration was at fault. She remembered having on one occasion, months before, at the Grange, mentioned in his presence that, if she went to live in London, she should prefer either Belgrave Square or Park Lane for her residence; but whether he also had recollected this, or whether his selection was the result of accident, she could not decide. Moreover, it was not easy for her to determine how to act in the matter. If he had made the selection intentionally, and she allowed it to pass unnoticed, it would be a sort of tacit admission that she was willing to receive such secret attentions from him, appreciating them as kindnesses rather than resenting them as impertinences; while, on the other hand, if by any chance it was a mere coincidence, she was unwilling to afford him even the minute triumph of perceiving that she felt sufficient interest in him to remember whether or not he had been present on an occasion since which several months had elapsed, or that she cared to know if he had observed, or regarded her wishes. So she took a middle course, and, availing herself of a pause in the conversation, inquired carelessly:

"Where did you say the houses were situated, Mr. D'Almayne?" On obtaining the information she required, she added, "And how came you to select those particular localities?"

As he turned to reply, their glances met, but his face was perfectly inscrutable.

"If, as your tone implies, they do not meet your approval, my dear Mrs. Crane, we need take no further trouble in regard to them," was his ambiguous reply. "I chose them because I fancied situations so generally popular might not be displeasing to you."

Kate was again foiled, and D'Almayne, as he quietly observed it, muttered inwardly, "Won the first trick, at all events!"

Mr. Crane, leaving the room to put on his great-coat, a precaution without which he was most careful not to stir from home, D'Almayne observed:

"You would prefer bay carriage-horses to grey, or any more conspicuous colour, would you not?"

Surprised at his having thus discovered her taste, Kate was so far thrown off her guard as to exclaim,

"How in the world do you know that?"

Horace smiled a quiet smile.

"I reasoned from analogy," he said; "your dress is always

rich and striking, but never showy; and the effect is produced by its consistency as a whole."

Kate involuntarily returned his smile; tact and keen intelligence were qualities she highly appreciated.

"You are a close observer," she said, "and shall be rewarded by learning the interesting fact that I do prefer bay horses to those of any other colour."

Before the week was over, Mr. Crane had purchased a magnificent pair of bay carriage-horses, and had taken a lease of a noble mansion in Park Lane. The only fault Kate could discover in either, was the conviction forced upon her that it was to the agency of Horace D'Almayne she was indebted for them.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ADVICE GRATIS.

HARRY could not give up shooting, Harry would not give up shooting, and Harry did not give up shooting. On the contrary, he could, would, and did shoot every day, and all the day long, except on Sundays, throughout September and October: at least, there were so few exceptions that they only proved the rule. Alice did not like it at all; at first she was very miserable. One day Harry found her crying, and being considerably surprised and greatly concerned at the unaccountable discovery, did not rest until he had ascertained the cause, when he was particularly shocked, and blamed himself so much that he refrained from shooting for two whole days, and really would have striven to reform his conduct, only that, unfortunately, an invitation arrived to join a grand "battue" at a certain Colonel Crossman's. This, in his then frame of mind, he would have refused; but there being a Mrs. Crossman in the case, Alice was included in the invitation, and they were begged to stay three or four days; which, as the Popem Park preserves were the best stocked of any in the county, was an offer not lightly to be rejected. Thus, unfortunately, they went—we say unfortunately, because Colonel Crossman was, taken as a whole, a jovial, hot-tempered, selfish brute; and his wife a quick-witted, worldly-minded, selfish fool. They did very well together, because, as he usually lived out of the house, and she in it, and both did exactly as they liked, when they liked, their faults seldom clashed; if such a collision did take place, there was an awful tumult, in which brutality had his way for the minute, and paid for it in minor miseries which folly inflicted upon him for the next fortnight. And yet this amiable couple had a kind of theoretical and useless affection for each other,

which was engendered partly by habit, and partly by a deep and essentially vulgar reverence for appearances, which, together with going to church once on Sunday, stood them in the stead of religion and of morality. Thus were they bad counsellors for our young married couple. On the first morning of her visit, Alice was standing at the drawing-room window, watching the figures of her husband and Colonel Crossman striding through a turnip-field about a quarter of a mile distant, when Mrs. Crossman joined her.

"Ah! there they go," she observed, in a vinegar-and-water voice; "we shall see no more of them till seven o'clock, depend upon it."

"Does Colonel Crossman never return to luncheon?" inquired Alice, timidly, for she stood slightly in awe of the female soldier beside her.

"Return to luncheon!" was the astonished reply, delivered in much such a tone as might have been anticipated if Alice had inquired whether the gallant colonel usually made his mid-day meal upon red-hot ploughshares; "come home to luncheon! not he. He wouldn't do such a thing to save my life, I believe; certainly not if the scent was lying well. Why, Mr. Coverdale does not spoil you in that way to be sure, does he? The Colonel told me he was a thorough sportsman."

So he is," returned Alice, with a sigh, which escaped her involuntarily.

"Ah! no woman with a heart should ever marry a sportsman," rejoined Mrs. Crossman, with rather more vinegar and less water in her tone than before. "Out all day, from the first of September till the breeding season comes round again; then the moment they've finished dinner and their bottle of port-wine, asleep they go, and only wake to stamp and swear with the cramp, and drop off again, till they tumble upstairs to bed, and are no comfort to anybody. You are a young wife yet, my dear, and your husband's hardly grown tired of you, perhaps; but wait another month or two and you'll see—men are all alike!"

There was just enough applicability to her own case in this tirade to make Alice feel rather angry and thoroughly uncomfortable; but the idea of comparing Harry with Colonel Crossman was too bad, and anger predominated as she replied, "Mr. Coverdale is not quite so selfish as you imagine, my dear madam; certainly he left me a good deal alone when the shooting season first began, but as soon as he was aware how dull and lonely I felt, he gave up shooting for, for——"

"Half a day?" inquired Mrs. Crossman, sarcastically.

"He did not go out for two whole days; and since that he has generally returned to luncheon," replied Alice, colouring from vexation.

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Mrs. Crossman, with an affec-

tation of extreme surprise; "actually stayed at home for two whole days, when he's been married as many months—what a model man! Not that I believe Colonel Crossman ever did so much as that even," she continued, turning on the vinegar. "I picked him up in India, you know—was actually weak enough to fall in love with the creature! even went the length of refusing two district judges and the resident at Bamboozel for his sake! And would you believe it, we hadn't been married above a week, when the man was brute enough to go out hog-hunting, and leave me all by myself at Boshbogie, on the borders of the great Flurry-yunghal Jungle, with nothing more conversable than tawneys and tigers within thirty miles of me; but, however, I was not long before I learned how to take care of myself—and the sooner you do the same, my dear, the better for your happiness. Men are easily enough managed if you do but set the right way to work. If you choose to be always humble and meek to 'em, they'll let you lie down for them to wipe their boots on, but if you only show them you've got a spirit of your own, and don't care for 'em——"

"But I don't know that I have got what you call a spirit of my own," interrupted Alice, smiling at her companion's vehemence, "and I certainly do care about my husband."

"Ah, my dear, that's all very well now; but wait a bit—wait till some day when he wants to go shooting, and you want him to do something else, and then see of how much use your meekness and fondness will be to you. He will think to himself, 'Oh! she will be just as well pleased a couple of hours hence, as if I had lost my day's sport for her silly nonsense.' I know he will, men are all alike. No; sooner or later you'll find you will have to pluck up a spirit, and treat your husband as he will treat you. If he leaves you by yourself all day, fill your house with company; if he goes out shooting and hunting with his friends, do you go out riding or driving with yours; if he has his season in the country, do you have yours in London; operas and shopping are amusements you've just as good a right to as he has to go popping at the partridges and pheasants; and if you care so much about keeping him at home, hook some young dandy (there will be plenty ready to nibble when such a bait as your pretty face is hung out for them), and flirt with him steadily till the desired effect is produced. That will bring your husband to his senses, if anything will. I once settled the Colonel in three days by going all respectable lengths with Adolphus Fitzduckling. It led to a duel, though; but that was because both Duck and Crossman were army men, and mixed up with a fighting set. I took care never to go quite so far again, except with a civilian; but then I hadn't got such a quiet, demure manner as you have. A set of impudent young puppies in the old 43rd used to call me 'Flirting Fan.' How-

ever, I can tell you I was able to keep the Colonel in much better order, 'flirting him down,' as I used to call it, than I've ever managed to do since I grew old—that is, less young than I was at that time." And so this good woman, or rather this women who, despite her faults, had some good in her, whereby she vindicated her title to humanity, ran on until Alice heartily wished her back again amongst the tawneys, or the tigers: we are afraid that, at that especial moment, our little heroine would decidedly have preferred the latter.

In the meantime, Harry and the Colonel were blazing away at the long-tails most unmercifully: Harry, who was a crack shot, bringing down everything he pointed his gun at, while the Colonel, whose hand had an awkward trick of shaking, as if its proprietor was in the habit of imbibing too much port-wine, missed much oftener than was agreeable to him, on each of which several occasions he attributed his failure to, and condemned in no measured terms, either the gun, or the bird, or both. About two o'clock Harry pulled out his watch, and glancing at it, observed, "I don't know what your arrangements may be, Colonel, but if Mrs. Crossman is of as sociable a disposition as my little wife, she will consider us great bears if we don't return till dinner-time."

At this moment a splendid cock-pheasant rose, "whirring" into the air at some considerable distance from the sportsmen, whereupon the Colonel, considering it a difficult shot, called out, "Your bird, Coverdale." Harry, embarrassed with his watch, which he still held in his hand, raised his gun, and catching his finger in the guard chain, pulled the trigger too soon, and missed with both barrels, while the Colonel, seeing that the pheasant was now so far off that it could be no discredit to miss it, pulled at it, and by accident brought it down.

"Bravo! Colonel, that is the cleverest shot that has been made to-day, by long odds!" ejaculated Harry.

"Ah! that's a trifle to what I used to do when I was your age," was the slightly apocryphal reply: "nothing with feathers or hair on it had a chance, if I put my gun up at it, I can tell you. But what were you saying about going home? why, I'm just getting into shooting order; you're not knocking up, to be sure, already."

"No; nor six hours' more hard walking would not do it," returned Harry, laughing, as he mentally contrasted his own powers with those of the Colonel, who, although he had carefully assigned all the toughest of the work to his guest, was evidently beginning "to want his corn," as Coverdale metaphorically paraphrased the fact of his entertainer's requiring his luncheon. "I merely asked you whether Mrs. Crossman would not disapprove of our remaining out all day?"

"Mrs. Crossman may go and——hang herself in her own petticoat strings!" was the uncourteous rejoinder. "Ah! I

see how it is," continued the "old soldier." "I see all about it: you're a young hand yet, Coverdale, and I'm an old one; take my advice. You've married a nice gal, and a pretty gal —don't you go and spoil her; it's the nature of women to like to have their own way, and one of their ways—and a most aggravating and unaccountable one it is—is always to have a fellow dangling about after them, and there they'll keep him, driving 'em out, or riding with 'em, or dawdling in shops, and paying their bills for 'em—they don't forget that, mind you—or reading to 'em, or some such confounded humbug. Hang it, sir, I'd sooner be a galley-slave, or a black nigger at once! Well, if you begin by indulging a woman (they're all alike in such points), she'll be your master ever after, and your life won't be worth a——" (As we do not know the exact value of the coin to which the Colonel alluded, we abstain from a more particular mention of it.) "No, if you're to have any peace or comfort in the married state, you must let your wife see that you're determined to show you're the superior. The only way to do it effectually is—come to heel, Countess, ah! would you then!" (and whack, whack, went the dog-whip against poor Countess's sides)—"the only way to break 'em in is—(whack)—to shew 'em clearly whose will is the strongest, and whose must yield. I had trouble enough with Mrs. Crossman, I can assure you. She was not an easy woman to break in, sir; but she found she'd met her match. If she scolded, I stormed; if she raved, I swore; if she sulked, I whistled; if she cried, I lit a cigar; if she fainted, I laid her on the hardest board that I could pick out in the floor, and smoked till she came round again. The only time she went into hysterics I flung a pail of cold water over her—that cured her at once and for ever. I daresay you think me an old brute, but the day will come when you'll recollect my advice, and be glad enough to act upon it. Women are all alike, more or less."

Harry did think him an old brute, and thanked his stars that neither in mind nor in person did Alice in the smallest degree resemble Mrs. Crossman; he also thought that he should never remember the Colonel's advice with any other feeling than disgust. Ah, Harry—Harry!

but the rabbits had begun barking the young ash-trees in a favourite plantation, and were to be "pulled down" accordingly. This occupation lasted several days; at the expiration of which period certain poachers, choosing to join in the amusement uninvited, had to be "pulled up" for their iniquities—a series of ups and downs which left only two days vacant before the important Tuesday dedicated to the dinner-party at Allerton would arrive. The first of these days it rained cats and dogs and snowed fragments of polar bears so decidedly that even Harry could not get out till about half-past three, when, in desperation, he enveloped himself in a macintosh, and galloped over to the town, five miles off (as all towns are from all country houses), to match some ribbon for Alice, and look at the newspaper on his own account. The "County Press" was just out, and therein Harry perceived a leading article attacking the decision arrived at by himself and his brother magistrates in the case of the "pulled up" poachers. This being equally irritating and interesting, he sat down in the reading-room of the library diligently to peruse the same —phsa-ing, pish-ing, and "confounding the fellow" at every second line. He had just got to a paragraph beginning, "Mr. C—d—le may be well qualified to lead the way across a stiff line of country after the hounds, or roll over unoffending hares and rabbits in a 'battue'—but that is no proof that he possesses an equal right to ride rough-shod over the enactments of a British Parliament, or to overturn the decrees of abler lawyers than are to be found among the bench of magistrates at H——," when a large hand was placed over his eyes, and a loud, jovial voice exclaimed—

"Never mind, Harry, my boy—little Flipkins the editor's got a wife with the devil's own temper, and she helps him to write the leaders; she took a dislike to you when she was Miss Jamby, and kept the confectioner's shop, when you neglected her and flirted with the girl behind the counter, because she happened to be the prettiest, and now she's paying you off; you can't horsewhip a woman, you know, so you'd better take it easy."

Before the speaker had arrived at the conclusion of his advice gratis, Coverdale had removed the hand which impeded his vision, and turning round, exclaimed—

"Why, it's Tom Rattleworth, by all that's extraordinary—I thought you were in Canada, with your regiment, man!"

"So I was till the gout carried off the governor, and left me a miserable orphan with £15,000 a year in my pocket. When that lamentable event occurred I thought I was, for the first time in my life, worth taking care of, so determined to cut the red cloth and pipe-clay business, and come home and live virtuously ever after."

"You seem to have recovered your spirits pretty well, if one

may judge by present appearances," returned Coverdale, half-amused, half-disgusted at his quondam friend's sentiments; "at all events you've not grown thin upon it."

"No! but that's the very fact which proves how deeply I feel my forlorn condition; it's old Falstaff—is it not—observes how grief swells a man? I don't ride a pound under twelve stone," was the rejoinder. "By the way," continued Rattleworth, "that reminds me—it's deucedly lucky I met you; you're the very man that can tell me all about it—Broomfield is anxious to give up the fox-hounds; he's growing old and lazy, and he wants me to take 'em."

"My dear fellow, I'm delighted to hear it," exclaimed Harry, eagerly; "old Broomfield is completely past his work, and of all the men I know, you're the fittest to succeed him—you will do the thing as it ought to be done. I should have undertaken them myself, if I had not become a Benedict: Broomfield tried to persuade me."

"Well, now look here," resumed Rattleworth, meditatively; "I've promised to meet Broomfield to-morrow, and take his horses and everything at a valuation. Now, there is not a man in the county whose opinion about a horse I'd sooner have than yours; can you spare time to go with me? I shall really consider it a personal favour if you will do so."

"Of course I will," returned Harry; for if he had a weak point on which he was accessible to flattery, it was concerning his knowledge of horseflesh; "there can be nothing I should like better, in fact: what time do you go?"

"I was to lunch with him at one," was the reply; "and we were to look at his stud afterwards."

"Then I'll meet you at the cross roads by Hanger Wood, at half-past twelve," returned Harry; and so, with a hearty shake of the hand, the friends parted.

Tom Rattleworth was the only son of a man who had begun life as a land-agent and attorney in H——; but having very early in his career dabbled in stock-jobbing till he made a considerable sum of money, which his business connection enabled him to lay out to great advantage, he grew rich, purchased an estate, married into one of the county families, and brought his son up "as a gentleman"—that is, he sent him to Eton, where he learned nothing but how to get into and out of scrapes; and bought him a commission which he would have done better without. Nature having thus placed a silver spoon in Tom's mouth, appeared to consider his head sufficiently furnished without going to any unusual expense in the article of brains; so she gave him barely an average quantity, and made up the deficiency by an actual passion for horseflesh. Thomas, thus endowed, was the schoolfellow and holiday associate of Harry Coverdale; and having one, and only one taste in common, they had kept up their

was sent with his regiment to Canada, since which period the interview we have just described was their first meeting.

As Coverdale cantered home through the mud, and rain, and sleet, it suddenly flashed across him that the next was the only day remaining in which to call on the Duke and Duchess of Brentwood before the dinner at Allerton House; and his conscience smote him as he reflected that the engagement he had formed would prevent him from accompanying Alice; indeed, so annoyed did he feel at this unlucky coincidence that for a moment he was on the point of turning his horse's head and riding after Tom Rattleworth, to get off the engagement; but it was growing dusk, and he reflected that Chase Hall, the residence of the renowned Thomas, was so far out of his way that he should be unable to reach home by dinner-time, and then Alice would get frightened about him, which would annoy her more than being obliged to pay her visit alone; so with this bit of sophistry he, for the moment, quieted his conscience. Before he arrived at his own house he had mentally decided that, as it would only worry his wife, he should say nothing about the Rattleworth engagement to her that evening, and that in the morning he should mention it as an equally unfortunate and unavoidable necessity, and persuade her to pay the first visit without him. Of course, she would be a little annoyed just at first, but she was so sweet-tempered and amiable, that—that—and here his reflections refused to clothe themselves in intelligible language; had they done so honestly, the sentence would have ended thus—"that she would submit without making a scene." And so he cantered home, where Alice, with her sunny smile and bright, loving eyes, was waiting to receive him, and made a vast fuss with the poor dear because he must be so wet, which, thanks to Mr. Macintosh, his admirable invention, he was not in the slightest degree, though he appreciated the affectionate fuss Alice made about him all the same.

Harry! you blind, stupid Harry!—as if her little finger, bless it, were not worth all the horseflesh that ever was foaled, from Bucephalus down to the winner of the last Derby.

The next morning was a very fine one. Alice and Harry made their appearance in the breakfast parlour about nine o'clock; each was a little out of sorts. Alice, not having been able to get any air or exercise on the previous day, had waked with a headache, which Harry continually forgetting, would leave the door of his dressing-room open, and attire himself to the tune of "A hunting we will go." Then a new morning-gown, on which Miss Flippery, the dressmaker at H——, had staked her credit, did not fit, and in turning round to look at the set of the back, Alice trod on the skirt, and tore it out of the "gathers"—whatever they may be; and as women

cry over, poor little Mrs. Coverdale was unable to vent her annoyance, and brought it down to breakfast with her accordingly. Harry, on the other hand, conscious that he was about to commit an act of injustice, on which (although he repented of it sufficiently to feel very uncomfortable) he was still determined, tried to keep up his courage by affecting a degree of hilarity which caused him to make bad jokes about every subject mentioned, and to evince such a total want of sympathy with his wife's headache and consequent depression of spirits that Alice, for the first time in her life, considered him tiresome and in the way, and felt inclined to say sharp things to him and snub him. After a longish pause, interrupted only when, on two occasions, Harry was pulled up for whistling, and a third time for beating the devil's tattoo on the chimney-piece, Alice began, "Really, Wilkins has taken to burning the toast so black, it is impossible to eat it. I wish you would speak to him about it, Harry."

"Certainly, my love," was the cheerful reply; "what shall I say to him? That although I approve of his blacking my boots, I disapprove of his blacking my toast, and that I shall thank him to do it brown in future?"

"If you like to risk the chance, which is almost a certainty, that the man will misunderstand you, for the sake of making a stupid slang pun, I advise you to do so," was the captious reply.

"Phew!" whistled Harry; "how solemn, and sensible, and serious we've grown all of a sudden! I beg to inform you, Mrs. Coverdale, that I expect my wife to admire my puns, if nobody else does."

"Then you must contrive to make better ones, and to time them rather more appropriately," rejoined Alice, so snappishly that her husband looked up in surprise. Recalled to herself by the unmistakable astonishment depicted on the bright, good-natured countenance of her better half, Alice continued in a milder tone, "You must not mind what I say this morning, Harry, dear; my headache makes me so dreadfully cross and stupid."

"Poor little thing! you were shut up all yesterday, you know, and that is enough to give anybody a headache," returned Harry, who considered houses were built only to dine and sleep in, and would have had Alice spend her days "al fresco," even as he delighted to do. "You must go out as much as possible to-day; luckily it is very fine."

"Yes; and I am to be honoured with my husband's company too, which is a most unaccustomed pleasure," rejoined Alice, brightening up at the recollection. "It is certainly very good policy to make yourself so scarce, though I wish you did not adhere quite so strictly to it; why, you have not driven out with me since we returned from Popem Park! At what time do you mean to order the carriage?"

"Why, it's an hour's drive at least; James had better be at the door by two o'clock," replied Harry. Then turning towards the fire, and moving the ornaments on the chimney-piece into wrong positions, with an elaborate attempt at nonchalance, which veiled most inefficiently his consciousness that he was about to perform an act against which his moral sense rebelled, he resumed: "I'm afraid, my love, that I must ask you to call upon the Duchess of Brentwood without me this morning—a business engagement of—a—importance—that is, one that I cannot avoid, will, I am afraid——"

And here he broke off abruptly, for, glancing at his wife, he perceived an expression in her pretty face that he had never beheld there before; the bright eyes were flashing, the soft cheeks burned, and the coral lips pouted with unmistakable anger. Harry had at length gone too far, and his sweet-tempered, loving-hearted little wife was positively and seriously angry with him. But so unusual a circumstance demands a fresh chapter.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE STORM BURSTS.

ALICE COVERDALE, annoyed and pained by what she considered her husband's injustice and unkindness, did not leave him long in doubt as to her feelings upon the subject: for as soon as she could conquer a choking sensation in the throat sufficiently to speak, she exclaimed:—

"Really, Harry, I must say you are most unkind and inconsiderate; you chose of your own accord to accept the invitation to Allerton House, though I warned you at the time that it would necessitate your calling on the Duke and Duchess first: you agreed—in fact, you promised to do so. There has not been a day since that I haven't reminded you of this promise, so it is impossible you can have forgotten it. There was a time, and not so very long ago either, when you were ready enough to go anywhere with me, and were only too glad to find I wished you to do so. I little thought, poor foolish girl that I was, how soon things would alter; and now, when you knew as well as I did that this is the last day on which we can pay this visit, you've formed some stupid engagement (to go and shoot somewhere, I daresay; I wish guns had never been invented—horrid, dangerous things—always going off unexpectedly and killing people), and so made it impossible to return the Duchess's call: and to-morrow I shall be ashamed to look her in the face, or to speak to her; though I daresay she won't give me a chance to do that, for she is as proud as Lu——as a woman can be."

Here, from sheer want of breath, Alice being forced to pause, Harry quietly remarked: "Women can be as proud as men for that matter, 'ecce signun,' but now just listen to a little common sense for a minute. I fully intended and wished to accompany you, but I happened yesterday, at H——, to meet with a very old friend of mine, who informed me that he was going this morning to transact certain business matters which would involve the expenditure of a considerable sum of money, in regard to which affair he particularly required my advice and opinion."

"He must be going to buy a gun or a horse then," interrupted Alice; "those are the only things people imagine you understand; and I don't wonder at them either, when they see you waste half your life about this horrid sporting. If you give up all intellectual pursuits in this way, you'll go on till you become fit for nothing but to hunt, shoot, eat, drink, and sleep, like that dreadful old creature, Colonel Crossman."

Thoroughly provoked by this last speech (which touched on a sensitive point in Harry's disposition, and aroused a latent fear, by which he was always more or less oppressed, lest people should consider him, from his fondness for field sports, a mere addlepated fox-hunting squire), he replied, with more asperity in his tone than he had ever before used, or believed it possible he could use towards Alice, "Take care you don't become a peevish shrew, like Mrs. Crossman. You are angry, and forget yourself; when you grow calm again, you will perceive how foolish and unreasonable you have been to lose your temper about such a silly trifle."

"You think being rude to your friends and unkind to your wife a silly trifle, do you?" inquired Alice.

Harry's colour rose as he took a turn up and down the room to compose his feelings ere he would trust himself to reply. "You want to make me angry," he said, "but I do not intend to afford you that satisfaction. Listen to me," he continued, seeing that his wife was again about to interrupt him, "listen to me, and when you have heard what I am about to say, you can reply as you please. I made this engagement to oblige my friend, without at the moment recollecting that to-day was the time appointed for calling on the Duchess; but when I reflected that one was business of importance, and the other a mere visit of ceremony, I hoped and believed you would be reasonable enough, when I should have explained the matter to you, not even to wish me to give up my engagement, and would exercise sufficient common sense and self-control to go and pay the visit alone."

"Then you thought wrongly," returned Alice, with vehemence; "if you required a wife who could go about by herself and visit a set of proud, stiff people who are strangers to her, and keep up your position in the county, while you

are out hunting and shooting all day, for your own selfish amusement, you should have chosen some fashionable woman of the world, and not a poor simple country girl like myself, who relied on your affection to protect and encourage her"; and here Alice showed strong symptoms of a disposition to bring that "young wife's last resource" of a flood of tears to bear upon her disobedient and refractory spouse.

Harry, seeing this, and having been throughout the interview haunted by a latent consciousness that he was in the wrong, was strongly tempted to yield, and, despatching a messenger to Tom Rattleworth, furnished with some good and sufficient social white lie to account for his non-appearance, to stay quietly at home till the time should have arrived to accompany his wife to visit the aristocratic neighbours; but, unhappily, Colonel Crossman's caution, "You've married a nice gal and a pretty gal, take care you don't go and spoil her," flashed across him: "women are all alike, more or less; it's the nature of 'em to choose to have their own way; if you indulge 'em at first, they will be your masters ever after; show your wife she has met her match," etc., etc.—these, and such like precepts, rang in Harry's ears. Alice was angry and unreasonable, striving for the upper hand, in fact; he must not permit this: for her sake, as much as for his own, he was called upon to assert himself, and vindicate his marital authority. Yes, painful as it was to his feelings to speak or act harshly to his young wife, whom, even at that moment, he cared for more than any other created being, he would give her a lesson which should cure the evil at once and for ever. So putting on a very grave look, he began: "My dear Alice, you are forgetting yourself, forgetting our relative positions; but there is a quiet way of settling such affairs; verbose discussions of this nature do not suit me—I am essentially a man of action. It is the husband's right to command, the wife's duty to obey. I had hoped your own proper feeling would have saved me the pain of being forced to remind you of this. I must now add that I consider myself bound to fulfil my engagement to my friend, and intend to do so: during my absence, it is my wish and desire that you should drive and call on the Duchess of Brentwood; if, which I can scarcely conceive possible, you still refuse to do as I have pointed out, I shall, before I leave this room, write a note to Lady Allerton, informing her that we are unable to dine with her to-morrow, without assigning any cause whatsoever for this change of intention—which, as I cannot give the true reason, and will not stoop to invent a false one, is the only course left open to me."

Having delivered himself calmly and firmly of this despotic speech, Harry folded his arms across his broad chest, and leaning his autocratic back against the chimney-piece, stood looking as if he felt himself completely "monarch of all he

surveyed," his wife included. Meanwhile a fearful struggle between good and evil was proceeding in Alice's mind; a kind word or look would instantly have caused the good to triumph: but her husband stood cold and inexorable as a statue of Fate. Then the same personage who tempted Eve to the sin which lost her Eden, suddenly caused to flash across Alice's recollection all Mrs. Crossman's arguments, and she determined to follow her advice, to "pluck up a spirit, and treat her husband as he treated her," etc. Accordingly, by a great effort restraining her tears, which during Harry's harangue had begun to flow, she looked up with flashing eyes and crimson cheeks, as she replied:

"The obedience you require is not that of a wife but of a slave, and I refuse to yield it. You have treated me unkindly and unjustly, and I will not sacrifice myself to oblige you."

Harry made no reply, though his lips moved convulsively, as though he could scarcely command himself to keep silence; then snatching pen and ink, he scrawled a hasty note, sealed and directed it, and rising, quitted the room without uttering a single word. As the door closed behind him, the tears which Alice had hitherto with such difficulty repressed, burst forth unrestrained. She was roused from a paroxysm of weeping by the sound of horses' feet, and springing to the window, reached it in time to see Harry give a note to a groom, who rode away at speed in the direction of Allerton House; then mounting his own horse, he also galloped off, ere Alice could muster sufficient presence of mind to attempt to recall him.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE ATMOSPHERE REMAINS CLOUDY.

FALLING out with the wife of one's bosom is a process that bears a marked affinity to two other domestic operations which, from time immemorial, have lapsed into well-merited disrepute—viz., quarrelling with one's bread and butter, and cutting off one's nose to spite one's face; the same moral but uncomfortable necessity of inherent self-chastisement being common to all three. Thus Harry Coverdale, having vindicated his marital dignity, and galloped off the irritation consequent upon so acting, heartily wished the deed undone, and Alice and himself friends again; for, little as he appeared to prize it, her affection had become necessary to him, and he could no more do without it than he could have dispensed with sunshine in summer, or fires at Christmas. Accordingly it was in no very amiable frame of mind that he joined his fox-hunting ally; and it required all the allurements of oysters, porter, devilled bones, and unimpeachable port wine,

to enable him to "cast dull care away," sufficiently to take a proper and sportsman-like interest in all the minutiæ of the proposed transfer of stock, canine and equestrian. Once fairly in it, however, his stable-minded propensities asserted themselves, and he spent a deeply interesting afternoon in feeling back-sinews, detecting incipient curbs and spavins, condemning an incurable sand-crack, and otherwise testing and pronouncing judgment upon the quadrupedal inmates of Squire Broomfield's hunting-stables. As the waning light heralded the approach of dinner-time (that important epoch in the day with all country gentlemen, and with most London ones also), and the last horse had been trotted out and trotted in again, and its petticoats (which grooms call "body clothing") replaced, Harry's thoughts fell back into their former gloomy train. Anxious, therefore, to learn how Alice was progressing under the weight of his high displeasure, he was about to take leave, when Tom Rattleworth drew him aside, observing in a confidential whisper—

"I say, Coverdale, old Broomfield is going to ask you to stay and dine—I know he is, he looks so pleased with himself. For mercy's sake don't refuse, or else I shall have to endure a 'tête-à-tête' with the old boy, and that will use me up altogether—horse, foot, and artillery; for, besides being bored to extinction, he will do me out of every advantage you have obtained for me to-day. He's an awful screw, and I'm good for nothing at a bargain after the first bottle; so if you leave me to his tender mercies, I'm safe to be butchered like a lamb, and served up in my own mint sauce before we quit the mahogany."

"I'm afraid I must decline," was the reply, "for my wife has been at home by herself all day, and it is not fair to expect her to spend the evening in solitude also. But you need not be victimised on that account; come home and dine with us. You've never met my wife; she was in the schoolroom and a pinafore when you went abroad with your regiment. Say yes, and then you can tell old Broomfield that you are engaged to me."

"So be it then," was the rejoinder, and thus was Mr. Broomfield cheated of his guests, and Harry enabled to avoid a "tête-à-tête" dinner, and possibly a scene, with his outraged spouse. In the meantime, Alice had been enduring all the mental torments consequent upon having been angry with the person one loves best in the world. First, the idea that she had been most cruelly used, and extensively sinned against and put upon was the only one which presented itself to her mind in anything like a clear and definite shape; and she bewailed her evil fortune in a very thunder-storm of weeping. Having by this means condensed, and disposed of, a vast amount of superfluous steam, she grew calmer and more reasonable, when the uncomfortable possibility gradually dawned

upon her that she also might have been to blame—that she had first irritated, and then defied Harry, and utterly and completely failed in her duty as a wife; and so penitent did she become on the strength of this conviction that if her husband had returned at that moment, she would have thrown herself at his feet and humbly implored his pardon, which act of unqualified submission must have disarmed Harry so entirely and totally that he would instantly have forgiven her, and frankly confessed himself to blame, and Alice would never again have experienced the effects of his "quiet manner." But, unfortunately, Harry was at that moment differently occupied, in impressing upon Tom Rattleworth the important fact that Lucifer would be all the better for having a red-hot iron passed lightly over his off fetlock at the first convenient opportunity, and thus Alice's extreme penitence evaporated as her anger had done. The final conclusion at which she arrived was that she would confess her fault to Harry on his return, and then try calmly and quietly to convince him of his injustice. If she should succeed in this, of which she did not feel by any means certain, they would exchange forgiveness; and, warned by that which had occurred, take heed to their ways, and live in harmony and affection ever after. All these sentiments Alice proposed to deliver when she and her husband should be "tête-à-tête" after dinner, at which time she had observed Harry to be unusually in an amiable and convincible frame of mind. It may easily be imagined, therefore, that when she heard Tom Rattleworth declare with much enthusiasm, and in a voice raised to the pitch in which its possessor had been wont to direct the gallant fraction of the British army lately under his command to "Should—der ar-r-ums," that he was open to "be blessed," on the spot, if "the jolly old place did not look stunning," she was by no means inclined to afford him the benediction he had invoked, and heartily wished him at the bottom of the Red Sea, which we take to be the lowest geographical limit to which a lady's anathema can be permitted to descend. She had not time to do more than condemn her unknown visitor to the oceanic penal setlement aforesaid, ere a sound as of a jibbing man impelled forward by some powerful agency in the rear, together with the following expostulation, met her ear:—"My dear fellow, I'm not fit to be introduced; I'm all over mud, I am, upon my life!"

In another moment the drawing-room door flew open, and her husband and a tall, large, bushy-whiskered, bluff young man, who looked as if he could only have been brought indoors by way of a trick, like a pony, or a wheelbarrow, stood before her.

"Alice, this is Tom Rattleworth, an old schoolfellow of mine, who is very anxious to form your acquaintance, and has kindly consented to dine with us," observed Harry.

"Hey!—haw!" began Tom Rattleworth, uttering sounds like a bashful ogre in his intense consciousness of his muddy disqualification for female society; "haw!—hey! the kindness lies all—haw!—the other way. I hope—Mrs. Coverdale—my dear fellow—will excuse—I told you I was not fit to be seen; but you seem to be—the roads are—impetuous as ever—so very muddy." Having delivered himself of this slightly incoherent address, the embryo M.F.H. "made his reverence" to Alice, and then performing the military evolution expressed in the mysterious terms "To the right about! wheel!" he laid violent hands upon his host, and forced him out of the room as energetically as he had been himself propelled into it.

The dinner soon made its appearance, and was a "real blessing" to all parties, for it provided them something wherewith to occupy their mouths, and thus obviated the painful necessity of manufacturing small-talk—a toil compared with which the labours of Hercules appear child's play, and the up-hill work of Sisyphus a mere game at ball.

The first sharp edge of his appetite taken off, Tom Rattleworth began to converse fluently upon the only topic which never failed him, and which invariably formed the staple ingredient in his discourse, and, indeed, in his thoughts generally—viz., himself and his own sayings and doings.

Alice, bored and unhappy, uttered monosyllabic replies, when she perceived that she was expected to do so; and remained silent and "distraite" when such exertions were not required of her.

Harry, partly grieved at perceiving the accustomed sunshine in his wife's pretty face overcast, partly irritated at what he imagined to be the sulkiness of her manner; annoyed at his friend's egotistic chatter, which he felt was disgusting Alice, and which he could not contrive to check (seeing that the obtuseness of Tom Rattleworth's faculties rendered him totally impervious to a hint); and generally provoked by the change from his usual state of careless, light-hearted happiness to his present uncomfortable frame of mind—a change which he rightly enough attributed in a great measure to his own hastiness and mismanagement, almost lost his temper. This he displayed by rating the lad who assisted Wilkins, until he reduced that unhappy juvenile to such a pitch of nervousness and general mental debility that, having inveigled his mistress into sugaring instead of peppering a broiled turkey's leg, and replenished the champagne glasses from a bottle of bitter ale, he was sent out of the room in disgrace. But in this mortal life (which would be quite unendurable if such were not the case) all things sooner or later come to an end—and dull dinners are no exceptions to the rule—thus, after the dessert had been placed on the table, Alice, having finished her half-glass of sherry and nibbled a fragment of some little

vegetable absurdity preserved in candied sugar, and looking like a geological specimen rather than a sweetmeat, reckoned she had sufficiently fulfilled her duty as hostess, and was watching for an opportunity to escape and go and be wretched comfortably by herself, when Tom Rattleworth, addressing her especially, began:—

"'Pon my word, my dear Mrs. Coverdale, when I see you and my friend Harry here so happy together" (Harry seized a pear and began denuding it of its rind with a kind of ferocious eagerness, suggestive to anyone acquainted with the "dessous des cartes" of his willingness to perform a similar operation upon his "mal à-propos" guest), "I declare it makes a fellow feel quite down in the mouth when he thinks of going home to enjoy his own single blessedness, as they call it—though single t'other thing would be more like the truth, I fancy—but then it isn't everybody that's as lucky as Harry and you—not suited to each other so charmingly, you understand." (Alice, avoiding her husband's eye, bent over her sweetmeat as though she were anxious to count the number of spangles of candied sugar it took to cover a square inch thereof.) "Now there was a man in our regiment—curious coincidence, his name was Harry, too—but those things do happen so curiously—Harry Flusterton his name was—well, ma'am, when we were quartered up at Montreal, there was a family there to whom Harry and I took out introductions, and as we found ourselves decidedly hard up for amusement, we used to visit there pretty much. There were two or three daughters in the family, but the eldest was the one that took my fancy most, and Harry Flusterton was of the same opinion. Accordingly we both laid siege to her, but Harry soon began to shoot ahead, and I, finding that it was no go, quietly took up with number two, who, although she hadn't her sister's points, figure, or action, was by no means a girl to be despised, especially in a dull place like that: well, my dear fellow—haw!—my dear ma'am, I mean—'pon my word, I'm not fit for ladies' society—but the long and short of it is, Harry was married—everybody thought he was the luckiest dog breathing—I'm sure I did for one, and said as much to Eliza—that was the younger one, you understand, that I was obliged to put up with. When I made that remark to her, she looked at me queer like, and says she, 'I hope your friend is a very sweet temper, Mr. Rattleworth?' 'Of course he is,' returned I, for he was, up to the day he married, as easy-tempered a fellow as you'd wish to meet with. Would you believe it, Mrs. Coverdale, this charming creature that we had both fallen so desperately in love with (not but that I liked Eliza just as well when I once got used to her) turned out a regular vixen—a perfect virago, ma'am; why, Harry himself told me that they hadn't much more than got over the honeymoon,

like, some nonsense about visiting, or some such stuff, the way she flared up was a caution to single men——"

"My dear Rattleworth, I'm sorry to interrupt you," exclaimed Coverdale, who could bear it no longer, "but I'm afraid my wife is a little overcome by the heat of the room—those servants will make such ridiculously large fires. My dear Alice, if you prefer the drawing-room, I'm sure Rattleworth will excuse you; this place is like the black-hole in Calcutta." And while Rattleworth, talking all the time, sprang to open the door, Harry covered his wife's retreat by instituting a furious onslaught upon the unoffending fire. It was well he came to the rescue when he did, for in another minute Alice would have been in hysterics. To get rid of his dear friend as soon as possible was Harry's next anxiety, but this was no such easy matter. Thomas Rattleworth, Esq., M.F.H., was at that happy moment the victim of two strenuous necessities—one, to listen to the sound of his own voice, expressing not so much his ideas as his paucity thereof; and the other, to imbibe a bottle of port wine, in twelve doses of a wine-glass each; and these necessities had the unfortunate property of reacting upon and increasing each other; for talking made him thirsty, and drinking made him talkative, so that it was eleven o'clock before he had talked himself out, by which time the terminus of a second bottle of port had been arrived at. With a feeling of relief such as Sinbad the Sailor might have experienced when he felt the legs of the Old Man of the Sea gradually relaxing their clasp around his wearied shoulders, did Harry assist his friend to light a cigar, then watched its fiery tip gradually disappear in the darkness, as Rattleworth's cover-hack cantered off with its master's six-feet one of good-natured goose-flesh.

Left to his own meditations, Harry started a cigar on his own account, and, the night being a fine one, he paced up and down the gravel walk in front of the house until he should have cleared his brain from the fumes of the wine civility had forced him to swallow. The calm stars came out one by one, and as he watched their bright effulgence, an idea of his childhood, that they might be the eyes of angels, recurred to his memory; and he could even fancy they appeared to gaze upon him reproachfully. No human being possessing even the lowest order of reflective powers, or the faintest vestige of imagination, can watch the tranquil splendour of a starlight night—a scene which at once proclaims God's omnipotence, and appears a work fitted to the majesty of the Great Being who created it for his own glory—without becoming imbued with the idea of rest and peace, and desirous of realising these blessings in his own life. With God and infinity so near us, how we loathe the trifles of existence! and, above all, how we despise and contemn the littleness of our fallen nature! how we re-

pent with bitter tears of shame and contrition the evils they have wrought in ourselves, and through us to others! And how, at such a moment, do the qualities we inherit from heaven—truth, and love, and mercy—expand within us, and fill us, and raise us, for the time, above ourselves, and nearer to the high estate from which we have fallen—alas! that it should be only for the time! Coverdale was not insensible to these elevating influences; his love for Alice returned in all its original strength and purity, and he determined, before he slept that night, to bring about a reconciliation, even if his wife should refuse to confess that she had acted wrongly. Yes! he would actually go the length of owning that he had been to blame, and was sorry for it, and then Alice would forgive him, and all would be as though this foolish disagreement had never occurred.

"False reasoning, Harry! there are two things a woman, however thoroughly she may forgive them, never forgets—neglect and unkindness; and when once these have cast their shadow across the bright eager gladness with which she yields up her whole soul as a thank-offering to him she loves, man, with his stronger, sterner nature, can no more bring back the delicacy and freshness of that young affection, than he can restore to the peach the bloom which his careless fingers have profaned—the love may still exist in its full reality, but the bright halo of early romance which surrounded it has been dispelled, never to return!

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE PLEASURES OF KEEPING UP THE GAME.

HAVING looked at the stars, and profited by their quiet teaching, Harry went in a sadder and a wiser man, resolved, ere he slept that night, to confess his fault, and, if it might be so, obtain Alice's forgiveness. But Alice, tired and unhappy, had gone to bed, and cried herself to sleep like a weary child; and when Harry entered her room, he found her lying with her head pillowed on her arm, and the tear-drops scarcely dried upon her long silken eye-lashes, as soundly asleep as though care, and sin, and sorrow were evils of which her philosophy had never dreamed—so Coverdale could only invoke a silent blessing upon her, and hasten to follow her example by going to bed and to sleep himself. Thus an opportunity was lost of regaining the "high estate" in his wife's affections, from which he had fallen by reason of his inconsiderate selfishness and hasty and impetuous temper; and it is a fact equally true and trying, that an opportunity once lost

never returns—even an advertisement in the "Times" would fail to regain it.

One of the strangest and least comprehensive of psychological phenomena is the total change produced in our thoughts, feelings, opinions, hopes, fears, sympathies, antipathies, and all the other component parts which make up that wonderful spiritual steam-engine, the mind of man, by a good night's sleep. We go to bed desperately in love with some charming girl we have flirted with half the evening, despising her cruel old male parent, who would come and disturb our "tête-à-tête," and take her away at least an hour sooner than anybody not utterly callous to all the finer feelings of human nature would have dreamed of doing; and hating with unchristian malignity her tall cousin in the Blues, who, having known her from her cradle upwards, dared to call her "Gussie" to our very face—we sleep soundly, our mind lies fallow for some six hours, and lo! a change has come o'er us; our goddess has stepped down from her pedestal, and appears a very average specimen of white muslined femininity and flirtation, while her father has improved into quite an amiable model paterfamilias, at whose patient benignity in remaining, to please his daughter, at an evening party till half-past three a.m., we actually marvel; and as to that fine young fellow her cousin, we are really shocked when we recall our unchristian feelings towards him, and, as some slight compensation, mentally book him for an invite to that dinner at Blackwall which we propose bestowing upon a dozen of our very particular friends, in the unlikely event of our exchequer holding out till the whitebait season. Thus, by the next morning, Coverdale had slept off the sharp edge of his penitence, and when Alice began by a great effort to refer to the events of the previous day, with the intention of confessing herself in the wrong, and asking forgiveness, Harry, dreading a scene with a degree of horror equally masculine and English, checked the flow of her eloquence by exclaiming abruptly and cheerfully, "Yes, dear, certainly—but don't say another word about it; we were both very silly, and made each other very miserable, when we might be as happy as the day is long; let bygones be bygones, we will forgive and forget, and be wiser for the future, eh?" As he spoke, he drew her to him, and sealing his forgiveness on her lips with a kiss, rendered all discussion impossible by leaving the room.

This speech (kiss included) ought to have satisfied any reasonable wife, but unfortunately at that moment Alice was not exactly in a reasonable frame of mind; she had dwelt so long on one idea, in accordance with which she had arranged the whole programme of a dramatic reconciliation scene, that she by no means approved of Harry's short cut to concord, rendering null and void all her explanation of how, and why,

and wherefore she had come to behave ill, together with a spirited sketch in monologue of her contrition for the past and vows of amendment for the future; the whole to conclude with certain annotations and reflections, which she trusted would so affect her husband's feelings, and convince his understanding, that he would for the future restrict shooting to two short mornings a-week, and cast hunting "to the dogs" entirely; and now all the mysterious pleasure the gentler sex derive from talking a thing well over, was denied her.

Ah! that "talking over," what a wonderful female attribute it is! how vast and important a part of "woman's mission" does it constitute! in fact, we have met innumerable women —the majority of our female acquaintance, we should say— whose whole and entire mission appears to consist of a "call" to "talk over," first, their neighbours' affairs (a duty to their neighbour in which they never fail), secondly, their own. The French aphorism (seldom acted upon by its voluble originators), "Cela va sans dire," must seem unspeakably absurd to these advocates for an indefinite extension of the "freedom of debate"; while the "silent system" must appear a more "capital punishment" than death itself, always supposing the excellence of a punishment to be tested by its severity: but we are slightly digressing.

If anything were needed to prove the absurdity of human beings—creatures with immortal souls, placed in this world to prepare for eternity — darkening the sunshine of each other's lives by bickering about trifles, that evidence would be afforded when we observe the manner in which such mental "nebulæ" vanish before the presence of any of the stern realities of existence. Thus when, breakfast being concluded, Harry was called mysteriously out of the apartment, to learn that a mounted groom had just arrived from Hazlehurst Grange, with the intelligence that old Mr. Hazlehurst had been seized with a fit, from which, when the servant came away, he was not expected to recover, Coverdale's only thought was how most tenderly and judiciously to break the sad news to Alice. Having executed his painful task with a degree of tact and delicacy of feeling for which those who knew only the rough side of his character would scarcely have given him credit, and soothed, to the best of his ability, the burst of grief with which Alice received the intelligence, Harry continued, "And now, love, the moment you are able to start, the phaeton will be ready; it is lighter than the close carriage, and in an emergency like the present every minute becomes of consequence."

"And you?" inquired Alice, glancing at him timidly through her tears.

"I of course will drive you myself; you did not suppose I should let you go alone?"

Alice could not reply, but as she pressed her husband's hand caressingly, the old loving look came back into her eyes, and Harry felt that he was forgiven. On reaching the Grange the report of the sick man was more favourable than Alice had dared to hope. An apoplectic fit constitutes one of the few exceptional cases in which prompt medical assistance does not necessarily increase the evil, and the Esculapius of the neighbourhood had this time successfully interposed between death and his victim; while Mr. Hazlehurst had received a lesson sufficiently severe to prevent him from *objecting* to the substitution of toast and water and "bland" puddings for port wine, bottled in the year 1830, and the roast beef of Old England. Coverdale having remained at the Grange for three days, during which time he had shaken hands with, and lamented over, Arthur (who, summoned at the commencement of his father's illness, appeared looking so pale and thin, that it was decided nem. con. that he was working himself to death—a view of the case which he rather than otherwise encouraged by the faintness of his denial), was forced to return to the Park to attend the next meeting of magistrates, and finally to dispose of the offending poachers. Accordingly, having arranged with Alice to send the close carriage for her on the day but one following, he took leave of the Hazlehurst family, and drove to H——. Here, after long examination, the aforesaid poachers were convicted, and sentenced, one to nine months', another to a year's imprisonment—Markum's evidence being so clear and convincing, that such an issue became inevitable. As the gamekeeper left the court, a tall, gipsy-looking fellow came up to him, and muttered in his ear, "You'll live to repent this day's work Master Keeper; look to yourself one of these dark nights."

"Look to yourself if I catch you on our ground," was Markum's contemptuous rejoinder; "there's enough oakum to pick in H—— gaol for Tom and you too."

"Who is that fellow?" inquired Coverdale, as the man, perceiving that the keeper's reply was beginning to attract attention, turned away with a scowl.

"That be Jack Hargrāve, Mr. Coverdale, sir," returned Markum; "brother along o' Tom, as we've give twelve months to; and sarve 'im right, a poachin', thievin' wagrant."

"Is this fellow a poacher also?" asked Harry.

"That is he then," was the reply; "a reg'lur bred un, and as deep a hand as ever set a snare, only he's so 'wide o',' that it's not so easy to nab the warmint; but I'll be down upon 'im yet, for all his threatenings. He's bin heard to swear he'll put a charge o' shot under my veskit some o' these nights; he'd better not, though, or he may find there's two can play at that game."

"No violence, my good fellow, no violence; it's not a light

thing to shed the blood of a fellow-creature—besides, there's a quiet way of managing these affairs. I shall warn the police to keep an eye on that man Hargrave; he looks dangerous; and you may as well put on another watcher, it won't do to be short-handed just now." So saying, Coverdale turned away, and was soon deep in conversation with the inspector of the mounted rural police; after which, refusing to make one of a jovial party who were about to dine with Tom Rattleworth, and were tolerably certain to remain playing whist and imbibing strong liquors till the small hours should be again upon the increase, he drove home to his solitary mansion.

It was the first time since his marriage that Coverdale had dined by himself, and he felt proportionably lonely; everything tended to remind him of Alice—her favourite dog, a little black-and-tan spaniel, with large loving eyes, not unlike her own, leaped on his knee after dinner, and gazing wistfully at the empty chair opposite, uttered a low whine, as though it would inquire, "Where's my mistress?" The footstool, whereon her dainty little feet were wont to repose—the screen with which she was accustomed to shade her fair cheek from the too ardent advances of the fire—each object, animate or inanimate, recalled his thoughts to Alice; and feeling, even more strongly than he had ever yet felt, how deeply and tenderly he loved her, he for the first time perceived that love in its true light, and, in acknowledging its full reality, became conscious of the duties and responsibilities such an affection entailed upon him. Faintly and dimly at first the light broke in upon him; deeply did he feel the difficulties of the task, and his own inability to perform it; and bitterly, most bitterly, did he regret his own selfish carelessness, which had, as he was fain to confess, tended already to estrange his young wife's affection, and to convert a gentle, yielding girl into a wilful and exacting woman. And thus he sat, pondering over and regretting the past, and forming wise and good resolutions for the future, while minutes gliding by unobserved, grew into hours, until the sudden restlessness of the little dog, which had been sleeping quietly upon his knees, roused him, and looking at his watch, he perceived it was nearly midnight. As he did so, the dog, whose restlessness appeared to increase, uttered a short bark, while at the same moment a distant sound was faintly audible, which Harry's practised ear instantly recognised as the report of a gun. To spring to the window, open the shutter, and fling up the sash, was the work of an instant; a like space of time sufficed to resolve doubt into certainty—guns were being discharged in a favourite plantation about half a mile from the house—a plantation in which the pheasants were as well fed and tame as barn-door fowls; it was evident the poachers were taking their revenge, and that these sacred

birds, the Lares and Penates of Harry's sporting mythology, were being ruthlessly slaughtered on their roosts. Harry rang the bell furiously; then, before the alarmed Wilkins (who, having commenced his career in the service of an apoplectic alderman, laboured under a chronic impression that somebody was in a fit) had passed beyond the door of the servants' hall, he rushed impetuously out of the dining-room, and meeting that bewildered domestic in full career, nearly frightened him into an attack of the malady he so much dreaded for others, by exclaiming, "Here, quick! Tell Saunders, or some of them, to saddle the shooting-cob, and bring him round instantly; then find me a hat and pea-jacket. Quick, I say!"

As the butler vanished on his mission, Coverdale took down from a peg in the hall a special constable's staff which had been intrusted to him on behalf of her gracious Majesty, at a time when an extra dose of politics and strong beer had proved too potent for the dense agricultural pates of certain free and independent (alias bribed and tipsy) electors of the neighbouring county town. It was a stout piece of ash, about a foot and a half long, thicker than an ordinary broom-stick, and weighted with lead, for the benefit of any unusually opaque skull into which it might be deemed advisable to knock a respect for our glorious constitution. Harry felt its weight, and, as he passed his wrist through the leather thong attached to it, he thought to himself they would be bold men who could prevent him, with that in his hand, from going where he pleased. The instant the cob appeared he sprang into the saddle. "Do you and Marshal get a couple of stout sticks, and make the best of your way to the ash plantation!" he exclaimed, hastily; "there are poachers out, and from their venturing to come so near the house, I should fancy there must be a strong gang of them, and Markum may want all the help we can give him."

So saying, Coverdale gathered up the reins, and without waiting the groom's reply, rode off at a brisk canter. As he approached the wood, he drew in and paused, uncertain whether Markum might yet have reached the scene of action: as he listened, the sound of men crashing through the dry underwood became distinctly audible; then shouts and a clamour of angry voices, and finally, the unmistakable noise of a conflict met his ear. Pausing no longer, he put his horse into a gallop, and dashed on till he reached a hand-gate leading into the wood. This, to his annoyance, he found locked; true, he had a master-key, which he had fortunately brought with him, but he was forced to dismount in order to unfasten the padlock. While thus engaged, the sounds proved that the affray was still raging fiercely, and, as he flung the gate open, a gun was discharged, followed almost instantaneously by the report of two others. Fearing mischief might occur

before he could reach the combatants, Coverdale remounted hastily, and heedless alike of obstacles and darkness, galloped down one of the grass rides through the plantation, avoiding collision with the trunks and branches of trees by, as it appeared, a succession of miracles. Before, however, he could arrive at the scene of action the sound of blows, the shouts and imprecations, had ceased, and nothing but a confused hum of voices, together with a low moaning, as of some person ill or in pain, met his ear. Forcing his horse through the tangled underwood, Coverdale came suddenly upon a group of men, amongst whom he recognised several of his own farm labourers, while two under-keepers were kneeling beside the prostrate figure of a man who, from the stiff, unnatural attitude in which he lay, appeared either dead or dying. To leap to the ground, and snatch a lantern from one of the bystanders, was Harry's first act; then bending over the fallen man, he recognised in the ghastly features, distorted and convulsed with agony, the well-known countenance of honest, sturdy Markum, while from a gun-shot wound in his right side the dark life-blood was slowly flowing.

"How has this happened?" was Coverdale's hurried inquiry. "Is it an accident, or have any of those scoundrels dared to shoot him?"

There was a moment's pause, and then one of the elder men replied, "It wor no accident, Mr. Coverdale; but Giles there can tell you best, squire; he wor nearest to un when he dropped."

The under-keeper thus appealed to—a tall, strapping young fellow, who was vainly attempting to staunch the blood which still continued to flow—turned to reply, while Coverdale, kneeling beside the wounded man, endeavoured to arrange a more effectual bandage.

"All as I know, sir," he said, "is that I wor a watching nigh down by the warren, when up cum poor Master Markum here, and 'Giles,' says he, 'ye're wanted, lad; there's them out as didn't oughter be.' So him and I, and the rest o' our mates here, which master had appinted to meet at eleven o'clock—for I expect he'd had some hint give him of what was to be up—made for the ash spinney, and laid us down in a ditch. Well, it wasn't long afore we heard the blackguards at work among the pheasants, a banging away like blazes. We waited till they got near us, and then we up and at 'em like good uns. There was more of 'em nor there was o' we, so they showed fight a bit. Poor master there he jest wor real savage; he hit out hard and straight, and rolled 'em over like nine-pins; they worn't o' no manner o' use again him, not one on 'em. Well, they soon got enough of that sort of fun, and one arter another cut away, till at last they all fairly turned tail and bolted—that is, all but one, and him master collared, and says he, 'Stop a bit, Jack! I'm agoin' to

send you to see your brother in H——gaol; I'm afeard Tom should be dull for want o' cumpany, poor chap!" Well, Jack Hargrave, for him it wor, fit sharp for his liburty, but master was too good a man for him; and he'd a took him as safe as mutton, only Jack hollared arter one of his mates as had a gun, and told him to shoot the —— keeper, and not let him be took. The fellow stopped and faced round—he wor a young chap as I knows well—I'd cotched sight of his face afore he cut away, a soft young feller, as anybody might bully into anything; and when Jack rapped out a volley of oaths, and told him to let fly, and chance hittin' him, shoot he did, and poor master let go his hold o' Jack's collar, and rolled over and over like I've seen many a hare and rabbid roll over afore his gun."

"But there was more than one barrel discharged," interposed Coverdale; "I heard three shots in succession—how was that?"

"Why, when I see poor Master Markum fall, I was jest agoin' to kneel down to raise him a bit, when I ketched sight o' Jack Hargrave and his pal a cutting away like lamplighters, and I felt mad like to think he should get off scot free arter what he'd been and done, and having my gun in my hand, I give 'em the contents of both barrels; it worn't right, I knows, Mr. Coverdale, but if you'd been in my place, squire, I'm blessed if I don't think you'd ha' done the same, axing your pardon."

Feeling a strong private conviction that "Giles" had only judged him correctly, Harry looked grave and shook his head, as if such a possibility could not exist in the case of a magistrate, ere he inquired, "Do you think you hit either of them?"

"They'd got a farish start before I pulled at 'em," was the reply, "and the light ain't that good for a long shot, but I fancy Jack Hargrave's got something to take home with him, for he gave a rare jump as the charge reached him; but it worn't enough to stop him, for I see him runnin' like a greyhound arterwards."

While this conversation was proceeding, Coverdale, by aid of sundry neckcloths, and a strip that he cut from his own pea-jacket, had contrived a bandage which in great measure stopped the bleeding, and Markum revived sufficiently to recognise those about him; as his eyes fell on Coverdale, a faint smile passed across his features.

"Is it you, squire?" he murmured in a low voice. "Ah, you always had a kind heart of your own! Jack Hargrave's kep his word, you see. I expects him and his mate 'as finished me atween 'em this time."

"We'll hope not, my poor fellow—but don't speak. Do you think you can bear carrying yet—yes? Four of you take that hand-gate off its hinges, and bring it here; we'll lay him on that. We shall have a surgeon for you directly, my

poor fellow! I sent one of the lads off on my horse to fetch Mr. Gouger the moment I came up—now, steady with him. I'll lift his head — that's it; now raise the gate steadily. Gently there—well done—are you all ready. Step together mind—march."

As he spoke, Harry (who himself supported one corner of the temporary litter he had contrived) and three others raised the wounded man on their shoulders, and carried him to his own cottage, which fortunately was near at hand. He bore the transit bravely, though the pain occasioned by such motion as was unavoidable reduced him more than once to the verge of fainting. Shortly after he had reached his destination the surgeon arrived. Coverdale waited until he had pronounced the wound dangerous, though not necessarily mortal, then leaving him to make a more minute examination, he quitted the house. He found a mounted policeman awaiting him outside, who, making his rounds, had been attracted by the sound of guns at that unusual hour.

"Ah, policeman, I was just going to send after you; my head keeper has been shot by these poaching rascals, and is seriously hurt, I'm afraid!" exclaimed Coverdale. "How are we to make sure of the fellows who did it? It lies between a man called Jack Hargrave——"

"A reg'lur bad un," observed the horse-patrol, parenthetically.

"You said you knew the other man," continued Harry, appealing to the under-keeper; "are you acquainted with his name?"

"They do call him 'Winkey' in a general way, from a trick he's got with his eyelids; but his right name be Jim Fags," was the reply.

"I know him," observed the policeman. "Well, sir, as we're acquainted with the parties, I should say we're safe to be down upon 'em somewheres to-morrow. I'll ride over to H——, and put all our men on the scent."

"Stay! that gives me an idea," said Coverdale; then turning to the under-keeper, he continued in a lower voice, "You are sure you hit Hargrave—are you, Giles?"

The young man nodded in the affirmative, and his master resumed—

"Go and fetch Nero, poor Markum's night-dog, muzzle him, and bring him in one of the greyhound leashes. We'll contrive to take these rascals before day dawns, policeman."

While Coverdale was explaining his plan to the patrol, Giles returned with the dog; it was a splendid animal, a cross between the English mastiff and a Spanish bloodhound. Its size was unusual, and its strength enormous. Its eyes glared red in the torchlight, like those of some wild beast. When it saw the policeman it uttered a low growl, and the bristles on its back stood up like a mane; but at a word from Cover-

dale it relinquished its hostile attitude, and with a sagacious look, which said almost as plainly as words could have expressed it—"I comprehend; it's not him they've sent for me to worry"—thrust its huge head caressingly into its master's hand.

"Now patrol," resumed Coverdale, "if you will ride along the skirts of the wood, and lead my horse, I fancy I shall be able to put the dog on the track of these fellows—and, if so, he will never leave it till the game is run down. You have handcuffs with you?"

"Aye, and pistols too, for the matter of that," was the reply.

"I don't expect they will be required," rejoined Coverdale; "the scoundrels will scarcely want more fighting than they've had already"; then signalling Giles to follow with the dog, he turned, and, re-entering the plantation, soon reached the scene of the late conflict.

"Now try and find, as near as possible, the spot where Hargrave was when you fired at him," began Coverdale; "give me the dog to hold, and take the lantern with you."

Giles obeyed; and having walked about fifty paces down a narrow pathway through the wood, began carefully to examine the ground on either side. Having pursued his investigation for some minutes in silence, he paused, examined the spot still more closely, and then made a sign to Coverdale to join him.

On reaching the place Harry observed by the light of the lantern several dark spots, and a long mark on the soft ground, as though some person had slipped and nearly fallen; then deep footsteps led towards the outskirts of the wood. The moment the dog perceived the scent of blood all the savage instinct of its nature awoke, and, with a bound, which tested the strength of the leash, and nearly dislocated Coverdale's shoulders, it sprang forward along the track of the fugitives. Five minutes' painful toiling through bush and briar brought them to the outskirts of the plantation, where they found the policeman waiting with the horses. Hastily springing to the saddle, Coverdale made Giles attach a small cord he had brought with him to the end of the leash, against which the bloodhound now strained impatiently; then twisting the other end round his own wrist, he was about to desire the under-keeper to return, when the patrol interfered by observing:

"Better take Giles with us, sir!"

"Why so, policeman?" rejoined Coverdale, sharply; "we're two to two, fresh men against tired ones; besides, you're armed, and they're not."

"Jack's got a gun with him, and is likely enough to use it now his steam's up," insinuated Giles, who by no means approved of losing his share in the expedition.

"And when we have nabbed 'em, I shall want help to convey 'em to H—— gaol," pleaded the policeman. "I can take him up behind me."

"As you will; only lose no more time," was Coverdale's reply; and cheering on the dog, he rode forward at a brisk trot.

The track led them through the Park, and then over hill and dale, ploughed field, and rough stubble, till it brought them out upon a wide, bleak common, dotted here and there with patches of furze and broom, which showed dark and shadowy in the moonbeams, like plumes upon a hearse. Across the wildest and most tangled portion of the heath the dog led them, still straining at the leash, and uttering from time to time a suppressed whimper, indicative of impatience. On the farther side of the common rose a steep bank, in one portion of which a deep hollow had been excavated for the purpose of obtaining gravel. As the dog approached this place, its eagerness became, if possible, stronger than before, until, at about thirty yards from the spot, it suddenly stopped, and again erecting the bristles on its back, uttered a deep growl. At the same moment, Coverdale, whose sight was remarkably keen, perceived a figure cautiously stealing away under cover of the bushes. Pointing him out to the policeman, whose horse was beginning to evince symptoms of distress under its double burden, Coverdale observed:

"I can only see one man, but let us make sure of him. Get down, Giles, and hold the dog. Now, patrol, while I ride round that bush, and head the fellow, do you go on and seize him; and if you want any assistance, I shall be ready to afford it."

So saying, Coverdale rode forward to cut off the poacher's retreat, while the policeman, putting spurs to his horse, and drawing his cutlass, dashed up to the fellow and seized him by the collar.

Overawed by the gleaming weapon, and exhausted by his previous exertions, the unfortunate Jim Fags (alias Winkey) attempted no resistance; and the policeman availed himself of his pusillanimity to produce the handcuffs and dextrously secure his prisoner. He was thus engaged when Coverdale, who was walking his horse quietly towards them, suddenly caught sight of what, at the first glance, appeared to him only the stump of a tree, but on closer inspection proved to be the figure of a man, crouching under the shadow of the gravel-pit, while at the moment in which Coverdale first perceived him he was taking a deliberate aim with a short gun at the unconscious patrol. For a moment the policeman's life hung upon a thread; but a slight movement of the horse brought the unfortunate Winkey's head into the line of fire, and his accomplice lowered his piece, and slightly altered his position, while he took fresh aim. The opportunity was not to be lost—quick as thought Coverdale rose in his stirrups,

and with the full force of his muscular arm hurled the constable's staff, which he had retained the whole evening, at the head of the kneeling figure. Fortunately for the policeman, the missile took effect, and, stunned by the force of the blow, Jack Hargrave (for he it was) measured his length upon the turf, discharging the gun harmlessly as he fell. Before he could regain his feet, Giles and the dog (who, but for his muzzle, would have torn the poacher to pieces) were upon him. In less than two hours from that time both the culprits were safely lodged in H—— gaol.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ALICE SUCCOURS THE DISTRESSED.

MR. HAZLEHURST'S progress towards recovery was so satisfactory that Alice, when the carriage arrived to fetch her home, felt not the smallest scruple in leaving him. As Harry considered the distance between the Grange and Coverdale Park too great for his carriage-horses to perform twice in one day, the equipage had been dispatched the previous evening, and the servants were consequently unacquainted with the events of the past night. Having taken leave of her mother—who, roused by the necessity of becoming a nurse instead of a patient, appeared rather benefited than otherwise by the unusual demand upon her energies—and of Emily, now fast developing into a very pretty girl, Alice started on her return home, and accomplished the greater portion of the transit without let or hindrance. When within about five miles of the Park, however, one of the horses was discovered to have cast a shoe; and as it would have been worth more than his situation to have taken it farther in so defenceless a condition, the coachman drew up at a village blacksmith's, where the evil might be remedied. Under these circumstances, Alice determined to walk on till the carriage should overtake her, which, as the morning was fine, she considered the reverse of a hardship. Pondering many things—for Alice was no longer the careless, light-hearted girl we once described her—she trudged on, at first briskly, then more leisurely, as the road began to ascend, until she might have proceeded some two miles; and yet the carriage did not make its appearance. Toiling up hill, attired as ladies usually are from November to April, with an amount of merino, velvet, and fur, which might defy the severities of a Siberian winter, and is clearly "de trop" under the influence of a sunshiny morning in March, not unnaturally rendered Alice hot and tired; and fancying, from her imperfect knowledge of the locality, that she must be upon her husband's territory, she determined

to make acquaintance with the inmates of a cottage which she perceived by the roadside a short distance higher up the hill, and, with their permission, to rest herself until the carriage should arrive. With this intention, she approached the cottage, and finding the door closed, rapped at it with, first, her knuckles, then the handle of a most frivolous and ephemeral little parasol; but neither of these applications producing the desired effect, she, like little Red Riding Hood, raised the latch and opened the door. The sight which met her eyes was one calculated alike to stimulate her curiosity and interest her sympathies. In a cradle, on the opposite side of the room, lay an unconscious and remarkably pretty and comfortable-looking baby, fast asleep, while near it, with the light from the casement streaming full upon her smooth dark hair, only partially concealed beneath her neat white cap, sat the young mother, her face hidden in her hands, weeping bitterly. Starting at the sound of the opening door, she removed her hands, and disclosed features which, swollen and disfigured as they were by grief, yet evinced tokens of unusual beauty. She rose as Alice entered, and hastily drying her tears, stood regarding her with a wild eager glance of inquiry.

"What have you come to tell me?" she said: "they have not relented—not set him at liberty again?—or the other one—he is not worse—oh, God!—not dead?"

Surprised and embarrassed by the strange eagerness of her manner, and interested by her appearance and evident distress, Alice hastened to assure her that she was not the bearer of any tidings, good or evil, and having explained the object of her intrusion, continued—

"But you are anxious or unhappy about something; will you not tell me why you were crying so bitterly when I came in—perhaps I may be able to assist you?"

Thus appealed to, the girl (for she appeared scarcely above twenty) fixed her dark eyes on Alice's face, and reading therein her kind and loving nature, which indeed was so legibly depicted that the veriest dullard at deciphering character could scarcely fail to discover it, answered more gently than she had before spoken—

"I beg pardon, lady; but I'm almost crazy with grief this morning, and my head's so a-running on it, that I hardly know what I'm a-saying or a-doing on. Ye're welcome to rest, lady, as long as you please"; and as she spoke she dusted a chair with her apron, and placed it for Alice, who, seating herself, resumed—

"You say you are unhappy, but you do not tell me what about."

The woman paused for a moment in thought, then continued—

"I need make no secret of it; the whole country round is

ringing with it by this time. Some poor fellows, lady, as had wives and children to feed, and no money to buy bread to give to 'em, went to get a few of the birds and things that's running wild in the woods of them that's rich, and don't want 'em; and the keepers cum to stop 'em, and one of 'em got shot in the confusion; and the police have took my husband and my brother and swear they're the men that did it; and they're to be had up to-day before them that's sure to condemn 'em, innocent or guilty—gentlemen that chuses to keep the wild creatures that God sent for food for them as wants it, all for their own selfish amusement—begging your pardon, lady—but it's the truth; and when one's heart aches like mine does, the truth will out."

"It is natural, perhaps, that you should think thus in your situation," returned Alice, gravely; "but depend upon it your husband and your brother will not be punished unless they justly deserve it. The gamekeeper was not killed, I hope?"

"Oh no, my lady! not hurt very serious neither, I do hope; only they want to make the most of it, to get a chance to punish my poor fellows, don't you see?" was the reply; "and if my husband is put in prison for long, and lays out of work, what's to become o' me and the children?"

"You have more than this one, then?" inquired Alice.

For answer the woman rose, and passing into the inner room of the cottage, in less than a minute returned, bearing in her arms a little girl, apparently about two years old, whose bright, rosy cheeks, and eyes evidently distressed by the vivid sunlight, gave unmistakable tokens of having been roused out of a sound sleep. Alice possessed a thorough woman's love of children, leading her to consider ugly ones pretty, and pretty ones "little angels"; so she immediately took this particular duodecimo angelic specimen on her knee, and won its celestial affections by allowing it to play with her watch, and a bunch of miscellaneous rubbish attached thereunto, and denominated, on the "locus a non lucendo" principle, a chatelaine. This reinforcement of infantry having completely won the day (the "dear" sleeping baby had been a powerful, unconscious advocate of his parent's cause), Alice began to consider how best she could assist the distressed mother. The first point was to learn to whom to apply in favour of the culprits, and she accordingly inquired on whose land they had been taken, and in whose service the wounded gamekeeper resided? The answer was at the same time embarrassing and satisfactory. Of course, if the offence had been committed upon her husband's property, he could, if he would, decline to prosecute the offenders. If he would,—there lay the difficulty. Alice was well aware of the serious light in which Harry regarded the crime of poaching; and the attack on the gamekeeper even she was forced to reprobate; but if it should prove that the man was not

seriously injured, she trusted to her newly-regained influence to enable her to place the matter in such a light that Harry would agree with her in overlooking the culprit's offence for the sake of his family; or, at all events, if that was expecting too much of his penitence, she had only to ask it as a personal favour, and he surely could not refuse her. So, carried away by her feelings of kindly sympathy, and acting on the impulse of the moment, she put forth all her powers of consolation, and ended by disclosing her name, and the relation in which she stood towards that persecutor of poachers, Harry Coverdale, at the same time promising to use her influence, which she represented as all-powerful, to screen the culprits from the effects of their misdemeanors.

Before her consolatory harangue was well concluded, the carriage arrived, and Alice, having kissed the children (the unfortunate baby being aroused expressly for the performance of the affectionate ceremony, a violation of the rights of the subject which it resented by crying and slobbering with a twenty-infant power over Alice's velvet mantle), left five shillings in the hands of their mamma, by way of a peace-offering, and departed, thoroughly satisfied with her "début" in the character of poor man's friend and cottager's comforter. All the way she drove home she was building castles in the air for the benefit and behoof of the ruined family, having mentally adopted the little girl as lady's-maid, and apprenticed the baby, which was of the nobler sex, to a serious and immaculate carpenter, before she reached the Park.

Coverdale was absent when his wife arrived, having ridden over to H——, to assist at the committal of Jack Hargrave and his accomplice; but she received from Wilkins, who was, in more senses than one, a confidential servant, an over-full, untrue, and particularly-exaggerated account of the affray of the previous night, from which she acquired two facts, which tended considerably to disquiet her, viz.:—first, that the wounded man was Markum, her husband's especial favourite; and secondly, that Harry had been personally involved in the affair; both of which considerations increased the difficulty of the negotiation for gaol-delivery to which she had incautiously pledged herself. Having taken off her things, she proceeded first to fraternise with her King Charles spaniel and the two canary-birds (which latter plumed bipeds celebrated her return in songs of shrill triumph, like a couple of inebriated penny whistles), then to put all the ornaments right, which the housemaid had dusted into uncomfortable and heterodox positions. She had just discovered a china cup, which nobody had broken, and which yet was divided in several places, having probably split its own sides laughing at the grotesque figures with which its manufacturer had seen fit to embellish it, and she was hunting for a bottle of diamond cement wherewith to repair the damage before her hus-

band's return, when the sound of horses' feet announced that event to have taken place.

The first words that met her ear were, "Let one of the helpers go down to Markum's cottage, wait till Mr. Gouger has seen him again, and bring me his report without a moment's delay; if it should be unsatisfactory I'll send for Brodie by electric telegraph. Is your mistress returned?"

A warm embrace, an expression of his delight at having her back again, a hurried enquiry after Mr. Hazlehurst, and then Harry rushed into his narrative of the poaching affair, and in his eagerness to detail every circumstance of a matter which interested him so deeply, did not notice the tameness of Alice's sympathy, or the lukewarm manner in which she seconded his virtuous indignation against the miscreants who had all but murdered good, honest Markum: "And small thanks to them that it was 'all but,' for, if ever a scoundrel meant mischief, that scoundrel was Jack Hargrave."

Alice saw this was no time to urge her suit, and so merely confined herself to the general remark that it was a dreadful affair for all parties, and that she pitied the wives of the wretched men who had committed the rash act, as much as anybody concerned in the matter; to which Harry replied—

"That it served them right for marrying poachers, and that they might think they were lucky not to be the victims themselves, for that a fellow who would take to poaching was capable of cutting his wife's throat, or of any other enormity."

Mr. Gouger's report was, on the whole, satisfactory. Markum was going on well, though he (Gouger) could not pronounce him out of danger; the injury was very serious, and several days must elapse before the ulterior consequences would be apparent; or, as the doctor himself remarked, "the effect of extraneous particles of plumbago, or lead, introduced into the vital system by the sudden expansion of saltpetre and other explosive compounds compressed within the narrow limits of a gun-barrel, and discharged thence by ignition, according to the natural laws of projectiles, was most subtle and deleterious, leading sometimes to the total destruction of animal life, at others to a concussion of the nervous system; or again," etc., etc.: from which sapient opinion Harry collected that Brodie need not be sent for immediately.

Days glided by, the prisoners were remanded till Markum's chance of life or death should be ascertained, and Alice had not found a fitting moment in which to make her appeal. At length, the surgeon, with grave looks, which might mean everything, anything, or nothing, advised, merely as a matter of precaution, that the wounded man should make a deposition before a magistrate, so that if anything were to happen, the jury might have the advantage of his statement of facts. Coverdale, therefore, having persuaded one of his brother magistrates to accompany him, proceeded to the cottage for

the above purpose. Shortly after he had set off, Alice was informed that a poor woman was desirous of speaking to her; and on ordering her to be shown in, she was less surprised than embarrassed to recognise in the tearful applicant her cottage hostess, the wife of the culprit, Jack Hargrave. The result of the interview may be easily foreseen. Alice descanted on the greatness of the crime committed, Mr. Coverdale's virtuous indignation against the offenders, and the consequent difficulty of persuading him not to prosecute them. Mrs. Jack brought forward, in reply, the baby and a flood of tears—arguments so unanswerable that Alice, having kissed the one, and all but joined in the other, dismissed the afflicted matron, having renewed her pledge of exerting her whole influence in favour of the prisoners. It was with a feeling akin to desperation that she determined to plead her "protégées'" cause the moment Harry should return, certain that if she again allowed her ardour to cool, she should never have courage to enter upon the subject to him. Accordingly, as soon as he had finished giving her an account of the clear and able manner in which Markum had detailed the proceedings of the eventful night on which the affray had occurred, she began:—

"I, too, have had rather a trying interview; the wife of one of the men who have been taken up on suspicion has been here—a frail, delicate-looking young creature, scarcely more than a girl, with the dearest, sweetest little baby imaginable. I do so wish you had seen it!"

Harry muttered a reply, which though scarcely audible, conveyed the impression that he was perfectly content without having had ocular demonstration of its infantine perfections; and Alice continued—

"Yes, I wish you had seen both mother and child—its sweet innocent looks, and the poor girl's tears would have pleaded her cause better than any arguments of mine can do; your kind heart could never have resisted them."

"Plead her cause," repeated Coverdale; "that means, because her husband and his accomplice have been so obliging as to destroy my game, and murder, or half murder, as the case may prove, my head keeper, she considers it my duty to support herself and family, I suppose; she has brought this irresistible baby as a safe dodge to work upon your feminine susceptibilities; and with thorough woman's logic, she has persuaded you to look upon her as a suffering innocent, and upon me as a tyrannical oppressor. Now confess—is not this the truth?"

"No, really it is not," replied Alice, eagerly. "I own I think you, from your passion for field-sports, take rather an exaggerated view of the crime of poaching; but I quite feel, as you do, that wounding poor Markum was a cruel and

cowardly act; still, revenging it upon this family will not benefit him nor ourselves."

"I don't wish the people to starve, of course," returned Harry, moodily, "though I should imagine the young woman and her brats can scarcely have got through all the game in her larder yet. I should not mind starving on hashed hare and broiled pheasants' legs myself for a week or two; however, if the poor girl really is in want, I have no objection to your relieving her, but do not be imposed upon, darling, that is all that I mean to say."

The kindness of her husband's manner, and the good-natured way in which he appeared willing to support the family of the man who had injured him, served alike to remove Alice's fears and to lead her to overrate the extent of her influence with her husband; so, leaning her arm on his shoulder, while with her other hand she smoothed back his clustering hair, she continued, "What a good, kind boy it is, though it does growl sometimes. But now, to show that my 'protégée' is not seeking to impose on me for the sake of obtaining money, I will tell you that her petition was for quite a different object, and one creditable alike to her feelings as a wife and a sister: she wants you to act as only a high and generous nature like your own would be capable of acting—she implores you to pardon her husband and her brother."

"To do what!" exclaimed Harry sharply, a dark shade coming across his features.

"To let off two of the men who were engaged in this unlucky business—her husband and her brother—not to prosecute them, I mean," returned Alice, removing her hand from her husband's shoulder and preparing to "hold her own" in the dispute she foresaw impending.

"And their names?" inquired Coverdale.

Alice repeated them.

"As I expected," resumed Coverdale; "the man who fired the shot and his accomplice, who, more guilty than himself, urged him to do it. Now, ask your own good sense, Alice, and reflect a moment before you answer. Even were I willing, can I in common justice let these fellows off?'

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Alice, without a moment's deliberation; "it is so great—so noble to forgive an injury! Revenge is but a mean, petty feeling, after all."

"An admirable reason for shaking hands with an individual who has knocked you down," returned Coverdale, "but none whatsoever for screening two malefactors from the just punishment of their ill-deeds"; then, lapsing into the magistrate, he continued, "You mistake the whole scope and intention of our penal code, my dear Alice. We do not punish offenders as an act of revenge upon the individual, but in order to benefit society by deterring others from committing

a like crime; thus, laying aside personal feeling, I should be doing an injury to the community at large, by refusing to prosecute these fellows. You see this clearly, do you not?"

Alice's reasoning powers did see it, and had seen it all along, but Alice had also seen the poor wife and the meritorious and seductive baby, and she cared "fifty thousand times" (as she herself would have expressed it) more for them than for the community at large; so finding that the argument was going against her, she, woman-like, adroitly shifted her ground. "According to your reasoning, there would be no room for such a quality as mercy," she began; "stern, inexorable justice would condemn every criminal, no matter what extenuating circumstances there might be; in each case punishment must follow sin, as effect follows cause. I, for one, should be very sorry always to be judged by such a cruel rule."

"Oh, if you're going to put German metaphysical sophistries in the place of English common-sense, I've no more to say about it," returned Harry, gruffly; "only it seems to my simplicity that punishment always does follow crime in this world, as soon as it's found out. If a brat steals the sugar, its mother slaps it; if a school boy prigs apples, the master flogs him; if an apprentice bolts with the till, the law transports him; if Jack murders Tom, the hangman stretches his neck for him—and serve 'em all right, say I; it would be a precious deal worse world to live in if it were not so, to my thinking."

Alice paused to consider the justice of this remark—we will follow her example!

CHAPTER XXIX.

HOW TO MAKE HOME HAPPY.

MRS. COVERDALE, resuming the matrimonial discussion broken off at the end of the last chapter, thus pursued the argument by which she hoped to induce her husband to let off her poaching "protégé."

"In the present case the innocent must suffer with the guilty. I see no justice in ruining a poor family by imprisoning or transporting the only member who is able to work and support it."

"The said member should have thought of that himself," returned Harry; "if he had been working and supporting his family, he would have been safe from transportation, like any other honest man; but as he preferred to steal my game and shoot my keeper, he thereby deprived his family of the pleasure of his inestimable society; it is he, therefore, who has brought this evil upon them, not I; and when I consent to your relieving their necessities out of my pocket, I think I

am doing, to say the least of it, as much as any reasonable woman ought to expect of me."

Despite her prejudices in favour of the seraphic baby and its interesting mother, Alice felt the truth of her husband's reasoning; but she had boasted of her power too confidently, and pledged herself to exert it too deeply, to retreat; so, perceiving that argument would avail her nothing, she was obliged to fall back upon woman's last resource—personal influence, and strive to win from Harry's affection that which his reason had denied her. A dangerous experiment, pretty Alice! and one in which, if your philosophy did but go deep enough to enable you to discern it, you would perceive success to be a greater evil than failure, for it would argue culpable weakness in him on whom you have to lean for support through life. But Alice was by no means in an ethical frame of mind at that moment, and cared only for obtaining her point by any means which occurred to her; so, drawing a stool close to Harry, she meekly seated herself at his feet, and looking up into his face with her large imploring eyes, began coaxingly, "Harry, dear, are you quite, quite determined to say No?"

An affirmative bend of the head was the only reply.

"But if I make it a personal request," she continued, laying her soft cheek caressingly against his hand; "if I ask you to forgive these men for my sake, and so afford me the exquisite pleasure of making this poor woman happy? Oh, you will not refuse me. If you do, I shall think you do not love me. Come, you will say Yes."

Poor Harry! he was sorely perplexed. Had it been any personal sacrifice—even a pledge to give up hunting or shooting—which she required of him, he would gladly have yielded, in the true and deep tenderness towards his wife which his late self-examination had aroused. But the serious thoughts which a review of his past errors had called forth, while they pointed out to him how he had failed in his duty to her whom he had vowed to love and protect, also proved to him that where Alice was inclined to act wrongly, or foolishly, he was bound to save her even from herself; and his clear, good sense instantly told him that this was a request which she ought not to have urged, since to grant it would necessitate a sacrifice of principle on his part. Accordingly, he replied:

"Alice, love, listen to me; this is not a mere matter of personal feeling, or I would yield to you without a moment's hesitation, but it involves a question of right and wrong. I could not refuse to prosecute these men without diffusing an amount of moral evil amongst the whole of my poorer tenantry, which years of the most careful supervision would fail to eradicate. The utmost I can promise you is that the culprits shall have every opportunity afforded them of clearing themselves; and if, as I am convinced, that proves im-

possible, every palliating circumstance shall be brought forward and allowed its fullest weight. I have already given you my free permission to assist the poor woman and her children, and more than this you cannot expect me to say."

"But I do, or rather did, expect you to say more," returned Alice, with flashing eyes and glowing cheeks; "I expected you to say what I would have said to you, if you had appealed to me thus—that there was nothing, even if it were life itself, that I would not give up for your sake. But I see how it is: you do not really care for me, if you do, man's love is not like woman's, it is merely the excitement of the pursuit that interests you—the prize once attained becomes valueless in your eyes: in fact, love, which makes the entire joy or sorrow of a woman's life, is to men but a superior kind of sporting—more engrossing than a fox-chase, or than hunting a poor stag to death, simply because the game is of a higher order." She paused to give vent to a sob which she was unable entirely to repress, then continued in a sarcastic tone of voice: "However, mighty hunter as you are, I do not intend to give you the satisfaction of being in at my death; I have too much of the old Hazlehurst spirit about me to break my heart for a man who does not love me. There is a quiet way, as you call it, of arranging these affairs: you have your own pursuits and amusements, henceforward I shall have mine. You need not dread my again attempting to interfere either with your pleasures, or your graver occupations. I have had too severe a lesson on each point to forget it readily. But I expect you to exercise the same forbearance towards me. From this day forth we each follow our own line!" and, drawing her shawl over her shoulders, with an imperious gesture, as of an offended queen, Alice swept out of the room, leaving Harry in a frame of mind which may be more easily imagined than described.

A complete change, which might have been lated from the above conversation, appeared to have taken place in Alice Coverdale. Instead of shrinking, as she had hitherto done, from society, she rather courted it than otherwise—ordering the carriage, and visiting the different families in the neighbourhood, without consulting Harry on the subject, or seeming to care in the slightest degree whether he accompanied her or not. At first this conduct on his wife's part occasioned Coverdale the greatest uneasiness; but, after a time, seeing that she was amused and interested by the new acquaintances she thus formed, he began to hope that good might perhaps come out of evil, and that the intimacies then commenced might afford sources of lasting pleasure when the feeling of pique which had led her to seek them should have long since died away. And so the time glided on, working its usual changes in men and things as it passed away.

Mr. Gouger having ventured one day to commit himself to

the rash assertion that Markum was sinking rapidly, and could not possibly survive the week, from that hour the gamekeeper began to amend, and had sufficiently advanced in his progress towards recovery to be able to appear and give evidence in person, when Jack Hargrave and his accomplice took their trial at the next assizes. So unmistakably was their guilt brought home to them that they were each sentenced to seven years' transportation, and would probably have had fourteen allotted to them, but for the thorough good-faith with which Harry redeemed his promise to Alice that every extenuating circumstance should be clearly placed before the jury. Indeed, he laboured so strenuously to impress this point upon the counsel for the prisoners that the learned brother, entertaining a proper degree of professional scepticism in regard to the purity of human motives, immediately settled, to his own satisfaction, that Jack Hargrave must be a natural son of the late Admiral Coverdale, commended, with his dying breath, to his nephew's especial care and protection. Alice received the news of the verdict with great "sang froid," merely remarking that she had felt certain all along that it would be so; but when she had gained the privacy of her own chamber, she indulged in a hearty flood of tears, occasioned as much by what she was pleased to consider her husband's inhumanity, as by her compassion for the poor woman and her transcendental baby.

As these latter individuals exercise no further influence over the destinies of our principle "dramatis personæ," we may as well, ere we finally take leave of them, add the information that Alice (having supported them much better than Jack Hargrave had done in his best days), at the expiration of two years, sent them out at her own expense to join that worthy, who, reformed by sea-sickness and the amenities of convict discipline, had obtained a ticket of leave, by reason of which privilege he was enacting the part of a penitent bullock-driver, to the admiration of all right-minded settlers in Australia.

The month of May had begun to temper with a dash of sunshine the fine old English east winds of April, which annually sow their share of the seeds of consumption in the glorious British constitution—Harry Coverdale had ceased to oppress the brute creation, leaving foxes and pheasants to increase and multiply by antagonistic progression—and all London was flocking to the Royal Academy Exhibition, to see a great many very original portraits of gentlemen, who scarcely looked the character after all—when one fine morning Alice received a letter from the modern Babylon, in Mrs. Crane's handwriting. Having eagerly perused it, she exclaimed—

"Kate has written a most kind and pressing invitation to us to come and stay with them; Mr. Crane wishes it as much as she does."

"Or as much as she orders him to do rather," muttered Coverdale, "sotto voce."

"Of course you can have no objection to my accepting it," continued Alice; "for myself, at all events?"

"Am not I invited?" inquired Harry, gravely.

"Yes, certainly; only I did not know whether you could tear yourself away from your dearly beloved dogs and guns."

"And you were willing to have gone without me?"

"I did not wish to be any tie upon you," was Alice's reply, though she coloured slightly, and turned away her head as she spoke. "You remember our compact; I am a great advocate for free will."

"Between husband and wife such a question ought never to arise," rejoined Harry, seriously but kindly; "there should be complete unanimity. I hoped you had forgotten all that folly."

"I never forget unkindness," was the cold reply; "but I see you are going to favour me with a specimen of your 'quiet manner,' and as I am not in the humour for a scene or a lecture, you really must excuse my leaving you"; and as she spoke she rose to quit the apartment.

For a moment Harry's eyes flashed, then a look of pain passed across his features, and, taking his wife's hand, he led her back to the sofa on which she had been seated, saying gently, but reproachfully—

"Why will you misunderstand me thus? You wish to accept your cousin's invitation?"

Alice bowed her head in token of assent.

"Then write and tell her we shall be happy to do so; I shall be ready and willing to accompany you at whatever time you and she like to arrange together."

"Oh, that is very nice and kind of you!" returned Alice, delighted at getting her way so easily; "I thought you were going to be cross and disagreeable, as—as you sometimes are."

"As usual, you were going to say," rejoined Harry; "speak your thoughts honestly, whatever injustice they may do me. But if, in future, instead of condemning me unheard, you were to admit the possibility—nothing more—of my being willing occasionally to sacrifice my wishes to yours, it might save us both considerable pain and misconception; recollect this, and reflect upon it quietly and calmly." So saying, he placed his wife's writing-table before her, found her a footstool, and left the room.

As the sound of his retreating footsteps died away in the distance, Alice felt decidedly penitent, and wished she could unsay all the sharp things she had uttered at the beginning of the conversation; but this was a frame of mind too uncomfortable to last long, and so she consoled herself by the reflection that if, on this particular occasion, she had done her

husband an injustice, it was his conduct at other times which had led her to do so. It was unfair to blame herself for the natural effect his selfishness and unkindness had produced upon her mind; she was sure there had been a period, before she was so rudely awakened from her "love's young dream," when she had given him credit for possessing every noble, heroic, and tender quality under the sun: it was not her fault that she could think so no longer—people must take the consequences of their own misdeeds. And so, consoling herself with these and many like arguments, and magnifying the mote in her husband's eye, and ignoring the beam in her own, Alice talked herself into her former frame of mind, and sat down to write her acceptance of Kate's invitation, convinced that if her husband had said "Yes" on this occasion, he would say "No" on every other.

CHAPTER XXX.

INTRODUCES A LORDLY GALLANT.

THAT day week saw Alice, Harry, and Celeste (a little pert "soubrette," whom Alice had brought back from Paris with her), on their way to the railway-station at H——; a groom and a couple of saddle-horses (without which Harry could not support the burden of a London life) having preceded them by a slower train. As Harry had a great horror of being too late, and had flurried and bustled Alice to such a degree that, if she had not been the most good-natured little woman in the world (except in matters connected with feelings), she would assuredly have lost her temper, of course they were at least a quarter of an hour too soon, and were forced to promenade up and down beneath a Brobdignagian glass roof, open at each end, and enjoy the large supply of draughts afforded by this ingenious compromise between indoors and out of doors. Having paced up and down the platform for some ten minutes or so—lost Celeste and the trunks, and found them again—and narrowly escaped violent death from wild luggage-barrows, urged by reckless and excited porters, neatly bound in green corduroy, and numbered like the lots in a sale-room,—the train by which they were to fly to London crawled up ignominiously at the tail of a strong-minded cart-horse, which a heroic, but unclean, supernumerary, conducted in the way he should go. Just as Alice had taken her seat, and was imploring Harry to join her before a dreadful green dragon of a locomotive engine (which had been getting up its steam, and taking in its fuel, and wetting its whistle, and otherwise performing its awful toilet in a neighbouring cavern, whence it issued, looking as vicious, and dangerous, and eager to burst in a tunnel, as a furious steam-devil could

do) should get at him and do him a mischief, a tall, elegant-looking young man, who was seeking for an unoccupied place, suddenly exclaimed—

"I beg pardon, but surely I have the pleasure of seeing Harry—a—that is—Mr. Coverdale?"

"A true bill, sir," replied Harry; "but just at present you've all the pleasure to yourself, for I must honestly confess that I do not recollect you; and yet—no—yes—why, it can't be little Alfred Courtland?"

"As for the 'little,' I must leave you to judge for yourself; the copy-book tells us that 'ill weeds grow apace,' and I'm afraid I'm a shocking example; but Alfred Courtland I most certainly am, and delighted to meet an old acquaintance—if an urchin in the under-school dare pretend to have been on such a footing with one of the sixth form."

"Little Alfred Courtland, six feet high, and cultivating whiskers! Wonders will never cease," resumed Harry, meditatively: "but are you going by this train? Jump in here, man, and I'll introduce you to my wife. Alice, this is Alfred—I beg his pardon, but I can't remember he's not a little boy still—Lord Alfred Courtland. You remember Arthur Hazlehurst, my 'fidus Achates,' don't you, Courtland? my wife is his sister. Tickets! well here they are. What a suspicious generation these railway officials are! Anybody would suppose they had been accustomed to deal with thieves and pickpockets all their lives, instead of honest Englishmen. But I hate the railroads, root and branch, that's a fact; they've ruined the breed of horses in this country."

While Harry ran on in this style, Alice had time to observe her new acquaintance more attentively. He appeared very young, scarcely above nineteen or twenty. His figure, though tall and graceful, was slight and boyish; his head was small and well set on, and his pale, delicate features were shaded by a profusion of fair, curling hair; while his bearing and appearance were singularly refined and aristocratic; or, as Harry afterwards observed, "He looked thorough bred, every inch of him." His expression was good and amiable; but a want of firmness and resolution about the lines of his mouth belied the promise of intellect afforded by his high, smooth brow, and bright, speaking eyes.

"And what are you doing with yourself?" inquired Coverdale, after sundry mutual acquaintances had been talked over, and the reminiscences usual between old schoolfellows run through; "are you at either of the universities?"

"Yes, I'm a Cantab," was the reply; "but scarcely more than nominally so, for during my first term I got a tumble into the Cam, boating—dined at Ely in my wet clothes, and was rewarded for my carelessness by an aguish low fever, which I am only now recovering from; so I am ordered to be perfectly idle and amuse myself—a prescription which I am

afraid agrees but too well with my tastes and habits."

"And finding country ingredients too mild, you are going to town to try and get a stronger dose there, I suppose?" inquired Harry.

"You must be a wizard," was the reply. "The fact is, my people have wintered abroad, and Chiselborough became so dull the moment the hunting was over, that I found 'ennui' was bringing my ague back again; so holding solemn conclave with the apothecary and my valet, we yesterday decided, 'nem. con.,' upon a couple of months' sojourn in the modern Babylon."

To this piece of intelligence Harry vouchsafed no further answer than a shrug of the shoulders, by which significant gesture he intended to telegraph to his wife his opinion as to the wisdom of trusting the young gentleman to his own sapient guidance amidst the shoals and quicksands of a London season. At this period the dragon, which had been drawing the train very quietly and peacefully, suddenly gave a prolonged scream (courtesy termed a whistle), panted violently, hissed a good deal, and having by these manœuvres "blown off" its superfluous steam, it kindly postponed bursting for a short time, and condescended obligingly to stop at the Tearem and Smashingly Junction, without demanding any immediate sacrifice of human life. Coverdale and Lord Alfred instantly jumped out (although perfectly aware that they should be obliged to jump in again at the expiration of three minutes and a quarter), and, after the fashion of impatient male humanity, which, as Harry somewhat paradoxically observed, "Cannot stand sitting," began stamping up and down the platform as though a legion of black-beetles, or some such entomological freebooters, had crept up their trousers' legs, and they were striving to dislodge them. Some operation, however, which was going on under one of those queer kind of sheds peculiar to railway-stations, which gave one an idea of a child's toy magnified, attracted their attention, and caused them to discontinue their amusement. After gazing earnestly for a few seconds, Harry exclaimed—

"They'll never do it so, never! There, do you see, he's standing right before him, dragging at his head, and yet expects the poor animal to go on; the man must be an idiot! Yes, of course, hit the poor thing for your own fault, and frighten him, so that you'll be able to do nothing with him. Ah! thought so; they'll have an accident directly, the fools! as if there wasn't a quiet manner of doing these things. Hold my great coat, Alfred; I shall be back in two seconds." And suiting the action to the word, he tossed his coat to his companion and ran off.

"Where has he gone to?" inquired Alice, disconsolately, from the window of the railway-carriage.

"To assist a stupid groom to put a very fine horse into one

of the horse-boxes," was the reply. "He said he should be back in a minute."

"Now, gentlemen, take your places; the train's going to start—take your places," vociferated an individual, who looked like a very oddly-dressed soldier, but who was the railway-guard.

"Oh! where can he be? We shall start without him!" exclaimed Alice, in dismay.

"I'll go and look for him," rejoined Lord Alfred, good-naturedly.

"If you would be so very kind," returned Alice, her lovely eyes sparkling with gratitude.

"Better not, sir; only lose your own place, without finding the gent—train's agoin' to start. I must shut the door," grumbled a cynical porter.

"Pray keep it open till the last moment!" exclaimed Alice, drawing out her purse, while Lord Alfred, disregarding the porter's advice, dashed off on his mission.

"Am I allowed to give you anything?" continued Alice, timidly, as a vague suspicion of the illegality of bribing railway porters flashed across her.

The man looked up and down the platform, and perceiving no informer near, did not commit himself by words, but partially closing the door, so as to conceal the action, held out his hand, with the palm turned suggestively upwards. As his fingers closed over the half-crown which Alice, with a strong idea that she was committing an indictable offence, placed within his grasp, an angry and imperative voice called out, "Now then, shut that door there!" and in spite of Alice's remonstrances, the porter was about to obey, when, breathless with running, Lord Alfred sprang into the carriage, the door was slammed to, a bell rang furiously, the dragon gave a short, pert scream of delight at getting its head, and the train started. Unheeding, in fact scarcely hearing Lord Alfred's mild remonstrance that he believed it was reckoned dangerous to put one's head out of the window of a railway carriage, Alice immediately committed that folly, and was rewarded for her imprudence by seeing, just as the train was getting to its full speed, Harry rush distractedly on to the platform, shake his fist at the retreating carriages, and then, watch in hand, stride up to the station-master, and evidently afford him a specimen of his quiet manner. With a feeling half way between an inclination to laugh and a disposition to cry, Alice resumed her seat, and, under pretence of arranging her veil, took a glance round the carriage. Her only companion, besides Lord Alfred Courtland, was a species of prize old gentleman, who, having spent his life hitherto in growing as fat as the nature of the case admitted, was evidently resolved to guard against the possibility of his shadow becoming less, by devoting the remainder of his existence to the duties of eating,

drinking, and sleeping, which latter accomplishment he was then displaying to the admiration of all lovers of that science of which honest Sancho Panza so fervently blessed the inventor. Having mentally summed him up in the definition "wretched old thing," Alice next took a survey of their new friend, and decided that he had such a good, innocent, child-like expression of countenance, that young and handsome as he was, she would not have minded even if the "wretched old thing" had not been present to play "chaperone" in dumb show.

"How very provoking for Mr. Coverdale to lose the train, and all through his good-nature, too," began Lord Alfred; "I saw the affair as well as he did, but it would never have occurred to me to interfere."

"Nor to any one else except Mr. Coverdale," returned Alice, scornfully; "his devotion to horses and dogs is quite exemplary."

"As a pattern or as a warning?" inquired Lord Alfred, favouring her with a look of intelligence for which she was scarcely prepared.

"You are laughing at me," she said; "but I will honestly confess that it is rather trying to see Mr. Coverdale place himself and me in a ridiculous, if not actually an embarrassing situation, merely for the sake of a horse."

"It was a very fine horse," observed Lord Alfred, meditatively.

"And therefore the worthier animal of the two—thank you for the compliment, my lord," was the slightly piqued reply, which of course produced a carefully veiled but teasing rejoinder; and with such-like light badinage did they beguile the time, until having rushed for some distance over acres of turnips, stubble, grass-land, and other such agricultural territory, changing as by some pantomimic agency to the roofs of houses, with elegant "parterres" of chimney-pots, they were surprised to find they had reached the London terminus.

The cessation of movement having roused the prize elder from his meritorious slumbers, Alice waited until, with many snorts and grunts, he had aroused his legs (which were evidently each enjoying a separate and independent nap of its own), and toddled off upon them, ere she inquired in rather a forlorn tone, "And now I wonder what is to become of me? Would you kindly ascertain when the next train will be in?"

Lord Alfred made the inquiry, and obtained the cheering intelligence that the next train which stopped at the Tearem and Smashingly Junction would arrive in exactly two hours fifteen minutes and a quarter, at which time, as nearly as Alice could calculate, the Crane butler would be removing the fish and soup.

"It is impossible that you can wait here all that time, my

dear Mrs. Coverdale!" exclaimed Lord Alfred. "What will you like me to do for you? You must tell me exactly what you wish."

"You are very kind," returned Alice, feeling much inclined to get into a fuss at the oddness of the situation which thus forced her to rely on a handsome young man with whom she had been acquainted some two hours. Then submitting to her fate with a feeling of desperation, she continued, "First give me your arm, and conduct me to the ladies' waiting-room; and then if you would be so kind as to look for Celeste, my maid, and—really I am ashamed to trouble you, my lord, but there are some trunks she ought to find, and she can't speak a dozen words of English intelligibly; and—how you're to recognise her I can't tell; really how Mr. Coverdale could——"

But before she could finish her accusatory sentence, Lord Alfred, anxious to distinguish himself in his new capacity of squire of dames, had disappeared. In less time than Alice had deemed possible, he returned with Celeste, and a bundle of shawls and wrappers on one arm, and carrying a carpet-bag with the other.

"My mission has been accomplished with the most signal success, I flatter myself: and now I hope your difficulties are ended, my dear Mrs. Coverdale; Celeste and I have found all the trunks. Fortunately, my brougham is here, and, I need scarcely add, entirely at your service." Seeing she hesitated, he continued, "Don't be alarmed about the properties. I have been too well drilled in such matters by my sisters to intrude where I am not wanted."

"Really your lordship is most kind," exclaimed Alice, all her scruples vanishing before his good nature and consideration. And there being nothing for it but to take his arm (relinquished somewhat hastily by Celeste when she discovered that it was a "Milor Anglais" with whom she had made so free) and allow him to put her into the well-appointed brougham, Alice did so with an interesting succession of smiles and blushes which made her look most dangerously pretty. Thereupon the two hundred guinea horse, which was so thoroughly stuffed with oats that it might almost as well have been a corn-bin, and which, being an animal of the highest breeding, had evinced such an amount of disgust and terror at the hissing, snorting, whistling, and other low habits of the steam dragon, that nothing but the strongest sense of propriety and a very severe curb-bit could have kept it from running away, stood on its hind legs like a Christian, vindicated its transcendentalism by salaaming like a Turk ere it resumed its quadrupedal attitude, and finally set off, at about the rate of fifteen miles an hour, with his head and tail as erect as if some invisible giant were attempting to lift

CHAPTER XXXI.

SPIDERS AND FLIES.

"My dear Kate, I think your cousin, Mrs. Coverdale, has just driven up; and yet I don't know. Is it likely, or, as I may say, probable, that she should arrive in a brougham?"

"With high-stepping horse, and a coronet on the panel?—scarcely, I should imagine."

The speakers were Mr. Crane, who had grown rather less like a scaffold-pole since we last were favoured with his society, and Horace D'Almayne, who appeared quite himself and quite at home. Attracted by their remarks, Kate joined her husband at the window.

"It can't be them," she said, "there is no luggage"; but, as if to contradict her remark, at the moment she ceased to speak a cab dashed into Park Lane with a fair amount of imperials, cap-cases, portmanteaus, carpet-bags, and other female travelling "miscellania," and drew up behind the brougham. As it stopped, a tall, handsome young man sprang out, and opening the door of the brougham, offered his arm to Alice, and conducted her up the steps most carefully.

"Why, that surely cannot be Mr. Coverdale; or, at least, if I may be permitted to say so, he has become singularly thin and—and youthful-looking, if it is," bleated Mr. Crane.

"No, that is not Harry Coverdale," returned Kate, wonderingly, "nor do I see anything of him either!"

"If Mrs. Coverdale has lost her husband, really she has found a most attractive substitute—a—it almost seems one of the cases in which such a loss might be considered a gain," lisped D'Almayne, in so low a tone that Mr. Crane, who was nearly as slow of hearing as he was of understanding, did not catch the remark. "Really quite a touching farewell," he continued, as Alice, ere she entered the house, shook hands most cordially with her young cavalier; "and a gallant, gay Lothario jumps into the brougham (which, coronet, high-stepping horse, and all, evidently call him master) and is lost to our admiring gaze."

At this juncture a fat and rosy butler (who looked as if he had been brought up by hand upon port wine, and had remained faithful to it ever since) flung open the door, and announced Mrs. Coverdale.

Throwing off, for once in her life, all coldness and reserve, Kate embraced her cousin warmly, and, holding her by both hands, led her to th[illegible]

"My dearest child," she exclaimed, "how delightful it is to see you once again!"

"But if I may be permitted," began Mr. Crane, "if I may be allowed to inquire, what have you done with—or perhaps I should rather say—what has become of our good friend, Mr. Coverdale?"

"And how came you in a brougham with a coronet upon it? and who was that handsome and distinguished-looking young exquisite whom you had inveigled into playing courier—eh, Mistress Alice?" inquired Kate, archly. "I expected to find you a pattern wife, and to have your example held up for my imitation twenty times a day; but I have alarmed myself very unnecessarily, it seems."

"Don't tease, dear," was the reply; "it was all the fault of that silly husband of mine: he got out at one of the stations, and, seduced by the attractions of a restive horse, contrived to be out of the way when the train started, and so I was forced to do the best I could for myself."

"Which theory you reduced to practice by selecting the handsomest young man you could find as a 'cavalier servente,'" returned Kate, laughing. "But who is your friend? I hope he is coming to call upon you!"

"Oh, yes, he means to call—to-morrow I think he said. I'm glad you consider him handsome: it's always satisfactory to have one's taste approved by one's friends; and I honestly confess I admire him particularly."

Mr. Crane's countenance, during this speech of Alice's, was wonderful to behold; the intense surprise with which he listened to the beginning of it gradually changing to the deepest disgust as she continued, afforded such a clear index to his thoughts, that Horace D'Almayne turned away to hide an irrepressible smile, which Kate perceiving, observed with a slight shade of annoyance—

"And now, having mystified us thoroughly, be kind enough to tell us who the gentleman really is, and how he came to offer you his brougham and his services."

Thus appealed to, Alice was obliged to confess that, in point of fact, there was nothing wrong or romantic in the adventure from beginning to end—that Lord Alfred Courtland was an old schoolfellow of her husband's who had travelled in the same carriage with them, and who had naturally done all he could to save her from being inconvenienced by the effects of Harry's stupidity, on which she dwelt rather more at length than Kate approved of—that young lady having a very keen perception of right and wrong, although she by no means always acted up to the light thus afforded her.

Some few hours later Harry arrived, very anxious about his wife, and decidedly crestfallen and penitent, and bore all the quizzing which fell to his share with most exemplary patience,

although any attempt to excite his jealousy in regard to Lord Alfred Courtland proved a dead failure, his reply being that "He was always a very good little boy, and that he did not see much difference in him except in height."

When the Coverdales went up to dress for dinner the following dialogue ensued:—

"How well your cousin Kate is looking," observed Harry; "the pomps and vanities of this wicked world appear to agree with her; now she has grown a little stouter, she really is a splendid woman."

"Yes, she appears in better health," returned Alice, slowly, "but——"

"But what?" inquired Harry. "A woman's 'but' is like the postscript to her letter; it unsays all she has said before. Come, out with this 'arrière pensée,' as that puppy D'Almayne would call it. By-the-way, he seems regularly domesticated here. I wonder old Crane likes it; I should not, in his position, I know."

"I wonder Kate likes it," returned Alice; "however, my 'but' has nothing to do with the fascinating Horace. I was going to say that although Kate looked well, yet she had a listless, weary expression of countenance, which gave me the idea that, with all her riches and splendour, she was far from happy."

"The same being a result rather to be expected than otherwise, when a lovely and talented young female sees fit to espouse an elderly and feeble-minded old scarecrow," rejoined Harry, making frantic dives into his portmanteau, and fishing up patent bootjacks, miraculous razor-strops—everything but the dress neck-tie he was in search of.

"I don't believe they see anything of Arthur," continued Alice, reflectively; "I asked Kate, and she seemed to know nothing about him—such friends as they used to be at one time—it's very odd!"

"I don't see the oddness, myself," returned Harry, speaking through his dressing-room door, which stood ajar; "there is a great difference between feeling spooney about a pretty cousin, when you're living in the house with her, and have nothing better to do, and dangling after her to the neglect of your business, when she lives at one end of London and you at the other—when, moreover, she's married to a dreadful old muff, antiquated enough to be her father, and slow enough to be the father of every fool in the kingdom. I think it's easily accounted for by prose means, without adopting the poetical hypothesis of a romantic attachment—two fond hearts blighted, and all that 'Keepsake' style of business; besides, Arthur's a great deal too good a lawyer to fall in love; it's only idle fellows like myself who commit such follies."

"You must go and call on Arthur to-morrow, and you will then perceive by his manner whether he is averse to coming

here; but mind you are very careful not to let him see that you suspect anything; I am quite sure he would be most sensitive on such a point," observed Alice, in a tone in which you would caution a schoolboy against playing with gunpowder.

"Keep your advice for your own benefit, most sententious Alice, seeing that you are the suspecting party, and that such an idea would never have occurred to my unassisted reason," was Harry's rejoinder; and the dinner-bell at that moment ringing, the conversation ceased.

The next day, however, Arthur put an end to the controversy by making his appearance in Park Lane soon after luncheon. Although no one alluded to the circumstance, it was the first time he had set foot in Mr. Crane's house, or indeed seen Kate since her marriage. He looked pale and overworked, and there was a restless excitement in his manner, which Alice's quick eye at once discovered. Beyond this, however, there was nothing which tended in the slightest degree to confirm her in her suspicions. He apologised quietly and naturally to Kate for not having called oftener, adducing business as a good and sufficient reason for his remissness; then, turning to Alice, he informed her that she could not have chosen a more unfortunate time for her visit to London, at least, as far as he was concerned, as he was obliged to start the next morning for Naples, being sent out by the Foreign Office on an affair of some importance, which, if he could bring the matter to a successful issue, might tend to his ultimate advancement. Kate, on the contrary, appeared nervous and ill at ease, and probably feeling that for once she could not rely on her self-command, took an early opportunity of quitting the room, leaving the brother and sister "tête-à-tête."

"Alice, you are changed," exclaimed Arthur, as the door closed on her whom he had once so deeply loved, towards whom he now felt as we can only feel towards those whom we have admitted into the inmost recesses of the heart, and who have availed themselves of the privilege to profane and make desolate the sanctuary; "you were a girl, you have become a woman; has matrimony produced the alteration?"

"Yes, I suppose so," was the rejoinder. "You know one can't remain a child always; the realities of life are sure to find one out sooner or later, and I was a mere baby in the ways of the world when I married."

There was a spice of regret in the tone of this remark, which did not escape Arthur's quick ear and keen intelligence, and he hastened to reply—

"You mean more than you say; why, surely, Alice, with such a husband you must be perfectly happy; it is impossible that it can be otherwise."

As he spoke he fixed his dark eyes questioningly upon her. Unable fairly to meet his gaze, Alice turned away her head, as she replied, with an effort at careless gaiety—

"Don't alarm yourself, most romantic of barristers; there is no Bluebeard's closet at Coverdale, nor does Harry turn into a skeleton, or anything else but his bed, at twelve o'clock at night. He is just the thoroughly good fellow (that is the term you men delight in) he always was, and devoted to——"

"His wife!" interrupted Arthur.

"Well, I was going to say dogs, guns, and horses," returned Alice; "and I'm afraid I must adhere to my text, unless you prefer fiction to fact."

She spoke jestingly; but the lines which care, and thought and intellectual exertion had already traced on Arthur's brow, deepened, as, after a pause, he murmured, half in reply to Alice, half in soliloquy—

"I am disappointed, deeply disappointed; it ought to be so different! I—I wish I were not going abroad to-morrow; and yet I could not be a frequent visitor in this house!"

The last words were inaudible, though, by one of those intuitions which often compensate for the inefficiency of our physical powers, Alice divined his train of reasoning, and with subtle generalshp diverted the attack, by carrying the war into the enemy's country, as she replied—

"Do not puzzle your brains about me and Harry: we jog on very serenely together, now we have found out each other's peculiarities."

"But you never had any peculiarities, either of you," interrupted Arthur, positively; "except that Harry was the finest, noblest, manliest fellow going, and you were a good, simple-hearted, sweet-tempered little girl. What do you mean by peculiarities?"

"Never mind us," continued Alice, not heeding his interruption; "I want to know something about you. You say I have changed from a child into a woman, but you have turned from a young man into a middle-aged one during these last six months; you are either ill or unhappy, or working yourself to death—all three, perhaps."

"Oh, you are fanciful, and not used to the pale faces of us Londoners," returned Arthur.

"You cannot put me off in that manner," continued Alice, pertinaciously; "people do not look ill and careworn without some cause for doing so. How is it, pray, that you never come here? so fond as you used to be of Kate, too! I expected to find you regularly installed as 'l'enfant de famille.' Do you know I began to have my suspicions——"

"Hush!" interrupted Arthur, in a low, stern voice; "whatever you may suspect, never refer to this subject again; there are some sorrows in life for which there is no remedy; these

must be endured and struggled with in silence, for so only can they be borne. If you would not give me pain, forget that this idea ever occurred to you."

As he spoke his pale face flushed, and his lips quivered with the emotion he strove, but was unable entirely, to conceal.

"Forgive me, dear Arthur!" exclaimed Alice, whilst tears of ready sympathy glistened in her eyes; "I spoke carelessly—foolishly; indeed, indeed, I did not mean to give you pain! But you are not angry with me?"

As she spoke she laid her hand caressingly on his shoulder, and glanced up in his face with a beseeching look, which would have melted the most flinty-hearted stoic. Arthur drew her to him, and kissed her smooth brow, in token of forgiveness, ere he replied:

"Before we quit this subject, never to resume it, let me say this much to you: in this matter I have nothing to reproach myself with; as far as I have been able to see what was right, I have acted up to it. This is my only comfort. That I have suffered much, I will not attempt to deny; but I am thankful to say the blow, though severe, has not paralysed me. The sunshine of my life may be destroyed for years, perhaps for ever, but my vigour and energy are left me, and I will yet make myself a name, and win myself a position that the mere possession of wealth can never bestow. Now, forget that this conversation ever took plaee."

As he spoke the door flew open, and Harry and Lord Alfred Courtland, having encountered each other at the club, made their appearance arm-in-arm, like a pair of well-grown Siamese twins, and Alice was despatched all in a hurry to put on her "things," to be taken to a private view of the annual exhibition of the Society of Amalgamated Amateurs in Water-colours, whom Harry irreverently paraphrased as the "Amalgamated Muffs"; a definition the truth of which a closer inspection of the efforts of those mild and amiable caricaturists did not tend to disprove. As they strolled up and down the rooms, waiting for Kate and Mr. Crane, who had promised to join them, Lord Alfred—on whose arm Alice was leaning, and who had been rattling on with great volubility, and in the highest possible spirits—suddenly observed:

"I do find myself such a complete country cousin in London, that really it's quite ridiculous! I meet all sorts of celebrities, and don't know one of them by sight. Now, for instance, do you see that pair of young exquisites lounging elegantly along, like a couple of self-enamoured sleep walkers, and dressed like beatific visions of dandies, rather than mere sublunary fops? I'm sure I've met the youngest of them somewhere—he with the 'petites moustaches noires,' which are so irresistible that I should certainly cultivate a pair myself,

if I did not feel morally certain that my prejudiced progenitor would cut them, and me, off with the same shilling."

"In fact, cut off his heir because you would not cut off yours," punned Coverdale. "But in regard to your beatific swells, I fancy Alice can enlighten you as to the patronymic of one of them, if she chooses; he is a very particular friend, to say nothing more, of hers. She only married me because she failed in captivating him."

Alice replied to Lord Alfred's expressive look, which asked as plainly as words could have done, "Is this all jest, or is there a small foundation of fact for it to rest upon?"—"If that had been my only reason for accepting my romancing husband, I should have remained Miss Hazlehurst still; however, I plead guilty to knowing Mr. D'Almayne, as he happens to be an intimate friend of Mr. Crane, the gentleman who married my cousin Kate, and in whose house we are now staying."

While they thus chatted, the following conversation was being carried on in French between the subject of their remarks and his companion, a showily-dressed man, some half-dozen years older than Horace D'Almayne, with handsome features, but a worn, dissipated look, which involuntarily prejudiced one against him. He spoke with a thoroughly foreign accent, and the animated gestures with which he sought to elucidate his meaning also tended to prove he was not a native of this country.

"The plan has been worked out," he continued, referring to some subject with which D'Almayne appeared acquainted, "and with his name as director, and £1,000 ready money to pay clerks, and establish the concern on a respectable foundation, the affair will go charmingly; John Bull shall buy our shares and hand us his money, and in six months' time, with that and"—here he sank his voice—"the club in J—— Street, we may set fortune at defiance."

"Mind you are careful about keeping our connection with the club secret," returned D'Almayne, almost in a whisper: "we are not in Paris, remember; and the slightest suspicion that we played would be fatal to your hopes of inducing men of capital to join the other affair.'

"Do not fear, 'mon cher'; I know your game," was the reply. As he spoke, his eye fell upon the Coverdale party, and hastily indicating Lord Alfred Courtland to his companion, he continued, "Do you see that stripling? he was pointed out to me last night as a pigeon worth plucking, and ea ily handled; he is a young 'milor,' very soft, and what you call 'green.' You must get introduced, and bring him to 'the club.'"

"The boy is not of age yet," returned D'Almayne, "and English fathers never pay gambling debts; so you must not hope for large gains from him."

"He can sign bills and post-obits, I presume," rejoined his companion, with a sneering laugh; "but the people he is with are regarding you as if they were of your acquaintance—is it so?"

"Decidedly," was the reply. "I will effect the introduction you desire at once, but as soon as it is over you must find an opportunity of withdrawing; I will join the party, feel my way cautiously, and you shall see Milor Courtland's childish face in J—— Street before a fortnight has passed. 'Allons, mon cher.'"

Having offered two fingers to Coverdale, and three to his wife, D'Almayne glanced towards Lord Alfred with a supercilious look, which seemed to express, "I perceive you, but on account of your extreme youth and inexperience, am wholly indifferent to the fact of your existence"; at least so his lordship interpreted it, and was immediately seized with an eager desire to know the man who could thus afford to look down on him.

"Introduce me to your friend, will you, Coverdale?" he said; "I must get him to give me a few lessons in dress and deportment; he really is a second Brummell."

"He really is a conceited, empty-headed puppy," returned Coverdale, "sotto voce," "and it's little good you'll learn of a jackanapes like that; but I suppose if I didn't introduce you, somebody else would—so come along." Then placing his hand on his shoulder, and urging him forward, he continued: "D'Almayne, here's my friend, Lord Alfred Courtland, wishes to be introduced to you; he thinks it his duty to know every well-dressed man in London, and you're so 'facile princeps' in that line—so transcendently got up— that he's dying to ask your tailor's address, and the length of tick he allows."

"You're so obliging as to laugh at me, Mr. Coverdale, because I cannot reconcile myself to your English Schneiders, and still patronise Blin et Fils, in that paradise of tailors Paris; but—ar—really you are uncivilised in this particular and require reform in your coats more than in your constitution, which, glorious as you consider it, you are always altering. Does not Lord Alfred Courtland agree with me?" And as he made this appeal, Horace D'Almayne simpered, to show his white teeth, stroked his moustache, and awaited a reply.

Ere Lord Alfred had found words to imply his admiration of Horace's taste, without paying him an actual broad and unmistakable compliment, Harry put his ideas to flight, by exclaiming:

"Listen to a word of common sense, Alfred, my boy. Men make coats—if you can properly call a tailor a man—but coats can never make men. You may dress an ass up in the grandest lion-skin going, but you can make nothing of him

but an ass, nevertheless. In fact, I never believe a man's a man till I've seen him with his coat off; then, if he can use his fists as a man should, I believe in him."

"Aha! I comprehend; 'ce monsieur' refers to your English science of the box. Very clever science is the box; I am acquiring him of a professeur, who keeps a restaurant what you call a public-house, in Smissfiel."

As D'Almayne's companion thus spoke, Horace seized the opportunity of introducing him, which he did as follows:—

"Allow me to make you acquainted with my friend, Monsieur Adolphe Guillemard, a gentleman connected with the financial interest in Paris, and with that of Europe generally." Then, in a stage whisper, he added, "He was educated in Rothschild's house."

So Harry bowed, and Lord Alfred bowed, and Alice inclined her head in rather a stately manner, because she did not approve of Monsieur Guillemard's roving eyes; and Monsieur Guillemard bowed and scraped, and laid his hand on his waistcoat, where his heart ought to have been, and abased his unappreciated optics, and appeared profoundly touched, and anxious to weep on the bosom of society at large! and Mr. Crane, who at that moment came up in his wife's custody, not making allowance for foreign manners, thought he was in a fit. Then Monsieur Guillemard drew out his watch, and found he had an engagement at the Bourse, as he was pleased to call the Stock Exchange; and so took leave of his new acquaintance, squeezed both the yellow kid hands of his 'cher' Horace, and with short, jaunty footsteps, as of a male ballet-dancer, quitted the spacious gallery, sacred to the noble efforts of the Amalgamated Amateurs. And when he had departed, of course his friends began to talk him over. D'Almayne drew Mr. Crane aside, and related to him wonderful anecdotes of his (Guillemard's) skill in foreseeing political events and their consequences, and the splendid hits he had thus made in stock-jobbing for himself, and others who had wisely availed themselves of his talent, and what Baron Rothschild had said and thought of him; until Mr. Crane began to imagine him an incarnation of Mammon, and yearned to fall down and adore him on the spot. For, be it observed parenthetically, that Mr. Crane, albeit nominally a member of the Established Church, was verily and indeed a worshipper of a certain golden calf, to whose likeness he had for years striven earnestly, and not unsuccessfully, to assimilate himself. And Harry remarked confidentially to Alice, Kate, and Lord Alfred, that he was prepared to bet a pony that Guillemard was neither more nor less than a "leg," and that whoever had many dealings with him would be safe to put his or her foot in it—which sentence sounded like nonsense, but was only slang. And Lord Alfred laughed, and replied that Harry said so because he was jealous of the superior cut of

Monsieur Guillemard's garments. Alice agreed perfectly with her husband, which, Kate remarked, was the most original feature of the whole affair—an observation intended for a mild and playful jest, but at which Alice blushed, and Harry suddenly became engrossed by a spirited sketch, in very water-colours, of Ophelia as she appeared when drowning, which, according to the talented representation of Miss Appela Brown, M.S.A.A., was remarkably jolly, and slightly inebriated—next to which hung a portrait of Miss Brown herself, seated at her easel, her pre-Raphaelite countenance beaming with mingled talent and astonishment on the picture growing beneath her gifted brush—a compound expression, at which, as the subject was some demi-god, or other mythical celebrity, in heroic muscular proportions strongly developed, and nothing else, we can scarcely feel surprise. Then the whole party devoted their serious attention to the performances of the amalgamated ones, and were rewarded by beholding many fearful and wonderful things. There were "young gentlemen taken from life," and transported by amalgamated magic into the regions of romance—an unlikeness of Snook's ruddy face being affixed to Hamlet's velvet body, or Mary Ann Jones's very "retroussé" profile heading Joan of Arc's steel bodice, and a select squadron of twelve French soldiers in green hunting-coats, and fancy hats and feathers, prepared to "mourir pour la patrie" to any extent which the said Mary Ann might require of them. Then there were landscapes with gamboge foregrounds, pasturing comical cows of shapes and colours unknown to zoology; and middle distances, gloomy with indigo trees, and cast-iron rivulets purling rigidly over wild rocks, suggested by bald places, showing the naked paper through a severe application of sepia and neutral tint. Ferocious battles were there also, designed by gentle girls, who had never witnessed so much as a street row, wherein gallant Henri Quatre-like parties with slim waists, feminine complexions, and white waving plumes, slaughtered strong men in funny dresses, and pranced over their dead bodies with the most heroic magnanimity and indifference. Then there was Mount Vesuvius during an eruption, which, to judge by the colouring, must have been the eruption attendant on scarlet fever; and Mont Blanc well iced, showing the "mer de glace" (the most difficult mare to mount on record, as "we know who" would say), and the last batch of proselytes from the Egyptian Hall sliding serenely down on their haunches, as wolves are reported to do, only the proselytes appear to have got the "advantage" of the wolves, by reason of their coat-tails. Scripture pieces, too, had some of these rash amateurs perpetrated, wherein "daughters of Babylon" appeared like the "corps de ballet," and kings, prophets, and patriarchs had evidently found their *prototypes* in Mario, Lablache, and Tamburini—a fact which afforded

Horace D'Almayne an opportunity of observing that it was charming to perceive in England the amiability of the Muses; as Apollo, the divinity of painting, instead of being driven to rugged nature for materials, or, worse still, compelled to fall back upon his own powers of invention, was obligingly supplied with them by Melpomene and Thalia; which same he and Mr. Crane thought a very smart saying—the former because he had made it himself, the latter because he did not understand it.

As they strolled on through the gallery, Kate took an opportunity, when Mr. Crane had relinquished her arm in order to adjust his great coat more to his satisfaction, to lag behind a few paces, glancing at D'Almayne as she did so, who immediately joined her.

"I have made the inquiry you wished," he said, in a low tone. "and I am truly glad to be able to assure you your sympathy has fallen on a deserving object; the poor woman is as she represented herself—a widow, with a family of young children depending upon her for support, and her poverty is extreme."

"Many thanks for taking so much trouble," returned Kate, in a tone of voice more cordial than she generally used towards her companion; "and now tell me how best I can assist them."

"I have a plan, but can scarcely give you the details here; when would it be agreeable to you to"—here his eye rested for a moment on Mr. Crane, contending with a button-hole—"to resume the subject, and give me your opinion on my scheme?"

Kate reflected a moment, during which she struggled with an instinctive feeling, and deeming it reasonless, conquered it, then replied:

"If you should be disengaged at eleven o'clock to-morrow, and would look in, I should be very much obliged to you."

While this conversation passed between Kate and D'Almayne, they had been themselves the subjects of observation to a party of strangers, who, coming probably from the country, had not yet attuned their voices to the requirements of London sight-seeing. Accordingly, the following remarks were distinctly audible to those for whom, of all others, they were not intended.

"What a lovely young woman!" observed Mater Familias; "I suppose the moustachioed gentleman is her 'futur.'"

"She don't look over loving at him, if he is," grumbled Pater F.

"Perhaps that is because her father (regarding Mr. Crane) is so close, and does not approve of the match," suggested Sarah Jane, the eldest daughter, to Louisa Anne, her sub——

"'Au contraire,'" remarked the intelligent London cousin, a clerk in the Ignorance and Delay Office, who was popu-

larly supposed to know everything and everybody; "the old boy is a rich Manchester cotton-spinner, and the young lady his wife; she married him for his tin, and half London is raving about her beauty."

"Poor thing!" muttered Mater Familias, who, for fifty-two, was unusually romantic—"poor thing, how I pity her!"

While listening to these agreeable remarks, D'Almayne had kept his eyes steadily fixed upon an amalgamated catalogue, desirous not to add to Kate's embarrassment; but at length, surprised at her silence and immobility, he ventured to glance towards her, and was alarmed to perceive that she had turned pale to her very lips, while she grasped the brass rail, which was placed to protect the pictures, convulsively, in order to save herself from falling. Anyone with less tact than D'Almayne would, in officious eagerness to assist her, have made a fuss, and caused her to become the subject of general attention; but Horace knew better how to turn the situation to account; handing her a chair, he said, quietly:

"The heat has made you feel faint; sit down for a moment, and perhaps the feeling may pass off."

As Kate hastened to follow his suggestion, she glanced towards him, to read in his features whether he also had overheard the conversation which had affected her. Whether his subtle intellect had led him to divine her intention, and he was enacting the character he considered most likely to tell with Kate, or whether he was merely obeying a natural impulse, we do not attempt to decide; suffice it to state that, when she looked at him, he was scowling after the amiable family whose conversation had caused the embarrassment, with so angry an expression of countenance, that a fear seized his companion lest he should be about to do something indignant and foolish, which might attract attention to her, and produce the scene she dreaded. A moment's reflection on his cautious, prudent character, would have proved to her the unreasonableness of such a fear; but she spoke without allowing herself time to think of this.

"What are you going to do?" she said, in a hurried whisper; "you can take no notice of—of——" and unable to find words to express her meaning, she paused in confusion. D'Almayne finished her sentence for her.

"Of those people's ignorance of the usages of society? No, I am not so inconsiderate; pardon me that I allowed you to see my just indignation, but for the moment I was completely carried away by feeling. Now," he continued, "if you can make the effort, let us join the others; no one has, as yet, observed your indisposition."

By way of reply, Kate rose and took his proffered arm.

"Get them away from this place," she said, hurriedly; "I shall suffocate if I remain here longer."

Horace bowed assent, and after exchanging a few indif-

ferent remarks with Alice and Lord Alfred Courtland, turned to Mr. Crane, observing:

"Will you forgive me for pleading the cause of one of your new carriage horses? The coachman tells me it has a slight cough; and it will scarcely tend to get rid of the ailment to wait too long in this piercing east wind."

"No, indeed," chirruped Mr. Crane; "and a horse that cost a hundred and thirty puns (he meant pounds!) must not be injured, even, if I may be allowed to say so, to please the ladies." And having spoken, straightway he fell into a fidget; so that, in less than two minutes, the noble productions of the Amalgamated Amateurs became as a dream of the past to our "dramatis personæ."

On reaching the street, with his wife hanging on his arm, Mr. Crane, ere he placed her in the carriage, thus addressed his domestic:

"Why, coachman, you never told me one of the horses had a cough."

As he spoke, Kate, perfectly understanding that the horse's cough was an invention of D'Almayne's, to enable them to get away from the gallery in accordance with her wishes, involuntarily glanced towards him. But where manœuvring and "finesse" were required, Horace was quite in his element. Catching the attention of the servant (whom he had himself recommended) by a fictitious attack of the malady under which the quadruped was supposed to labour, he, by an almost imperceptible contraction of the eyelid, telegraphed his wishes, ensuring their fulfilment by suggestively tapping the silver head of his cane, to express that in that metal should his compliance be rewarded; so Mr. Crane was glibly informed that his horse had suffered under a bronchial affection for about the space of four days, more or less; but that he, the coachman, having applied an invaluable specific, known only to himself, had not considered the matter sufficiently serious to trouble his master withal—for which reticence he bore meekly Mr. Crane's peevish rebuke, consoled by the expectation of five shillings the next morning from Horace D'Almayne.

The polished boots of that good young man trod upon roses rather than granite, as he ambled down Pall Mall; for, by means of those trifles which make the sum of human things, he had achieved a great and almost unhoped-for success—he had succeeded in establishing a private understanding with the young and beautiful wife of the millionaire!

CHAPTER XXXII.

A GLIMPSE AT THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER.

HAVING consoled himself by a canter in Rotten Row for the minor martyrdom he had undergone in his pursuit of the fine-arts, as misrepresented by the Amalgamated Amateurs, Harry made the best of his way to Park Lane. As he entered, a note was handed to him by the pompous butler, who took the opportunity to inform him, in a voice husky with the bee's-wing, from which his throat was never entirely free, that "dinner would be served in a quarter of an hour."—"Then I've no time to lose," was the reply, and without looking at the note, Harry dashed upstairs, three steps at a time. On reaching his room, however, and finding that Alice's toilet was by no means in an alarming state of forwardness, he recovered his composure, and opened the note; it ran as follows:—

"On my arrival here two hours ago, I was surprised and embarrassed by hearing that you and your bride are staying in the house. Had I been aware of this fact, I need scarcely tell you I would have delayed making my appearance until your visit should have ended. But, although I knew you had married a connection of Mrs. Crane, such a probability never occurred to me. However, it was not likely that, mixing in the same grade of society, we should pass through life without ever again encountering each other; and I am still weak enough to dread our first meeting, and to wish it over. I know your generous nature, and feel the utmost confidence that the past will remain a secret between us. It will, perhaps, be better—easier for us both, not to pretend to meet as strangers. An accidental travelling acquaintance will sufficiently account for our knowing the same places, people, etc. For your own sake, as well as mine, I implore you to be careful—I have never forgotten your advice, and have striven to act upon it—but mine is a rebellious nature. Destroy this note as soon as you have read it.

"ARABELLA."

With stern, compressed lips and knitted brow, Harry perused this mysterious epistle, and when he had finished it, crushed it in his hand and threw it on the fire with a gesture of impatience.

"Your letter does not seem to please you," observed Alice; "does it come from a dun, or is there a screw loose (don't I get on with my slang!) in the stable or the kennel?"

Absorbed in thought, Harry made her no reply, until, surprised and slightly annoyed at his silence, she resumed:—

"Has the mysterious epistle stricken you dumb, or have we become so thoroughly matrimonial that you don't consider it worth while to answer your wife when she asks you a question?"

"Eh! what? I beg your pardon, dear, the letter? no it was not from a dun. I never was preyed upon by those vampires, thank Heaven; 'out of debt, out of danger,' has always been my motto," replied Coverdale, rousing from his reverie.

"If it was not from a dun, whom was it from then?" continued Alice, pertinaciously.

"You are singularly curious all of a sudden," rejoined Harry; "all I shall tell you about the matter is that the note referred to a disagreeable affair which happened three or four years ago, and which I had hoped was entirely passed and forgotten."

"And having raised my curiosity thus, do you actually mean to say that you will not gratify it farther?" inquired Alice.

"As you can have no good reasons for asking, and as I have a very good and sufficient one for keeping my own counsel, I am afraid I must leave you in ignorance," was Harry's tantalizing reply.

Alice glanced at his face, and reading there that he was in earnest, and meant to act on what he had said, pouted like a spoilt child who had been refused some coveted plaything, while Coverdale betook himself to his dressing-room in a "who - the - deuce - would - have-thought-of-her-turning-up!" frame of mind, from which he had by no means recovered when, with his wife, still mildly vindictive, hanging on his arm, he descended to the drawing-room.

There they found Mr. and Mrs. Crane, and a lady whom Kate introduced as her old and particular friend, Miss Crofton. Having bowed to Alice, Miss Crofton turned towards Harry, observing to Kate, as she did so:

"I have never had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Coverdale before; but Mr. Coverdale and I are old acquaintances; when I was travelling in Italy with the Muirs, Mr. Coverdale was also indulging his tastes for the fine-arts, and we encountered each other at several points of the route."

As she spoke she held out her hand to Coverdale, who, after a moment's hesitation, and with a slight accession of colour, just touched and immediately relinquished it, saying, in a cold but polite tone of voice—

"Do you know whether the Muirs are in England now, Miss Crofton?"

As the person addressed remarked his look and tone, she pressed her lips together so forcibly that every trace of red vanished from them; but repressing all other sign of emotion, she replied to his question. Then taking a seat next Alice,

she began cultivating her good graces with a degree of tact and talent which evinced her powers of shining in society, and deserved more success than it appeared to meet with.

Arabella Crofton was a handsome woman of thirty, looking younger than her age. She was tall, and her figure was fully developed without being actually "embonpoint." Her hands and feet, although proportioned to her height, were beautifully modelled, and the former unusually white and soft. In feature she resembled Kate, so much so that she had more than once been mistaken for her former pupil's elder sister; but the expression of the two faces was totally dissimilar. In Kate Crane a fiery, passionate nature was kept under control by an equally strong degree of pride, and an amount of self-respect which served her in place of a higher principle; in Arabella Crofton lay concealed even a greater depth of passion, but its sole antagonist was an intellect keen, strong, and acute, though not of the highest order, and a determination of will and fixity of purpose which, while it led her straight towards the object she sought, rendered her somewhat unscrupulous as to the means by which it was to be attained; and as the mind usually writes itself more or less legibly on the countenance, so did the expression differ in Kate and her late governess. Still Miss Crofton's was a face to attract and rivet attention, a face which exercised a species of fascination over those who beheld it, so peculiar that it is not easy to define it. As you gazed upon it, you felt that you were in the presence of an intelligence of no common order, but of whose nature, hopes, fears, wishes, and designs, you were entirely ignorant—nay, in regard to which you could not decide whether the good or evil principle predominated. In this sense of power with which she impressed others, together with the uncertainty how it might be directed, lay the secret of much of Arabella Crofton's influence. Alice, not being metaphysical, did not attempt to define the sensations with which her new acquaintance inspired her; had she done so, it might have appeared that she had formed much the same estimate of her manner and appearance as that with which we have furnished the reader. But if Alice did not moralize, she arrived at strong and definite conclusions without that process, for before she had been half an hour in Miss Crofton's company, she felt morally convinced that she should hate her, and that it would turn out that the "ci-devant" governess either had done, or was about to do, something which would completely account for and justify this sudden animosity.

During dinner a note arrived from Lord Alfred Courtland, offering Alice and Harry seats in his opera-box, which offer, after a few polite speeches to and from Mr. Crane, in his (in?) capacity as master of the house, was accepted. As they drove to the theatre, the following conversation passed be-

tween the husband and wife, the lady of course beginning it.

"What a detestable woman that Miss Crofton is! I'm sure I shall never be able to endure her. I see now where Kate's faults came from. Miss Crofton has taught her to be worldly-minded, and ambitious, and all sorts of horrid things which she never used to be; and the creature is an old acquaintance of yours, too! Did you know her well—intimately?"

"Eh? yes! I saw a good deal of her at one time. How slow this fellow drives; we shall lose the overture!" was Harry's reply, which, if he intended thereby to change the subject of the conversation, proved a dead failure, for Alice continued:—

"Oh! then you are not mere acquaintances, as she tried to make out! I thought she wasn't speaking the truth. Well, and did you like her?—I daresay you did, for I feel sure she was in love with you; indeed, I think she is still, by the way she casts down those great rolling eyes of hers whenever you say a word to her. I declare I feel quite jealous."

Coverdale paused for a moment, ere he replied: "My dear Alice, you speak thoughtlessly, but you do not know how such remarks annoy me—faults I have, and more serious ones than until lately I was at all aware of; but to suppose that since I first saw you I have ever devoted one minute's thought to any other woman breathing would be to do me a foul injustice."

Alice perceived, from his manner of speaking, that her vague suspicions had really pained him, and having no other ground for them but an instinct which she confessed to herself to be utterly unsanctioned by reason, she determined to confess her sin and obtain absolution. This is in many cases a tedious and difficult operation, but when individuals are on those easy and agreeable terms which sometimes last so long as a year after marriage, the process becomes greatly facilitated. Thus, by a little graceful and appropriate pantomime, Alice caused it to be understood that she felt deeply penitent, and in a state of mental self-accusation only to be allayed by a remedy consisting (as some light-minded jester has phrased it), like a sermon, of "two heads and an application." When this specific for female grief had been duly administered by Harry, peace was for the time restored, and the evening passed away most harmoniously in every sense of the word.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

TELEMACHUS AND MENTOR.

THE Opera-house was very full and proportionably hot on the evening when Coverdale and his wife visited it (it being the "début" of the since famous Signora Bettimartini). Alice, unused to London gaieties, and uneasy from the suspicions she could not contrive to banish, acquired a headache, which, when she went to bed, prevented her from falling asleep. Thus, being anxious to court without loss of time nature's sweet restorer, of course she chose the most vexatious and exciting topic she could select as a subject of thought, and began to speculate on all the evidence she could call to mind in regard to her husband's relations, past and present, towards Arabella Crofton, who, as the reader must have perceived, was just at that especial epoch poor little Mrs. Coverdale's "bête noir." The first circumstance she could recollect to form the initial link in her chain of evidence was Harry's inquiry about her when Alice casually mentioned her name during the halcyon days of their honeymoon. In this conversation, Harry had confessed to a previous acquaintance with Miss Crofton, and when pressed further, added that he knew no good of her, or words to that effect. His manner, Alice remembered, was so peculiar that her curiosity had been at once excited, or as she mentally put it, that "naturally she felt her husband ought immediately to have told her everything about it—she had no concealments for him, she was sure." Following up this train of thought, another instance of this unkind and unflattering want of confidence occurred to her—the mysterious epistle which he had received that very afternoon, which had annoyed him so much, and about which he had refused to afford her any explanation; and here a new idea flashed like an infernal inspiration across her brain—could that note be in any way connected with Miss Crofton's arrival? "Yes! it must be so." She remembered when they entered the drawing-room, and she had felt surprise at finding a stranger there, Harry seemed to take it as a matter of course: good reason why, he knew it previously—this hateful woman, this detestable creature, Arabella Crofton, had written to him privately, informing him of her arrival! Oh! she saw it all; and now she would try to wean his affections away from his poor wife—his poor, neglected, betrayed wife! and succeed most likely—men were such fickle, wicked things; and then it would break her heart; that there could be no question of, and she should die in the

course of a year—in six months, very likely, for she wasn't at all strong, though she had a colour—consumptive people always had brilliant complexions — think of her poor aunt Kitty! and Harry would be sorry when it was too late, perhaps. And so, drawing a vivid picture of her repentant husband grieving over her untimely decease, she cried herself to sleep, bedewing with her tears the "fickle, wicked thing," calmly slumbering at her side; who straightway dreamed that, being out hunting, and riding a young thoroughbred, he had charged a brook, and that his horse, refusing it, had pitched him head foremost into its rapid waters.

A month soon elapsed—the London season was at its height. Everybody had been everywhere, and was going again; Grisi and Mario had arrived, recovered from sea-sickness and British catarrh, and "surpassed themselves" in their favourite characters. A mob of costly equipages jostled each other round Hyde Park every afternoon; carriage-horses, deprived of their sleep o' nights, began to grieve coachmen's hearts by revealing the position of their ribs; young ladies from the country danced away their roses and their "embonpoint"; men whose book for the Derby was at all "shy" trembled in their patent-leather boots; the glory of the lilacs in the squares had departed; water-carts made unpleasant canals of the principal thoroughfares; the Honourable Mrs. Windsor Soape had presented her youngest daughter at the last drawing-room, and tried without success to stuff her down the throats of several eligible eldest sons; Lady Close Shaver had inveigled an hundred and seventy unfortunates into her hot drawing-rooms, bored them with Signor Violini's scientific rendering of Beethoven's sonata in A B C minor, poisoned them with bad ice and worse champagne, and turned them out to grass upon lobster salads, of which the principal feature was the unaccountable absence of lobster: these, and many other miseries, attendant on the "joys of our dancing days," had been gladly suffered by the fanatical votaries of the Juggernaut of Fashion, and still the Coverdales lingered within the precincts of the modern Babylon. Lord Alfred Courtland having received a summons to join his family at Leghorn, had refused to obey it on the plea of ill health, backed by a physician's opinion, which cost one guinea, and was worth——! Well, really, in this case it was worth something, for it saved Lord Alfred a lecture, and he disliked being lectured, even for his good—silly young man! so he stayed in town, doing as other folks did, and hoping thereby to become a man of fashion; but, as he only acted like other people, and did nothing very clever, or very foolish, or very wrong, he by no means succeeded in obtaining the reputation he coveted. With this consciousness of failure before his eyes, he one night lounged dismally out of his stall at the Opera, and was proceeding with dejected steps along the

tobb-, when he suddenly encountered Horace D'Almayne, better dressed and better pleased with himself than ever.

"Well met, my lord; I was just wishing for an agreeable companion," was his complimentary salutation. "I am naturally a sociable animal; if you have no better employment, will you take pity on me for an hour or so?"

Deeply impressed with such unexpected condescension, and overcome by the transcendent cut of D'Almayne's waistcoat, nothing remained for Lord Alfred but gratefully to consent; which he accordingly did. Linking his arm in that of his companion, D'Almayne continued:—

"You are looking 'triste, ennuyé'; has Grisi developed a cold, or Cerito a corn? is it opera or ballet which has thus bored you?"

"Neither one nor the other," was the reply; "though even operas cease to excite after one has grown accustomed to them."

"Yes! that is true; except to an educated musician" (and D'Almayne looked as if he humbly trusted that he was equal to Mendelssohn, at the very least), "I can conceive they grow tedious; but," he continued, "you should seek some more exciting amusement: mix in clever, witty society: do things—see things; in fact, enjoy life as a young man with such advantages of person and of station should do."

"It may seem easy to you, who have achieved a reputation in the 'beau monde,' and can command any society you please, to accomplish this; but it is the reverse of easy for a young man in these days, even if he have a handle to his name, to persuade people that he has anything in him; in fact, I think a title stands rather in a young fellow's way on entering London life; people have somehow taken to connect the ideas of a lord and a fool, until I believe they begin to think the terms synonymous!"

"What a frightful democratic opinion for one of your order to promulgate!" returned D'Almayne, smiling at the disconsolate tone in which Lord Alfred spoke; "really you ought to have been born on the other side of the channel; but I think I perceive your difficulty: you do not care to be admitted into society merely for your rank, but wish to achieve a distinctive social reputation for yourself; is it not so?"

"Yes! you have expressed my ideas exactly; a great deal better than I could have done myself," was the reply. "And now tell me in what way is this desirable consummation to be effected."

"Nothing is more easy. In the first place you require self-confidence; let people see that you think yourself a fine fellow, and they will begin to think so too. In the next place, take a decided line of some kind, and adhere to it steadily; but, in order to be able to do so, be careful, ere you select

it, that it is in accordance with your natural dispositions and tastes."

"Good general maxims," returned Lord Alfred; "and now to apply them to the particular instance."

D'Almayne paused for a moment ere he replied:—

"If you really wish me to constitute myself your Mentor, you must allow me more opportunities of enjoying your society than I have hitherto possessed, and then, from time to time, I dare say I may be able to give you a few hints which you may find practically beneficial; and as there is nothing like making use of the present occasion, what say you to allowing me to introduce you to a kind of private club, where I and a few of my particular set sometimes meet after the opera, and while away an hour or two with a hand at whist or ecarté, or exchange our ideas on the topics of the day over a game of billiards; the stakes are, of course, suited to the measure of our purses, my own being an uncomfortably shallow one. We are close to the entrance; shall we turn in?"

After a moment's hesitation, the result of an indefinite notion that he was about to do something wrong, Lord Alfred consented; and D'Almayne knocked at the door of what looked like a good private house. The portal unclosed, and immediately shut again by some mysterious agency, for, when they entered, no domestic was visible; and they proceeded along a passage to a second door covered with red baize, with a glass eye, placed Cyclop-like in the middle of its forehead, through which a human face observed them for a moment, then disappeared, and the red baize door opened and admitted them of its own accord, as the outer one had set it the example. Following his companion up a flight of stone stairs at the top of which yet another baize door with a Cyclopian optic presented itself, Lord Alfred Courtland heard the sounds of laughing and conversation, and in another moment found himself in a large, well-lighted apartment, round which were dispersed sundry small tables, at which were seated, in groups of three or four, from a dozen to fifteen men, all of whom were recruiting exhausted nature with champagne, pine-apple, ice, or more substantial viands, if their tastes inclined them thereunto. Placing himself at an unoccupied table, D'Almayne inquired in his most insinuating tone:—

"Champagne, Claret, Johannisberg—what is your pet vanity, my lord?—'c'est affreux,' the inefficient ventilation of that Opera-house. I am positively famished with thirst, and must drown my enemy before Horace is himself again."

"Having obtained the privilege of considering you my Mentor, I cannot do better than avail myself of your valuable taste and experience in the selection of a beverage," returned Lord Alfred, falling into his companion's humour with

that dangerous facility which was at once his bane and his greatest charm. So champagne and ice, and biscuits, all first-rate of their kind, were brought and discussed; and during the demolition thereof, one or two intimates of D'Almayne, faultless in mien and manners, lounged up, and were introduced to his lordship, and drank wine dreamily, anl talked smart nothings with a sleepy wittiness as of inspired dormice; and otherwise exhibited symptoms of that life-weary, all-to-pieces condition which very young men believe in as the "ne plus ultra" of modern dandyism; and Lord Alfred's heart leaped within him as he thought that now he had at last really begun "life," and was in a fair way to become a man-about-town. Such wonderful beings are we, "ætatis" nineteen!

When a man is thirsty nothing is easier than to drink a bottle of champagne without knowing it. perhaps even till the next morning; I never heard of the delusion lasting longer. Whether Lord Alfred Courtland drank more or less than a bottle on the occasion in question, history relateth not, but certainly, when he rose and strolled into the billiard-room, he felt considerably exhilarated, and eager to achieve something "fast," which might tend to impress his incipient "about-townishness" on the minds of his fashionable acquaintances. Thus, hearing the rattle of dice in a further apartment, he, to D'Almayne's surprise and amusement, declared billiards a bore, and whist "slow," and "voted" for something with a little more fun in it. So, "Dante" like, entering the infernal regions, they very soon "knew a bank whereon" much "wild time" had been wasted, and an immense crop of wild oats sown;—and off which certain proprietors had reaped many golden sheaves, while the sowers themselves had gained only experience, teaching them how to take care of their money, about the time when their money was all gone, which must have been more improving than consolatory to the "cleaned-out ones." Then first upon Lord Alfred's youthful ear fell the command, diabolical in its persuasive eloquence, "Faites le jeu, messieurs!" then timidly, and with feelings akin to those of mediæval youths who, in the good old feudal times, signed uncomfortable compacts with the Evil One, which never turned out satisfactorily for them even in this world, did Lord Alfred stake his first guinea, and unfortunately lost it. We say unfortunately for had he won, and so come, seen, and conquered, he might have listened to the appeals of conscience which just then were striving to make a coward of this neophyte man about town; but, as matters stood, he felt a stern necessity to vindicate the "sang froid" with which he could support a run of ill-luck; and playing again—won, doubled his stake—won; then, against D'Almayne's advice, staked his winning on "le rouge,"

and that colour proved successful; and then the gambler-spirit came upon him, and he played with a fierce eagerness, and drank more champagne, and played again, until two hours later D'Almayne almost forced him away from the table, and took him home, flushed and excited, a winner of one hundred pounds! Poor boy! as he left that haunt of sordid vice and idle folly, he believed that he had done something clever, and spirited, and manly, and longed for the next evening, when he might again distinguish himself; but could he have foreseen half the consequences of this, his *first step in evil*, or the sorrow he was thereby bringing upon true hearts that loved him, he would have shrunk from again crossing the threshold, as though it were indeed that of the hell which, in their unseemly jesting, men term it.

Rising late the next morning, he was informed that a gentleman was waiting to see him, and on entering the sitting-room, found Horace D'Almayne in an easy chair, and an elegant attitude.

"I was anxious about you, 'mon cher'" (they had grown wonderfully familiar over their champagne); "you appeared so much excited last night," he began, uncrossing his graceful legs, clad in a seraphic pair of "Blin et Fils' chefs-d'œuvre"—

"Sure such a pair were never seen!"

"You seemed so carried away by your enthusiasm that I thought you would not sleep, and thus ventured to call at this unreasonable hour to see how you were getting on."

"Very kind and friendly of you, I'm sure," returned Lord Alfred, quite overcome by such unhoped-for condescension on the part of his model Mentor. "I suppose I did get rather excited, but I'm all right again this morning,—at least I shall be," he continued, as a dizzy swimming in the head obliged him to grasp a chair-back for support, "as soon as I have had a cup of coffee."

"Or if I might suggest, a bottle of seltzer-water with a suspicion of cognac in it is a much more efficient substitute: allow me to brew for you;—may I ring the bell?"

Receiving the permission he sought, Horace acted accordingly, and when the servant appeared, desired him (on a glance from Lord Alfred, delegating all authority to him) to bring a bottle of seltzer-water, brandy, and a lemon. Possessed of these "desiderata," he commenced shredding off two or three delicate little spiral circles of lemon-peel, like yellow watch-springs, then dropping these into a Brobdignagian tumbler, warranted not to run over under any severity of effervescence, he added thereunto a liqueur glass full of the purest (and strongest) cognac. Unwiring the seltzer-water,

he allowed it to draw its own cork (for thus, under his skilful control, did the operation appear to be performed), and, forcing it to explode into the tumbler, he presented the beverage, foaming wildly, to Lord Alfred, who, at the risk of immediate suffocation, drank it off in that rabid condition, and providentially surviving, declared himself greatly benefited by the treatment. Having thus re-invigorated his patient's exhausted frame, D'Almayne proceeded to perform the same friendly office by his mind, and very good counsel did he bestow upon him—only that his advice had this peculiarity, viz., that whilst in words he recommended Lord Alfred Courtland to bend his steps in a northerly direction, that young nobleman felt an unaccountable conviction that by proceeding due south, he should raise himself in the estimation of his Mentor, and of all other men of spirit. Thus he heard, with a complacent smile, that D'Almayne was surprised at the manner in which he had carried all before him at the gaming-table on the previous evening; that everyone imagined him to be an old hand at such matters; and one individual, who was generally supposed to make a very decent living by gambling, had declared his conviction that Lord Alfred played on a system, and a deucedly clever system, too!—At all of which D'Almayne appeared alarmed and uneasy, and assured his friend that it was a very dangerous talent for a young man, and that it would be a great relief to his mind if Lord Alfred would promise never to go there again; to which his lordship replied by lighting a cigar, handing the box to his Mentor, and asking him whether he considered him such an irreclaimable muff as not to be able to win or lose a matter of a hundred pounds without making a ninny of himself. Declaring himself innocent of any such disrespectful innuendo, D'Almayne also lighted a cigar (it being impossible in these piping times to do anything without plenty of puffing), and these new allies grew loquacious and confidential: but with this difference, that Lord Alfred gave his confidence, and Horace obligingly received the sacred deposit. Thus, after a fair amount of the horticultural cruelty, yclept "beating about the bush," had been committed, the good young man was made acquainted with the "secret sorrow," which as the reader is aware, was, with much success, performing the part of the "worm i' the bud" to Lord Alfred's "damask cheek." As soon as Mentor thoroughly understood the state of the case, which he did in an incredibly short space of time—tact being so strongly developed in him that it almost amounted to intuition—he followed the advice of Polly in the "Beggar's Opera," by "pondering well" before he ventured to prescribe for the complaint of his Telemachus. Having sat with bent brows until his cigar was exhausted, he flung the end into the grate, smoothed his beloved moustaches, and then spoke oracularly:—

"You see, 'mon cher,'" he began, "you are taking to the rôle of a 'flaneur,' what you call a man-about-town, full early for an Englishman; thus, the chief thing you want is self-confidence, without which a man can neither do proper justice to himself nor to his position. Now, it seems to me the best thing for you would be to get some pretty woman of good station to take you in hand; you must try and establish a flirtation with somebody."

"'Cui bono?'" inquired Telemachus; "the governor would never stand me marrying for—oh! not for the next five years!"

"Marrying before you're one-and-twenty! My dear fellow, what can have put such a frightful idea into your head!" exclaimed Mentor, aghast at the supposition. "No, no; marriage is the last thing I should think of recommending, except quite as a 'dernier ressort.' For which reason, I was about to add that the best practice to set you at ease with yourself, and therefore with other people, will be to devote your attentions to some pretty and fashionable married woman;—there! don't look so awfully scandalized; of course I only mean a sentimental and platonic affair—just enough to excite and interest you into self-oblivion. When you once forget your 'ipsissimus ego'—when, as that punning friend of yours, Mr. Coverdale, would say, you cease to mind your I—all your anxieties in regard to popular opinion will vanish, and you will soon find that with your face, figure, address, and position, Lord Alfred Courtland will become the admired of all admirers. And that reminds me that Mrs. Coverdale would be just the person for that purpose;—she is very pretty, moves in good society, and 'entre nous,' is smitten with you already!"

"But really—of course I don't set up to be any better than my neighbours," stammered the poor boy, colouring at the possibility of being suspected of such slow attributes as good feeling and right principle, and yet unable entirely to silence the promptings of his better nature;—"of course I don't set up for a saint; but Harry Coverdale is an old friend and schoolfellow, and one of the best creatures in the world; I should not like—that is, I really couldn't—But, I beg your pardon, I don't think I exactly understand your meaning."

"I don't think you do," returned D'Almayne, his sarcastic tone expressing such unmistakable contempt that Lord Alfred actually winced as if in pain! "I don't think you have the faintest glimmer of my meaning. You don't suppose I intend you to order a chaise and four, and run off with pretty Mrs. Coverdale to the Continent, do you? My ideas are much less alarming, I can assure you! 'par exemple'—your friend Harry is a physical force man: he is a mighty hunter, a dead shot; he loves only his dogs and his horses; but requires a

Joe Manton to ensure him good sport, and a pretty wife to sit at the head of his table: Mrs. Coverdale, on the other hand, has a soul—reads Tennyson, feels her husband's neglect, and pines for someone who will appreciate her and sympathize with her; you, in the kindness of your heart, pity her, and knowing you can afford her the consolations of congeniality, obligingly make up for her good man's deficiency; therefore, you read poetry with her, explain the obscure passages which neither she, you, nor anyone else can understand; her mind reposes on your superior intelligence; she trusts you, and confides to you important secrets—the exact age of her dearest female friend, whom she suspects of designs upon your heart, the dress she is going to wear at the next fancy ball—and eventually, with heightened colour and averted eyes, the history of that ring with the turquoise forget-me-not, together with a biographical sketch of the noble giver—showing how he lived pathetically, and died in the odour of heroism, fighting at the head of his regiment in the Punjaub, the centre of a select circle of slaughtered foemen; which latter confidence may be considered as the latch-key to the fair lady's heart, ensuring you admittance at all times and seasons."

"And having attained this agreeable position, how long do you expect so pleasant a state of things to last, and what is to be the end of it?" inquired Telemachus.

"Oh! until she has got rid of her romance, and you of your diffidence; by which time you will have grown mutually tired of each other, and the London season will have come to an end," was Mentor's oracular reply. Telemachus mused, lit a fresh cigar, and mused again. He liked the idea, had a faint suspicion it might be wrong, but was quite sure it would be very pleasant. Mentor, thinking this a promising frame of mind in which to leave his pupil, would not weaken the force of his argument by vain repetitions, so made an arrangement to meet again in the evening, and departed. And while "les petites moustaches noires" wounded female hearts as he passed down courtly St. James's Street, the spirit of the good young man, their wearer, glowed within him. and—

> As he walked by himself,
> He talked to himself,
> And thus to himself said he!

"Ha! ha! Milord Courtland, you are mine—your purse, your credit, your influence—all are mine! But what a child it is! what a baby! 'Sacre! 'at his age I was winning twenty pounds a day at billiards in New Orleans!—And you, Harry Coverdale, 'mon ami,' I will teach you to watch me with black looks when I am conversing with 'la belle millionaire';

you had better attend to your own wife now—young, pretty, and neglected! 'Le petit' Alfred has a fair game before him, if he have but wit to play it—yes! all goes as it should! fortune fills the sails! there is a cool head and a steady hand at the helm: 'vogue la galère!'"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CIRCE.

In this "tight little island"—of which as a whole we are all so proud, although it affords ample occupation for its public in grumbling at its institutions, viâ its "Times" newspaper—the only season of the year when fogs are not, and every day does not resemble a "washing-day" on a large scale, the only period in fact when the country is endurable, is the early summer. Thus the educated classes, whose well-balanced and carefully developed minds enable them to arrive at sound conclusions, and whose well-stored pockets render them free to come and go untrammelled by pecuniary considerations, have bound themselves by the laws of the tyrant Fashion to spend June and July in London, where they simmer in hot rooms, when they should be in bed and asleep, until all the goodness is boiled out of them—which new "theory of evil" we beg to offer to the notice of Miss Martineau, and all other speculative minds anxious to elevate humanity by substituting earthly nonsense for heavenly revelation. But, however you may brick her up and smoke-dry her, Nature will assert herself, and, turning with disgust from oats at 40s. the quarter in a mahogany manger, pine for green meat and a canter over the spring turf. So a compromise has been effected between town and country amusements, and horticultural fêtes have been devised to afford parboiled fashionables breathing time between their rounds of dissipation, together with a gentle reminder of the "pleasures of the plains," which they are sacrificing to their craving for unnatural excitement. Horticultural fêtes are brought about in this wise: Early in the inclemency of a British spring, when all London is shivering over its fondly cherished fire, that noun of multitude perceives in the first column of its "Times" a notice that members of the Horticultural Society may obtain tickets at privileged prices until some specified day; thereupon All-London writes to its particular friend the M. H. S. for an "order," and the member, vouching by implication for All-London's standing and respectability—into which he has probably gone

no deeper than its coat—All-London besieges the office of that floral autocrat, Dr. Lindley, and clamours for tickets, crying "Give, give," and insatiable as the daughter of the horse-leech. Having at length obtained its desire, All-London buttons up its great coat and waits timidly but eagerly for the first Horticultural. But the London season is an outrage upon, and an insult to, Nature, and Nature takes her change out of the first Horticultural. It is a pouring wet day, Chiswick becomes Keswick, and the Duke of Devonshire's grounds, yielding to hydraulic pressure, cease to be dry grounds any longer. Dr. Lindley . . . . we have not the pleasure of that gentleman's personal acquaintance, but we can imagine Dr. Lindley feels disappointed and . . . . expresses it. Then All-London exchanges its great-coat for a paletot, and looks forward with a timid anxiety to the second Horticultural, which being in June enjoys the advantage of April weather, and is only showery, so the boldest quarter of London goes, from the Herbert Fitz-tip-tops, careless of the bronchial tubes of their serving-men and carriage-horses, down to the Robinson Joneses, safe in the immunity of a hack brougham, driver, and horse—a long-suffering trio, so accustomed to wait in the rain that use has become a second nature to these amphibious hirelings. Our enterprising pleasure-seekers come back ere dewy eve, and say that, considering the fact that flowers won't blow out of doors in cold weather, and that the gravel was a swamp, and the turf a morass, the tents were very hot, and the east wind very cold, and that there was nobody there except a few dreadful people, who really ought not to be anywhere—(Mrs. Robinson Jones was actually pushed up against Mr. Cutlet and his rib, her own butcher, who makes a clear £2,000 a year, while genteel Robinson Jones scarcely averages £1,500 at the Bar; but what does that signify?)—and that the female Quarter-of-London had got the ridiculous soles of its little French shoes wet through in five minutes, and had felt a tightness at its chest ever since; allowing for these and several other slight drawbacks, it really was not such a complete failure after all! But even English weather has its bright side; and, content with taking the shine out of the first two, on the third Horticultural fête the sun seems resolved to come out strong, and, setting parasols at defiance, imprint his burning kisses on the pale features of all the pretty woman in town, like an ardent old luminary as he is. And All-London, finding that it really is a beautiful day, puts on its best bib and tucker, and takes its wife and daughters to Chiswick. Where the roads are watered they are very muddy, where they are not watered they are dusty; and as the dust sticks to the carriage, and the dust sticks to the mud, and the horses get first very hot going there, then very cold waiting there, and the pole of every

other carriage invariably runs through the back panel of the vehicle immediately preceding it, coachmen are not, as a general rule, fond of the third Horticultural; but nothing can please everybody, and these Flower-shows "please the ladies" (to quote Mr. Crane's favourite phrase), and that is the great point after all. It was probably with a view to "pleasing the ladies" that Mr. Crane had thought proper to invest capital in half a dozen Horticultural tickets—seeing that his own horticultural tastes were confined to drinking Sherry-cobbler in an arbour, whenever such a privilege was vouchsafed to him, and his knowledge limited to the capability of discriminating between a cabbage and a cauliflower. The weather having been such as we have described it during the first and second fêtes—on both which occasions Mr. Crane bewailed the useless expense into which his gallantry had seduced him, with a truly touching degree of pathos—these tickets remained unused until the third and last flower-show, when "the face of all nature looking gay," and "bright Phœbus" obligingly condescending to "adorn the hills," the ex-cotton-spinner and his spouse, Harry Coverdale and Alice, together with Arabella Crofton, availed themselves of five of them—Horace D'Almayne quietly pocketing the sixth in a fit of mental (and physical) abstraction. They were to start at a quarter before two, as Mr. Crane always preferred being early on all occasions; but at a quarter before two, when the carriages drew up to the door, Alice was not ready, and moreover it was Alice's own fault that she was not ready; and thus it fell out. Lord Alfred Courtland played the flute well for so young a man, and an amateur; since he had been in town, a talented professor instructed him in this art, who was an exiled patriot—that is to say, he and several other ardent young men had attempted one fine morning to take their "Fatherland" away from the gentleman in possession, and give it to the Secret-blood-and-bones-united-brother-band—the same being a pet name by which they saw fit to call themselves. What they would have done with their fatherland, if they had got it, neither do they, nor does anyone else appear to have the least idea; but this difficulty of disposing of their country was fortunately spared them, as their enterprise consisted simply of a stroll along the principal street of their native city, in company with a drum and a little red flag, bearing the cheerful device of a skull and cross-bones, with the motto, "Death to Tyrants!" which stroll continued until they accidentally encountered a company of soldiers, who conveyed them—drum, flag, and all—to the State prison, where they were detained, until it being discovered that they were eating their heads off, the authorities exild them, to save their keep. Herr Hildebrand Tootletootzakoffski, one of this devoted band, had brought his Polish

sorrows and his German flute to England, and between them both managed to make a much more comfortable income than tyranny had hitherto allowed him to enjoy under the mildewed institutions of his own blighted country. For the rest, he was a mild little man, addicted to conversing on music and patriotism with a sort of washy sentimentality which enabled him to pass as an individual of refined tastes and cultivated mind with those who did not look beyond the surface; personally he rejoiced in a complexion as of bad putty, and an amount of heroic beard and moustaches which would have stuffed a chair-cushion very comfortably. And being such as we have described him, Herr Hildebrand—an acquaintance of, and introduced by, Horace D'Almayne, who, in his multifarious occupations, may have been a banded-brother, for aught we know to the contrary—had suggested to Lord Alfred Courtland the great advantage it would be to him in his, the professor's, talented absence, if he, Lord Alfred, could find any amiable pianiste of his acquaintance, able and willing to play duets with him, to "improve his time"; and as he said this in the presence of and immediately after a "tête-à-tête" with Horace D'Almayne, it really was scarcely necessary for that judicious mentor to suggest to his lordship pretty little Mrs. Coverdale, although, to guard against mistakes, he did so. Thus Alfred Courtland and Alice had played a good many duets in Park Lane; and on the morning in question, luncheon being announced in the middle of one of these interesting performances half an hour sooner than usual, to guard against the possibility of anybody's being too late, Alice, feeling by this time quite at home in her cousin's house, coolly told Lord Alfred to come down and partake of the mid-day meal, as she was resolved to finish the duet after it was over, before he went to dress, and if they made haste she was sure there was plenty of time. But time unfortunately is one of those stubborn facts with which it is impossible to take a liberty without suffering for one's rashness; and although the latter part of the duet was rattled through with a Costa-like rapidity, which elicited from his breathless lordship an acknowledgment that "it is the pace that kills," yet when all the rest of the party were assembled, Alice was only half dressed. Then, as was his wont on such occasions, Mr. Crane fell into a fretful fuss, and trotted up and down the room, and made everybody fidgety and uncomfortable, especially Harry, who was provoked with Mr. Crane for being annoyed with Alice, and with Alice for having given him cause for annoyance.

"There is a quiet way of arranging the matter, my dear sir," he said; "let those who are ready start in the barouche, and I will wait and drive Alice in the mail-phaeton."

"Yes, and then we shall never meet at the gardens, and

never all come away at the same time, and my arrangements will be completely subverted, and everything will go wrong," whined Mr. Crane. On this Harry ran up to hasten Alice, and Alice, who was attiring herself at express speed, was cross, and snubbed him out of the room, and he rejoined the company in the drawing-room with compressed lips and an angry flush on each cheek; and Arabella Crofton favoured him with a glance of intelligent pity, which, if it were intended to soothe his wounded spirit, failed in its effect most signally. After a lapse of an awful ten minutes, by the expiration of which period Mr. Crane was on the verge of tears, the culprit Alice made her appearance, looking very pretty, but not altogether as penitent as might have been desired; but as she said in a cheerful tone that she "really was quite distressed at having kept them all waiting," we will hope she felt more than she allowed to appear. Then arose a debate and confusion of tongues and opinions as to how the party was to divide. Harry offered to drive the phaeton, Mr. Crane having privately hinted that such an arrangement would meet with his approval. Who was to accompany him? Harry suggested his own wife, meaning to treat her to a gentle reproof on the road for her want of consideration in having kept a whole party waiting merely to finish a silly duet with that boy Alfred Courtland. But Kate disapproved of this arrangement—perhaps because she had begun to suspect that the Coverdale couple did not always in "their little nest agree," and had read in Harry's flashing eyes warning of a perturbed spirit. Whether Alice's conscience led her to the same result we do not pretend to decide, but for some reason she seconded her cousin until she discovered that by doing so Arabella Crofton would be her substitute, by which time the affair was settled beyond her power of altering. Her annoyance would have been sensibly diminished, however, if she could have known that the arrangement was, if possible, more distasteful to her husband than to herself, but unfortunately there was no "clairvoyant" at hand to afford her this desirable intelligence. Having handed up his companion, and done all that his chivalrous nature taught him was due from a gentleman to any woman entrusted to his care, and nothing further, Harry gathered up his reins, placed himself by Miss Crofton's side in the phaeton, and sitting bolt upright, drove off with an unapproachable expression of face, which indicated, as plainly as words could have done, his resolve not to advance beyond monosyllables until they reached Chiswick. But Harry was in such matters no match for the astute woman of the world who sat beside him. Apparently falling in with his humour she leaned back in the carriage, and the only sign she gave of her presence was an occasional sigh, which escaped her, as it appeared, involuntarily. Be-

fore they had proceeded far, however, they encountered the peripatetic theatre of that inconvenient humourist, dear old Punch, with his private band pop-going-the-weasel like a harmonious steam-engine; whereat the horses (the identical pair which had run away with Harry and Alice in the early spring-time of their courtship, and which Mr. Crane still retained, although he carefully avoided driving them himself), preferring probably a more classical style of music, began to express their disapprobation by plunging violently, nearly dashing the phaeton against a coal waggon, a catastrophe which nothing but the most consummate skill on the part of their driver could have averted. As Coverdale succeeded in voluntarily glancing at his companion to ascertain how the incident had affected her. She was leaning forward, her attitude and the expression of her features indicated excitement and interest rather than terror, while her fine eyes, dilated and sparkling with a more than ordinary lustre, were fixed upon his countenance with looks of unmistakable admiration. Courage, or, as he would have termed it, "pluck," especially in a woman, where he considered it as an "additional attraction," while in a man it was simply a "sine quâ non," always delighted Harry Coverdale; and, being as innocent and natural as a child, he could no more help expressing his sentiments than he could exist without inhaling vital air.

"Well, I never did see such nerve in a woman!" he exclaimed; "why, you look pleased rather than frightened! not that there was any danger, except of damaging Mr. Crane's near hind wheel. They don't bit these horses properly, and that white-nosed animal hasn't the tenderest mouth at the best of times." And as he spoke he administered a smartish cut across the ears as a practical comment on the delinquent's oral insensibility.

"You are such a good whip," was the reply, "and it always interests me to see brute force controlled by skill, energy, and strength of will. You guide these fiery horses with such a calm sense of power that I could never feel afraid when you were driving me."

Miss Crofton was decidedly a clever woman; if there was one thing on which in his secret soul Harry prided himself, it was on his driving; and this practical compliment, standing as it unfortunately did in somewhat marked contrast to his wife's feminine dislike of certain contentions with "queer tempered" horses, which had at odd times come in for a specimen of Coverdale's "quiet manner," appealed to his weak point—he was mortal, and it touched him, and at the touch his taciturnity vanished, and straightway he began to confide to his dangerous companion all his most secret thoughts and feelings in regard to——bitting hard-mouthed horses. It seemed an unlikely topic for Arabella to make

much of, and yet she allowed him to run on, listening with a smile of pleased attention; for though his talk was solely equestrian, yet it served as well as any other subject to melt away the icy barrier behind which Harry had hitherto entrenched himself, and thus effectually defended himself against all attempts at a renewal of the former intimacy which appeared to have existed between them. Having explained completely to his own satisfaction the advantage which in the instance under consideration would be gained by driving "brown muzzle" up at the "cheek," and the white-nosed horse in the "lower-bar," together with copious notes, descriptive and explanatory, and voluminous annotations and reflections on this momentous question, Harry metaphorically resumed his seat amid continued cheering, and Arabella Crofton rose in reply. Of course she started on horses, to which she soon attached carriages, by means of which she in an incredibly short time contrived to ride back to Italy, and finding Harry stood it better than she expected, she continued in a voice indicative of deep but repressed feeling—

"Ah! that was a strange, strange summer we passed there! And yet, now I can calmly look back upon it, there were many happy hours, bright, sunny little bits, to set against the deep shadows of such a life as mine, times when I enjoyed the privilege of your friendship, before"—and here her voice faltered—"before I forfeited that and everything, even my self-respect, by my own mad folly!"

She paused in emotion, and her companion replied in a kind, frank manner:

"Why distress yourself by reviving a disagreeable reminiscence?" (as he used the word a slight shudder seemed to convulse her, and a look of pain, but not the pain of contrition, flitted across her handsome features)—"an affair which I have, as I promised you, practically forgotten, which I should never again have entered upon with you, and in regard to which my lips are sealed to every other living creature."

"You are kind and generous-hearted, as you ever were," was the rejoinder, "but I cannot forget so readily." Here she paused, sighed deeply, then continued—"I am so glad to have had this—this conversation with you; your manner has been so cold and stern, I was afraid you had repented of your promise that if we ever met again it should be as friends."

"Well, you see," returned Harry, in an embarrassed tone, "you see, circumstances have changed with me since the time to which you refer; and I thought—in fact, you yourself said in that note it would be better—I assure you I meant nothing unkind, why should I? as long as you——" and here, having been on the point of "putting his foot in it," as he mentally paraphrased his colloquial "étourderie," Harry [illegible] actually blushing in his generous fear

of wounding his companion's feelings. Having relieved his embarrassment by giving that unfortunate scapegoat, the white-nosed horse, one more for himself, he resumed—"And now let me ask you whether you approve of the wife I have chosen?"

Harry made this inquiry, not because he felt particularly anxious to learn Arabella's opinion of Alice, but because he wanted to say something, and this was the first idea which occurred to him; thus the moment he had spoken he wished the speech unsaid. Miss Crofton hesitated for a moment ere she replied, in a slightly constrained tone of voice—

"Your choice does your taste credit; for, in her style, Mrs. Coverdale is singularly pretty, and I can imagine her very attractive—when she pleases."

"You speak as if she had not pleased, in your case," rejoined Harry, smiling at the unmistakable emphasis with which the concluding words had been spoken. Miss Crofton smiled also; then with a melancholy expression she replied—

"In my anomalous position in life, I am too well accustomed to slights to feel a moment's annoyance at such trifles."

"But it annoys me though," returned Coverdale, firing up with the indignation all generous natures feel at the idea of indignity being offered to anyone in a dependent situation. "I am surprised at such want of right feeling, or even common courtesy, in Alice! She cannot be aware of the impression her manner has made on you. I shall speak to her about it."

"Do not think of such a thing!" exclaimed Arabella, hastily; "it was folly in me to mention it." She fixed her eyes on his face, and reading there that his resolution was unchanged, she laid her hand gently on his arm, and continued—"Listen, and I will tell you the whole truth: womanly instinct, I suppose, made your wife dislike me from the first moment she was introduced to me. I have tried in vain to conquer her dislike, and we now, by a sort of tacit consent, avoid each other; were you to interfere in my behalf, it would be of no avail; on the contrary, it would increase the evil, and pardon my saying, might lead to a disagreement between you; for, I may be mistaken, but I have fancied Mrs. Coverdale appears a little impatient of control sometimes—I hope I am mistaken."

She waited for a reply; but Harry, not being able to deny the charge, and not choosing to assent to it, remained silent, and she, rightly interpreting his reserve, continued:—

"In that case, I implore you, do not dream of advocating my cause. Were I to be the occasion of any difference between you, it would render me most unhappy."

After a moment's silence, she added—

"I was so much interested when I heard you were going to be married, and hoped, nay prayed, that you might be as

happy as I would—would always have you. I am grieved to think that Mrs. Coverdale should not fully appreciate the prize she has drawn in that most uncertain of all lotteries, marriage; but I feel sure she will learn to understand you better, and all will come right: you are evidently much attached to her, and that being the case, she must love you." Then in a lower tone she added—"You are not one likely to love in vain.'

What reply, if any, Harry would have made to this speech, will never be known, as at that minute they entered the line of carriages setting down at the gate of the Chiswick Gardens, and Coverdale had enough to occupy him in preventing his excitable horses from committing a breach of the peace. Whether or no the phaeton groom was an observant man we cannot say, but if he felt the degree of amiable interest usually displayed by domestic servants in the affairs of their superiors, he must have been struck, when mentally contrasting Mr. Coverdale's manner of handing Miss Crofton into and out of that open carriage, by an immense accession of cordiality, for which he was probably more puzzled to account than we trust the reader finds himself.

CHAPTER XXXV.

FLOWERS AND THORNS.

"WE have somehow contrived to lose sight of the barouche," exclaimed Coverdale, after looking up and down the line of carriages in vain; "I expect they must have escaped us when that white-nosed horse shied at Punch; I fancied I knew which way they had turned, but I must have gone down a wrong street—poor old Crane will be in fits—I wonder what we had better do?"

"What I should suggest is to walk slowly backwards and forwards inside the gate, and watch for their arrival," returned Arabella, wishing in her secret soul that one of the barouche-horses might have fallen dead lame, or that any other catastrophe, not involving injury to life or limb, might have befallen the rest of the party.

After parading up and down with most laudable perseverance for nearly half an hour, during which time the crowd grew thicker and thicker, and everybody arrived except the party they were in search of, Harry suddenly exclaimed—

"You'll be tired to death with all this pushing and squeezing; they must have come some shorter way, and got here before us; let us go on to the conservatory; we shall meet them there, I daresay."

When they reached the conservatory, however, they found

the crowd so dense that to attempt to discover their missing friends would have involved a difficulty beside which that popular definition of a forlorn hope, "looking for a needle in a bottle of hay," would have sunk into comparative insignificance. There were a couple of chairs near the exit from the conservatory, from which a lady and gentleman rose as they approached.

"Suppose we take possession of those seats," suggested Arabella, "and watch the people as they come out; I must honestly confess I am both hot and tired."

"I sympathise in the first adjective," returned Harry, taking off his hat to allow the air to cool his heated brow. "I've walked up hill through heather on the moors for six hours at a stretch, and not been so warm as this; but then I must own I was in better condition; one eats too many dinners in London, don't you see, and can't get exercise enough to keep a fellow in working order."

Having made a suitable reply to this and sundry other thoroughly Harry Coverdale-ish remarks, Miss Crofton turned the conversation by asking:

"Pray, is that Mr. D'Almayne a particular favourite of yours?"

"Not a bit of it," was the unhesitating reply; "rather the other thing, in fact. I consider him a confounded puppy; and have what you ladies call a presentiment that some of these days I shall be obliged to give him a lesson which he will not forget in a hurry."

"Then you also have observed——" began Arabella.

"I have observed nothing in particular," interrupted Harry quickly; "but I know this, if I were old Crane I would not have an insufferable, ridiculous young fop dangling about my house every day, and all day long."

"I think it is silly and imprudent in Kate to allow it," returned Arabella, "and I ventured to tell her so, but she did not take the hint kindly, and I have not attempted to recur to the subject. I am afraid her marriage has not improved her; I really believe since I spoke to her she has been kinder to Mr. D'Almayne than before; he and his insinuating young friend, Lord Alfred Courtland, have almost lived in Park Lane this last week."

"His friend!" exclaimed Harry; "little Alfred is my friend—he and I were at school together—that is, he was at the bottom when I was at the top; I introduced him to D'Almayne myself, and now I wish I had left it alone; oh, there's no harm in little Alfred—besides, I never heard him speak a dozen words to Kate Crane."

A meaning smile passed across his companion's handsome features, but she only said:

"I am sorry he is your friend; I am afraid Mr. D'Almayne

is a dangerous acquaintance for so vain and weak a young man."

"Alfred is no fool, though perhaps firmness is not his strong point," returned Coverdale; "vain perhaps he is—all handsome boys are, I suppose. But why do you say you are sorry he is my friend?"

Miss Crofton was silent for a minute, then in a timid and hesitating voice replied—

"You will be angry with me if I tell you my reason for disliking Lord Alfred's constant visits; you will doubt what I say, and impute to me all kinds of false and evil motives for saying it."

"Go on," returned Harry, in a low, stern voice; "you have said too much for me to rest satisfied not to hear more—tell me all you know or suspect; but take care—if, as you say, you value my good opinion—that you speak only the simple truth."

Thus urged, Miss Crofton proceeded cautiously to relate that, much as it grieved her to say anything which might cause him pain or annoyance, she would not disguise from him that she felt convinced Lord Alfred Courtland was deeply smitten with Alice, and that his frequent visits to Park Lane were the result of his admiration—that, moreover, Horace D'Almayne was evidently doing his best to nurse what had been a mere boyish fancy into a warmer and stronger feeling; of his motive she was unable to judge, but of the fact she was certain; she believed, moreover, that he possessed a strong and daily increasing influence over the young man.

"And Alice?" inquired Coverdale, with flashing eyes, "what of Alice? Beware how you tell me that she encourages this misguided, foolish boy! for by heaven, if you do, and it should appear that you have misjudged her, I should be tempted to inform her and all the world the reason which has induced you to invent such malicious calumnies!"

"You wrong me by your unkind suspicions," was Arabella's calm reply, "as much as you wrong yourself by an ungenerous threat which you would be incapable of executing; it is not for me to judge Mrs. Coverdale one way or the other. I have satisfied my conscience in warning you; I leave you now to examine and observe for yourself, and test the truth of my statement—but of one thing I am certain, Horace D'Almayne has some deep scheme 'in petto,' and that he is an unscrupulous adventurer, clever enough to render him a most dangerous associate for any one—a person to beware of, in short."

"If I become convinced he is putting young Alfred up to any such rascality as you imagine, I'll break the scoundrel's neck for him!" growled Coverdale, in a tone like the rumbling of distant thunder.

As he spoke someone touched him on the shoulder, and

looking round, he was more surprised than pleased to see the object of his kind intentions standing behind the chair on which he was seated. How long he might have been there, or how much of their conversation he might have heard, it was impossible to tell; but so convinced was Coverdale that D'Almayne had been playing the eavesdropper that he was on the point of inquiring what amount of information he had thus acquired, and especially whether he had clearly understood the fate that awaited him, if he were really inciting "little Alfred" to make love to his wife, when D'Almayne, who possessed a womanly predilection for always having the first and last word, began:

"Pardon me if I interrupt what appears a most interesting conversation, but I have been hunting all over the gardens for the last half-hour to find you. Mr. Crane imagines you have eloped with his phaeton and horses, and Mrs. Coverdale is so completely 'au désespoir' at the loss of her husband that even Lord Alfred Courtland's attentions are powerless to console her. Really, Miss Crofton, it is too cruel of you to seduce Benedick from his allegiance to his Beatrice—you might be content with enslaving us poor bachelors!"

This speech was not particularly palatable to Arabella, and she would have probably have passed it over in contemptuous silence had she not glanced at Coverdale; but, perceiving by his flashing eye and quivering lip that he was so angry that he literally dared not trust himself to reply, she hastened to prevent anything unpleasant occurring between them by observing in her usual calm, slightly sarcastic manner:

"It is like Mr. D'Almayne's policy to screen himself by throwing the blame on the injured party. We have been roaming up and down like restless ghosts, hunting for Mrs. Crane and Mrs. Coverdale for the last half-hour—ever since we arrived, in fact, until I grew so tired that out of compassion Mr. Coverdale allowed me to sit down and rest."

"One word, Mr. D'Almayne," interrupted Harry, regardless of an imploring look and gentle pressure of the arm from Arabella Crofton; "you made a joke (for I suppose you do not wish me to consider you spoke seriously) about my wife a minute ago; now, I'm a quick-tempered fellow—touchy you may call it, upon some points, and this happens to be one of them; so to prevent anything disagreeable, I tell you frankly, I don't like such jokes—you understand?"

Horace did understand; he glanced at Harry's face. The handsome mouth was sternly compressed—the small, well-cut nostril quivered, and the large dark eyes flashed with the anger he could scarcely restrain; his tall form was drawn up to its full height—his broad chest dilated, and the muscles stood out on his stalwart arms until their shape became visible beneath the "Zephyr Paletot"; altogether, Coverdale did not look just then the kind of man with whom it would be plea-

sant to quarrel: so D'Almayne, deeming "discretion the better part of valour," smiled, and said something which might mean anything, and conveyed a clear idea of nothing, in his most fascinating manner, and then piloted his companions to the spot where he had agreed on a rendezvous at a certain time with the Crane party. They had not yet made their appearance, however, and D'Almayne (who, since Harry gave him the "caution" conveyed in his last speech, had evinced a marked desire to keep on good terms with, and out of arm's reach of, so dangerous an acquaintance), guessing their whereabouts, volunteered to go and fetch them.

"Pray do not quarrel with that man," urged Arabella, as D'Almayne quitted them; "you are as little his equal in scheming and manœuvring, as he is yours in strength and courage, and for this reason he is more to be dreaded than if he were a very Hercules; do not lose your temper with him, for by so doing you will put yourself in the wrong and play his game; come, be guided by me in this matter; believe me, my only object is to secure your happiness."

As she spoke, she looked up in his face with such an expression of interest, not to say affection, that Coverdale, whose anger at the worst was always a very evanescent affair, felt an impulse of pity for her, which appeared in the softened tones of his voice, as he replied:

"Don't be afraid; I'm not going to give him his deserts at present, and I'm very sorry I spoke harshly to you just now; but I know Alice to be so good, and true, and pure—innocent and spotless as a child (by heaven, the slightest blow to my faith in her would drive me mad!), and the mere mention of that foolish boy supposing her to be a fit recipient for his romantic sentimental nonsense, made me lose my temper: but you need not fear my doing anything hasty. I shall, as you advise, observe Alfred Courtland, and if, as I feel certain, his attentions annoy Alice, I shall speak to him seriously and kindly (I know the boy has a good heart, and that it is D'Almayne who has set him on this business, if he is set on it); then, finding I am aware of it, his fancy will die a natural death; but I have little expectation that my preaching will be required. Alice's indifference will work the best cure."

As she spoke, the Crane party came in sight, Kate and her husband leading the van, closely attended by Horace D'Almayne; while, at some little distance behind them, lingered Alice on the arm of Lord Alfred Courtland. As they came up, he was addressing her in an earnest, pleading manner. Alice appeared thoughtful and "distraite," but the moment her eye fell upon Harry and Miss Crofton she started, coloured up, and turning to her companion, said in a hurried, eager tone:

"Such constancy and perseverance, my lord, deserve rewarding"; and as she spoke she gave him a rosebud she car-

ried in her hand, which he fastened in his button-hole with an expression of eager delight.

Alice's words and action were neither of them lost upon her husband or his companion.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ARCADIA IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

It is popularly asserted and believed that everything has two sides to it. Even a plum-pudding has an inside and an out; and that romantic malady yclept "love unrequited," although at first sight it appears an entirely one-sided affair, often demonstrates its bilateral capabilities by proving a much less heartrending business than was imagined, when the lapse of time enables one to discern the bright side of the picture. The Crane expedition to the Horticultural Fête formed no exception to this law of nature. Thus, at the moment when Harry, like Hamlet's unfortunate papa, was having poison poured into his ear, and was gradually working himself up to the bolster-scene-in-Othello pitch, Alice, that pleasant little Desdemona, unconsciously amused herself with Cassio, Lord Courtland, emulating Dr. Watts' "busy bee," by flitting from flower to flower, laughing at very small jokes, and altogether conducting herself with great levity, and in a singularly undignified manner—at least, so Mr. Crane thought; and as he was said to be made of gold, his opinions ought to have partaken of the value of that precious metal. But Mr. Crane had never quite forgiven Alice for not appreciating his many excellences, and was disposed to judge her harshly. After a time, however, when the novelty of the scene began to wear off—when Alice had reviewed the contents of Howell and James's, Swan and Edgar's, Redmayne's, and other ruination shops, on the fair forms of the ladies of the land—when she had "oh-how-beautiful-ed," and "isn't-it-lovely-ed" the flowers to her heart's content—when she had heard, and longed to dance to, the Guards' band, suddenly a dark vision rose to her mind's eye—her husband "tête-à-tête" with that evil mystery, Arabella Crofton, obscured the sunshine of her spirit; the rose-coloured spectacles through which she had beheld Vanity Fair fell off; the serpent had entered in; and, for Alice Coverdale, Chiswick was Paradise no longer. Thereupon she decided that Lord Alfred was a silly, tiresome boy, and worried her with his childish nonsense; that Mr. Crane was a fractious old idiot, who ought to be shut up in an appropriate asylum; that Kate looked bored and tired, which she did not wonder at; that Horace D'Almayne was fitter for the Zoological than the Horticultural Gardens, and deserved to

be caged with the chimpanzees without loss of time; and, finally (forgetting their separation had resulted from a caprice of her own), that Harry was very unkind to stay away from her in that way, with that hateful creature, Arabella Crofton, whom she was sure he liked after all, though he did pretend to treat her so coldly.

Then people began to push and crowd, and dresses became tumbled; and D'Almayne having left the party to look for Harry and Miss Crofton, Mr. Crane misled them, and they fell into difficulties, and were very hot and uncomfortable; and Alice quite pined to meet her husband, whose sturdy arm would have supported her, and whose tall figure and broad shoulders would have forced a way for her through the crowd. Next, Lord Alfred began to tease her to give him a flower from her bouquet, and got snubbed for his pains; until Horace D'Almayne, returning, made his report, viz., that, after much toil and trouble, he had at length discovered Miss Crofton and Mr. Coverdale, seated together in a shady corner, apparently absorbed in some deeply-interesting topic of conversation. This information tallying so exactly with her worst fears, and finding poor little Mrs. Coverdale both vexed and tired, very nearly produced a burst of tears, to avoid which pathetic display she did that which the unfortunate first Mrs. Dombey failed to effect—viz., she "made an effort," and became, not exactly herself again, but Alice Coverdale as she appeared when enacting the heartless coquette. And this she did, poor child! not from a want, but from a superfluity of heart. So, seeking to read her truant husband a practical moral lesson on the iniquity of charioteering dangerous damsels in common with whom he possessed mysterious antecedents, she afforded Lord Alfred a "material guarantee" of her favour, in the shape of the flower he had coveted; and having thus firmly riveted his chains, ostensibly petted and made much of her captive. This conduct on his wife's part was by no means calculated to soothe Harry Coverdale, pained, ruffled, and excited by his conversation with Arabella Crofton; and, without reflecting on the prudence or politeness of such a proceeding, he left his late companion to take care of herself, and stalking with stately steps, as of an offended lion, up to Lord Alfred Courtland, observed, in a tone of dignified irony:

"I am much obliged to your Lordship for taking such extreme care of Mrs. Coverdale, but will now relieve you from any further trouble on her account: take my arm, Alice."

Lord Alfred, strong in the possession of his rosebud, felt inclined to resist, and murmured something about its being a pleasure rather than a trouble; while Alice was just determining to support her swain, when luckily she happened to read in Harry's flashing eye symptoms of the approach of an attack of his "quiet manner," so hastily disengaging her

arm, she placed it within that of her husband, saying as she did so:

"I am not going to let this truant escape, now that I have caught him. He deserves punishment, so I shall inflict my society upon him for the rest of the afternoon—unless," she added, with a glance which bewitched Lord Alfred more completely than before, "I should find any stringent necessity to exercise my feminine prerogative of changing my mind."

"Your friend Mr. Coverdale's method of relieving you of your fair charge was more vigorous than polite, 'mon cher,'" remarked D'Almayne to Lord Alfred, who, feeling he was "de trop," had left the wedded pair to their own devices. "However, I think I have obtained a clue which I have only to follow up to arrive at a discovery which will help you on with your pretty little lady-patroness, by rendering her more the 'femme incomprise' and neglected wife than ever."

"Indeed!" was the reply; "what a clever fellow you are! I certainly owe Coverdale one, for his manner to me just now was anything but nice. Tell me, what have you discovered?"

"Well, it seems nothing very remarkable at first; but many a large and goodly oak has grown from as small an acorn. Listen—the immaculate Harry Coverdale has a private understanding with that dark-eyed gipsy, Arabella Crofton; they are a great deal more intimate and confidential in a 'tête-à-tête' than they allow themselves to appear in general society. I must try and learn what passed between them in Italy, and I think I can do so with very little trouble. I saw a man in town yesterday, Archie Campbell, who married one of the Muir girls, with whom the fair—or rather the dark—Arabella lived as governess, when they tried to exchange their Scotch brogue for the 'lingua Toscana.' She went to Italy with them, and there met Harry Coverdale—that I know as a fact; for additional particulars, I shall apply to the said Archie."

"Then do you think—do you conceive—do you mean to imply, in fact, that Mr. Coverdale is attached to this Miss Crofton?" stammered Lord Alfred, colouring, as though he, and not Alice's husband, were the supposed delinquent.

"You always put things into such plain words, 'mon cher'; it is a foolish habit, and the sooner you can divest yourself of it the better," was D'Almayne's reply; "probably the mighty Nimrod, in flirting with Miss Crofton, means no more harm than you do by your Platonic attachment to his pretty wife. Nevertheless, if such should prove the fact, and you gently insinuate the same to 'la belle Alice,' the chances are that she will be kinder than ever, to evince her gratitude for your having rendered her jealous of her husband—not that you seem to require any help—I saw where that rosebud came from, 'coquin'; but now you may, if you will, render me a

service; find your way to the entrance-gate, and wait till my friend, Monsieur Guillemard, makes his appearance—probably you will find him waiting there already—and having discovered him, bring him here."

As the obedient lordling strolled away on his mission, the indefatigable Horace gathered a rose; then approaching Kate Crane, he lisped in his most dreamy and affected style—

"I've been searching everywhere to find a rose of that peculiar tint which might harmonise and yet contrast well with your dress; at length, I am charmed to say my efforts have been successful. Mr. Crane, will you favour me by presenting this rose to Madame? Coming through your hands, I feel sure it will be accepted!"

"No, positively; that is, really it will be much more fitting—if I may be allowed to say so—that, as you have been so obliging as to find it, you should yourself present it. Mrs. Crane will, I feel convinced, be happy to acknowledge your politeness, by accepting a flower offered—if I may be permitted to say so—with such propriety and respect."

D'Almayne appeared about to avail himself of the permission which Mr. Crane thus graciously accorded him, when suddenly drawing back, he exclaimed, "Excuse me one minute; the thorns are so very sharp, I am afraid to hand it to you without some protection against them"; then, taking a slip of paper from his waistcoat pocket, he wound it round the stem of the flower, and fixing his eyes with a meaning look on those of Kate, he gave her the rose. Having done so, he began talking to Mr. Crane; and soon contrived, by a judicious selection of topics, chiefly connected with the Stock Exchange, to engross that zealous Mammonite's attention. As soon as his wife perceived this to be the case, she unrolled the paper from the stem of the rose, and, glancing at it hastily, perceived the following words written in Horace D'Almayne's neat hand: "Give me five minutes' conversation — I will make the opportunity, if you will avail yourself of it." Instantly crushing it in her hand, she rushed into conversation with Arabella Crofton, on the merits and demerits of certain new annuals; which subject, skilfully managed, lasted her until Lord Alfred Courtland returned, arm in arm with Monsieur Guillemard, better got up, more jaunty, and in yellower kid gloves than ever. This vivacious foreigner was instantly captured by Horace, and desired to explain, "as he alone could do," the peculiar advantages of that famous investment in Terra Cotta preference bonds, as Mr. Crane had an odd £10,000 lying comparatively fallow—only at three-and-a-half per cent.—which he would be glad to put out well. So, foolish avarice and clever roguery ambled off together. Then D'Almayne contrived to despatch Coverdale and his wife to look at a wonderful specimen of the

Hypothetica Screamans, and to saddle Lord Alfred with Arabella Crofton, although that smitten young aristocrat would have preferred to have trotted mildly about after Alice, like a pet lamb. Having disposed of these supernumeraries, he, as a matter of course, offered his arm to Kate, who had quietly acquiesced in his arrangements, and followed at such a judicious distance that, although they still belonged to the party, in effect they enjoyed all the advantages of a "tête-à-tête."

D'Almayne was the first to break silence.

"This is most kind," he said; "and leads me to hope that you are at length beginning to understand me—to perceive that my only wish is to act the part of a true friend towards you. I have a conviction that I owe a duty to you, for I often reflect with pain how large a share I had in bringing about your marriage."

At these words Kate gave a slight start, and her colour deepened; not appearing to observe these signs of agitation, her companion resumed:

"You may not be aware that it was by my advice that Mr. Crane transferred his attentions from your cousin (whose affection for Mr. Coverdale I perceived would oppose an effectual barrier to his wishes) to yourself. My object in doing so was twofold. Mr. Crane had shown me much kindness and attention: he was anxious to marry someone whose presence would invest his home with an air of distinction and attractiveness which his wealth could never bestow. The moment I beheld Miss Marsden I felt that no one could do so more efficiently. Thus, from an impulse of gratitude towards Mr. Crane, I persuaded him that it would be in every way a most suitable and desirable match, and induced him to make such an offer to Mr. Hazlehurst as should neutralize any objection that gentleman might have had to your occupying the position he had destined for his daughter. Again mistaking, in great measure, both your character and that of Mr. Crane, I believed you would have suited each other far better than I fear is the case. I fancied you ambitious, and that the power which wealth would bestow would render you not only contented, but happy; while I trusted marriage would develop in Mr. Crane traits of generosity and tenderness of which I now am forced to confess his nature is incapable. Had I guessed this sooner, I need scarcely add, the respect and admiration I have always experienced for one so gifted as you are would have prevented my advocating the match. All that now remains for me is to compensate, as far as it is in my power to do so, for any little failures in tact (believe me they are nothing more) of which my excellent friend, Mr. Crane, may be guilty; and I speak thus honestly and openly, in order that, appreciating my motives, you may place full confidence in me, and thus enable me"—and here he sank his voice al-

most to a whisper—"to assist you in bearing the burden which I have unconsciously helped to place upon you."

"I must believe you mean kindly by me," was Kate's reply; "but you are aware that, with me, deeds tell better than words. Has the application been made?"

"Yes."

"And with what result? But I fear I need scarcely ask."

"Not a favourable one, I regret to say. Mr. Crane saw Mrs. Leonard, hoping, I fancy, that she might have learned some tidings of her husband; but when he became aware of the object of her visit, he not only refused to assist her, or to do anything for her children, but grew irritated, reproached her with what he termed her husband's infamous conduct, declared he had lost thousands of pounds by his negligence, and wound up by threatening that, if she ever set foot in his house again he would give her in charge of the police. When I visited her I found her in tears, and utterly heartbroken by this failure of her last hope."

"You must go to her again," exclaimed Kate, eagerly; "tell her you have mentioned her necessities to a lady of your acquaintance, who is willing and, thank God, able to assist her; give her money; find out what she most requires; devise some plan by which she may be enabled to support herself and educate her children. Oh! if I can save this poor family from ruin, it will be some little ——" She checked herself abruptly, then continued: "Mr. Crane is most liberal to me, and allows me more than I have the least occasion or desire to spend on myself—so do not let them want for anything. And oh! be most careful—you say she is a lady, poor thing! —be most careful not to wound her feelings. You do not know how shrinkingly sensitive poverty makes natures that are at all refined."

"I fear Mr. Crane's words, spoken, I dare say, under a very just feeling of annoyance, both pained and irritated her," returned D'Almayne. "She naturally draws a strong line between the fact that her husband has been imprudent and unfortunate and the insinuation that he had been criminal. Mr. Crane, I grieve to say, appeared to doubt the truth of her statement that Mr. Leonard was ignorant of his partner's intended flight and defalcation."

"Ungenerous! cruel!" murmured Kate, carried away by her excitement, and forgetting, or perhaps at the moment scarcely heeding, the fact that D'Almayne's quick ears were eagerly drinking in these acknowledgments of the estimation in which she held her husband.

"I am most anxious to save you all trouble in this matter," resumed D'Almayne; "but it would be a great satisfaction to me, and relieve me of a responsibility for which I am scarcely fitted, if you would not object to visit Mrs. Leonard

yourself. She is already most anxious to see and thank the kind benefactress to whom I have informed her she is indebted. Were you once to talk to her, you would perceive the gentle yet strong nature we have to deal with; you would learn her hopes, fears, and prospects, from her own lips, rather than through such an unworthy interpreter as myself; you would see the interesting children—may I hope that you will consent?"

Kate paused—considered; but her answer demands a fresh chapter.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A CONCESSION, AND A "PARTIE QUARREE."

THE question we left Kate Crane considering in the last chapter she decided thus:—

"I should like to visit Mrs. Leonard," she said, slowly. "I feel the truth of all you urge—but there are difficulties in the way; Mr. Crane would greatly disapprove of such a proceeding on my part."

"He need never know it," suggested D'Almayne, in a voice little above a whisper.

"He need not," returned Kate, calmly, "but I have since my marriage made it a point of conscience never to do anything which I should object to Mr. Crane's hearing of; I still consider the rule a good one, and am disinclined to break through it."

"Does not your sensitive conscience," rejoined D'Almayne, "lead you to refine rather too much, until, adhering to the form of goodness, you in a great degree lose the substance, and thus, by a chivalrous scruple of never disobeying your husband, miss an opportunity of doing real good, by which you would neutralise the injury Mr. Crane's peculiarities may otherwise inflict upon this unfortunate family? I think, if you reflect on this for a minute, your excellent sense will convince you that your amiable but romantic scruple is fallacious."

Kate did reflect, and apparently her convictions assumed the shape D'Almayne had predicted, for she replied in a less assured voice than that in which she had formerly addressed him:—

"Mr. D'Almayne, you have spoken more honestly and openly to-day than you have ever done before, and I will treat you with equal frankness. You were acquainted with Mr. Crane before I had ever heard his name; you appear to know him well; you have alluded generally to his good points,

and have pointed out his weak ones with equal talent and perspicuity. I neither admit nor deny your statements—but, in the individual instance before us I believe that you are introduced this poor Mrs. Leonard to my notice; you have introduced this poor Mrs. Leonard to my notice; you have since taken much disinterested trouble on her account; you possess great tact, and have divined the happiness it affords me to assist those who, from misfortune and poverty, have fallen from the rank of gentlewomen; therefore in this matter, I feel you have a claim to work with me; for the first time, therefore, I will repose confidence in you. I wish to visit this poor lady—how am I to accomplish it without my husband's knowledge?"

Horace D'Almayne had won his point, Horace D'Almayne was happy! yet he did not clap his hands, neither did he hurrah wildly, nor dance a lively measure around Kate Crane, whom he believed he had circumvented in a different manner; but he forced his imperturbable countenance into an expression of philanthropic benevolence and gratitude, and arranged with Mrs. Crane a plan by which, during her husband's daily worship in the temple of Mammon, his god—an edifice more familiarly known in the good city of London as the Stock Exchange—she should visit unfortunate Mrs. Leonard, and witness with her own eyes how justly the prince of this world (who is identical with the monarch of a lower kingdom still) distributes his subjects' property.

About this time all the members of this disunited party assembled, and jointly and severally ended their day's enjoyment (?) by returning home tired, dejected, and suffering more or less from that ailment which defies those guinea-pigs, "the faculty"—an ailment as rife in St. James's as are cholera and small-pox within the precincts of St. Giles's—an ailment which, thanks to those bitter curses, the forms, ceremonies, requirements, and prejudices of society, afflicts and hangs heavily on many an honest man and loving woman—an ailment indigenous even in our glorious constitution, and which has as many aliases as shapes: the spleen, "ennui," but truest name of all, the Heartache!

"'Ogni medaglia ha il suo reverso,'" there is no rule without its exception! Horace D'Almayne was the exception to this particular rule—he was not troubled with heartache, because, in the metaphysical sense of the word, he did not possess a heart; but nature had made it up to him by giving him a very clear head, and thus it reasoned:—

"Yes, my pretty Kate, 'tout va bien'; you have grown civil, almost kind—not yet affectionate, but that is to come. Yet she is clever; doubts, suspects me! What children women are, even clever women; once appeal to their feelings, their impulses—bah! their reason lies captive before you—they are

puppets in your hand. 'Ah! c'est bien drôle cette petite existence ici bas!' for the rest, all goes well; the beautiful Kate shall compromise herself—the millionaire shall open wider his purse-strings—the bank wins for me—the little Alfred plays my game — courage, Horace! thy star is in the ascendant, you will die a rich man yet!"

The morning after the Horticultural Fête, Coverdale suggested to his wife that they had, in his opinion, spent sufficient time and money in the gay metropolis, and that agricultural and manorial duties called him to the country forthwith; but Alice pleaded so earnestly for only one week more of dissipation, with Lady Tattersall Trottemout's "soirée dansante" at the end of it, that Harry could not find it in his heart to refuse her. Scarcely had he yielded the point when a letter arrived from Tom Rattleworth, Magistrate and Master of Foxhounds, to inform him that, owing to the baneful influence of a certain grand seigneur in the neighbourhood, it was proposed to enclose a common and turn a road, which would destroy a favourite fox cover, and give Coverdale half a-mile further to drive to the nearest railway-station—that the matter was to be decided at the next meeting of magisrates—that he (Thomas) had striven tooth and nail to get up an opposition, in which he had been tolerably successful, and that he considered it only required Coverdale's presence to prevent the evil altogether. Thus urged, Harry had but one course to pursue, viz., commend his wife to Mrs. Crane's safe custody, and start for Coverdale Park forthwith, promising to return in time for "Lady Tat. Trott.'s benefit," as he was pleased to term it. Alice at first opposed his going, but when she found the question resolved itself into one of these alternatives, either that she must let him go alone, or give up her ball and accompany him, her opposition ceased. So Harry packed his carpet-bag, and departed—and the hours rolled by on their patent noiseless wheels, until the time appointed for that notable solemnity, Lady Tattersall Trottemount's "soirée dansante," arrived.

On that day Lord Alfred Courtland invited to a quiet dinner, at his comfortable bachelor lodgings, Horace D'Almayne, Monsieur Guillemard, and a youth who, because he was in every particular Lord Alfred's exact opposite, was an especial crony of his. Jack Beaupeep, "ætatis" twenty-five, was a clerk in a public office with a salary of £150 per annum, on which, by means of his talents, he contrived to live at the rate of—anything under a thousand. As, however, we shall not have very much to do with him in the course of this history, we will spare the reader further details by summing up his character in the two expressive words, "fast" and

"funny." Everybody knows a fast, funny man; and his was a bad case of the complaint. At a quarter to eight p.m. on the day in question this excellent young buffoon of private life betook himself to Lord Alfred's lodgings, and finding himself first in the field, looked around with a practised eye for the best means of turning the situation to comic effect. First he perceived a valuable statuette of Venus, as she appeared before the discovery of the art of dressmaking, for which has innate sense of propriety led him to improvise a petticoat, by means of a doyley and a small portion of the red tape of old England, purloined from her Britannic Majesty's stores that morning, and secreted by the delinquent for any possible exigencies of practical jesting. Having attired this young lady to his satisfaction, he obligingly bestowed on her a real Havannah cigar, which, thrust through an opening left by the sculptor in her clenched hand, with the end resting against her ambrosial lips, resembled a speaking-trumpet, and gave her that "ship-ahoy!" kind of appearance with which early engravers were pleased to endow Fame. He then wrote and watered on the pedestal of the statuette thus embellished a lable, bearing the inscription, "Eugénie, Empress of the French," murmuring to himself, "Delicate little compliment to the illustrious foreigner who is coming." Next he availed himself of a pair of boxing-gloves; "unearthing," as he termed it, the rolls inserted in two of the dinner napkins, and substituting for them these elementary instructors in the noble art of self-defence; and, lastly, espying the cruet-stand, he had just time to reverse the contents of the pepper and sugar casters, and confuse all the sauces, when to him entered Lord Alfred Courtland.

This young nobleman's appearance had considerably changed since first we had the pleasure of describing him. By abstruse study, and unflagging attention to the sayings and doings of men-about-town, he had acquired many noble attributes—he could lounge and dawdle, and walk with a pert yet lazy roll in his gait, as of a tipsy dancing-master, or of a cock-sparrow afflicted with sciatica; he could lisp as though his very tongue was too about-town-ish to speak plain, unadulterated English; he could make play with his eyes half shut, like a timid girl, or stare with them offensively wide open, like an insolent coxcomb, though he was not quite perfect in this last manœuvre as yet. Also, his clothes were large and loose enough for himself and half another man-about-town besides; and he had a bunch of baby's toys, modelled in gold, dangling from his watch-chain—Lilliputian house furniture, and a gun, and a sword, and a pistol to match, and a little man in armour with impossible features, accompanied by a horrid little skull of the same after his decease, with two of his little golden marrow-bones crossed under it, as if they were saying their prayers; there was like-

wise a ridiculous fish, which wagged its tail, and a fox's mask, as it is "knowing" to term the physiognomy of that astute quadrupedal martyr; the whole to conclude with a limp and jointed Punchinello, or Tom-fool, as a pendant (in every sense of the word) to the fool of larger growth who wore these childish absurdities. Thus attired and adorned, Lord Alfred Courtland withdrew one white hand from a pocket of his liberal trousers, and laying it on Beaupeep's shoulder, with a want of energy, general lassitude, and fish-out-of-the-waterishness of manner, which did him infinite credit, drawled forth—

"Ah! my dear fellar! this is veray good of you, to come at such short notice!"

"Not at all, not at all," was the brisk reply, for Beaupeep did not go in for, or revere, the all-to-pieces style, but rather made it a theme for playful jesting; "when I got your invite, I just scribbled off a line to Palmerston to say I'd dine with him to-morrow instead of to-day."

Lord Alfred quietly raised his eyebrows, while, nothing abashed, Beaupeep continued—

"It's very jolly to be on those terms with a man like 'Pam.,' and I consider it quite sufficient recompense for my unwearying devotion to my public duties."

"It really don't do with me, my dear Jack," interrupted Lord Alfred, in a tone of affectionate remonstrance; "reflect how long we've known each other!"

"By the way," recommenced Jack, ignoring the interruptional rebuke, "talking of 'Pam.' put me in mind of the Foreign Office, which, not unnaturally, leads to the inquiry of who may be the illustrious 'Mossoo' who is to make our fourth to-day?"

"Monsieur Guillemard! oh, he is a very gentlemanly and intelligent Frenchman, and a particular friend of Horace D'Almayne's."

"But what is he?" continued Beaupeep, pertinaciously; "is he a noble political exile, or a 'perruquier' from the Palais Royal, who can't meet his liabilities? Does he gain a frugal living by imparting a knowledge of his native tongue in six lessons, at half-a-crown each? or——"

"Hush! here he is," interrupted Lord Alfred, as a smart rat-tat-tat at the house-door announced an arrival; "he has something to do with the funds, and the financial interests, and the Rothschilds, and all the mysterious pounds, shillings, and pence business, in regard to which I have, I am afraid, no clearly defined ideas."

"Except to spend 'em first, and make your governor shell-out afterwards, you lucky beggar you!" was the plainly audible aside, as the servant announced Monsieur Guillemard and Mr. D'Almayne.

After the ceremony of introducing the volatile Jack to the

new comers had been performed, that individual immediately attached himself and devoted his conversation to Monsieur Guillemard, whom he persisted in addressing as "Mossoo le Comte," and whom he seemed to imagine just caught in some very foreign country indeed, and ignorant of the simplest English manners and customs; a delusion to which that gentleman's limited acquaintance with Lindley Murray's, or, indeed, any other British grammar, lent some slight colouring.

"I think I observed, Mossoo le Comte, that you came in a Hansom cab?" remarked Jack.

"Yers, we promenaded in a yer handsome carb, a handsome hors also; you shall drive some much more handsome hors in your street than with us," was the reply.

"The native British cab is a great and noble product of the liberal institutions of this free and happy land," returned Jack, oratorically; "if an Englishman chooses to walk, an enlightened legislature not only allows him to do so, but provides him with a granite pavement to walk upon; if he chooses to ride, the legislature has a cab awaiting his slightest wink—a mere contraction of the eyelid, Mossoo le Comte, obtains for the wearied Englishman a luxurious vehicle, a swift and steady horse, and a skilful driver, prepared to convey him one mile in any conceivable direction, for the trifling outlay of sixpence sterling."

"With the advantage of studying the 'patois' of Billingsgate in for the money, when the cabman returns thanks for his fare," added D'Almayne.

Jack Beaupeep favoured him with a glance of enquiry which, if it had been framed in words, would have run thus—"Are you a knave or a fool?" Apparently deciding in favour of the former hypothesis, he resumed—

"The additional attraction to which you so perspicuously allude, my dear sir, involves yet another striking peculiarity—viz., this driver, who so carefully conducts you through the crowded thoroughfares of our colossal metropolis, is no servile hireling, no parasitical serf to crouch at your feet, but a man, sir—a freeborn Briton—with as much vested right in 'Rule Britannia' as yourself. Sir! when a dissatisfied cabman alludes to my eyes and limbs, I open widely those aspersed optics, proudly draw up those vituperated limbs, and rejoice that he and I are fellow-countrymen!"

"My dear Jack, we're not upon the hustings; we have none of us the slightest intention of coming in for anywhere; and dinner has been served for the last five minutes," suggested his host, mildly.

Favouring him with a melodramatic scowl, which, at "Sadler's Wells" or the "Victoria," would, in theatrical parlance, have "brought down the house," Jack exclaimed—

"Is it thus a haughty aristocracy strives to trample on the

honest poor man! it is not well in ye, my lord, and before an illustrious foreigner, too; alas, my country!"—then perceiving that Guillemard was regarding him with a glance which evinced extreme doubts as to his sanity, that D'Almayne was looking supercilious, and Lord Alfred annoyed at his absurdity, Jack experienced the proud conviction that he had attained his object, viz., to astonish, confuse, and discomfit everybody. Having done so, he dropped the heroic, and condescended to make himself agreeable after the fashion of ordinary mortals, which, as he was really clever and well-informed, he succeeded in doing to a degree that, in great measure, effaced his previous misconduct from the recollection of his associates. He prefaced his reformation, however, by contriving to seat Guillemard by one of the boxing-gloved napkins, a manœuvre which elicited from that perplexed foreigner the exclamation, "'Mais quie diable! vot shall zies be?'" and a reproving "Jack, you idiot, how can you!" from Lord Alfred, who was equally amused and scandalised at his friend's absurdities. But a Frenchman's tact is seldom long at fault; and by the time Guillemard had extricated the boxing-glove from its envelope, he continued—

"'Ah, je comprends,' I apprehend! Monsieur Jacques Pipbo! 'il est gai, il est farceur,' he vos play vot you call von practicable joke, 'n'est-ce-pas, Milor?—bien comique!' ver fonney, ha! ha!"

So, harmony being established, they ate, drank, and were merry; champagne, moselle, Rhine wines, French wines, wines with names we know but cannot pronounce wines with names we do not know and could not spell if we did, were produced, and done justice to, during dinner and dessert; and then they quietly settled down to claret at 80s. the dozen, which tasted best, as they agreed, out of tumblers; Fribourg's finest cigars also made their appearance, and were not neglected; and for some time these four lords of the creation enjoyed life undisturbed. But Frenchmen seldom sit long over their wine. D'Almayne had too many schemes, which required a cool head to carry them out, to venture to inflame his brain with the juice of the grape; and by ten o'clock Lord Alfred proposed a hand at piquet, to while away an hour or so, until it should be time to adjourn to Lady Tattersall Trottemout's ball, to which Mentor and his pupil were invited; so Guillemard and his host began to play, Jack Beaupeep and his companion watching them, and betting half-crowns on the varying chances of the game. At first, fortune seemed inclined to befriend Lord Alfred, for he won three times consecutively; and Jack, who, as he observed, was resolved "to back the thorough-bred colt," realised capital to the amount of seven-and-six pence.

"Ah! bah! Horace, 'mon cher!' you shall bet wis me

'contre moi-même!' I cannot play for a so little stake, he does not agree wis me!" exclaimed Monsieur Guillemard, tossing down the cards pettishly.

"Let us double them, monsieur," began Lord Alfred, eagerly; "I was just going to propose it when you spoke; nothing is more 'ennuyant' than playing for inadequate stakes."

"'Mais oui!' you have reason, my lord. Horace, 'mon ami,' mix me 'de l'eau sucrée' wis a Ouinam Laque ice in him; I have thirst; he makes hot this evening."

"Not a bad idea, only I've a better one," rejoined Lord Alfred; "brew some sherry-cobbler, Jack; ring the bell, and order the materials: it's your deal, Monsieur Guillemard."

Sherry-cobbler is not a safe thing to play piquet upon, especially when your opponent confines himself to 'eau sucrée.' Lord Alfred lost, grew excited, doubled the stakes again and lost, trebled them and won, then played on recklessly against a run of ill-luck, until D'Almayne interfered.

"It is twelve o'clock, Alfred, 'mon cher'; we shall be late for Lady Tatt.'s."

"——Lady Tatt.!" was the uncomplimentary reply; "I shall not go."

D'Almayne leaned over him, and observing in a whisper, "You forget 'la belle' Alice is expecting you," drew the cards from his reluctant hand.

Rising sulkily, Lord Alfred walked with a slightly unsteady step to a writing-table, took pen and ink, and hastily tracing a few words, handed the paper to Monsieur Guillemard—it was a cheque for £500!

"Ring for the brougham, D'Almayne," he continued. "Monsieur Guillemard, you must give me my revenge at an early opportunity; good night, Jack"; then turning away with a laugh, as he perceived that youthful legislator, who had "gone in" for sherry-cobbler rather too zealously, fast asleep on the sofa, he retired to his dressing-room to remove, as far as he was able, the outward effects of wine and excitement.

As he quitted the apartment, D'Almayne, after a hasty glance at the "used up" Jack, drew Guillemard aside, and speaking French, said in an eager whisper, "You are much too precipitate, and will ruin everything; what could persuade you to win so large a sum from him at one sitting?"

"You conceive it that I am too impressed! 'Regarde!' One gave to me this 'billet' at the dinner-table," was the reply.

Hastily snatching it, D'Almayne read as follows:—

"—— Street, Eleven p.m.

"Prince Ratrapski, the Russian nobleman, has been playing

deeply; has had a run of unparalleled luck, and broken the bank; unless you can come by £500 immediately, there will be an unpleasant exposure, and D'Almayne and yourself will be, before morning, the tenants of a debtor's prison, with

"Your devoted, LE ROUX."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

SOME OF THE JOYS OF OUR DANCING DAYS.

LADY TATTERSALL TROTTEMOUNT lived in the Brompton and Kensington region, and knew everybody. Her deceased papa had walked into Manchester some fifty years since, with a good head on his shoulders, and fourpence-halfpenny in his breeches-pocket. Being tired with his walk, he sat down in Manchester, and rested there for the space of forty years, during which time, by a process peculiar to that city, his fourpence-halfpenny grew into a hundred and forty thousand pounds. Unto him was born, in lawful wedlock, one only daughter, the subject of the present brief memoir, who, on his retirement to "t' Oud Churchyard" (as, in his Lancashire dialect, he was accustomed to denominate his final resting-place in the burial-ground of the Collegiate Church), inherited the fourpence-halfpenny and its compound interest; with which, when her mourning for her father was ended, she purchased Sir Tattersall Trottemout. This noble baronet, who was by no means worth the price she gave for him, had been essentially a fast man, and had run through everything he could lay his "blood-red hand" upon—his own fortune and the fortunes of several of his relations included—and when they were all gone and spent, he ran through his reputation; which last "rapid act" did not take him long, as that "bubble" was not as "wide as a church-door, nor deep as a draw-well," when he began upon it. Thus, finding himself under a cloud and in difficulties—the only things he had yet encountered which he could not run through (the good old days of "pinking" one's tailor instead of paying him being unfortunately past)—Sir T. T. felt that his time was come, and that he must prepare his mind for another—that is, a married —life. So "ætatis" forty-five, he went into dock, dyed his hair and whiskers, purchased a new set of teeth, laid in a stock of patent leather boots, and ran down to Manchester to captivate an heiress. The respectable owner of the enlarged and embellished fourpence-halfpenny had, at that epoch, been about one year under the turf which his future son-in-law had been on for above twenty; and his orphan daughter, of sweet nineteen, was immediately smitten and wounded by the aristocratic appearance and distinguished

manners of the broken-down titled blackleg who sought her —— fortune. She, being then a simple-minded, honest girl, absurd as it may appear, loved the creature; and, despite the advice of several kind-hearted, strong-headed, fearfully vulgar old men, who were her trustees, guardians legal advisers, etc., etc. (policeman, so to speak, appointed by the lamented deceased to prevent his developed fourpence-halfpenny being prematurely reduced to its pristine elements), this young lady vowed she would marry Sir Tattersall Trottemout—and did so. But, as the baronet's talent for running through any amount of cash was rumoured even at Manchester, the ancient policeman tied up the fourpence-halfpenny so tightly that nobody could manufacture ducks and drakes with it—not even Sir Tat. Trott.: so, after a few abortive attempts, that ornament to his order gave up his evil courses, and settled down quietly on cigars, brandy and water, and whist with half-crown points—a notable example of the reformatory powers of matrimony. His lady-wife went through the usual agreeable process of awaking from "Love's young dream," and discovering that, after the manner of Caliban, she had, in her simplicity,

"Made a wonder of a poor drunkard,"

she, like a sensible woman, resolved to put up with her bad bargain, keep her husband in respectable order, and create or discover some fresh interest in life for herself. In accordance with this determination, she restricted the marital cigars and brandy and water to certain definite limits; tested several phases of London society; and then took her line, and chose her associates accordingly. Being an intellectual woman, and having literary taste up to a certain point, she affected the society of artists of all classes, and in every department of art. Thus, at her "soirées," you might meet literary men of various species: historians, novelists, journalists, critics, "et hos genus omne"; painters, sculptors, musicians; the leading actors of the day, male and female—in fact, all the celebrities whom the London season delighted to honour. But, knowing that talent requires an intelligent audience, Lady Tattersall Trottemout associated a certain proportion of the "profanum vulgus" to worship her collected divinities. Her parties, therefore, soon became noted as the most agreeable of their kind; and to one of these meetings, in which dancing was to be the chief feature of the evening, were our friends in Park Lane invited. Harry had promised Alice that, if it were possible, he would return to escort her to this notable gathering; however, on the appointed evening, ten o'clock arrived, but no Coverdale. Alice was rather frightened and considerably annoyed, but Kate persuaded her that there was no just cause for alarm; and so, leaving a note for Harry begging

him to join them, if he should arrive in time to make it worth while to do so, they proceeded to the "spacious mansion" of Lady Tattersall Trottemout.

For some time, little Mrs. Coverdale was sufficiently amused by observing the appearance, manners, and customs of the various notabilities, as they were pointed out to her by no less a personage than her hostess, who, attracted by the simple beauty of her new acquaintance, and the evident pleasure and interest she took in all that was going on around her, actually devoted to her ten minutes of the valuable time in which, on such occasions, a clever mistress of the house is expected, and actually contrives, to say and do something civil to a hundred and fifty human beings, all prepared to magnify any accidental neglect into an intended slight, and to resent it accordingly. But, ere ten minutes had well elapsed, an illustrious stranger arrived, who was so intensely foreign that he could not be prevailed upon to speak or understand any language of which the deepest philologists present were able to make head or tail, and who, in his consequent bewilderment, had seated himself on the music-stool, with his back towards the key-board of the pianoforte—thereby establishing a complete blockade of that harmonious and indispensable instrument, which no representations in French, German, or Italian, could induce him to relinquish: so a breathless female aide-de-camp, in flaxen ringlets and white muslin, hurried up to report this frightful dilemma to the commandress-in-chief, who, with the greatest presence of mind, despatched her to summon Count Cacklewitz, the young Hungarian patriot, who, it was generally believed, could speak everything, even his own language, and then hastened in person to raise the siege of the pianoforte. Alice, thus deserted, fell into the hands of a tall, gaunt, blue woman, rejoicing in a red nose and a long, fluent tongue, who began to talk high art to her, and confused her about transcendentalism and Carlyle; the Oxford Graduate (viz., Turner's single and singular disciple, wonderful Mr. Ruskin), and pre-Raphaelism; the meaning of Tennyson, when he condescends to be obscure (for he can write real poetry, which "he who runs may read" and feel), and of the dark Brownings, and Macaulay and the romance of history, and many other hackneyed pseudo-literary topics of the day, until our unlucky little heroine lapsed into that state of mental incapacity usually described as not knowing whether one is standing on one's head or one's heels. Then began vocal music, which mercifully silenced Alice's strong-minded persecutor; and a rather raffish baritone gentleman, who wanted shearing dreadfully, and was all voice, eyes, and feathers, like a lean bird, accosted a singularly hard-featured, middle-aged German lady, as "Oh! thou beloved one!" to which she made an appropriately tender soprano reply; and the company listened with much forbear-

ance, for quite ten minutes, to the united affection of this interesting couple, detailed to an accompaniment now rapturous, now pathetic, at the end of which period they both suddenly exalted their voices, bellowed their love at each other in one final outburst of sympathetic insanity, and subsided into a refreshing silence. Then a young lady in a pink sash informed the company that her brain was on fire, her heart consuming, and her digestive organs generally in a state of spontaneous combustion, because her fatherland writhed in the grasp of tyrants—"tra la, tra lira la!"—which unpleasant state of affairs was much applauded by hairy exiles, with microscopic washing-bills, which they never paid, and a monomania in regard to freedom, which they never obtained, but which had kept them in hot water (the only water they patronized) from their youth upwards. Lastly, a very mild young gentleman of England excited himself about some "Rivar! rivar! shining rivar!" into which pellucid stream he kept putting his foot "deeper and deeper still," until everyone was so sorry for him that the whole party appeared on the verge of hysterics, and were forced to conceal their emotion behind fans, flounced pocket-handkerchiefs, and white-gloved hands. Then the votaries of Terpsichore stood at ease upon their light fantastic toes (except in the cases of tightly-shod martyrs), and polking was the order of the night—at which period Alice looked about and wondered what had become of Lord Alfred Courtland, who had said a great deal on the subject of the delight he expected in dancing with her, and had engaged her hand for the first polka.

Now, whether any strictly moral reader, with that bad opinion of poor human nature which very strict morality usually induces, has decided that "every woman is at heart a rake," and believed our little heroine about to prove herself a "dreadful creature," and transfer her affections from her lawful husband to her unlawful admirer, we do not know; but if any reader has set his (or her) heart on such a consummation, we are sorry to be obliged to inform him that he is mistaken. Alice considered Lord Alfred a good-natured, agreeable boy, whose conversation served to amuse her, and to whose society she had become accustomed; she would a thousand times rather have talked to Harry at any time, but Harry was not always attainable—indeed, the chances were generally against her seeing anything of him from breakfast till dinner-time, and then Lord Alfred became a very good and safe substitute.

But the first polka was over, and a "valse à deux temps" followed it, neither of which Alice danced, and still no Harry, no Lord Alfred appeared; and, in despair, she was obliged to say Yes to a heavy cornet in the Life Guards, who was big enough to eat her, and polked like a polite young elephant. Glad to escape without being squeezed to death or trampled

under foot by this ponderous young warrior, Alice had just found a seat when D'Almayne and Lord Alfred lounged in; the latter immediately joined her, and claimed her promise to dance with him; but Alice was tired and bored, and feeling that it was in some degree owing to him that she had become so, and that he ought to have been there sooner, she replied coldly—

"I promised to reserve the first dance for you, my lord, but the first dance has been over some time, and several others have followed; I do not feel disposed to dance at present."

Of course, Lord Alfred endeavoured to excuse himself, and when Alice declined dancing, said, "Very well, then he should sit still too—all the night, if she pleased, for he certainly should not dance with anyone else." So, after she had teased him until he very nearly lost the little good temper which the events of the earlier part of the evening had left him, she took compassion on him, and danced with him twice consecutively; but when he urged her to do so a third time, she refused; and on his pressing her, told him plainly that, as her husband was away, she felt bound to be more than usually particular, and that it was not etiquette to dance the whole evening with one gentleman; at which rebuff his lordship was pleased to take offence, and leading her to a seat, he bowed and left her. Deserted by his lady-love, and swindled out of his money by his pseudo-friends, this victimised young nobleman looked about for his protector and adviser—at once patron and parasite—Horace D'Almayne, but for some time without success; when at length he did discover him, he was engaged in such earnest private conversation with some gentleman unknown that Lord Alfred felt it would be ill-bred to interrupt them; accordingly, he lounged through the rooms, resisting several introductions to "great heiresses" and "loveliest girls in London," all declared to be dying to dance with him, wandered listlessly into the refreshment-room, drank a tumbler of champagne and soda-water, and was thinking seriously of turning sulky and going home to bed, when D'Almayne seized him by the arm, exclaiming:

"Alfred, 'mon cher,' where have you hidden yourself? I've been hunting for you for the last half-hour. Why have you left 'la belle' Coverdale?"

"Oh, yes! that is good! looking for me, indeed, when I passed you twice close enough almost to brush against your elbow, and you never even saw me, so engrossed were you plotting treason with some party unknown," was the captious reply.

"Ungrateful! when it was for your interest I was exerting myself," returned D'Almayne, reproachfully; "but you do not explain why you have quitted 'la belle' Alice; you really are not sufficiently attentive; no pretty woman likes to be neglected."

"She's a little fickle, heartless coquette, and I'll let her see that I'm not so completely her slave as she appears to imagine," answered Lord Alfred, snappishly, at the same time filling his glass with champagne; "she refused to dance with me more than twice because it was not etiquette, and she wished to be extra particular because her husband was not here. I don't think he'd overwhelm her with his attentions if he were, unless he means to alter very much. No: the fact is, she is out of humour, and chooses to vent it on me; it would just serve her right if I were to go home, and leave her to her own devices."

"Do nothing of the kind, 'mon cher'; but listen to me, and—excuse me, but don't drink any more champagne, or you'll do something absurd; your comic friend brewed that sherry-cobbler too strong. Go quietly back to the Coverdale; try and persuade her to dance, but if she refuses, show no annoyance, and get her to allude again to her husband; then carelessly and incidentally, as if you had no design in what you were saying, suggest that she would scarcely be so particular, if she knew what a naughty boy he had been in Italy, and having excited her curiosity, tell her the following anecdote."

As a bevy of men entered the refreshment-room at that moment, D'Almayne, linking his arm with that of Lord Alfred, led him aside, and made to him a communication, the nature of which will appear in the due course of this history. Lord Alfred seemed surprised, and, to his credit be it spoken, even pained, by the information thus afforded him; and when D'Almayne had concluded, his auditor remained a minute or so buried in thought, then he asked abruptly—

"You are sure there is still some clandestine understanding between them—you are quite certain?"

"I am as certain as a man can be of any clandestine proceeding to which he is not a party," was the reply; "you are aware of what I observed on the occasion of the Horticultural Fête. I now relate to you the antecedents; you are no longer a child, but sufficiently a man of the world to draw your own deductions."

The adroit flattery on the weak point told: faith in truth and honour would argue a want of knowledge of life; so with a slight laugh, assumptive of an omniscience in evil, he replied, "I was willing to give him the benefit of a doubt, if it were possible; but, as you say, the thing is clear enough; and now, how is this to advantage me?"

"Do you ask?" was the surprised rejoinder; "I thought you told me just now that the cruel fair one had snubbed you, by throwing her duty to her husband at your head; so it occurred to my simplicity that this information, properly applied, would prevent a recurrence of such rebuff."

"But surely you would never have me tell her—and her

own husband the hero of the adventure!" expostulated Lord Alfred.

"Listen, 'mon cher,' one moment," was D'Almayne's reply, spoken in a low, impressive voice: "I do not wish you to follow any particular line of conduct; I have no interest to serve, no desire to gratify, by your doing or abstaining from anything; but when you tell me you desire to gain such and such a social position, and ask my advice as to the best way of attaining your wishes, I, as your friend, point out the means to you—it is for you to judge whether they are such as you choose to employ. You must now excuse me: I see some old acquaintances of mine, to whose memory I am anxious to recall myself."

"Then you really advise me to tell her!" exclaimed Lord Alfred, seizing D'Almayne's arm in his eagerness and indecision.

"I really advise nothing of the kind, 'mon cher,'" was the reply; "I have already cautioned you against that abrupt plain speaking of yours; you should divest yourself of that rustic habit. You could scarcely sin more deeply against good taste and good breeding than to go to 'la belle' Coverdale, and bring a railing accusation against her husband, nor could you divine a plan more certain to frustrate your hopes and wishes; but if, grieving over her misplaced confidence, you philanthropically incline to hint to her that he is scarcely the immaculate ascetic her imagination depicts, 'c'est tout autre chose!' and now you must excuse me"; and as he spoke, he gently freed his coat-sleeve from Lord Alfred's grasp, and regarding him with a half-sarcastic, half-compassionate, but wholly irritating smile, he turned and quitted the spot.

Thus left to his own reflections, which were none of the most agreeable, Lord Alfred paused for a few moments in indecision; then, with a hand tremulous from excitement, again replenished his glass, tossed down the champagne, and returned to the dancing-room.

During her admirer's absence, Alice had, for want of some more interesting occupation, been conversing with Arabella Crofton, using all her skill to try to elicit some particulars of her acquaintance with Harry in Italy, in which endeavour she had been most adroitly foiled by the quiet self-possession of the "ci-devant" governess, who told her most readily all she did not care to learn, and nothing that she did. As Lord Alfred approached, an individual was introduced to Miss Crofton, who desired the honour of her hand for the next polka, which desire that young lady obligingly gratified, thus affording his lordship an opportunity of seating himself by Alice, of which he instantly availed himself.

"It is never right to believe in a fair lady's nay," he began, "so I have returned to afford you an opportunity of confess-

ing your change of mind with a good grace; come, they are just going to begin a new polka, let us take our places."

"If ladies do always change their minds, I am going to be the interesting exception which proves the rule," was Alice's reply.

"How provokingly and unnaturally obstinate you are to-night, Mrs. Coverdale! You pretend to be fond of dancing, and yet, because I ask you, you resolve to sit still!"

"I have already told you my reason," rejoined Alice; "in Mr. Coverdale's absence I do not choose to dance the whole evening with any one gentleman."

"What a pattern wife you are!" was the reply; "you give up your own amusement, and destroy all my pleasure, out of regard for the ghost of a scruple, which I dare say has never entered Mr. Coverdale's brain; really, the patient Griselda was nothing compared to you."

Alice was annoyed by his pertinacity, and, considering this speech impertinent, was about to repeat her refusal in terms which would have enlightened his lordship very considerably on these points, when it flashed across her that he might have taken rather too much champagne; and the idea having occurred to her his flushed face and excited manner confirmed it. Having sufficient liking for him to wish to prevent him from making himself ridiculous, she good-naturedly resolved to engross his conversation herself, and, aware of what she conceived to be the true state of the case, not to take offence at anything he might say, intending to read him a lecture on the following day. In accordance with this resolution, she replied:

"I consider it a great compliment to be compared to the patient Griselda, more particularly as I was not of opinion that she and I had very many qualities in common. By the way," she continued, seeking to change the subject, and taking the first idea that occurred to her, "what do you think of the lady whose chair you are occupying? I have never asked your opinion of Miss Arabella Crofton."

The question was a most unfortunate one. Alice's continued refusal to dance with him had annoyed Lord Alfred, and wounded his vanity; the reason of her refusal was her absurd devotion (as he considered it) to her husband; and now she, as it were, held the cup of revenge to his lips by the question she had asked him. Up to this point his better nature had struggled with the temptation successfully, but now it had acquired an additional strength, and overcame him.

"I wonder you should care to know my ideas on the subject," he said; and as he proceeded to work out Horace D'Almayne's suggestions, his tone and manner unconsciously assumed a resemblance to that excellent young man's sarcastic and suggestive delivery: "Miss Crofton is merely a recent

and very slight acquaintance of mine; you should apply to Mr. Coverdale—he could tell you many much more interesting particulars of her history than I am able to communicate, if he were willing to do so."

All temptations to do things foolish or wrong are orthodoxly supposed to come from the Prince of Darkness; if it be so, the fact speaks very highly for the intellectual capacity of that sable potentate, as the said temptations invariably adapt themselves in a most wonderful manner to the various weaknesses and inconsistencies of our nature. Thus, as Alice's speech had, unintentionally on her part, appealed to Lord Alfred's leading foible—vanity, so, in turn, did his reply re-act upon Alice's vulnerable points—jealousy of Arabella Crofton, and consequent curiosity as to her former relations with Harry Coverdale. Accordingly, forgetting time, place, proprieties, even her doubt in regard to the perfect sobriety of the person she was addressing, in the overpowering interest of the question, she asked, hurriedly—

"Why do you say that? to what do you refer? has Mr. Coverdale ever told you anything on the subject?"

Lord Alfred smiled at the effect which his hint had produced; though, when he marked his victim's eager eye and trembling lip, his good feeling made one last appeal, and he half resolved to leave D'Almayne's communication untold. Had he been completely himself, the good resolution would have been formed and adhered to; but he had "put an enemy into his mouth to steal away his brains," and was no longer able to control his impulses; so, by an effort, he silenced the voice of conscience, and replied—

"I shall break no confidence by telling you why I supposed Mr. Coverdale better 'up' in Miss Crofton's previous history than I am, for he never mentioned her name in my presence; indeed, now I come to think of it, it is a subject he always studiously avoids; but my information relates to certain romantic passages said to have occurred in Italy."

"In Italy!" exclaimed Alice, aghast at this apparent realisation of all her vague fears and suspicions. "Go on," she continued, impatiently; "I can listen to no hints aspersing my husband's character; if you have anything to say against him, do not insinuate it, but speak out plainly and honestly."

"Really, you mistake me," was the reply; "I have no accusation to bring against Mr. Coverdale; but your question recalled to my mind an anecdote which I heard lately, and I was amused at your requiring information from me which your own husband was so much better able to afford."

"And what was this remarkable anecdote? Pray let me have the benefit of hearing it, my lord," rejoined Alice, in vain trying to look and speak in an unconcerned manner.

"Really I think I had better not tell you; you ladies are apt to be a little jealous sometimes without reasonable cause.

'Where ignorance is bliss,' you know——" He paused with a tantalising smile, then seeing from Alice's manner that she was not in a humour to be trifled with, he continued: "Well, I see you mean to hear it, so I may as well tell you at once—not that there is anything very wonderful to tell. You must know that, some three or four years ago, Miss Crofton, being then younger and handsomer than she is now (she is not my style, but many people consider her vastly attractive still), was living as governess with a family of the name of Muir, and in that capacity accompanied them to Florence. John Muir, the eldest son, was an old college friend of Mr. Coverdale's, and meeting by chance in Switzerland, they joined forces, and spent two or three months at Florence, making occasional excursions into the adjoining country. Everything progressed with cheerfulness and serenity in this Italian Arcadia until one fine day the eldest Miss Muir eloped with an individual who represented himself as a Neapolitan Count, and proved to be merely either valet or courier to the same. This broke up the party, and Mr. Coverdale took his leave; but scarcely had he been gone twelve hours when, lo and behold, Miss Crofton, who had been much blamed for not having looked after the eloped-with young lady more closely (I suppose she was looking after somebody else), suddenly disappeared. After hunting about Florence in vain, Paterfamilias Muir somehow obtained a clue to the lady's whereabouts, following which he reached a village some thirty miles distant, where he discovered Miss Crofton, and, if my informant did not err, Mr. Coverdale also. Whether it had been his intention to place her in that position now so much more worthily filled, or whether he proposed an arrangement of a less permanent character, history telleth not; suffice it to add, as the book says, that the eloquent representations of Pater Muir induced the lady to return with him to Florence, whence he instantly despatched her to England under some safe escort, while Mr. Coverdale pursued his onward course to Turkey and the East." He paused, but as Alice made no reply, merely concealing her countenance behind a voluminous fan, somewhat smaller than a peacock's expanded tail, he continued: "Such was the 'historiette' related to me; but scandal-mongers are so given to exaggerate that I dare say it is not half-true; so do not worry yourself about it, my dear Mrs Coverdale."

This consolatory codicil was added because his lordship heard, or fancied he heard, a sound analagous to a repressed sob proceed from behind the fan, and this pseudo-profligate young nobleman carried a very tender heart under his embroidered waistcoat.

On receiving this confirmation of her worst, nay, more than her worst fears, Alice's first impulse was to give way to a flood of tears—an impulse so strong that, unable entirely to check

it, the sob which Lord Alfred had partially overheard was the result. The story chimed in with her jealous suspicions so exactly that it never for a moment occurred to her to question the truth of it; on the contrary, it would have required the clearest evidence of its falsehood to make her disbelieve it. Having by a great effort repressed her tears, her next impulse was to prevent anyone, especially Lord Alfred, from perceiving how deeply his intelligence had affected her. Accordingly she turned to him, and replied in as careless a tone as she could summon—

"A very pretty bit of scandal, truly; and, as you say, worth as much, or as little, rather, as scandal usually is; however, the tale has served to amuse me and put me in a good humour; so, as you seem to have set your heart upon another dance, I suppose I must exercise my woman's privilege in your favour, and change my mind. They are going to waltz—shall we begin?"

Surprised and delighted at the success of his experiment, and almost inclined to attribute supernatural wisdom to Horace D'Almayne, Lord Alfred hastily offered his arm to his enslaver, and in another minute they were whirling round the room in all the giddy excitement of a rapid waltz. While the dance was still proceeding, a tall, striking-looking man entered the room, and shading his eyes from the unaccustomed brilliancy of the lights, carefully scrutinised the dancers, until his glance fell upon the figures of Alice and Lord Alfred, when a shade came over his handsome features, and leaning his shoulder against the side of a doorway, he remained with his eyes tracking the evolutions of two of the figures glancing before him. After he had remained motionless for some minutes, absorbed in his own thoughts, which were, apparently, of no over-pleasant nature, a gentle touch on the arm aroused him, and, looking round, he perceived Arabella Crofton. She was about to address him, but by a warning gesture he silenced her, and she remained standing silently beside him until, in a low, stern voice, he asked abruptly—

"How often has she been dancing with him?"

"Three times, I believe; but I assure you——"

"Hush!" continued Coverdale in the same stern, impressive voice, which was just above a whisper; "I want facts, not comments. Has she danced with anyone else since he has been here?"

"Not that I am aware of," was the reply. "She danced with a young guardsman before he came."

"And since?"

"They have been either dancing or talking together, except for about ten minutes, during the last two hours."

Coverdale made no reply, but his lips became more sternly

compressed, and the shade on his brow grew deeper, until the dance concluded, then muttering—

"This must not go on; I shall make her come away,"—he strode across the room to where (her late partner bending gracefully over her, and talking about nothing with the deepest "empressement") his wife was seated.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ARABELLA.

ON perceiving her husband Alice started, and, between surprise and anger, her cheeks assumed a hue more resembling that violent and unsentimental flower the peony than the blush-rose, to the use of which our minor poets are so strongly addicted. This blush, which, with all his trust in and affection for his wife, Harry could scarcely fail to misinterpret, did not tend to impart any great degree of cordiality to his manner as he thus accosted her:—

"I scarcely expected to find you still here, so late as it is; but I only reached Park Lane within the last half-hour. There had been an accident on the line, and our train was delayed between two and three hours. You look flushed and tired. You've been tempting her to dance too much, I'm afraid, Courtland. I saw the carriage waiting as I came in. I should think you must have had enough of this nonsense, Alice! What say you to coming away? I've lots of news to tell you from home."

"I'm afraid your budget must wait a little longer. I'm engaged to Lord Alfred for the next dance, and intend to fulfil my engagement; so you had better submit to your fate quietly, and provide yourself with a partner," was Alice's cool reply.

"Courtland will excuse you, I'm sure," urged Harry; "come away, if for no better reason than that I wish it."

"An all-sufficient one in your autocratic eyes, I dare say," was the flippant rejoinder; "but the barrel-organs remind us too constantly that 'Britons never shall be slaves,' for me to think of sacrificing my freedom to all your imperious fancies. Come, my lord, they are going to wind up with Sir Roger de Coverley; let us take our places." So saying, Alice accepted the proffered arm of her "cavalier servante," and walked off with him, leaving her husband to struggle against his rising anger (which in her then frame of mind she saw and disregarded) as best he might. A severe struggle it was, and one in which nothing but his deep love for her, and fear of compromising her by word or deed, could have rendered him success-

ful. By a powerful exercise of self-control, he contrived to avoid any outward manifestation of his feelings; and after watching Alice and her partner for some minutes, with flashing eyes and an aching heart, as they hurried through the boisterous evolutions of that romping dance, he wandered listlessly through the rooms, now partially deserted, seeking some spot where he might be alone with his troubled thoughts, and avoid the necessity of replying to the commonplaces of society, to which, at that moment, he felt himself completely unfitted. Having passed through the music-room, he found himself in an elegantly-furnished boudoir, which at first sight he believed to be untenanted, and, flinging himself into an easy-chair, leaned his head on his hands, and gave way to painful reflections. After remaining in this attitude for several minutes, a sound resembling a sigh caught his ear, and, hastily looking up, he perceived Arabella Crofton.

"Were you here when I entered?" he inquired.

"Yes; I was standing in the recess of the window, and the curtain concealed me. I should have spoken to you, but as I perceived you were preoccupied, I was afraid to disturb you, and did not intend to move until you had left the boudoir, but your ears are so quick that you detected me. I wish," she continued, in a timid, faltering voice, "your brow did not wear so deep a shade, or that I were in any degree able to remove it." As she spoke, she drew nearer to him, and leaned her arm on the back of the chair on which he was sitting.

Kindness and affection are never so much prized as when we have suffered injustice at the hands of one we love. Words cannot console at such a moment; but sympathy—the conviction that another heart feels for and with us—is able in some degree to do so. Whatever faults Arabella Crofton might possess—and that they were neither few nor light no one was better aware than Harry Coverdale—the truth and strength of her regard for him he did not doubt. Deeply, fondly, earnestly as he loved his wife, he must have been more than mortal had he not perforce contrasted the levity (to use the mildest term) and unkindness of her on whom he thus lavished his whole treasure of affection, with the ready sympathy, the watchful tenderness of one who, if she had been all evil, nay, if she had not possessed in some degree unusual generosity of character, might have hated him with a strength proportioned to the regard she now appeared to feel towards him. Men are constitutionally denied the relief which the gentler sex derive from tears; but if, when a woman would weep, a man of deep, strong feeling can be sufficiently softened to give vent to his sorrow in words, the effect is somewhat analogous. Harry's heart was full to overflowing, and Arabella's well-timed sympathy caused the torrent of his grief to burst forth.

"Why does she try me thus!" he said; "it is, it must be, mere want of thought; she is wilful, I see it as clearly as I

see and know that it was my culpable neglect which first made her so; but this is a hard punishment for even so gross a fault! If she knew how her cold looks and hard words pain me—how it grieves, destroys me to be forced to deny her anything—to feel it my duty, as I perceive it to be now, to oppose her slightest wish! And then to see her doing things which may give those who do not know her truth and purity as I do, occasion to slander her—Arabella, it maddens me!" he pressed his hand to his forehead to still its throbbing; but when his companion appeared about to attempt to console him, he resumed, abruptly—"Don't speak; you cannot defend her—her conduct admits of no defence, and I will not hear her blamed! Neither can you advise me; as far as action goes, my course is clear—I shall take her out of town to-morrow; and as I cannot have it out with that scoundrel D'Almayne, or the weak, ungrateful boy he is ruining, without compromising her, I must postpone the day of reckoning with them—it will come sooner or later, that is all clear enough; but that is not the point"—here words failed him, and covering his eyes with his hand, he relapsed into his former gloomy silence.

Arabella Crofton was a woman of strong passions, and naturally of strong impulses also, but these she had learned in great measure to control; thus her manner was usually quiet and collected, and she both spoke and acted according to a rule laid down by herself for her own guidance, and tending towards some definite end. But when, as in the present instance, she was actuated by any overpowering feeling, she was for the moment completely carried away by it, and would act for good or evil, as the impulse which controlled her was a right or wrong one, even in direct opposition to her own plans and intentions. She disliked Alice most heartily, and she had many—we cannot say "good," but sufficient—reasons for doing so; yet she sympathised so strongly with Harry's grief at the idea that his wife was encouraging the attentions of Lord Alfred Courtland, that—believing, as she did honestly, Alice to be merely amusing herself, possibly for the sake of annoying her husband, but evidently not from any deep feeling for her admirer—she could not help trying to comfort him.

"Do not afflict yourself so deeply," she said; "I cannot bear to see you suffer thus! Believe me, you think too seriously of this matter; Mrs. Coverdale is only amusing herself with this foolish, infatuated young man. I am as certain as if I were in her confidence that she does not really care for him; the very openness with which she accepts his attentions proves that it is so; as soon as she has left the gaieties and frivolities of town, she will forget his very existence."

"She may forget him," was the bitter reply; "but will he ever forget the cause which has driven her to encourage him

—which has forced her to seek amusement in all these heartless gaieties and follies? will she ever forget the time when, pursuing my own selfish pleasures, I left her, day after day, alone?—she who had always been accustomed to live in a cheerful family, will she ever forget my neglect, and restore to me that love without which life has no longer a charm for me?—that love which I once possessed, and which, God help me! I fear I have alienated for ever."

"Yes, she will," was the eager reply; "if she ever loved you, she loves you still; real, true love never dies: it would be better for some of us if time could efface feeling!"

The evident emotion with which she uttered these last words touched Harry's kind heart, and, regarding her with a look of pitying interest, he rejoined—

"Poor Arabella! you too have had much sorrow to contend with; and no one can lament more deeply than I do the share I have had in increasing it. Mine is a strange fate!—love that I cannot return is lavished and wasted on me, and the only affection I pine for I have alienated by my own rash and inconsiderate conduct!"

She stood by him as he spoke; in the excitement of his feelings he had taken her hand and clasped it in his own. At this moment two figures, which had been pausing at the door of the boudoir, passed hastily on—by the rustling of the dress, one of them was evidently a woman.

"But now hear me once more," he continued, raising himself, and regarding her kindly but steadily; "I am sorry, very sorry, to find that you have not yet overcome—however, we will not allude to that—if at any time you want a friend's advice or assistance, apply to me: my purse, I need scarcely say, is always at your command; in fact, as I am well-off, and you unfortunately are not, I think it is an over-refined, though generous scruple, which prevents you from allowing me to assist you as I might and wish to do. Why do not you remember and strive to follow my advice? You are still in a dependent situation quite unworthy of you; while you have talents and powers which, if you would employ them in some straightforward, honest avocation—instead of forming plans and seeking objects of, to say the least, questionable advisability—would secure you a respectable and comfortable position. Think of all this, dear Arabella, and then apply to me, as to an old friend, to advance you funds to carry out my ideas in any way which seems to you most advisable."

For a moment she remained silent; then bending over him, so that her ringlets mingled with his dark, curling hair, she murmured—

"You are good, and kind, and generous, as you ever were; and—yes, I will strive to make myself worthy of your friendship; if I fail, you know my impulsive, passionate nature, and you will pardon, not condemn me; for my greatest sor-

row, you know how to pity me! You say you intend to leave London to-morrow, and I think it will be wise in you to do so: perhaps we may never meet again, and so, my dear, dear friend, farewell!"

He had retained her hand, and she returned his cordial, warm pressure; then, by a sudden impulse, she stooped, pressed her pale lips upon his high, smooth brow, and—was gone.

Harry followed her with a glance as she left the room.

"Poor thing!" he murmured, "she has many high qualities; and such a life as she leads must be a complete purgatory to her proud, impetuous disposition; I hope she will fall into good hands, and—keep out of my way. Alice evidently dislikes and suspects her, and nothing I can say is likely to lessen the feeling. Now for taking my poor, dear, naughty, foolish little wife home, and lecturing her. She seemed angry with me; because I did not arrive in time to accompany her to the ball, I suppose—as if I could prevent railway-trains from breaking down!—ah, it's wretched, miserable work all of it!"

Having arrived at this cheerful conclusion, Harry rose and proceeded in search of his wife.

In the meantime, the country-dance being ended, Lord Alfred had offered his arm to his partner, and proposed a stroll through the rooms—a proposition to which Alice, who, in her present state of feeling, was anxious to do anything rather than hasten the inevitable "tête-à-tête" with her husband, consented. As they passed a group who were gathered round a clever copy from one of the great works of some old master, D'Almayne approached Lord Alfred, and making some light remark to screen his real object, found an opportunity to whisper to his pupil—

"Take her to the door of the boudoir, and detain her there to look at the pictures in the ante-room for a minute; there is a 'tableau vivant' inside the apartment which will interest her deeply!"

Partially guessing his meaning, Lord Alfred executed the task with so much tact and skill that all this by-play was completely unnoticed by Alice, and when they reached the door of the boudoir, which stood ajar, she stopped to examine a picture, in perfect unconsciousness of any plot or contrivance; as she did so the following sentence, spoken in tones of deep emotion, fell upon her ear—

"Love that I cannot return is lavished and wasted on me, and the only affection I pine for I have alienated by my own rash and inconsiderate conduct!"

The sound of the voice was all that Alice required to enable her to decide that the speaker was her husband; and a hurried glance proved to her that his speech had been addressed to Arabella Crofton, her rival, as she had long sus-

pected her to be—a fact in regard to which she now received the assurance of her own senses.

Harry's speech could bear but one interpretation: the "love wasted on him which he could never return," was her own—his wife's! the "affection he pined for, and had alienated by his rash and inconsiderate conduct," was that of Arabella Crofton! the "rash conduct" he was so bitterly repenting—his marriage. Yes, she saw it all, and felt that for her there was no longer such a thing as happiness in this life. Now that she knew, that she had heard from his own lips, that he no longer loved her—nay, that he had transferred his affection to another—she felt how all-important, how essential it had been to her; existence without Harry's love to brighten it would be like the universe without sunlight—cold, dark, desolate.

Poor little Alice! she had acted very wrongly; she had been self-willed, petulant, unjust, and disobedient to her husband; but if suffering could atone for sin, the bitterness of that moment might have expiated graver offences than those of which she had been guilty. Her first idea was to get away from the spot: lost as he was to her, Harry should never say she was a spy upon his actions. She turned to communicate her wish to her companion, and saw his eyes fixed on her face with a peculiar intelligence which she had never observed before, and in an instant the thought flashed across her that she had been brought there by design; and, without allowing time for reflection as to the advisability of making such an accusation, she exclaimed—

"You knew they were there, and brought me on purpose to see them, and so to destroy the happiness of my future life! what have I ever done to you to deserve this at your hands!"

Utterly taken aback by this direct and unexpected attack, Lord Alfred coloured up, stammered something unintelligible, and at last attempted to screen himself behind the equivocation that he did not know Mr. Coverdale was in the boudoir.

"If you did not know it, you suspected it," was the reply; "your features are more honest than your words, my lord, and betray you."

Greatly confounded at this most unexpected result of his scheme, Lord Alfred vowed and protested, and attempted to clear and defend himself, but in vain. The shock Alice had received had couched her mental vision, and, turning a deaf ear to his excuses, she sternly desired him to take her back to Mrs. Crane immediately; and then preserved an offended silence, so that his lordship was glad to take her at her word, and lead her back to the drawing-room, in which the Crane party had ensconced themselves.

"Kate, let us get home—I am wearied to death; somebody said the carriage was waiting."

The words were commonplace enough, but something in

the tone in which they were uttered caused Mrs. Crane to regard her cousin attentively, and her quick eye soon discerned that there was something amiss. "Alice, is anything wrong, dear? you are not ill?"

"Yes! no! my head aches—only let us get away!" was the reply.

"But someone told me that Mr. Coverdale had arrived; where is he?—you will wait for him?" returned Kate, alarmed and surprised at Alice's unwonted agitation.

"He will come when he likes; he—has found some friends of his, I believe," murmured Alice. "Only let us get away!" she added, in so imploring a tone that Kate, convinced some "contretemps" had occurred, despatched Mr. Crane in search of Miss Crofton, and, taking leave of Lady Tattersall Trottemout (who, thinking they had resolved to spend the night there, naturally deplored their "running away so early"), repaired to the cloak-room. Here the others, including Harry Coverdale, joined them, and in another quarter of an hour they were safely housed in Park Lane.

Thus ended Lady Tattersall Trottemout's "soirée dansante"; but its consequences continued to influence the lives of those whose fortunes we are tracing for many a long year.

Nothing passed between Coverdale and Alice in reference to the scenes we have just described until the next morning, when, before they went down to breakfast, Harry observed abruptly, "Alice, it is my particular wish that you should go down to the Park to-day: can you be ready to start by the four o'clock train?"

"Yes," was the unexpectedly acquiescent reply; then, after a moment's pause, "What reason am I to give Kate for leaving her so suddenly?"

Astonished at such a ready consent where he had expected strong opposition, if not an actual refusal to comply with his desire, Harry looked steadfastly at his wife, but her face was turned away, so that he could not read its expression. "My true reason I will explain to you at some time when we can talk the matter over coolly and quietly," was the reply; "the reason I wish you to give your cousin—which is a good, true, and sufficient reason in itself, although not the only one by which I am actuated—is, that your sister Emily has received an invitation to stay with a friend of hers, which Mrs. Hazlehurst is anxious she should accept, thinking she requires change; but Emily very properly refused to leave her mother. I dined there the day before yesterday, and hearing of the dilemma, proposed that you should take Emily's place for a fortnight or three weeks—I was not wrong in making such an offer, was I?"

"No; I shall be very glad to see and be of use to dear mamma," was the reply.

"I should have told you all this last night," continued

Coverdale, "but for reasons I will not enter upon at present."

He waited for some comment on his speech, but he waited in vain; Alice continued to add the finishing touches to her toilet, until, being completely equipped, she quietly observed, "It is time to go down, I think; the breakfast-bell will ring directly"; and, suiting the action to the word, she departed, leaving her husband to follow when he pleased. Kate was surprised to hear of their sudden determination to leave town, and sorry to part with them; but their reason for so doing was such a plausible one that she could urge nothing against it. She saw that there was something more—that neither Harry nor his wife were at their ease; but Alice kept her own counsel so closely that all Kate's endeavours to win her confidence were futile, and she was obliged to content herself by supposing that it was a mere matrimonial breeze which would blow over, as such affairs usually do, without any very serious consequences resulting from it.

Coverdale Park was reached without adventure, and appeared as cool, and calm, and happy as the country usually does to the eyes of fashion-wearied Londoners; and Harry, unaffectedly delighted to escape from the uncongenial atmosphere of a crowded city to his home—which he loved with his whole heart—forgot, in the pleasure he experienced, the amount of Alice's misdemeanours, and really desired to be reconciled with her, and to assure her of his perfect and entire forgiveness. But since the previous evening a change—for which he could not account, and which began to render him very uneasy—had come over Alice: she was no longer irritable and petulant at one moment, yet amused and light-hearted at the next, but a settled gloom hung o'er her brow, which indicated sorrow rather than anger; and although she had never allowed him to surprise her in tears, her eyes bore unmistakable traces of weeping. Their "tête-à-tête" dinner passed off heavily enough: as they sat moodily over their dessert, Harry observed, "The evening is most lovely—come out and take a stroll." He spoke kindly, almost tenderly, and as Alice looked up to reply to him, her eyes filled with tears; hastily checking them before they could be observed, she agreed. Her husband carefully placed a shawl over her shoulders, brought from the hall her garden-bonnet, and, drawing her arm within his own, they walked on for some distance in silence. At length Harry observed, "Alice, dear, you seem downcast and unhappy—why is this? surely you cannot regret that hot, miserable, artificial London? You must be glad to get back to our own dear, quiet home again?"

"I do not in the least regret London," was the reply; "on the contrary, I am glad to be once more in the country again."

"Then why this gloomy manner?" urged Coverdale; "I may have been a little annoyed with you at times lately, but I am quite prepared to believe it was mere thoughtlessness on

your part; in fact, I never considered it anything else. I feel sure when you come to reflect seriously on the matter you will yourself see that your conduct was a little injudicious; and, in that case, believe me, the affair is from this moment forgotten and forgiven." Harry paused for a reply, but for several moments none was forthcoming; at last, his patience being exhausted, he inquired in a tone of surprise, "Alice, did you hear what I was saying?"

"I beg your pardon," rejoined Alice, starting, "I was not attending properly at that moment; you were blaming me for something, were you not? I am very sorry—what was it?"

As she spoke, Harry glanced towards her to discover whether she had been really too much pre-engrossed to attend to him, or whether she merely affected to have been so for the amiable purpose of provoking him; deciding in favour of the first hypothesis, he resumed, "I was saying, my dear Alice, that although your flirtation with that foolish boy, Alfred Courtland, had caused me some uneasiness, because people dared to remark on it—unluckily not in a way that I could take up—yet that I was convinced it was merely thoughtlessness on your part, and was anxious to forgive and forget it."

If he had expressly tried to rouse Alice from the state of gloomy depression into which she had fallen, Harry could not have devised means more effectual than the speech he had just addressed to her. With flashing eyes she heard him to the end, then inquired: "And pray who has dared—(you may well use the word!)—who has dared to accuse me of flirting? But I need not ask," she continued, bitterly; "no one but Miss Crofton would have ventured to asperse your wife's character before you—from no one else would you have listened to such a falsehood—no one else could have induced you to believe it!"

Astonished, and, if the truth must be told, somewhat confounded at having the tables thus turned upon him, Harry exclaimed, "Alice, what do you mean? what are you talking about? have you taken leave of your senses all of a sudden?"

"If I had I should scarcely be surprised," was the rejoinder; "but I know only too well what I am saying, and the cause I have to say and believe it; however, I do not want to reproach you, that would do no good; but—but—knowing what I know,"—an hysterical sob choked her voice—"it's too hard that you should accuse me of flirting"—and here, utterly overcome by her feelings, she burst into a paroxysm of weeping. Wholly confounded at this unexpected result of his very mild remonstrance, which had been intended more as a judicious way of forgiving Alice's misdemeanours than as a reprimand, Harry led her to a seat, and then used his best endeavours to console and bring her to reason; but in vain, nor was it until she was fain to stop through sheer physical exhaustion that her tears ceased; by

which time, what between bodily fatigue (she had not been in bed until between three and four on the previous night, or rather morning, could not sleep then, and had accomplished a railroad journey since) and mental agitation, she was so completely worn out that even Harry, who was not usually too clear-sighted on such points, perceived this was not a fitting opportunity to continue the discussion.

CHAPTER XL.

DEEPER AND DEEPER STILL.

ON the afternoon of the day after that on which she returned home, Alice was to go to the Grange, and take her sister's place as companion to Mrs. Hazlehurst. During the morning, Harry was occupied with his bailiff and the farming accounts, but he made his appearance at luncheon. When that meal was concluded, and the servants had quitted the room, he began gravely, but kindly—

"Alice, dear, I do not wish to distress or annoy you, but, before you leave home, I must once again refer to the conversation of last night. I know not who has coupled my name with that of your cousin Kate's friend, Miss Crofton, nor what falsehoods they may have coined to blacken my character in your eves; but, since I have known you, I have never attempted to deceive you on any point; and I tell you now, on my honour as a gentleman, that nothing ever has passed, or is in the smallest degree likely to pass, between myself and that young lady calculated to cause you the slightest pain or even uneasiness. Does this satisfy you, or, if not, can I say or do anything that will?"

"Yes!" exclaimed Alice, her face flushing with eagerness as the idea struck her; "promise to tell me exactly all that passed between you and her in Italy!—promise me this; show me that you are willing to confide in me; trust to my affection to forgive you, should you tell me anything you think may displease me, and I will, on my part, try to forget my own convictions that—that—in fact, that you do not love me as I believe you once did! Tell me all frankly, and there may yet be happiness in store for us both."

She paused, breathless with emotion, and fixing her large eyes on her husband's countenance, as though she fain would read his very thoughts, awaited a reply; but for a minute none appeared likely to come. Coverdale, pushing back his hair, rubbing his forehead, and evincing unmistakable signs of annoyance and perplexity, at length roused himself by an effort, and, in a constrained, embarrassed tone of voice, replied:—

"Ask me anything but that: I am under a solemn promise never to mention the facts you desire to learn; I cannot break my word even to regain your affection."

"I will ask nothing more of you," returned Alice, in a tone of deeply-wounded feeling; "it was foolish to ask that—I might have known you would refuse to answer me; and it was worse than folly to fancy you cared to retain my affection. And now let me go home to mamma; thank God, I may yet be of some use and comfort to her, and, at all events, I know that she loves me—oh! that I had never left her!" and, disregarding Harry's exclamation, "Alice, hear me! indeed you mistake—" she hurried out of the room.

Her husband remained motionless until her retreating footsteps became inaudible, then springing from his chair, he began pacing up and down with hasty strides, while his ideas arranged themselves somewhat after the following fashion:

"Well, I've made a pretty mess of it now, and no mistake! Of all things in the world for her to have fixed upon—to want to know about Arabella; and poor Arabella has behaved so nicely and kindly too in this affair! I can't tell her! besides, there's my promise—come what may I'll keep my promise; but I am an unlucky dog as ever lived! Ah! I never ought to have married, that's the whole truth. Women don't seem to understand me, and I'm sure I don't understand them; whether I'm stern, or whether I'm kind, it all turns out alike, and all wrong. Poor, dear little Alice! she is making herself just as miserable as she has made me; and, for the life of me, I don't know how to say or do anything to mend matters! I must leave it to time, I suppose. Perhaps her mother may talk her into a happier frame of mind. I am glad she is going back to the Grange; I think I'll leave her there for a short time—home influences may soften her, and induce her to judge me more charitably. I'm certain it's all my own fault, somehow! She was as sweet-tempered as an angel when I married her." He continued to pace the room, and after some moments a new notion seemed to strike him. "I wonder who's been putting these ideas about Arabella into her head," he resumed; "somebody has been telling her about the Florence business, that's clear—lies most likely, and in order to set her against me. That man D'Almayne, I mistrust him—he's playing a deep game of some kind; and his manner to Kate Crane I disapprove of strongly. If he has been meddling—if he has dared to say or insinuate anything against me to Alice, by heaven, I'll—I'll—no, I could not trust myself to horsewhip him, at least not just yet, I should kill the scoundrel. I've a great mind to run up to London, when I've taken Alice to the Grange, and try and find out something about it; but I won't be hasty—I must not! the interests at stake are too important—Alice's happiness for life, to say nothing of my own, which is bound

up in hers, depends upon how I behave for the next few months—no; I won't act rashly or hastily, nothing shall induce me to do so!"

Of all the high and solemn mysteries that enshroud the spirit-life none are more inscrutable, yet invested with a deeper and mort vital interest, than those apparently irreconcilable paradoxes—predestination and free will. Our possession of this latter attribute is a tenet held, and carelessly acquiesced in, by Christians of every denomination; yet how little do we realise or estimate its practical importance! It is impossible to reflect, even for a moment, on so vast a field of thought without eliciting ideas at once salutary and impressive. Nor can we fully recognise our obligations as responsible beings until, in tracing the fortunes of some fellow-creature, of whose path through life our limited powers enable us to perceive only the dim and shadowy outline, we see how what appear trifles—made a right use of, as they should be, or abused, as they too often are—influence a lifetime here, and, fearful thought, determine an eternity hereafter! In things spiritual, as well as in things material, cause governs effect; and the laws which regulate consequences are equally stringent and immutable in both cases, although in the former they are not so easily traceable. Still, to the earnest, careful and patient observer of the mysterious ways of Providence, suggestive glimpses are afforded, aided by which he may reason from things seen to things unseen. Thus, remarking how some strange train of events results from a single act which we may long have feebly proposed to perform, but the execution of which we have delayed from day to day, until some unexpected excitement has quickened our resolve into action, we may legitimately argue that these events have been, as it were, waiting for the touch which was to set the train in motion; that if that motive power had been applied sooner the same results would have been proportionably hastened; and that if it had never been applied at all the history of events would have borne a different record. We are so fearfully and wonderfully constituted, and the dealings of the Creator with his creatures are so complicated and inscrutable, that we know not what great events may hinge upon our slightest actions. The avalanche lies in all its dread sublimity, apparently as immovable as the mountain-side it rests on; the careless foot of some chamois hunter dislodges a stone—the spell which enchained the destroyer is broken—with the velocity of the whirlwind the mass descends, crushing and overwhelming all before it—and heartrending memories are all that remain to bear witness of some once prosperous village and its inhabitants.

One, who saw all clearly where we but blindly and feebly catch a ray of light, prayed for His executioners in these remarkable words—"Father, forgive them, they know not what they do!" Ideas such as the foregoing are calculated to in-

spire the feelings of awe; but, if they are true, they should not be put aside because they give a solemn view of our responsibilities; when, moreover, rightly considered, they teach an important practical lesson—namely, never to neglect what appear to be little duties, or carelessly to fall into little sins. It seems but a little duty to extinguish a fallen spark; yet that spark may kindle a fire which may consume a city, which, save for that accident, might have endured for centuries. It seems but a little sin to utter a playful jest on some serious subject; but that jest may inspire a doubt which may injure a wavering faith, and endanger a soul's salvation. Some may deem these remarks misplaced in a work of fiction; but if it be a novelist's endeavour to depict truly the various phases of human life, nought that truly affects the springs of human action can be foreign to his subject.

The evening of Lady Tattersall Trottemout's party was not the first occasion on which Harry Coverdale had bestowed good and sound advice on Arabella Crofton, but never before had it produced the desired effect. Now, however, a new impulse sprang up within her—she would conquer her hopeless, selfish, sinful love for him, and strive to render herself worthy of his friendship, and win at least his esteem; but how should she begin practically to work out his advice—how attempt to render herself independent—what duty lay most directly in her path? Her intention was honest and sincere, and that morning's post brought an answer to her question. A female relation whom she had hitherto neglected, was taken seriously ill, and wrote wishing, but scarcely expecting, her to come to her immediately. This lady was old, uninteresting, and in straitened circumstances; to go to her was an act of unmitigated self-sacrifice, and in Arabella's then frame of mind this was its great attraction. Kate Crane was sorry to part with her, although the short time they had passed together had sufficed to convince her of the disagreeable fact that her dear friend no longer suited her as she had done in her schoolgirl days. There was a very simple reason for this, although Kate did not at once perceive it: Arabella Crofton was at an age when the mind and body having reached maturity, if they do not remain stationary, yet alter so gradually that the change is almost imperceptible; she was, therefore, much what she had been four years previously. Kate, on the contrary, had advanced from a girl into a woman; and her intellectual powers had not only developed until they were now in every respect superior to those of her "ci-devant" governess, but her taste had been formed on a better and purer model, and her natural instincts were of a higher and more refined character. Thus, Arabella was constantly jarring against and annoying Kate's sensitiveness by thought, word, and deed; and she felt that a gulf had grown up between them, which would effectually prevent her friend's society from affording

her the comfort and support she had hoped and expected. Arabella was much too quick-sighted not to have perceived the effect this feeling had produced upon Kate's manner, although she was ignorant of the cause. Thus, the parting between the friends—for, from old association, friends they still were—was by no means so painful as under other circumstances they might have considered it.

Left to her own devices, Kate bethought her of the expedition to visit Mrs. Leonard, which Horace D'Almayne had proposed to her on the occasion of the Horticultural Fête, but which she had never yet found an opportunity to accomplish. Mrs. Leonard's history was a distressing one. Her husband had been partner in a north-country bank, at which Mr. Crane usually kept a considerable account. On one occasion, when his balance there exceeded even its usual limits, a junior partner suddenly absconded to America, taking with him so considerable a sum that the bank was obliged to stop payment, and Mr. Leonard found himself a ruined man. In his adversity his mind became engrossed by one fixed idea, which almost assumed the character of a monomania—viz., that it was his mission to trace out his late partner, and recover the money with which he had made away; this notion preyed upon him until one morning he, too, suddenly disappeared, leaving a letter to inform his wife that he had set out in search of the delinquent, and that she would hear nothing more of him until he had succeeded in his object. On inquiry it appeared that he had taken a berth in an American packet, which had just sailed, and, beyond that, all trace of him was lost. Consequently, his family had fallen into actual poverty, which, day by day, assumed a sterner and more hopeless character. A gentleman well versed in the details of Mr. Crane's early acquaintance with Mr. Leonard (who, before Mr. Crane had amassed the fortune he now possessed, had several times advanced him money, and in a measure, therefore, contributed to his success in life), advised Mrs. Leonard to apply to him for assistance; and, being aware how much the millionaire was guided by the opinion of Horace D'Almayne, suggested that she should make her first application through him: in which appeal the fertile brain of that good young man perceived matter which might be made profitable to the furtherance of his designs, and rearranged his hand, so as to take in the new cards thus placed within his reach.

The plan which D'Almayne had settled with Kate was this: she was sitting for her portrait to an artist friend of Horace's, to whose painting-room she went twice a-week; D'Almayne proposed to send away the carriage and servants, when he would have a hired brougham in readiness to convey her to the obscure suburb in which Mrs. Leonard's poverty compelled her to reside; he would meet her on her arrival there,

and introduce her to Mrs. Leonard; she could then return to the artist's, whence her own carriage could again fetch her and convey her home. Kate disliked all this clandestine contrivance; but, considering the end of sufficient importance to justify the means, she was unable to devise any less objectionable scheme, and so reluctantly consented. She reached her destination without adventure. The dwelling occupied by Mrs. Leonard was situated in one of the labyrinths of small, unwholesome streets which lie between Islington and Pentonville, and contain a description of houses too good, or, more truly speaking, too expensive, for the very lowest orders to reside in, and yet so confined and comfortless that it appears incredible that any persons accustomed to even the ordinary requirements of respectable life can tolerate them. D'Almayne was waiting in readiness to receive her, and, offering her his arm, led her up the narrow steps and into a miserable parlour, some eight feet square, with the same elaborate and coxcombical politeness with which he would have conducted her across the receiving-room of a duchess. Mrs. Leonard was a singularly gentle, lady-like person, evidently worn down by her continued struggle to support herself and family, which consisted of two boys and three girls, the eldest son and daughter being respectively fourteen and fifteen, whence their ages decreased down to a little pale thing of four years old, whose juvenile roses could not bloom for want of purer air and more nutritious diet. To them, with the greatest tact and kindness, did Kate proceed to enact the character of guardian angel; and, ere she had been half an hour in the house, had completely won all their affections, from the poor mother, who began to see light breaking in upon her darkness, to the olive-branch of four—whose visions of unlimited sugarplums bade fair to be realised. Ah! it is easy to buy golden opinions of the poor and needy in this world: generosity, i.e., judiciously disposing of superfluous cash, is a virtue strangely overrated. The widow's mite is an offering for which one can feel respect, even with a well-filled stomach; but that shrine for an Englishman's heart must be indeed empty, ere he can thank Dives for his crumbs. But, when Kate smiled brightly, and spoke kindly and tenderly as she opened her purse-strings, what wonder that the inmates of that house of mourning were ready almost to worship her beauty and munificence? nay, in the excess of her gratitude, poor Mrs. Leonard so lauded Horace D'Almayne for the sunshine he had caused to fall upon the "frost of her despair," that this excellent young man really began to believe himself to have been actuated by pure philanthropy, and wished he had not, from disuse, entirely lost the power of blushing. So he talked, and she talked, and they talked, and were all very much pleased with themselves and with each other; and Kate Crane turned to depart, with her purse and her heart equally

lightened by this most satisfactory visit. D'Almayne, enraptured alike with the success of his scheme, and with himself for having so cleverly devised and executed the same, led Kate to her brougham with nearly as conspicuous a display of gallantry to the lady, and admiration of himself, as that which distinguished Lord Bateman's proud young porter on the memorable occasion of his playing gentleman usher to the fair Sophia. Having placed her in the brougham, handed her parasol (why do ladies take parasols about in carriages, where there is not the most remote chance of their being required?), and a shawl, and a carriage-bag full of elegant rubbish, and smirked to show his white teeth three times—once for each article—he received as a reward a kindly smile (for Kate really felt obliged to him for the opportunity of doing good which he had afforded her), which he received with a look of deferential ecstasy, and the brougham, with its fair occupant, drove off.

On a sordid pallet, in the garret of the house opposite to that in which Mrs. Leonard resided, lay a man who, having lived wickedly, was then dying miserably: stricken with remorseful terror at the near approach of death—inevitable, fearful, retributive death — gate to the stern, inexorable Future, when he would be weighed in the balance and found wanting—he had wished, poor wretch! to undo some of the evil he had committed, and so sent to a rising young barrister, then getting up evidence in a disputed peerage case, to confess to him the forgery of a name in a parish-register, and other iniquities, the knowledge of which would materially strengthen the cause of the young lawyer's client. The interview, a most painful one to any man of feeling, was concluded; and, having taken copious notes of the dying forger's confession in the presence of a competent witness, soothed the miserable being with such comfort as human sympathy could suggest, and promised to send the clergyman whom his patient and gentle persuasion had induced him to receive, the young barrister left the house at the moment D'Almayne handed Kate Crane to the brougham. Why does the stranger turn first red and then pale? why does he clench his fist till the nails dig deep into the flesh? why does he make a hasty stride forward, then, with an exclamation, half curse, half sob, as hastily draw back, and screen himself in the shadow of the doorway until the carriage had driven off? He starts because he has seen the woman he once loved better than his own life—the woman he has striven to forgive and forget, and has succeeded in accomplishing neither the one nor the other—leave a shabby house in a disreputable suburb, whither she had been in the society of a notorious libertine! He clenched his fist and strode forward from an impulse of rightful indignation, which made him burn to annihilate the scoundrel who stood triumphing in his villainy before him:

but he checked himself as the bitter remembrance flashed across him that he had no claim on her which could give him a right to interfere, although—and this, even at that moment, was the most painful thought of all—another had!—who was evidently incompetent to fulfil the sacred trust which he had undertaken. So, with old wounds thus cruelly re-opened, Arthur Hazlehurst, heart-sick and weary, returned to his chambers, pondering many things, both of this life and of the life to come.

CHAPTER XLI.

ADVICE GRATIS.

It is a dreary thing when much of life seems still before us, and a dark, unfathomable future lies between us and the grave; it is a bitter thing to sit alone and ponder on the days to come, and discover no bright spot in the darkness—discern no kind hand to beckon us forward—hear no friendly voice to counsel and encourage us in the battle of life; it is an uphill task to struggle through existence without an object on this side the tomb—a hard and cruel lot to hope for nothing until death shall have changed hope into fruition! To live in order to fit oneself to die is the duty of every Christian, but to live for that alone requires a far higher degree of spirituality than to lay down one's life for the faith: the stake and the axe of persecution are tender mercies compared with the chronic martyrdom of such a life-long sacrifice.

Some such gloomy thoughts as these passed through the overwrought brain of Arthur Hazlehurst as, late in the night after Kate's visit to Mrs. Leonard, he folded up the last document of which he had made himself master relative to the disputed peerage case in which he was retained. The evidence of which he had that day become possessed would, he felt certain, ensure his client's success, in which event his own career would, in all probability, be a prosperous one, and fame and fortune become his; but how worthless did these appear now they could no longer be shared with her he loved! Until the incident of that morning had so powerfully affected him, he hoped that he had in great measure eradicated this affection, which his good sense enabled him to perceive could only be a source of grief to him: but the pain he had then experienced effectually dispelled the illusion, and he was fain to acknowledge that, strongly as he condemned her conduct in sacrificing his deep and true regard to (as he deemed it) a desire for wealth and the pomps and vanities of fashionable life, he yet, despite his reason, loved her as he felt he never could love any other woman; and the thought that

through her husband's neglect and incompetency she was exposed to the insidious advances of such a character as Horace D'Almayne weighed upon him, and grieved and irritated him until he could endure it no longer. "Come what may of it, I will see her and warn her; she shall not be led on by that scoundrel without knowing his true character!" he exclaimed, rising and hastily pacing the room. "For what purpose could she have accompanied him to such a neighbourhood as that?" he continued, musing; "he may possibly have got up some plausible lie to induce her to do so, merely to compromise her in the eyes of her husband—such a scheme is not unlikely to have occurred to his subtle brain. Yes, come what may, I will see her to-morrow; and, unless she is indeed lost to all better feeling, I will rouse her to a sense of duty, and thwart that scoundrel's designs. If her husband should learn my interference, I care not; because, in his capacity, he neglects the sacred trust he has undertaken, that is no reason why I should stand tamely by and see her sacrificed; no—I will save her in spite of herself! this shall be my revenge for the happiness which she has blighted. God grant my interference may not prove too late!"

His mind occupied with such thoughts as these, Arthur Hazlehurst past a sleepless night, and the first moment he could tear himself away from business on the following day he betook himself to Park Lane. Kate was from home when he arrived, but having notified to the servant his intention of awaiting her return, he was shown into the drawing-room, where he found a tall, fashionably-dressed young man standing in a disconsolate attitude by the fireplace, to whom he made a slight inclination of the head, heartily wishing him at Jericho, or any other locality equally remote from Park Lane; then, taking up a book, he left him to his own devices. Things remained in this thoroughly English and unsociable state for about ten minutes, towards the end of which period the fashionable young man, having stared hard at Hazlehurst, grew first interested, then excited, and finally the spirit moved him, and he spake:

"I beg pardon—a—really I don't think I can be mistaken—a—very absurd, I'm sure, if I am—but I was at school with one Arthur Hazlehurst—and——"

"And I am he," was the reply; "but you have the advantage of me; for I was at school with some four hundred boys, and, to tell you the honest truth, it does not at this moment occur to me which of them you may have been."

"Yet Alfred Courtland has to thank you for such slight skill as he may possess in the noble arts of boot-cleaning, brushing clothes, and frying sausages; besides early lessons in the demolition of oysters and porter—enforced by example rather than precept," was the rejoinder; and, the unsocial ice of Old England being thus broken, the "ci-devant" schoolfellows

talked on until they grew quite intimate. At length, Lord Alfred looked at his watch, was silent and distrait for a minute or two, then began in a timid, hesitating voice, "I was waiting here to see Mrs. Crane; but, I don't know—that is, I feel as if I could tell you all about it quite as well; you can do what I wish better than she could; and I don't think you'll be angry with me when I've made you understand the affair."

"Suppose you come to the point, and try to do so at once," replied Arthur, anxious to get him away, if possible, before Kate's return.

"Well, you see, my dear Hazlehurst, I wish you hadn't been abroad, and then you would have understood it all so much better; but since you went away—though, by Jove, now I come to think of it, I saw you here one day when Coverdale and your sister first came to town—deuced odd I didn't make you out then; but, if I recollect, you went away just as I came in"—and thus rambling on, he gave a true, though by no means a full and particular account of his intimacy with the Coverdales, continuing: "Your sister was very kind to me, and took so much trouble about our duets. She pianos, and I do a little in a mild way on the flute, you know, and we were great friends, and got on very serenely until the other night, when I was fool enough to do, or rather to say something which made her angry—a good right she had to be so; but the fact is, I'd had some men dining with me, and we drank a lot of wine, and then sat down to cards, and I lost my money and my temper, and in this frame of mind I met Mrs. Coverdale at Lady Tattersall Trottemout's 'let off,' and she snubbed me—I dare say I deserved it, but I didn't like it; and, as my evil genius would have it, a man I know related to me a tale in regard to her husband's flirtations with a pretty governess in Italy, and to tease her, I, like a fool, must needs go and repeat it to her; and she took it more seriously to heart than I had expected, and was angry with me, and—but I see you are getting impatient——"

"Not at all, not at all," returned Arthur, who, preoccupied with his own cares and anxieties, and nervous in regard to the approaching interview with his cousin, scarcely heard or understood half Lord Alfred was saying, and was only desirous to get rid of him before Kate should arrive; "no; it's merely a legal habit I've fallen into of trying to bring people to the point with as little delay as possible. Yes; I quite understand—Alice told her husband of your flirting with a pretty governess, and he said something which offended you."

"No; it was I who told the story," interrupted Lord Alfred, aghast at the state of confusion his auditor appeared to have fallen into, and from which he immediately endeavoured to extricate him by commencing a long explanation.

Obliged in self-defence to attend, Arthur soon found out that Lord Alfred's object in his ill-timed confidence was to ask

him to convey his apologies to his sister, whenever he might be writing to her; whereupon, considering the whole affair a mere silly, boyish punctilio, he replied—

"If you'll take my advice, my lord, I should say, get a sheet of rose-scented paper and a diamond-pointed pen"—("a sheet of foolscap and a goose-quill would be more appropriate," was his mental commentary)—"and sit down and write your penitence to the fair lady yourself. Alice must be greatly altered for the worse if she does not grant you a ready pardon."

"But do you really think——" began Lord Alfred, in remonstrance.

Arthur cut him short—"I don't think about it, my dear Courtland; I feel as certain of the result as if I had already seen her answer. Do you suppose I don't know my own sister, man! But, to come to the point, here's her address"; he drew a card from his pocket, hastily scribbled a few words, then handing it to Lord Alfred, continued, "and the sooner you go to your club and write the letter the sooner will your mind be at ease."

Puzzled, confused, half-alarmed and half-pleased with the new idea thus forced upon him, one thing alone seemed clear to the bewildered young nobleman, viz., that for some reason unexplained his old-new acquaintance was desirous of getting rid of him; and, not having yet sufficiently acquired the habits and feelings of a man-about-town to be utterly regardless of the wishes of others, he shook Arthur's hand, promised to act upon his advice, and departed.

He had scarcely been gone five minutes when a thundering knock at the house-door announced that its mistress had returned, and ere Arthur had time to do more than spring to his feet, Kate, attired in the richest and most becoming out-of-doors costume, entered. As she perceived who was her guest, she started, and her colour went and came rapidly: but recovering herself by a powerful effort, she advanced towards him, and, extending her hand, observed—

"You are such an unaccustomed visitor that I could scarcely believe my eyes. When did you return from the Continent? I am afraid you expected to find Alice here; but she and Mr. Coverdale left me some days since."

"I returned the day before yesterday," was the reply, "and found a note from Coverdale, informing me they had left town; my visit here to-day is to yourself."

As he uttered the last words, his voice unconsciously assumed a sterner tone, and a shade came across his careworn features. An idea suddenly flashed into Kate's mind, and in a voice which sufficiently attested her alarm, she exclaimed—

"Something is the matter! I was sure of it the moment I saw you. You would not come here" (she unconsciously em-

phasized the words) "unless such were the case. What is it? I am strong, I can bear it—is my father worse?—dying?"

As she spoke she sank into a chair, and, fixing her eyes upon his face, awaited his reply.

"You alarm yourself unnecessarily," he said calmly, almost coldly; "I am the bearer of no ill tidings: that I have an object in visiting you I do not deny; whether you will consider it a justifiable one I know not; I regard it in the light of a duty, and therefore, even at the risk of paining and offending you, it must be performed." He paused for a reply, but as Kate remained silent, he continued: "Your brothers are mere boys, your father a confirmed invalid; circumstances lead me to doubt whether your—whether Mr. Crane is aware of the character of a person who is, I am grieved to find, a constant visitor at this house; and I therefore conceive I have a duty to discharge to one whom I have known from childhood—one in whose welfare an irrevocable past, which cannot be forgotten while memory remains, forces me to interest myself. Kate, I am here to warn you against the insidious advances of that heartless profligate, Horace D'Almayne!"

As he spoke, he fixed his eyes upon her with a searching glance. Kate coloured, drew herself up haughtily, and appeared about to make an angry reply; checking the impulse almost as it arose, she answered—

"I am bound, and indeed most willing, to believe you mean kindly by me; I will therefore explain to you that which I would not have condescended to explain to any other man living—that I merely admit Mr. D'Almayne's intimacy to oblige my husband, who has become so accustomed to his society and services as to consider them indispensable. Mr. D'Almayne may or may not deserve the harsh epithets you apply to him; but if you are aware of any circumstances seriously affecting his character, it is to Mr. Crane you should mention them, not to me."

For a moment Arthur remained silent, then pressing his hand to his forehead, he murmured inaudibly, "She can actually stoop to deceit!—is such a change possible!"

Surprised and hurt at his silence, Kate resumed: "Why do you not speak? You look at me as if you doubted my assertion."

Unheeding her question, Arthur still continued to regard her with an expression in which grief, surprise, and disapproval contended for the mastery. At length he said, in a low deep voice, which caused a shudder to pass through the frame of his auditor—

"I have suffered much on your account, but such pain as this I never thought to experience! Kate, you once said you had never attempted to deceive me—can you say so now?"

"I am at a loss to understand you," was the reply; and as she grew angry at what she deemed unmerited insult, her self-possession returned, and she spoke in her usual cold, hard tone of voice. "I can only repeat what I before stated, that I allow Mr. D'Almayne's intimacy merely to oblige my husband. From your manner you still appear to doubt the fact —may I ask why?"

Arthur paused for a moment, then, with an eager and excited voice, he exclaimed—

"Kate, hear me! I have not taken this step lightly, or without due consideration. I seek not to refer to the past, though that past is never absent from my memory; but you may imagine it cost me some resolution to come here to-day, when I tell you that I had rather have seen you lying dead before my eyes, feeling towards you as I felt one short year ago, than behold you surrounded by the luxuries of wealth—knowing as I do that you have obtained them by the sacrifice of all that is lovable in woman, by sinning against all your best and noblest impulses, by forfeiting all that renders life aught but one weary, endless round of cares and duties! To look on you as you are now, to read, as I can read, in every feature of your countenance—which, though a sealed book to others, I have studied too long not to decipher at a glance—traces of that desolation of heart which you have prepared for yourself; to see you thus, and to know that I am powerless to help you, and that you must sustain the burden of such an existence unaided, is to me bitter pain, and I have avoided this house as though it were plague-stricken. But as I sat through the long hours last night, striving to weigh dispassionately the past and the present, I arrived at the conclusion that even yet I owed you a duty, and I came here to-day actuated only by a desire to warn you, and to save you from a fate to contemplate the mere possibility of which inspires me with horror. I came, regardless of my own feelings, forgetful of my wrongs, to do you a benefit; and now you close your soul against me, and receive me with hard words and cold looks! Kate, I have not deserved this at your hands!"

"But, indeed—believe me you are mistaken," replied Kate, eagerly; "I appreciate and thank you for the interest you still take in one who, as you truly say, has forfeited every claim on your regard; but your fears and suspicions are groundless —the intimate footing Mr. D'Almayne has attained in this house is merely a natural consequence of the trust Mr. Crane reposes in him. Why will you not believe the truth of what I tell you?"

"Because it is impossible for me to do so without doubting the evidence of my own senses," was the stern reply. "If you require any further reason for my scepticism it is this: I was in —— Street, Pentonville, at two o'clock yesterday!"

"And if you were," rejoined Kate, with flashing eyes, "you

saw nothing to justify you in entertaining such a cruel and unjust suspicion of one whom you should have been the last to believe likely to sacrifice anything for love; and whom you might have known better than to deem an easy prey for the first self-confident libertine who should condescend to display his butterfly attractions in her presence. I consider that you have insulted me deeply—so deeply as to relieve me from part of the weight of self-reproach with which I have hitherto deplored the injury that by my choice of a career I have inflicted on you. You say it pains you to enter this house; I now therefore beg you to leave it, and will esteem it a favour —the only one I desire of you—not to enter it again until—yes! until I send for you!"

As she spoke she rose hastily, and rang the bell. Astonished at the effect of his speech, and for the moment overpowered by her vehemence, Arthur stood speechlessly regarding her. Then rousing himself by an effort, he said in a low, deep voice, that trembled with suppressed emotion—

"Remember the words you have spoken! I shall need no second bidding; I will not enter this house, nor will I see your face again, until you send for me! And since you thus drive your best friend from you, and encourage your bitterest enemy, may God protect you! and when you see and repent of your error, may He bless you also!"

As he uttered the last words, he seized his hat, hurried from the room, and ere Kate could sufficiently recover herself to attempt to stop him, she heard the house-door close behind him: and then the proud woman's haughty spirit failed her, and murmuring, "I shall never see him again—never, never!" she buried her face in her hands, and wept bitterly.

CHAPTER XLII.

L'EMBARRAS DES RICHESSES.

THE reader, if that noble myth who rules the destiny of us poor writers be possessed of an average amount of memory, will recollect that on the evening when Lord Alfred Courtland entertained Jack Beaupeep and friends at his comfortable bachelor lodgings, a gentleman then first mentioned, bearing the euphonious patronymic of Le Roux, conveyed to Monsieur Guillemard the startling intelligence that the Russian Count Ratrapski had broken the bank in J—— Street. Now, although immediately after receiving this news Horace D'Almayne had proceeded to Lady Trottemout's soirée, and, according to his wont, made himself universally agreeable, and transacted a more than usual amount of mischief, by bringing about the most serious disagreement which had yet

occurred between Harry Coverdale and Alice his wife, it must not be supposed that the intelligence did not interest him. On the contrary, it appealed to him in his weakest point—the pocket; for in that gambling establishment (of which D'Almayne was part proprietor) had he invested his little all, and the losses incurred by the good fortune of Count Ratrapski swallowed up every farthing he had in the world, leaving him nothing but his debts and his talents to live upon. This position, however, by no means possessed the charm of novelty for our excellent young friend; on the contrary, as it was a favourite theory of his—which he never lost any opportunity of reducing to practice—that it was the duty of those who had money to support those who had not, he rather preferred being insolvent; and, paradoxical as it may appear, considered himself best off when he was worst off—for then he was obliged to exert all his energies to ensure that some purse better filled than his own should relax its strings to provide for his necessities.

Thus, on the very day on which Arthur Hazlehurst had his unsatisfactory interview with Kate Crane, the husband of that proud beauty met by appointment, at an office not far from the Royal Exchange, Monsieur Guillemard—Mr. Vondenthaler, a Belgian capitalist—Mr. Bonus Nugget, a man well known upon 'Change—the Hon. Captain O'Brien—and last, though not least, Horace D'Almayne. Mr. Crane having seated himself, after undergoing the ceremony of introduction to Mr. Vondenthaler, who was the only member of the party unknown to him, D'Almayne opened the proceedings by observing:—

"Well, gentlemen, I am glad to tell you that everything is progressing as we could wish, and that my previous calculations, which I had the honour of laying before you at our last meeting, appear likely not only to be verified, but exceeded. Mr. Vondenthaler informs me that the applications for shares from the principal foreign merchants are incessant; and Mr. Nugget and Captain O'Brien will tell you the same in regard to their own connection. Is it not so, Captain?"

"Indeed, and it is, thin," replied the gentleman thus accosted, who, possibly from his having mixed so much with the aristocracy of Europe generally, spoke with a strong Irish accent. "Bedad, sir, the way they come tumbling in is perfectly astonishing; 'tis, upon me conscience!"

"The only thing that remains, then, before we proceed to issue the shares and receive deposits, is to decide how many we shall allot to each director 'ex officio,' and how many you gentlemen may desire to retain for—your friends," observed D'Almayne, glancing expressively towards Mr. Crane as he spoke.

"In regard to the shares to be held by directors, I would suggest five hundred," began Mr. Crane.

"Das ist gut; dat shall be him," muttered Mr. Vondenthaler.

"I'll not object to that same," exclaimed the Captain, "if you leave a thundering wide margin for the shares we may retain for our friends; for, to be plain with ye, gentlemen, my best friend in the world, and that's Terence O'Brien, means to go in for this business in real earnest; and if I can't invest capital that will take five figures to write, bedad, I'd rather be out of it altogether."

"Ten thousand, which I presume is the sum you hint at, Captain O'Brien, could not, I think, be objected to," observed Mr. Bonus Nugget, as if £10,000 were a mere cab-fare.

"'Mais oui,' we will all demand so much as him, he is so small; 'n'est-ce pas, mon cher?'" interposed Monsieur Guillemard, favouring Horace D'Almayne with a grimace indicative of the tenderest affection.

"If I might be allowed—if I might venture to suggest," began Mr. Crane, timidly, "I would propose that, at so early a stage in the affair, no limit should be placed to the number of shares the directors may hold. I am, ahem! a—myself I am a man who has been tolerably fortunate in my commercial speculations, and might be disposed—in fact, I may say I am disposed—to embark an amount of capital considerably above the sum lately mentioned by Captain O'Brien."

"Sir, your sentiments do you honour! Sir, I'm proud of your acquaintance; you're not one to do things by halves, I see. I like plain speaking—the speculation's a da-vlish good speculation, or you would not find such men as Mr. Vondenthaler and my friend Bonus Nugget in it. We're going to give our valuable time and trouble to work the thing shipshape; and bedad, sir, if we're not to profit by it, I'd just like to know who should!"

"Yes; that is all very well for you, O'Brien," observed Mr. Nugget, speaking with an air of authority; "but I happen to know a thing or two. Mr. Crane, gentlemen, is—I say it to his face—able to go down to his bankers, and draw a cheque, which they will honour, for more money than any two of us could raise between us. Very well; now it's no news to any of us to be told that 'money is power.' But if Mr. Crane thinks, because he can embark his £50,000—or I believe I might raise the figure as high again without overstating the matter—that he is going to ride rough-shod over the practical men who have started this scheme, and to take the lion's share of the enormous profits that he is sharp enough to foresee must accrue, I for one beg to tell him I won't stand it."

"Ya! ya! das ist gut! Ve have not started to be shod rough by Cranes! Herr Bonus he knows a thing; 'das ist

recht und gut!' Ve vill not be roughed by Cranes!" muttered Mr. Vondenthaler through the thick hay-coloured moustachios invariably worn by Belgian capitalists.

"'Mais oui,' you have reasons, Monsieur Vondenthaler, 'mon ami': but if you yourself have mistaken, 'n'est-ce pas?'" interposed Monsieur Guillemard, eagerly. "I am assured Monsieur Crane is not 'un homme comme ça'; he shall not 'se promener à cheval—vot you call ride on a horseback ovaire us 'du tout; au contraire,' zies grate skim whom wê are zie undairetakers for, shall advance herself on his capital for zie goods of us all. 'Voyez vous, cher Monsieur Bonous!"

"'Pon me conscience, now, ye're the first set of men I ever yet clapped eyes on that made a fuss about taking money when it was offered to 'em!" exclaimed the Hon. Captain O'Brien, surprised into a stronger brogue than he had yet allowed to appear. "Sure, now, by the time we've tunnelled under the whole of Arabia Pethreea, and flung our Britannia-metal tubular bridge across the Persian Gulf, we'll find money growing pretty tight with us."

"As there seems some difference of opinion on the point," returned Mr. Bonus Nugget, "I would suggest that we summon a general meeting of all the directors, and appoint a managing committee to decide such matters for the future."

This proposition was agreed to "nem. con.," and a day having been fixed for their next meeting, D'Almayne began:

"In my capacity as secretary, I have to call your attention to one point before this meeting breaks up. I have, in accordance with a resolution passed at the last board, gone into the current outlay, and find that to pay the engineers now surveying the portion of the line already decided on, and other expenses which I will not detain you by enumerating, the account at our bankers is overdrawn. I would propose, therefore, that two of the directors should sign a cheque for £3,000, to be placed to the company's credit."

"Better say five," interposed Nugget; "it don't do to be overdrawing our account; I've known a trifle like that ruin a speculation as promising even as the present one. Don't let this occur again, D'Almayne; I can let you have money at any moment, as you are well aware."

"Ya! ya! or I, vin you please; you must not starve him for no account," chimed in the Belgian capitalist.

"Certainly, £5,000 should be paid in at once," observed Mr. Crane, producing a cheque-book. "I shall have much pleasure in advancing the sum, if you gentlemen will sanction my so doing."

This both Nugget and the Belgian protested against, each urging their claims as originators of the scheme; but O'Brien silenced their opposition, and settled the matter by exclaiming in his off-hand manner:—

"Let Mr. Crane have his way, sir! he's a fine fellow entirely; a liberal and enlightened man he is—one of the merchant princes of this great counthry; and though I'd the misfortune to be born an aristocrat myself, I've no class bigotry about me. I admire a true Briton when I meet with one; and whoever wishes to bully and browbeat that Briton in my presence, must do it some time when Terence O'Brien isn't there to stand up for him. Shake hands, Mr. Crane—I'm proud to know you. Take this pen and write, sir! Browbeat a man like that, indeed!—'pon my conscience, what next I wonder!"

And so, under cover of the Captain's blustering, Mr. Crane signed a cheque for £5,000, for which D'Almayne gave him a receipt in the name of the company; then bowing to his co-directors, and exchanging a word or two aside with D'Almayne, he departed. As the sound of his retreating footsteps died away in the distance, D'Almayne, quietly pocketing the cheque, observed:—

"If we can but get the shares to sell for — say twenty thousand, the speculation will not pay badly. You see, Guillemard, these crafty islanders—these denizens of 'perfide Albion'—their pockets are not impregnable when you assault them judiciously. Five thousand pounds from one man is not such a bad morning's work!"

"Thrue for you, me boy!" exclaimed the Irishman; "by the powers, a few more such mornings' work will make men of us, if it please Providence to keep us out of jah so long; but it's a dangerous game you're playing. Sure now there's jist five of us here present—why wouldn't we take a thousand apiece, and make ourselves scarce without any more ado? I'm content for one, bedad!"

"You'll do nothing of the sort, Terence," was the reply; "for two very good reasons: one being, that if you remain quiet and follow my lead, I will enable you to bolt—if it come to bolting—with £10,000 instead of one; and the other, that Mr. Crane's cheque is very safely buttoned up in my pocket, to be applied as I think best; and any man who attempts to take it from me will become practically acquainted with the merits of this ingenious little instrument," and as he spoke he drew from his breast-pocket a small, beautifully-finished revolving pistol, whereupon the individual termed Nugget interposed by observing—

"Nonsense, D'Almayne, put that thing away: we're not in New Orleans, man; and the report of that would blow our schemes to the devil long before the bullet had penetrated O'Brien's thick skull. But really there is nothing to disagree about that I can see: it's quite clear, gentlemen, that D'Almayne knows perfectly well what he's doing, and that our interests could not be in better hands. We meet again on Friday. D'Almayne, you'll see me to-night in J—— Street;

and now that we're in funds again, Ratrapski will be as good as a fortune to us: a man does not break the bank twice." Then, nodding familiarly to the others, Mr. Bonus Nugget resumed his usual "City" look (worth five hundred a-year to him at the most moderate computation), and departed.

"Terence, never look sulky, man; I meant no harm; what I said was as much for your good as my own," began D'Almayne, in a conciliatory tone. "Come, I want you and Guillemard to dine at Blackwall, to meet an unfledged lordling, to whom I'll allow you to sell a horse, if you like; and you may do a little bit of 'turf' business too, if he'll bite; only it must be done in a quiet, gentlemanly way, mind, because I've ulterior views in regard to my young friend: he has a taste for the club in J—— Street—you understand?"

"I believe ye, me boy! an it's a fine child ye are intirely; and the way ye've cut yer wisdom teeth is a credit to yer blessed mother—always supposing ye ever possessed such a respectible relative," was the Hibernian's reply.

"By the way, if you're really going in for the horse business," resumed D'Almayne, meditatively, "you may as well do the thing properly. Get a flash trap, you know, and drive us down; and—who's that sporting-looking young fellow you had backing you at Epsom—dark curly hair, and grey hawk's eyes?"

"Oh, Phil Tirrett, the great Yorkshire breeder's son; he is his father's London agent, and a very promising young——"

"Scoundrel," interposed D'Almayne; "I read it in his face. However, you'll want somebody to back up your lies, and he'll pass with such green boys as we shall have to-day; so bring him. Let me see—it's now two o'clock—call for me at the Pandemonium at five; and, excuse me, but drop the Irish blackguard, and assume the foreign 'militaire' as much as you conveniently can. Remember, you're captain in the Austrian service, and I was in your regiment, your sub., for a year."

"Bedad! it's as well you reminded me of that same, for it had slipped my memory some way," was the affable reply, as, arranging his auburn, not to say red, hair under his hat, the gallant Captain prepared to take himself off. Ere he did so, however, he chanced to cast his eyes on the Belgian capitalist, who was amusing his leisure moments by performing some intricate manœuvres with a pack of cards, an occupation which he interrupted by slapping Vondenthaler on the back with such force that a covey of cards flew out of the pack about the room.

"What devil's dodge are you planning there, you old sinner!" he exclaimed; "let's look at ye!" he continued, seizing him by the chin, and turning his head so that the light fell upon his countenance; "bedad! them moustachios alter you

surprisingly. Nobody that had not known ye as I've done, since I could handle a dice-box, and that was before I was into me teens, would recognise in Mr. Vondenthaler, the Belgian merchant, Le Roux, the old 'croupier!'"

"Leave him alone," observed D'Almayne; "Le Roux's a steady, sensible man, and one I have a great respect for; he knows his work, and does it well and quietly; and I'd back his long head against your noisy talent (for the 'gift of the gab,' as you term it, is a noisy talent and a dangerous one) any day, Captain." Then, turning to Le Roux, he said- "The bank will re-open to-night, and we shall be there in force. Mind the champagne's better than the last batch. Let everything be in first-rate style, and spare no expense. Guillemard, you heard the rendezvous? Five o'clock messieurs; 'au revoir.'"

So saying, D'Almayne bowed with as much scrupulous politeness to the worshipful fraternity of——men of science he was quitting, as if he had been leaving the council-chamber of a prince. Calling a hansom cab, this industrious and zealous young man drove to his West-end lodgings, and exchanging his suit of quiet black, in which he had dressed the man-of-business character he had been pleased to enact, for more butterfly garments, went down to a certain fashionable club, where he felt sure of meeting Lord Alfred Courtland, and found him accordingly, but by no means in the amiable, docile frame of mind in which he usually rejoiced. The hour preceding that at which D'Almayne entered the club had been spent by Lord Alfred in concocting, pursuant to Arthur Hazlehurst's advice, a penitent letter to Alice Coverdale—a composition which had caused him much trouble and anxiety, and wherein he had endeavoured in some measure to justify himself, by shifting as much of the blame as he truthfully could on to the shoulders of Horace D'Almayne; and he had just closed and dispatched this accusatory epistle when, as though to overwhelm him with shame at such a betrayal of one who professed himself, and whom in great measure he still believed to be, his friend, his aspersed mentor seated himself opposite to him, and addressing him by his usual endearing epithet of "mon cher," invited him to dine with him that day, and meet a few choice spirits at Blackwall.

"You're very kind, but you really must excuse me," was Lord Alfred's reply. "I've been knocking about a good deal lately, and begin to want a little quiet."

"Yes, I know," was D'Almayne's rejoinder; "such is always one's morning theory—but one never puts it in practice; when eight o'clock comes, 'il faut diner!' Seriously, however, I can't let you off. I have asked two or three men to meet you, who are most anxious to make your acquaintance," —(this was strictly true)—"and who will be awfully savage if you don't come."

"Come—of course he'll come, and so will I too, if anybody will ask me, and there's a lark in hand—what does Milton say?—

'A bird in the hand is better far,
Than two that in the bushes are.'

Fine poem, 'Paradise Lost.' By the way, did you ever hear my riddle on that head? 'Why is the fact of the contents of a back-gammon-board having been thrown out of the window like Milton's 'chef-d'œuvre?' Do you give it up? 'Because it's a pair o' dice lost.' None so dusty that, eh? for a commoner like me? We poor devils that have to grind all day to procure our modest chop and our unassuming pint of London porter, can't be expected to say such brilliant things as you noble swells, who have had nothing to do but cultivate your understandings ever since you came into the world with gold spoons in your mouths. But you have not told me what's up yet."

Here the speaker, who was none other than the facetious Jack Beaupeep, paused for want of breath, and D'Almayne interposed with a reply to his question—

"The particular event exalted at the moment you joined us is a bachelor dinner at Blackwall to-day, for which I am trying to beat up a few recruits; let me hope you will enlist under my banner, and, with such a reinforcement, I am sure Lord Alfred will surrender at discretion."

"All serene!" rejoined the voluble Jack! "I was 'to let unfurnished' (with a dinner)—and let me tell you a Blackwall feed is a special mercy that's not to be sneezed at. Come, Alfred, my boy, merge the haughty noble in the jolly-good-fellow till further notice, and say 'I will.'"

"Have it your own way. Since you're both determined on my capture, it's hopeless to resist," said Lord Alfred, his feeble attempt at reformation completely defeated; "but I certainly had made up my mind to spend a quiet evening."

"So had I," returned Jack; "but then I did not expect such luck as to come in for a noisy one. What time, and where do we meet?"

"At the Pandemonium, at five o'clock," was D'Almayne's reply; "and mind you are both punctual."

CHAPTER XLIII.

EATING WHITEBAIT.

NERO fiddled while Rome blazed! We possess the record of the main fact, but all details connected with that memorable performance have perished in the lapse of ages. We can imagine, however, that the novelty and horrid grandeur of the situation by no means interfered with the skill and execution of the imperial amateur; but rather added a force and brilliancy to his playing, for which it may not have been usually remarkable. If he had at all a turn for improvisation, an opportunity then offered for his making a great hit; the roaring of the flames, the crash of falling buildings, the coarse laughter of a brutal soldiery, mingling with the shrieks of women and children, and with the shouts, changing to the half-curse, half-prayer, of the death agony of brave, true-hearted men, striving to rescue the helpless ones, and perishing in the exercise of their noble daring, all must have afforded a suggestive theme for the "crescendo" and "diminuendo" of the tyrant's catgut, which may have been handed down to posterity, until the tradition may have furnished the thesis of that classic and artistic composition, the "Battle of Prague."

Everybody considers Nero a hateful tyrant, and everybody may be in the main right; although good Dr. Goldsmith, in his interesting Roman history (which has been perpetually "abridged for the use of schools" ever since it was written, and is not half short enough yet), has probably applied too deep a coating of lamp-black even to Nero. But though, as manners and customs change, the outward seeming of things varies with them, human nature, too bad ever to be all good, and too good to be all bad, remains much the same, despite the preaching of Paul, and the watering-pot of Apollos.

Thus, while in the heart of mighty London vice filled model prisons with the recklessly depraved, or, far worse, the recklessly hypocritical—while hospital-wards teemed with those comparatively fortunate victims of disease and improvidence whom some good Samaritan had thus far rescued, when a frightful majority were dying untended in reeking alleys and other hotbeds of pestilence—while covetousness and hatred were scarcely restrained from breaking forth into rapine and murder by the strong arm of the law—my Lord Alfred Courtland, and the leeches who sought to prey upon his youth and inexperience, drove down to Blackwall to nibble a small fry of ridiculous little fishes, enveloped in batter, called white-

bait, and esteemed, for some undiscoverable reason, a delicacy.

Exactly as the clock struck five, a dark, well-appointed drag, with three bays and a chestnut—all thoroughbred, or thereabouts—drew up at the entrance to the Pandemonium. Captain O'Brien, handing the reins to a dark-whiskered, good-looking young fellow, who was his companion on the box, descended, and entering the club, was introduced by D'Almayne to Lord Alfred Courtland and Jack Beaupeep; the first-mentioned individual acknowledging his salutation by the slightest possible removal of the hat, together with an all but invisible motion of the head, the latter by a profound salaam, together with the diffident remark—

"Sir, you do me proud."

"Not at all, sir, not at all; on the contrary, it's proud I am to make your acquaintance, and you a mimber of the government, too. Did ye know Smith O'Brien, now?" Not waiting a reply, he continued—"Oh, he's a great legislathur entirely; and sure them that don't die first will live to see him prime-minister of this country, one of these fine mornings; and a 'prime minister' he'll make, sure! 'Justice to Ireland' will be found engraved in copper-plate on his heart, by any gentleman who may have the pleasure of attending the post-mortem examination of his remains, and long life to 'em!"

"Are you waiting for anyone?" inquired Horace, fearful lest his Hibernian associate should disgust Lord Alfred by his offensive familiarity at first starting, "Guillemard has, I see, already taken his seat. Have you any objection to pull up at the Guards' Club, O'Brien? There are three or four army men who have promised to come, and your drag will carry them easily."

The Captain agreeing to this—as indeed he appeared willing to agree to any and everything suggested by D'Almayne—they took their places; O'Brien insisting on Lord Alfred succeeding to the box-seat, vacated for that purpose by the dark-whiskered, hawk-eyed youth, who was none other than Phil Tirrett, the horse-breeder's son, whom Horace D'Almayne had designated as a very promising young scoundrel—a style of character which he was so well able to recognise, and so thoroughly competent to form an opinion upon, that we feel convinced he only did the young gentleman justice.

By no means captivated by O'Brien's manners or address, Lord Alfred was at first haughty and monosyllabic; but perceiving that D'Almayne was as scrupulously polite to this son of Erin as to the most polished member of the fashionable world, it occurred to him that in his character of man-about-town the correct thing was to assume a general languid citizen-of-the-worldship; and, as a duty to his presumed imperturbability, to appear, not all things to all men, but the same thing to every man. Thus, rousing himself, he paid a die-

away and meaningless compliment to the workmanlike manner in which Captain O'Brien "Ar— put his team along, and—ar—the correct style of the whole affair."

This led to an equestrian and sporting rhapsody on the part of the Hon. Terence, interspersed with anecdotes—strange, if true—of the dams and the sires, and the own brothers and sisters, of the individual members of the team, and especially of the chestnut, which had been "The sweetest thing, sir, across a stiff country that ever man rode; no day was too long and no burst too fast for him, bedad! and the bitterest moment ever I, Terence O'Brien, knew (barring the loss of me maternal grandmother, by spontaneous combustion, from fortuitously sitting down upon a lighted cinder, which had providentially popped out of the fire for that purpose), was when I staked him above the near hock at Melton, last season; and he's never been fit to gallop since, or it isn't in harness ye'd see him now—and him costing me a cool £400, and worth all the money now, if he was but sound," etc., etc.

The witty author of "Tristram Shandy," in introducing to the reader, that most lovable of humourists, my Uncle Toby, has discoursed eloquently on the various hobby-horses which take possession of, and enslave, the mind of man. Fortification, which was my Uncle Toby's mania, engrossed his thoughts, and influenced his conversation, until nothing but his simplicity and kindness of heart saved him from degenerating into a complete bore; but when a man's hobby-horse is the equine animal itself, you can no more unhorse him than if he were—as assuredly he ought to have been, if mind and body had borne a proper affinity to each other—a centaur. O'Brien was a centaur, and having once mounted his hobby, he rode him all the way to Blackwall, to Lord Alfred's extinction, or thereabouts; but considering that a certain amount of "turf" adheres to the character of a man-about-town, he bore the infliction like a—well, suppose, though we have foresworn slang as low, we for this once say—a brick.

Three guardsmen and a young heavy dragoon, who lived to consume beer and cigars, and produce moustachios and stupidity, were duly added to the party; and by the time they reached Blackwall everybody grew hungry, and prepared to do ample justice to the whitebait. Of course, everybody has at some period of their earthly career eaten a Blackwall dinner, and such feeds are all exactly alike. First appears a course of fish, enough to constitute a dinner in itself: sea-fish, river-fish, pond-fish—fishes boiled, fried, stewed, and bedevilled in various ways, which it would require the knowledge of the supposed inventor of cooks himself to detail; then come the wonderful whitebait themselves, their stupid little bodies enveloped in skeleton dresses of batter; and then fishes are ignored, and develop, according to the "Vestiges of Creation" theory, into the higher forms of animal, into which the

highest form of all—man—pitches, cannibal-like, until the culinary cosmos is resolved into its pristine chaotic elements. And around this hecatomb of slaughtered zoology and feasting humanity skip nimble waiters, furnished with bottles of every shape and hue; for, since Noah first discovered the seductive beverage, wine-bibbing has been a levelling principle, by means of which the lords of creation have been accustomed to assimilate themselves to their subjects the brutes, despite the hydraulic pressure of Father Matthew, and all others who have pledged themselves to cold-water such degrading customs. And, indeed, we fear that of the two parties whose respective mottoes might be "in vino veritas," and "truth lies at the bottom of a well," the latter will continue to constitute the minority until the end of the chapter; or, as Jack Beaupeep expressed the same sentiment, when D'Almayne propounded to him a somewhat similar theory, be "safe to kick the bucket, if they don't put their foot in it in any other way": but that misguided young man not only made, but rejoiced in, shocking bad puns.

The dinner had been done ample justice to—the wines (and their name was legion) had not been at all neglected—Lord Alfred had become quite intimate with the guardsmen, who, as the wine unlocked their tongues, began, in a quiet, gentlemanly way, to quiz everything and everybody, especially the heavy dragoon, who rejoiced in the patronymic of Gambier, a name on which the other military gentlemen were pleased to exercise their wit whenever they addressed him. As, for example, 1st guardsman, "loquitur":—

"I say, Beaupeep, have you heard Fred's (2nd guardsman's) last?"

"I haven't even heard his first," was the rejoinder.

"No; I should think not," continued No. 1; "he made that when he was quite a baby in arms."

"Ye may as well say before he could speak, while ye are about it," suggested O'Brien.

"Bravo, Captain! you won't better that," said the narrator. "However, Fred's last and worst was this—'Why is the gallant cornet opposite, an addition to any mess-table?' Do you give it up? 'Because he's half game and half beer!'"

"I daresay it's very funny," muttered the heavy subject of the jest, "but I don't see the point myself."

"It's a pint of half-and-half," observed Jack Beaupeep, explanatorily.

"Or 'heavy' wet, if he were out in the rain," added guardsman No. 2.

"Talking of heavy wet puts me in mind of coming down with the dust. When are you going to perform that operation in regard to the Windsor Steeple-chase?" inquired the cornet, surlily; who, not having anything witty to reply to

his assailant, substituted instead the most unpleasant topic he could select.

"That is soon answered," was the rejoinder; "whenever you'll make a fresh match between the horses, and give Rattletrap a chance of showing Teacaddy the way home, when he's not been pricked in shoeing by a confounded blacksmith."

"Oh! it that's all, you may hand over the cash to-morrow morning," returned the dragoon; "the mare's in first-rate order, and I'm game to back her for a match, hurdle-race, steeple-chase, or what you will," was the confident reply.

"Ah! is it a steeple-chase, now, ye're talking of?" interrupted O'Brien, filling himself a tumbler of claret; "sure an' I've got a horse I'd be proud to enter, if it wasn't jist putting me hand in your pockets and taking the money out of 'em; for if he's in the race, I'd name the winner before they start."

"He must be a wonderful animal, Captain," observed the first guardsman; "high-pressure, express train style of quadruped, eh?"

"Furnished with a screw-propeller, more likely," added his companion, ironically.

"Faith, and ye're wrong there entirely: it's little of the screw ye'll find about Broth-of-a-boy. Talk about railroads, indeed, I never knew what flying was till the day I first galloped him in the Phœnix Park. I only wish I'd had him in Spain, when I served with the legion of Sir De Lacy Evans; it isn't overtaken and kilt entirely by their blackguard dragoons I'd have been then—thought it's little but hard blows and hard swearing they got out of me, as it was, the Lord be praised!"

"Hear, hear! a story, a story!" "Military reminiscences of Captain O'Brien! order, order!" "Silence for the noble anecdote!" "Out with it, Captain!" etc., etc., were some of the exclamations with which the Hibernian's last speech was hailed by various members of the party, upon whom the white-bait (?) was beginning to tell.

Thus urged, that worthy, clearing his throat by a sip at the claret, which half emptied the tumbler, began:—

"Well, boys,"—(here he caught a look from D'Almayne, which caused him, nothing abashed, to add parenthetically)—"if in the congeniality of good fellowship you will permit me to call ye so, the story's nothing so very wonderful, after all—it was just a bit of a spree, do ye see, nothing more; but such as it is ye're welcome to it"—(polite aside from Jack Beaupeep for Lord Alfred's benefit—"You're too liberal, really!") "I was with Sir De Lacy Evans in Spain, captain in a regiment of lancers; a rare set of rattling dogs they were, too—up to everything, from robbing a henroost to burning towns and sacking monasteries"—(Beaupeep aside—"A decidedly 'sacreligious' act that last!") "On one occasion, we were sta-

tioned at a place distant about four miles from a village occupied by a strong body of Carlists; well, sir, for several nights running, our sentinels on the side towards the village were assassinated—stabbed through the heart they were! We had 'em doubled, two men to each post; bedad, the only improvement that effected was, we got two men murdered instead of one; and yet the scamp that did it always contrived to get away clear and clean—we never so much as clapped eyes on him! Well, I bothered and puzzled the matter over, and thought of this thing and that thing, and at last I got hold of a notion I fancied might work well; so I cut off to our Colonel, and 'Colonel,' says I, 'with your kind permission, I think I can stop these assassinations.' 'What is it, O'Brien?' says he; 'you're a clever, rising young officer, and a man that bids fair to be an ornament to his profession'; but I won't trouble ye with the illegant eulogy he was so polite as to pronounce upon me that day"—("Hear, hear!" from Beaupeep and the guardsmen). "So I jist obtained his permission to select two well-mounted troopers out of my own company, and leave to do what I pleased with them and myself during the night, and that was all I wanted. I happened at that time to have a particularly fast mare—a sweet thing she was, bay, with black points, nearly thoroughbred, a head like an antelope, and as to pace, 'gad! there wasn't a horse in the regiment could come near her. Before nightfall I picked out my two troopers—sharp, plucky young fellows, that I knew I could depend upon if it came to hard fighting, each of them well mounted; and I took care to see that their horses and the mare were properly fed and watered, so as to be fit for a stiff burst; then I amused myself with sharpening the point of my lance till it was as keen as a razor. About a stone's throw from the post where the sentry they used to assassinate was stationed"—("Of course, the same man every night till further notice," murmured Jack Beaupeep, continuing his running commentary)—"there was a thicket of olive bushes and other shrubs; behind this, as soon as it grew dusk, I posted my men with the horses, while I availed myself of a rise in the ground to advance nearer, and lie down, hidden from sight by a stunted bush or two. Well, I waited and waited, and watched, and watched, so that a mouse could not have stirred without my noticing it; but nothing did I see, except the shadowy figure of the sentinel pacing up and down in the moonlight, as though he were the discontented ghost of one of his murdered comrades"—("Very pretty—quite poetical, I declare!" from Beaupeep). "Well, at last, just about a quarter of an hour before daybreak, which is the darkest period of the night in those latitudes, whether I had dozed off for a minute I don't know, but I was startled by a noise differing from the monotonous tread of the sentinel, and which sounded to my ear like

the cracking of a dry twig; in another moment I perceived a dark, round object moving upon the ground, which I soon made out to be the head of a man drawing himself along, snake-fashion, upon his stomach—while so close had he got to the unconscious soldier that I perceived, if I would save the poor lad's life, not an instant was to be lost. I therefore gave the signal to my troopers to come up, and drawing my sword, rushed forward to secure the assassin. As I did so, a light active figure sprang up from the ground, and brandishing a long, keen dagger, made a furious stab at the sentry; but, fortunately, my approach confused the scoundrel, so that he missed his stroke, and instead of killing the man, merely inflicted a slight flesh wound of no consequence. Notwithstanding his surprise—for, as the soldier afterwards declared to me, his antagonist seemed to have risen out of the earth—the sentry attempted to seize him; but he contrived to slip out of his hands like an eel, and before I could reach the spot, had disappeared in the darkness. In another moment the dull sound of a horse's feet galloping over the turf proved to me that he was away; but my own horse being brought up, I sprang into the saddle, snatched my lance from the trooper who held it, and ordering the men to follow me, started in pursuit.

"'Pon me conscience, gentlemen, I niver reflect on me feelings at that critical moment but it makes me—Ah, well! I'll jist trouble your lordship for the claret."

CHAPTER XLIV.

LORD ALFRED COURTLAND SOWS A FEW WILD OATS.

CAPTAIN O'BRIEN, having finished his glass of claret, and turned up the points of his carroty moustaches, thus resumed his story:—

"At first it was as much as I was able to do to track the fellow by the sound of his horse's hoofs upon the soft turf, but I trusted a good deal to the mare's instinct to follow the horse before her; fortunately we had not very far to go before we got upon the hard village road, and then there was nothing to do but ride him down, for the grey light that precedes the dawn enabled me to see his figure distinctly. But that same riding him down was easier to talk about than to do, for the scoundrel had obtained a long start of us, and though I was well mounted, I soon perceived that he was equally so. Away we rattled at a slashing pace, and for about a mile the two troopers managed to keep up pretty tolerably; but by the time we had ridden rather more than twice that distance, I found my friend was gradually drawing ahead, and that if I

waited for my men, I should soon have seen my last of him; so giving the mare her head, and a trifling reminder with the spur besides, I left them, and they gradually tailed off in the distance, until a turn of the road hid them altogether. In my time, I've ridden steeple-chases, hurdle-races, and every species of race that the divil ever invented, but a faster thing than that morning's ride I never saw nor heard of. The horses were well matched as to speed, mine was rather the freshest, but then the Carlist was the lighter weight; the thing could not have been fairer. However, after a couple of miles or so more, I was glad to perceive that I was gradually creeping up to him; and I suppose he began to suspect it too, for as the light increased I saw him every now and then look round suspiciously, and urge his horse still faster at each successive glance. About a mile from the village I had gained upon him so decidedly that it was evident I must overtake him before he could reach its friendly shelter. Apparently he was of the same opinion, for, before I was aware of his intention, he unslung a carbine he carried, pulled up suddenly, and turning in his saddle, levelled it, and took a deliberate aim at me. Everybody that knows Terence O'Brien knows he's no coward; but 'pon my conscience, at that moment, I wouldn't have been sorry to have turned my horse's head, and cried quits with him; however, a bullet is a style of article that doesn't allow a man much time for deliberation, so seeing it was a case of hit or miss, I only rammed in the spurs harder, bent down my head, couched my lance, and galloped on. Bang went the carbine; and almost before the report reached me, a bullet whistled through the air; I heard a sort of 'thud,' as when an arrow strikes a straw target, and felt my throat-strap suddenly tightened: the messenger of death had passed through my cap, severing a lock of hair and just raising the skin, without doing me the slightest injury; but it was a close shave in every sense of the word. Well, as soon as the scoundrel perceived that his shot had failed, he felt that his only chance was to exert every nerve to reach the village before I overtook him; so, flinging away his discharged carbine, he dashed on, urging his failing steed with voice and spurs, and even, as I gained upon him, with the point of his dagger. Another minute brought us in sight of the village, where a sleepy sentinel was pacing up and down the road in front of a sort of toll-house. Astonished at the sight of two men riding like lunatics, he first attempted to close the bar fixed there to defend the entrance to the village; then, recognising my companion, he paused, and before he had come to any decision, we had dashed past him—my friend obligingly desiring him to 'shoot the dog of a Christino,' as we flew by; an order which, fortunately for me, he was too much confused to execute, discharging his firelock harmlessly into the air.

As we passed the toll-house, I was not above two horse-lengths from my antagonist, and gaining upon him at every stride. Any feelings of compunction I might have had at the thought of slaying a fellow-creature, had been effectually put to flight by the shot he had so deliberately fired at me; thus, when I found myself at length coming up with him, I grasped my lance more firmly, set my teeth, drove the spurs into the mare, and dashed at him. In another moment I had overtaken him, the point of my lance entered his back between the shoulder blades, and by the mere impetus of my onward career I drove it through him. As the weapon transfixed him, the poor wretch uttered a yell of agony, and fell forward on his horse's neck a corpse. If you'll believe me, gentlemen, it wasn't till I'd thus squared accounts with the rascal for our sentries that he'd murdered in cold blood, that the idea ever struck me how I was to get back again, with the Carlist village between me and our camp. The first thing I tried, was to pull my lance out of the dead assassin, as he lay on his face in the middle of the road; but the more I pulled, the more it wouldn't come—I'd driven it in with such force; and at last, with a wrench I gave it, I snapped the staff in two. Seeing there was no time to lose, I was about to turn my mare's head in a homeward direction, when it occurred to me that they'd never believe in the regiment that I'd killed the fellow," — ("Not an improbable thing," soliloquised Beaupeep)—"so I jumped down, secured the scoundrel's sash and dagger, remounted, and rode off. As I expected, the sentinel's shot had roused the village, and just as I got back, a company of soldiers were turning out, half awake, and in great confusion, and the lieutenant contrived to draw a file across the road to stop me. There was nothing for it but impudence; so, drawing my sabre, I waved it in the air, then looking round, as if I'd got a regiment at my back, I sang out, 'Come on, boys!—trot, gallop, charge!' and dashed at 'em, cut down the lieutenant, and what between their fright and their confusion, broke their line, rode slap through 'em, escaped by good luck half a dozen bullets that were sent after me, and should have got clear away but for a patrol of dragoons that came up on hearing the firing, and who, learning how the matter stood, gave chase. As their horses were fresh, while the race she'd won had pumped every puff of wind out of my mare, they soon overtook me; and after two or three minutes' hard fighting, a cut in the sword-arm disabled me, and I was forced to give in. Well, they carried me back to the village, settled that I was a spy, besides having killed Don Pedrillo Velasquez de Matadoro, or some such jargon; for which double crime I was to be hung at noon. Owing to the fortunate arrival of my lancers and a regiment of rifles, however, that event was indefinitely postponed; but I'll mer-

cifully spare you the recital of the scrimmage which ended in our taking the village; and, as talking is dry work, I'll just thank you for the claret, D'Almayne, me boy!"

Much cheering and acclamation followed the conclusion of the Captain's story, under cover whereof Jack Beaupeep insinuated to Lord Alfred his opinion that the history in question was better suited to the capacity of the marines than to that of able-bodied seamen. To which his lordship, quoting Horace, replied, that "Judæus Apella" might believe it, but that he did not; which, as he said it in the original language of the Roman poet, elicited from his companion the remark that it sounded very pretty, and he wished that he understood Dutch.

"But about this said race; what is it to be, and when is it to come off?" inquired the heavy cornet, who possessed every requisite except brains to become a first-rate blackleg.

"Do you really mean that you've a horse you'd like to enter for, say, a hurdle-race, Captain O'Brien?" observed the first guardsman, thinking the gallant Hibernian had been rhapsodising, and desirous of exposing the fact.

"Indeed then an' I have, if you're plucky enough to enter any horse against him," was the confident reply. "Broth-of-a-boy will show 'em the way home in style; but there may be a very pretty race for second, nevertheless."

A laugh followed this slightly gasconading assertion, and the "Heavy" continued: "Suppose we try and make a good race of it, and each of us here enter a horse, and do the thing well."

"'Mais que diable'—vot shall he mean?" inquired Monsieur Guillemard, completely out of his depth; "to entaire, to valk into!—how shall ve valk into a horse?"

"Oh, it's a mere 'façon de parler,'" returned Beaupeep, delighted at an opportunity of mystifying a foreigner; "it's merely a term used in this kind of game; it is a sort of lottery, in which each person thinks of—invents, in fact—some horse's name, 'Jacques-bon-Homme,' or 'Mort-de-ma-Vie,' or any other name that occurs to him; then, some day that may be agreed on, these names are written on slips of paper, and drawn out of a hat or cap, and those that don't lose, win; but there's very little chance of losing—almost everybody wins; it's a pretty game, and very simple when you're used to it. Do you quite understand, or shall I say it again?"

"'Mais oui,' you are polite, not at all. I shall apprehend him one day, when I shall have played at him: 'vive la bagatelle!' long live zie rubbish!" was the cheerful rejoinder.

While this little conversation had been proceeding, the dark, handsome young man, yclept Phil Tirrett, receiving a hint from O'Brien, conveyed in a contraction of the eyelid, so slight that no one but himself perceived it, wrote a few words on a scrap of paper, and tossed it to Horace D'Almayne.

Having read it, D'Almayne crushed it in his hand; then, turning to Lord Alfred, he said:—

"Do you know who my left-hand neighbour is?"

"What, the good-looking, gipsy-like party? —no; you will surprise me if you tell me he's a gentleman," was the sarcastic reply.

"By no means," returned D'Almayne, helping himself to claret, and pushing the bottle to Lord Alfred; "but, although he would pass with less discriminating critics than ourselves, what I like about him is, that he never pretends to anything of the kind—he knows perfectly well his position, and the terms on which he gets admitted to society such as the present. His father is a great Yorkshire horse-breeder—a man who supplies half the London market, and exports largely into the bargain; there's not a year in which old Tirrett does not turn over his ten or fifteen thousand pounds, and bag four or five of 'em clear profit by the end of it. This lad is his eldest son, and comes up to town every season with a lot of young horses; some are bought by the dealers, others, generally two or three of the best, he shows himself, and keeps back till he finds an opportunity of placing them to advantage. This is his third season in town; and from his manner and appearance, not to mention the chance of picking up a first-rate horse from him, he has acquired a sort of standing among turfmen."

"And this brief biography comes 'à propos' to what?" inquired Lord Alfred, languidly, filling his glass.

"'A propos' to his handing me this bit of paper," rejoined D'Almayne.

Lord Alfred unrolled the mysterious "billet-doux"; it ran as follows:—

"If your friend Lord A. C. has a fancy to enter a horse, I can show him one to-morrow no one in London has yet seen, or heard of; it can beat any animal that will be named to-night, I know; and, for its stamp, the figure is not a high one. If he likes the idea, let him name Don Pasquale."

Lord Alfred pondered: during his life in London his money had been making itself wings, and using them also with alarming assiduity. For a peer, his father was not a rich man, and his own allowance, although enough for a gentleman to live upon carefully, was by no means calculated to withstand such reckless inroads as had lately been made upon it. As yet he was not in debt, and had a virtuous horror of becoming so; but to purchase a racehorse, with such a name as Don Pasquale—an animal with a reputation which would ensure its beating any horse likely to be entered by cavalry cornets, real live guardsmen, or captains of lancers, who had speared Carlist spies, was an idea equally fearful and fascinating, which even the mystical information that (for such an unparalleled quadruped) the figure was not to be a high one, was un-

able to divest of its equal powers of terror and temptation. He glanced at the cornet and at the guardsmen; the cornet might be about his own standing, but he felt a proud consciousness that if the prejudices of his benighted country had allowed him to wear a moustache, he could have grown a much more imposing style of article. One guardsman was a noble adult, endowed by nature with unimpeachable black whiskers, and impregnable in the "sang froid" of three decimals; but the other, the fastest and punningest of the party, was a mere boy, apparently his lordship's junior by a year or more: yet this precocious young warrior talked of entering racehorses, and betting cool hundreds, as though such pursuits were analogous to playing marbles for stakes payable in the copper coinage sacred to the effigy of Britannia, of wave-ruling celebrity. And should he, the knowing man-about-town, the friend and favourite pupil of Horace D'Almayne, should he be deterred by prudential considerations which even that boy had the spirit to ignore and disregard?

D'Almayne's eyes looked through him as if he had been made of plate-glass, perceived his hesitation and its cause, and hastened to put an end to it. "Have nothing to do with it, 'mon cher,'" he said, "sotto voce"; "you've been spending money pretty fast lately, and we shall have your noble father cutting up rough, and refusing the supplies."

"You seem to think I am a baby!" was Lord Alfred's piqued reply, as he filled a large claret-glass to the brim, having already partaken of that liquor and others freely; "you fancy I am to go through life in leading-strings; but you will learn better some of these days!" Then, with a confidential nod to Phil Tirrett, which that accomplished young scoundrel acknowledged with a significant smile, he continued aloud, "Captain O'Brien, I am curious to test your assertion, and beg to enter a horse of mine, Don Pasquale, in order to discover whether Broth-of-a-boy can show him the way home, as that is a feat which I have yet to seek the animal able to perform."

At this challenge, so boldly thrown down, everybody grew clamorous and excited, with the exception of Jack Beaupeep, who, for the delectation of himself and the younger guardsman, went through a pantomimic representation of first hanging himself, then, with a dessert-knife, severing his carotid artery—regarding Lord Alfred the while with a smile of mock commiseration, as though to signify his conviction that the young nobleman was metaphorically performing a similar suicidal operation on his own account. Horace D'Almayne, with a face indicative of deep concern, vainly endeavoured to dissuade Lord Alfred from having anything to do with horse-racing, which he described as a snare and a delusion, with such pathetic earnestness that his lordship, bent on vindicating his enfranchisement from parental or moral leading-

strings, even if he were necessitated to throw himself over a precipice in order to do so, became more than ever determined to have his own way. Accordingly, he made an appointment to meet the guardsman and Captain O'Brien on the following morning at the "Pandemonium," and settle all the preliminaries of the race. This interesting and important matter being thus put properly in train, much "turf" conversation followed; and too much wine was drunk by the party generally, and Captain O'Brien in particular; until somebody suggesting that they had a longish drive before them, the meeting broke up, and D'Almayne retired with the head-waiter, to undergo that uncomfortable operation yclept "paying the bill." As he did so, Tirrett drew Lord Alfred into a corner, and inquired in a low tone—

"How early may I call on your lordship, and take you to see Don Pasquale?"

"Eh? early did you say?—do you mean really and positively early, or early for London? I seldom breakfast before eleven," was the "about-townish" reply.

"I did mean really early," rejoined Tirrett. "Don Pasquale is at a stable a little way out of town, where I would advise your lordship to keep him quiet till after the race; and, as there is no good in letting too many people into the secret of his whereabouts, I was going to propose to meet you at Hyde Park Corner, at eight o'clock to-morrow morning, and drive you down; in which case you might be in town again by your usual breakfast hour, and no one any the wiser for our expedition."

"Yes—*you know best, of course; but really it's an alarming sacrifice of 'nature's sweet restorer'*; still I'm game for the exertion—a—eight o'clock did you say? 'Gad, I'd better book it, for my memory is not my strong point"; and as he spoke, Lord Alfred produced a knowing little betting-book, which he considered it the correct thing to carry, and, in the portion thereof dedicated to memoranda, entered "Mr. Tirrett, H. P. C., 8 a.m."; then, replacing it in his pocket, joined a group, in the centre whereof Jack Beaupeep was spinning a dessert-plate on the point of his forefinger, and performing various feats of legerdemain. The drag being reported in readiness, this facetious young gentleman was obliged summarily to discontinue his performance, or, as he expressed it, "shut up shop, in consequence of the early closing movement"; and, after an agreeable moonlight drive, they reached town without adventure about eleven o'clock.

"D'Almayne, my boy, what are we to do with ourselves?" inquired the punning guardsman; "I'm open to anything—except, of course, going quietly to bed."

"Sure and can't we get into a row anywhere, now?—is there any gentleman's head handy that we could punch for a little harmless diversion?" asked O'Brien.

"What do you say to kidnapping a policeman, charter a cab, convey him to a gin-palace in some obscure locality, fill him blind drunk, shave off his whiskers, blacken his face, and then deposit him at the door of the nearest station-house, to be punished for insobriety, riotous conduct, and neglect of duty?" suggested Beaupeep, with the air of a philanthropist proposing some plan for the benefit of his species.

"Sure, an' it's a great idea entirely, and a thing that should be done forthwith," observed O'Brien, meditatively and approvingly.

"You can, of course, please yourselves, gentlemen," replied D'Almayne; "but such valorous achievements are scarcely in my line, or in that of my friend Lord Courtland; 'n'est-ce pas, Alfred,' 'mon cher?'"

"Yes, decidedly. I was going to propose that we should look in at J—— Street for an hour or so, and then go quietly to bed—I don't want to be late to-night."

"I'm with you," chimed in the first guardsman; "what say you, Fred?'

"All serene: though I was in a position to vocalise in the teeth of a footpad—'vacuus canit,' etc., you know—regularly cleaned out, the last time I quitted those realms of enchantment; but never mind, faint heart never succeeded with lovely woman, eh? Go in and win, that's about the time of day!"

"Of night, rather," suggested Beaupeep, critically; then, assuming a severe tone and manner, he continued, "I'll tell you what it is, you're a set of very dissipated young men, and gambling is a vice of which all your anxious parents most strongly disapprove!"

"Faith, and if mine should happen to do that same it won't cost me any overpowering amount of remorse thin; for me father died some years before I came into this wicked world, and me other was so cut up by the catastrophe that she did not survive him many days," remarked O'Brien, with drunken gravity.

And having by this time reached the door of the mysterious club in J—— Street, D'Almayne knocked a peculiar knock, and the whole party entered, with the exception of Jack Beaupeep, who, observing that he had to write a private despatch to the Pope, and a confidential note to Abd-el-Kader, before he went to bed, excused himself on the score of his official duties. As he turned to depart, he glanced at Lord Alfred Courtland, who, with flashing eyes and heightened colour, was the first to enter—"If that poor boy has not fallen into the hands of the Philistines, it's a pity!" was his mental comment, and he shook his head with the ominous profundity of a second Lord Burleigh.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE OVERTURE TO DON PASQUALE.

No one could justly accuse Mr. Philip Tirrett, son and agent to the well-known Yorkshire horse-breeder, of that prolific vice, idleness—mother of evil—on the night and morning after D'Almayne's whitebait dinner. So far, indeed, was he from evincing any reprehensible slothfulness in attending to his father's (and his own) interest, that hastening, the moment he quitted his companions, to his lodgings, he exchanged his evening costume for his every-day habiliments; then lying down, ready dressed as he was, he snatched a couple of hours' sleep; and, as soon as the first ray of daylight became visible, rose and took his way to a neighbouring livery stable. Arriving there, he roused a sleepy helper, and desired him to saddle the bay mare; which, when his order had been complied with, he mounted; and telling the man to have the tilbury and the chestnut thoroughbred ready by a quarter before eight, rode off. As at that early hour the entrances to Hyde Park were still closed, he followed the windings of Park Lane, until he reached Cumberland Gate, when, giving his mare the rein, he rode at a smart trot down the Bayswater Road, until he reached the turnpike, after passing which he increased the trot to a fast canter. This pace he kept up for about four miles along the Harrow Road; then turning off to the right, he proceeded about a mile farther, until he came to a gate leading across a field, on the opposite side of which were situated a cottage and some farm buildings. Riding into the yard, Tirrett gave a shrill whistle, and immediately a round, bullet-shaped, close-cropped head was protruded from a stable-door.

"Come and take my mare, Dick; put her in and give her a handful of corn to nibble at. How is the Don?"

"He be a-getting on stunnin', Mr. Philip; I've kept him bandaged, as you told me, sir, and it aint hardly noticeable."

"Let me have a look at him," was the reply; and after leading the mare into the stable from which he had originally himself appeared, Dick produced a key, and, unlocking therewith the door of another stable, Tirrett entered. In a loose box, enveloped in cloths, stood a remarkably fine horse, which, as the door opened, turned its small, well-formed head to gaze at the intruders, laying back its ears and showing its teeth when Tirrett approached it. Master Phil, however, appeared perfectly aware of its various little peculiarities, both of temper and bodily estate. "Put a saddle and bridle on

him," he said; "I want to see him out." The execution of this order invoked a scene analogous to the little "ballet d'action" usually performed between a refractory child requiring to have its face washed, and a firm, but tender and judicious nurse. Thus, on Dick approaching his charge gingerly, with the bridle held out in a tempting and seductive manner, that perverse quadruped immediately elevated its head to the altitude of that of a camelopard, or thereabouts; which, as Dick was rather under than over the middle height, completely frustrated his purpose; whereupon the groom told Pasquale to "now then!" superadding a request to him to "come out o' that, will yer!" without unnecessary delay. If the demonstrative pronoun referred to the Don's attitude, he did "come out of it" instantly, by turning short round, and in a most senseless and uncivil fashion presenting his tail to be bridled instead of its head: but this little display of wilfulness and ill-breeding defeated his object, for by his sudden gyration he placed himself in a corner of his loose-box, where Dick cleverly contrived to pin him, and before (if he had possessed the faculty of speech) he could have evoked Jack Robinson, clapt the bridle on him, and "brought him round" in every sense of the term. "Take the bandage off the fore-leg," was Tirrett's next order; as soon as the groom had executed it, his employer stooped down and carefully felt and examined the uncovered leg. "The heat and tenderness seem all gone," he said; "there's a little fulness still, but that will go down when you've had him out for half an hour. Does he show lame at all?"

"I aint took him out of a valk, you know, since it happened, Master Phil; but he don't valk lame none," was the reply.

"I must see him out, Dick: take him down to the meadow with a saddle on over his clothes. How is his temper?" was the next inquiry.

"Vell, he ain't jist the sort o' hanimal for a timid old gentleman, you know, Master Phil; it takes a man to ride him; but he'd be civil enough with you or me on his back, after the first five minutes," rejoined Dick, buckling the girths so tightly as disagreeably to compress the person of the irascible Don Pasquale, who, fortunately for himself, by no means resembled in figure his namesake, as enacted by the inimitable Lablache; but who still resented this indignity by making sundry vigorous, but abortive efforts to bite and kick his attendant, by which he obtained an exhortation to "cup!" (which we take to be an abbreviation of "come up!"), together with the interrogative remonstrance, "what are you arter—can't ye?" His toilet thus completed, the Don was led, snorting and curvetting, across the yard to a gate opening into a grass paddock of from ten to twelve acres; where, as soon as he was fairly inside the gate, he commenced a series of violent pantomimic protestations against the indignity of

being mounted; nor was it until Dick, having exhausted his entire vocabulary of equine endearment, had been forced to betake himself to a course of hard Yorkshire swearing, that he could be induced to stand still for ten consecutive seconds. That desideratum being fortunately attained just before Dick became black in the face from the force of the language he was compelled to employ, the groom, gathering up the reins, grasped the front of the saddle firmly, and requested from Tirrett the favour of a "leg up"; a demand to which that young gentleman responded by seizing him by the right knee, and flinging him recklessly upward into space, whence by a special mercy he descended on the saddle, and therefore on the back of Don Pasquale. Then that noble quadruped tried to obtain forcible possession of his own head, with the felonious intention of careering madly round the meadow, and annihilating Dick in his rapid career; but the astute groom, foreseeing some such catastrophe, would by no means permit him to accomplish his design, but retained possession of his head by a strong hand, a stout rein, and a powerful bit. Frustrated in his amiable intention, the Don appeared determined to prove to society at large, that if he had lost his head, he at all events possessed the free use (not to say abuse) of his limbs; so he pranced, and sidled, and jumped with all four feet off the ground at once, varying the performance by alternately kicking and rearing, until he had in that rash and inconsiderate manner made the circuit of the paddock, when, finding his rider clung to the saddle with an adhesive pertinacity which rendered the probability of throwing him completely a forlorn hope, he apparently gave the matter up in despair, dropped quietly into the habits and customs of ordinary horses, and permitted himself to be ridden hither and thither at his master's, and his master's master's, pleasure.

"Take him by at a slow trot, then at a fast, then at a canter," was Tirrett's first direction; when this had been complied with, he continued: "Now take him over the leaping-bar." Dick, who seemed devoid of all individuality of will, and to exist only in order to do as he was bid, without the slightest reference to its compatibility with the safety of his own life and limbs, immediately turned to obey; but Don Pasquale, whatever degree of fondness he had evinced for gymnastic exercises on his own account, clearly had not the smallest inclination to perform such feats for the pleasure of others; thus, when brought up to the leaping-bar, he not only refused to go over it, but actually turned his "head where was his tail," and dashed off in a diametrically opposite direction. But it was of no avail; Dick, once mounted, was immovable, inexorable; moreover, he wore a pair of singularly sharp spurs, with which he had a disagreeable habit of excoriating the sides of any cantankerous quadruped he might bestride. So, after fight number two, the Don was again con-

quered, and taken over the leaping-bar, which he cleared in gallant style. "That will do, bring him here," continued Tirrett; "he scarcely shows lame at all; but he's too fresh, his temper appears too plainly, he wants severe exercise. Will the fore-leg stand training for a race, do you think?"

"Vell, if ve has the doing of it, Master Phil; so as we can humour him, and doctor him, and vork him only on the soft turf, and little and often, not to overtire the back sinews, do yer see; and keep him cold-bandaged at night, and so work the horacle that fashion, the thing may be done without making a mull on it."

Tirrett removed his hat, passed his fingers through his hair, replaced it again, thought for a moment, once more felt the suspicious back sinews, shook his head, and then resumed: "Keep him out for the next two hours; give it him sufficiently stiff to take the devil completely out of him; then feed and clean him, and have him ready to show by half-past eight. Get yourself dressed, too, for if I sell the horse I shall let you go with him for a time—you understand; but you shall have full directions when I see my way clearly. Now I must be off; you need not come in, I can get the mare myself. Take him over that bar again once or twice; it won't do for him to shirk it when I'm showing him—remember, half-past eight." So saying, Tirrett returned to the stable, brought out his mare, remounted, and rode off at the same speed as that at which he had arrived.

When he reached the livery stable whence he had procured the mare, it still wanted a quarter to seven; calling a cab he drove without delay to a small street in the neighbourhood of Leicester Square, and rang twice at one of the houses without producing any result, but a third and more strenuous application of the bell-pull unearthed a curl-papered and slip-shod maid-servant, who replied to his inquiry, "Whether the captain was at home?" that he was in bed and asleep, for aught she knew to the contrary. "Show me his room," was the reply. The girl scrutinised him with a doubtful air, which, Tirrett perceiving, continued, "It's all right, my good girl; I'm not a dun"; at the same time he placed a shilling in her hand, and, her scruples vanishing at the magic touch of silver, she led the way up two flights of stairs, then, tapping at a bedroom door, she exclaimed—"Here's a gentleman to see you, Captain."

Tirrett, without further announcement, opened the door and walked in; thereby relieving the gallant tenant of the apartment from an alarming suspicion which was continually haunting him.

"Ar, Phil, me boy, and I'm glad to see you are your own self then, and not a sheriff's officer. What has brought ye here at this onconscionably early hour of the night? Have

ye set the Thames on fire or bolted with the Bank of England?"

"Neither," was the reply; "both exploits are more in your way than mine; but I've not a minute to lose. I've just come back from the stables at Shark's Farm, and I'm to drive that green goose with a handle to his name down to look at the horse at eight o'clock."

"You've got his lordship so far as that, have ye? 'Pon me conscience, you're a clever lad, and your father ought to be proud of ye," was the complimentary remark this announcement drew forth.

Unheeding it, Tirrett continued: "And now, Captain, before we go any further, let us come to a clear understanding; the matter, I think, at present stands thus: I sold you the horse for 200 guineas, and half everything he might win during the ensuing year; 100 you paid out of your Derby winnings, 100 you still owe me. You next made a foolish bet, when you were half screwed, that the horse could perform an impossible leap, and in attempting it threw him down and lamed him; from that lameness he has wonderfully recovered—sound I never expect him to get; though, with care and management, he may now be sold and trained; but how are we to arrange about terms?"

"Terms, indeed!" was the astonished reply. "Why, I'll pay you your second hundred out of the price I get for him; and well content ye should be with your good luck, for if the nag had gone to the bad, it's more kicks than ha'pence ye'd have got from Terence O'Brien."

"Won't do, Captain," was the cool rejoinder: "I must have the hundred down, and half whatever you get beyond. Why, there's a bill of thirty pounds from the 'Vet.' for time and medicines, besides the half share of the winnings which I lose by your selling him."

The angry discussion which ensued, and which ended in O'Brien's obtaining terms slightly more favourable for himself, we will not inflict on the reader; suffice it to say that, ere the associates parted, all their differences were reconciled, and their alliance likely to be cemented more firmly than ever, by their proposed inroad on the credulity and cash of Lord Alfred Courtland.

CHAPTER XLVI.

KATE BEGINS TO REAP THE WHIRLWIND.

KATE CRANE was the eldest of a large family; two children younger than herself had died in infancy, so that her next brother was five years her junior. He was a fine, high-spirited lad, generous to a fault, as wilful and determined as his sister, but unfortunately without her power of self-control or steadiness of principle. Thus constituted, he was at once the darling and the torment of his family. Through Mr. Crane's interest he had obtained a good position in a large mercantile establishment in the city, where, though Kate had at first entertained considerable apprehensions as to his steadiness, he appeared to be going on satisfactorily.

One morning, about three weeks after the date of the occurrences we have related, Mr. Crane having as usual departed for the city to coin money, the midday post brought the following letter for his wife:—

"DEAREST KATE,—It is with reluctance that I take up my pen to ask you whether it will inconvenience you to pay me a part of the next quarter's allowance you so generously make us in advance. You know well how I strive and struggle to keep down our expenses, without depriving your dear father (who, I grieve to say, gets weaker and weaker) of the comforts which his declining health renders daily more necessary for him. My best endeavours cannot, however, prevent some of the tradesmen's bills from getting in arrear—the fearful expense of your father's illness absorbing the addition to our income which your kind husband's liberality has enabled you to make. Such a difficulty is now pressing upon me, and induces me to apply to you. If you can help me, I am sure you will; if you are unable to do so, I can only trust that the beneficent Providence who has hitherto supported me under my heavy trials will not now desert me. Believe me to remain, dearest Kate,

"Ever your affectionate mother,

"RACHEL MARSDEN.

"P.S.—I am uneasy about Fred; his letters have been short and unsatisfactory for some time; and for the last three weeks he has not written to me at all. I wish you would see him, and endeavour to learn from him how he employs his evenings, etc. You will think my fears unreasonable; but you

know how fond and proud we both are of our boy. If anything were to go wrong with him, in your father's present state of debility, I believe it would be his death-blow."

Kate's first impulse on reading the above epistle was to fly to her writing-desk—ten, twenty, thirty pounds, was all that remained: the liberal assistance she had bestowed on Mrs. Leonard and her family having reduced her finances to this low ebb.. Reserving only five pounds for her own use, she immediately despatched a hurried answer, enclosing an order for five-and-twenty pounds, and explaining, in general terms, the reason of her inability to render her parents more effectual assistance, promising to be more careful of their interest for the future.

As she was desiring the servant to post her letter without delay, a sharp knock at the street-door caused her to start, and she had barely time to close her writing-desk, ere Mr. Frederick Marsden was announced, and a tall handsome lad entered.

"Why, Fred, how is this? away from business at this hour! what will that tremendous individual, the 'Head of the Firm,' say to you?" inquired Kate, with an attempt at gaiety which scarcely concealed an undefined dread of something having gone wrong, with which her brother's unexpected arrival and the information contained in her mother's letter had inspired her.

Young Marsden waited until the servant had quitted the room, then, meeting his sister's glance steadily, he replied—

"It does not much signify what he might say, Kate, for I no longer am a member of his establishment."

"What do you mean? You have surely never been so mad —so ungrateful to Mr. Crane—so cruel to our mother—as to throw up your appointment!"

"Do not add to my misfortunes by upbraiding me, for I am wretched enough as it is; or at all events hear what I have to tell you first," was the reply.

Kate made a gesture for him to continue; and he immediately began an eager, hurried recital of his troubles and difficulties. It was the old story—poverty and pride, temptation resisted often, yielded to once; and that once effacing in a moment the recollection and results of the repeated resistance. Youth and impetuosity led astray by high and generous impulses, without judgment to control them; meanness and malevolence profiting thereby to effect the poor boy's ruin. And as he stood before her, with his fair clustering hair in wild disorder, his bright cheeks glowing with contrition for the past, and real, earnest, good resolutons for the future—with the tear-drop sparkling in his bright blue eye, suggesting the childhood from which he had so lately emerged, while the compression of the short, stern upper lip, indicated the

approach of the full rich manhood into which, if the world will but grant him forbearance for the present, and fair play for the future, he will surely develop—what wonder that his sister, deeming him more sinned against than sinning, should press him to her warm woman's heart as she murmured—

"My poor boy! don't make yourself so miserable; we must see what can be done to help you."

When, however, she had in some degree succeeded in calming his emotion, and they came quietly to review his position, the said question of "What could be done to help him?" appeared no easy one to answer.

The son of his late employer, and junior partner in the establishment—a dissipated and unprincipled young man—had, on Fred Marsden's first arrival, taken, or pretended to take, an extreme fancy to him, introduced him to his sporting acquaintance, and made him his constant companion. The first fruits of this ill-assorted alliance were that the high-spirited boy, eager to vie with his associates, was led almost unconsciously into expenses, which soon left him first penniless, then in debt.

In debt!—to owe a few shillings, a few pounds, appears a mere trifle—an imprudence, perhaps, but scarcely a sin; or if a sin, a very venial one—a peccadillo, nothing more. Believe it not! the fact of owing that which, if it be required of him, a man cannot pay, is the step across the Rubicon between honesty and dishonesty, between honour and dishonour, between being a free agent or a bond-slave. To be in debt is to forfeit self-respect; to lose self-respect is to lose the practical result of obedience to the guiding principles of religion and morality; a loss too soon followed by a distaste for the holy things thus dishonoured, by a relaxation of all attempts at self-improvement, by a reckless indifference to the opinion of the good and the true. The stone set rolling, gathers speed from its own impetus; the wedge inserted, the seam widens, and the stoutest oak is riven. Let a young man be once in debt, and no helping hand stretched out to save him from the consequences of his imprudence before the sense of shame has departed, and the dereliction of duty acquired the fatal force of habit, and it does not require any very profound experience of life to prophesy his future career. No one who has witnessed the mean subterfuges—the paltry evasions—the shameless encroachment on kindness—the parasitical cringing to opulence, which the burden of debt forces on natures not originally deficient in generosity and delicacy of feeling, but must dread for those near or dear to him the first downward step towards this abyss of misery, and exert every nerve to restrain them, ere it be too late.

Frederick Marsden, ignorant as a child of the value of money, and imagining his salary calculated to supply his every fancy, had spent it at least three times over, ere the un-

comfortable possibility of being in debt occurred to him; and when he did open his eyes to the fact, his pseudo friend soon quieted his scruples by lending him a sum—not, indeed, sufficient to defray his debts, but to enable him to continue his career of extravagance a little longer. But the delusion was soon rudely dispelled. After a wine-party, at which Marsden had drunk quite as much, and his friend considerably more than was good for him, the latter, returning home, chose to follow and insult an unprotected girl. Fred attempted to restrain him, but in vain; and on his instituting a more vigorous remonstrance, a quarrel ensued, in which, heated by wine and anger, the junior partner struck his subordinate, by whom he was immediately knocked down in return. Becoming from this moment Frederick's bitter enemy, he commenced a series of petty persecutions, to which the high-spirited boy submitted with unexpected patience, until on one occasion, stung beyond his powers of endurance by some unjust indignity inflicted on him in the presence of several of his fellow-clerks, he gave vent to his anger, and was instantly summoned before the head of the firm, and only saved himself from dismissal by taking the initiative, and resigning his situation.

"And now, Kate," he continued, "I have told you the whole truth; I own myself to blame; I see where I have been weak and foolish, where I have been headstrong and impetuous; and I admit that, by contracting these debts which are weighing me down, and paralysing any efforts I might hope to make to regain my character and position, I have acted weakly, and—and" (with a choking sob)—"almost dishonestly." He paused, then added, "and now, seeing all this, feeling it most deeply; anxious only to retrieve the past, or, if that is impossible, at all events to do better for the future, how am I to carry out my intentions—how prove to my poor mother that I am in earnest? Oh, Kate, dear Kate, help me—advise me! I know I don't deserve it; but I have nobody but you to look to!"

Thus appealed to, Kate would not have been the true woman she was had she hesitated. Fred had acted wrongly, foolishly, but he had done nothing unmanly or mean; he was her own dear brother still, and all the assistance in her power she would render him gladly. But what was in her power? there was the rub. What were his own ideas? had he any friends, any future prospects? Friends likely to assist him he had none—future prospects he had plenty, but they were very hazy. He should like to go out to India—could Mr. Crane get him a cadetship, or anything else which would enable him to earn his own living? Kate did not know. Mr. Crane would of course be very angry, but she would talk to him, and see what could be done; these debts were the worst part of the affair—did Fred know their amount?

Fred was not exactly aware of their uncomfortable total, but was afraid they could not be less than £150; and a peculiar feature in the case was that the tradesmen appeared by instinct to have discovered his altered prospects, and were all sending in their bills at once, and clamouring for payment. And so while they schemed, and devised, and hoped, the time slipped away, until it approached the hour at which Mr. Crane usually returned, when Frederick grew alarmed, and would by no means risk meeting him until Kate had talked to him well—from which colloquial process he seemed to expect extraordinary results: thereby proving that this young fellow, however deficient he might be upon most points of worldly knowledge, was not wholly ignorant of some of the arcana of married life; especially of those private enactments relating to the maintenance of the proper authority, rule, and governance of the wife, over that legal and clerical fiction, her lord and master.

When her brother had left her, Kate sat down, and endeavoured to review quietly and dispassionately the circumstances of the case. Her brother must be saved at all hazards; as a first step, his debts must be paid; to do this £150 were required, and she possessed exactly £5, and would not receive any more for another month. She must apply to her husband, that was clear; and now she should reap the advantage of her sacrifice. Had she married Arthur Hazlehurst, knowing that every farthing he possessed was acquired by his mental labour, she could not have ventured to ask him—it would have been unfair to him, wrong on her part; but now the case was different; what were a couple of hundred pounds to a man whose income was reported to be £20,000 a-year! True, Fred had thrown up the appointment which Mr. Crane had obtained for him; this she knew would offend and vex him; worse still, Fred had run in debt—a sin which, as he had no temptation to it himself, her husband regarded with the greatest horror. He would be very angry with Fred, and perhaps refuse to assist him. No doubt she had great influence with him, and where money would in any way make a show, as in the matter of carriages and horses, plate, jewellery, and the like, he was liberal in the extreme; but on other points he was strangely parsimonious. She had never known him give a sixpence away in charity since she had been married; and all such appeals invariably irritated him, and threw him into a state of dogged obstinacy, in which it was perfectly impossible to influence, or in any way control his actions. Her pride rebelled against asking him a favour, even for her brother's sake; but the mental suffering Kate had gone through since we first made her acquaintance, had given her truer views on certain important points, and she had begun to perceive pride to be one of the rocks on which she had shipwrecked her happiness, and had learned to mistrust it ac-

cordingly. Occupied by such thoughts as these, she, for the first time in her married life, sat awaiting her husband's return with a feeling of mingled anxiety and impatience. At last the expected knock sounded, and when Mr. Crane made his appearance in the drawing-room his greeting to his wife ran thus:

"Really, my dear, I must be excused for observing that I know no door in London at which I am kept waiting so long as at my own. I am sure my establishment costs me money enough; but the better servants are paid, and the more they're indulged, the more useless they become. I shouldn't be surprised if I've taken cold standing there. I did hope—no doubt it was unreasonable of me—but I certainly did expect when I married, that a household conducted on so liberal a scale as—I must be allowed to remark—mine is, would be well regulated; that the eye of a mistress would see whether the domestic duties were performed properly."

He paused, so evidently expecting a reply, that Kate felt it incumbent on her to say something, so she began:—

"If Thomas is inattentive, you should desire Roberts to reprove him; and if that does not produce the desired effect, give him warning and let him go."

"Yes, it is easy to say 'Let him go,' but you forget that one has to teach a new servant all one's habits and wishes. Thomas has lived with me for some years, and though at times he is slow and dilatory, yet he knows my ways—not that I require much waiting on; thank Heaven, I can wait upon myself: still I am not going to part with a faithful servant merely to satisfy—if I may be allowed the expression—female caprice."

Having delivered himself of this sensible and consistent opinion, Mr. Crane solemnly stalked off to prepare for dinner. Poor Kate! she had by this time become acquainted with her husband's small and dreary peculiarities, and she perceived, from his fretful, irritable manner, that something had occurred to disquiet him in the course of the morning. It was clear that this was no favourable moment in which to make her appeal; and yet time pressed. She trusted the dinner would produce a tranquillising effect on him; and she must choose a favourable opportunity, while he was sitting over his wine, to introduce the subject of her brother's troubles and indiscretions.

Mr. Crane reappeared with a gloomy brow; he had been obliged to wash his hands in cold water—the hot was a perfect sea of blacks. "Why were his things not put out for him to dress?" Kate believed they had been; unless she was very much mistaken, she had seen them laid out in his dressing-room. "What, his dress shoes?" Kate did not remember to have seen the shoes. "No! he should think not; the shoes were what he was particularly alluding to—they were not put out: on the contrary, it took him quite five minutes to hunt

for them. But it was always the case—few things as he required, those few were certain to be neglected"; and in this strain did he bewail himself, until, to Kate's inexpressible relief, dinner was announced.

Without being exactly a "gourmand," Mr. Crane took a deep and solemn interest in his dinner, the cooking of which he criticised with equal acumen and severity. On the present occasion he helped himself to soup, and tasted the first spoonful with an air of anxious inquiry. As he became aware of the flavour, his countenance fell, and the shadow on his brow darkened.

"Have you tasted that compound, Mrs. Crane?" he asked, in a tone indicative of deep but tragic feeling.

"It's rather salt, is it not?" returned Kate.

"Rather salt! it's brine, made with sea-water, I'm certain; such a deleterious mixture as that is sure to disagree with me: the way they dress my food in this house is undermining my constitution—bringing me to my grave! I'm certain of it! Roberts, take that down to Mrs. Trimmins, and tell her I can't touch it; and mind such stuff as that does not come up again. That's the way money is wasted in this family; that woman gets the best and most expensive materials, and then, just because she has not to pay for them herself, goes and spoils them by her unpardonable carelessness—it's too bad!—oyster sauce. My dear Kate, you've given me no sounds now!"

"Really," rejoined Kate, colouring with annoyance, and making vigorous but fruitless pokes at the cod with the fish-slice, "really, I'm afraid there are no sounds with this fish."

"No sounds!" repeated Mr. Crane, in a high, whimpering falsetto; "codfish and no sounds! the only part, as Mrs. Trimmins knows, that I care about! Serve up a codfish without sounds! No, really this cannot be allowed to go on; there's no man cares less about his eating than I do! Take it away, Roberts, I shall not touch a bit. A crust of bread and cheese, if it is but clean and wholesome, is all I require; still, when I do sit down to a dinner, I like to have that dinner fit to eat. As a bachelor, I put up with such annoyances; if they spoilt one's dinner, one dined at one's club for the next week, and so gave the cook a hint, which rendered her more careful; but I own, when I married I did hope that these things might be remedied; that while I was out, working hard from breakfast till dinner-time, to provide funds for all these expenses, the eye of a mistress might have been applied to an occasional inspection of her household; and that her husband's comfort would have been a fitter study for an amiable and domestic character, than the immoral and pernicious writings of German and French novelists. Take that horrible joint up to your mistress, Roberts, and bring me the cutlets and tomato-sauce. I should have thought Mrs. Trimmins might have known by this time how much I dislike a

great coarse leg of mutton; but I suppose your rural tastes lead you to prefer it to a more refined style of cookery, in which case I must only request that your favourite dish may always be placed at your end of the table; I declare the sight of it is enough to destroy my appetite, and makes me quite uncomfortable!"

"Don't you think there may be a little fancy in that?" returned Kate, as cutlet and tomato-sauce at last filled Mr. Crane's mouth, and stopped his grumbling monologue; "I cannot help thinking good roast meat must contain more nourishment, and for that reason be more wholesome than made dishes."

A struggle between his rising anger and his descending food having occasioned a fit of choking, which did not tend to increase his general amiability, Mr. Crane, as soon as he was sufficiently recovered, continued:—

"Unless it may be for the sake of contradicting me, my dear, I cannot conceive—ugh! ugh!—I cannot conceive why you should imagine it possible you can form a judgment about the matter: with such a strong—I may say herculean—digestion as you are gifted with, how should you guess how these things affect a delicate organisation like mine? You can doubtless eat these fearful legs of mutton with impunity; but were you to eat the legs of a horse—as I verily believe you could—that would be no argument in favour of dieting me on dog's meat. I know you think me fanciful; your more robust temperament does not enable you to sympathise with the difficulties my delicate, sensitive digestion subjects me to—ugh!"

"The better way will be to give the housekeeper a general order never again to send a leg of mutton up to table," returned Kate; "I have no especial predilection for the joint, and can dine quite as satisfactorily on anything else."

"No, my dear; I beg you will give no such order. I am not of such a selfish disposition as to wish the dinner ordered merely with a view to my likes and dislikes; neither is it my desire to curtail any of your enjoyments, however much I may regret that they are not of a more refined or intellectual nature—have your legs of mutton as you have been accustomed to have. I dare say there will always be bread and cheese or cold meat in the house; thank Heaven, I am not particular, anything simple and wholesome—give me some wine, Roberts; no, Burgundy, only half a glass—simple and wholesome does for me. Roberts, desire Mrs. Trimmins to take care that she provides a liberal supply of legs of mutton for her mistress."

"Really, Mr. Crane, you mistake me; I have no particular preference for legs of mutton, I assure——" began Kate.

Mr. Crane raised his hand deprecatingly, and checked her.

"Quite enough has been said on this subject," he inter-

posed, severely; "these endless discussions weary me. I come home tired and annoyed with the cares, and anxieties, and fatigues of business; and when I seek for quiet and repose in the bosom of my family, I am met by these frivolous and vexatious complaints, my dinner made a trial to me, and my digestion upset, my constitution undermined, and my comfort in my home—my domestic comfort, Mrs. Crane—entirely destroyed! However, one word shall end this matter; if I am to be subjected to these ebullitions of—I am afraid I must say, a fretful and dissatisfied temper, I dine at my club in future."

And having thus worked himself up into a mild, childish, and ineffectual rage, Mr. Crane continued to growl at his wife, and harass the servants until dinner was over and the domestics had departed. And then came out the cause of this agreeable episode in Kate's married life—the "Bundelcundah, East Indiaman, had gone down at sea, all hands had perished, and £40,000 worth of cargo, the property of Jedediah Crane, had gone down with them!

Tears for their loved and lost ones dimmed the eyes of the widows and orphans of the gallant seamen who had sunk in the "Bundelcundah"; mothers wept as memory recalled some bright young face, glowing with health and youthful daring, which now lay pale and swollen in the depths of mighty waters; girls, with blanched lips and hollow eyes, grieved for the lovers whom they should behold no more till the sea should give up its dead, in an agony of speechless anguish, to which the sorrow that can find vent in tears would have been a merciful relief; and Crane, the millionaire, fretted over the loss of his £40,000 with a grief as lively and earnest as any of them—for, "where the treasure is, there shall the heart be also."

During all this scene her brother's difficulties were never absent from the mind of Kate Crane, but she felt that this was not the time to bring them forward, and kept silence. Did the idea occur to her how differently she would have felt had Arthur Hazlehurst been the person to whom she had desired to confide her trouble? Let us hope not, for her heart was full enough without it.

CHAPTER XLVII.

A GLIMPSE AT THE CLOVEN FOOT.

"So he will not do anything for me?"

"Nothing, my poor boy!"

"And you asked him—pressed him very much?"

"Don't speak of it. I actually stooped to implore him; I did my duty by you thoroughly; I kept down my rebellious heart, though it throbbed as if it would burst. I told him of your youth, your penitence, and I entreated him to befriend you."

"And he still refused?"

"He said money was 'tight' in the city, and that he had none to waste on an ungrateful boy who did not know its value."

"I am not likely to learn it practically now, unless by trying how I can live without it. I have just five shillings left; though as I am in debt I cannot honestly call those my own," was the bitter reply. There was a pause; then suddenly raising his head, Frederick asked abruptly, "Kate, have you got any money?"

"Never was anything so unfortunate!" was Kate's answer; "I have been at a good deal of expense lately in assisting a distressed family; and yesterday, just before you came, I received a letter from mamm, telling me she was pressed for money in consequence of poor papa's illness, and, excepting five pounds, I sent her every farthing I had."

As she thus destroyed his last hope, her brother sprang to his feet, and began to pace the room with hurried strides. At length he exclaimed, "I'll not stay here to beg or starve—I'll enlist in a cavalry regiment; I am quite six feet now, and ride under nine stone; I should not wonder if they'd take me in the Lifeguards or the Blues."

Kate's only reply was by a mournful and dissentient shake of the head, and Frederick continued—

"What! you don't think it gentlemanly to enlist as a private? Well, it would be a bore, having to associate with the common men—not that I've any false pride about me, but a gentleman can't help being a gentleman, and I own I should feel out of my element. I have it—I'll work my way out as a sailor to Australia, and go to the gold-fields—eh? Gold is what I want, you know. I'll dig up enough to pay my debts and keep a decent coat on my back for a year or two, and then I'll come home, and be a credit to you yet—why won't that do?"

"Think of our poor mother, Fred; it would break her heart. She is so wrapped up in you—has always loved you the best of all her children; think of all she has upon her now—you would not add to her distress! Oh, no; you must give up all such wild thoughts, it would be too cruel!"

As she spoke, the boy paused in his impetuous walk, and murmuring, "I shall break her heart any way, miserable wretch that I am!" he flung himself on the sofa, and gave vent to an outburst of mingled shame and contrition.

Kate's unhappiness at witnessing this grief — which she could soothe, indeed, but of which she was powerless to remove the cause—may readily be imagined. Having after a time succeeded in subduing his extreme sorrow, of which unavailing self-reproach formed the sharpest sting, Kate gave him three out of her five pounds, to provide for his immediate necessities, and dismissed him, promising to take advantage of any symptoms of relenting which Mr. Crane might evince, again to press her suit; and the poor boy departed, in some degree reassured by hopes of which, even as she expatiated upon them, she perceived the probable fallacy.

As soon as he had quitted her, she sat down and fell into a train of gloomy and bitter reflections. This wealth that surrounded her, of what use was it in her trouble? None! She could not convert it into money to save her brother; and its possession had hardened the heart of him to whom she should naturally turn for assistance—her husband! And as she pronounced the name, an involuntary shudder came over her. She had sold herself to a man she despised, for the good of her family! sold herself to save them from the curse of poverty; and now, at her utmost need, her self-sacrifice proved unavailing — the money she required was denied her—her earnest pleadings were disregarded; the evil she dreaded had come upon her in its bitterest form, and she was powerless to avert it. Was it for this, then, that she had stifled the voice of affection in her heart? was it for this she had thrown aside the priceless love of Arthur Hazlehurst, and embittered his life and her own by so doing? And now the harrowing doubt which, from the first hour in which she had conceived the project of marrying Mr. Crane, to this moment in which the conviction of its fruitlessness was forced upon her, had never ceased to haunt her, recurred with redoubled vigour. In so acting, had she indeed deceived herself?—had she, instead of performing an act of generous self-sacrifice, committed a sin against her better nature, for which she had no justification, and of which she was now paying the bitter penalty? As she thought it over, the conviction forced itself upon her, more and more strongly, that she had rebelled against the decrees of Providence, and sought to free herself and her family from the cross He had seen fit to lay upon them, by unlawful means; that, blinded by the proud and haughty

spirit which precedes a fall, she had done evil that good might come: she had sown the wind—what wonder that she should reap the whirlwind! It was a cruel discovery to make now, when it was too late to remedy the evil; but, fortunately, Kate had a strong brave spirit for good, as well as for evil; and though this new aspect in which she regarded her past conduct occasioned her the deepest remorse, though it displayed her faults of pride and overweening self-confidence in their worst and most repulsive aspect, yet she did not shrink from the scrutiny, but honestly sat in judgment on herself; and where, weighing herself in the balance, she was found wanting, she recognised the deficiency, and unhesitatingly acknowledged her transgression. Yes! she saw it clearly, now it was too late—in the deep, earnest, tender affection of Arthur Hazlehurst, Heaven had bestowed upon her an inestimable blessing, which she had no right to cast from her. By so doing she had inflicted the bitterest wound man can receive on him who thus had given her his all of love—a wound which time indeed may heal superficially, but which continues to throb and bleed internally while life remains; that death-blow to hope which the heart receives when the conviction is forced upon it that the idol enshrined in its inmost recesses is unworthy of such holy sanctity.

Well, she had chosen her lot, and must abide by it; repining was worse than useless: all chances of happiness she had forfeited by her own act; but there still remained to her the possibility of resignation, which, persevered in, might produce contentment. Could she gain that, and the self-approval of her own conscience, life might become endurable after all. But, to obtain this, one path alone was open to her—the rigid path of duty. She had done Mr. Crane sufficient wrong in marrying him without affection, and for the sake of expediency: if she could not love and honour him—as at God's holy altar she had falsely sworn to do—she could at least obey him, and strive to render his life as easy and comfortable as in her lay: she would alter her cold manner towards him: she would refrain from the covert sarcasm which lurked under every word she had hitherto addressed to him, and which so thinly veiled the contempt she felt for him that occasionally even his dull perception penetrated it. Oh, how, as the clearer light in which she now regarded her past behaviour fell upon each separate fault and error, did she abhor herself! with what bitter tears of unavailing contrition did she bewail the thoughts, words, and actions which could never be recalled! Unavailing contrition! yes, unavailing as regards the irrevocable past, but the past only, for there was One who witnessed her true penitence, who has declared, in His gracious mercy, that "a broken and contrite heart He will not despise."

How long she thus sat, reviewing and grieving over her

past errors, and forming good resolutions for the future, and imploring strength from above to enable her to carry them into effect, Kate Crane knew not; but she was startled from her reverie by a knock at the house door; and ere she had time to banish the traces of her late emotion, a light footstep bounded up the stairs, and Horace D'Almayne entered. Assuming as composed a manner as she was able, she began—

"You are an early visitor to-day, Mr. D'Almayne; so early, indeed, that Mr. Crane has not yet returned from the city."

"I am aware of that fact already, my dear Mrs. Crane, having parted from my good friend scarcely an hour since, when I left him engaged at Lloyd's, going into the details of his losses on the unfortunate East Indiaman. I was on my way to visit a friend in Belgravia, when a circumstance occurred which induced me to alter my destination, and take the chance of finding you disengaged; in which case I ventured to hope you would allow me a few minutes' conversation."

Rather surprised at his mysterious manner, though by no means so much so as if she had been unacquainted with his habit of making a mountain of any molehill he might happen to stumble upon, Kate motioned to him to be seated, resumed her own chair, and wondered what was to come next.

Probably reading as much in her expression, D'Almayne began: "You will at once understand why I have thus presumed upon my privilege as an old friend, when I tell you that I have just met, and had a long, and I hope not entirely profitless, conversation with your brother."

"With Fred!" exclaimed Kate, colouring with mingled surprise and annoyance, for D'Almayne was about the last person to whom she desired to confide her family troubles.

D'Almayne read her thoughts.

"Your brother," he said, in a tone expressive of wounded feeling—"your brother, entertaining no unkind suspicions of my friendly interest, unhesitatingly confided to me the dilemma in which his inexperience has placed him, and which his want of knowledge of the world has magnified into something much more alarming than it really is. So I obtained his permission to speak to you on the subject, promising, if he would allow me to do so, that between us we should very soon devise means to relieve him from his difficulties."

"I'm afraid, then, you have only prepared a fresh disappointment for the poor boy," returned Kate. "Did he not tell you that he had already applied to me, and that I was so unfortunate as to be unable to render him any effectual assistance?"

"Surely a word from you to Mr. Crane would remove all difficulty? Believe me, you are the only person who could for a moment doubt the effect of such an appeal"; and, as

she spoke, D'Almayne fixed his dark, piercing eyes upon her, as though he would read her very soul.

For a moment Kate looked down in confusion and annoyance; then her spirit rose, and calmly returning his glance, she replied:

"My brother, no doubt, wished to spare me pain, by concealing from you that I have already applied to Mr. Crane; but that, irritated against poor Fred, and vexed by the loss of this ship, my husband refused my request."

Smarting under Mr. Crane's unkindness, anxious and unhappy about her brother, provoked at Fred's imprudence in admitting Horace D'Almayne to his confidence, yet clinging to the hope that her companion's tact and knowledge of life might devise some means of extricating her brother from his difficulties, Kate forgot her usual caution, and spoke eagerly and hastily.

D'Almayne glanced at her as, with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, she owned her vain appeal to her husband's liberality—never had he seen her look so lovely; he had always admitted her statuesque grace, but now the statue had become animated, and her beauty appeared to his fascinated vision enthralling, entrancing; while the absence of the reserve she usually maintained towards him misled him and threw him off his guard. Thus, utterly sceptical as to the existence of female virtue, urged by the impulses of his warm southern blood, and deceived by his experiences of foreign society, he conceived the moment for which he had so long waited and schemed had arrived; gamester-like, he resolved to stake all on the hazard of a die; and, turning towards her, while his voice trembled with an emotion which for once was not feigned, he exclaimed, passionately—

"I have witnessed long and silently, though that silence has proceeded from an effort of the strongest self-control, the mean-spirited and selfish conduct of the cold-hearted, witless 'imbécile' to whom it is your misfortune to be allied; I have seen also, with sentiments of the warmest and most vivid admiration, the heroic endurance with which you have borne his insults—the gentle tenderness with which you have striven to conceal his faults—the noble generosity with which you have impoverished yourself to atone for his selfish parsimony. I have seen all this with feelings of the deepest indignation towards him—of the warmest, the most devoted admiration towards you. I have perceived the low, sordid spirit of the one—the beautiful, angelic nature of the other; and I have afflicted myself with a vain remorse when the reflection that I was a weak, blind instrument in bringing about this incongruous, this most abhorred union forced itself upon me—night after night have I lain sleepless, indulging in these sombre reflections. At length a thought, an idea, an inspiration, as it were, flashed across my brain, like lightning through

the darkness that overwhelmed me. The laws of man change, it said; they are weak, vain, frivolous; a breath can make, a breath can alter them; but the laws of heaven are immutable —written on human hearts, whence death alone can efface them. In the stillness of night a voice said, 'Look within; read your own heart; what do you find written there? Is it not that a strange, sweet, yet mysterious sympathy attracts you towards her—links you to her? Does not intuition teach you her every thought and wish? When she smiles does not an ecstatic joy pervade your frame? When she suffers, do you not suffer also?' I recognised the truth, delightful yet exquisitely painful; but I put it away from me. I said, 'Our paths in life diverge—the joy of such soul-communion is not for me—I am alone in life!' But I watched you; I saw your unhappiness increase; you required a friend—again the voice addressed me; it said, 'Be that friend'; and I came, and did the little I was able to aid you. I was of use to you, and for the time I was happy. Once more, this day, when your brother confided in me, the voice spoke; 'Go, Horace,' it exclaimed, 'she requires you.' It had not deceived me; I found you pale, dejected, traces of tears on your silken lashes, sorrow marked in every line of your speaking countenance—in every 'pose' of your graceful figure; and with flashing eyes and burning cheeks you tell me of your wrongs. Again, at this moment, the voice addresses me: 'It is in vain to strive,' it cries, 'you cannot silence the utterances of the heart; they may be repressed for a time, but they will make themselves heard. Listen to their dictates now. She who is part of your soul is unhappy; she seeks affection, and is repelled with insensate coldness; she requires a mind capable of appreciating and reciprocating her own, and is met by feeble incapacity; she asks for common justice—common courtesy, and encounters sordid illiberality, fretful churlishness. Oppressed by her dismal fate, she sits alone and weeps. And shall this continue?—no! break through the trammels of dull conventionality, and let heart speak to heart; tell her of your ardent sympathy—of your tender devotion; ask her to permit your boundless love to compensate for the effete indifference of her despicable partner."

Up to this point Kate had been so entirely taken by surprise, and so carried away by the vehemence of D'Almayne's address, that she could scarcely collect her ideas sufficiently either to comprehend his meaning or to attempt to check him; when, however, encouraged by her silence, he exchanged his German sentimentalism for the plain speaking contained in his last sentence, Kate's indignation could no longer be restrained:

"Do not further degrade yourself or insult me, Mr. D'Almayne, by continuing to address to me language which I should have thought you had known me sufficiently to feel

sure could excite in me no other feelings than those of contempt and disgust. Leave me, sir! I am disappointed in you; I believed you were too much of a gentleman to have presumed upon Mr. Crane's mistaken confidence in you, and dared thus to insult me! I shall now, however, feel it my duty to enlighten him as to the true character of the man he has so injudiciously trusted."

As Kate thus reproached him, a look of fiend-like malignity, compounded of disappointed passion, baffled rage, and an eager thirsting for revenge, passed across D'Almayne's usually unmoved countenance; it came and went in an instant, but not so quickly as to escape Kate's keen glance; and from that time forth she knew that he was a man to be feared as well as to be disliked.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

MAGNANIMITY.

THE malevolent glance with which D'Almayne favoured Kate passed away in a moment, and was succeeded by his usual expression of quiet, contemptuous sarcasm.

"If you choose thus to resent the warmth of expression into which my sympathy for your trials has betrayed me," he said, "at the same time that you inform Mr. Crane of my delinquencies, pray tell him of the attentions which you have accepted from me, as well as of the one you reject. Tell him of the scroll wrapped round the rose-stalk, asking a private interview, which you instantly granted; tell him of the ostensible visits to the portait-painter, undertaken to conceal the secret expedition to Mrs. Leonard; tell him that this expedition was made in a carriage hired by me to convey you to meet me by appointment at a house in an obscure quarter of London; and ask him, as a man of the world, whether he imagines you went there simply out of pure benevolence, and whether that benevolence to the wife of a man whom he supposes to have defrauded him meets with his approval; or rather, I will ask him all this when he applies to me for an explanation of my conduct." He paused, then perceiving from Kate's look of embarrassment and annoyance that she recognized and was disconcerted by the force of his remarks, he continued: "You now see the absurdity, as well as the danger, of threatening me. Were Mr. Crane to break with me to-morrow, it would only be the loss of a dull acquaintance——"

"Indeed!" interrupted Kate, with quiet but cutting irony. "I should rather have compared it to the fact of your banker failing."

D'Almayne's cheeks grew pale, and his lips quivered with suppressed anger, but he continued as if she had not spoken:

"His vengeance does not greatly alarm me. A man who can snuff a candle with a bullet at twelve paces need not fear an old gentleman" (he sneered as he pronounced the word) "who probably never saw a pistol levelled in his life, and would not easily be brought to face one." Finding that Kate made no reply, he resumed in a more conciliatory tone: "I think your quick intelligence has by this time shown you the folly of quarrelling with me; let there be truce between us. I will own that, carried away by my feelings, I used language in which perhaps I was scarcely warranted; but you must remember that the blood of sunny France sparkles through my veins—that one of my parents sprang from a race, who (unlike you cold and cautious islanders), when they feel strongly, speak with warmth and ardour; and now say, is it to be peace or war between us?"

"I perceive that by my own imprudence, springing not so much from a misconception of your true character, as from a desire not to act from the dictates of what I strove to convince myself was an unfounded prejudice against you, I have so far placed myself in your power that I cannot in a moment judge whether I shall be doing right or wrong by informing my husband of your conduct towards me; but of two things be sure, first, that whatever I decide to be right, I will do; secondly, that neither your threats nor your sophistries will turn me from my purpose; for the rest, after what has occurred to-day, there can be no further—friendship I will not call it, for it never was so—but alliance between us. I now know you, sir! and that is enough."

Again the evil look flashed across D'Almayne's handsome features, but so transient was it that even Kate failed to perceive it. D'Almayne's quick wit showed him that he had already gained an advantage, which, if he could follow it up, would go far to retrieve the false, or, as he considered it, premature step he had taken. If he could induce Kate to conceal the declaration he had made her, the very fact of her having done so would place her still more in his power, his schemes in regard to Mr. Crane might yet be prosecuted; and so confident was he in his own resources that he even believed he might gain from Kate's fears that which he began to doubt whether he should obtain from her affection. So assuming the manner of a good man suffering injustice meekly, he rose to depart, saying—

"You are now very angry, and unable to regard the matter in its true light. You have confessed you are prejudiced against me, but I know you well enough to feel sure of justice at your hands; nor shall I allow this painful misunderstanding between us to cause any relaxation, on my part, of such efforts as I may be able to make towards freeing your brother from

his embarrassments—do not interrupt me," he continued, seeing Kate was about indignantly to refuse his aid, "I know what you would say—how, still mistrusting me and misinterpreting my motives, you would reject my assistance—and I would gladly save myself the pain of hearing from your lips bitter words, which at some future time you would repent having uttered. I will now leave you, nor shall I again intrude upon you until I have won, at least, your forgiveness."

D'Almayne was an excellent actor, and as he pronounced the concluding words of the last sentence, his voice trembled with so good an imitation of the pathos of real emotion, that Kate actually glanced towards him to ascertain whether the expression of his face confirmed the idea. Unwilling, however, to weaken the effect he trusted his words had produced, he turned and quitted the room, without having afforded her the opportunity she sought for.

Mr. Crane did not return home that day, being summoned by telegraph to Liverpool—a merchant there, who was concerned with him in the speculation for which they had chartered the "Bundelcundah," East Indiaman, having, on hearing of its loss, blown out his brains. Thus Kate had no opportunity of revealing to her husband D'Almayne's misdeeds. As soon as she found Mr. Crane had left town, she sent to her brother, intending to warn him against accepting D'Almayne's offers of assistance, but her messenger brought back her missive, with the announcement that Mr. Marsden had quitted his lodgings. Early the next morning she received the following note:—

"DEAR KATE,—You need be under no farther uneasiness on my account. My difficulties are at an end, and a career far betted suited to me than the drudgery of a counting-house is afforded me. I am not at liberty to inform you to whom I am indebted for this unhoped-for assistance; but I have indeed met with a true friend in my distress, towards whom I, and all who care for my welfare, must ever feel the deepest gratitude. I am bound by an express stipulation not to reveal the name of the benefactor who has so generously come forward to assist me, even to you; but, believe me, I am not deceived this time. I long to tell you all, but my lips are sealed. I will write to my mother when I can explain more fully my future prospects. Farewell, dear Kate, my faith in human nature is restored; this is not one of the least obligations I owe to my noble-hearted friend.—Ever yours,

"FRED MARSDEN."

CHAPTER XLIX.

ALICE PERCEIVES THE ERROR OF HER WAYS.

"My dear Alice, what has changed you so completely? You have lost your spirits, and appear to take a dark, morbid view of life. You find a thousand faults with things and people you used to be perfectly satisfied with; and you look thin and ill! Are you unwell?" inquired Mrs. Hazlehurst of her daughter, after Alice had been staying some days at the Grange. They were sitting together in Mrs. Hazlehurst's morning room, which commanded an extensive view across the park. Alice's eyes had been for some minutes fixed upon one particular spot, and as she gazed they filled with tears—it was the stile leading to the shady walk wherein Harry had first told his love, and the sight of it called up a host of tender recollections. How different was the bright, sunny, trusting affection which she then felt for him, from her present perturbed state of mind!—in which jealousy of Arabella Crofton and estrangement from her husband (springing originally from his neglect and injustice, and kept alive by the untoward events of their London season) contended with a love, the strength of which was proved by the wretchedness all these doubts and misunderstandings caused her. Scarcely hearing her mother's question, she replied mechanically, "No, that she was not ill," and relapsed into her train of gloomy musing. Mrs. Hazlehurst regarded her in anxious silence for a few moments, then observed abruptly—"Alice, you never speak of your husband now; yet, when you were first married, your letters were full of his praises, and you could neither talk nor write of anything but Harry's perfections. How is this?"

"Oh! one cannot be always a baby," was the reply. "While I was a new plaything, Mr. Coverdale spoiled me, and made much of me; and I was child enough to be delighted with his attentions—to fancy they would always continue the same, and that life would prove a path of roses, so I rhapsodised about it accordingly. I have now found out my mistake, and indulge in raptures no longer—that is all!" She strove to speak lightly and carelessly, but her tearful eyes and quivering lips belied the sense of her words. Her mother saw it, and could abstain no longer.

"Alice, my child, you are unhappy," she said; "it is useless to attempt to conceal it. Come, tell me what it is. You know of old that I am to be trusted, and who so fit as your mother to confide in?—who so well able to sympathise with,

and perhaps to counsel you?" As she spoke, she passed her arm caressingly round Alice's slender waist, and drew her towards her. For a minute or so Alice submitted passively to her embrace, then, with an hysterical sob, she flung her arms round her and burst into a passion of tears. Mrs. Hazlehurst allowed her to weep in silence until the violence of her grief had in some measure subsided, then, by degrees, drew from her an account, at first broken and disjointed, but becoming fuller and more coherent as she proceeded, of all her woes, real and imaginary, with which the reader is already acquainted.

"And now, mamma dearest, how can I ever again be happy, knowing as I do that Harry is still attached to that dreadful woman, and that he regrets his marriage with me more because it places a bar between them, than because I have disappointed him by not proving the spiritless, tender, and affectionate doll he fancied me when I first married? I—I almost wish I was, for then perhaps I could make him happy, and I'm sure I don't now!" She paused, then resting her head against her mother's shoulder, added, "Mamma—you will tell me honestly—do you think I have behaved very ill?"

"I certainly cannot exonerate you from blame, my poor child; there have been, as it seems to me, serious faults on both sides. Mr. Coverdale's appear to me to have proceeded more from thoughtlessness than from intention; while yours, I am both sorry and surprised to find, seem chiefly to have arisen from warmth of temper."

"Yes, I see it now; and yet you know, mamma, I am not really ill-tempered—at least, I never used to be; but you know I loved, or," she added, with a sigh, "I may say I love Harry so very dearly, that the slightest neglect or unkindness on his part appears such a cruel return for my affection that I cannot bear it quietly; if I were not to lose my temper and get angry about it, I should pine away and die—I know I should!"

"Did you ever tell him this?" inquired Mrs. Hazlehurst.

Alice shook her head. "One does not tell such things," she said: "if Harry cared for my affection he would soon perceive how entirely I love him; if, as I fear, he is indifferent to it, all the telling in the world would make no difference; besides, I have heard from his own lips that he loves another."

"I do not make out that affair at all," observed Mrs. Hazlehurst, reflectively; "it is so completely unlike Mr. Coverdale's straightforward, honest character, to marry one woman when he cared for another, that I cannot but think there must be some mistake about it."

"How can there be any mistake, dear mamma?" was the rejoinder. "I have long felt certain that Miss Crofton was attached to Harry; and I myself heard him say to her that he was most unfortunate, because love which he could not re-

turn was lavished upon him (meaning mine), while he had alienated by his own act (his marriage, of course) the only affection he cared to possess (that is, Arabella Crofton's): I do not know what could be clearer."

"Did you not say that Mr. Coverdale appeared aware that he had neglected you for his sporting, and blamed himself for so doing?"

"Yes; I think he knows it, and is sorry for it—and—and he does not leave me nearly so much alone as he used; only I fancied—that is, I was afraid he did so from a sense of duty, and not because it was a pleasure to him to stay with me. Harry has a very strict sense of duty."

"You say he seems to doubt your affection," continued Mrs. Hazlehurst, "and you own you conceal it from him, treating him to bursts of pettishness and ill-humour, of which you refuse to explain the cause. You also tell me that this Miss Crofton appears to have been attached to Mr. Coverdale; now, from what you have told me of the way in which you behaved at Lady Trottemout's party—which I confess I think was both foolish and wrong—I can easily conceive your husband to have been greatly annoyed with you; and it seems to me that nothing would be more natural than for him to have told, or in some way to have allowed Miss Crofton to perceive his annoyance; in which case, as I fear she must be a designing, unprincipled woman, she might avail herself of the opportunity to contrast her own affection with your disobedience and petulance. Thus your husband's speech, on which you have built up all this alarming fabric of future unhappiness, may be interpreted much more satisfactorily; as, for instance, the affection lavished on him, which he could not return, might be Miss Crofton's, and the love he coveted, yours, which he, by his own neglect, had alienated. Do you perceive?"

"Oh, yes, mamma!" exclaimed Alice, eagerly, her face lighting up with the ray of hope thus given her; "I see it really might mean that! Oh, if I dare but believe it was so!"

She paused to reflect, and as the recollection of Harry's frank, earnest face, and simple, truthful manner came across her, when in their last discussion he had told her there was not, and never had been, anything between himself and Miss Crofton which need give her uneasiness, she, for the first time since Lady Tattersall Trottemout's "soirée," allowed herself to hope that she had mistaken the meaning of the words she had overheard; that her husband still loved her; that she had only to show him how these troubles and estrangements had served but to prove to her the depth and reality of their mutual affection; and that, warned by past experience to bear and forbear, a life of happiness still awaited them.

"No one could be more averse than I am to raise false hopes," resumed Mrs. Hazlehurst; "but I really believe, from my previous knowledge of Mr. Coverdale's character, as

and forming your mind, and supplying the deficiencies which well as from all you have told me to-day, that my interpretation of the enigmatical speech is the true one."

"If it is, dearest mamma, I shall owe the whole happiness of my life to you," exclaimed Alice, enthusiastically; "already I feel as if a load which had been crushing me to the earth was taken off my shoulders: the thought that Harry preferred that woman to me haunted me continually, and embittered my existence. Even now," she continued, sorrowfully, "as long as the fact of Harry's refusal to tell me what has passed between them remains unaccounted for, I cannot feel quite satisfied."

"Do you know, Alice, I think you are evincing extreme narrow-mindedness in these unworthy suspicions; if you do not take yourself seriously to task, and strive to overcome this very grave fault in your character, I am afraid the evil you so much dread—the loss of your husband's affection, may come upon you after all; but it will be solely to your own ungenerous mistrust that you will owe it. I do not wish to distress you," she continued, as Alice burst into tears at this the most severe rebuke she had ever received from her mother's lips; "but if I did not tell you what I believe to be the truth, I should fail in my duty to you."

Alice wept for some moments in silence, then drying her tears, she said in a submissive, child-like manner, "I have done very, very wrong; advise me, mamma, and I will try and act according to your wishes."

Mrs. Hazlehurst drew Alice towards her, and kissing her pale cheek affectionately, replied:—

"My advice is this, love; when you return home, do not enter upon any of these matters which have been subjects of dissension between you and Mr. Coverdale; and should he do so, take care to reply gently and without irritation, remembering that 'a meek and quiet spirit is a woman's chiefest ornament'; for the rest, try and make yourself as pleasant and agreeable as you can to him. Let him perceive your affection in the thousand constantly-recurring trifles of which a loving woman can avail herself for such a purpose, but be careful not to bore him with it at unsuitable times; above all, do not be 'exigeante,' and expect or desire him to give up his sporting tastes, or his love of farming, or even the society of his gentlemen friends, for your sake: you could not do it if you would, and you would only deteriorate his frank, manly character if you were to succeed. At the same time you may, by your influence, lead him to cultivate some of his more refined pursuits, into which you can enter with him. He sings charmingly; get him to keep up his music, procure the cleverest and best-written books, and persuade him to read and discuss them with you. His clear intellect and strong good sense will be of the greatest use in expanding

my ill-health has occasioned in your education. I see I need not go farther into detail—you understand me."

"Oh yes, mamma! and if I were but able to realize the picture you have drawn of our domestic life, how happy we might yet be! but I will try my very best, only I feel so weak, and sometimes so wicked; if I were but as wise and good as you—but I will try. Ah! if I had done so at first, I should have had so much easier a task—however, they say it is never too late to mend." She paused, sighed deeply, then continued: "Emily comes home to-morrow; I will write to Harry to send for me the next day, and then—and then—mamma, do you think I shall succeed?"

At the very moment Alice was thus repenting the past, and forming good resolutions for the future, Harry, with gloomy brow and clenched teeth, was striding impatiently up and down his library holding in his hand a sealed letter—it was addressed to his wife, and the writing was Lord Alfred Courtland's. "So," he muttered, "so, not content with amusing (that's the phrase now-a-days) himself during his London season by dangling after my wife, he must try to keep up the thing now she is away—foolish young idiot!—but I feel sure that scoundrel D'Almayne is at the bottom of it, setting him on for some purpose of his own. Well, I've borne it patiently—more patiently than one man in fifty would have done—nobody can say I've been rash or hasty in this matter; but it's time to act, and when I do begin I'll astonish them. I'll take Alfred Courtland off to his father, and tell him the boy's not fit to be trusted alone. If he won't go, I'll horsewhip him; and as to D'Almayne, by the Heaven above me, I'll shoot him like a dog! such a scoundrel is not fit to live! it would be a benefit to society to rid it of such a fellow. But I may be wrong; I said I would do nothing hastily in this business, and I'll be true to my word. I'll wait till Alice comes home, give her the letter myself, and ask her to show it to me. If she refuses, or if it contains such matter as I expect, I shall then know how to act."

CHAPTER L.

THE LETTER.

WHEN things happen not to go smoothly in this mortal life (that is, about nine times out of every ten) people are apt to rail against destiny, deplore their evil fortune, or, if they happen to be very good indeed, reckon up the number of crosses vouchsafed them with self-complacent resignation; in fact, they each, after their own fashion, give currency to the sentiment expressed by our neighbours across the water in the

proverb, "L'homme propose, Dieu dispose." Now, although we acknowledge that this proverb embodies a great truth, yet, looking at the present state of things more closely, we conceive it to be by no means the whole truth—for this reason: a large proportion of the evils of life are no results of blind chance, or, more correctly, no chastisements proceeding direct from the hand of Providence, but the natural, almost the necessary, consequences of our own actions. Action might be generally defined as the working—according to certain fixed rules—of cause and effect; if we would but bear this in mind, and reflect that every action produces some result, good or evil, we might not indeed (so wrong-headed is human nature) act more wisely, but we should at all events feel less surprise when the inevitable results followed; and so, knowing that we had only ourselves to thank for our punishment, gain experience which might make some few fools of us wiser for the future.

These remarks were called forth by, and therefore might have occurred to, Alice Coverdale, had she been of what it is the fashion to term an "introspective habit"—i.e., had she been accustomed to turn her mind inside-out before its own eye. Not, however, being given to this uncomfortable practice, she failed to discern the troubles in store for her, and returned home fondly deeming that, having at length perceived the error of her ways, she need only confess, and receive her husband's absolution, to set every wrong right again. Harry did not come to fetch her, it being a day on which there was a magistrates' meeting; but he was standing at the hall-door waiting to receive her, which he did warmly, and as if he was very glad to have her back again, though a gloom hung on his brow which, when the first confusion of her arrival was over, Alice could not fail to perceive; but conscious to a painful degree of her own faults and shortcomings, she did not venture to remark upon it. When they reached the drawing-room, Harry threw back her veil, and regarded her with a long, earnest gaze, which brought the warm blood into her cheeks.

"You are looking better, brighter, and more like your former self than I have seen you for some time," he said. He paused, then resumed sadly: "Ah, Alice, I'm afraid you were happier in your old home than you will ever be in your new one!"

"Do not say so—do not think so, dear Harry!" was the eager reply. "I may have been silly, and—wicked enough to have been unhappy, and to have vexed you and rendered you so, too; but I have been taking myself seriously to task since I have been away, and have come home full of good resolutions, and intending to strive hard to keep them; and if you will be so good as to forgive me the past and help me in the future, I think I may succeed."

Touched by her words and by the evident feeling with

which they were spoken, Harry drew her to him, and kissed her tenderly.

"We may both have been in some measure to blame," he said, "but I by far the most so, for neglecting the sacred trust I took upon me when I possessed myself of your affection; but I was a heedless boy then—experience has made something rather more like a reasonable being of me by this time, I hope; at all events, I now know how to appreciate and guard the treasure I possess." But even as he uttered these words his brow grew clouded, for he thought of Lord Alfred Courtland's letter, lying at that moment in his pocket. Should he give it to her at once, as she stood by him blushing, and smiling, and looking up at him with all the light of her former love beaming in her soft blue eyes. What if she refused to show it to him?—if its contents should destroy the harmony so happily re-established between them? Still it must be done sooner or later, and Harry was not one to put off the evil day. With that letter on his mind he could not meet Alice's affection warmly and frankly as it deserved, and as she would expect him to do; besides, the contents might be of a nature to relieve, rather than to increase his anxiety, in which case he was needlessly prolonging his own uneasiness. So turning towards her, he said in a tone of voice which he vainly endeavoured to render easy and unconstrained, "Alice, love, here is a letter for you, which I chose to give you myself, and which, when you have read it, I hope and believe you will allow me to see also." As he spoke he led her to the sofa, then handing her Lord Alfred's unopened letter, waited, in a state of anxiety which he vainly attempted to conceal, until she should have perused it. Alice coloured slightly when she perceived by the handwriting from whom the epistle proceeded; but, judging from her consciousness that nothing really wrong had passed between them, that she should be able to show it to Harry, and so eradicate any seeds of jealousy which might be lurking in his mind, she hastily broke the seal.

The letter was a long one, for Lord Alfred, being really very sorry for his misconduct on the night of the ball, and anxious to retrieve Alice's good opinion, waxed eloquent, and expended as much fine writing upon his exculpation as would have formed a leader in the "Times." After two sides of penitence, he continued:—

"In fact, my excuse amounts to this: that I was, and I may say am, a fool in the hands of a knave; and a very, very bad excuse I feel it to be. But really D'Almayne is such a clever rogue, if rogue he be—knows so much of life—is so brilliant and amusing—dresses so well—does everything with such perfect tact and good taste—is, in short, so consistent as a whole, that although one neither respects nor approves of him, yet

it is impossible (at least for me) to resist his influence; time after time have I resolved to break with him, and time after time have I allowed him again to do what he pleased with me. I can truly and honestly declare that everything that I have said or done which could cause you a moment's annoyance, has been prompted by him; he flattered my vanity by urging me to get up a sentimental flirtation with 'la belle' Coverdale, as he impertinently styled you; and, but for your good sense in showing me you had no taste for such folly, I know not what absurdities I might have committed. Again, he told me that ill-natured story of Mr. Coverdale, which I believe he embellished, and gave a much more serious colouring to than the truth would bear out; and finally and lastly, he it was who persuaded me to take you to the door of the boudoir to witness that scene between Miss Crofton and your husband, of which I feel certain we do not know the true explanation; for I am most confident my good friend Coverdale cares for you, and you only, as an affectionate husband should do. Why D'Almayne did all this, except that I fancy he has some spite against Coverdale, I do not know or care. Nor do I think I am wrong in thus showing the exquisite Horace up in his true colours to you, as every word I have stated is the simple truth: and were he to tax me with having done so, I should be perfectly ready to justify my conduct and abide the consequences, though he is such a dead shot, and fond of 'parading his man' at daybreak. Of course you will not show this letter to your husband, as, although I do not think, if he knew the whole truth, he would be very angry with me, such would not be the case in regard to D'Almayne, and might lead to something serious between them. But if, my dear Mrs. Coverdale, I can obtain your forgiveness, and (after my return from Italy, where I am shortly about to join my family) you will, in consideration of my penitence, still allow me the privilege of your friendship, I shall not so deeply regret the inexcusable folly of,

"Yours very sincerely,

"ALFRED COURTLAND."

"His lordship has treated you to a voluminous epistle," observed Harry; "I am, I own, curious to learn what the boy can have found to say to you; he was by no means so prolific with his pen in the days of Greek exercises."

As he spoke he held out his hand for the letter; but Alice drew back; the words "of course you will not show this letter to your husband"—"dead shot"—"fond of parading his man before daybreak"—"lead to something serious," etc., swam before her eyes, her brain reeled, all the blood seemed to rush to her heart, and for a moment she felt on the verge of fainting. By an effort she recovered herself sufficiently to falter out—

"Dear Harry, do not ask to see it—I cannot show it to you

—it is a private letter, meant for my eye only; and—and you will not ask to see it!" She spoke in the humblest, most imploring tone; but the shadow on Harry's brow grew deeper.

"It is most strange—incomprehensible, in fact—how and why you misunderstand me in this way!" he said. "I have a right to ask to see that letter; I should be neglecting a plain and positive duty if I failed to do so—putting aside all personal feeling in the matter—the duty I owe to you; the responsibility I took upon myself when I married you, requires it. I have suffered too much already from my careless neglect of these sacred obligations to fall into the same error again!" He paused; then taking Alice's hand in his own, he continued with a mournful tenderness:—"You are but a young girl yet, my poor child; as ignorant of the ways of the world as if you were a child; I have deprived you of the safeguard of a father's authority, of a mother's watchful tenderness, and, with my best endeavours, it is but most imperfectly I can make up for these deficiencies. You may trust me in this matter; in trifles I know I am rash and headstrong, but in a case like this, where my deepest, strongest feelings are concerned, you need not fear me; your happiness is not a thing to trifle with. Understand me clearly: I do not in the slightest degree suspect you of anything in this affair but thoughtlessness; I do not believe anybody or anything could deprive me of your affection but my own acts; and if, by my heedless folly in neglecting you to follow my selfish amusements, I have not already alienated your love, I hope and believe that I shall give you no farther cause for repenting that you ever entrusted me with so priceless a treasure." A warm pressure from the hand which he still retained, assured him better than words could have done that his wife's heart was still in his keeping, and he continued:—"With every confidence in you, however, it is not right that I should allow this foolish boy to continue his intimacy with you, after the tone he and his libertine friend, that scoundrel D'Almayne, have chosen to give it. I have heard more than one conversation at clubs and elsewhere in regard to 'D'Almayne's promising pupil and "la belle" Coverdale,' as the puppies had the insolence to call you" (Alice started as she remembered Lord Alfred's allusion to the phrase being D'Almayne's), "which would have caused your cheeks to burn with shame and anger, and which, if I were quite the rash, headstrong character people would make me out to be, might have led to unpleasant consequences—men have been shot for such remarks before now. Thus, it is quite time this folly should be brought to an end. I hoped it would die a natural death when I took you out of town; but as Alfred Courtland has chosen to write to you, I think it my duty to see the letter, that I may be able to judge what steps it may be necessary to take to bring the affair to a close."

"Indeed, Harry dearest, there will be no need to take any steps at all!" exclaimed Alice, eagerly. "Lord Alfred simply writes to apologise for something he did which annoyed me on the evening of Lady Tattersall Trottemout's party, owing, as he confesses, to his having drunk more champagne than was wise. I can assure you the letter evinces nothing but good feeling on his part, and is rather to his credit than otherwise."

"Then, in the name of common sense, why not show it to me—write him a good-humoured, friendly answer—and there will be an end to the matter without any more fuss?" exclaimed Harry.

Poor Alice, she could only repeat "I cannot show it to you—do not ask me!" and as the words passed her lips, she felt how foolish, or obstinate, or wicked, they must make her appear. Her husband rose and took a turn up and down the room, as was his wont when anything annoyed him, yet he did not wish to lose his self-control—the first symptom, in fact, of the approach of his "quiet manner." Alice recognised it, and her heart fluttered, and her colour went and came. Having regained his self-command, Harry reseated himself, and began:—

"You need not be afraid to trust me in this matter, Alice, love; I promise you I will do nothing inconsiderate or hasty, if you will but act straightforwardly by me, and treat me with proper confidence. Alfred Courtland is a mere boy; the utmost I suspect him of is foolish romance, which, joined with his inexperience in the ways of the world, enables such men as D'Almayne to guide him as they please. I have an old regard for him, having known him from his childhood; and the worst I am likely to do to him is to read him a lecture, give him a little good advice, and possibly write to his father, and suggest that he had better look after the young gentleman until he is a year or two older, and, it is to be hoped, wiser. Perhaps even when I see the letter, I may not deem it necessary to interfere. Come, do not let any fanciful punctilio weigh with you, but give it me at once."

"Harry, do not ask me! Indeed, indeed, dear Harry, I cannot—mut not show it to you! Oh! how unlucky, how strangely unfortunate I am!—now, too, when I wanted so to do right!" and, overcome by embarrassment, Alice burst into tears.

Surprised and annoyed at her continued refusal, Harry, despite his confidence in his wife's fidelity, not unnaturally began to suppose there must be more in this letter than he had at first imagined; and his desire to see it increased, as he became more and more convinced that Alice meant to adhere to her determination not to show it to him. Again he rose, and again, more impatiently than before, began to stride

up and down the room; he continued silent for two or three minutes, and when he did address his wife, it was without resuming his place by her side.

"Many men," he said, "would consider themselves justified in forcing you to show that letter; but I do not feel so. I will, instead, put clearly before you the effect which your agitation, and your determination to conceal its contents, must necessarily produce on my mind. Either the writer must address you in such language that you are afraid to show it, lest it should lead to a serious misunderstanding between him and me; or he refers to some previous passages between you, with which you are unwilling your husband should become acquainted. Now, as I have before said, I have every confidence in you, which nothing but proof positive that you are not deserving of it could shake. The matter then resolves itself into this—that Courtland has addressed you in that letter in some unbecoming style; and if you persist in refusing to satisfy me on this point in the only effectual manner, viz., by showing me the letter, I shall be under the necessity of obtaining the information in some other way; and when once I have taken up the matter and begun to act for myself, depend upon it I shall go through with it, to whatever consequences it may lead. Should they be such as to cause you sorrow, remember it is now in your power to avert them—then it will be too late! Go to your own room, and reflect on all this quietly and calmly. If you decide to show me the letter, rely on my moderation and discretion; if you persist in your refusal, I must act as I may consider my position renders necessary; and may God help us both if evil should come of it! If you should think better of your unwise determination, bring or send me the letter at any moment; but if not, I had rather you remained in your boudoir during the evening, as I feel deeply on this matter, and cannot trust myself to speak of it without saying things which I should be sorry for afterwards. Now go, and think it over. Do not look so frightened," he continued in a gentler tone; "believe me, I speak more in sorrow than in anger."

"Oh, yes! I see you do," returned Alice, in a tone of the deepest emotion; "and it is that which is breaking my heart! I had rather, ten thousand times, that you were angry with me: and yet I know I am doing what is best!" She paused; then, with a fresh burst of tears, she threw herself into her husband's arms, exclaiming, "Harry! dearest Harry! have pity on me!"

Her husband soothed and supported her tenderly till she grew somewhat calmer, then, kissing her forehead, he led her to the door, saying kindly but gravely, "Have pity on yourself, darling; act as I would have you, and all will go well."

Greatly perplexed, considerably frightened, and altogether

in that state of mind which can best be described by the term "upset," poor Alice's first performance was the thoroughly feminine one of "having her cry out." Having thus poured forth her grief, viâ her eyelids, she set to work seriously to face her difficulties, and come to some decision which might, if possible, reconcile her conflicting duties. The simplest and easiest way would, of course, be to do as Harry wished her: show him the letter, and leave him to decide on the matter, both for her and for himself. With this view she carefully re-read it; and when she had done so, felt more than ever convinced that to allow her husband to see it, would be to ensure a quarrel with Horace D'Almayne—and from that to a hostile meeting, Harry shot, and herself sent for by telegraph to receive his dying benediction, was only a natural feminine transition. Supposing she were to adhere, then—as adhere she must—to her resolution, what would Harry do? Set off for London, to seek an explanation from Lord Alfred; yes, and he would get it too! Lord Alfred would be forced to say much the same as he had written; for it was clear he felt no delicacy about showing up D'Almayne; and though, perhaps, he might not mention the business in regard to Miss Crofton, yet Harry would soon collect that D'Almayne had first suggested to Lord Alfred to flirt with her, and then encouraged him to try and change what would have been simply an agreeable acquaintanceship into a sentimental love affair. Oh! if she had but known all this sooner, she would have effectually cured Lord Alfred of his "penchant," instead of encouraging him in order to pique Harry out of his supposed indifference. How blind, how stupid she had been! how she had mistaken everybody and everything! even in regard to Harry—his conduct about this letter—trusting her when she was obliged to confess appearances were strongly against her—treating her with such tender forbearance when her behaviour must seem to him, to say the least, perverse and incomprehensible! How differently had she behaved in regard to Miss Crofton! how ready had she been to suspect Harry on the slightest grounds! Yes, she saw it clearly now, her mother's interpretation of that speech was the true one—Harry loved her still; nay, had never ceased to do so. Ah! her first idea of him was right—there was nobody like him; and she was not worthy of such happiness as to be his wife—his chosen one—the object of his deep, tender, manly affection. Her eyes were open at last; she saw the truth; recognised his worth, perceived her own deficiencies and faults. If this wretched business could ever be got over, how careful she would be to guard against her former errors! what happiness was there not yet in store for her! Could nothing be devised? As she pondered, an idea struck her. Harry evidently would take no step till the next morning; the post had not yet gone out; there would be time for her to write to

Lord Alfred, explain her dilemma, and appeal to his good feeling to leave town for a day or two. Harry, thus missing him, would naturally return home, when she would ask Lord Alfred to write him such a letter as would satisfy his doubts—a duplicate, in fact, of the one which had caused all this trouble, only without the attack on D'Almayne. The scheme was not perfectly satisfactory; still, the more she thought of it the more she became convinced that it was the only way of escape from the present emergency. Lord Alfred, she felt pretty sure, would act as she wished, if she made his compliance the condition on which her forgiveness of the past and friendship for the future must depend. Then she trusted a good deal to the chapter of accidents to help her; and at some indefinite epoch, when Horace D'Almayne should have gone abroad, and be out of Harry's way, she would show him the letter, explain why she had not done so sooner, confess the words she had overheard at Lady Tattersall Trottemout's party, the history she had been told in regard to Arabella Crofton, and, in fact (to use an inelegant but graphic expression), make a clean breast of it, and trust to his affection to pity and forgive her. So she sat down and scribbled off a hurried but eloquent letter to Lord Alfred, which she flattered herself would produce the effect she desired. Having completed it, she indited a few lines to Harry, telling him she had thought the matter over calmly and seriously; and with the strongest desire to do as he wished her, she yet felt it her duty to adhere to her former decision.

In the meantime Coverdale sat in gloomy meditation. Why would not Alice let him see that letter? he could not, he did not, imagine it contained anything to lessen his respect and affection for her; but if not, what could it contain to make her so resolute not to show it to him? He perceived with pleasure, though it added to his perplexity, that she was not swayed by any ebullition of temper, but was acting from a sense (however mistaken) of duty; he saw the pain it gave her to refuse him, and appreciated and rejoiced in the good resolutions she had formed at the Grange. It was strange, certainly, how events seemed to militate against the happiness of his married life! he had forfeited his domestic felicity by his own selfish addiction to his bachelor pursuits and habits, and it appeared impossible to regain it. Then he commenced a minute and painful review of all the occurrences of his matrimonial career, endeavouring to trace out the causes which had led to each several result, and carefully scrutinising his own conduct, to discover how far he had acted up to the rules he had laid down for himself. He was thus engaged when Alice's note was brought to him; he read it, and his resolution was formed: he would go to London by the first train the next morning, see Lord Alfred Courtland, and learn the contents of his letter, either by fair means or

foul; he would try fair means first, and be patient, and for Alice's sake endeavour to avoid a quarrel—yes, that was decided on. So he sat down and wrote a couple of notes to put off engagements in the neighbourhood, then rang the bell. "Has the post-bag gone?" he asked, as the servant appeared. The reply was in the negative, and in another minute Wilkins returned with it. Harry and Alice had each a key, but when he was at home hers was seldom used; he was therefore rather surprised to find it already locked. Unlocking it, he attempted hastily to insert his two notes, but a letter which was in the bag had become fixed in a fold of the leather, and prevented his doing so. With an exclamation of impatience he took it out, and was about to replace it, when the address accidentally caught his eye; it was in his wife's handwriting, and directed to Lord Alfred Courtland, with "immediate" written in one corner. "Leave the bag two or three minutes, Wilkins," he said hurriedly, "I have thought of something else." As soon as the servant quitted the room, Coverdale again took up the letter. What could it mean?—why had Alice written off in such hot haste to this young man? Had she divined his intention of seeking out Lord Alfred, and was this letter sent off thus hurriedly to tutor him what to say—or worse still, what to conceal? Should he end all these wretched doubts and suspicions at once—should he send for Alice, and in her presence open and read the letter? The temptation was a strong one, but he overcame it. Even if the circumstances of the case were sufficient to warrant him, he felt it would be an act of domestic tyranny against which his generous nature revolted. What should he do then? Suffer the letter to go, and so throw away his only chance of arriving at the truth? No, that would be mere weakness: his resolution was formed. Putting Alice's letter in his pocket, he relocked the post-bag, and ringing the bell, desired it might be taken immediately. Having seen his order executed, he sat down and wrote a note, and sealed up a packet. About four hours later on the same evening, i.e., between nine and ten o'clock, this packet was placed in Alice's hand; it contained her letter to Lord Alfred Courtland, unopened, and the following note from her husband:—

"MY DEAR ALICE,—When you receive this I shall be on my road to London, whither I am going to have a little serious conversation with Alfred Courtland. As I wish and intend him to tell the truth uninfluenced, I have taken upon me to delay your letter a post. Trusting this affair may end so as to secure your happiness, in which I think you now see mine is involved,

"I am, ever yours affectionately, "H. C.

"P.S.—If you have occasion to write to me, direct to Arthur's chambers."

CHAPTER LI.

OTHELLO VISITS CASSIO.

CONTRARY to Mr. Philip Tirrett's expectation, Don Pasquale's delicate fore-leg improved under training, and became so nearly sound that he and Captain O'Brien were quite depressed when they reflected that but for its temper, which was vile, the horse was really worth two out of the £350 they had received from Lord Alfred Courtland for it; and regretted with sundry strong but unavailing expletives their folly in not having demanded £500, which they now considered to be its figure in proper (i.e., their own dirty) hands. A conclave had been held at the Pandemonium, and the handsome guardsman, and the fast cornet, and the heavy lieutenant, and sundry other noble and gallant cavaliers had entered spicy screws with impossible names; and a steeple-chase, with gentlemen riders, was to come off in a sporting locality within easy distance of London, on a certain day. This day had nearly arrived, when, on the same afternoon which witnessed Alice Coverdale's return home, and the uncomfortable scene produced by the delivery of Lord Alfred's letter, that young nobleman was seated at a library-table in his fashionable lodgings, poring over his betting-book, which, since the Blackwall dinner, was, we suspect, the only book he had looked into, when "to him entered" Horace D'Almayne,

"What! at it still?" he exclaimed; "why, 'mon cher,' you'll be fit for some 'book-keeping-by-double-entry' style of appointment before this business comes off. How do you stand by this time?"

"Safe to win £500 if the Don does but run true," he replied.

"And if he should make a fiasco by any unlucky chance?"

"Don't talk about it; time enough to face evil when it comes, without going half-way to meet it. The Don is looking splendid; he improves every day under training, and even Tirrett seems surprised at his performance. Dick took him over the brook this morning, and, by Jove! he cleared it in his stride, and six feet beyond, at the least. Tirrett seems sure about the line of course; if so, that brook will win us the race. Captain O'Brien's is the only horse I'm at all afraid of, and Tirrett's got out of his groom that Broth-of-a-boy won't face water."

"Witnessing these trials necessitates a frightful amount of early rising, does it not, 'mon cher?'" inquired D'Almayne, with a half-pitying, half-provoking smile; "breakfast comes

off at six, I suppose, instead of eleven or twelve? You look sleepy now from your unusual exertions."

"Well I may," was the reply; "I dined with the Guards' Mess yesterday, and went knocking about with Bellingham and Annesley afterwards; got home about three a.m., had a cigar and a bottle of soda-water, changed my dress clothes, and slept in the arm-chair until Tirrett came for me in a dog-cart at half-past four—for they take the Don out as soon as it's light."

"You certainly improve, 'mon ami'; you have learned how to live, instead of merely existing, as you used to do, and are better able to take care of yourself—which is fortunate, by the way, for I've come to tell you (what on your account I'm very sorry for) that I shall be unable to be with you at this said steeple-chase."

A start, and an exclamation of surprise, we had almost said of consternation, which escaped Lord Alfred at this announcement might have suggested that he did not feel quite such implicit confidence in his own resources as his associate's compliment would seem to imply. He only said, however—"Eh, really! what an awful bore! But why are you going to throw me over?"

"Simply because, not being a bird, my presence in Brussels and at the steeple-chase at one and the same time is impossible."

"And, in the name of common sense, why go to Brussels at this particular juncture?" inquired his lordship.

"'Que diable allait-il faire dans cette galère!'" quoted Horace; "business takes me—not pleasure, I assure you. It seems this East Indiaman, over the loss of which old Crane has been whining and pining for the last three days, was heavily insured in a Belgian house; but owing to some supposed informality in the drawing up of the papers, they, on hearing of the shipwreck, deny their liability. Now a cousin of mine is an 'avocat'—the same thing as a barrister—at Brussels, so I am going over to put the case in his hands. Old Crane pays my expenses, and gives me a very handsome commission, and—you know I never make any secret of the unfortunate anomaly, that my habits are expensive and my pocket shallow—I can't afford to throw such a chance away. I tell you this in confidence, to prove to you that I really am unable to see you through this horse business, which from the first, you are aware, I never liked; but I find, as I suspect many mentors have found before me, that it's a good deal easier to lead on a young fellow of spirit like you than to hold him back."

Lord Alfred smiled faintly—a preoccupied smile—at the implied compliment, for his mind was engrossed by the prospect of the loss of D'Almayne's presence and support at the steeplechase—a loss at which he felt vastly more uneasy than he

would have been at all willing to confess. Anxious as much to be re-assured himself as to inspire his companion with confidence, he said in a tone which betrayed his self-distrust—

"Yes, but really, D'Almayne, even taking your view of the matter, I don't see reasonably what there is to croak about; that young fellow Tirrett, who has been born and bred among horses, and knows practically what those prigs of guardsmen, the frightfully heavy dragoon, the romancing Irish captain, and, last and least, my innocent self, pretend to know, assures me there's no horse entered that can come near the Don. As they are to be all ridden by gentlemen, and he is a gentleman rider (so called, like the theatrical walking gentleman, from his being utterly unlike the genuine article—on the 'lucus a non lucendo' principle, I imagine), he rides for me, and I depend a great deal on his perfect acquaintance with all the peculiarities of the horse (for I fancy his temper is his weak point); and as his pay is to be more than doubled in the event of his winning, I think I have every reason to believe he will do me justice, and to feel sanguine as to the result."

"Well, 'mon cher,' I wish you most heartily success," was the reply; "and I still more wish I could remain and see you through it; for without meaning to throw discredit on young Tirrett, or any of them in particular, I, as a general rule, mistrust these horse people. However, I think you have your eyes open, and may be trusted to take care of yourself. And now I must be off; I embark at eight to-night. By the way, I dare say you'll allow me to write a note here; it will save my going round by the club."

Suiting the action to the word, he seated himself at a library-table, and wrote as follows:—

"DEAR TIRRETT,—Your game is clear; let A. C. and O'B——n each believe that you will ride for him, and at the last minute throw both over. In this case Captain Annesley's Black Eagle is safe to win, as I dare say you know better than I do; thus you will perceive how to make a paying book. If I prove a prophet, I shall expect a £50 note from you, as O'B——n will (before you quarrel with him) tell you I got up the whole affair myself, introducing him to A. C., etc.

"I remain, yours faithfully,

"YOU'LL KNOW WHO WHEN I CLAIM THE TIN.

"P.S.—If you make a heavy purse out of the business, I shall expect ten per cent. on all beyond £500."

Having sealed this precious missive, and put a penny stamp of Lord Alfred's upon it, he consigned it to his pocket, took an affectionate farewell of his victim, and departed.

When Harry Coverdale reached London that evening, Horace D'Almayne was "off the Nore," and, feeling none the better for sea-air, wished most heartily that he was "off" the

ocean also. In order to make up for his want of sleep the previous night, Lord Alfred Courtland desired his valet not to let him be disturbed until he rang his bell, the result of which order was that at one p.m. on the following morning his lordship was eating his breakfast in that state of dreamy imbecility usually induced by an overdose of "nature's sweet restorer." From this mental torpor he was in some degree aroused by a quick, sharp, and decided knock at the door, followed by a heavy but active footstep on the stairs, and ere he had time properly to regain his sleep-scattered senses, the valet announced Mr. Coverdale.

"You're just about the last person I expected to see in town!" exclaimed Lord Alfred, languidly rising and holding out two fingers—a mild civility of which Harry did not avail himself. "I thought you were revelling in all the sweets of rural felicity, and that nothing would have tempted you to leave them. I'm uncommonly glad to see you though," he continued, as it suddenly occurred to him that Coverdale would be a very good substitute for Horace D'Almayne, to advise and see him through this alarming steeple-chase, in regard to which two fixed ideas constantly haunted him, viz.: that he had risked a sum of money upon it much larger than he had any right to have done; and that he was as entirely ignorant of the whole affair, and as completely in Tirrett's hands, as a baby could have been under the circumstances. "I'll tell you why," he continued: "the truth is, I've got in for an affair, the magnitude of which I by no means bargained for; in fact, I should not be surprised or offended if (as I know you're both a kind friend and a plain-spoken fellow) you were to tell me I'd made a considerable ass of myself."

"One moment, Courtland," interrupted Coverdale; "I have come to town expressly to see you, in regard to a matter which nearly concerns me; and until we have discussed that, I really cannot give my attention to anything else. Now listen to me, Alfred," he continued gravely, but not angrily; "I've been acquainted with you since you were a child, and I know your good points as well as your weak ones. I know, although you're easily led away by bad precept and worse example, that you've a kind heart and a generous nature; and so, for the sake of this old regard, I have allowed you to —to amuse yourself and occupy your idle time by devoting yourself to my wife; and I am now about to talk to you, and reason with you on the subject, in a far milder tone than I should use to any other man under the circumstances."

Lord Alfred was about eagerly to interrupt him, but by a gesture Harry restrained him:

"Hear me out," he continued, "and then, when you understand the tenour and amount of my accusation, you can say what you like in your defence. You considered my wife pretty and good-natured, and you fancied, or were told, it

would give you 'éclat' with the set you have unfortunately mixed up with—and a very shady set I'm afraid they are—to have a sentimental love affair with some pretty young married woman. I was not quite the blind, careless creature you imagined me all the time we were in London; on the contrary, I saw what was going on plainly enough, and was annoyed at it—but nothing more. I had the most thorough confidence in my wife; and she is so real in her feelings, so completely fresh and genuine, that I was not afraid your sentimentality would infect her; moreover, I trusted to your own good heart to keep you from going very far wrong; but towards the conclusion of our stay in Park Lane I heard remarks dropped at clubs, and observed other things which made me resolve to put an end to the folly: and as the quietest and best way of doing so, I took Alice out of town. As far as she was concerned, the experiment appears to have succeeded; for I can't flatter your vanity by saying that I believe she ever gave you a second thought. But with you it does not seem to have had the desired effect; for, a few days since I was not best pleased to perceive a letter for my wife in your handwriting. Wait!" he continued, seeing Lord Alfred was again about to speak; "hear me out. This letter I chose to give her myself, for the purpose of asking her, as soon as she had read it, to show it to me——"

"And she refused?" observed Lord Alfred, coolly.

"Yes, sir, she did!" returned Harry, with flashing eyes; "she refused to show me that letter; and at the same time was unable or unwilling to give me any good reason for objecting to satisfy my just demand: and now, perhaps, you can guess at the nature of my business with you. I have come up to town to obtain from you the information I have been unable to gain from her; and I now ask you to repeat to me, as nearly as you can, word for word, the contents of that letter."

"Under what penalty if I should decline to comply with your—somewhat unusual request?" was the reply.

Harry's brow grew dark. "I have not wasted a thought on so unlikely a contingency," he said, abruptly.

There was a pause, then Lord Alfred rose, and drawing up his tall but slender figure to its full height, replied:

"Now listen to me, Coverdale; you have spoken unpleasant truths to me in an unpleasant manner—a manner which, boy as you deem me, I should in any other man resent; but you are, as you have said, one of my oldest friends, and, as such, privileged. Moreover, in the transactions you allude to, I freely confess that I have been to blame; and I have no objection to tell you that my chief object in writing to Mrs. Coverdale was to make her aware of this, and ask her to forgive me any annoyance I might have caused her. Having explained thus much to you, you must excuse my declining to say more."

"Indeed, I shall do no such thing," was Coverdale's angry reply; "you have told me no more than Alice told me herself. Sir, I came to town expressly to learn from you the contents of that letter, and by fair means or foul I intend to do so! I may not know how to deal with women, but, by Heaven! I do know how to deal with men, or with green boys, who give themselves the airs of men, before they have acquired man's strength, either of mind or body!" He took a turn up and down the room, then continued in a milder tone: "Come, Alfred, do not let us quarrel about this foolish affair; you see I am in earnest, so satisfy me on this one point, and let there be an end of these absurd misunderstandings between us."

"You pay Mrs. Coverdale a very bad compliment," rejoined Lord Alfred, "when you make out that she refused to comply with her husband's wish without some very good reason; at all events, I so entirely differ with you on this point that I feel called upon to follow her example."

"Am I then to understand——" began Harry.

"You are to understand clearly and distinctly that I refuse to tell you one single line in that letter," was the unexpected answer; "and so now do your worst, for to this decision I intend to adhere, and no representations or threats shall induce me to alter it."

As he spoke, Lord Alfred again drew up his slight, graceful figure with a degree of dignity of which those who had seen him only in his languid, affected moods would not have deemed him capable, and folding his arms calmly, awaited Coverdale's reply. But that reply was for some little time not forthcoming; the truth being that, in spite of his assertion to the contrary, Harry for once in his life did not know how to deal with a man. He was very angry with Lord Alfred, and felt strongly tempted to knock him down; but even at that moment his old feeling that it was his duty to protect the high-spirited but delicate boy, though it were from himself, came across him, and paralysed his energy.

Lord Alfred, however, who, like all very good-tempered, easy people when once roused, felt a necessity to give immediate vent to his anger, did not wait the termination of this mental struggle, but continued:—"Well, Coverdale, do you perceive the reasonableness of my position, or am I to incur the penalty of my disobedience, and become acquainted with your terrific method of dealing with refractory men?"

As he spoke sarcastically, and with a slight resumption of his fashionable lisp, Coverdale made one step towards him, and clutching his shoulder with his left hand in a vice-like grasp, while the fingers of his right clenched themselves involuntarily, he said in a low, deep voice:—"For your own sake—nay, for both our sakes—Alfred, I advise you not to provoke me further!"

"And why not?" inquired Lord Alfred, firmly, though he grew pale at the expression he saw stealing over Coverdale's features.

"I will tell you why not," was the reply; "look at this!" and he raised his clenched fist to a level with his companion's features; "with one blow of this I believe I could fell an ox. I have felled a man of double your weight and power, and I did not use my full strength then; if I had I believe I should have killed him. I have a quick temper, and you have roused it. I don't want to hurt you, but I can't trust myself; so if you are not utterly reckless, leave me alone!"

As he spoke he unconsciously tightened his grasp on the young nobleman's shoulder, till it became so exquisitely painful that it required all the fortitude Lord Alfred could muster to endure it without flinching. Whether owing to this practical proof of his adversary's strength, or whether he read in Harry's flashing eye and quivering lip the volcano of passion that smouldered within, certain it is that as soon as the grasp was removed from his aching shoulder, Lord Alfred turned away, and seated himself with a discontented air in an attitude of passive expectation.

After pacing the room in moody cogitation for several minutes, Coverdale suddenly paused, and said:—

"I was unprepared for this refusal, so pertinaciously adhered to, and I confess it embarrasses even more than it provokes me. I fancied—that is, I forgot you were not really a boy still, and imagined that when you found I was serious about the matter, your will would yield to mine: it seems I was mistaken. Any other man who had withstood me as you have done, on such a subject, would now be lying at my feet; but I can no more bring myself to use my strength against you than I could bear to strike a woman; and as to the alternative which equalises strength, I shudder at the idea as a temptation direct from Satan. If I were to shoot you, I should never know another happy moment. How should I face that kind old man, your father, who, when I was a boy, has given me many a sovereign in the holidays? I should feel like a second Cain, as if I had slain my brother!"

This speech appealed to Lord Alfred's better nature; he grew more excited as it proceeded, and at its conclusion he exclaimed:—

"'Pon my word—'pon my honour as a gentleman, Coverdale, I assure you you are worrying yourself about nothing! I own I have behaved foolishly in this matter, and I am sorry for it. But your wife is an angel, and cares for you and you only: she treated me with friendly kindness, but nothing more: I am to blame entirely."

"Why then does she so obstinately refuse to show me your letter, and why do you object to enlighten me as to the contents and so set the matter at rest for ever?" inquired Harry.

Lord Alfred paused for a moment in thought ere he replied.

"I think I can divine Mrs. Coverdale's reason for not showing my letter to you, and if so, it is one that does her credit; but it is enough for me to know that she does not wish its contents revealed, to make me feel that, as a man of honour, I am bound to be silent. Believe me, Coverdale, I do not say this to annoy you, or to set you at defiance. I would gladly tell you, if I did not think it would be dishonourable and wrong to do so. I wish to heaven I had never written the letter, since it has produced all this annoyance; but I did it for the best—I did, upon my honour!"

He spoke with such an air of truthfulness, and his manner was so simple and ingenious, that Coverdale felt it impossible to doubt his veracity; and for a moment he was on the point of flinging his suspicions to the winds, and, shaking hands with Lord Alfred, to tell him everything was forgotten and forgiven. But Harry's mind was of that order which is slow to receive a feeling so foreign to its general tone as suspicion, and which, when the idea has once become fixed, finds equal difficulty in relinquishing it. Thus, in the present case, having convinced himself that the only satisfactory way of clearing up his doubts would be by gaining oral or ocular acquaintance with the contents of the mysterious letter, he could in no way divest himself of the conviction, but was continually looking out for reasons in its favour. Instead, therefore, of yielding to his first impulse, he reflected that, having refused to put faith in Alice's unsupported assertion, he should equally be unjust to her, and untrue to his own convictions, if he gave credence to that of Lord Alfred. So he said:—

"Since you persist in your refusal, I must go and think this matter over coolly and quietly; you shall see or hear from me before this time to-morrow." He turned to depart, but Lord Alfred held out his hand:—"We part as friends?" he inquired.

"Neither as friends nor foes," was the reply. "You shall learn my decision to-morrow." And rejecting his proffered hand, Coverdale quitted the apartment.

CHAPTER LII.

A GLEAM OF LIGHT.

No alarming amount of imagination will be required to enable the reader to conceive that Harry returned to his hotel considerably provoked and dissatisfied at the result of his interview with Lord Alfred Courtland. He had encountered opposition where he had expected an easy victory: where he had felt certain of success he had failed most signally; and

by no means the least embarrassing part of the matter was that he really did not know whether to be most angry or pleased with Lord Alfred for his unexpected firmness. But if the past was perplexing, the future appeared much more so. On quitting Lord Alfred, he had called at Horace D'Almayne's lodgings, where he acquired the information that their usual occupant had started for the Continent on the previous evening. Baffled in every attempt to obtain information concerning the mysterious letter, which haunted his imagination with the pertinacity of some intrusive spectre callous to the restringent influence of bell, book, and candle, Coverdale, after lying awake the greater part of the night, bent his steps, the first thing the next morning, in the direction of his brother-in-law's chambers, wishing to consult him, but at the same time feeling so unwilling to blame Alice, even by imputation, that the chances were against his taking such a step. On reaching his destination, however, the difficulty solved itself, for, early as was the hour, Arthur was from home, but Coverdale found a letter awaiting him in Alice's handwriting. Hastily tearing it open, an enclosure dropped from it, and on stooping to pick it up he perceived, to his extreme surprise, that it was the identical epistle which had already caused him a journey to London and a sleepless night; and which, but for his forbearance and kindliness of disposition, might have involved him in a serious quarrel—if nothing worse—with his former friend and schoolfellow. Alice's letter, which bore every mark of having been written under feelings of the greatest excitement, ran as follows:—

"DEAREST HARRY,—Your hasty departure has overturned all my plans and arrangements, which, believe me, were made with a view only to try and avert the catastrophe which, I shudder to think, may be even now impending. Justice to Lord Alfred, who may have incurred your indignation, as well as my anxiety to clear myself in your eyes, by making you acquainted with the whole truth, induce me to send you the interesting letter which has given rise to all this sad misunderstanding; and, as I imagine you have ere this seen and come to some sort of explanation with Lord Alfred, my reason for withholding it exists no longer. When you read it you will perceive why I was so unwilling to show it to you. I felt convinced that the passages referring to Mr. D'Almayne, which completely confirm the unfavourable opinion you have always entertained of him, would irritate you greatly against him; and, when Lord Alfred proceeds to write of him as a noted duellist, a dead shot, etc., you may smile at my womanly weakness, but can you wonder that I hesitated to show you the letter—that I chose rather to allow you to think untrue things of me, than to clear myself at the risk of imperilling your safety? And now, dearest Harry, if you love me as you

say, and as I hope and believe you do, if you would ever have me know another moment's peace, and not be weighed down by endless self-reproach, return home, I implore you, without taking any further step in this matter. I am not afraid, when you have seen his penitent letter, that you will be angry with Lord Alfred, but I entreat of you to avoid that hateful Mr. D'Almayne. Even supposing that he has been the cause of all this unhappiness; that is now passed, and he will be powerless to influence our future life. I am quite willing, if it will be any satisfaction to you, to agree never to spend another spring in London; I have seen enough of its heartless dissipation and frivolity, and, for the future, hope to find my happiness in our own dear home, which, if you do but return to it safe and sound, I would not exchange for a queen's palace. Pray, pray, dearest Harry, come back without delay. I have worried and fretted myself quite ill already, and shall be wretched till I see you again.—Ever your penitent, but loving,

"ALICE."

Having perused his wife's letter with mingled feelings of satisfaction and regret—satisfaction to find how completely she was able to clear herself, and regret at the pain and annoyance which he was sure this affair must have occasioned her—Coverdale unfolded and read carefully Lord Alfred's epistle, which had occasioned results the writer little contemplated. At his lordship's ingenuous confession of his follies and absurdities, Harry smiled, muttering, "Poor boy! I wish I had not been so sharp with him yesterday"; but as he went on his brow contracted, and when he came to the account of Horace D'Almayne, and the report he had circulated in regard to Coverdale and Miss Crofton, he could restrain his rage no longer, and springing up, he exclaimed, "Scoundrel! mean, pitiful, lying scoundrel! but he shall answer to me for this. A bold rogue, who would execute his own villainy, is a prince to a rascal like this, who lays a plot to deprive me of my wife's affections, and then makes a cat's-paw of that poor foolish boy to carry it out. I see it all now. The behaviour which appeared so strange and unaccountable in my darling Alice, proceeded from a very natural feeling of jealousy, excited by all these abominable reports; and, the worst of it is that even now I can't be entirely open with her, because of my promise to Arabella. I wish to heaven I had never been fool enough to bind myself!—and yet how could I avoid it? for she has a good heart and a generous disposition—though, partly from a bad education, partly from natural temperament, her ideas are sadly warped. I am sure she really loved me; of course, in a conventional point of view, it was not right in her to do so; but—well, it's no use humbugging—I don't believe the man ever breathed, who honestly,

and from his own heart, could blame a woman for loving him; principle and reason may accuse her, but feeling defends her so eloquently that the cause is gained at the first hearing. I think I acted rightly by her. If I had to do it over again, I don't see how else I could honourably behave; perhaps it was weak to make her a promise of concealment, but she was so unhappy, her proud spirit was so utterly crushed and broken down, that I would have done anything, not actually wrong, to console her."

He paused, reseated himself, then resumed more quietly, "Perhaps it is as well that scoundrel D'Almayne is not within reach: if I were to horsewhip him, as I most assuredly should and would, I suppose I should be forced to meet him, blackguard as he is, if he were to challenge me; and he would do so, I dare say, though I know him to be a coward at heart, for his social position is his livelihood, and he must maintain that, or starve. I utterly abhor duelling—it's so very like deliberate murder; it was different in the old days, when men wore swords habitually; then a couple of fellows quarrelled and tilted at each other across the dining-table, while their blood was up, and a flesh-wound or two generally let off their superfluous energy and cured their complaint—it was little more than knocking a man down who has insulted you. There was none of that waiting, and then coolly, calmly taking the life of a fellow-creature in cold blood; which is the disgusting part of the modern duel. And now about little Alfred. Poor boy, he has been sadly led away by that scoundrel; but his heart is in the right place still; that is a very nice letter of his to my wife, and I'm glad he wrote it, though it has caused me some trouble and annoyance. Well, I'll call on him, and tell him I did him injustice, and then go down to the Park by the next train, to comfort my darling Alice. By Jove, I feel quite a different man since I read that letter—Harry's himself again." And he began, for the first time for many weeks, to whistle his favourite air—

> "A souther'ly wind and a cloudy sky
> Proclaim it a hunting morning."

Another ten minutes, and a hansom cab sufficed to take him to Lord Alfred's lodgings.

CHAPTER LIII.

AFTER THE MANNER OF "BELL'S LIFE."

"I DARE SAY the lazy young dog isn't up yet," was Coverdale's mental comment, as he knocked at the door of Lord Alfred Courtland's lodgings. Although, as a general rule, the idea might not be a mistaken one, yet this particular occasion was evidently an exception, for, on entering Lord Alfred's sitting-room, Coverdale found that young gentleman most elaborately got up in an unimpeachable sporting costume, but sitting with an open letter and his betting-book before him, looking the picture of despair. As Coverdale entered he glanced upward with a slight start; then, without waiting to be spoken to, he exclaimed, in a strange, reckless tone, as different from his usual manner as a tempest from a zephyr, "Well! which is it to be? peace or war? either will suit me, though I should prefer the latter; about the best thing would be for you to put a bullet through my head; at all events, it would save me the trouble of blowing my own brains out, for I expect that is what it will come to before long."

"Nonsense!" was the reply. "What do you mean by talking such childish rubbish? what is the matter with you, man?"

"First answer my question, and let me know whether I am speaking to a friend or a foe," rejoined Lord Alfred.

"A friend, as I always have been, and always will be, to you, as long as you deserve an honest man's friendship," returned Coverdale, heartily. "Alice has sent me your letter, and it does you great credit; but I always knew you had a good heart; so, for any trouble or annoyance you have caused me, I freely forgive you, and I'll answer for it Alice does the same; and I don't know that you may not have taught her a lesson which may be very useful to her in after life. She was young and giddy, and pleased with admiration and gaiety; and this has shown her the danger and folly of such frivolous pursuits as these tastes lead to."

As he spoke, he held out his hand; Lord Alfred seized and shook it warmly

"My dear Coverdale," he said, "you have made me happier, or I might more truly say, less miserable, than five minutes ago I would have believed it possible for anything to do. It was not your anger, or its consequences, I dreaded; but the truth is, I always had the greatest regard and respect for you —I was proud of your friendship—and the idea that, by my faults, I had forfeited it lowered me in my own estimation, and was a source of continued uneasiness and regret to me.

You thought I was talking exaggerated nonsense just now, but I assure you, when you came into this room five minutes ago I was thoroughly reckless; just in the frame of mind in which men commit suicide, or any other act of wicked folly."

Coverdale, though he by no means comprehended the "situation" (as it is now the fashion to term all possible combinations of events), yet perceived that his companion was thoroughly in earnest, and required sympathy and assistance; so he evinced the first by getting up and laying his hand encouragingly on Lord Alfred's shoulder, while he offered the latter in the following words: "What is it, my boy? anything that I can help you in?"

"If anybody can, you are the very man," replied Lord Alfred, as he eagerly grasped his friend's hand; "but really," he continued, while the tears that sparkled in his clear blue eyes proved his sincerity, "really, I don't know how to thank you for all your kindness, when I have deserved so differently at your hands too; but you always were the most generous, best-hearted——"

"There! that will do, you foolish boy," interrupted Coverdale, who, like all simple, truthful characters, felt uncomfortable at hearing his own praises; "we'll take it for granted that I'm no end of a fine fellow, and proceed to learn what particular scrape your wisdom has failed to keep you out of."

"Scrape, you may call it," was the reply. "Partly through my own folly, partly through the rascality of others, I am almost certain to lose a couple of thousand pounds on a steeplechase, for which I've been idiot enough to enter a horse, and where to lay my hands on as many hundreds is more than I know. I shall not be able to meet my engagements, and shall be stigmatised as a blackleg and a swindler, at the very time when it is through the villainy of blacklegs and swindlers that I shall be placed in such a position!"

"Can't your father——?" began Coverdale.

"If you don't wish to render me frantic, don't mention my father," was the unexpected rejoinder; he paused, then resumed—"Coverdale, I will not trust you by halves; I know you will hold my confidence sacred. My father is most kind and liberal to me, more liberal almost than he should be, for he is not a rich man, and has many calls upon him, and this year I know he has met with severe losses. I had an allowance on which I could have lived well, and as becomes my rank; but Horace D'Almayne, under pretence of showing me life, took me to a gaming-house, I acquired a taste for play, or rather I played, because I thought it the 'correct thing,' and I am now not only without money, but actually in debt. Then came this horse business,"—here Lord Alfred gave Coverdale a succinct account of the various particulars of the affairs with which the reader has been already made acquainted. "I felt, up to this morning," he resumed, "toler-

ably confident of success, relying chiefly on Tirrett's riding, which is said to be first-rate; imagine, then, my rage and disgust when, half an hour ago, this was given me!" As he spoke, he handed Coverdale the following note:—

"I am sorry to inform your lordship that circumstances, over which I have no control, oblige me to decline the honour of riding Don Pasquale for you to-day.—I am, your lordship's obedient servant,

"PHILIP TIRRETT."

"Pleasant and encouraging, certainly," observed Coverdale, when he had finished reading the note.

"That fellow Tirrett is the greatest scoundrel unhung!" exclaimed Lord Alfred, crushing the paper in his hand with an action suggestive of his willingness to perform a similar process of annihilation upon its writer.

"By no means," returned Harry, coolly; "he is simply a very average specimen of his class, half-jockey, half-dealer, and whole blackleg of a low stamp—there are hundreds such on the turf; however, he seems to have got you into an awful fix this time—we must try and find out what can be done. I'll stay and see you through it at all events; it's fortunate to-day is the day, for I could not have remained beyond; I dare say I shall be back in time to catch the eight o'clock train, and I shall then be at home by eleven. What time do you start, and how do you get down?"

"I go down on a drag which leaves the Pandemonium at twelve. I'll take care to keep a seat for you, if you really are kind enough to go with me. I am really quite ashamed to avail myself of your kindness, when I know how anxious you must be to get back, and calm Mrs. Coverdale's fears; but I feel your presence and your knowledge of the right way in which to deal with these people will be so invaluable to me, that I have not sufficient self-denial to deprive myself of them."

"All serene! don't make fine speeches about it," rejoined Harry. "I've one or two places to call at, and I'll meet you at the Frying Pan, as they call that diabolically named club of yours, five minutes before twelve; and, above all, don't look so woe-begone, or you'll have the odds against Don Pasquale increased to a frightful degree; put on a cool nonchalant air, like your precious friend and adviser, D'Almayne, who may thank his stars that the German Ocean lies between him and me just now, for I'd have horsewhipped him, as sure as I stand here, so that he should have spent the next fortnight in his bed at all events, and it would have been a mercy if I hadn't broken some of his bones for him; but I'm glad he's away, for, after all, I suppose one has no right to take the law into one's own hands. Well, I must be off, but depend

upon my meeting you, and in the meantime look alive, and don't sit poring over that stupid betting-book; you're in a mess, that I don't deny, but that is no reason why you should lose heart: on the contrary, you'll have need of all your pluck to get you through it. Never despond, man! when things come to the worst they're sure to mend. Look at me: since I received that letter from my little wife, and read your notable composition, I'm a different creature." So saying, Coverdale resumed his hat, and was about to quit the room when, glancing at his companion's countenance, he suddenly stopped.

"Alfred, my poor boy," he said kindly, "I can't leave you with such a face as that! listen to me: I'll do all I can for you, to get you out of this scrape to-day, and very likely things may turn out better than we expect; but if the worst come to the worst, you have only to promise me two things, viz., to give up your intimacy with Horace D'Almayne, and not to enter a gambling-house again for the next ten years, and whatever money you require shall be placed in your banker's hands before settling-day."

As he spoke, Lord Alfred grasped his hand, endeavoured to falter forth a few words of gratitude, but, utterly breaking down in the attempt, burst into tears.

Harry, nearly as much affected at the sight of his friend's emotion, muttered, "Pshaw! there's nothing to make a fuss about," wrung his hand cordially, and hastily quitted the room.

At ten minutes to twelve a well-appointed drag, with four slapping greys, excited the admiration of street boys in the vicinity of the Pandemonium by drawing up at the door of that fastest of clubs, and five minutes later, Harry Coverdale, habited in a loose dust-coloured wrapper, made his appearance, and tossing a small carpet-bag to one of the grooms, desired him to put it in the boot. Lord Alfred was eagerly waiting to receive him, and introduced him to sundry noble sportsmen, or men desiring so to be considered, who were to compose the live freight of the drag; one or two of them were old acquaintances of Coverdale's, amongst them being the facetious Jack Beaupeep, who appeared in his usual charming spirits, and took an early opportunity of informing Coverdale, in the strictest confidence, that a certain young man, with pale and swollen features, who, he declared, lived only to play on the cornopean, might be expected to produce new and startling effects upon his next performance, he (Jack Beaupeep) having already contrived to insinuate percussion crackers into all three valves of his victim's instrument. One minute before twelve a tall, good-looking man, attired in a white hat and a wonderful driving cape, whose christian name was William, and his patronymic Barrington, but who, from his passion for driving, was more commonly known by the sobriquet Billy Whipcord, descended the steps of the Pande-

monium, and, arranging the reins scientifically between his fingers, mounted the box and assumed his seat, at the same time not taking, but bestowing, the oaths for the benefit of an abtuse helper, who had "presumed to buckle the off leader's billet in the check, instead of the lower bar, when he knew the mare pulled like——" well, suppose we say, "like a steam-engine!" As the first stroke of twelve pealed from the high church steeple of St. Homonovus, which, as everybody knows, stands exactly opposite the Pandemonium, the aforesaid Billy Whipcord obligingly made his team a present of their respective heads, the attendant helpers seized the corners of the horse-cloths which had hitherto guarded their thoroughbred loins from whatever may be the equine equivalent for lumbago, and jerked them off with a degree of energy which threatened to take hide and all together; with a bound and a plunge the denuded quadrupeds sprang forward, the boys cheered, the club servants performed pantomimic actions indicative of admiration and respect, and the drag started.

Monsieur de Saulcy, Mr. Kinglake, and other travellers, French, English, and American, who take pleasure in going to the East to make mistakes about the site of Sodom and Gomorrah, hazard a futile hypothesis in regard to the Holy Sepulchre, or, in some similar fashion, exert themselves to prove that other than wise men come from the West in these latter days, inform us that, when a camel dies, vultures and other strange fowl suddenly congregate around the body, though in what way the intelligence (for those birds can have no "Bell's Life") reaches them, is a point on which no "savant" has yet been found wise enough to enlighten us—wherefore, in general terms, the fact is stated to result from instinct. By a like instinct do strange creatures mysteriously appear on the face of the earth, when a steeple-chase, or other sporting event, is arranged to come off in any given locality: human vultures, hawks, carrion-crows, bats, and owls, all (singular as an ornithologist may deem it) with very black legs, attracted by the fascinations of horse-flesh, assemble from the four quarters of—heaven, we were going to say, but, on second thoughts, we cannot so conclude the paragraph. Still, from whatever locality they come, come they do in flocks, and gather at certain points, whence they may witness the start, or "the jump into the lane," or "crossing the brook," or the "awkward place," over which the horse that leaps, tumbles, or scrambles first, is safe to win, as their various tastes may lead them.

There is one feature in these affairs for which we have never been able to account, viz., the mysterious presence of a certain average amount of babies; they invariably arrive in taxed carts, and entirely engross the mental and bodily faculties of one mother and one female and sympathetic friend each, so that every ten babies necessitate the presence of twenty

women, who, from the moment they set out, to the time at which they return, never appear conscious of the race-course, the company, the jockeys, the horses, or, indeed, of anything save their infant tryrants. That these women can have brought the babies for their own pleasure is an hypothesis so absurd that no one who has seen the goings-on of these young Pickles towards their parents and guardians can for a moment entertain it; a more perhaps the most, probable one is that the infants come to please themselves; for, although we have never observed that they pay much attention to the strict business of the race, yet, in their own way, they appear to enjoy themselves very thoroughly. Their manners and customs are marked by an easy conviviality, and absence from the restraints which usually fetter society, which we can conceive must render their babyhood one epicurean scene of gay delight. Thus, monopolizing the best place in the cart, shaded by the family umbrella, and dressed in the latest fashion from Lilliput, these young Sybarites recline languidly on the maternal bosom, or sit erect, "mooing," crowing, and "wa-waing" in the faces of the company generally, roaring at the sight of family friends whose acquaintance they do not desire to cultivate, or clawing at the eyes and hair of the select few whose homage they are willing graciously to receive. Then, wildly reckless of appearance, and consulting only their own ungoverned appetites, they not only resolve to dine in public, at the maternal expense, but when their desire has been gratified by their self-sacrificing parents, betray a thankless indifference to the safe custody of the good things afforded them, which renders their vicinity dangerous to all decently attired Christians (those only excepted who consider a "milky way" the way in which they should go) during the remainder of the festivities. Thus (we say it boldly, though we know we are provoking the enmity of all our female readers, who consider a darling baby can never be "de trop") we hereby declare our opinion that, by the laws of the Jockey Club, all dogs and infants found unmuzzled on any race-course should be seized by the police, and instantly——we leave the minds' eyes of the anxious mothers of England to supply the blank. But we are digressing.

As they reached the field whence the start was to take place, in which a booth or two and a very mild specimen of a grand-stand had been erected, Harry whispered to Lord Alfred—

"Now, remember what I told you; appear as cool as if you hadn't sixpence depending on this race; if long odds are offered against the horse, take 'em; I'll stand the risk up to a fifty-pounder; if it has transpired that Tirrett won't ride for you, say quietly that you are provided with an efficient substitute—as soon as I see clearly how the land lies, I'll tell you more."

Lord Alfred looked, as he was, singularly puzzled, but of

the hundreds who were flocking to the race-course, Coverdale was the only man on whom he felt he could rely, and he most willingly placed himself in his hands.

Having insinuated the drag into the most favourable position for beholding from its roof the line of the course, the Hon. Billy Whipcord, having acquitted himself so as to call forth an encomium even from Harry Coverdale, who was a severe critic in such matters, descended from his seat, and, with most of the others, repaired to an extempore betting-ring, composed of all the knowing ones present.

Lord Alfred was about to accompany them, when Harry laid his fingers on his arm and detained him.

"What time did you order the Don to be on the ground?"

Lord Alfred referred to his watch.

"He won't be here for the next half-hour," was the reply. "It was considered advisable to spare his excitable nerves as much of the noise and bustle as possible."

"He is at a farm somewhere near, is he not?" continued Coverdale. "I see your saddle-horses on the ground; let us canter down and have a look at him."

Lord Alfred agreeing, at a signal from his master, the paddock groom rode up, and resigning his horse to Coverdale, the friends mounted, and were about to ride off in the direction of the farmhouse, when the Honourable Billy Whipcord intercepted them with a face expressing the deepest concern.

"My dear Courtland," he began, "a report has somehow got abroad that Tirrett won't ride for you, and that Irish blackguard, Captain O'Brien, does not scruple openly to declare that he is to ride Broth-of-a-Boy for him instead; the rumour gains ground every minute, and the Don is going down accordingly; all his best friends are hedging wherever they can get a bet taken. I hope there's no truth in it."

Coverdale glanced for a moment towards Lord Alfred, who replied carelessly, "Don't alarm yourself, my dear fellow; I can hardly suppose even Phil Tirrett would have the face to throw me over and ride for O'Brien; but, if he should indulge in such a caprice, I know my man, and am prepared with a substitute so efficient that I rather hope your tidings may be true." Seeing that the Honourable William looked incredulous, he continued, "If you're inclined to follow the hedging dodge yourself, I'm as willing as ever to back the Don against the field: how do the odds stand?"

Reassured by this practical proof of his lordship's sincerity, the Honourable William (who, in spite of his innate honourableness, was rather a "leg" than otherwise) hastily muttered "That he'd a very safe book as it stood, and that if the Don was all serene, he had no wish to alter it," and returned to reap some advantage from the information he had acquired.

"How did I do that?" asked Lord Alfred, as they cantered off.

"Splendidly!" was the reply; "when all other trades fail you, you'll be able, with a little of my able tuition, to turn horse-chaunter and blackleg."

Lord Alfred shook his head, adding, "Only let me get out of this affair safely, and if you find me doing anything in the horse line again, write me down the veriest idiot that ever ran his head, open-eyed, against a brick wall."

Five minutes' brisk riding brought them to the gate at which Tirrett had entered on the morning after the Blackwall dinner-party. As they did so, a horseman left the yard by a hand-gate at the opposite corner. Lord Alfred gazed after him eagerly.

"Who is your mysterious friend?" inquired Harry.

"I can't be certain," was the reply, "but the figure and the way in which he sits his horse are very like that young scoundrel, Tirrett; I've a great mind to gallop after him, and either make him ride for me, or horsewhip him"; and Lord Alfred looked quite fierce and determined, as if he meant to do as he said, and was able; but Coverdale, smiling at his energy, restrained him—

"Gently there—take it coolly! why, you're becoming quite a fire-eater," he said, laughing; "but, seriously, if you could make him ride for you against his will, he would only contrive to lose you the race. And, as to horsewhipping, if you were to horsewhip every blackleg who breaks down with you in turf affairs, you'd require a portable thrashing-machine, for mortal arm could never stand it."

As he spoke they reached the stable, dismounted, and, tying their horses up to a couple of rings in the wall, Lord Alfred drew a key from his pocket, and, applying it to the lock, admitted Harry and himself. So quietly did they enter, and so engrossed was the groom with his occupation, that they had full time to observe him before he was aware of their presence. Fully equipped (with the exception of his coat) for appearing on the race-course, he was stooping over a pail of water, bathing his nose, from which the blood was still rapidly dropping. Coverdale glanced expressively at Lord Alfred, then whispered, "Speak to him—I want to see his face."

"Why, Dick, what is it? have you hurt yourself, my lad?" he inquired, good-naturedly.

Raising himself with a start, the man looked round. "No, my lord, nothin' to sinnify; honly, has I wos a reching hup to get the Don's saddle, hit slipped, hand fell right hon my blessed nose, hand set hit a bleeding howdacious!"

"Did you obtain that genius, with the horse, from Tirrett?" inquired Harry, "sotto voce," receiving a reply in the affirmative, he continued, "Then let me have a word or two with him in private—I think he may be made useful, but one never can get anything out of these fellows, except in a "tête-à-tête."

Lord Alfred nodded assent, and left the stable.

As soon as they were alone, Harry addressed the groom with an intelligent half-nod, half-wink, which, however ineffectual it might have proved in the case of a blind horse, produced a decided impression on the sharp-sighted Dick.

"Hark ye, my friend," he began, "it strikes me you and I are old acquaintances."

"Can't say as I ever remembers setting heyes on your honour afore," was the reply, though something in the expression of the man's face contradicted his assertion.

"Did you never live with Count Cavalho, a Spanish nobleman?"

The man paused, then answered in a surly tone, "And suppose I did, what then?"

"Merely that while I was in Paris, a groom in his employ was detected selling the corn and hay; the moment the charge was brought against him the fellow decamped, but the evidence of his dishonesty was so clear that the Count offered a reward of fifty pounds for his apprehension; the man was not found, but I should know him by sight if I were to meet him," and again Coverdale fixed his piercing glance upon his companion's features.

Having paused for a minute, during which time the groom stood eyeing him furtively, and shifting uneasily from leg to leg, Harry asked abruptly, "Why did young Tirrett strike you in that brutal manner, before he left the stable just now?"

He spoke at a venture, but the arrow hit the bull's-eye. Thrown completely off his guard, the man exclaimed with an oath, "You know everything! who in the world are you?"

"My name's Coverdale," was the reply. "I'm no wizard, but I've been on the turf long enough to keep my eyes and ears open; and now listen to me: you know all I've said is true; you perceive that I could expose you if I were so inclined; you have no cause to entertain any very strong affection for Mr. Philip Tirrett; therefore I see many reasons why you should do as I wish you—none why you should not."

He paused for a reply, and, after a moment's hesitation, the groom began, "I see it ain't o' no use trying to gammon you, Mr. Coverdale; you're right about Tirrett, he cum here a wantin' me to lame that horse, and so git myself into trouble, may be; when, as I told him, there ain't no need for it, for he ain't agoing to ride it, and barrin' myself and him, there ain't nobody else as can ride it to win, I'll take my davy o' that, so he'd no call to cut up rough, and knock a feller about like that—but I owe him one for it, and I'll pay it some of these days. As to that hay and corn business of the Count's, I didn't do the correct thing altogether by him, I know, but though I had to cut, and it was all laid on to me, there was others more to blame nor me, I do assure you; I was but a boy like at the time, and I wor led on, don't ye see? Still, it's true enough; I don't want the thing brought up again.

My lord here, he's a nice young feller—precious green, tho'! I never did—" he added, parenthetically, with a sympathy-demanding wink at Coverdale, "and he's treated me very kind and liberal, and so the long and the short of it is, if I can oblige you, sir, I'm agreeable."

"Well, you can oblige me, and it shall be worth your while to do so," was the reply; "and as I see you've got an honest side to your nature, I'll be frank with you. Lord Alfred has trusted Tirrett to win this race for him, and has betted very largely on the faith of his riding for him; Tirrett, being a scoundrel, has thrown him over, and we're in a fix—the only way I see of getting out of it is to ride the horse myself."

Here the groom interrupted, by audibly ejaculating, "The Lord have mercy on your poor neck!"

"To ride the horse myself," continued Coverdale, coolly; "and I want you to tell me honestly, first, whether if the brute is properly ridden, he has a fair chance to win, and secondly, if you were going to ride, and try all you knew to come in first, how you would set about it."

For a minute the man remained mute with surprise, then muttering, "Well, I've seen you ride, and you've a better seat, and nearly as good a bridle-hand as Phil Tirrett himself; but, lor, to think of riding a steeple-chase on that beast the first time you're on his back! however, if you will do it, listen to me," and, drawing Harry aside, he whispered innumerable hints and directions in his ear, in as low a tone as if he feared the very winds of Heaven would reveal the matter.

CHAPTER LIV.

SETTLING PRELIMINARIES.

"To keep a light but steady hand on him; to be careful not to pull at him or check him with the curb, but to saw his mouth with the snaffle, if he can't be held without; never to hit him, upon any consideration, by reason that he'll stand the spur, but not the whip; to be prepared for his knocking my brains out when he throws up his head, or breaking my back by a way he's got with his hind-quarters when he flings up his heels; to look out for his pleasant little trick of jumping off the ground all four feet at once in a slantindicular direction when anything surprises him; to let him take his leaps in his own fashion, or he'll either rush at them or refuse them altogether; to jump on his back before he bites or kicks me, if I can possibly do so; and, above all, to show him, from first to last, that I'm not in the slightest degree afraid of him—I think these are the chief points to which I am advised to direct my attention in riding the fascinating quadruped on

whom you have invested your capital," observed Coverdale to Lord Alfred, as they cantered back to the race-ground.

"You shall not do it—you must not think of it!" rejoined Lord Alfred, hastily; "you'll be thrown and killed, and Mrs. Coverdale will say it's my doing. I could not bear it—it would drive me mad. Come, promise you'll give it up!"

"Silly boy!" returned Coverdale, with a good-natured smile; "tell me, would you give it up in my position?"

"Well, yes—no, perhaps I should not; but then, you know, the case would be a very different one."

"Certainly it would," returned Coverdale; "I am not the heir to an ancient peerage—the noble constitution of England would not suffer any injury in one of its three notable estates, if my neck were broken; but I don't see the necessity for pre-supposing any such sombre contingency—this is not the first time, by many, that I've galloped a queer horse across country. Why, man, from the day I was fourteen I've broken all my own hunters, and let me tell you a hot-tempered four-year-old thoroughbred is rather an awkward customer to deal with. A timid old gentleman would find himself decidedly misplaced astride such a quadruped. But here we are. Now recollect, keep up a bold exterior, as the melodramatic gents paraphrase 'never saying die.' Back the Don as freely as if Tirrett was going to ride for you, and mention me as the illustrious gentleman-jockey you have secured as his substitute."

Lord Alfred nodded assent, and they rejoined the group around the betting-ring, in the centre of which stood the gallant Milesian, Captain O'Brien, vociferating loudly in what he would himself have termed a thundering rage. The cause was soon discovered: Mr. Philip Tirrett had, five minutes before, made his appearance on the course, and coolly informed the captain not only that he was mistaken in supposing he intended to ride for him, but that he was going to perform the service for Captain Annesley, of Her Majesty's Life Guards, upon his famous steeplechaser Black Eagle, which, in his poor opinion, looked very like a winner. As Lord Alfred and Harry came up, the Honourable Billy Whipcord, who, so to speak, lived upon horseflesh, and having a tolerably heavy book on the race, was in a great state of agitation and excitement, exclaimed, "Here, Lord Alfred, what do you say to all this? there's a squabble as to who Mr. Tirrett is to ride for. I thought you'd settled with him, long ago, to ride Don Pasquale?"

"Such was, no doubt, the understanding between us," returned Lord Alfred, firmly; "nor had I reason to suspect that he meant not to fulfil his engagement, until I received a note some two hours ago, telling me that circumstances prevented him from riding for me. These circumstances I now, for the first time, conjecture to resolve themselves into the

fact that he has been bribed by someone to ride for Captain Annesley."

"Pray, my lord, do you intend that remark to apply to me?" inquired Captain Annesley, who was a tall, handsome, fashionable-looking man, with black whiskers and moustaches.

"I intended the remark to apply to Mr. Tirrett," was Lord Alfred's reply; "he had engaged to ride for me; I believe he has been bribed to break that engagement, because I can imagine no other reason so likely to influence a person of his character; but it's a matter of perfect indifference to me who may have bribed him, and as I am fortunate enough to have secured the services of a gentleman on whose honour I can rely, as well as upon his horsemanship, I care little about the whole matter, and must leave you, to settle your differences without my interference."

As he spoke he was turning to leave the spot, when Tirrett stepped before him and prevented him.

"Not so fast, my lord," he said, insolently; "I consider that you've insulted me by the terms in which you have just spoken, and I desire you to recall your words."

An indignant refusal from Lord Alfred apparently exasperated the young blackleg beyond endurance, and raising his horsewhip threateningly, he advanced a step towards his opponent. As he did so, a heavy hand was pressed against his chest, effectually barring his further progress, while a deep voice said sternly, "Stand back, sir! I should have thought you had been on the turf long enough to recognise a gentleman when you see him, and to know that such persons are not to be bullied, though they may be swindled. Let me give you a word of advice: you will have quite enough on your hands to get out of this morning's work without some unpleasant 'exposé.' Your associate, Captain O'Brien, seems inclined to be disagreeably communicative—don't get yourself horsewhipped into the bargain!"

When Coverdale made the reference to O'Brien, Phil Tirrett turned pale, and gnawed his under lip in fruitless anger; but, as he concluded, he got up the steam sufficiently to inquire, with an insolent laugh, "Horsewhipped, eh?—who's likely to do it?"

"I am," was Coverdale's quiet answer. Their eyes met—but Tirrett could not endure Harry's steadfast gaze; so, favouring him with a most melodramatic scowl of hatred, he slunk away through the crowd. After much angry altercation, Captain O'Brien's horse was withdrawn—other preliminaries of the race settled—and the time appointed for starting drew nigh, when Captain Annesley lounged up to Lord Alfred Courtland, and, twisting his moustaches, drawled out, "Haw! ar 'spose yur 'ware m'lord that—haw—tha're all gen-

tlemen riders?—eh! yur friend comes under that denomination, 'spose, haw?"

"When the officers of the —th chose me as umpire about a disputed stroke at billiards, and I decided in favour of one Cornet Annesley, he did not object to the verdict on the score of my position," returned Coverdale, with quiet self-possession; upon which the captain muttered—

"Hey, haw, Mr. Coverdale, aw thing—arm sor davlish short-sighted—ar reelv didn't recognize yar—haw! beg par'n, reely," and lounged off considerably discomposed.

After the ceremony of weighing the riders had been satisfactorily performed, and other preliminaries arranged, the bell rang for saddling, and Coverdale, flinging off his wrapper, and removing a pair of leggings which had concealed his top-boots, appeared in appropriate racing costume, to Lord Alfred's surprise.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, as the blue silk racing-shirt revealed its glories to his astonished optics—"by Jove! Coverdale, you really are one of the most wonderful fellows I ever came across; why, you were not aware two hours ago that there was a chance of your being required to ride this race, and yet you come togged out in as noble and appropriate garments as if you had been preparing for the last month—it is all a perfect mystery to me!"

"The mystery is easily explained," returned Harry, laughing at his companion's puzzled look. "When I left your rooms this morning, the idea of riding for you had already occurred to me; it so happened that I, when last in town, ordered a new pair of hunting breeches and boots of my tailor and bootmaker, which I knew would be ready for me to jump into; the tailor directed me to a masquerade warehouse, where I procured the racing-shirt; and I purchased the wrapper and leggings ready made. In the carpet-bag I have a coat, which I could have put on at the stables, had Tirrett chosen, at the last moment, to keep his engagement with you: so there's no magic in it after all."

As he spoke, Don Pasquale, arching his neck, snorting, laying back his ears and pointing them forward alternately, rolling his eyes until the whites were plainly visible, and altogether showing symptoms of a temperament quite unlike that popularly attributed to the genus pet lamb, was led in by Dick and an attendant satellite, at the imminent risk of their respective lives and limbs. As the clothing was removed, Coverdale scrutinized him narrowly without speaking; at length he exclaimed—"He's a devil, that there's no mistaking; but he's a splendid horse: if he's sound, and it's at all possible to screw him along, I'll give you all the money you paid for him, and fifty pounds to the back of that, if you don't like to part with him under."

"My dear Coverdale, in that and everything else I shall be guided by your wishes," was the reply. "I'd make you a free gift of him, and be glad to get rid of the brute, if it wasn't for the money I owe."

At this moment the groom made a signal, to which Coverdale immediately attended.

"The longer he stays in this here crowd, the wilder and savager he'll get, and the worser he'll be to mount; so the sooner I sees yer honour in the saddle, the better I shall be pleased."

"All serene, Dick," returned Harry, cheerfully. "Wish me luck and keep your spirits up, Alfred, my boy!" he continued, shaking his companion's hand heartily: then, with a nod to the groom, to announce his intention, he approached the horse leisurely, and watching his opportunity, waited until something had attracted the animal's notice, and caused it to turn its head in an opposite direction; when, placing his foot quietly in the stirrup, he was firmly seated before Don Pasquale became aware of his intention, or had time to attempt any resistance. Slowly gathering up the reins, Coverdale desired Dick to "give him his head"; the first use he made of it being to place it between his fore-legs with a jerk which, if his rider had not judiciously yielded to it, would have pulled the reins from his grasp. But Don Pasquale had an object in thus lowering his haughty crest—namely, at the same time to fling up his heels, and eject the intruder who had dared so unceremoniously to usurp the seat of dominion on his august back, much as a stone is hurled from a sling. Harry, however, being prepared for any eccentricity of motion on the part of the amiable quadruped he bestrode, retained his seat in spite of the Don's strenuous efforts to dislodge him; a performance which appeared to astonish and impress the creature to such a degree that he tossed up his head so suddenly as to render Dick's caution in regard to "knocking out brains" by no means a superfluous figure of speech, and abruptly started off in a kind of half-sidling, half-dancing canter. Having indulged the Don with a preliminary gallop up and down the first quarter of a mile of the course, during which he amused himself by occasionally lashing out in a way which soon obtained for him those popular desiderata—a clear course and no favour, Harry brought him back to the starting-post just as Phil Tirrett appeared, looking the perfection of a jockey, and mounted on a splendid black thoroughbred, which Coverdale conjectured must be—from its superiority to every other horse on the course—Captain Annesley's Black Eagle. At this moment Dick, the groom, handed Coverdale a leaf of a betting-book, crumpled up into the form of a note; seizing an opportunity when his horse was for an instant quiet, Harry opened it, and read the following words:—

"Honoured sur, Black hegel's wery prity to luke hat, but he han't got the Don's pluck, nor P. T. han't got yourn—hin ther last field but won ther's a corner may be cut hoff by taking a dich with a low ston warl hon the bank abuv, and a rail atop—hits a properly dangrus leep, but if our 'orse is rode boldly and ain't blow'd, he'll face hit and clear hit, hand B. E. and P. T. won't.—Your humbel survent, Dick Dodge."

Hastily casting his eve over it, Harry caught the general meaning of the note, and, tearing it, he gave his confidential adviser a glance which so clearly conveyed his recognition of the merits of his scheme, that Dick in soliloquy confided to himself, that he was at that moment open to be "blowed" if it was not his conviction that, if Coverdale could keep his seat for the first five minutes, he might do the trick after all. As Harry rode up to the starting-post, Tirrett perceived, from his firm but easy seat in the saddle, his strong yet light hand on the rein, restraining without irritating his horse, that he had a first-rate rider to contend against; and knowing, as no one did so well as himself, the powers of the animal on which Coverdale was mounted, he, for the first time since he had refused to ride for Lord Alfred, felt anxious as to the result of the race, which, reckoning it completely secure, he had betted on more largely than was his habit. After relieving his feelings by a muttered volley of oaths, he continued, mentally:

"This is pleasant: the fellow sits his horse as composedly as if he were in an arm-chair! He seems to understand the temper of the brute, too! I suppose Dick has put him up to that, in revenge for the blow I gave him. I've got a frightfully heavy book on the event—nearly £1,000. I was a fool to risk it; and yet I thought the money was as safe as if it had been in my pocket. I never expected the horse would have trained sound as he has; if I'd been sure of that I would have ridden him myself. Well, the race must be won at all hazards; if the Don would but get into one of his tantarums now, nobody that didn't know his ways could sit him. Ha! yes, a good idea; I think it may be done that way—and yet it's hazardous—but I won't be rash—only Black Eagle must not lose, whatever may be the consequence." While such thoughts as these were passing hurriedly through his brain, the signal was given, and the horses started.

CHAPTER LV.

THE RACE.

AFTER making one violent effort to get his head and both—an effort which it tasked Harry's strength and skill to the utmost to counteract—the Don gradually settled into his stride, crossed a grass field, and flew across an easy fence at the end of it, with a bound which would have cleared one of three times its magnitude, in a style which convinced Harry of the superior powers of the animal he bestrode. Besides Black Eagle and Don Pasquale, six other horses started. Of these, one, a fiery chestnut colt, rushed at his first fence, fell, threw his jockey, then got away, and was not caught for the next two hours; a ploughed field pumped the wind out of two more so effectually that for all chance of winning the race they might as well never have started; the jump into the lane settled a fourth, which was led off with two broken knees; while a furze common used up a fifth; so that as they approached the brook, the sporting cornet (who rode his own horse, Grey Robin), Tirrett, and Harry were the only remaining competitors. About five hundred yards from the brook (which was a very picturesque but singularly uncomfortable looking stream to ride over, having steep rugged banks, being too deep to ford, and quite as wide as a horse could conveniently leap) Tirrett, who was leading, held in Black Eagle with a view, as Coverdale imagined, to save his wind, and get him well together for the leap. His own horse, which was going beautifully, was so fresh that Harry considered him able to clear the brook without any such precautions, and believing, if he kept on at the same pace, he should either gain ground which Tirrett would be unable to recover, or force him to press Black Eagle to a degree which might break him down at his leap, he did not draw rein until he came to within about fifty yards of the bank. Having mentally selected the spot at which he meant to charge the brook, he was about to put his horse at it, when a rushing sound caused him to turn his head. As he did so, Tirrett dashed by him like a flash of lightning, so closely that their elbows brushed, while as he passed he turned in his saddle, and brought his riding-whip down with his full force between Don Pasquale's ears. The effect of his villainous scheme fully answered his expectations; the horse, which had been going at an easy, stretching gallop, and was just gathering itself up for the leap, stopped so abruptly that it was with the greatest difficulty Harry was able to prevent himself from going over its

head; the next moment the animal reared, and stood pawing the air wildly with its fore-legs, so that Coverdale was forced to throw himself forward and cling to the creature's neck to prevent it falling over upon him. Then commenced a furious struggle for mastery between man and horse. Tirrett's cowardly stroke had aroused the vicious temper of the brute, and failing in its first desperate attemps to unseat its rider, it laid back its ears, planted its feet firmly on the ground, and obstinately refused to move. Irritated beyond control at the rascally trick which had been played him, and at its complete success, Coverdale, with whip, spurs, and bit, gave Don Pasquale a thorough specimen of his quiet manner, but with no other result than one or two futile attempts to bite or kick its rider; at length he was compelled to desist from pure exhaustion, and, laying the bridle on the animal's neck, he shifted the whip to his left hand, while he extended the cramped fingers of his right, preparatory to recommencing hostilities. Whether through mere caprice, or whether, as is more probable, the Don caught sight of the other horses, which had safely accomplished the transit of the brook, and were resuming their course on the other side, it is not easy to decide; certain it is, however, that the moment it found its head at liberty, it dashed off at full speed; and before Harry could gather up the reins, the creature had reached the bank, plunged madly forward, and in another moment Coverdale found himself up to the breast in water, with no part of his horse visible except the head. Although taken completely by surprise, his presence of mind did not forsake him; thanks to his experience in the hunting-field, the situation was not new to him, and scarcely had he glanced round ere his quick eye selected the point at which he should effect a landing; guiding his horse to a spot where the bank was least steep and abrupt, he waited until the animal obtained a precarious footing; then, encouraging it by hand and voice, he lifted it by the rein, and urged it forward; there was a scramble and a slip, then a more violent struggle than before, and the Don and his rider were once again high, though by no means dry, on "terra firma." As soon as he could find time to look after his competitors in the race, he became aware that both had cleared the brook in safety, and were half across the field beyond, Tirrett some twenty yards ahead—a distance which he kept so completely without effort that Harry at once perceived Grey Robin was beaten. That Tirrett thought the same of both his antagonists was evident, from the easy pace at which he was going. In order to accomplish his rascally manœuvre before crossing the brook, he had pressed Black Eagle injudiciously; and confident that both the other horses must be in an equally exhausted condition, he was saving him for the final struggle. He was, however, wrong in regard to Don Pasquale; true, its contention with its rider had taken for the

time a good deal out of it, but the last act of that affair, having consisted of a display of passive obstinacy, had in some degree refreshed it; and its plunge into the brook had also exercised a beneficial influence; so that Harry perceived, to his great delight, as soon as they resumed their course on the farther bank, that his horse had plenty of good running still left in it, and when it got again into its stride, that it was improving every minute. Thus, if Coverdale could manage to creep up to his opponent so gradually as not to alarm him until he had regained a portion of the ground he had lost, and Dick's suggestion of the desperate leap over the wall should prove at all practicable, he did not despair of the race yet. In accordance with this view, Harry rather restrained than urged the Don, until Tirrett had cleared the next fence, and entered the field beyond; but the moment the overhanging branches of the hedge closed behind him, Coverdale gave his horse the rein, came up with Grey Robin, who disputed precedence with him for a few yards, and then fell back beaten; flew over the fence like a bird, took up the running on the other side in first-rate style, and before Tirrett had got Black Eagle fairly into his stride again, the Don was alongside of him. And now the race, properly so called, began in earnest: for nearly a mile the course lay along a slight descent of smooth springy turf, terminated by a ditch, and a low brick wall heightened by a rail, beyond which the ground rose more steeply for a short distance, up to the winning-post. Thus, as Dick had foreseen, the man and horse that first cleared the wall in safety must of necessity win. At one spot the fence was broken, and the wall partially knocked down; but this gap, although within the marked line, was somewhat out of the direct course. Thus, by taking the ditch, wall, and fence, at the nearest point (always supposing any jockey bold enough to attempt such a leap, and fortunate enough to accomplish it in safety), an amount of distance would be saved which would ensure success to the enterprising rider. Harry's quick eye took in the situation at a glance, and he resolved to attempt it, unless he should gain such an advantage over his adversary before reaching the boundary wall, as should render his success no longer a doubtful matter. That Tirrett equally perceived the critical nature of the situation might be gathered from the fact that, although aware of the task before him (for even across the gap the leap was one which a good horseman, on a fresh steed, might congratulate himself on having accomplished safely, and which, on a tired one, he would think twice ere he ventured to attempt), he pressed the pace to the utmost extent of his horse's power, with the evident intention of rendering Don Pasquale so blown that it must break down at the leap. Unwilling to risk the desperate chance which Dick's "billet" had suggested, Coverdale exerted all his skill to maintain the posi-

tion he had gained, which at one moment was in advance of, and for some distance neck and neck with, his opponent; but, although Don Pasquale was the stronger animal of the two, and gifted with greater powers of endurance, on soft level turf Black Eagle had decidedly the advantage in point of swiftness; moreover, in a mere trial of speed, Tirrett's acquaintance with all the resources of professional jockeyship stood him in good stead, so that before they had approached the wall, Black Eagle had not only passed, but was several lengths ahead of his opponent. Thus, Coverdale perceived that, unless he chose to adopt Dick's dangerous suggestion, he must relinquish all chance of winning the race. Had it been simply a trial of speed and skill, good sense and right principle would probably have prevented Harry from risking his life for so inadequate an object; but Tirrett's dishonourable behaviour towards Lord Alfred, and his rascally attempt to excite the vicious temper of Don Pasquale (an attempt which all but gained its object), had irritated and excited Coverdale to such a degree that, reckless of consequences, he was eager to dare any peril rather than allow such infamous conduct to be triumphant. Accordingly, keeping the direct line, he shouted to Tirrett, who had turned off to the left, and was making for the gap, "Why don't you follow me, sir, like a man, instead of sneaking over gaps like a coward?" he got his horse well in hand, and rode boldly on.

When Tirrett became aware of his intention he half drew in his rein, irresolute what course to take; if he refused to follow, and Coverdale should by any chance succeed in getting safely over, he knew that the race, and all he had depending on it, would be lost, and he eagerly scanned the leap with his practised eye; but it was too formidable, and, as Dick had foreseen, his courage failed him; so, turning first red, then pale, he muttered an uncharitable wish concerning Harry's neck, and rode on towards the gap, hoping for its fulfilment. As Coverdale approached the wall, the conviction that he was about to attempt a most hazardous, if not an impossible feat, forced itself upon him; still his resolution never wavered, and he was preparing himself for the leap, when a figure, which he recognised as that of the groom, suddenly rose from the ditch, and, pointing to a particular spot, shouted, "Come over here! give him his head, and let him take it his own way; he's got his steam up, and wouldn't refuse a haystack."

Relying on the man's acquaintance with the animal, Harry resolved to follow his advice implicitly, and, slackening his rein, pressed his hat firmly over his brows, clasped his saddle tightly with his knees, and awaited the result.

Dick was not mistaken in his estimate of the Don's courage; for, as soon as the horse perceived the obstacle before it, it pricked up its ears, gathered its legs well under it, and dashed

forward. Nor had he formed a wrong conception in regard to the animal's general powers of endurance; but the episode occasioned by Tirrett's foul blow, with the subsequent immersion in and struggle out of the brook, were incidents on which he had not calculated. Thus, although Don Pasquale rose to the leap gallantly, and by a prodigious bound cleared ditch, wall, and fence, the exertion so completely exhausted its remaining strength, that, on its descent on the further side, all Harry's efforts were unable to keep it on its legs, and it pitched heavily forward, falling with and partially on its rider.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE CATASTROPHE.

STUNNED by the violence of the shock, Harry was aware vaguely, and as in a dream, that the horse had risen, and that some person was soothing and caressing it; from this state of semi-unconsciousness he was aroused by Dick, the groom, exclaiming, "If you b'aint too much hurt, Mr. Coverdale, you may do it yet, sir, if so be as you can sit your horse; for Black Eagle has refused the gap, and Tirrett's a bullying him to get him over now."

Thus appealed to, Harry rose with difficulty (uttering an exclamation of pain as he did so), and gazed confusedly round him. Uninjured by its fall, Don Pasquale was standing by him, held by Dick; while, considerably to the left, Tirrett, having ridden back a few paces, was forcing Black Eagle, by a sever application of both whip and spur, to attempt the leap over the gap, which he had just refused.

"Here, quick!" exclaimed Coverdale, eagerly, "hold the stirrup—that will do—don't touch my arm—I'll disappoint that scoundrel yet!" and gathering up the reins with his right hand, he put spurs to his horse, and galloped off. After a struggle, Tirrett succeeded in forcing Black Eagle across the gap, and, by dint of spurring and shaking, got him into a sort of shambling canter on the further side of it; but it was of no avail, for, as Don Pasquale passed the winning-post, Black Eagle was still several lengths behind: Coverdale's desperate leap had accomplished the purpose for which it had been attempted, and Lord Alfred Courtland's horse remained winner of the steeple-chase.

As he rode in triumphant, an eager crowd of Don Pasquale's backers surrounded him with loud congratulations. "Splendidly done! I never saw such riding in my life!" "That leap with a tired horse was the pluckiest thing ... attempted—there's not another man on the course would have faced it!" "The business of the brook was the cleverest

dodge of all—I saw it through a race-glass, and I never expected you could have kept on him." "Didn't the horse fall on you? are you hurt, Mr. Coverdale?" Such were some of the numerous remarks and exclamations which rang in Harry's ears, as, faint and giddy, it was as much as he could do to retain his seat without falling from the saddle.

"Harry! my dear friend, how can I ever thank you sufficiently?" exclaimed Lord Alfred Courtland, forcing his way through the crowd.

"Find the groom," was the hurried reply, "for I can't keep on the horse much longer."

As he spoke, Dick, with a face crimson with heat and triumph, made his appearance, and took charge of Don Pasquale, while Harry, with a painful effort, swung himself to the ground, where he staggered and appeared scarcely able to stand.

"You are faint!" exclaimed Lord Alfred, hastily; "here, lean upon me, and let us get out of this crowd."

"Take care of my arm," murmured Harry, compressing his lips as though to restrain an expression of suffering.

"Your arm! why, good heaven! what is the matter with it?"

"It is only broken," returned Harry, quietly; "the horse fell upon it with his full weight at the last leap; but I was able to hold him with one hand, so it did not signify."

"And you mounted again, and won the race, with your arm broken!" exclaimed Lord Alfred. "Why, it's the most gallant, noble—but you are suffering dreadfully! Oh, what am I to do for you? why did I ever let you ride that vicious brute!"

"There, don't make a fuss," returned Coverdale; "let us get out of this crowd; find me a glass of wine, for I've a sort of faintness comes over me every now and then, and when I've drunk that I shall do well enough until we can get a surgeon to set my arm; don't worry about it—when I put the horse at that wall I fully expected to break my neck."

Five minutes' rest, and a couple of glasses of old sherry, restored Coverdale sufficiently to enable him to announce his readiness to proceed, though he refused to leave the ground until the Honourable Billy Whipcord had undertaken to see that the winner was defrauded of none of his rights; and then, and not till then, did Harry accept Lord Alfred's offer to accompany him to town in a hansom cab, which a gentleman obligingly gave up the moment he learned for what purpose it was required.

The conversation of the two friends during the drive to London afforded a curious illustration of character. Lord Alfred, grieved and shocked beyond measure at the accident which had occurred to his old schoolfellow in his service, was engaged the whole time in pouring forth unavailing lamentations of self-accusings; while Coverdale, although suffering

the most excruciating anguish from every motion of the cab, was so touched by the evidence of feeling shown by his companion, that he not only repressed all outward signs of pain, but used his best endeavours to comfort and console Lord Alfred. On their way to Lord Alfred's lodgings, where he insisted Coverdale should take up his abode until he should be well enough to travel, they called at the house of a surgeon celebrated for his skill in cases of fracture, and were fortunate enough to find him at home. On learning the nature of the accident, he provided himself with the necessary apparatus, reached the lodgings as soon as his patient, and, within an hour, Coverdale's arm was set, and the fracture pronounced to be not a very serious one.

"And now for my poor Alice," was Harry's first exclamation, when, with strict injunctions to go to bed and keep his arm quiet, Mr. B—— had departed; "how am I to act about her? If I write her word I've met with an accident, she'll be frightened out of her wits; and yet, if I don't, she may hear of it some other way (those confounded newspapers are sure to get hold of the affair), and fancy I'm killed, or some such notion; I'd better write—give me the tools, there's a good fellow."

"But, really you 'ought not to exert yourself to do it, remember——" began Lord Alfred, deprecatingly.

"I remember, sir, that my wife is alone, and anxious about me already, and that if I can spare her any shock or alarm, I will do so as long as I can hold a pen," was Coverdale's positive and somewhat snappish answer; for which he must be held excused, as severe bodily pain does not tend to improve the temper.

Lord Alfred, seeing it was useless to contend the point, gave him pen, ink, and paper; and, unfit as he was for such exertion, Coverdale wrote Alice a full account of his day's adventures, only concealing the nature and extent of his accident. The letter was most kind and judicious, and well calculated to soothe and console her to whom it was addressed, and no doubt would have succeeded in so doing, but for the following untoward events.

Alice, left to herself, had grown desperately frightened as to the possible upshot of her husband's rash expedition to London; and, as the reader is already aware, had despatched after him Lord Alfred's letter, and her own reasons for so doing, fairly written upon two sheets of scented note-paper. But although she rightly considered this the best thing she could do, yet it by no means afforded her lasting comfort, and she remained restless and unhappy until, on the evening of the day on which the steeple-chase occurred, she worked herself up to such a pitch of nervous anxiety, that she was becoming quite ill, when the idea struck her that perhaps Harry, having received her letter, might set off at once, and

arrive by a train which got in about seven p.m. On the chance of this she despatched, to meet the aforesaid train, a groom and a dog-cart. Now, as the reader knows, it was impossible Harry could arrive by that train, because, at the time it started, he—having written to Alice—had just been undressed by Lord Alfred Courtland's valet, and gone to bed, which, no one can doubt, was by far the best place for him. But though he did not come by that train, a young farmer did, who was one of Harry's tenants, and who, as ill-luck would have it, had been at the steeple-chase, witnessed Coverdale's leap and fall, and heard afterwards an exaggerated account of the injuries he had received. Thus, when the groom inquired if he had seen his master get into the train, he favoured that equine servitor with a graphic history of the morning's proceedings, illustrated and embellished by the narrator's imaginative powers; which recital producing much grief and consternation in the mind of the faithful fellow, who was much attached to his master, induced him to drive home as fast as the trotting mare could step, to destroy his mistress's peace of mind, by imparting to her these disastrous tidings. Having great and, as the sequel proved, unfounded reliance in his own tact and eloquence, he, on his arrival, would by no means allow Wilkins to be his mouthpiece; on the contrary, nothing would serve him but to be shown into his mistress's presence, and, as he termed it, "break it to her easy-like" himself—which judicious intention he carried out thus:—"If you please, Mrs. Coverdale, ma'am, I'm sorry to say somethin' dreadful's been and happened, which I thought p'r'aps you might like to 'ear; so, not to frighten you, I made bold to come and break it to you myself!"

Poor Alice! all the blood seemed to rush to her heart, while a choking sensation in her throat totally deprived her of the power of speech. After a moment, she contrived to gasp out interrogatively, "A railroad accident? your master——"

Answering her idea rather than her words, the man replied, "If you please, ma'am' it wasn't on the railway as poor master met with his accident!"

"Then he has met with——" began Alice, and the idea at that moment flashing across her mind that he had encountered D'Almayne, and been wounded, perhaps killed, in a duel, she shrieked out, "Oh! I see it all; he is dead or dying, and I have been his murderess!" and sank back in a fainting fit.

The groom, frightened at the effect of his tidings, summoned the female servants, and Alice was carried to her room, undressed, and placed in bed, before she had by any means recovered from her swoon; and even when, after one or two relapses, she did regain her consciousness, her burning hand, flushed cheeks, and unnaturally brilliant eyes, together with an incoherence of expression and an excitability of man-

ner occasionally verging on delirium, so alarmed the stately housekeeper, that she, on her own responsibility, sent off for that eminent medical practitioner, Gouger; the result of his visit was, that Harry, bruised and sore from head to foot, having lain awake half the night from the pain of his broken arm, was aroused from an uneasy slumber, into which, towards morning, he had fallen, by the following telegraphic message:—"H. Coverdale, Esq., from Scalpel Gouger, M.D. —Was called in to Mrs. C. last night, at nine p.m.—symptoms acute, febrile, threatening the brain! state critical—if Mr. C. can travel without danger, let him come at once!"

In less than half an hour Harry Coverdale was up, dressed, and in the first railway train which left London. As he had lain sleepless through the weary hours of the night he had thought the pain of his broken limb all but unbearable; during his journey home he never even felt it, so deep and absorbing was his mental agony.

CHAPTER LVII.

AN ANONYMOUS LETTER.

WHILE Harry Coverdale, with the best possible intentions, had been breaking his wife's heart and his own bones, the world had not stood still, nor had the ordinary course of events been in the slightest degree retarded. On the contrary, the unsympathizing globe we inhabit had revolved on its axis with its accustomed perseverance, and men had been born into it in their first childhood, and died out of it in their second; and the sons and daughters of men had married and given in marriage, and the many had gone on sinning and the few repenting, very much as it all happened in the days of Noah, while the ark was a-building, and the long-suffering of God waited to allow the evil-doers to perceive the error of their way, and to turn from it ere the day of mercy should be over, and the destroyer should be let loose upon them. The world was then a profligate young world, sowing its wild oats broadcast, with a frank and careless disregard of appearances, which involved at least the one virtue of sincerity; the world is now a crafty old world, in its dotage, one is sometimes tempted to imagine; but even the Flood only whitewashed its outside, for it still clings to its darling sins, though no longer openly—the world has grown too cunning for that, it knows the value of a good name, and has set up a gilded idol of clay, yclept Respectability, to resemble the refined gold of which virtue's image is composed; and because it worships this idol zealously, short-sighted optimists mistake hypocrisy for true religion, and deem the world has grown pious in its old

age; but there are those who fear that if the waters should again overspread the earth, sin would weigh so heavily on the inhabitants thereof, that not very many of them would swim.

Be this as it may, certain it is that while Harry was riding Don Pasquale across the country at the risk of his neck, and Alice was fretting herself into a brain fever on the chance of his being shot by Horace D'Almayne, that talented young gentleman was labouring most industriously, with the assistance of his cousin, the "avocat," at Brussels, to obtain the sum of money due to Mr. Crane, on the cargo of the unfortunate "Bundelcundah" East Indiaman. When men exert their utmost energies to attain an object, success nine times out of ten is the result; consequently, very few days had elapsed after Horace's departure before Mr. Crane had the pleasure of learning that the mere threat of energetic law proceedings had brought his adversary to reason, and that the money had been actually paid into D'Almayne's hands. But somehow this announcement did not appear to afford the worthy ex-cotton-spinner such satisfaction as might have been expected; on the contrary, when he closed the letter which conveyed the intelligence, he, to his wife's surprise, muttered something very like an oath; whereupon, that lady appeared deeply scandalized, and exclaimed, "My dear Mr. Crane!" in a tone of voice which metamorphosed that affectionate address into "You wicked old man, where do you expect to go to?" Replying rather to her tone than her words, her husband began:

"Yes, it's all very well for you, Mrs. Crane, who have nothing to do but sit here and spend the money I pour into your lap, to keep your temper, and look horrified if one utters a hasty expression; but if you had to toil and moil all your days to scrape it together, and then be defrauded out of your hard-earned gains by creeping serpents, whom you have warmed and cherished in—if I may be allowed the expression—in your breeches pocket, and who have availed themselves of their position to—yes, I may say—to pick that pocket, I wonder what expressions you would indulge in then!" And having worked himself up almost into a fit of crying, Mr. Crane once more turned to his letter.

"Ah! coming home, is he? I've a great mind to have him arrested as soon as he places his foot on British soil; I wonder at his impudence, that I do!"

"To whom do you refer?" inquired Kate, quietly.

"To whom do I refer?" repeated her husband, in the highest note of his shrill falsetto; "why, madam, to whom should I refer, except to your precious friend and admirer, Horace D'Almayne?"

"Mr. D'Almayne!" exclaimed Kate, in surprise; for only two days before, Mr. Crane had detained her for a good half-hour to listen to the praises of his factotum's zeal and fidelity. "Mr. D'Almayne! why, I thought you were so much pleased

with the tact and intelligence he had displayed in your service! Surely, you told me he had actually received the money of which your foreign agent attempted to defraud you."

"And if he has, how do I know that it's any safer in his hands than it was before? it's a large sum to trust a needy man with: how can I tell that he won't bolt with it?"

"Surely, you do not suspect him of dishonesty?"

"I suspect him of everything that's wicked, and deceitful, and dreadful," returned Mr. Crane, in a tone of voice so dismal, that Kate could scarcely restrain a smile. "But of course you defend him—I am not surprised at that—in fact, I may add, I expected as much. I had reason, good reason, madam, to imagine such would be your line of conduct."

Kate paused until her husband had talked himself into the state of mean and abject peevishness which was the nearest approach he could ever make towards being in a rage with one who was not utterly weak and powerless, and, when he stopped from sheer want of breath, observed quietly—

"I really am at a loss to comprehend to what you allude, or what reason you can possibly have to connect me with this sudden change of opinion in regard to Mr. D'Almayne: would you oblige me by explaining?"

"I shan't do anything of the kind, madam; I don't see that I'm obliged to give you any reason; it ought to be enough for you to know that I disapprove of your conduct — conduct which could give rise to such representations, madam; and ——and comments, Mrs. Crane—impertinent remarks, derogatory to my position—must be reprehensible."

"I do not desire to annoy you, but I must again ask you to what remarks and representations you refer?" was Kate's reply. Mr. Crane fidgeted, looked perplexed, tried to get angry and carry it through with a high hand, met Kate's calm eye and could not, and at last, with a very ill grace, drew from his pocket a letter, which he unfolded and prepared to read, saying—

"There, Mrs. Crane! since my word is not sufficient to gain your credence, or my desires, ahem! my wishes, if you prefer the expression, to secure your obedience, you force me to submit to you this singular—I may say, this offensive document, which, in conjunction with other information, has occasioned me much justifiable annoyance, and, I may add, mental anxiety and distress."

The letter was written in a bold, dashing, though evidently disguised hand, and ran as follows:—

"SIR,—I have no doubt you consider yourself a clever, cautious man of business, a prudent master of a family, and a kind and judicious husband—if you do, all that I can say is that 'I am unable to agree with you.' A clever, cautious man of business would scarcely leave important money transactions

to the management of Horace D'Almayne, a needy and unprincipled adventurer; a prudent master of a house would not encourage such an intimacy; nor would a kind and judicious husband allow a notorious libertine to be constantly in the society of his young and pretty wife. Your infatuation has already produced some of the unpleasant results naturally to be expected from it; you have advanced above £5,000 on a bubble company, not one farthing of which will you ever see again, while you have incurred liabilities, to learn the extent of which you had better consult your man of business, and I wish you joy of the revelation I expect you will obtain from him. In regard to your young wife, I have no positive information to afford you; but that D'Almayne has designs upon her, I know—and he is not the man to fail in an adventure of that description, even without taking into consideration the circumstance of a beautiful young woman being married to a man of your years. You may wonder why I trouble myself to write thus to you; so I will tell you: I owe D'Almayne a grudge, and it suits me to take this opportunity of discharging the debt. But though this is my object, all I have told is only the plain truth; I suspect it comes too late to be of much use to you; but that is your look out, not mine."

The letter was without signature.

Kate listened attentively while Mr. Crane read aloud, with much hesitation and stammering, such portions of the alarming epistle as concerned his property and his wife, carefully suppressing every sentence which related to his own weakness and gullibility. When he had concluded, she remarked, "The letter is a singular one, and appears to bear a certain ss of truth; if I were you, I would attend to the hints in regard to your pecuniary investments."

"And as to those which affect my wife, what would you advise in regard to them, madam?" inquired Mr. Crane, screwing up his face into an expression of feeble sarcasm, which gave him very much the appearance of an ancient monkey. Kate paused: here was an opportunity which might never occur again of enlightening her husband as to her experience of Horace D'Almayne's true character. She had every reason to do so; his threat of revealing the clandestine visit she was prepared to forestall, if necessary, by an honest confession of the entire affair, preferring to bear with her husband's fretful displeasure (of which, if the truth must be told, she did not stand very greatly in awe), rather than to excite his suspicions by a concealment which would lend countenance to the insinuations of this anonymous correspondent—yes! she had every reason to tell all she knew concerning him, even to his late avowal of affection, and yet she felt she could not do it. In the first place she shrank, as any pure-minded woman would shrink, from confessing that such an avowal had been

made to her; but especially did she shrink from confessing it to such a nature as that of Mr. Crane: he would never see the matter in its true light—never believe that she had not, in some measure, encouraged such advances—never comprehend the disgust and loathing with which they had inspired her. But another and more stringent reason withheld her—her brother Frederick! she still believed that D'Almayne had befriended, and saved him from, at all events, the immediate consequence of the dilemma into which his youth and inexperience had plunged him: true, she mistrusted his object in performing this act of benevolence—or, rather, she felt convinced that he had done it merely to establish a claim on her gratitude; still the fact remained the same—in her difficulty, when all other human aid appeared to have forsaken her, he had come to her assistance, and by doing so had saved her brother: believing this, could she expose his baseness? The question was a difficult one.

CHAPTER LVIII.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

THOSE who are skilled to read that strange, yet easily to be penetrated mystery, a woman's heart, will have at once decided how Kate Crane determined to act in regard to D'Almayne—he had saved her brother, and though he had offered her an unpardonable insult, she would not betray him, so she replied calmly—

"I should on that point advise you as I did on the former one: reflect whether the accusation is likely to be true; whether you have observed any encouragement given by me to Mr. D'Almayne; whether, from what you know of my character, you imagine it likely that I should be so devoid of principle, so wanting in self-respect, as to accept Mr. D'Almayne's or any other man's attentions. Recollect a speech I once made to you, which really appears as if I had had a presentiment of this accusation—a speech in which I begged you to bear in mind that, if at any time comments should be made on the intimate footing on which Mr. D'Almayne visited at this house, it was according to your expressed wish and desire that he did so, and on that account only did I tolerate it. If, when you have thus considered the matter, you still feel dissatisfied, I advise you to use every endeavour to arrive at the truth. My own opinion is, that the letter being written by (as the writer honestly enough confesses) an enemy of Mr. D'Almayne's, he has raked up every accusation which scandal may have invented to blacken that gentleman's character: still, as, if there is any truth in the charges, the knowledge of

it would prove of great importance to you, it behoves you quietly and carefully to inquire into them, and I would recommend you to do so without delay."

Kate's perfect self-possession and coolness always produced great effect on Mr. Crane, and in the present instance they so thoroughly convinced him that his anonymous correspondent had accused his wife falsely, that without more ado he started for the city to investigate the truth of the other charge, leaving his better half to strive against the uncomfortable conviction that unintentionally she had played the part of a hypocrite.

One of the elements of Horace D'Almayne's success in life was his punctuality in all matters of business; if he said he would do a thing, he did it; if he promised to be at any place by a fixed time, at the appointed day and hour there was Horace to be found: this consistency even in apparent trifles caused others to place great reliance on him, and contributed to establish a certain degree of prestige and weight of character which often stood him in good stead. No one was better aware of this fact than Horace himself; who, perceiving the value of the practice, had adopted it as one of his guiding principles, to which he invariably acted up with a consistency worthy of a better code. Accordingly, having transacted Mr. Crane's business to his own satisfaction, he appointed a day on which to return to England, and when the time arrived, embarked; but, unable finally to conclude the transaction without proceeding to Liverpool, he selected a vessel bound for that port. On his arrival, after a favourable passage, he took up his abode at a small, quiet hotel, much frequented by foreigners. Having engaged a private room, he was looking over the papers which he had brought with him, when his quick ear caught the sound of a voice with the tones of which he fancied himself familiar—listening attentively, he overheard the following colloquy:—

"Can I have a private sitting-room here?"

"Well, sir, we're very full; you require a bedroom also?"

"No; I am going by the New York packet, which leaves at eight o'clock this evening."

"If you'll wait one moment, sir, I'll see."

Anxious to obtain a view of the speakers, D'Almayne crossed the room with a noiseless tread, and looked out through the half-opened door; the figure nearest to him was that of the waiter at the hotel; the person with whom he had been conversing was, or appeared to be, a seafaring man of the more respectable class, and at the first glance D'Almayne believed him to be an entire stranger—still, the voice, so peculiar and so well known, he surely could not be mistaken in that! and again he scrutinised the stranger's appearance. He was a tall thin man, well advanced in life, with sharp acute features, and keen grey eyes; his hair was cut short, and of an un-

naturally raven blackness; and his face was closely shaven, without the slightest trace of whisker or moustache. For a moment, Horace D'Almayne paused in doubt, during which interval the stranger's evil genius obliged him to cough, a dry husky cough, which, once heard, was not easily mistaken —it was enough. In going to seek the master of the hotel, the waiter had to pass the door of D'Almayne's room; a sign from that individual's finger caused him to enter it.

"Show that gentleman into this room, as if it was the untenanted apartment he has inquired for—leave the key in the lock inside, and if I ring the bell twice fetch a policeman instantly; but as I hope such an extreme measure may not be necessary, do not say a word about the affair to anyone." As he spoke he slipped a sovereign into the man's hand, adding, "Manage this cleverly and quietly, and a second awaits you."

The waiter bowed, and with a nod of intelligence quitted the room. The door of the apartment was so placed that when opened it shut in an angle of the wall, in which stood a screen quite large enough to conceal the figure of a man; in this corner did D'Almayne ensconce himself; scarcely had he done so ere the waiter returned, ushering in the stranger for whose benefit these arrangements had been made. Perfctly unsuspicious of any stratagem, the new comer signified his approval of the accommodation provided for him, placed a leathern valise which he carried in his hand on the table, and then seated himself by the window with his back towards the door, which the waiter immediately closed, at the same time leaving the room, when, with noiseless steps, D'Almayne glided from his place of concealment, and double-locking the door, placed the key in his pocket. The slight sound made by the bolt shooting into its socket attracted the stranger's attention, and turning round quickly, he gave a most perceptible start as his eye fell upon his companion; recovering himself instantly, he rose, and bowing to D'Almayne, said:

"The waiter must have made some mistake! I asked for an unoccupied room. I must apologise for thus intruding on you, sir; but the mistake is not on my part." As he spoke, he took up his valise preparatory to leaving the room, but D'Almayne motioned him to a chair, as he replied:

"There is no mistake in the case, my friend, unless it be your fancying that, because you have shaved off your whiskers and dyed your hair, I should not recognise you—that is a complete mistake."

The person thus addressed turned pale, and bit his lip; but, making an effort to recover himself, replied:

"I do not understand you, sir; allow me to pass directly, or I shall ring and summon the waiter."

"You'd better not," returned D'Almayne, drily, "for that is the signal agreed on—for him instantly to fetch a policeman."

The stranger glanced towards the door, on which D'Al-

mayne quietly produced the key, and when it had caught his eye replaced it in his pocket; he then stretched his hand, with a hesitating and uncertain action, towards a stout stick on which he carried his valise; but D'Almayne drew from the breast pocket of his surtout the beautifully finished little revolving pistol which he always carried, and, having somewhat ostentatiously displayed it before the eyes of the individual he was thus browbeating, returned it to its place of concealment, as the other, with a sullen, dogged look, replaced his stick, and murmured:

"Well, Mr. D'Almayne, supposing you do happen to recognise me indulging in a little freak—supposing I have disguised myself the better to carry out a little intrigue of my own, why should that so greatly surprise you? I do not think you have ever found me absent from my post when business required me; you must be aware I have the interest of the establishment as much at heart as anyone; when they begin to play to-night in J—— Street, my frolic will be over, and I shall be in my proper place."

"I think it's highly probable you will, always supposing that place to be a cell in Pentonville Prison, or, as you lodge in Westminster, the Penitentiary, perhaps; but it strikes me that, if I had not fortunately met you, you would at that hour have been tossing about in St. George's Channel—as I happen to know you have taken your passage in a New York packet, which is to sail at eight this evening." As D'Almayne spoke, he fixed his piercing eyes on the individual he addressed, who, unable to bear his scrutinising glance, turned away, muttering with an oath, "—— him, I thought he was safe in Holland." After a moment's reflection, he appeared to decide on the best course.

"Assuredly there never was anyone like you, Mr. D'Almayne, for shrewdness and penetration," he said, in a tone of apparent frankness; "here am I (supposed by all who take an interest in my whereabouts to be in London), in a disguise in which my own mother (the poor soul has been dead these twenty years) would not have recognised me; at the first glance you penetrate it, and by intuition appear to have discovered my intentions. How you have tracked me, or whether you have met me by accident, I am unable to divine; but, as you have discovered me, I think it is best to be frank with you, and to throw myself on your generosity—confident that you will deal leniently with your old associate, if I may venture to use the term; though, perhaps, your faithful follower would be more true; for I am well aware how such talent as yours raises you above us plodding poor fellows. But I will make a clean breast to you, sir. The fact is, I am no longer young; scarcely still middle-aged; and the life I have been for so many years engaged in is a hazardous and exhausting one. I have been a frugal and careful man, and I do not

scruple to tell you, sir, that I have contrived to save a few hundred pounds. Well, sir, I have for some time wished to leave England, and settle in America, where I am unknown, and might begin the world afresh—in some quieter and more respectable line of life; so I thought I would avoid all the difficulties and all the troubles which, none are better aware than you, sir, would attend my quitting London just at this time, by taking French leave, and setting off in disguise and under a feigned name, hoping that in Mr. Maxwell, the traveller for a Manchester cotton firm, no one would recognise Le Roux, the croupier; and now, sir, having told you all, I throw myself on your generosity not to attempt (though I see no pretext on which you could legally do it) to detain me."

While Le Roux had been making this statement, which he did with the air of a man convinced against his will that the only course left open for him is to declare the whole truth, come what may of it, D'Almayne had taken a pencil from his pocket, with which he had been writing certain calculations on the back of a card. As soon as the other had concluded, he observed, quietly:

"I have been making a rough estimate of all the available cash on which you could lay your hand, and it appears to me that, owing to my folly in resting contented with the belief that it was your interest to be honest, you have at least £15,000 in that leathern case of yours—a sum quite sufficient to tempt you to bolt, especially at a time when you fancied I was safely out of your way. I make it out thus: the establishment in J—— Street has never less than £5,000 ready to pay all demands; to that, of course, you have unlimited access, and have availed yourself of it. Then comes the Overland Route Railroad speculation; Guillemard writes me word that the shares are going off tolerably fast, and that something like £10,000 in hard cash has been paid into our bankers; a cheque signed by two of the directors would enable you to draw out the whole amount at any moment—your own signature as Herr Vondenthaler, the Belgian capitalist, provides for one, and the other would offer little difficulty to a man of your talent and experience. I have so strong a conviction that, in consequence of my absence, you will have done me the honour to select my name, that it is upon a charge of forgery I intend to have you apprehended, and to take you up to London in my company and that of a policeman."

During this speech the varying expressions on Le Roux's face would have formed an interesting study to the physiognomist or the artist—at first, assumed indifference, changing to surprise, anxiety, and ill-concealed alarm—then astonishment and fear, merging in a state of bewildered terror, which again gave place to an astute, subtle look, as an idea occurred to him which might yet interpose to save him from the utter ruin to which the supernatural discovery, as it ap-

peared to him, of his intended and partially executed villainy exposed him. As soon as D'Almayne had ended, Le Roux turned to him, and said in a low, calm tone:

"You are, without any exception, Mr. D'Almayne, the cleverest man, for your years, that I have ever met with in our profession. I don't say it to flatter you, sir; but I say it because it is my deliberate conviction. One of your strong points is your clear good sense, and it is to that I am now about to appeal. You have, how, I cannot divine, got me completely in your power, and, knowing or suspecting all you say you do, it is useless for me to attempt to deceive you; it is clear you can ruin me if you choose; but how will it advantage you to do so? or, rather, how can you expose me without exciting a host of unpleasant inquiries about yourself? I presume you scarcely wish your connection with the gaming-house in J—— Street published to the world at large, nor would you like too much revealed concerning the private history of the directors and general management of the railway company, and yet I don't see how you could place me in the hands of justice without my enlightening the public on some of these points. As I am sure you are aware of the force of these remarks, I need say no more; but I put it to you, as a sensible man of the world, will it not be better for me to pay you that £1,000, which, I daresay you can remember, I am indebted to you, for 'value received,' we'll say, and for you to forget that you happened to meet me here to-day?" As he spoke, he fixed his sharp cunning glance upon D'Almayne, as though he would read his inmost thoughts; but even to such an old hand as Le Roux the gambler, Horace's expression was a sealed book. But he was not long in doubt as to his appeal; for in his usual tone of calm sarcasm, Horace replied:

"Cleverly put, Monsieur Le Roux; but there are two important flaws in your argument. In the first place, your offer proves the truth of my suspicions, only that, as you are not usually famous for the liberality of your disposition, its amount satisfies me that I have rather under than overrated the sum of which you have contrived to gain possession. As to any accusations you can bring against me, I care little or nothing for them; they may be true, but you have damaged your own character so deeply that no one will believe you. You may assert that I am part proprietor of the gambling-house, and you may call Guillemard to prove it; I shall deny the fact, and he will back my denial. You will assert, also, that I have got up this nefarious railroad speculation in order to levant with the capital as soon as I could obtain a sufficient amount to gratify my cupidity; I shall reply that you have done what you accuse me of intending to do, and that I have been the means of bringing you to justice. You will adduce in proof of your assertion, the fact that I introduced you as a director under the feigned name of Vondenthaler; I shall re-

but this accusation by declaring that I had always known you as Vondenthaler, which I believe to be your true name; and that your identity with Le Roux, the croupier, was never even suspected by me. Of course, in these instances, I shall be swearing falsely; you, truly; nevertheless, I shall come off with flying colours, and you will be transported. 'Telle est la vie!' Would you oblige me by ringing that bell twice, for the policeman?"

The transition, from the assurance of successful cunning, to self-distrust, anxiety, rage, despair, which flitted across the sharp but expressive face of Le Roux, showed how strongly D'Almayne's words had agitated him. For a moment, he stood trembling in every limb, clenching his hands until the nails dug into the flesh; then, carried away by his overpowering terror, he flung himself at Horace D'Almayne's feet, exclaiming—

"For God's sake, Mr. D'Almayne, have pity on me! I am an old man, sir; older than I seem. I am sixty-five next month; I am, indeed; and I have led such a wretched, miserable life! I have always been somebody's tool, somebody's slave. Sir, I have been for years the victim of monomania: as a very young man I lost every halfpenny I possessed (and that was enough to have secured me a competence in some respectable line of life) at the gaming-table; and since that time I have been haunted by the idea that, by intensely studying, and constantly calculating the chances, I should discover some infallible system by which I could not only retrieve my losses, but realise a large fortune. Over and over again have I tried, and over again have I failed; until, at last, experience has brought some little wisdom, even to such a miserable fool as I have proved myself, and I have given up all attempts at discovering a system; but, sir, when this last hope failed me, the little honesty I had left deserted me, and you have divined the result. Mr. D'Almayne, I have a wife and three little innocent children at Brussels; they were to join me in America if this attempt (which they only know of as a mercantile speculation) had proved successful. If I am sent out of this country as a convicted felon, it will break my wife's heart; and my little children will be left to starve. Mr. D'Almayne, for the love of Heaven, have pity, if not on me, on them!"

During this appeal Horace remained in an easy and fashionable attitude, with his back against the closed door which detained his captive, and the points of his white and taper fingers inserted in his trousers pockets; at its conclusion, he said, in his usual cool and indifferent manner, "I think, my good friend, you began this harangue with a complimentary appeal to my common sense; not wishing to discredit your flattering opinion, let me ask you, is it likely that, having toiled and schemed for the last twelve months to bring these two projects

of the gambling-house and the railroad company into working (and paying) order, I should allow you to go quietly to America, carrying with you the fruits of my labour, forethought, and sagacity, merely because, when your last subterfuge has failed you, you whine out a beggar's petition about the love of Heaven, and a wife and three children? Bah! it is childish, it is really too absurd! Still, for old acquaintance sake, I do not want to be hard on you; and if you will do exactly as I shall propose, perhaps there may still remain some middle course by which such ununcomfortable result as transportation for life may be spared you. What say you?" Poor wretch! his crime discovered, its fearful penalty awaiting him, and the "tender mercies of the wicked" his only hope and refuge—with remorse for the past, and despair for the future, rending his very heart asunder—what remained for him but to give himself up, soul and body, as the dupe, tool and agent of Horace D'Almayne?

Long and earnest was their conference: the valise was opened; money and papers produced and examined; accounts gone into; arrangements for the present, and schemes for the future, discussed and agreed upon. The result may be summed up in a few words: when the New York packet sailed, at eight o'clock that evening, Le Roux had taken possession of his berth, with his valise considerably lightened; and Horace D'Almayne, having seen his associate safely out of the country, departed by the last train which left for London, some ten thousand pounds richer than he had been on his arrival that morning in the good city of Liverpool!

CHAPTER LIX.

HORACE WEATHERS THE STORM.

MR. CRANE obtained nothing by his visit to the city, except a bad cold, caught in a draughty omnibus, in which he rode because he was too stingy to indulge himself with a cab; all the men he wished to see were out of town, or attending some special appointment, and no information could he obtain in regard to the security of his property invested in the "Direct Overland Route to India Railway" shares, so he returned home in a worse temper than any in which Kate had yet seen him, and led her such a life of misery during the evening, by means of a process termed in the "patois" of black kitchens and washhouses, "nagging" at her, that when she retired to her own room, at ten o'clock, she was so utterly worn out that she sat down and cried, from sheer nervous depression. If Arthur Hazlehurst could have seen her then, he would scarcely have recognised in that shrinking, trembling,

spirit-broken woman, the proud, cold, haughty, beautiful Kate, who had won his heart but to trample on it in her career of worldly ambition;—if he had heard her broken, faltering prayer that death might soon relieve her from the daily, hourly martyrdom of striving to render respect and obedience to a man whom she did not hate, only because hate involves some degree of equality, and Mr. Crane she too utterly despised;—if Arthur could have witnessed her total prostration, mental and bodily, he would scarcely have retained his hard thoughts of her, although the gentler ones which might have replaced them, would, in their way, have been exquisitely painful to him.

The next morning, Mr. Crane's cold was worse, and Kate recommended him to dispatch a note to his man of business, asking him to come to Park Lane; which advice, being good and sensible, was, of course, rejected, and Kate was asked whether, not content with impoverishing him by her extravagance, and by the burden of supporting her pauper relatives, she wished to ruin him quite, by inducing him to neglect the management of his property. Having delivered himself of this kind and judicious remark, so well calculated to call forth and rivet the affection of the wife of his bosom, this noble specimen of "Man, the great master of all," took 'bus for the city, to clip the wings which, he feared, his riches were about to make for themselves. His man of business was again "in court," and uncome-at-able; but when he reached the office of the "Overland Route to India Railway Company," he found there Mr. Bonus Nugget, in as near an approach to a rage as was at all compatible with his high standing and intense respectability; a frame of mind in which Mr. Crane speedily sympathised, when the disastrous intelligence was communicated to him that a sum of nearly £18,000 had been drawn out of their bankers' hands, in the joint names of Horace D'Almayne and Herr Vondenthaler, the former being abroad, and no trace to be discovered of the latter. Poor Mr. Crane! he loved his money dearly: he could not bear to part with it even to pay a bill; and, as to giving it in charity ("fooling it away" was the term he applied to such senseless squandering), that was an unbusiness-like weakness of which he had never been guilty; and now to have his idol thus rudely torn from him, oh! it was too cruel. If Nugget had not been present, he would have sat down and cried, for his sympathy with, and pity for, himself was unbounded; but, as he was not alone, he swore instead, for the sake of appearances; but he did not swear well; for to anathematize, "con brio," demands more energy than Mr. Crane possessed. Having sworn, however, to the best of his ability, he and Mr. Nugget went into the affairs of the company together, and really, according to the latter gentleman's showing, the speculation appeared to be progressing so well that these ministers of

Mammon agreed the defalcation must be made good, and the public be kept in the dark as to aught being "rotten in the state of Denmark." So, strange and mysterious proceedings were entered upon; bills for large sums of money, drawn by Mr. Nugget, and endorsed by Mr. Crane, and cheques bearing that gentleman's signature, were deposited with the company's bankers to replace the £18,000 with which Herr Vondenthaler had eloped; also astute detectives were placed on that gentleman's track, and desired to look out for Horace D'Almayne, should he venture to set his foot on English soil —an imprudence which Mr. Crane declared, confidentially, he was sure he never would be fool enough to commit. For once, however, that worthy man's sagacity was at fault, as he was informed, on his return home, that a gentleman was waiting to see him in his library; and greatly was he astonished, and, if the truth must be told, considerably alarmed also, when the stranger proved to be none other than the unblushing Horace himself. Their interview was long, but it ended much more agreeably than it began; for Horace, first clearing himself from the imputation of having had any hand in the railway company defalcation, by proving that, at the time the cheque was drawn and presented, he was at Ostend, gradually elicited from Mr. Crane the fact of the anonymous letter, which, when it was with much reluctance submitted to him, he at once recognised to be in the handwriting of the perfidious Vondenthaler. Having produced satisfactory evidence of this fact also, he produced certain bills, promising to pay on demand, at an early date, the cash which he had proceeded to Holland to obtain.

This palpable proof of his factotum's integrity quieted all Mr. Crane's suspicions, and D'Almayne was from that moment reinstated in his patron's good opinion. But now, according to his own showing, this excellent young man was himself the victim of circumstances. His name having been the name selected by the forger Vondenthaler, he felt that he ought to withdraw from the railway company altogether; if he remained he should always be an object of suspicion. He knew the nature of city capitalists well; they had not all such enlightened views, such generous souls, as his excellent friend, Mr. Crane; besides, he could not reconcile it with his honour to remain a director without paying, in ready money, his share of the loss they had sustained by the rascality of Vondenthaler—a man who, he blushed to reflect, he had introduced. He would most gladly pay his share that minute, but he honestly confessed he had not the money ready. He knew what he would do; he would sell his estate in Normandy—England was the country of his adoption; if he could not live there, life would become a burden to him. No! he would go to France, sell his estate, and, with the proceeds, return to redeem his honour. But it would be at a sacrifice; he must

part with his shares in the Overland Railway, shares that were certain to become so fine an investment: did Mr. Crane know anyone who would like to purchase them? Mr. Crane paused, considered, and then, in what he considered to be an off-hand, indifferent manner, though eager rapacity twinkled in his cunning eye, and quivered on his trembling lip, he replied, "If it will be any accommodation to you, D'Almayne, I don't know that I should object to take your shares myself; and in regard to your Normandy estate, it seems a pity you should be forced to sell it, at a time, perhaps, when you may not obtain its proper value. You have the title-deeds in England; suppose we look through them together I have lent you money on them already, and might, perhaps, be willing to advance you more on the same terms—six per cent., I think? this would afford you time to look about you, and to sell your estate, if you must part with it, to better advantage." Horace D'Almayne's gratitude was quite touching to witness: so was his manner at dinner, which Mr. Crane insisted upon his stopping to partake of. Kate was greatly astonished, and not best pleased, to find him reinstated in his former high position in her husband's favour; but he treated her with such respectful deference, and his conversation was so clever and interesting, that it was impossible for her not to contrast his social advantages with those of Mr. Crane, which did not gain by the comparison. Kate was nervous and unhappy, a state of mind in which kindness, or its reverse, is felt with a morbid degree of acuteness; and just as much as Mr. Crane's peevish irritability oppressed and annoyed her, did Horace D'Almayne's soft voice, polished manners, and considerate tact, calm and soothe her, and reinvigorate her drooping spirits. If Kate Crane had a heart to win, now was the time to gain it. Horace D'Almayne was by no means a tyro in such cases; he perceived the situation at a glance, and availed himself of it to the utmost. When he rose to take leave, Kate, knowing to what his departure would expose her, and being, as we have before explained, overwrought and ill, forgot her self-control so far as to observe, "It is very early; are you obliged to go so soon?" The moment she had spoken the words she would have given worlds to have recalled them. Her husband's fretful observation, "Really, my dear, it's past ten o'clock,"—and D'Almayne's look of triumph, ill-concealed under the guise of polite, conventional regret at being obliged to leave such kind friends, showed her the indiscretion of which she had been guilty. But, ere she could sufficiently collect her ideas to attempt to redeem the false step she had made, Horace had bowed himself out. Then Mr. Crane took up his parable, and drew a feeble picture of a vicious young wife, who, possessing a sapient, tender, and judicious husband, in the prime of life, laid herself out to attract the attentions of, if he might be allowed the expression, mere boys, who, for-

tunately for her, had too strongly innate ideas of—yes, of propriety and morality, to avail themselves of her very reprehensible levity, etc., etc. Poor, proud Kate! she bore it all silently—her will was now as strong for good as it had been for evil, and duty sealed her lips, though she suffered none the less for her silence. Saint Bartholomew was flayed alive, yet we nowhere read that the good man was garrulous under the operation. When D'Almayne quitted Park Lane he returned to his former lodgings, and, taking pen, ink, and paper, wrote the following note to the waiter at Liverpool:—

"A well-wisher of yours has much pleasure in enclosing for your acceptance a £10 note; should any impertinent inquiries be made in regard to the gentlemen who have visited your hotel lately, he feels sure you know your duty too well, as a faithful servant of the establishment, to reply to them in any way which might injure the interests of your employer or your own! in which case you shall hear again from

"MORE WHERE THIS COMES FROM."

Having despatched this Machiavellian document, Horace the indefatigable sought and obtained interviews with Guillemard, Bonus Nugget, and Captain O'Brien, from all of whom he obtained useful information; then proceeded to the gaming-house in J—— Street, where he found the Russian Prince Ratrapski, unprofitably sober, and playing for sovereigns only. To him, therefore, he devoted himself with so much success that between five and six on the following morning the Russian was taken home in a cab, considerably disguised in liquor, having lost above £20,000 to the bank. It is a laudable practice of some pastors, to exhort the members of their flock to chew the cud of reflection before they retire to rest, and so to strike a balance of the good and evil deeds which, in the course of that day's transactions, they may have performed. Now, although Horace D'Almayne had either no conscience at all, or one of such an elastic material that its expansive limits were still undiscovered; although, moreover, if he belonged to a flock, it must have been composed of the very blackest sheep known to zoology, he nevertheless conformed to this good habit of self-examination; and on the night, or rather morning in question, his meditations assumed some such shape as the following:—

"'Voyons, Horace, mon ami!' You have not been slothful, what have you accomplished? the affair of Le Roux safely got over, without the fact of our having encountered each other being suspected; good so far: but the interview might transpire at any moment! I dare not remain here very many days, scarcely hours longer.—Crane, ha! ha! there is no pleasure in duping him, he is so dense a fool; but if there is no pleasure there is profit, which suits my book equally well—what between the shares and the Normandy mortgage, I shall

draw £5,000 of him: to-morrow morning I must obtain the money.—Then the Russian; I did that neatly; my share will be £7,000; though I shall claim more, for it was all my management—yes, when I turn my back upon this 'triste' and mercenary country, I shall be able to carry at least £30,000 with me." He paused, reflected for some minutes, then continued: "With such a capital as that to start with, in America a man with a head on his shoulders may do and become almost anything, president, perhaps, who knows? She is ambitious, I can read it in her haughty glance, her queenly step; such a career might tempt her!" Again he mused, but the working of his features showed how deeply his feelings were excited. Rousing himself with a start, he exclaimed, passionately, "I shall fail with her, I know; I feel it!—she does not love me, nor, excepting at times when I make her feel my power, does she even hate me; I wish she did, for then I should have more hope—why should she be so indifferent to me? I have played my game well and carefully; if I had it to play over again, I do not see how I could mend my hand. That declaration, perhaps, was premature; yet with any other woman, though it failed at the time, it would have told afterwards. I wonder whether she had any attachment before she married Crane? that cousin, Arthur Hazlehurst, perhaps; if so, she loves him still; in that case, I need not seek far for revenge, even if she again disdains my passion. Married to Crane and loving her cousin, she must bear about a living hell in her own bosom. Strange the power she has over me; I really and honestly believe I am as completely in love with her as if I were a green boy of eighteen! if I had known her five years sooner, before I became so thoroughly and hopelessly involved, I might have been very different, who can say? That old man, Le Roux, was right—the life of an adventurer is an unsatisfactory affair, either to look back upon, or, worse still, to look forward to; but so it is with every phase of life, when you come to know it well and examine it closely. For what are we placed here? nay, what are we ourselves? have we lived before? shall we live again? can spirit exist without matter? who knows? The religionist? bah! a set of either feeble-minded enthusiasts, bigoted to childish superstitions, or canting hypocrites, who assume piety as a cloak beneath which to conceal their vices, as the devil is said to lurk behind the cross. Who then? philosophers, metaphysicians, your men of science? solemn pedants, dreamy mystics, vain fools, who, because they have invented a rushlight, fancy they can illuminate the universe. Ah, charlatans all of them; an adventurer's career is preferable to a life devoted to such dreary mummeries. I may succeed with the fascinating Kate yet; she was singularly amiable last night; and if so, Horace, 'mon ami,' the line you have selected will not prove such an unprofitable one, after all."

CHAPTER LX.

ANXIETY.

HARRY COVERDALE was blessed with an iron constitution, or as he would himself have expressed it, the good keep and training he had come in for ever since he was a colt, had put real hard flesh and muscle on him, so that take him when you would, he was always in working order. Thus, although the hurried journey he had performed with a broken arm and a series of bruises from head to foot, would have stretched most men on a bed of sickness, and although Scalpel Gouger, M.D., elongated his already sufficiently lengthened visage on beholding his condition, and prophesied results of which lock-jaw was by no means one of the most terrible, Harry yet experienced no ill effects from his imprudence. His stiffness wore off after a day or two, the bruises disappeared one by one, and the broken bone began to re-unite as quickly as in the nature of things was possible. But although his bodily ailments gave him little cause for uneasiness, his mind remained a prey to anxiety, grief, and remorse; for Alice, his young wife—the depth and strength of his love for whom he became painfully aware of, now that, as it appeared, he was about to lose her—lay at the point of death. The demon of fever had fixed his burning fingers upon her, and held her in an iron grasp which no mortal powers seemed able to unclasp. When Harry arrived, Alice did not recognise him, her state alternating between attacks of delirium, in which she talked with the wildest incoherence, and intervals of stupor, during each of which she lay perfectly unconscious and prostrated by the violence of the paroxysm which had preceded it. Poor Harry lost not an instant in making his way to her room, disregarding the housekeeper's entreaties to wait for Dr. Gouger's return. When he entered, Alice was sitting up in bed, with flushed cheeks and eyes brilliant with the unnatural lustre of feverish excitement, and talking with the utmost volubility; at first he fancied she recognised him, for regarding him earnestly, she exclaimed—

"So you have come at last, have you?—and now tell me quickly, what news do you bring me?" Without waiting a reply, she continued: "Why don't you speak? No news, do you say?—it is false, you are trying to deceive me; I can read it in your face.—What! have they met already? then Harry is killed. Ah! I knew it, I knew it! D'Almayne is a dead shot—Alfred Courtland told me so in that letter.—What did you mutter?—an accident—it was no accident. D'Almayne

has shot him—killed him in a duel; but it was my fault—I made him angry—I drove him to go up to London—it is I who have murdered him. Oh, Harry, my own loved husband, if I could but have died for you!—shall I never see him again?" She continued wildly: "Ah, yes, I must, I will! Let me go to him, I say"; and as she spoke she attempted to get out of bed. Throwing his uninjured arm round her, Harry prevented her from accomplishing her purpose, though she struggled so violently that he was obliged to obtain the assistance of the hired nurse who had been recommended by the medical man.

"Alice, love, look at me," he said tenderly. "I am safe—I am here by your side—I will not leave you. Do you not know me?"

Gazing at him wildly, she exclaimed in a tone of horror—"Know you? yes, I know you, fiend! demon! you are Horace D'Almayne! Do you come here with my husband's blood fresh upon your hands, and dare to insult me by your detestable caresses?—are not you afraid that the ground will open and swallow you? Leave me instantly, or, weak woman as I am, I will take my vengeance into my own hands, and stab you to the heart!"

This idea that Harry was D'Almayne occurred to Alice's mind whenever she beheld her husband, and was the source of so much pain and distress to him, that for both their sakes Mr. Gouger forbade him to enter her room for two or three days, by which time he trusted the delusion might have worn itself out. The prohibition was a judicious one, as it enabled Harry to obtain the rest he so much required; and when, after an interval of nearly a week, he again returned to his wife's apartment, although she was still unable to recognise him, she no longer evinced any repugnance on his approach. Her fits of delirium became less violent and frequent, but she appeared to be gradually sinking into a state of prostration, mental and bodily, which to the eye of the medical man was even more alarming. Her next fancy was that Harry was her brother Arthur; she talked to him of old scenes and recollections, of their childhood, and half broke poor Harry's heart by deploring in the most pathetic terms the loss of her husband's affections, which she declared Arabella Crofton had stolen from her.

"Ah, Arthur," she would exclaim, "it is cruel of her, because, you know, I loved him so very, very much! Until I saw him I meant never to marry; I fancied I could not bear to leave dearest mamma, and Emily, and Tom, and all of you. But it was of no use: he was so good and kind, and brave, and handsome; and though he was a little rough at first, I soon saw what a noble, gentle heart his rough manner concealed, and when I found he loved me (for he did love me

once, Arthur), how could I help loving him with my whole soul?"

Poor Harry, as she thus wildly talked, would lean over and kiss her pale, worn cheeks, and tell her he was her own loving husband, and doted on her, and her only—that he never cared for any other woman, and she would smile faintly, and reply—

"No, Arthur, Harry would not say that; he loved her before he knew me, over in Italy; Alfred Courtland told me all about it—how they ran away together, and all."

As she uttered these words Coverdale started, and a shade passed across his brow; not heeding it, Alice continued:—

"Oh! she is a dreadful woman, and so clever; all the foolish things I did to pique Harry, in order to regain his affection, she showed them up to him in a false light, and made him believe me as wicked as herself, and she so stole his love away from poor, poor Alice"; then she would turn her face from him, and wail feebly like an unhappy child. At other times she would burst into the most violent self-reproaches.

"Yes, I deserve it all," she would exclaim; "I deserve to lose his affection; what right had I to expect him to give up all his manly sports, which had made him so brave and strong, to sit at home with a poor foolish girl like me, who have not even wit enough to amuse him; I who should have been too proud even of his slightest notice, and to thwart him and try to make him do foolish and wrong things, and to lose my temper, and grieve and wrong him,—oh! how wrong and wicked of me!—I must have been mad to do it; and now he has left me, gone with Arabella Crofton to Italy, and I shall never see him again, never!" and then she would break off and resume her weeping.

And so the weary days passed on; Emily, who had come over as soon as she had heard of her sister's illness, was an indefatigable nurse, and she and Harry sat up with the patient on alternate nights, Coverdale having on one occasion discovered the hired nurse fast asleep when she ought to have been wide awake and giving Alice her medicine. As soon as his arm ceased to cause him such violent pain, Harry's attendance by his wife's bedside became unremitting, and night after night he sent Emily to bed, and remained watching Alice's broken slumbers, or to the best of his power soothing her, during her fits of delirious excitement. Could those who had known Coverdale as the rough and eager sportsman, or the just but stern and inflexible magistrate, have seen him then, as (heedless of the pain of his injured arm) he tended with all a woman's devotion, and more than woman's strength and judgment, the sick couch of his (as at times he feared) dying wife, they would have been unable to recognise the same individual whose nature they, in their hasty judgment, had so wholly mistaken. His dying wife! ah! how the idea

haunted him. Alice, his loved one, would die; she would be taken from him while they were both so young, and he would have to live on during long, dreary years alone!—alone! yes, but how bitterly did he feel the hope-crushing significance of that cruel word! true his married life had been a somewhat stormy one, still it had taught him the charm of that spiritual companionship with a beloved and loving woman, without which a man's best nature remains incompletely developed. To feel a deep, true, and unselfish affection for an object worthy of so precious a boon, raises a man's whole moral nature, and (if he is good for anything) makes him wiser and better; to be loved in return renders him happy despite the toils and trials of life.

Of these great truths, the events which we have in the course of this history endeavoured to pourtray, had caused Harry to acquire a painful consciousness; he had become aware also of the causes which had hitherto militated against the full amount of the happiness to be enjoyed in such a position. He had learned from poor Alice's delirious confessions both the depth of her attachment to him, and the fact that experience had in her case also produced its bitter but salutary fruits. Thus, should she indeed be restored to him, what a bright, enviable future lay extended before them! even as the thought occurred to him his eye fell upon her thin, pale features, her parched lips, sunken cheeks, and the dark, ominous hollows beneath her closed eyes; nay, as she lay motionless, wrapped in a heavy, oppressive slumber, the horrible idea flashed across him that she might be dead already; and with a shudder he placed his hand upon her wrist, to feel the beating of her feeble yet rapid pulse, ere he could satisfy himself that his frightful suspicion was but the offspring of a morbid fancy. Still, the idea had occurred to him, and he could not divest himself of it—what if she should never wake again, or if she should die without any return of reason—die, ignorant of the depth of loving tenderness towards her which filled his breast! Oh! if he could but purchase her life at any sacrifice; there was nothing he would not gladly give up—wealth, position, even his cherished field-sports, everything!—how powerless he was, and how utterly wretched! Accustomed, as he had hitherto been, to rely on his own strength, both of mind and body, to accomplish his wishes, the situation was equally new and painful to him. But Coverdale had a powerful and singularly healthy mind, and even while he smarted under this severe chastening, he recognised the Hand which inflicted it, and the purpose for which it was sent; and, mindful of the lessons of his childhood, the strong man sank upon his knees by the side of his wife's sick couch, and prayed to his Father in Heaven to spare, in His mercy, the one little ewe-lamb, without which he must wear out the rest of his earthly pilgrimage desolate and lonely-hearted.

The crisis of Alice's complaint was now rapidly approaching, and Harry sent for one of the leading London physicians, who, after a careful examination of the patient, and a long and solemn consultation with Dr. Gouger, was pleased to say the latter gentleman had pursued exactly the orthodox method of treatment; that he feared Mrs. Coverdale's state was a very precarious one, but that she could not be in safer hands.

After Sir J. C—— had taken his departure and his fee of fifty guineas, Coverdale, who had sent Emily from Alice's bedside, with strict orders to take a long stroll and refresh herself, was somewhat surprised to see her return in less than half an hour considerably excited, and with a heightened colour, which made her look remarkably pretty. She beckoned Coverdale out of the sick room and then began—

"Oh! Harry, dear, I want to speak to you, please; and you must be good and kind, and not fierce, you know!"

In spite of his heavy heart, Coverdale could not help smiling at his little sister-in-law's address.

"What is it, my dear child," he said, kindly; "I'll promise to behave prettily; my fierceness, as you call it, is tolerably well taken out of me by this time."

"Well, I was walking in the Park, you know," resumed Emily, "and just as I got to Markum's cottage, I perceived a tall, aristocratic-looking young man talking to Mrs. Markum; as soon as she caught sight of me, she exclaimed, 'Here is Miss Hazlehurst, sir; she has just come from the house, and can tell you the last account of poor mistress.' Whereupon the gentleman approached me, and, taking off his hat, said, 'I believe I have the pleasure of addressing a sister of Mrs. Coverdale?' I bowed assent, and he continued, 'My name is Alfred Courtland. I do not know whether Coverdale has told you'—(here he stammered and blushed, so like a frightened girl, that I began to feel quite brave)—'that is, whether you are aware, that it was in my service he met with his accident, and that—that, in fact, I cannot but feel that your sister's illness has been, in great measure, brought on by my folly; the consequence is that ever since I heard of her attack I have been miserable. Coverdale said he would write me word how she was going on, but I suppose in his sorrow and anxiety his promise has escaped his memory. I bore the suspense as long as I was able, until yesterday, hearing by accident that Sir J. C.—— had been sent for, I could stand it no longer; so I put myself into a train the first thing this morning, and came down to learn the truth; may I venture to hope, that, as you are able to leave your sister, her danger has been exaggerated?' Then I told him that dearest Ally was still very ill, but that you were head nurse, and had forced me to come out to get a little air; and I said I was sure you would like to see him. He was dreadfully afraid of intruding, and for some time refused to come, but at last he changed his mind,

and walked home with me; he's in the library, and you will go and see him, there's a dear boy, for he is very unhappy, and I'm sure he's a nice fellow."

At any other time Coverdale would have been amused at the extreme zeal with which Emily had taken up and advocated Lord Alfred's cause, and have teased her about her undisguised admiration of the handsome young peer, but his heart was too heavy for jesting, so he merely replied—"In the library, did you say? it's very good of the boy to take such interest about poor Alice, but he always was kind-hearted. Go to her at once, Emily, dear; she was asleep when you sent for me, but she might wake at any minute, you know—go to her, I won't be away long."

On reaching the library, Coverdale found Lord Alfred awaiting his arrival in an extreme state of nervous trepidation; grasping his hand, Harry shook it warmly, saying—"This is very kind of you, Alfred, my dear boy; you see you find us still anxious; I hope there is no serious cause for alarm, but you know it's a case in which a man can't help feeling very, very anxious."

As Coverdale thus spoke words of encouragement, which his looks and manner, his quivering lip, brimming eye, and the forced cheerfulness of his voice, alike belied, Lord Alfred, more deeply affected than he could have been by the most vehement reproaches, lost all self-control, and, bursting into tears, exclaimed:—

"Do not speak so kindly to me; it kills me. I'd rather by half you would horsewhip me until I could not stand, for that is what I deserve. Oh! what misery my wicked folly has brought about! But for me, you would never have met with this accident, and Mrs. Coverdale would have escaped the anxiety and the shock which has brought on this illness; if I could but do anything to help you or her, I should hate myself less."

Harry approached him and laid his hand on his shoulder.

"Listen to me, my dear boy," he said kindly, but impressively, "these things cannot happen to a man without obliging him to reflect seriously, and, as I hope, to some good purpose; you should not judge of your own conduct, or of anyone's else, simply by results; we are instruments in God's hands to work out His designs; and all that we can do is to make ourselves acquainted with the rules He has laid down for our guidance, and strive to act according to them, but the results are in His hands, and there we must be content to leave them. You have acted foolishly, but you are aware of it, and sorry for it; and in such a case, to look back is worse than useless; the only good in ever recalling the past is that the recollection may guard you against falling again into a similar temptation should such a one come in your way. So much for sermonizing; and now, you say, you want to make yourself

of use, and I can see you mean it. My poor Alice's mother is a great invalid, and the shock of hearing of this affair has made her more ill than usual; she is most anxious about her daughter. Emily—you met Emily?"

"Yes, a most interesting, charming young lady; I knew her directly, from her likeness to poor Mrs. Coverdale," was the reply.

"Well, Emily or I write every day, but the letter takes twelve hours to get there by post; now, Sir J. C.——is coming down this afternoon to see poor Alice again, and Gouger fancies some change is about to take place in her; he supposes the crisis of the complaint is at hand—in fact—" Harry paused, for as he spoke of the approach of the moment in which Alice's sentence for life or death was to declare itself, a choking sensation in his throat deprived him of the power of utterance; trying to conceal his emotion under a feigned cough, he resumed: "Now, if you wish to perform a really kind and good-natured action, will you remain here until the physician has given his opinion, and then take my dog-cart and mare, and drive over to the Grange, and detail his report to Mrs. Hazlehurst? They will give you a kind welcome and a bed, and you can either go to town from thence, or come back and dine and sleep here; you'll not be a bit in the way, and will help to amuse Emily, and tempt her out of the sick room; for the good little girl is so zealous in her attendance on her sister, that I live in constant dread of her knocking up, and then I should have two of them on my hands—what do you say?"

"Say! if you think that by going to the world's end I can be of the smallest use or comfort to you, you have only to speak the word, and I'm off," was the eager reply; then in a plaintive tone, Lord Alfred continued: "Coverdale, are you quite sure you don't hate me for all this misery I've brought upon you?"

"Go into the dining-room and eat some luncheon, you young muff," was the unsentimental reply; "why, you have not a better friend in the world than I am, or at all events a more sincere one, you stupid boy; but come along, I'll send Emily to play hostess, and mind you make her eat well. I know that girl will knock up if she refuses her corn."

The luncheon passed off pleasantly enough—Emily not being overburthened with shyness, and possessing a flow of animal spirits, which even her anxiety for her sister could not wholly overcome, chatted away so pleasantly that Lord Alfred caught the infection, and took his share in the conversation with spirit, so that when the meal was over, they parted mutually pleased. Sir J. C.—— arrived true to his appointed time, examined his patient, looked grave, consulted with Dr. Gouger, and then the two medicos summoned Coverdale. As he entered, the physician, who was a tall, gaunt man, with a

large, sharp nose, raised himself on tiptoe, as if he were trying to fly, then giving it up as hopeless, subsided on his heels again, cleared his throat, stroked his chin, looked at Coverdale as if he wished to feel his pulse or give him a pill, and began in a bland and insinuating tone of voice:

"You are anxious, my dear sir—naturally anxious as to the state in which we (here by a little condescending but patronising pantomimic action he indicated Gouger) have found Mrs. Coverdale?"

Poor Harry, boiling with anxiety and impatience, shot a "Yes, of course," at him as if he had been a partridge. In no way disturbed, however, the autocrat of all the pill-boxes continued—

"The duration of your justifiable anxiety, my dear sir, will not be much further prolonged; in less than twelve hours the complaint will have reached its crisis, and the result will not be long in revealing itself to educated eyes."

"And you think the result will be favourable?" stammered Harry, his stalwart frame trembling from head to foot with the emotion he was unable to conceal. "You do not think your patient worse than when you last saw her?"

The physician paused; then replied, gravely:—"It would be mistaken kindness to disguise from you the truth, sir. Mrs. Coverdale is in a most precarious state—her life hangs on a thread; I do not say that she must die, but it is my duty to tell you that it is more than probable that she may do so; the next twelve hours will probably decide. She is now apparently sinking into a heavy slumber—from this she may never awake, or it may be succeeded by fits of delirium, from which she would be unable to rally."

Harry shuddered, then asked:—"And what would be a favourable symptom?"

"If Mrs. Coverdale should wake free from delirium, so as to be able to recognise those about her, you may reckon that the fever has worn itself out; and the only thing then to dread will be her extreme weakness; in that case every effort must be made to keep her up; give her port wine, or even brandy, a teaspoonful every five minutes if she appears faint; but my friend, Mr. Gouger, is quite aware of the proper measures to be taken: she cannot be in better hands."

CHAPTER LXI.

ALICE APPOINTS HER SUCCESSOR.

THAT supposed great arbiter of life and death, the London physician, had departed, leaving at least one aching heart behind him; for Coverdale could not disguise from himself that, although Sir J. C.——had not actually pronounced Alice's sentence in plain words, his intention had been to prepare him for the worst. In pity to Emily's youth and warm affection for her sister, he did not acquaint her with the immediate proximity of the crisis on which depended their loved one's fate and his happiness; nor, not placing any great reliance on Lord Alfred Courtland's power of keeping a secret, did he enlighten him either; but he made some excuse for detaining him and offering him a bed, so that he might be unable to start on his mission to Hazlehurst Grange until next morning.

As the evening advanced, Alice, who had been alternately dozing and waking up to bewail herself in wild, incoherent sentences, fell into a deep, heavy sleep.

Dr. Gouger, having yielded to Harry's earnest request that he would return and sleep at Coverdale Park, set out to pay two or three indispensable visits, promising to be back in good time.

About eleven o'clock, Emily used every argument she could think of to try and induce Harry, who had sat up during the last three nights, to allow her to take his place, but in vain; and reading in his pale, anxious countenance, that his mind was made up, she contented herself with obtaining his promise that if any change took place, she should be summoned immediately, went to bed, and dreamed that Lord Alfred Courtland was a Persian prince, disguised as a physician who had brought a talisman to cure Alice, for which he was to be appropriately rewarded with her (the dreamer's) own fair hand and the Archbishopric of Canterbury.

Emily had scarcely retired when Dr. Gouger returned. Alice was still rapt in a heavy sleep, from which he gave strict orders she should not be aroused.

"Who sits up with her?" he inquired.

"The nurse, of course," returned Harry; "that is, if snoring in an arm-chair deserves to be called so; and, until she is out of danger, or, if it should be so, until God may see fit to take her from me, I will never leave her!"

"Well, then, if she awakes of herself before morning, be very careful not to startle or alarm her. Watch her eyes

closely, and see if she recognises you; if she does so, that will be a favourable symptom; if she speaks to you, control your feelings, and answer her quietly and calmly; then instantly send for me. I think you perfectly understand? Well, then, as I've ridden a good many miles to-day, and have even a longer round to take to-morrow, I'll go and lie down. I shall not undress, so I can be with our patient the moment you send for me."

Thus saying, the doctor, who was a short, plump, florid little man, with a plain face preserved from insignificance by a pair of bright, keen eyes, and a magnificent forehead, yawned twice, and betook himself to the spare room allotted to him.

Twelve o'clock! Alice still asleep! The nurse having arranged a formidable line of medicine bottles ready for use, produces a well-thumbed volume from her pocket, and adjusting her spectacles, sits down to read by the night-lamp. One o'clock! The nurse, after many fruitless attempts to keep up appearances, and delude Harry into the belief that she is wide awake, begins to nod over her book, occasionally varying the performance by trying to swallow a suppressed snore, and choking in the attempt. Two o'clock! No change in the patient; but the nurse, who during the last half-hour has settled down into a deep and undisguisable sleep, begins to snore so loudly that Coverdale, afraid of her disturbing Alice, takes her by the shoulder, and leads her quietly, but unresistingly, into the dressing-room, and seats her on a sofa; to which discipline, the nurse, who has once or twice before experienced the force of Harry's quiet manner, submits with a lamb-like meekness and docility, of which those who had seen her tyrannizing in the sick chambers of her poorer clients would scarcely have deemed her capable. Three o'clock! How long the hours seem, and how dreary! The stillness—broken only by the measured breathing of the patient, and the distant snoring of the banished nurse—the deep, solemn stillness of a country house at night, becomes painfully oppressive to the overwrought senses of the watcher. Will the crisis never arrive? Alice moves slightly, and moans in her sleep. Harry trembles from head to foot. Is she about to wake? Will she recognise him? No!—she sinks again into a deep, heavy slumber, and Harry breathes a sigh of relief and of thankfulness that the fearful moment is again postponed. Four o'clock! The dim grey light of dawn begins to peep in through the opening in the shutters, causing the lamp to shed lurid, flickering rays around the sick room, and thus adding to, rather than diminishing, the darkness. How cold it has become! and how every nerve and fibre in Harry's injured arm aches and throbs! What an eternity of anguish appears to be condensed into a few minutes of severe bodily pain!

Hark! what is that low, wailing sound outside the window? He starts, and turns pale! Why do those foolish, hateful

legends of Banshees, throng and crowd into his brain? Why does he remember with shivering dread that old wife's tale of a white lady who weeps and wrings her hands before the death of any member of the Coverdale family? He laughed at it as a boy, and dressed himself in white to frighten the maids. He cannot laugh at it now! Again it comes, louder and more prolonged! but he knows this time that it is the howling of a dog—the King Charles's spaniel, Alice's pet, which he has been obliged to have tied up, lest it might disturb her; but hitherto it had borne its confinement quietly. Why should it howl so dismally to-night? Did any strange instinct warn it of its mistress's danger? Ah! that word—danger!—yes, a danger from which all his deep, fervent love, and his unequalled manly strength, were alike powerless to shield her. How crushed, and helpless, and miserable, well-nigh despairing, he feels! And yet are they not both in the hands of a merciful Father? God's will be done! but as the words of resignation pass his lips, the big tears roll down his cheeks as the recollection of all that he might be resigning wrung his loving breast. Covering his eyes with his hand, he strove to shut out all thought, all feeling! How long he remained in this position he never knew; but as soon as he removed his hand, it struck him that Alice had changed her attitude. Shading his eyes from the glare of the lamp, he gazed earnestly at her. Yes, she had moved, and surely she was awake. While he yet looked, unable to trust the evidence of his senses, a soft, faint voice, scarcely above a whisper, pronounced his name: so low was the sound that, fancying it might be a delusion of his overwrought senses, Harry bent down his head, as he asked, in a gentle tone of voice, "Alice, darling, are you awake? Did you call me?"

For a moment there was no reply; then the same gentle voice whispered, "Harry, dear, you have been away a long, long time."

As she spoke she tried to raise her arm to draw his face nearer; but the wasted muscles refused to do their duty, and the poor, thin, almost transparent, hand dropped powerless beside her.

"I am very weak, Harry, love," she said: then, with an effort at recollection, she added: "Where am I?—here, at home? Have I been ill long?"

"You have been very ill, my own darling; but you will soon get well now. Don't try to talk yet. I will fetch you a soothing draught, and then you must endeavour to go to sleep again."

Fearful of over-exciting her, he rose to call the nurse. As he turned to leave her for this purpose, Alice again stretched out her hand to detain him.

"Harry, love, do not go away, please. I will do everything you tell me, but I shall die if I lose you again."

Harry stopped, and kissed her pale, thin cheek.

"I am only going to call the nurse," he said. "I will never leave you any more, dearest!"

Alice faintly endeavoured to return his caress, and sank back exhausted on her pillow.

Harry roused the still sleeping nurse, and despatched her to summon Dr. Gouger. Then returning to his wife's bedside, he took her thin hand in his; and as his affectionate pressure was feebly returned, the hope that Alice might be restored to him—a hope which that night of anxious watching had nearly destroyed—began once more to reanimate him.

Dr. Gouger, accustomed to be called up at all hours of the night, made his appearance in an incredibly short space of time. As he approached the bed, Alice perceived him, and smiled faintly in token of recognition—a favourable symptom, at which the doctor nodded approval. Having made a careful examination of the patient he gave her a draught. Then saying, "Now try and go to sleep, my dear madam, and I trust to find you much refreshed to-morrow morning," he turned to leave the room.

Harry followed him to the door.

"Well?" he said in a tone of the deepest anxiety.

"The disease has worn itself out. Mrs. Coverdale is free from fever, and the only thing we have now to fear is weakness," was the doctor's reply. "She must be kept perfectly quiet both in mind and body for some days. When she wakes in the morning, throw a cape or something over that arm of yours; it might give her a shock if she were to perceive it suddenly. It is a very favourable symptom her having recovered consciousness so completely—in fact, the case is going on as well as, under the circumstances, I conceive to be possible."

"Thank God!" was all the reply Harry could make; but as Alice, with her hand in his, fell into a sound, refreshing slumber, his whole soul poured itself out in silent but heartfelt thanksgiving to the Father of all mercies, who had accepted his penitence, and again entrusted to his care the tender flower which, in his inconsiderate carelessness, he had once neglected.

When Emily came down to breakfast on the following morning, she quite started with pleased surprise to perceive the bright, happy expression of her brother-in-law's countenance. "I need not ask whether Alice is better," she began; "I can read it in your face. But has any great change taken place since yesterday?"

In the reply to her question, Harry told her all—told her even more than he had ever confessed to himself—how, day by day, his hopes had diminished and his fears increased, until, after the physician's caution on the previous morning, he had made up his mind that the medical men considered Alice dying; how he had concealed from her that the crisis of

the complaint was at hand; and how he had passed the night in an agony of trembling expectation, longing for and yet dreading the moment in which she should awake; together with his delight when he heard her pronounce his name.

Lord Alfred Courtland set off in high glee for Hazlehurst Grange, certain of a hearty welcome, as bearer of such good tidings, and happier than he had felt for the last six months.

A week passed away. For two or three days Alice appeared to progress favourably—as favourably as even her husband's anxiety could desire. She knew every one, and conversed reasonably upon all subjects; but with the return of consciousness, a settled melancholy appeared to have taken possession of her. This, together with her extreme weakness, gave uneasiness alike to her indefatigable nurses, Harry and Emily, and to Dr. Gouger. Taking Harry aside one morning, he began—

"There are symptoms about Mrs. Coverdale which I cannot understand, and which appear to me more mental than bodily. They are retarding her recovery; and if you could ascertain the cause, and were able to remove it, I do not hesitate to tell you that you would prove a more effectual physician than I, or anyone else, can be to her; but you must bear in mind her extreme debility; she is not fit to discuss any exciting topic at present."

"Then how would you recommend me to proceed?" inquired Harry, the doctor's warning having impressed him with two diametrically opposite ideas: first, that it behoved him to ascertain whether anything, and (if anything) what, was preying upon his wife's mind; and, secondly, that by so doing he should probably lead her to talk on some exciting subject, which, in her present weak state, was the thing of all others to be avoided. How were these difficulties to be reconciled?

Dr. Gouger's answer did not tend greatly to elucidate matters.

"Really, my dear sir, that is a point on which I can give you no advice. In the treatment of all bodily ailments, I, with all due deference to my professional brethren, consider myself as competent as any man; but were I so far to overstep my proper province as to attempt to 'minister to a mind diseased,' as our great poet has it, I should be guilty of unpardonable presumption. No, my dear sir, I have given you the suggestion, and must leave it to your sound judgment how far, or in what way, it may be desirable to act upon it."

Poor Harry! just the very points upon which he felt most incompetent to form an opinion, were those on which he was called upon to decide and act; but Harry had one adviser which never failed him—his own simple, straightforward common sense; and to that, and the so-called chapter of accidents, he resolved to trust.

During the remainder of that day, however, the aforesaid

chapter did not afford him the opportunity he sought for. Alice appeared weak and depressed, and more inclined to sleep than to converse. On the following morning she seemed a degree stronger and less disinclined to exertion. She inquired into the particulars of the steeple-chase, and especially interested herself in all the details relating to the leap at which he met with his accident, and his "pluck" in remounting and winning the race with a broken arm.

After Harry had given a full, true, and particular account of the affair from beginning to end, and his wife had evinced all proper interest and sympathy, a pause ensued in the conversation, which was broken by Alice.

"Emily has been telling me how you would sit up with me, night after night, when you ought to have been lying in bed yourself with your poor arm," she said; "how kind and good it was of you! I hope you do not suffer very much pain now?"

"Oh, no! it is troublesome at times, but in general it is pretty easy," was the reply.

After another pause, Alice asked, in a low, trembling voice, "Did you think I should die, Harry?"

"I was naturally very anxious and unhappy about you," returned Coverdale, "and—well, since you are getting on so nicely, I will confess that I was terribly frightened about you at one time—that night on which the crisis took place especially; I never wish to pass such another six hours, I assure you!"

"Harry, love, I hope it would not make you very unhappy to lose me. Just a little sorry I should wish you to feel; I should like you, when you are recollecting me, to think, 'she was a poor, foolish little thing, very obstinate and perverse at times, but still she loved me as well as such a silly little thing could.'"

"Alice, my own darling, why indulge in such gloomy fancies?" replied her husband, tenderly; "you know, you must be sure, it would break my heart to lose you. Ask Emily whether I am not a different man since the doctors pronounced you out of danger?"

"Harry, my own dearest husband, I love to hear you say that, and I know it is true; but, dear Harry, you must not be very unhappy if such a thing were to occur, for—for—I think I shall die yet; I think I grow weaker and weaker every day; I shall never have strength enough to get well again."

Coverdale was about to interrupt her, but she placed her finger on his lips to imply her wish that he should remain silent. "Yes, dearest, I believe I am gradually sinking into my grave; it made me very, very unhappy at first; for life is pleasant, and I am young to die! besides, I know, love, what a bad, tiresome wife I have been to you, and I did so want to try if I could not do better; I know what a proud, rebellious, wilful temper I have shown towards you, but indeed I don't

think I have altogether a bad heart, and I did hope, if I tried very hard, perhaps, I could make you happy; but lately I have begun to think it may be better for you as it is."

"My own darling, what strange, silly fancies are these? Gouger says you are going on as well as possible; you make me wretched to hear you talk so, and what do you mean by it being better for me as it is? If I were to lose you, I should never know another happy hour."

"You think so now, dear," was the reply, "and very kind it is of you to be so fond of your naughty, tiresome little wife; and I know you will be very unhappy at first when I die; but you must go abroad, or take a shooting tour somewhere, to keep you from thinking and fretting about me; and—you must not be angry at what I am going to say, dear—in a year or so you must come back, and then you can marry some one who will make you a better wife than poor, silly little Alice—some one who has been attached to you a long time, and whom there will be no reason why you should not love in return when I am out of the way; she is more clever and courageous than I am, and will be able to enter into your pursuits, and help you with your magistrate's business, and—and—oh! I am sure you will be very happy with her, dear!"

CHAPTER LXII.

MRS. COVERDALE THINKS BETTER OF IT.

HARRY listened with all the patience he could muster while Alice was thus comfortably arranging her own decease and his second marriage, then, speaking gravely, though still in the most affectionate manner, he replied:

"I cannot even feel annoyed with you now you are so ill and weak, my poor child, but the matter to which you allude is most repugnant and distasteful to me; it is a subject, in fact, on which I would not allow any human being but yourself to address me. I will not pretend to misunderstand your allusion; but I do most solemnly assure you that you are mistaken and that were it, indeed, God's will that you should be taken from me, no new ties should come between my soul and the memory of the only woman, except my poor mother, whom I have ever really loved. I see that you do not believe me! it is unjust, almost unkind of you!"

Harry spoke with deep feeling; and Alice, with tears in her eyes, placed her poor, thin hand within his as she replied:

"I do most fully believe that you love me as you say, and that at this moment you do not imagine you could be happy with anybody else, but it is a comfort to me to think that when I am parted from you there will still be some one to care

for you. I assure you I feel quite differently towards Miss Crofton now; I was jealous of her, dreadfully jealous—I confess it! but I now am grateful to her for loving you, and sorry I ever entertained such feelings towards her. I mean to leave her all my jewels, except one or two little things I should like to give poor Emily."

Alice paused, partly through weakness, partly because she wanted her husband to signify his approval of her sentiments, which she considered was the least he could do, in return for what was, in fact, to her, an act of almost superhuman charity and self-denial. But Coverdale was in no humour to comply with her desire; on the contrary, so distasteful was the whole matter, and poor Alice's idea of the situation so far from the truth, that he was driven to his wits' end with perplexity and annoyance, which nothing but a sense of his wife's unfitness to sustain so energetic a mode of address prevented from breaking forth in a burst of his "quiet manner." As he continued silent, Alice resumed:—"You must not be angry with me for knowing about it, Harry dear, for the knowledge was forced upon me, nor was I aware what Lord Alfred Courtland was about to tell until I heard so much that my womanly dignity would not allow me to stop him; I did not choose to let him think I could believe it possible you had done anything I should be afraid to hear, and so he told me all."

"And pray what might all be?" inquired Harry.

"Oh! about her being in love with you, and your running away together, and old Mr. Somebody (I can't remember names) taking her away again, and preventing you from marrying her, yes, he told me all about it."

"He told you a pack of lies, so mixed up with a little truth, that, unless I were able to give you a detailed account of the affair, I could not separate them, and I am under a solemn promise not to say anything about it; but I know what I will do. In the meantime believe this—I love you with my whole heart and soul, and you only, and if you have any regard for me you will strive to banish all these silly fancies, which only delay your recovery, and get well as fast as you can, for my sake. And now you have talked more than is good for you, so I shall send Emily to you to read you to sleep."

As soon as he had put this resolution into practice he betook himself to the library, and wrote as follows:—

"DEAR ARABELLA,—The promise I made to you at the Inn at Fiumalba, I have up to this time kept faithfully; I now ask you to release me from it. My wife's happiness (in which my own is bound up), perhaps her life even, depends upon your doing so; she has just passed the crisis of a brain fever, her bodily weakness is lamentable to witness, and the mental depression naturally arising from it leads her to take a morbid and desponding view of her own chances of recovery: In such

a position anything that will conduce to raise her spirits and tranquillise her mind will effect more than twenty doctors. Some mischief-maker has caused her to obtain a garbled account of a certain occurrence, to which I will not farther refer; nothing but the whole truth will suffice to set her mind at rest. Arabella! I deeply regret this necessity, but it cannot be avoided, and I trust to you to act towards me as I would act by you if the situation were reversed.—I remain always,

"Your true and sincere friend,

"HARRY COVERDALE."

For two or three days after that on which the foregoing conversation between Coverdale and his wife took place, Alice continued much in the same condition: the idea that she should die, and that after her death Harry would espouse Arabella Crofton, and be much happier than she had been able to make him, appeared never absent from her mind; her appetite decreased, her sleep became broken and fitful, and Mr. Gouger's face grew longer, and his head shook more and more like that of Lord Burleigh in the "Critic," every time he visited her.

One morning, on Coverdale's return from the neighbouring town, whither he had ridden to procure some delicacy wherewith to try and tempt Alice's capricious appetite, he was equally surprised and pleased, on entering her room, to perceive a brightness in her eye and a colour in her cheek such as he had feared never to see there again.

"Why, Alice darling, this fine morning has inspired you—you are looking more like yourself than I have seen you this many a long day!" he exclaimed, as he seated himself by the easy-chair which Alice used as a substitute for her couch.

Regarding him with a smile and blush, which tinged her pale cheeks with the most delicate rose-colour, she replied:

"You have grown very clever in reading people's faces of late, Harry dear; but you are quite right in fancying something has inspired me—at least, if feeling very happy is what you mean by inspiration. But oh! how foolish I have been! how wrong, how unjust I was ever to doubt you! Harry, dearest, can you forgive me for not feeling certain that you had always acted as nobly and generously before I knew you as you have done since? If you could tell how I hate and despise myself for my silly, illiberal suspicions! But you must wonder all this time what has set me raving in this strange way. What do you think of my having had a letter from—yes! actually from Miss Crofton, telling me—here, read it yourself, I am certain every word of it is true; and oh! how I pity her for being obliged to write it, and, indeed, for the whole affair, poor thing!"

As Alice spoke she drew a letter from the pocket of her dress, and gave it to her husband; it ran as follows:—

"I have received a note from Mr. Coverdale, urging me to release him from a promise he most kindly made me, at a time when, bowed down by shame and contrition, his doing so saved me, as I verily believe, from madness or suicide. He tells me your health and happiness depend upon my complying with his request; it becomes then a duty in me to do so; and, however painful it may be, I will not flinch from it. It appears to me that the most effectual way to remove any misapprehension from your mind, in regard to the nature and extent of my acquaintance with Mr. Coverdale before his marriage, will be to give you a concise account of the occurrences which took place during the summer I spent in Italy, whither I had accompanied a family of the name of Muir, in the capacity of governess. The Muirs were well meaning, commonplace people, not possessing the slightest tact or refinement of feeling. I was at that time young, and morbidly sensitive; and the slights they put upon me, without, as I can now perceive, intending any unkindness, or, indeed, being aware of the effect their thoughtlessness was producing upon me, were a daily martyrdom to my proud spirit. We spent three months at Florence; and shortly after we had settled there, John Muir, the eldest son, who had been making a tour among the Swiss mountains, rejoined his family, accompanied by Mr. Coverdale, who had known him at the university. Slightly attracted, I fancy, by the good looks of my eldest pupil, who was an unusually pretty nonentity, Mr. Coverdale, always talking of the necessity of continuing his journey to the East, still lingered at Florence. The great kindness of heart and delicacy of feeling which lie hid under a roughness of manner that can only mislead a very superficial observer, soon led him to perceive and pity my isolated position; and from the moment in which he became aware how keenly the sense of dependence preyed upon me, he treated me with a degree of deference and attention which could not but contrast most favourably with the neglect I experienced from others. Under the cold manner which circumstances have forced me to assume, I have concealed a naturally ardent and impetuous disposition, and as deeply as I had been affected by the ungenerous conduct of the Muirs did I now appreciate Mr. Coverdale's sympathy and kindness —in a word, for I have resolved to conceal nothing from you, I loved him with all the force of my passionate nature. But the very strength of my feelings led me studiously to conceal them; nor, until the elopement of my eldest pupil with a scheming Italian adventurer broke up the party, did I give Mr. Coverdale the slightest opportunity of suspecting the warm interest he had excited in me; but when about to bid him farewell, as I imagined, for ever, my self-control gave way, and I burst into a passionate flood of tears. Equally grieved and surprised, he soothed me with his accustomed kind and

considerate delicacy, begged me always to look upon him as a friend, and apply to him in any emergency, as to a brother; and, as soon as I became somewhat more composed, left me. The next tidings I heard of him were that he had quitted Florence. Scarcely had I retired to my room, to endeavour to calm my excitement, and to struggle to subdue my hopeless attachment in tears and solitude, when Mrs. Muir sent for me and reproached me with equal virulence and unkindness for her daughter's elopement, which she declared to have been the consequence of my neglect. 'Had you,' she continued, 'been less engrossed by seeking to ensnare the affections of Mr. Coverdale, you would have been better able to perform the duties of your situation, and this misfortune might never have come upon us.' Stung by the mixture of truth and falsehood in this cruel reproach, I replied—I know not what—proudly, and I can now well believe impertinently; and the next thing that I became aware of was, that a sum of money sufficient to defray my expenses to England was placed before me, and that I was dismissed. Thrown thus on my own resources in a foreign land, without a single friend near to help or advise me, what wonder that I instinctively turned to the only quarter from which I had for years (for mine had been a desolate youth) met with kindness, consideration, and sympathy; and that from the chaos of conflicting emotions one idea alone stood out clear and defined—to seek Harry Coverdale, throw myself on his generosity, tell my tale of sorrow and of love, and leave the result to him and destiny. That such a course was unwomanly, almost unpardonable in me, none can be more bitterly aware than I am; but I pray God that those of my own sex who are inclined to condemn me may never be tempted as I was tempted—may never fall as, but for the superhuman goodness of heart, and the tender, simple, yet chivalrous nature of your husband, I should have fallen. With me, to resolve and to act were simultaneous. I lost not a moment in ascertaining the route Mr. Coverdale had taken, and ere the Muir family were aware of my departure I had followed him to Fiumalba, a small town within a few hours' journey of Florence. Without allowing myself an instant's time for reflection, I sought the hotel at which Mr. Coverdale was stopping, and in my distraction flung myself at his feet, and told him everything—how I loved him better than any other created being—better even than my own womanly pride and good name—how I felt convinced that such love as mine must in time win return—how that, if he would make me his wife, I would devote every thought, every action of my future existence, to secure his happiness—how, if he refused me, I would lie down at his feet and die, but never leave him. Then did he indeed redeem his promise of acting by me as a brother—then did he save me from my worst enemy—myself. Having soothed and quieted my agony of spirit, by his calm good

sense and judicious kindness, he appealed to my reason—set before me how, by yielding to my request, and making me the partner of his future life, while unable to feel for me that degree of affection without which such a tie must become unbearable, he would be doing me an injury rather than conferring a benefit; nor did he leave me until he had obtained my consent to allow him to return to Florence, explain the whole matter to Mr. Muir, expostulate with him as to the cruelty and injustice of thus dismissing me with an undeserved slur on my character as a governess, and endeavour to arrange that I should remain with his wife and daughter, and accompany them on their return to England. In this negotiation he was successful. Mr. Muir—an easy, self-indulgent character, yet one who could, on occasions such as that to which I refer, act kindly and honourably—accompanied Mr. Coverdale back to Fiumalba, where he informed me that he had prevailed on Mrs. Muir to agree to the above proposal, adding that he and Mr. Coverdale were the only persons aware of the imprudent step I had taken, and that they were both willing to make me a solemn promise never (unless by my desire) to reveal the transaction to anyone. Utterly broken-spirited and miserable, I consented, and, taking leave of my preserver, returned with Mr. Muir to Florence. From that day until our accidental meeting in Park Lane I saw Mr. Coverdale no more. What it has cost me to write this I will not attempt to describe, but that every word of it is the simple truth, I call Heaven to witness; that the knowledge of it may for ever reconcile all differences between you and your noble, generous-hearted husband, and that you may be restored to make him happy as I am certain it is in your power to do, is the wish and prayer of one who, if she has erred deeply, has suffered equally, as she hopes, not without some good result.

"ARABELLA CROFTON."

When Harry had read the letter, he returned it to his wife, observing, "That is, as she says, a faithful account of all that ever occurred between us. You now see why I was unable to explain to you the apparent mystery. I hold a promise to be so sacred a thing, that nothing—not even the loss of your affection—could induce me to break one. And now, my poor child, I hope you are satisfied that I love you with my whole heart, and that the affection of a thousand Arabella Croftons would never compensate me for the loss of one bright smile or fond look from my own darling wife."

Alice attempted to reply, but her heart was too full for words: bursting into a flood of tears of mingled joy and contrition, she flung her arms round her husband's neck, and in that prolonged embrace ended once and for ever all Harry Coverdale's matrimonial disputes and discomforts.

CHAPTER LXIII.

LORD ALFRED SEVERS HIS LEADING STRINGS.

LORD ALFRED COURTLAND and Horace D'Almayne were both members of the Pandemonium, at which notable club the latter, when he had no rich victim on whom to quarter himself, chiefly spent his days. The visit which Lord Alfred had paid to Coverdale Park, and his subsequent mission to Hazlehurst Grange, had impressed him deeply, and brought out all his best qualities. On his return to town he took himself to task more seriously than he had yet done, for the careless and extravagant life he had been leading; and, warned by experience how futile such repentance might prove, unless followed by some practical efforts at self-reform, he set to work, with his accustomed impetuosity, to remedy the evils resulting from his injudicious attempt to become a fast "man-about-town." The Honourable Billy Whipcord relieved him of one difficulty, by purchasing Don Pasquale for the same amount which Lord Alfred had given Tirrett for the animal; and with the money thus obtained, together with his winnings on the steeple-chase, he, like an honest fellow, paid all his creditors. Feeling much happier for this step in the right direction, he determined to follow it up by another, and accordingly wrote to his father, saying that, his health being now re-established, it was his wish to return to Cambridge, and endeavour to make up for lost time. Having despatched this letter, and ridden for a couple of hours in the Park, the necessity of dining occurred to him, and he turned the horse's head towards the Pandemonium. As he rode thither, it struck him that he might possibly encounter Horace D'Almayne, and he bethought him of his promise to Harry Coverdale, to give up the acquaintance of the man whom he had so incautiously trusted, and who had abused that trust by leading him into evil whenever an opportunity presented itself for so doing.

Yes! disagreeable as it was, perhaps even dangerous (for D'Almayne was not a man to insult with impunity), he would redeem his pledged word—he would show his gratitude to Coverdale. If D'Almayne was at the club, he would cut him in a marked and unmistakable manner. As these thoughts were passing through his brain, he became aware of a young man, flashily dressed, and mounted on a magnificent horse, who, as he passed, took off his hat to him. Confused for the moment by the idea that it must be some acquaintance whom he ought to recognise, he bowed stiffly, whereupon the horseman rode up to Lord Alfred's side.

"I beg your lordship's pardon," he began, "but I wish to say a few words to you. Does not your lordship remember me?"

"Your behaviour towards me, Mr. Tirrett, was of a nature neither easily to be forgotten, nor calculated to make me desirous of cultivating your further acquaintance. I have the honour of wishing you good morning."

Saying this with the hauteur and dignity of the whole House of Peers combined, Lord Alfred turned his head away from his unwished-for acquaintance and rode on; but Tirrett had an object in view, and was, therefore, not to be so easily shaken off.

"I won't deny," he said, coolly, "that your lordship has good reason to be angry with me, for I played you a trick that, if I'd been a gentleman, and your lordship's equal, I should consider a very dirty one; but, if your lordship will consider a minute you'll perceive the difference between us."

Amused, in spite of his anger, at the fellow's cool audacity, Lord Alfred replied, with a sarcastic laugh:

"I should scarcely imagine that would require any very deep thinking to discover!"

"Your lordship is sharp upon me this afternoon," observed Tirrett, in no way disconcerted, "but I was going to remark that horse-dealing, and horse-racing, which you gentlemen enter into for amusement, is the regular business by which such men as myself gain our livelihood; it's a ticklish sort of trade at the best of times, for we're liable to be deceived and cheated on all sides as well as other people; so a fellow's obliged to look out, and never throw away a chance. Now your job was just this—the Don was recovering from a bad sprain in the off-foreleg when I sold him to you."

"Pleasant intelligence for the Honourable Billy!" murmured Lord Alfred.

"I thought he'd stand training, but expected he'd break down in the race, and as I never like to ride a losing horse if I can help it, I made my book to win on Black Eagle, but I was obliged to promise to ride Don Pasquale for you, or else you wouldn't have bought him. I don't say I acted right by you; but I mean to say that I didn't act any worse than others that call themselves gentlemen, and your friends too!"

"Do you allude to anyone in particular, may I ask?—it is as well to know one's friends from one's foes," inquired Lord Alfred, his curiosity beginning to awaken.

"I allude to Horace D'Almayne. Your lordship best knows whether you consider him your friend," was the reply.

"I certainly did at one time; but what has he to do with the affair?" asked Lord Alfred, his attention now fully aroused.

In answer to this question, Tirrett entered into a full account of the plot connected with the whitebait dinner, his own

acquaintance with Captain O'Brien, and other particulars, with which the reader is acquainted, dwelling especially on D'Almayne's advice to him, to throw over Lord Alfred and ride for Captain Annesley, for which D'Almayne bargained to receive a percentage on his winnings.

"And now," he continued, "if I can afford your lordship proof of the truth of my statement, in D'Almayne's own handwriting, and let you have that proof, so that you may, if you please, confront him with it, perhaps your lordship will set that off against my refusal to ride the steeple-chase for you."

"Let me see your proof, sir; I shall then be better able to judge of my amount of obligation to you," was the curt reply.

Thus urged, Tirrett drew from his pocket the identical epistle which D'Almayne had written to him from Lord Alfred's lodgings on the morning (as the date testified) before he started for the Continent. Lord Alfred perfectly remembered his writing the note, but the authenticity of the document was established beyond a doubt by the paper, which was stamped with a coronet and the cypher A. C. As this proof of his mentor's treachery was brought before him, Lord Alfred coloured with anger, and drawing out his pocket-book, he said: "You must permit me to keep this document, Mr. Tirrett; but as I consider it of value, I shall give you an equivalent for it." Then, handing him a ten-pound note, he continued, "Note for note is a fair exchange."

Tirrett glanced at the money as if he had half a mind to return it; but a moment's reflection served to dispel the romantic scruple, and adhering to his rule of never throwing a chance away, he pocketed the cash, and raising his hat, began: "Really, your lordship's too liberal! I am off to Yorkshire to-morrow morning; but I shall be up again before the hunting season, with a lot of very first-rate horses; and as I hope I've now made all straight with your lordship, I shall be highly honoured if your lordship will look through the stables before I let the dealers see them."

Then, with another low bow, he turned his horse's head, and touching him with the spur, cantered off, leaving Lord Alfred to his own reflections, which ran somewhat after the following fashion:—"So much for there being honour amongst thieves! Tirrett coolly sacrifices his accomplice, in order to retain my custom! What an inconceivable scoundrel that Horace D'Almayne turns out! I'm about as easy-tempered a fellow as can be; too much so, I'm afraid; for I often say Yes, when I feel I ought to say No; but I'll cut the swindler dead at the club, or wherever I meet him, and if he does not like it, I'll show him his note to Tirrett, or, better still, read it out at the club; such perfidy ought to be exposed, and I'll not flinch from doing so. Coverdale shall see that his example of straightforward manliness is not quite thrown away upon me. I've followed a bad model with tolerable success, and reaped

the fruits of such folly, and now I'll try whether I cannot imitate a good one. I'd do a great deal to reinstate myself in the good opinion of Harry and his wife; they've been very kind to me, too kind, for it overpowers me; but of course they must have lost all respect for me—Harry thinks me a soft, foolish boy, and Alice, a weak, sentimental puppy. Well, I'll do my best to gain their esteem, and if I fail, I shall be none the worse for having tried. How pretty that little Emily is! prettier than her sister, I think, and she believes in me to a great extent, that's some comfort!"

By the time his lordship's meditations had reached this point, his lordship's horse had reached the Pandemonium, which fact forcing itself on his lordship's attention, he dismounted, and, consigning the animal to the care of his groom, entered the clubroom, when, of course, the first person he encountered was Horace D'Almayne! Owing to Lord Alfred's absence from town, D'Almayne had not seen him since his return from the Continent; he, therefore, advanced to meet him with the greatest "empressement," greeting him with the usual "Ah! mon cher," which he reserved for those of his associates whom he particularly delighted to honour. Great, therefore, was his astonishment and disgust when Lord Alfred walked past him with his head in the air, and his eyes immovably fixed upon the ceiling.

For a moment D'Almayne could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses, so much at variance was his late pupil's conduct with Horace's preconceived ideas of his gentle, yielding character; but a covert smile on the faces of Barrington and several of the usual club-loungers was sufficient to convince him of the irritating fact that, in the presence of the very men before whom he had often boasted of and paraded his intimacy and influence over Lord Alfred Courtland, that young nobleman had most decidedly and unequivocally cut him. For some days past D'Almayne had perceived a change to have "come o'er the spirit" in which he had been received by society at large. Intimates had suddenly become slight acquaintances; slight acquaintances had grown strangely short-sighted; and when he forced himself upon their notice, appeared afflicted with a painful degree of stiffness in the "upper spine." Still, until that moment, no one had ventured actually to cut him. Now the matter had come to a climax, Horace felt himself brought fairly to bay, and in such a frame of mind he was dangerous. After Lord Alfred had passed D'Almayne, he touched the Honourable William Barrington, alias Billy Whipcord, on the arm, and drawing him aside, said:—

"I have just been let into a pleasant little secret; it seems that the reason my dishonourable young acquaintance, Mr. Tirrett, set his face so determinedly against riding Don Pasquale was that the notable quadruped had a screw loose in

the back sinew of one of its inestimable forelegs, and Tirrett was afraid he would break down in the race. Now, as I have become aware of this only within the last half hour, I daresay I have asked, and you have given, too much for the brute. 'Caveat emptor' may be a very good general maxim, but I never can see why a gentleman should act about selling a horse in a manner undeserving that title—so, if you find the creature unsound, I shall be happy to hand you back a fifty-pound note, or more, if you require it. I've passed my 'little go' as a patron of the turf, and wish to come out of it with clean hands ere I take my leave of that noble pastime."

"Really, my dear Courtland, you're too chivalrous," was the reply; "but I'm quite content with my bargain; the Don is sound enough to answer my purpose" (he had sold him that morning, and pocketed a cool hundred by the transfer), "and if he were not, I have purchased him, and must abide the loss; but, excuse me, are you aware that you have just cut Horace D'Almayne?"

"As he deserves to be cut by every honourable man," interrupted Lord Alfred, "and for reasons which I will explain here before every member of this club now present, if he has the audacity to—to venture to force himself upon me," he continued angrily, as he perceived D'Almayne sauntering up to him, with his accustomed listless gait indeed, but with a sparkle in his eye, and a red spot on each cheek, which, to those who were well acquainted with him, showed that he was unusually excited.

"Has foreign travel, and the lapse of a fortnight, really altered me so much that your lordship is unable to recognise an old friend? or to what other circumstance am I to attribute your singular failure of memory when I accosted you on your entrance?" he inquired in his most superciliously polite tone and accent.

"Attribute it to its right cause," was the spirited reply; "that I desire to associate only with men of honour, an idiosyncrasy which precludes my longer availing myself of your society."

"In fact, that, having made use of me to convert a raw schoolboy into a very tame specimen of a fast man, you fancy now you are able to run alone, and that it will add to your reputation for fastness to kick down the ladder by which you have mounted the social mole-hill you stand on," was the sneering answer; "but you have mistaken your man, my lord. Horace D'Almayne is not a puppet of which you hold the wires, to dance, or to be thrown aside, at your lordship's pleasure. Had you simply chosen to deny me your further acquaintance, I should have set the gain of valuable minutes against the loss of one of the social incubi my good-nature has entailed upon me, and overlooked the boyish impertinence; but as you have seen fit to insult me publicly, nothing short

of a public apology will satisfy me. Should you be infatuated enough to refuse me, I will for once flatter your lordship's vanity by supposing you man enough to be aware of the alternative."

As D'Almayne spoke, he drew himself up with an expression of contemptuous superiority, which he imagined highly effective.

It certainly had one effect, that of rousing Lord Alfred's temper; and, with flashing eyes and quivering lips, he replied:—

"If I could believe that you had one thought or feeling of a gentleman in your composition which my conduct could wound, I would accept one of the alternatives you propose; but to a man who can abuse the confidence of friendship by availing himself of it to swindle and betray the friend who trusted him—to such a low, sordid blackleg, I will neither apologise, nor will I afford him the satisfaction due to wounded honour."

For a moment, as D'Almayne's glance met that of the man he had wronged, his self-possession failed him: and, ignorant to what extent Lord Alfred might have become cognizant of his nefarious practices, he hesitated how far he dared provoke any disclosure. But it was too late to retract: his social position, on which depended his very means of existence, was at stake; and as the thought crossed his mind, the gambler spirit awoke within him. He would carry the matter with a high hand; a bold course was always the wisest; Fortune would favour those who trusted her. It was his only article of faith, and he clung to it with pertinacity.

Highly melodramatic!" he said, with a sarcastic sneer. "Your lordship has a 'specialité' for juvenile tragedy. But may I inquire what particular perfidy of mine has elicited the burst of virtuous indignation you have selected for your histrionic 'début?'"

"I was willing to have spared you the disgrace of a public exposure," was Lord Alfred's reply, "but since you choose thus to provoke your fate, I can have no reason for longer concealing the cause which has led me to consider you unfit for the society of honourable men." Turning to Barrington, who happened to be standing next him, he continued, "You sir, and other gentlemen present, may remember how, not many weeks since, a certain steeple-chase rider, named Tirrett, suddenly left me in the lurch, by refusing at the last minute to ride for me, by which rascality I was on the point of losing the race, upon which I had made an imprudently heavy book. Mr. D'Almayne was at that time abroad, and, I presume, imagined, owing to that circumstance, he might transact a little profitable blackleg business with impunity. He accordingly wrote a note to Tirrett, suggesting the scheme which he afterwards attempted to carry out; stipulating, in

case of success, to be paid fifty pounds and a percentage on Tirrett's winnings."

As Lord Alfred concluded, a murmur of disapprobation ran round the room, and all eyes were turned upon Horace D'Almayne.

"A cleverly devised tale!" he said, scornfully; "a mole-hill ingeniously inflated until it appears a mountain. I certainly betted on the race; I may have given the jockey Tirrett the benefit of my suggestions on the subject, as any other man who has ever been on the turf would have done; but that all this demonstrates anything, exept Lord Alfred Courtland's deplorable ignorance of that said art of 'life about town' in which he appears to have striven in vain to become a proficient, I am at a loss to conceive."

"Perhaps the simplest answer to Mr. D'Almayne's statement will be to place the note, on which the foundations of my 'mole-hill inflated into a mountain' rest, in Mr. Barrington's hands, asking him, for his own satisfaction, and for that of the other gentlemen present, to read it aloud."

As he spoke, Lord Alfred drew from his pocket the note given him by Tirrett, and handed it to Barrington, who, after a moment's hesitation, read aloud the following notable epistle, which the reader may remember was written by D'Almayne, with his usual cool audacity, in Lord Alfred Courtland's lodgings:—

"DEAR TIRRETT,—Your game is clear: let A. C.—— and O'B——n each believe that you will ride for him, and at the last minute throw both over. In this case, Captain Annesley's Black Eagle is safe to win, as I daresay you know better than I do; thus you will perceive how to make a paying book. If I prove a true prophet, I shall expect a fifty-pound note from you, as O'B——n will (before you quarrel with him) tell you I got up the whole affair myself, introducing him to A. C——, etc.—I remain, yours faithfully,

"YOU'LL KNOW WHO WHEN I CLAIM THE TIN.

"P.S.—If you make a heavy purse out of the business, I shall expect ten per cent. on all beyond five hundred pounds."

As Barrington ceased reading, D'Almayne observed, coolly:

"Exactly as I expected—an anonymous letter, supposed to be mine on the word of a blackguard horsedealer (who probably wrote it himself to conceal his own rascality), and eagerly caught at by this fiery young gentleman, who, anxious to prove that he is out of leading-strings, gladly seeks any pretext for quarrelling with one to whom his lordship has a painful consciousness that he appears no more a hero than to his 'valet-de-chambre.' Tirrett declares that I wrote this letter, I say I did no such thing; there is no proof about the

matter, it is simply a question of assertion—Tirrett's word against mine. I leave it to the gentlemen present to say which is most worthy of credit."

"Allow me to mention one small circumstance which may assist them to arrive at a just decision," interposed Lord Alfred, quietly. "I have a perfect recollection of Mr. D'Almayne's writing a note, much resembling the one in question, at my lodgings, on the morning before he left England. If I am right in my conjecture, the date would be the 5th of last month, and the postmark Pall Mall; may I trouble you to ascertain the point, Mr. Barrington?"

"Right in both respects," was the unhesitating reply. "Moreover, here is a coronet and the initials A. C. stamped on the paper, a corroboration which quite satisfies my mind on the subject."

D'Almayne glanced round, and read his sentence on the faces which surrounded him—faces of men who, in the insolence of his false position, he had made to feel the lash of his covert sarcasm. Amongst the many there he could not discern one friend. But his self-possession did not forsake him.

"Of course, all against me," he said; then turning to Lord Alfred, he continued—"Your lordship once expressed a doubt as to the social value of a title; you now, I should imagine, perceive your error: for the rest, the letter is an impudent forgery, and the accusation false; but until I can prove the whole story the clumsy fabrication I know it to be, I shall leave the matter where it stands, unless"—and he glanced round the circle with a savage light in his cold, grey eyes, which no one cared to meet—"unless any gentlemman feels inclined to make a personal affair of it, in which case I shall have much pleasure in affording him satisfaction."

No one appearing desirous of improving the occasion as D'Almayne had suggested, the baffled intriguer stalked out of the room, with a look of scornful indifference on his features, and rage and hatred burning in his breast.

CHAPTER LXIV.

D'ALMAYNE PLAYS HIS LAST CARD.

"LEAVE me, sir! I consider your very presence an insult!"

"Before you drive me from you for ever, I am determined to set plainly before you the results which must inevitably follow your decision, and show you unmistakably the difference between the future which awaits you, and the lot which might even yet be yours if you have only sufficient strength of character to cast aside the meaningless conventionalities of a false

and hollow state of society." D'Almayne—for, as the reader has no doubt already conjectured, the foregoing speech proceeded from his lips—paused for a moment to control the excitement under which, despite his endeavours to conceal it, he was evidently labouring. Kate Crane appeared again about to interrupt him; but by a glance and a gesture of the hand he restrained her, while he continued:—"You talk of marriage as a holy tie, and where such a bond is indeed one of the heart, I, sceptic and libertine as you consider me, entirely agree with you; but such a term cannot apply to the cruel mockery which has bound youth, beauty, and intellect to age, decrepitude, and imbecility. But putting aside all idea of affection, the temptation which led you to commit this outrage against every better feeling of your nature exists no longer. Mr. Crane is a ruined man; if, therefore, you adhere to the conventional prejudice which you vainly endeavour to dignify by the name of duty, you have nothing to hope but to sacrifice to it the best years of your life, years in which you will still be young, when your queenly beauty and bright, clear intellect will fit you to shine in and lead society of a class in which your elegant tastes and refined sympathies would meet with a gratification sufficient in itself to render life one scene of pleasurable excitement. But, more than this, you are ambitious; I can read it in your flashing eye, in the curl of your haughty lip. I would open to you such a field for that ambition as in your wildest moments you have never dreamed of. You do not believe me! you consider me a base, unscrupulous adventurer. If it were so, what have I ever had to call out the higher, nobler qualities of my nature? Nothing! But with such a soul as yours to urge and inspire me, and with your love as my reward, to what height might not my genius soar! What was the great Napoleon but a Corsican adventurer; and yet his was a career an Emperor's daughter was proud to share. You think I am romancing—talking bombastic nonsense; but it is not so. In America, at the present time, there is an immense field for talent. I know the character of the nation well, know how both its strong and weak points could be turned to account, and form the ladder by which I might climb even to the President's seat, and once there!—Presidents have ere now become Emperors—from democracy to despotism is the natural transition—history proves it. Since I have known you, a change has come over my every thought and feeling; hitherto I have exerted my talents merely to supply my own fastidious requirements, but now my ideas are enlarged, my aspirations heightened. Brought up from my earliest childhood among men, clever indeed, but without one pure thought, one disinterested feeling, I became—what I am. You have excited in me higher, nobler feelings. I will not deny that your beauty first attracted me; but since I have known you, and each day dis-

covered new qualities with which I could sympathise, I have learned to love you with the only deep, real sentiment I have ever yet felt for one of your sex. Hitherto I have looked on women as mere toys wherewith to solace one's leisure hours; but in you I recognize a loftier nature; I feel not only in the presence of an intelligence equal to my own, but I have an instinctive perception that you might become my leading star, my tutelary deity! Kate, hear me! my destiny is in your hands. Fly with me to America—everything is prepared; and when we arrive on the soil of a new world, you shall become the bride of a man already possessed of riches sufficient to obtain for you luxuries greater than you have yet enjoyed, and with a gift riches are powerless to procure—talent which has never yet failed me, however critical the position—talent which, henceforward, you shall direct into any course that best may win your approval; knowing that, whatever career you may select, the sole reward I shall seek will be your approbation—my only happiness, your affection. You have not heard me unmoved—you cannot, will not refuse me!"

As D'Almayne concluded, he fixed his eyes on Kate's face, as though he sought to read there his sentence before her lips should pronounce it, while his cheeks flushed, and his eyes glistened with unfeigned emotion. For an instant, unable to bear the intensity of his glance, Kate turned away with a heightened colour, then, recovering her self-possession by an effort, she replied calmly—

"I have heard you thus far, Mr. D'Almayne, without interruption, partly because I believe that, for once, you are speaking under the influence of real feeling; partly because I owe you, as I imagine, a debt of gratitude for your kindness to my brother; these reasons have induced me to listen to addresses, every word of which I consider as the deepest insult which can be offered to a pure-minded woman. You tell me I married Mr. Crane for money; I neither admit nor repel the accusation—like most taunts, it contains a half-truth, so disguised by sarcasm as to appear a whole one. But how doubly sordid should I be, were I to act on your suggestion and quit my husband—who, if your supposition be correct, I have sufficiently wronged already—because he has, as you inform me, been swindled out of his wealth—how I leave your own conscience to inform you. The fact that he is poor, and that you profess yourself rich, is enough to carry conviction to my mind. But I will not enter further into the question: suffice it that your sophistries have failed to blind me, and that I am still able to discern the path of duty—let it lead whither it may, I am resolved to follow it. I have given you, as you requested, a fair hearing and a deliberate reply. For your kindness to my brother, I again thank you. As I gather that you are about to leave this country, and can well imagine

it may be necessary for you to do so, farewell for ever! I set your one good deed against your evil ones, and bear you no ill-will. We part neither as friends nor foes."

As Kate spoke, she rose to quit the room, but D'Almayne interposed between her and the door.

"One moment," he said in his usual tone of sarcasm; "my modesty cannot permit me to depart, taking credit for a good deed which I have never performed. It was not I who rescued your brother from his difficulty; though, as a stepping-stone to your favour, I would willingly have done so: for that act of kindness you are indebted to——"

"Whom?" inquired Kate, eagerly.

"One to whom, if he had this morning pleaded as I have done, I fancy even your rigid virtue might have offered a kinder answer—your cousin, Arthur Hazlehurst!"

D'Almayne spoke at random, but the arrow wounded as deeply as even his disappointed malevolence could have desired. With every vestige of colour banished from her cheek, Kate sank back upon her chair, and drawing her breath with difficulty, placed her hand upon her side, as if in pain. Heedless of her suffering—nay, rather rejoicing in it—the evil expression came across D'Almayne's face as, in a tone of triumph, he exclaimed—

"You love him! I was certain of it, and am fully avenged. Chained by your marriage vow to a decrepit imbecile, while you love another with all the depth and fire of your passionate nature, you will experience the torments of the damned. To the remorse and despair these reflections will engender—a despair so desolating that you will live to regret even your decision of this morning—I leave you. When your husband returns to-night, a ruined man, remember my words—the curse that you have brought upon yourself will have begun to work!"

Unable to reply, Kate remained leaning back, her eyes fixed upon him with a kind of horrible fascination. Leisurely drawing on his gloves, he appeared to be feasting his gaze with the misery he had created; then, casting on her a look of sardonic malevolence that a fiend might have emulated, he turned and quitted the apartment, and immediately afterwards the house.

Kate's reflections after D'Almayne had left her may easily be imagined; all feelings of resentment against the man who had insulted her were merged in the one thought that her cousin, Arthur Hazlehurst, had been her brother's unknown benefactor. When she had imagined him implacably offended at the unjustifiable manner in which, during their last interview, she had treated him, he was still watching over her interests, and with a chivalrous devotion to the remembrance of their former attachment (for such could be the only kindly sentiment he could now cherish towards her), he had come

forward and saved her brother from the ruin which had appeared inevitable. She had received a note that morning from Frederick, informing her of his return from the Continent, and stating his intention of paying her a visit immediately, adding that he had obtained his benefactor's sanction to tell her to whom he was indebted for his present good fortune, and all other particulars she might wish to learn. While thus engaged, a knock at the door announced a visitor, and in another moment her brother's arms were thrown around her. Six months' foreign travel, and daily association with persons mixing in good society, had produced a great change in Fred Marsden's appearance: the handsome boy had become a fine manly young fellow, whose frank address and courteous manners were certain to ensure him a kindly welcome, and greatly increase his chances of success in life. Fred had much to tell, and found an eager listener in Kate. Arthur was the best, kindest, wisest, most generous of men; Arthur had sent him abroad more to finish his education than for any use he could be of in a business point of view; Arthur was most liberal to him in money-matters: and yet, superior as he was in everything—talent, age, position—Arthur treated him like an equal, nay, like a brother.

While he thus ran on, a cab drove up to the door, and shortly after Mr. Crane entered the apartment; he appeared to walk feebly, and once staggered, and nearly fell in crossing the room. Glancing angrily towards Fred, he muttered, "Send that boy away, Mrs. Crane—I—I wish to speak with you on matters of importance."

Hastily dismissing her brother—promising to write him word when to come again—Kate returned to her husband. "You look ill and worried," she said; "let me fetch you a glass of wine and a biscuit."

"Ill and worried indeed! I tell you, Mrs. Crane, I have this day received my death-blow. Don't reply, madam; don't mock me with any pretence of affection—I know its worth. You married me for my money—I am not so blind as you may imagine—yes; you married me for my money; and now you are rightly served, for I am a ruined man. You may well stare and look surprised, for I can scarcely believe it myself. Oh, it is too cruel—horrible, to think that I, Jedediah Crane, whose name has been good for five hundred thousand pounds any day, should die a beggar!"

Here he paused, and broke into a fit of childish weeping; after a time he again resumed angrily, "And for this, madam, I have chiefly to thank your precious admirer, Horace D'Almayne; my money was safe enough till he led me on to speculate; and I believe your arts and allurements were the chief cause that attracted him here. But your wickedness has brought its own punishment, for you must work for your

living now—you, and all your pauper family, whom you have supported out of my pocket: and as for D'Almayne, may the bitterest curses light upon him—may——" Here, suddenly breaking off, he stared round him wildly, raised his hand to his forehead, murmured, "Oh, my head!" and sank back in his chair. Greatly alarmed, Kate rang the bell violently, and whilst the butler and another servant conveyed Mr. Crane to his room, she dispatched a third in search of medical assistance. That evening Arthur Hazlehurst received the following note:—

"In the unpardonable pride which has been my besetting sin through life, but to which, if suffering can eradicate faults, I ought never again to yield, I requested you not to enter my house until I sent for you; deeming, when I said it, that I was pronouncing a sentence of banishment which would continue in effect as long as we should both survive. Having placed this bar between myself and the generous friendship you have always evinced for me, I dare not now ask your assistance—but if in the great strait in which I am placed you would advise me to whom I ought to apply, you will be rendering me a kindness I have little deserved at your hands. Mr. Crane returned home this evening greatly excited, and declared that he was a ruined man; while still raving almost incoherently on the subject, he was attacked with paralysis, and now lies in a state which the two physicians I have called in inform me is in the highest degree critical. He has recovered his consciousness, but his speech is so much affected that I can only collect that his mind is still troubled by business details. I am not aware of the name of his legal adviser, nor, indeed, certain whether he was in the habit of consulting one. I await your reply with much anxiety.

"KATE CRANE."

Within a quarter of an hour after he received this note Arthur Hazlehurst was in Park Lane.

CHAPTER LXV.

SETTLES EVERYTHING AND EVERYBODY.

FIVE years had elapsed since the events narrated in the last chapter occurred—five years!—a twentieth portion of one of those centuries which stand like milestones along the path of

time, and index the slow but steady march of human progress and development. To the different characters of our story these years had brought many changes. Arthur Hazlehurst, summoned by Kate Crane in her hour of need and difficulty, fully justified the high opinion she entertained of him. Applying all the powers of his acute intellect and legal experience to the involved affairs of Mr. Crane, he contrived to secure a small competency from the wreck of his once colossal fortune, on which, by Arthur's advice, Kate, as soon as her husband was sufficiently recovered to bear the journey, retired to a small town in the south of France, where she continued to reside until some arrangement could be effected with the shareholders of the railway company started by Monsieur Guillemard and Horace D'Almayne. After a severe illness, from which he was at one time not expected to recover, Mr. Crane partially regained his health, but the paralytic stroke which had reduced him to this extremity had affected his mind to such a degree that he remained nearly childish. His wife's attention to him was most kind and devoted. When he was able to walk out for the finest half-hour in the day, it was Kate's arm which supported his tottering footsteps. So strong was her sense of the duty she owed him, that the tenderest affection could not have dictated a more exemplary line of conduct. Arthur Hazlehurst, who was rapidly acquiring a very high standing in his profession, paid them occasional visits, to report as to the state of Mr. Crane's affairs, which were left entirely to his control. His manner to Kate on such occasions was that of a kind and judicious friend, but nothing more. He never made the least allusion to old times; indeed, his avoidance of any approach to topics which might elicit the slightest display of feeling was most marked, yet a close observer might have seen that he noticed Kate's every word and action, especially her behaviour to her husband, with a keenness of scrutiny which allowed nothing to escape it. Of Horace D'Almayne nothing more was known than that he had somehow eluded the search made after him, and got clear away, as it was supposed, to America.

We will now trouble the imagination of our readers to travel with us as far as H——shire, and join a group gathered one fine autumn morning around the hall-door at Coverdale Park. In the centre of it, and the especial object of interest to the bystanders, was a rough little Shetland pony, on which was mounted a singularly pretty boy, of some, possibly, four years of age, in whose chubby features might be traced a marked resemblance both to Harry and Alice, the former of whom was settling the reins in the child's hand, and giving him directions both how to sit and to manage the pony, while the latter was regarding the young equestrian with looks of mingled anxiety and affection. A sweet little girl, the image of her

mother, perhaps a year older than her youthful playfellow, was endeavouring to attract the pony's attention towards a tuft of grass, which she held at a distance from his nose.

"Now, my boy, stick your knees well into the saddle, give him his head, and let us see how you can canter round the sweep," observed Coverdale, who, save that his complexion had assumed a more manly brown than ever, and that his broad shoulders looked broader still, was little altered since we last had to do with him.

"Dear Harry, you will not let him go by himself—suppose he should tumble off!"

Alice, the speaker, whose rounded figure and matronly air only added to her beauty, smiled at her own fears, as, placing his arm round her still taper waist, her husband replied—

"We are to be frightened about our dear boy now, are we? What a miserable little woman it is, and how she does delight in tormenting herself! Why, you silly child, little Harry has as good a seat as I have. He would be no son of mine if he could not ride by instinct. Hollo! what is the young dog at now! he never can mean to try and leap that ditch, surely!"

And as he spoke Coverdale ran off at the top of his speed, to secure the safety of his self-willed son and heir, who, having cantered round the grass-plot, coolly turned his pony's head towards a low haw-haw which separated the garden from the park beyond. Before his father had half crossed the lawn, he slackened the reins, and giving his pony a cut with the whip, cleared the sunken fence with greater ease than many of his elders with whom we are acquainted could have done, then turning, cantered back through a hand-gate which stood open, and rejoined his mother and sister.

"How could you do such a dangerous thing, Harry? You might have broken your neck!" exclaimed Alice.

"And what do you say, papa?" inquired the young hopeful, in no way abashed by his mother's reprimand.

"What do I say?" returned his father, coming up out of breath with running, and considerably perplexed between his parental responsibility and his delight at his boy's spirit; "why, I say that if you don't mind what your mother tells you, the thrashing I shall give you one of these days will considerably astonish your juvenile intelligence; with which qualification I confess, taking you altogether, I consider you a very promising young four-year-old. And now, brats, be off with you! I have got a letter which I want to talk to mamma about."

As soon as the children had departed, Harry drew from his pocket a letter with a black border and seal.

"It is for you, love," he said, "from your cousin Kate; but I can tell you the news it will contain; Arthur enclosed it to me, with a line, telling me that poor old Crane is dead at last."

"And Arthur writes to tell you—what does he say?" demanded Alice, eagerly.

"He simply informs me of the fact! states that, for business reasons, Kate, who is left sole executrix, must immediately return to England; and suggests that, till some permanent arrangements can be made for her, it would be well she should come to us; adding, that if we agree with him in thinking so, he would be glad if I could make it convenient to go down to Dover and meet her, as professional duties will detain him in town—which of course I shall be delighted to do, and she must come and live with us."

Alice could not for a moment reply; but she pressed her husband's hand in silent acknowledgment of his kindness. Another week saw Kate domesticated beneath their hospitable roof.

Reader, our tale is well-night told. Horace D'Almayne had absconded with a considerable sum of money in his possession, and all attempts to trace him failed. His less fortunate co-swindler (if we may coin a word), Guillemard, became practically acquainted with the interior of a British prison, and the amenities of hard labour. All that transpired in regard to D'Almayne's further career was, that some years after he was connected with a kindred spirit in conducting a notorious gambling-house in New Orleans; a quarrel ensuing between Sedgwick (for so was his partner named) and D'Almayne, the latter gave his antagonist a practical lesson as to the advisability of studying the habits and customs of the natives before you settle in a country, by discharging the contents of his revolver into his ribs. Unfortunately for society, the wound did not prove fatal, but not choosing to wait the result, D'Almayne again made himself invisible; he was last heard of at the head of a band of very questionable individuals, who were proceeding to the diggings to procure gold, whether by fair means or foul, history sayeth not.

Lord Alfred Courtland, warned by the disastrous results of his attempt to become a fast "man-about-town," contented himself for the future by fulfilling his duties as a high-born gentleman, and if he ever did anything at all likely to disgrace his noble order, it was by the obstinate determination he evinced to marry none other than Emily Harlehurst; but a "wilful man must have his way," and eventually, after much useless opposition from his patrician papa, Lord Alfred had his.

Of Harry and Alice we need say no more; perfectly happy in each other's affection (which, warned by the past, they never again suffered their faults or foibles to endanger), theirs was a joy to which only hearts true, pure, and simple as their own can ever attain.

And what of Arthur Hazlehurst? Kate, his first, his only love, was again free!—true, she had erred deeply, but had she not repented more deeply, and worked out her penitence during long years of trial and of suffering? She was free! would wounded pride prevent him from taking the only step which could ensure his happiness and her own? or should "Love be still the lord of all"? Those only who have suffered and loved as he had done can be competent to decide—and in their hands we leave the matter!

THE END.