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MRS FENTON

A SKETCH

BY

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MRS. FENTON.

CHAPTER I.

IN the gloomy, spacious bedroom of a gloomy old house at Oxford an old man lay dying. There could be no doubt as to the fact that he was dying: that same morning the doctor had whispered to the housekeeper that it was now only a question of days, perhaps even of hours; nor was he himself ignorant of his condition, for at the very beginning of his short, sharp illness he had observed that he would not get over it. Yet any one, looking at his hard, stern, handsome face, might have found it difficult to believe that he was really near his end. It betrayed few symptoms of suffering or exhaustion, and it was the face of a man who never gives in. Not by any means the typical British bulldog countenance, but rather one of a kind which is more commonly seen north than south of the Tweed. The high,

narrow forehead, the bushy white eyebrows, the thin lips, the long, square chin—all these made up a whole which, if not attractive, was at least free from any element of weakness. His eyes—those terrible gray eyes with which, all his life long, he had been wont to stare down those who came into contact with him—were closed now; but one could guess what they must be like, and perhaps it was not very strange that the possessor of such a face should, at this hour of extremity, be utterly alone, save for the old housekeeper, who was sitting by his bedside, and who glanced furtively at him from time to time, without daring to ask whether he wanted anything.

In fact, the Dean of St. Cyprian's, though a personage in the University and one whose name was tolerably well known outside University circles, by reason of his great reputation for scholarship and on account of certain learned works which he had published, was probably as friendless and lonely a man as could have been found in all England. His near relations, it is true, were dead and gone; but if they had been still living it would have made no difference, for he had quarreled with them all. He had quarreled

with his only brother; years ago he had quarreled mortally and finally with his only child, who had run away from his house to marry her music-master; he had quarreled—not finally, to be sure, because that would have been too inconvenient, still pretty sharply and continuously—with every dignitary in Oxford, except with the Master of All Saints; and he would certainly have quarreled with him too had it not been a thing beyond the power of human achievement to quarrel with dear old Dr. Drysdale. And so now he lay grimly and silently waiting for death, with only his housekeeper to bear him company; and she scarcely counted.

It was evening—a bitter, stormy March evening—and he had not addressed a word to her since midday, merely signing to her every now and again to give him a weak brandy-and-water or the beef-tea which the doctor had ordered. The poor woman had sat up with him for two nights and was almost worn out; yet she did not venture to leave the room without permission or to suggest that one of the other servants might take her place for a time. She was wondering whether any very awful consequences would en-

sue if she were to indulge in forty winks, when a cautious tap summoned her to the door. There was a brief whispered consultation, and she returned to the bedside.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said she, "Mr. Breffit have arrived."

The Dean opened his eyes. "Let him come in, then," he answered, in a deep, husky voice.

Mr. Breffit, the lawyer, came in: a brisk, middle-aged man with a rosy face, made rosier than usual by the east wind. "Sorry to find you so poorly, Mr. Dean," he began in a cheerful voice; but the old man stared at him, and the remarks which he had been about to make upon the inclemency of the weather remained unuttered.

Mr. Breffit, like the rest of the world, was afraid of the Dean of St. Cyprian's. However, it does not do for a solicitor to look frightened; so presently he resumed: "I have lost no time in obeying your summons, you see."

"You would have neglected your duty if you had lost time," said the Dean; "there is no time to be lost. Mrs. Simpson, you may leave us. I sent for you, Mr. Breffit, because I wish to make

a fresh will. You will find writing materials on the table. Sit down, if you please."

Mr. Breffit had no very lengthy task to perform. Lawyers, as a rule, do not much relish drawing up the concise, intelligible testaments which are more in favor nowadays than they used to be; but what are you to do when you have to deal with an opinionated and peremptory client, who knows his own mind and will tolerate no superfluous verbiage? In less than a quarter of an hour the dying man had revoked all previous wills made by him (there had been a good many such), and had disposed of his realty and personalty after a fashion which seemed likely to be final.

When the butler and the footman had been summoned to witness their master's signature, and when Mr. Breffit was once more left alone with his client, he lingered, as if he had some observation to make.

"Well," said the Dean sharply, "what is it? You think I have acted unfairly perhaps?"

"Oh, no," answered the lawyer; "no, I don't know that anybody could call it exactly unfair—and, after all, it will come to the same thing,

most likely. It isn't quite—quite what was expected, of course."

"I am not answerable for anybody's expectations," said the old man, "nor can I pretend to sympathize with anybody's disappointment. Expectations are frequently unreasonable and, according to my experience, are seldom fulfilled. I may say that my own expectations have been strictly reasonable; yet they have not been fulfilled. However, I am not concerned to defend myself. If I were, I might, with some show of plausibility, claim to have done an act of tardy justice."

The lawyer looked down and smiled slightly, but made no rejoinder.

"Good-by, Mr. Breffit," said the Dean presently; "perhaps you will be so good as to touch the bell as you pass. Thank you."

The lawyer accepted his dismissal without a word, beyond a muttered "Good-by, Mr. Dean." A living dog is better than a dead lion; but the old lion was not dead yet, and while he still breathed he continued to inspire inferior beings with the awe which they had always felt for him.

On the staircase Mr. Breffit recovered himself

and laughed. "Tardy justice, indeed! Well, if it's justice, it's certainly tardy; but, taking everything into consideration, it doesn't altogether realize my idea of justice. The chances are, however, that the woman died long ago. We should have heard of her before now if she had been alive, you may depend upon it." Then he betook himself to the oak-paneled dining-room and had a very good dinner, doing full justice to the Dean's old port, before he returned to London.

While the lawyer was thus fortifying himself against cold and fatigue, a visitor called to inquire, and, strange to say, this visitor was presently shown up into the Dean's bedroom. He was a tall, lean old man, with a stooping figure, a bald head, and a kindly, wrinkled face.

"Well, Drysdale," said the Dean, as he entered, "so you have come to see the last of me."

The Master of All Saints took his old friend's hand and looked down at him sadly. "I hope not, Musgrave," said he; "I think not. It seems impossible that you should be taken before me—with your splendid constitution, too! You have not to me at all the appearance of—of being in danger."

"You would argue with a stone wall, Drysdale," returned the other. "I have no strength left for controversy, but in twenty-four hours or so you will have to admit yourself in the wrong. Take a chair, Drysdale; you are the last man whom I shall talk to in this world, and I don't suppose that I shall be able to talk to you very long." After a pause of a few seconds he resumed: "Do you remember my daughter Laura?"

"To be sure I do. Oh, yes, I remember her very well, poor child! I'm glad you remember her too, Musgrave, and I only wish she could be with you now."

"I have a tolerably good memory, and in any case I presume that few men can forget the existence of their children, although they may have good reasons for wishing to do so. I cannot say that I share your wish to have Laura with me at the present moment. Considering that she has allowed twelve years to elapse without troubling herself to communicate with me or to express one word of regret for the disgrace which she has brought upon me and upon herself, I am unable to feel that a meeting with her

would be agreeable or desirable. However, I have just made a will in her favor, under which she will inherit all that I possess, with the exception of a sum of £10,000, which I have thought it right to bequeath to my nephew Frederick."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Dr. Drysdale. "Well, really you surprise me, Musgrave! So Fred will only get £10,000; dear me! But have you—excuse my asking the question—any knowledge of your daughter's whereabouts?"

"Not the slightest. As I tell you, she has never communicated with me, directly or indirectly, since the day when she fled from my house with her blackguard of a music-master. In the letter which she left for me then she informed me that she proposed to sail for New Zealand. I do not know whether she carried out her intention or not; I do not know whether she is living or dead. If the latter, my property will go to the next of kin. I could think of no other satisfactory manner of disposing of it," added the Dean a little regretfully, meaning, perhaps, that he could think of no other manner of disposing of it which would not be eminently satisfactory to somebody.

"Ah!" said his friend meditatively. And then: "Wont you have Fred telegraphed for, Musgrave?"

"Certainly not. I have no wish to see him, nor can I imagine that he has any wish to see me. He has thought fit to disobey and defy me, and he has deliberately refused to take up any career worthy of a gentleman."

"Well—hardly that, has he, Musgrave? He has been called to the bar, has he not?"

"Because I insisted upon it. I have led him to the water, but he has given me to understand that I cannot make him drink. Instead of practicing or qualifying himself for a legal appointment he is pleased to spend his time in writing plays. Plays!"

"Men have achieved distinction in that way before now," observed the Master of All Saints mildly.

"Have they, indeed? I was not aware of it."

"Well, there was Shakespeare, you know."

"Oh, if you are driven to resort to a *reductio ad absurdum*, there is an end of argument, of course. But indeed I have neither the wish nor the power to argue with you. I have more than

done my duty to my nephew. In spite of his disobedience I have left him £10,000 to play the fool with; added to which there is a strong probability of his coming into my entire fortune. Under the circumstances, he has perhaps no just ground for complaint if I decline to read his literary productions or to be annoyed by hearing him talk about them."

"I daresay he wouldn't talk about them," suggested the peacemaker; for really it seemed a grievous thing that poor Musgrave should pass away without so much as a word of farewell to the nephew whom he had adopted and whom for some time past he had treated as his heir. True, there had of late been a coolness between them, amounting almost to a breach, and it appeared that Fred was to be punished by inheriting £10,000 instead of a considerable fortune; still it was undoubtedly the young man's duty to be with his uncle at the last, and he ought to be summoned.

His uncle, however, did not seem to think so. "I don't want to hear him talk about that or any other subject," he declared. "I don't want to hear anybody talk—except, perhaps, you for a

minute or two. I have heard enough of talk in my long life, and I am weary of it. I am going now to a land where talking is unknown. At least, that is the natural presumption, since talking presupposes a tongue and a tympanum, and I am about to lose mine."

"When a man dies his spirit returns to God who gave it," said the Master of All Saints.

"I suppose so. But what that means I do not understand, nor do you, my friend."

The Dean of St. Cyprian's had always been broad, not to say unorthodox, in his theological views. Many a bitter and heated argument had he had with other ecclesiastical dignitaries upon questions of dogma, but never a one with the Master of All Saints, whose habit it was to listen and shake his head, but to return no answer when attempts were made to draw him into such discussions. He made no answer now; but presently he lowered himself stiffly on to his knees by the bedside and said an audible prayer for the dying man. It was a great liberty to take; it was just the sort of thing that Musgrave would not like at all; only, for all his mildness and meekness, he was not and never had been in the

least afraid of Musgrave, which peculiarity of was possibly one of the reasons why they remained such good friends.

When he rose the old Dean smiled at him and held out his hand. "Good-by, Drysdale," said he; "thank you for coming."

"I will come again to-morrow," said the other.

"Ah—to-morrow! I am not sure that you will find me here to-morrow. Still, if you are passing this way and care to look in—For to-night, however, I must dismiss you; I am fairly tired out."

So the worthy Dr. Drysdale departed, and, instead of making straight for home, went to the nearest post-office, whence he despatched, upon his own responsibility, a telegram to Mr. Frederick Musgrave in London.

He might have spared himself the trouble; for, as it chanced, Mr. Frederick Musgrave was dining out when the telegram reached his rooms, nor did he receive it until past midnight, before which hour the Dean of St. Cyprian's was dead.

CHAPTER II.

AS the pendulum of the clock swings to and fro, ticking off minutes and seconds from the limited period of time allotted to each of us as our share of sojourn upon the surface of this planet, the process of decay and renewal, which alone renders it inhabitable, goes on without interruption.

> Every moment dies a man,
> Every moment one is born.

We cannot be always mourning with those who mourn, or rejoicing with those who rejoice; for, if we could, our lives would be spent in a perpetual state of hysterics, which would altogether incapacitate us for the performance of our daily duties. Yet every now and then we receive a disagreeable shock when we find that we have unconsciously and in a figurative sense been dancing over the graves of our friends, and it was certainly an unfortunate and incongruous circumstance that while the Dean of St. Cyprian's was

gasping his life out in his solitary room at Oxford, his nephew should have been enjoying himself very much at a cheery London dinner-party.

General Moore's dinners were always cheery, as indeed, for the matter of that, was General Moore himself. It is the right, not to say the duty, of a retired officer with an ample income, a handsome young wife, and a commodious mansion in South Kensington to be cheery. The General liked seeing his friends, of whom he had plenty, and his wife liked entertaining. Perhaps the skill and tact displayed in the selecting and assorting of the guests who assembled so constantly in the house in Cromwell Road should be credited rather to her than to him. She was his second wife and his junior by something more than twenty years, her step-daughter Susie being now eighteen. She had four small children of her own; but that did not prevent her from being an excellent step-mother, as step-mothers go, and resolved to do her very best for Susie, who had made her formal entrance into society at the last Drawing-room. That is to say, that whenever she issued invitations for a dinner-party, she took care to consult Susie's interests

by the inclusion of at least one eligible young man in the list.

On this particular occasion she had two; namely, Mr. Frederick Musgrave, and Captain Claughton, of the 4th Life Guards, to both of whom had been assigned parts in the private theatricals which were to take place later in the evening. As for Captain Claughton, it was perhaps going a little bit too far to describe him as strictly eligible. He was well-bred, and by no means bad-looking; he seemed to spend a good deal of money, and his father had a considerable property. But then he was not his father's eldest son; and young fellows in the Household Brigade are only too apt to spend a good deal of money which they do not possess. Mr. Musgrave, however, was certainly all right. It was well known that he would in due season inherit the fortune of his uncle, the Dean of St. Cyprian's, an old man in failing health, who, as Mrs. Moore had heard upon the best authority, had been economizing more than half of his income for many years past. Mr. Musgrave, therefore, might be encouraged with a clear conscience, and of late Mr. Musgrave had received as much

encouragement as any young man could wish for. These theatricals, for instance, had been got up entirely by his wish and under his supervision. He knew something about theatrical matters, for he was the author of a little comedy which had been accepted by a London manager, and was even now being performed nightly; besides which he had, when at Oxford, been somewhat notorious as an amateur actor. And so, in permitting him to arrange this entertainment, and to instruct Susie in an art of which she had hitherto been ignorant, one seemed, as it were, to be killing two birds with a single stone; because, of course, one wishes one's entertainments to be successful almost as much as one wishes one's stepdaughter to be provided with a husband.

Fred Musgrave fully intended the entertainment to be successful; perhaps, too, he intended to oblige his hostess in the other particular specified. At all events, he was beginning to think that he did; and the somewhat forward behavior of Captain Claughton made him think so still more. Trim, slim Captain Claughton, with his closely cut black hair, his slight mustache, his perfectly fitting clothes, and his eye-glass,

assumed during dinner a certain air of confidential familiarity in talking to Miss Moore which struck the other young man as rather offensive. As, however, the other young man was very good-natured and easy-going, he did not lose his temper, but only wondered whether Miss Moore really liked that sort of thing, and hoped she didn't, and was a little bit afraid that she did. It seemed quite possible that she might, nor was there any reason why she shouldn't; for Claughton was a very pleasant-mannered fellow, and she had already seen enough of him to have discovered that his admiration was not given to everybody. If he admired her, he paid her a compliment which no doubt she deserved, but which she might nevertheless be pardoned for appreciating.

Susie Moore, though not likely to achieve renown by reason of her beauty, had been pronounced to be "decidedly upon the pretty side" by her step-mother. "She has points," that unbiased critic had declared. "Of course, if you take her piecemeal, there isn't much to be said for her; but she has a genuine complexion, and her hair and eyes are of a rather nice shade of

brown, and the general effect is quite pleasing. Besides, she is as good as gold."

The latter encomium may have been irrelevant, but it was true, and it certainly deserved to be reckoned among Susie's charms. One may venture to say, without fear of giving offense (because no young woman would think of applying the remark to anybody except her neighbors), that whatever may be the charms of *débutantes* of the present day, that is scarcely the one for which the majority of them are conspicuous, and perhaps it was Susie's possession of it that had aroused the interest of Captain Claughton, who had dawdled through many London seasons. Possibly also it may have been that which had attracted Fred Musgrave; though he was a man of quite another type, and had had fewer opportunities of discovering its rarity.

He himself might almost have been cited as coming under the same denomination. Notwithstanding his twenty-seven years, he had remained to most intents and purposes a boy. He was liable to be carried away by occasional enthusiasms, such as his present craze for the drama; he had a fine, healthy belief in his fellow-crea-

tures, nearly all of whom he liked, and, having always been extremely popular, he had fallen into the habit of taking his own way and expecting that other people would see the reasonableness of making their convenience suit his. Probably he would have been rather a spoiled boy but for the natural sweetness of his disposition, which had enabled him to keep upon tolerably good terms even with his crabbed and arbitrary old uncle. In respect of personal appearance he had the advantage of Captain Claughton, being tall, broad-shouldered, and handsome, with curly fair hair, blue eyes, and regular features. In a vague sort of way he was understood to be clever, though it cannot be said that he had as yet done much to earn that reputation, save by the production of the comedy above-mentioned.

When one has such a number of things to make one happy, as health, strength, good looks, popularity, and a rich uncle, one must be abnormal indeed if one does not enjoy life, and Fred Musgrave enjoyed it thoroughly. He enjoyed General Moore's dinner, in spite of the slight disturbance of equilibrium which has been alluded to; he enjoyed making preparations for the play

afterwards, and giving last instructions to Susie, whom he had been carefully drilling during the previous fortnight; and most of all he enjoyed the play itself, which proved an unbroken triumph for him from beginning to end. Captain Claughton, to be sure, had to figure in it as Susie's lover; the exigencies of the piece demanded that. But Captain Claughton's histrionic abilities were but slender, and though he got through his part respectably, he did not throw much animation into it or obtain much applause from his audience. Fred, on the other hand, was applauded loudly, and a great many flattering things were said both of and to him, after the conclusion of the performance, which was succeeded by what Mrs. Moore was pleased to call "a little impromptu dance."

"Fine young fellow, that young Musgrave!" one of her guests remarked to her as she stood in the doorway, smiling benignly upon the dancers; "one doesn't often see such a happy combination of brains and physique. Pity he has no regular occupation."

"Well, perhaps," agreed Mrs. Moore indulgently; "but he seems to be able to make plenty

of occupations for himself, and he will never be under the necessity of working for his living, I suppose."

Mrs. Moore's friend, who was a middle-aged gentleman of large experience, shook his head with a skeptical smile. "I understand that he is entirely dependent upon his uncle, Dean Musgrave, the most cantankerous, cross-grained old wretch in the three kingdoms. Suppose his uncle were to take it into his head to cut him off with a shilling to-morrow!"

"Oh, but he would never do such a wicked thing!" exclaimed Mrs. Moore, quite shocked.

"There is no saying *what* an old man may not do," returned the other impressively. "I myself had an uncle who married when he was nearer seventy than sixty, and, if you'll believe me, that man had three children before he died. Left the whole of his money among them too, though for years he had been in the habit of spending the greater part of every summer in our house and growling at the cook. Besides, hasn't old Musgrave got a prodigal son somewhere or other, whom he kicked out of doors in days gone by?"

"Oh, no, I don't think so," answered Mrs.

Moore; "I never heard a word about his having had any children."

"Well, I have. Upon second thoughts I'm not sure that it wasn't a prodigal daughter. Anyhow, there was somebody."

Mrs. Moore made a mental note of the alleged circumstance. She did not know very much about Mr. Musgrave or his belongings, and perhaps it might become her duty to make inquiries.

Meanwhile Fred, unconscious of the disagreeable possibilities which were being forecast on his behalf, was dancing with pretty little Susie Moore, and it so chanced that when their waltz was over, and when he had led her into the apology for a conservatory which adjoined the ball-room, she began, in the innocence of her heart, to question him about his present manner of life and his plans for the future, of which she was even more ignorant than her mother. Fred did not object to being questioned; he had nothing to conceal, and he was pleased that Miss Moore should display any interest in his career.

"My present ambition," he informed her, "is to develop into a dramatic author. That is a very

respectable sort of ambition, it seems to me, though my uncle thinks differently."

"Your uncle and you generally do think differently, don't you?" asked the girl.

"I should hardly say that; we get on wonderfully well, considering all things. As for our thinking alike, it is impossible to tell whether we do or not, because my uncle has a sort of mania for opposition. It would go to his heart to have to confess that he agreed with you upon any given subject. He disapproves strongly of my writing plays; but that's a matter of course. I suppose he would disapprove of my accepting the office of Prime Minister, if it were offered to me."

"That must be rather disagreeable for you."

"Oh, I'm accustomed to it, and I don't mind. It's only his way. Every now and then we have a quarrel—we are supposed to be in the midst of a quarrel at present—but it blows over after a bit, and we go on as before."

"Does that mean that you always end by doing what you wish?"

"Well, pretty much; but then I never wish to do what he has any business to dislike."

"I should think he must have been very kind to you," observed Susie, after a moment of reflection; "you seem to live only to amuse yourself."

"Oh, Miss Moore, what a cruel thing to say! I am sure I have every wish to lead a useful existence; but I really don't see why I shouldn't amuse myself into the bargain. My amusements are quite healthy and innoeent. I play cricket; I shoot a little, when I get the chance; I hunt a little, if anybody is good enough to give me a mount; and sometimes I take a part in private theatricals. There's no harm in all that, is there?"

"No; only I should have thought that, with your talents, you might have been better employed."

"I know what you mean; I ought to have a profession. Now, I'll tell you exactly how that matter stands. Shortly after I matriculated my uncle gave me my choice of the professions which he said were the only ones open to a gentleman. There weren't a great many of them. The Navy of course was out of the question; so that there remained the Army, the Church, the Bar, and Diplomacy. I chose the Army.

He said, Very well; only I must take my degree first—which practically disposed of that. Diplomacy wouldn't do, because of my ignorance of foreign languages; I didn't feel that I had any vocation for the Church; and accordingly I swallowed the requisite number of dinners and became a barrister. But the study of the law is simply loathsome to me, whereas I really do think that I have some little turn for the composition of dramatic dialogue. Consequently I write plays instead of pleading cases. According to my ideas, the one is as much a profession as the other; but my uncle can't be brought to admit it."

"And is he very angry with you?"

"Oh, he says he never was so disgusted and disappointed in all his life; but that is a mistake. He has been quite as much disgusted and disappointed scores of times before, and he will continue to be so to his dying day."

Susie laughed. "Poor old fellow! But don't you think you ought to try and do what he would like?"

"That would be an impossible ideal to strive because nobody has ever yet discovered

what he would like. I would a great deal rather try to do what you would like, Miss Moore."

"I? Oh, but I am not your uncle."

"Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that you are my aunt; you will find me a dutiful and submissive nephew. Only issue your commands, and you shall be obeyed to the best of my poor ability."

Susie declined the responsibility which it was sought to thrust upon her; yet, on being a little further pressed, she did not refuse to state what—supposing that she had any reason to feel a personal interest in Mr. Musgrave's career—she would desire on his behalf. And it was gratifying to hear that, in that event, her aspirations would not, after all, differ very widely from his own. A man, she thought, ought always to set some definite object before himself and work toward it; but she admitted that the circumstance of his being a barrister does not compel him to keep one eye forever fixed upon the woolsack. One may very well deserve to be Lord Chancellor without attaining to that dignity, whereas one can scarcely become the most successful dramatic author of the period without de-

serving it. Therefore the ambitious playwriter is rather more likely to reach his goal than the ambitious barrister, while both ambitions must be pronounced equally legitimate.

Now, anybody can guess what course a conversation thus initiated was sure to take, and if Fred Musgrave, when he left the house, had not declared his love to Susie Moore, that was because he was a conscientious young man, and knew that he had no business to propose to any one without having previously obtained his uncle's permission to do so. He was not, however, so conscientious but that he had made his wishes tolerably clear, and Susie certainly had not seemed to be displeased with him. And so, as he was being driven in a hansom toward the chambers in St. James's where he dwelt, he whistled light-heartedly and had visions of a happy future. He would go down to Oxford the very next day, he resolved, and make it up with his uncle. That, probably, would not be difficult. He had had periods of estrangement from the old man before now, and had always been able to terminate them when it had pleased him to do so. In fact, he had a pretty strong conviction

that he was essential to his uncle's comfort, and also that that terrible old gentleman's bark was worse than his bite. "I suppose," he thought, "I shall have to make some concession. Perhaps I might promise to go circuit once a year, upon the understanding that I must be allowed to occupy my spare moments in composing comedies. Of course, when I first introduce the subject of my possible marriage there will be a tremendous explosion, but he'll cool down before night and see that I might do worse. The Moores are all right as far as breeding and connections go—that's one comfort."

Then, having reached his destination, he ran upstairs, and on the table he espied the telegram from the Master of All Saints, which had been lying there for the last six hours or more.

"*Come here as soon as you can. Your uncle is dangerously ill.*"

The young man was startled and sobered. He had heard nothing of this illness, and was quite unprepared for a summons which, unfortunately, he could not at once obey. The first train for Oxford would leave at 5:30, and it was now nearer three than two o'clock. It was hardly

worth while to go to bed, so he changed his clothes, packed up a few things, and smoked until it was time to start. Upon further reflection he did not feel very much alarmed, his temperament always inclining him to hope for the best; still, although the delay which had occurred in his departure was due to no fault of his, he was sorry about it and afraid that the old man might set him down as heartless. As a matter of fact he was really fond of the old man—more so, perhaps, than the old man had been of him. But that is a point which can never be decided; for the secret of Dean Musgrave's affections, supposing that he possessed any, remained in his own keeping and died with him.

CHAPTER III.

IT was still early morning when Fred Musgrave reached Oxford, and walked up from the station to the venerable college in which for so many years his uncle had been more feared than loved. The ancient buildings looked grim and mournful under the leaden March sky; the soft stone of which, like all except the most modern Oxford edifices, they had been constructed, was peeling and crumbling away, and to a fanciful spectator they might have worn an ominously suggestive aspect of death and decay. Fred Musgrave, however, was not at all a fanciful person, and he only thought that it was a horrid raw morning, and that he would be glad to warm himself before the dining-room fire. Nor did he draw any gloomy deduction from the circumstance that all the blinds in the Dean's residence were drawn down: most people's blinds are down before eight o'clock on a wintry morning.

It was, therefore, a great shock to him when

Williams, the butler, appeared with a very long face, and, in answer to his inquiry, said: "It's all over, sir, I am sorry to tell you. The Dean expired peacefully shortly after eleven o'clock last night, sir."

The housekeeper followed, with confirmatory sighs and shakings of the head. Neither she nor the butler had been much attached to their late master—indeed, it was quite impossible that they should be—but decency commands us to look sad when anybody dies, even though he may have been an old man and a tyrant into the bargain. As for Fred, his distress was genuine, though he could not for the moment find any words in which to express it.

"How awfully sudden!" he exclaimed.

"Well, I don't know as we can call it that, sir," answered the housekeeper, twisting her cap-strings between her fingers. "For three days past I 'aven't 'ad no 'opes myself, and when the doctor come yesterday he give me to understand as nothing more could be done."

"And yet you never sent for me!"

"We durstn't do it, sir, without orders. Day before yesterday I says to Mr. Williams—which

he can bear me out in that—'Didn't somebody ought to telegraph for Mr. Frederick?' I says; and Mr. Williams he quite agree. But I couldn't take upon me to mention it, you see, sir; and when Mr. Breffit was here yesterday I spoke to him; but he couldn't give me no authority to hact. 'Well,' he says, '*under* the circumstances,' he says—"

"It doesn't much signify what Mr. Breffit said," interrupted Fred, who perhaps was not particularly anxious to hear the circumstances in question dilated upon; "the upshot of it is that, among you, you have managed to prevent me from saying good-by to my uncle."

"Which no one can deplore that more than I do, I'm sure, sir," returned Mrs. Simpson with an injured air.

The butler begged to associate himself with that expression of regret. At the same time, he felt bound to say that in his opinion no blame attached to Mrs. Simpson. Mr. Frederick must be aware that instant dismissal would have been the fate of any servant who should have presumed to offer a suggestion to the late Dean.

Mr. Frederick was quite aware of it; and in-

deed he was also aware that both Williams and Simpson were inspired by more friendly feelings toward himself than any that they had ever entertained for the old man, who had paid them handsomely but had treated them like slaves. "Well," he said, after a pause, "it was no fault of yours, I suppose; but I wish Dr. Drysdale had thought of summoning me a little sooner."

Then he asked for some particulars of his uncle's illness; and then, since we must eat, whatever happens, he had his breakfast.

Later in the morning he went upstairs and looked for the last time upon the stern, calm features which had never been quite so terrible to him as they had been to the rest of the world. His uncle had not been his friend, nor anything approaching to his friend; no confidences had ever been exchanged between them, nor had the severity meted out to him been even tempered by justice. Yet he could not but remember, and had no wish to forget, that he owed everything to his uncle. He well recollected the day when, as a boy of fifteen, he had been sent to Oxford, had been introduced into the presence of his alarming relative, and had been coldly informed

that henceforth he would be provided for and "educated in the manner customary amongst English gentlemen"—always supposing that he did not grossly misconduct himself. He had since often wondered what would have become of him if he had not been adopted by the old Dean. He had at that time been an orphan, absolutely alone in the world, and absolutely without means of subsistence. His father, after having amassed a large fortune as a China merchant, had lost everything through some unfortunate speculations, and had dropped down dead on the very day that his bankruptcy was announced. Then the Dean of St. Cyprian's, who had broken off all relations with his brother from the moment that the latter had engaged in trade (an avocation which, according to the Dean's ideas, was utterly disgraceful and degrading to a Musgrave), thought fit to take charge of his brother's only child; and it is but fair to add that he behaved quite as generously to Fred as he would have done to a son of his own. He was not tender; he made no allowances for the young fellow (except, in due season, a pecuniary one, which was sufficiently liberal); he took very little

interest in his pursuits or tastes; but he tolerated him, and that, after all, was more than he had been able to accomplish in the case of any other living mortal, with the solitary exception of the Master of All Saints.

Fred had not distinguished himself at the University, save in the matter of athletics; but he had been steady and sensible, and had not run up bills. Such differences as he had with his uncle, until that rather serious one arose about the question of his career, had for the most part had their origin in mere trifles, and the younger man had always given in—or at any rate appeared to give in—with a grace and good humor which the elder had been unable to resist. To Fred these needless quarrels and reconciliations had seemed more comical than provoking; he had taken a very indulgent view of the perversity which had brought them about; probably he had to some extent understood his uncle, though it is doubtful whether his uncle had ever understood him.

Well, it was all over now; and henceforth this once destitute orphan would not only be his own master but the master of considerable wealth. He could not help thinking a little about that,

though he was rather ashamed of admitting the thought at such a time. That he would be the sole inheritor of his uncle's fortune he did not doubt for a moment: who else was there to inherit it? And this reflection naturally led to the further one that there was nothing now to debar him from proposing to Susie Moore.

The moment that the breath is out of the body of a king his successor seizes pen and paper and indites a manifesto to the nation. Custom requires of him that he should do this, and also that, in doing it, he should use certain conventional expressions of grief; but it will be observed that these manifestoes, when stripped of conventionalisms, usually amount to nothing more nor less than: "I beg to inform you that I have ascended the throne. Three cheers for me!" In private life something of the same sort is very apt to occur; and indeed there is no help for it. The world is for the living; a man must needs face his new duties and responsibilities and privileges; one should not be too hard upon an heir who finds that his sorrow is mingled with an excitement which is not very far removed from joy. But Fred did his best to choke down any

such sentiment, and he received some help in doing so from the Master of All Saints, who called later in the day and who asked to see him.

"My dear fellow," exclaimed the old man, "I'm dreadfully distressed about this—dreadfully distressed to hear that you did not arrive in time! I blame myself for it; though I assure you I had no idea that my poor friend's life was in danger until yesterday afternoon. As soon as I knew that I telegraphed; but unhappily it was too late. If only you could have met, he would doubtless have forgiven you. Not that you have much to reproach yourself with; for, after all, it is no crime to write a play. Still—"

"I don't think my uncle was really very angry with me," said the young man, somewhat surprised. "And even if he was, I am sure he forgave me before he died."

"Yes; well—perhaps. Let us hope so," answered Dr. Drysdale, who had been going to say a little more, but who changed his intention. It was possible that no such will as the Dean had described to him had actually been executed; and again it was quite possible that, if executed, it had been revoked. Perhaps the

best plan was to keep his own counsel for the present, since the truth must so soon be known. He contented himself, therefore, with a few oracular utterances upon the uncertainty of all earthly things and with making some excuses which seemed a little unnecessary for his dead friend.

Fred quite mistook his meaning. He thought he was receiving a mild lecture for his selfishness and willfulness, and he was not at all sure that he didn't deserve it. Certainly there is no crime in writing a play, but perhaps he might have shown a little more deference to the wishes of his benefactor, whose wishes could never be enforced again. As a matter of fact, the wishes and wills of deceased benefactors can be and are enforced, with all the majesty of the law to back them; but this view of the case did not present itself to Fred, and after Dr. Drysdale had left him he was as penitent and melancholy as his uncle would have said that he ought to be.

He had of course, a good deal to occupy him during the next few days. Every morning the post brought him instructions from Mr. Breffit, who appeared in person to attend the funeral,

accompanied by one Sir James Le Breton, an ex-Indian judge and a brother of the late Dean's wife. With this gentleman the Dean had remained on terms of amity, although—or more probably because—they had never met, and he had, therefore, at Mr. Breffit's suggestion, been requested to pay the last tribute of respect that could be paid to his kinsman.

Fred and he represented the family of the deceased between them; there was absolutely no one else who could have been asked to figure in that capacity, although the ceremony was attended by a large number of ecclesiastical dignitaries, and some distinguished literary and scientific men came down from London in order to be present at it. The majority of the visitors, having borne their part in a rite which was rather imposing than touching, hurried away; a few returned to luncheon at the late Dean's residence, and after these had departed Mr. Breffit stated, not without a certain mournful solemnity, that it would now be his duty to read the will.

From this it appeared, first of all, that the Master of All Saints and Sir James Le Breton

were nominated as executors, and that to each of them was bequeathed a sum of £100 as a small token of regard. The valuable library of the testator was left to the College of St. Cyprian's; the servants took substantial legacies; then, after a pause and with something of a sigh, Mr. Breffit announced that a sum of £10,000 was to go to "my nephew Frederick Musgrave," and that the residue of the estate, real and personal, went to "my daughter, Laura Fenton," whom failing, the next of kin was to inherit in her place.

Whether, as a general rule, it is amusing or not to be a solicitor must of course depend upon what people's notions of amusement may be; but if a solicitor's duties are in the main a little dull, they are no doubt susceptible of occasional enlivenment by the power to bring about a truly dramatic situation, and any satisfaction that Mr. Breffit may have been able to derive from the knowledge of having thoroughly astonished his hearers was not denied to him. Sir James Le Breton, a thin, white-haired old gentleman, who had been rather annoyed to find that he was to be saddled with the duties of an executor, and

somewhat consoled on hearing that he was to have a hundred pounds for his trouble, started up, exclaiming, "God bless my soul!—his daughter, Laura Fenton! Why, I always understood that she had died long ago."

Fred's amazement was even more profound, since he had not until now been aware that such a person had ever existed. He sat with his mouth open and made no remark.

"I am almost entirely without information upon the subject," Mr. Breffit said. "When Dean Musgrave first did us the honor to intrust us with the management of his affairs his daughter was already married, and the references which he has instructed me to make to her in previous wills have been unimportant, and—and I may say hypothetical. From other sources however, I have learned that about a dozen years ago this lady contracted an alliance of which her father disapproved, that she has not since then held any communication with him, and that she and her husband emigrated to New Zealand immediately after their marriage. If living, she is probably in New Zealand now."

Sir James Le Breton rubbed his ear impa-

tiently and said, "How the deuce are we to get hold of the woman?" To which Mr. Breffit replied, "Well, I suppose we must advertise."

The Master of All Saints, who was also present, but who had not opened his lips up to now, observed in an apologetic tone that nobody would quite like his daughter to run away with the music-master, and that one could easily understand how a man upon the threshold of death might hesitate between the conflicting claims of paternity and—and—and, in short, other claims.

Mr. Breffit regretted that he did not possess the same facility of comprehension. It was not for him to express any opinion as to the action of his late client; but he was bound to say that in all his experience he had never met with a man less given to hesitation. This appeared to exhaust all that there was to be said about the matter. A short period of silence supervened, and shortly afterwards the conclave broke up. The Master of All Saints, before leaving the room, patted Fred on the shoulder and looked sympathetic, but as he could not think of any-

thing consolatory to say he adopted the wise course of saying nothing.

Mr. Breffit was more outspoken. Mr. Breffit knew Fred well, and liked him. The late Dean, who had been a most litigious person and had kept his legal advisers pretty constantly employed, had often invited Mr. Breffit down to Oxford for a day or two at a time, and thus an acquaintanceship, which was almost a friendship, had sprung up between the lawyer and the young man who had always been understood to be his uncle's heir. When, therefore, these two were left together, the former did not allow professional reticence to deter him from exclaiming, "Upon my word it's a confounded shame! And so I would have told him if it would have been of the slightest use. But you are as well aware as anybody that your uncle was not the man to brook interference."

"Oh, I don't know about it's being a shame," said Fred; "it seems to me quite right that he should have provided for his daughter, since he had a daughter. The extraordinary thing is that neither he nor anybody else should have breathed a word about her to me in all these years."

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders. "In my opinion, and in everybody else's opinion, she was virtually, if not actually, dead; and your uncle did not like his family affairs to be talked about. I might have warned you that there was just the possibility of a doubt about your succeeding to his property, but I had no reason to suppose that there was such a possibility, so I thought it best to hold my tongue with regard to matters which did not concern me."

"It's all quite as it should be," Fred declared. "Discoveries of this kind rather take one's breath away; but I certainly have no cause to complain. Ten thousand pounds is a good round sum."

"Oh, you think so, do you? You imagine that you will be able to live upon the interest of £10,000? You imagine, perhaps, that you have hitherto been living upon such an income?"

"There's no imagination about it. My uncle allowed me three hundred a year."

"And paid the greater part of your expenses into the bargain."

"Well, he helped me out with a check from time to time; but if I can get five per cent. for my money—"

"You can't get five per cent. for your money—nobody can. And you have no profession worth speaking of. I confess I should look upon it as a bad business if I didn't feel tolerably certain that your cousin Mrs. Fenton is no more."

"Why shouldn't she be alive and well?"

"Simply because she has given no signs of life for twelve years. Just consider what the position of affairs is. Here is a woman, married to a musician who certainly can be no great master of his craft, or he wouldn't have emigrated. She is the only child of a rich man—for, mind you, the Dean inherited from more than one relation, and he held house property which has greatly increased in value. I shall be very much surprised if his estate realizes a penny less than £200,000. Well now, I ask you, is it likely that a woman so circumstanced would have allowed all this time to elapse without so much as trying the effect of saying, 'I beg your pardon'?"

"It doesn't strike me as impossible. I wonder whether you will succeed in unearthing her?"

"I hope that she is a little too far beneath the surface of the earth for that; but of course every inquiry will be made, and I trust that our labors

may be rewarded by the discovery of her burial certificate."

"Thanks; but it seems rather shabby to wish her dead, poor thing! Anyhow, I had better assume that she is alive."

"Oh, yes, you had better assume that in the mean time. And if I were you, I should abandon all thought of a literary career. Literary earnings are very precarious at best, and then you see, literature leads to nothing. A barrister may not make his fortune while he is young; but he has always the prospect of dropping into some snug berth or other by the time that he is growing old."

Fred, however, did not seem disposed to listen to well-meant advice upon that point.

CHAPTER IV.

FRED MUSGRAVE had never troubled himself much about the question of expenditure. He had not got into debt; but possibly he might have done so if the allowance which his uncle had made him had not been supplemented by tolerably frequent presents. Mr. Breffit, therefore, was perhaps entitled to doubt whether the interest of £10,000 would suffice to pay for the keep of this careless young man. However that might be, it was evident that he could not afford to marry upon such an income; and when he realized this unquestionable fact his heart grew heavy within him. He did not share Mr. Breffit's confident belief that his cousin was dead and buried, the circumstance of her having remained silent for so long not appearing to him by any means as conclusive as it had appeared to the man of law. It was not very unnatural that she should have remained silent. Knowing what her father was, she must

have known that he would never be persuaded to receive her husband, and she probably had not cared to crave a pardon which at the utmost would be extended to herself alone. So Fred, as he journeyed back toward London, had some serious thoughts to keep him company, not the least disagreeable of which was that he was now in honor bound to refrain from paying his addresses to Susie Moore. A man who has some definite prospects may be justified in asking the girl who loves him to wait for better times; but Fred's prospects were indefinite in the last degree, and he could not but feel that the finger of duty beckoned him away from Cromwell Road for the present.

On the afternoon of his return he looked in at a club of which both he and General Moore were members, and it so happened that General Moore was the first person whom he came across in the smoking-room. The General, who had seen an obituary notice of Dean Musgrave in the papers, jumped up, shook his young friend by the hand, and endeavored to assume a proper air of affliction. "So sorry to hear of your loss, my dear fellow! Very sudden, was it not? I'm afraid

you can hardly have been in time to see your uncle alive."

"I was too late by a good many hours," answered Fred. "I didn't even know that he was ill until I got home from your house the other night, when I found a telegram waiting for me. I left by the first train in the morning, but it was all over. He must have died at the very time when our theatricals were coming to an end."

"Dear, dear!—how very sad, to be sure! Although," added the General, with a cheerfulness which could no longer be repressed, "he wasn't exactly a young man, you know."

"Oh, he wasn't a young man certainly."

"That's what I say. And, really when you come to think of it, extreme old age isn't a thing to be desired; one doesn't want to outlive all one's friends and relations. You were poor Dean Musgrave's only surviving relation, were you not?"

"Very nearly," answered Fred, with a slight smile.

"Ah, so I understood. It sounds melancholy; still no doubt it simplifies matters in some ways. I presume, then," continued General Moore,

casting aside all affectation of sorrow, "that we may congratulate you upon having come into a very handsome fortune."

The General turned rather red and felt a little ashamed of himself after he had made this interrogative remark, which, it must be confessed, was not in the best taste. But there were excuses for him. He knew that when he reached home he would be sure to let out that he had met young Musgrave at the club; he knew that he would be questioned by his wife, and he also knew that she would be displeased with him if he should profess himself unable to answer her questions. Now, a wise man never gives his wife reason to be displeased with him if he can possibly help it.

Fred hesitated for a moment, but only for a moment, before replying, "My uncle left me £10,000." The truth would have to be told sooner or later, and to tell it at once seemed to be the most straightforward course.

General Moore's chin dropped and his eyes grew round. "Ten thousand pounds! God bless my soul! do you mean to say that he had no more than that to leave?"

"The lawyer tells me that he had something like £200,000; but the whole of it, except my share and a few small legacies, goes—as of course it ought to go—to his daughter. Until I heard the will read I had no idea that he had a daughter, but it seems that there is such a person, though nobody knows her exact whereabouts at present. She married against my uncle's wishes shortly before I went to live with him, and apparently they have never met since. However, he behaved generously to her at the last."

"Generously!—yes; he behaved generously to her, and no mistake! But I must own—however, it's no business of mine. And nobody knows where this woman is, you say?"

"Well, it is known she sailed for New Zealand after her marriage. I dare say we shall soon have news of her."

"What—what a very unpleasant surprise!" General Moore could not help ejaculating. "You take it most good-humoredly, Musgrave; but it must be a great blow for you; I defy any man not to feel such a thing as a blow. Still," he added presently, "there's always a chance that

your cousin may have died in New Zealand. In that event you would inherit, I suppose."

"Yes; in that event everything would go to me, as the next of kin."

"Oh, well," returned the general, rubbing his hands, "we'll hope for the best then."

Like Mr. Breffit, he was strongly of opinion that the only child of a man who possesses £200,000 does not allow the fact of her existence to remain a secret for twelve years, and he said as much, adding, while he moved away, "Come and look us up when you've nothing better to do, Musgrave. Always glad to see you."

But Mrs. Moore, when this deplorable tale was related to her, decided that intimacy with young Mr. Musgrave must for the time being be discouraged. "Of course we can't ask him to dinner while he is in such deep mourning; and although one wouldn't wish to seem unfriendly, it would be as well to keep him at a certain distance until we know a little more. Oddly enough, somebody—I can't remember who—told me about this daughter of the old Dean's on the evening of the theatricals. It is really very unfortunate! Such a nice young fellow in every

way; and a fortune of £200,000 too! But for Susie's sake we are bound to be careful."

The General concurred. Neither he nor his wife were more worldly than their neighbors; but it stands to reason that when you are blessed with a daughter who is of an age to marry, you cannot allow yourself the additional luxury of perpetually welcoming handsome young paupers to your house. On the other hand, it had to be remembered that Fred Musgrave might not be a pauper, after all, and that nothing certain was likely to be known as to that for a considerable length of time; so that his case was one which required delicate handling.

Taking all this into consideration, Mrs. Moore judged it advisable to write a very kind note to the young man, in which much sympathy was expressed for him in his bereavement and no allusion was made to his uncle's will. In a postscript she added: "I don't know whether you care about seeing your friends just now, but you would always be pretty sure of finding us at home between half-past five and six o'clock." And for a whole week afterwards she took very good care to be out at the hour named; which was a need-

less precaution, since during that time Mr. Musgrave did not avail himself of her permission.

When at length he did call, Mrs. and Miss Moore happened to return from their drive while he was standing on the door-step, and of course they could do no less than ask him to come in and have a cup of tea. He, for his part, did not see how he could decline the invitation without rudeness; and his conscience, which had kept him away from South Kensington for so long, allowed him to accept it upon the condition that he should abstain from any marked attention to Miss Moore. Accordingly, he accompanied the ladies to the drawing-room, and for about a quarter of an hour enjoyed such happiness as may be derived from gazing at forbidden fruit.

Susie apparently had not much to say to him; but perhaps that was because her step-mother did not give her the chance. Mrs. Moore was extremely amiable and extremely talkative. They had a great many engagements and were very busy, she said. No doubt they would be even more so when they returned from the country, whither they were just about to go down for a week.

"I hear of all sorts of entertainments in prospect; we ourselves shall be going to two dances later on, I think. So sorry we shall not see you at them; but of course you wont be going out."

Indeed, she laid a good deal of stress upon this point, and recurred to it repeatedly in the course of her conversation, seeming to take it for granted that Mr Musgrave would retire from society for the remainder of the season. "She couldn't be more determined to dismiss me into a life of seclusion if I were a widow," Fred thought, with some inward amusement.

However, her manner was as friendly as possible; and if the impression which she conveyed (and desired to convey) to her visitor was that they were likely to have very few opportunities of meeting for a long time to come, she also implied that this was a source of sincere regret to her. Fred went away pretty well pleased with her and much pleased with himself. He considered that he had behaved very nicely under circumstances of exceptional difficulty; he had scarcely spoken a word to Susie, nor had he said anything of a nature to betray his secret. Once or twice, it was true, their eyes had met, but that had been

unavoidable. And indeed it may be conceded that if you keep your eyes steadily fixed upon the face of any person for a quarter of an hour, you render it practically impossible for that person to avoid meeting them once or twice. Fred had, in fact, betrayed his secret to an intelligent observer quite as effectually as he could have done through the medium of speech; and after he had taken his leave Mrs. Moore looked meditative and serious.

The outcome of her meditations was that she remarked, "That young man will never make his fortune, I'm afraid."

"Why not?" asked Susie.

"He seems to me to take things far too easily. His uncle's will must have been a great surprise and disappointment to him; yet he talks as though nothing were changed. He doesn't seem to realize the immense difference that this makes in his life."

"Grumbling wouldn't make the difference any less," observed Susie.

"Of course not; and nobody would wish him to grumble. But his friends, I should think, might wish him to show some sign that he appre-

ciated the necessity of carving out a career for himself."

Susie replied rather warmly that she thought Mr. Musgrave accepted adverse fortune quite as a gentleman should. He said nothing about it—why should he? He might intend to carve out a career for himself without brandishing his carving-knife in the face of all his acquaintances. "His uncle seems to have treated him very badly," she added in conclusion.

"Well," said Mrs. Moore, in an impartial tone, "I am not quite so sure of that. From what I have heard lately he can have taken no trouble at all to conciliate his uncle, and one can't deny that a daughter has better claims than a nephew."

"But he ought to have been told that there was a daughter."

"Perhaps he would have been told if he had asked. I really think that it was his business to inform himself, instead of assuming that he must necessarily be the heir, whether he obeyed orders or not. One can't feel very sorry for people who expect everything to be made smooth for them and wont lift a finger to help themselves."

Mrs. Moore said this partly because she really meant it, and partly because she did not wish Fred Musgrave to become too interesting a figure in Susie's sight. Having said so much, she refrained from further censure. Should circumstances, after all, place his late uncle's fortune in his hands, there would be nothing in the criticisms which she had uttered to debar her from consenting joyfully to his union with her step-daughter, and she would have defeated her own object if she had exceeded the limits of legitimate criticism or given Susie an excuse for taking up the cudgels on his behalf.

The girl showed no disposition to do so, merely remarking, "He dances very well; I'm sorry it wont be allowable for him to go to any more balls this summer."

Possibly such bereavements as Fred had sustained should make it improper for the bereaved ones to show their faces in society for two or three months; but they are not regarded in that light by the general run of nephews. At all events, nobody will assert that the death of an uncle ought to prevent a healthy young man from seeking relaxation in cricket and racquets; and

Fred devoted a good deal of his leisure time to these games, at both of which he excelled. He had no lack of leisure time (for it is evident that if you want to produce a really good comedy, with some strong situations in it, you must above all things avoid hasty workmanship), and he was a member of the Marylebone and other clubs, and had an abundance of friends. Besides, do what he would, he could not help regarding the present period as one of transition. It was all very well to say that he would assume his cousin's existence as proved; but there are serious difficulties in the way of basing your whole manner of life upon a mere assumption, and the more he tried to familiarize his mind with the idea of practicing at the bar the more he hated it.

So far, nothing had been heard of Mrs. Fenton. Inquiries—so Mr. Breffit informed Fred—had been instituted by telegram in the principal towns of New Zealand, but without result; and now advertisements had been inserted in all the leading colonial newspapers. "We shall have news of some kind before long, you may be sure," the lawyer declared. "People don't disappear in these days even when they want to disappear,

much less when they have no motive for concealing themselves."

Meanwhile Fred continued to obey the voice of conscience by seeking no occasion of encountering Susie Moore; and this was all the more creditable to him, because rumors had reached his ears that Captain Claughton was forever at the house in Cromwell Road.

Now it came to pass one fine morning in the month of May that Musgrave had an appointment which obliged him to walk across Hyde Park; and when, among the crowd of ladies who were seated beneath the trees there, he recognized Mrs. Moore and her step-daughter, what could he do but stop and speak to them? They had not met for such a very long time that it would have looked decidedly odd if he had walked on without addressing a word to either of them; and, indeed, they both appeared to be pleased to see him. Mrs. Moore was engaged in conversation with an elderly gentleman; and as the chair by Susie's side was vacant, Fred thought there could be no great harm in his occupying it just for a minute or two, and asking her how she was enjoying her first season.

She was enjoying it very much, upon the whole, she said; and she had heard that he also was enjoying himself. "Papa says you are playing cricket all day and every day."

"Well, hardly that," answered the young man; "but I have been playing in rather more matches than usual this year. You speak as if I oughtn't to have been playing. What ought I to have been doing!"

"Oh, I shouldn't presume to say. Wearing a wig and gown, perhaps."

"So I will, as soon as somebody is obliging enough to give me a brief. In the mean time I go on with my literary work, such as it is. I really am not a loafer, Miss Moore, though I know you set me down as one. I am not half such a loafer as Claughton, for instance."

"Are you not?" asked Susie innocently. "I should have thought—but of course I know nothing about it. Only papa always says that Captain Claughton is a very keen soldier."

"It's bad luck for him if he is, because he belongs to a corps which never sees any active service."

"Well, the Life Guards were sent to Egypt, you know."

"So we are always being reminded," answered Fred, whose good-humor was not proof against this attempt to represent his rival as a hero; "but there wasn't much fighting worth speaking of there."

"They were not to blame for that, I suppose," Susie was beginning; but now Mrs. Moore somewhat abruptly dismissed her elderly friend and rose.

"Susie, dear," she said, "we really must be making our way home. Good-by, Mr. Musgrave; do come and see us some afternoon when you have nothing better to do."

This was quite kindly said; but for all that, Fred walked away feeling rather sore and with an intuitive conviction that Mrs. Moore was not particularly anxious for his company. Moreover he was conscious of having been undeservedly snubbed by Susie. Was it possible that his changed fortunes had caused him to lose her favor? Or had her step-mother been setting her against him?

Both of these things were perfectly possible

and even, from an abstract point of view, probable, but neither of them happened to be true. Had Fred been able to look into the not very obscure depths of the girl's mind he would have discovered that, if she was displeased with him, it was because she was a little hurt by his recent inexplicable neglect of her. But such tremendous powers of penetration as that are granted to few young men and to no lovers.

CHAPTER V.

WHILE Fred Musgrave was holding the brief and discouraging interview with Miss Moore described in the last chapter, Mr. Breffit was sitting in his office and gazing in some dismay at an open telegram which lay upon the table before him. This message, which had just arrived, purported to come from "Laura Fenton, Sydney, New South Wales," and seemed to dispose pretty finally of the prospects of Laura Fenton's next of kin.

"Have seen advertisement. Am sailing for Europe. Mr. Fenton died three years ago." Such was the substance of a communication which caused the worthy Mr. Breffit to use strong language.

"Confound the woman!" he muttered; "what's the use of her husband being dead? He would have had no claim if he had survived her. Well, she will have to prove her identity, and that may not be so easy a matter as she imagines."

The lawyer derived some comfort from this reflection, which, however, was not shared by the next of kin, to whom he hastened to impart what he called his bad news.

"I am not in the least surprised," Fred declared; "I never understood why you should jump to the conclusion that a woman of thirty or thereabouts must be dead. As for proving that she is my uncle's daughter, that ought not to be difficult. There are plenty of people in Oxford who would be sure to remember her."

"Well—I'm afraid so," sighed Mr. Breffit; "still the executors will very naturally and properly demand convincing proofs. I'm very sorry about it on your account."

But Fred was not so very sorry that uncertainty was at an end. His position, at all events, was now clear, and there was no longer any necessity for him to hesitate about visiting at the Moores' house if they chose to receive him. The next time that he met the General he told him that the missing heiress had been discovered, which intelligence, however, had already reached that gentleman through the medium of the press. The late Dean of St. Cyprian's had been a well-

known personage, and those journals which depend upon records of personalities for their circulation had not failed to comment upon his somewhat startling will. Within the last few days they had, by some means or other, learned that Mrs. Fenton was alive and on her way home, and this new feature of a queer story had of course been duly furnished to their readers.

Mrs. Moore, when she read the paragraph, remarked: "That settles poor Mr. Musgrave's hash! It's a pity; but we must be thankful that matters were checked in time."

"Oh, well; matters hadn't gone very far, had they?" said the General.

"I'm afraid they were upon the verge of going rather far," answered his wife. "It just shows how careful one ought to be! Happily, there is no great harm done, and nothing will be easier than to quietly let him drop out of our visiting-list."

But General Moore, who was an honest and kind-hearted old gentleman, did not quite like this cynical suggestion. "Is there any occasion for that?" he asked. "I would rather not turn my back upon the poor fellow now that he is

down; and, after all, how do we know that he ever thought of Susie or she of him? It seems to me that Claughton is a good deal more dangerous."

"I don't think Captain Claughton can be called exactly dangerous," answered Mrs. Moore musingly. "It appears that he has some money of his own, and I am told that his elder brother, who is unmarried, is subject to epileptic fits. Of course I don't want to turn my back upon poor Mr. Musgrave: let him come and dine if you like. All I stipulate for is that he shall only be asked on dinner-party nights."

Thus the General felt at liberty to be amicable and hearty when his young friend accosted him, and, after offering his condolences, did not hesitate to add: "What are you doing next Thursday? We have one or two people coming to dine with us, and should be delighted to see you, if you're not engaged."

Fred gladly accepted the invitation and betook himself to Cromwell Road on the appointed evening; but the opportunity thus afforded him of exchanging a few words with Susie—it was only a few words that he was permitted to

address to her, and these were spoken in the presence of witnesses—was productive of no great increase in his happiness. It occurred to him that he would hardly have been asked to the house if the risk of his ensnaring Miss Moore's affections had been thought worth taking into account, and he was hampered by a feeling that any such attempt would be rather dishonorable. Hence he had an awkward and constrained manner during the few minutes that he spent with her, and she certainly did not seem desirous of prolonging the conversation. He came to the conclusion—which was a sensible one enough, so far as it went—that he had better create something like an assured position for himself before he tried to stand upon his former footing as regarded Susie; but this did not prevent him from feeling a good deal aggrieved by her present attitude of apparent indifference.

However, he set to work with might and main upon his play, as to the conclusion of which there was in truth no great hurry, since he was assured that it could not possibly be produced that year. The comedietta which he had already written, and which had been tolerably successful as a

lever de riaeau, had now been withdrawn, and the profits which he had derived from it in the shape of royalties had not been magnificent. The proprietor and manager of the theater at which it had been performed was very civil and encouraging, was quite open to consider the more ambitious forthcoming play, and said that, should it prove suitable, he would be glad to make a more liberal arrangement with Mr. Musgrave than he had been able to do in the previous instance. Only he could not under any circumstances undertake to promise that the first representation should take place for another six or nine months. That was tantamount to saying that Fred could not hope to obtain any return from it, either in the way of money or of fame, for at least a twelvemonth; and in a twelvemonth there is more than enough time for a disengaged young lady to marry a Life Guardsman.

From all this it resulted that during the month of June, while haymakers were busy in the country, and matrons and maids were busily making metaphorical hay in London after the time-honored fashion which never changes, and Susie Moore was dancing to her heart's content,

the young men were disporting themselves and losing their money at Ascot and elsewhere, Fred Musgrave carried about a mournful face above his broad shoulders. Is anybody really very sorry when one of his acquaintances is balked of a fortune? The very rich perhaps may be—for reasons which it is needless to specify, most of us have a difficulty in entering into the feelings of the very rich—but, with the possible exception of that small minority, men do not seem to feel much sympathy with such disappointments; and it may be noticed that there is a general disposition to regard them as having been in some way or other deserved. Some of Fred's friends said it was "an awful sell" for him, and laughed (because, as everybody knows, there is nothing in the world so mirth-provoking as an awful sell); others thought him a very lucky beggar to have got ten thousand down; the unanimous verdict of them all was that he did not face adversity bravely.

Let us hope that they would have been less hard upon him if they had known what the loss of £200,000 meant in his case. From time to time he met Susie Moore, but these meetings

were most unsatisfactory. They never lasted for more than a minute or two; she had the air of wishing to avoid them, and her demeanor had become distinctly formal and chilling—far more so than that of her parents, who were always friendly and pleased to see the young man, and very anxious to hear whether his cousin had arrived yet. Relations may not be an altogether unmixed blessing, yet in times of trial one naturally turns to one's own kith and kin for sympathy; and some idea of the loneliness from which Fred was now suffering may be gathered from the fact that he had begun to look forward with impatience to the arrival of the highly inconvenient cousin, who was the sole surviving representative of the Musgrave family besides himself.

That lady reached London a few days earlier than Mr. Breffit had calculated that she could do, and lost no time in calling upon him at his place of business in Bedford Row. The first thing that struck him when she had been ushered into his presence was that she was very pretty, and the next was that she was remarkably well dressed. Lawyers get into the habit of noticing details, and some of them—little as one might suppose it

to look at them—really know the difference between a well-dressed and an expensively dressed woman. The materials of which Mrs. Fenton's mourning was composed were not costly; but there could be no doubt that she had good taste, and that she was acquainted not only with the prevailing fashion, but with that variety of it which is affected by the select few. Mr. Breffit had not supposed that civilization in the southern hemisphere had reached such a pitch of refinement, and he knew that Mrs. Fenton could not possibly have bought her clothes ready-made at any shop in London.

While his sharp eyes were thus taking note of externals he was shaking hands with her, hoping she had had a pleasant voyage, inquiring whether she had found tolerably comfortable quarters in London, and getting her seated in the clients' chair. His own chair was fixed upon a pivot. He gave it a half-turn, so that he sat sideways to the writing-table and facing his visitor. Then he threw one leg over the other, placed his elbows upon the arms of the chair, rested his chin upon his folded hands, and said:

"Well, Mrs. Fenton, I must congratulate you

upon your good fortune. I need hardly tell you that it has come as something of a surprise to those who knew your poor father."

"And to me, too," answered Mrs. Fenton (she had a singularly musical voice, he noticed). "Sometimes I used to hope that he might perhaps have forgiven me; but I never thought of his leaving his money to me. I dare say I ought to have written; and yet I doubt even now whether he would have answered me if I had."

Mr. Breffit shook his head. "In all probability he would not. There is no harm in my telling you that I have drawn up more than one will for him, and under none of them, except the last, which he signed on the very day of his death would you have received more than an insignificant legacy."

Mrs. Fenton looked rather sorry for a moment, but a smile broke out upon her lips as she said, "Well, at any rate, he must have forgiven me at the last; and I think that in his heart he must always have cared a little for me, though I was such a bad daughter to him. He never liked to let people see what he felt."

Mr. Breffit shook his head once more. It was,

perhaps, rather cruel to deprive a daughter of this pious belief in her father's repressed love, but then Mr. Breffit's sympathies were not with Mrs. Fenton, in spite of her pretty face; and he thought she ought to be very well satisfied with having inherited a fortune which she had fairly forfeited. "To tell you the truth," answered he bluntly, "I doubt whether the Dean's last will was prompted so much by paternal affection as by avuncular spite. His nephew, whom he had always intended to be his heir, was foolish enough to offend him, and he was not the man to let any offense, however venial, go unpunished."

"His nephew?" repeated Mrs. Fenton, with raised eyebrows; "who would that be, I wonder?"

"Mr. Frederick Musgrave, the only son of the Dean's only brother. You will, perhaps, remember that the Dean had a brother."

She made a sign of assent. "I have heard of him, but I never saw him. He was a rich merchant. My father thought that he had lowered himself by engaging in trade of any kind, and so they were not on speaking terms."

"Exactly. Well, Mr. Thomas Musgrave died a bankrupt, and your father adopted the orphan, who was then a boy of fifteen or sixteen, and is now a young man of six or seven-and-twenty. Very unfortunately for him, he recently took it into his head that he had a talent for dramatic composition, and employed himself in writing plays instead of trying to obtain a practice at the bar, as his uncle wished him to do. The consequence is that he now finds himself with a capital of £10,000 instead of the £200,000 which he had every reason to count upon."

"Oh, poor fellow!" exclaimed Mrs. Fenton impulsively. And then, after a pause, "Is he a nice young man?"

"In my humble opinion he is a very nice young man," replied the lawyer, smiling.

Mrs. Fenton looked down for a moment or two at the pearl-gray *Suède* gloves which fitted her little hands so perfectly. When she raised her eyes there was a look of appeal and doubt in them which might have softened the heart of any lawyer in Bedford Row. Her eyes were of that uncertain blue color which can hardly be called beautiful in itself, but which varies in

sympathy with health or emotion, and which, in those rare cases when it is seen in combination with dark eyelashes, is certainly attractive. Mrs. Fenton's eyelashes were both dark and long.

"Mr. Breffit," said she, "do you think I ought to take all this money from my cousin?"

"My dear madam," said Mr. Breffit, for he was a little touched, and he did not choose her to think that he was touched, "I am a solicitor; I am not the Pope, and I have no pretensions to adjudicate upon matters of conscience. As a solicitor, however, I may say that you cannot help taking what is legally yours."

"But I may part with what is legally mine."

"You can execute a deed of gift, no doubt. No doubt also your cousin would decline to accept such a gift. Still, you might try."

There was a rather long pause, during which Mrs. Fenton cast down her eyes once more, while the lawyer smiled a little cynically. But all the cynicism was shamed out of him when she began to speak again, because her voice trembled, and it was evident that the tears were not very far off.

"I feel as if I ought to give the money up," she exclaimed; "and yet it is hard—I suppose you can't imagine how hard it is! My husband, as I dare say you know, was a music-master; and while he lived, his profession, which he carried on first in New Zealand and then at Sydney, brought us in just enough to keep us going; but he had a long and expensive illness, and when he died I was left very nearly destitute. Everybody tells me that I might have made a great deal of money by my voice if only it had been a little more powerful; but unluckily it is not a strong voice, and so I have had to earn what I could by giving lessons and sometimes singing at concerts. Upon the whole, I have been moderately successful; still, I have saved next to nothing, and always I have had before me the specter of a poverty-stricken old age. You may guess what my feelings were when I heard so unexpectedly that I was a rich woman. And now it seems that I cannot become rich without, in a sort of way, defrauding somebody else. Wont you advise me, Mr. Breffit? I don't know that I shall take your advice if you tell me that I ought to resign everything to my cousin, because

it would be so dreadful to have come all this way only to be disappointed at last. But—but I should be *very* glad if you could tell me that I am not bound to do so."

There was a candor and a pathos, and even a touch of suppressed humor, in this which fairly vanquished Mr. Breffit, who burst out laughing.

"My dear young lady," said he, "you must not distress yourself with such quixotic scruples. I don't mind owning to you that I think Fred has been hardly dealt with. Still he is a young man and can work for himself, and he has £10,000. And, after all, you are your father's daughter. By the way, you will have to prove that you are your father's daughter."

He had meant to make this announcement in a very different tone, but now he was ready to give any assistance in his power to the lady whom, a short time before, he would have been only too delighted to embarrass. Probably, however, he would not in any case have succeeded in embarrassing her, for she answered composedly:

"Yes, all my friends in Sydney warned me about that. My case is such a peculiar one, all my relations, except this cousin whom I never

saw, being dead—and I suppose also all, or almost all, of those who knew me at Oxford when I was a girl. And indeed," she added, with a smile and a sigh, "I don't believe any of them would recognize me. Twelve years have changed me from a child into a middle-aged woman."

With her fair hair, which was arranged in clusters of curls over her broad, low forehead, with her clear complexion and her childish blue eyes, she looked about five-and-twenty, and Mr. Breffit, in an unwonted access of gallantry, felt impelled to say as much.

She laughed. "I sometimes think that I do look ridiculously young," she said. "It is odd that I should, for I have had a great deal of trouble and anxiety, and I was thirty on my last birthday. But I have a way of looking on the bright side of things; perhaps that is what has preserved me from wrinkles so far."

She had brought a small hand-bag with her, which she now opened, taking out of it a bundle of papers. "I was told," said she, "that these would be sufficient to establish my identity, and some of the people who were kind to me at Syd-

ney thought I might like to show you letters from them. Here they are, if you will look through them."

Mr. Breffit took the documents handed to him and ran his eye over them. There was a copy of her marriage certificate, and there were papers relating to the death and burial of William Fenton at Sydney; also there were three or four letters in unsealed envelopes from persons of unquestionable position and authority in New South Wales. The lawyer read these letters quickly, mumbling out their contents half-aloud. The first was from the Governor of the colony:

"'Very happy to be able to render this small service to Mrs. Fenton, whose acquaintance it was a pleasure to me to make soon after my arrival here. Although ignorant of her family history'—h'm, h'm—'that she is the widow of the late Mr. William Fenton, who died three years ago in this place—matter of fact—documentary proof easily obtained.' Ah, and this is from a bishop, I see. 'Admirable talent, irreproachable private life, industry, and courage above all praise.' Not much to the point, but

kindly meant, no doubt. And here we have a judge. 'Should have no difficulty in proving her title to the estate. May mention that her relationship to the testator has been long known to my wife and daughters, though by her wish not generally spoken of'—h'm, h'm! Well, Mrs. Fenton, I think you were quite right to provide yourself with these letters."

"Will they do?"

"Eh? Oh, well, they are evidence. Not, of course, conclusive evidence; but I imagine that no one is very likely to dispute your claim. Let me see; you would hardly recollect your uncle, Sir James Le Breton, who is one of your father's executors. He was in India, I think, until after the time of your marriage."

"Yes, I fancy so. At all events, he never came to Oxford."

"But you will remember the other executor—the Master of All Saints."

"Of course I do—dear old man! And so he is still alive?"

"Yes, and I think it would be as well for you to see him."

"I should like it of all things. Might I run

down to Oxford to-morrow, do you think? And would you write him a line to say that I am coming?"

Mr. Breffit replied that he would do so.

"And then there is my cousin. Oh, dear! I shant like seeing him at all; it will make me feel so horribly ashamed of myself! Perhaps I might wait a few days before facing him."

She rose and looked as if she would like to say something more, but could not screw up her courage sufficiently to say it. Mr. Breffit divined what that something was, and with graceful tact anticipated her.

"No doubt," said he, "it would be convenient to you to have a little ready money. If you will allow me to supply your wants until the necessary formalities have been gone through, I shall feel much honored."

"I have over a hundred pounds left," answered Mrs. Fenton simply. "Thank you very much for your kindness, but I needn't trouble you yet. However, I confess that I was going to ask you whether I should have to wait long for my inheritance."

"Oh, we wont let you starve," answered the

lawyer, laughing; "you may make your mind quite easy as to that."

So she thanked him once more, and, after giving him her address, took her leave.

When she had departed Mr. Breffit stretched out his legs, threw himself back in his chair, and said aloud:

"I know what I should do if I were Master Fred—I should marry that woman."

After all, it was not such an impossible solution of the difficulty, and, being a man of much natural kindness of heart, he rubbed his hands and chuckled over the idea for some minutes before he reverted to business.

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. FENTON, as the discriminating reader may have gathered from the foregoing account of her interview with Mr. Breffit, was a woman of quick emotions and varying moods. The distress and compunction which she had manifested at one period of that interview had been quite genuine ; but this phase of feeling had soon passed away, and when she reached the hotel in Albemarle Street, at which she was staying, she was in the highest of spirits.

The establishment in question, which had been recommended to her by no less a person than the Governor of New South Wales, was as good a one of its kind as could be found in London ; and although that may not be very extravagant praise, it certainly implies an extravagant scale of charges. But one of the great advantages of possessing a fortune of £200,000 is that this enables one to rise superior to such considerations and to pay ten shillings for a small dish of straw-

berries without wincing. Mrs. Fenton had strawberries with her luncheon, and laughed delightedly at the thought that it really would not very much matter if they cost her a sovereign each. The sitting-room which she occupied could not be called luxurious; but she knew that the daily price of it would be rather more than double the weekly rental that she had been accustomed to pay in Sydney, and this knowledge invested its rather shabby furniture with a halo of glory in her eyes. Her joy in her newly acquired wealth was childish and undignified, no doubt; but it was also very natural, and by means of a slight effort one may manage to sympathize with it. If we ourselves have never felt the anxiety, the misery, and the degradation of extreme poverty, we ought not to have much difficulty in understanding what these are. It is a humiliating fact—but a fact it is, and, like all facts, it had better be acknowledged—that the poor of this world are despised. Let the reader imagine a reigning sovereign slapping him on the back, and then let him endeavor to picture to himself what his feelings would be if his music-master were to greet him in the same kindly and familiar fashion.

One may venture respectfully to doubt whether, in the latter case, he would resent that liberty any the less if the music-master in question happened to be a gentleman by birth. Music-masters and music-mistresses must order themselves lowly and reverently to all their betters (that is, to those who pay them), and for a long time Mrs. Fenton had been ordering herself lowly and reverently to people of whom a great many were, to tell the truth, as vulgar as they were rich. Perhaps, under all the circumstances, a little exultation may be forgiven her.

When she had finished her luncheon, she ordered a brougham and drove to several houses in fashionable quarters, where she left cards and letters of introduction with which she had been provided by some of her Sydney friends; for although she had been poor, she was possessed of gifts which had won popularity for her, and in every one of these letters stress was laid upon the circumstance that she had a perfectly exquisite voice. In an overgrown society like that of London it is well that new-comers should have some special claim or other upon notice; though, to be sure, an income of £8,000 a year or thereabouts

might almost suffice to launch a deaf-mute. The remainder of the afternoon Mrs. Fenton devoted to shopping, an occupation which, for the time being, completely satisfied her soul. Her taste and her imagination were alike admirable, and never in all her life until now had it been possible for her to give a free rein to both. She did not hurry herself; she had a good look round and made a careful selection; also she gave orders which were received with the respect to which their magnitude entitled them. When at length she reached home, pleasantly tired, she did not feel the want of a companion, as many people would have done. Of late years her life had been necessarily lonely, and before her widowhood a great part of it had been spent with one whose companionship was by no means agreeable at all times; now she was quite contented to curl herself up in an armchair and to keep on murmuring luxuriously, "I am rich—I am rich—I am rich!"

Nothing that appertains to this world can confer happiness upon any mortal for more than a limited time; but the mere consciousness of being rich was enough to make Mrs. Fenton perfectly happy throughout that afternoon and

evening and to send her rejoicing to bed. For some reason or other, this mood did not survive the night. She brought a poor appetite down to her early breakfast the next morning, and it was with a rather depressed and weary air that she drove to the Paddington station and took her ticket for Oxford. When all is said and done, money, immense though its power appears to be, can only shield its possessors from a small class of sufferings and misfortunes. That small class, it is true, includes great sufferings and great misfortunes; still there are others against which wealth affords no protection whatever; and perhaps it was of these that Mrs. Fenton was thinking as she sat in the railway-carriage, gazing pensively out of the window at the sunny landscape which she did not see.

Not until the spire of St. Mary's and the dome of the Bodleian came into view did she rouse herself from her abstraction; and then there was only time to cast an eager, searching glance at the beautiful old city before the train stopped and she had to get out upon the platform. A porter called a hansom for her, and, to his intense astonishment, received half-a-crown for

his trouble. Mrs. Fenton laughed at his open mouth and round eyes: it was so delicious to feel that half-a-crown was of no more consequence to her than a penny.

This trifling incident had the effect of raising her spirits, and she sighed no longer while she was being driven through the streets and past buildings of which the foundation-stone had not been laid in the days when Miss Musgrave had scandalized the whole place by eloping with her music-master. Twelve years work many transformations even in Oxford; but for a much longer period than that there has been no perceptible alteration in the aspect of the venerable college of All Saints, where Mrs. Fenton was presently set down. The Master was at home, she was informed; so she gave her card to the butler, who admitted her, and was shown into a dim, lofty library which smelt of the bindings of old books, and had oriel windows, looking out upon a shady lawn. She was not kept waiting long. While she was gazing at the grass and the trees and thinking how marvelously green they were, and how unlike anything in Australia, a tall, stooping old man entered, toward

whom she advanced, holding out both her hands.

"Don't you know me?" she cried.

"Well, well!" said Dr. Drysdale, taking her hands; "and so this is my poor little Laura Musgrave! No, my dear, no, indeed; I don't think I should have known you. You are much changed—much changed!"

"You are not," she returned; "you aren't changed a bit. You don't look a year older."

"Oh, I am older," said the Master of All Saints, smiling; "but then I was an old man already when you went away, whereas you were a little girl. Now you are—"

"A woman who is a long way past her prime."

"I wasn't going to say that; I was going to say a very beautiful and fashionable-looking lady. At my age one is allowed to say such things."

He had led her to the light and was still holding her hands, while he looked down kindly at her upturned face; but now she drew away from him, with an impatient jerk of her shoulders and a grimace.

"I hate to be spoken to in that way!" she exclaimed. "I have learned to dress myself

properly; but of course I am not beautiful. And I am thirty."

The old man broke into a low laugh. "Ah, Laura, Laura!" said he, "you are not so much changed as I thought you were, after all. You never liked flattery or believed that anybody who paid you compliments could be sincere. You used to shrug your shoulders and stamp your foot at me just like that when I told you that you would some day have a voice which would astonish the world."

"Well," she returned, "I was right and you were wrong. My voice has been developed as far as it will go, and the world hasn't been in the least astonished. Still, such as it is, it has kept me alive. Ever since my husband died I have supported myself by giving lessons and sometimes singing at concerts. But for that, I daresay I should have starved."

Dr. Drysdale looked sorry and a little ashamed. "Why did you never write to your father, my dear?" he asked presently.

"You know it would have been useless. He never forgave any one."

"I don't think we can be quite sure of that.

At all events, he has given convincing proof that he forgave you."

Mrs. Fenton shook her head. "I thought so at first, but Mr. Breffit undeceived me. He named me as his heiress because there was nobody else to name except my cousin, and he happened to be displeased with my cousin at the time. When I heard about this cousin and how badly he had been treated, I felt as if I ought to give up all the money to him and disappear again."

"Oh, dear me!" exclaimed Dr. Drysdale, "that would be a very strong measure to take. You didn't say so, I hope."

"I believe I did say so, but that isn't the same thing as doing it. Tell me about this cousin of mine. Is he dreadfully disappointed?"

Dr. Drysdale smiled. "To the best of my belief Fred has expressed no disappointment," he answered; "I am not prepared to say that he hasn't felt any. At any rate, I am sure he would be the first to admit that your claim is a stronger one than his, and that substantial justice has been done. For my own part, I am inclined to believe that a young man is better off with a

small fortune than with a large one; the workers are always the happiest men."

"Then you think that I shall not really be doing him an injury by taking the money from him?" she asked eagerly.

"In the first place, my dear, you are not taking it from him, because it is not his and cannot be made his. Perhaps it would have been better if your father had told him that he must not count upon a doubtful succession, but that can't be helped now. He has an income upon which he can very well live, and it rests with him to increase it by his own exertions. He really is not very much to be pitied."

Mrs. Fenton said no more upon the subject. By Dr. Drysdale's request she lunched with him, and they had a long and pleasant chat over bygone days.

"I hardly know whether there are any old friends of yours here whom you would care to see," the Master said, when they had strolled out into the garden. "Death has been busy among us. My poor wife was taken from me, as I dare say you know, nine years ago, and many others have gone since. Still there are a few remain-

ing." And he mentioned the names of some of them.

"Yes," said Mrs. Fenton, "I recollect them all, but they wouldn't recollect me. I was only a gawky schoolgirl in those days, and ladies never came to our house, you know."

In truth, the Dean of St. Cyprian's had regarded women with supreme contempt, nor had he ever disguised his sentiments in their presence. His daughter he had looked upon as a mere child, and had not thought it necessary to provide her with associates of her own sex.

"You were the only friend I had in Oxford," Mrs. Fenton went on. "Do you remember how I used to come and sing to you sometimes, and how fond you were of 'Il Segreto per esser felice'? I sing it still, only not in the old way."

They were opposite the open windows of the disused drawing-room. She stepped in abruptly, threw open the piano, seated herself before it and, in a singularly sweet mezzo-soprano voice, gave a brilliant rendering of the operatic air which she had mentioned, while Dr. Drysdale, who had followed her, kept time with head and hands.

"No, indeed!" said he, when she had finished; "that is not the old way. You have marvelously improved, my dear, and yet—"

"And yet you like the old way best? Well, then, here it is for you."

And now she repeated her performance in a very different style, altering the pitch of her voice a little, affecting a difficulty with the high notes, and stumbling from time to time over the accompaniment.

The old man laughed. "You take me back," he said, "you take me back. I could have fancied myself a dozen years younger. Well, I'm glad you haven't forgotten old times, Laura, though I hope the new times will be happier for you than the old."

He thought it his duty to give her a little lecture on the deceitfulness of riches and the responsibilities which belong to those who possess them. He was a very simple, kind-hearted, and honest old man, and what he said was so true that nobody could resent it. Mrs. Fenton shaded her face with her hand while he was talking, and when she looked up there were tears in her eyes.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "I wish I were a good

woman! I should like to be—I suppose everybody would. But it seems so easy for some people to be good and so difficult for others!"

She cried a little as she said good-by to the worthy Master of All Saints, who made her promise to come and see him again, and she shed a few tears on her way down to the station; but when she entered the railway-carriage she shook her shoulders and set her lips firmly. "All this is sentimental nonsense," she said aloud, "and I can't afford to be sentimental. I must keep what I have got. After all, it is a thousand times more valuable to me than it would be to him. Besides, I shouldn't wonder if it was true that young men are none the better off for being rich."

CHAPTER VII.

MR. BREFFIT (having previously made an appointment by means of an interchange of post-cards) called at Fred's rooms one evening after office hours in order to report upon the lady as to whose existence he had so often professed himself skeptical. That she existed he could no longer doubt; nor, for that matter, did he appear to regret the circumstance quite as much as a consistent man should have done.

"The fact is," said he, "that your cousin is simply charming. I don't know exactly what there is about her; but there is something that is irresistible; you'll say so yourself when you have seen her. It isn't only that she is pretty, nor that she is a thorough lady all over—"

Fred interrupted this eulogium by a laugh. "What a rage my poor old uncle would have been in," he remarked, "if he had heard you say that. Just imagine the audacity of calling his daughter a lady. As if she could possibly be anything else."

"Well, she might have deteriorated, you know; girls who marry music masters and run away to distant colonies are not so very unlikely to deteriorate. But she hasn't. Indeed, she has improved, according to the Master of All Saints, whom she went to see the other day, and who has written me an enthusiastic letter about her. He says she has gained immensely in appearance and manners, but that she doesn't strike him as having gained much in the way of experience, and he is terribly afraid lest she should fall among evil-doers. By which, I take it, he means that he is afraid of her making another foolish marriage. Such a catastrophe is on the cards, no doubt; though a burnt child dreads the fire, and I rather suspect that Mrs. Fenton burnt her fingers in her first venture. Anyhow, her friends must try to protect her from adventurers."

"It is pretty clear that she has made one staunch friend already," Fred observed.

Mr. Breffit looked a little shamefaced. "I can't help it," said he; "I am just as sorry for you as ever I was, my dear fellow, and I feel that it is very bad luck for you; still it isn't the poor thing's fault that she is the Dean's daughter or

that he remembered that he had a daughter before he died. And then, as I tell you, she is irresistible. Even that dry old stick Sir James Le Breton thawed before she had been talking five minutes to him. He says she has a look of her mother, which I dare say is true: she certainly hasn't much look of her father. Now I'll tell you what I want you to do, Fred; I want you to go round to Albemarle Street and call upon her. I know you well enough to know that you don't bear malice; but she doesn't know you yet, and she is very much distressed in her mind about you. She says she can't get over the feeling that she has robbed you."

Assuredly Fred bore no malice; and even if he had, propriety would have compelled him to pay his respects to his cousin. Moreover, he was really anxious to see her. So, as it was only a little after six o'clock when Mr. Breffit left him, he walked over to Albemarle Street forthwith, and was glad to hear that Mrs. Fenton was at home.

She was busily engaged in writing letters when he was announced; but the moment that she heard his name she started up and walked quickly

across the room to meet him, holding out her hand. "Oh, Mr. Musgrave," she exclaimed, "how very kind of you to come! All to-day I have been trying to screw up my courage to write you a note; but I couldn't get it as far as the sticking-point, and the note hasn't been written yet."

"What were you going to say in it?" asked Fred, smiling.

"Ah, that was just the trouble; I couldn't make up my mind what to say, and now I'm very glad of it, because talking is so much easier than writing."

She pushed a chair forward for him, and he seated himself and gazed at her, and was quite as much impressed by her beauty as Mr. Breffit had expected him to be. Nevertheless, he, for his part, did not find talking particularly easy. He could not begin by alluding to the subject which was necessarily uppermost in the thoughts of both of them; so he asked her whether she had had a prosperous voyage, and whether she did not notice a good many changes in London and so forth. But she did not even take the trouble to reply to these well-meant commonplaces, which

she interrupted without ceremony after she had made a somewhat prolonged scrutiny of the young man.

"Tell me," said she suddenly, "do you think me a horrid wretch?"

"Of course I don't," he answered, laughing; "why on earth should I?"

She sighed. "Well, all I know is that I should be ready to murder anybody who cropped up from the southern hemisphere to pick my pocket of nearly a quarter of a million of money. But perhaps you are not vindictive. You don't look so."

"I don't think I am, and besides—"

"Oh, yes, I know. Wills can't be set aside, and the testator's only child has a natural right, *et cetera.* I have heard all that from Mr. Breffit. Still the fact remains that if I had put an end to myself out there in Australia, as I have more than once been tempted to do, you would be a rich man to-day."

"What made you think of putting an end to yourself?" asked Fred, more impressed by this incidental admission than by the feeling of compunction to which she laid claim.

"Perhaps I will tell you some day, if we ever become friends. Is it at all possible for us to become friends?"

"I hope so," answered the young man. "At all events, we are relations."

"Yes, but I am not sure that that is any great help toward friendship. Say what you will about it, you can't help feeling that I have supplanted you, and you can't like being supplanted; no human being ever did since the world began."

"I think it's all quite right," said Fred, "but even if it were not, you have had nothing to do with it. My uncle left his money as he thought fit."

"I dare say men don't look at these things in the same way as women do. You are supposed to have an inborn or acquired sense of justice which we haven't, I believe. I should like very much to be your friend, Fred. May I call you Fred?"

"What else should you call me?"

"That's understood, then; you are to be Fred henceforth, and I will be Laura, if you please. I was going to say that I have very few friends in the world, and none at all in England—and I

like the look of you. Do you like the look of me as far as you have got?"

"Very much indeed," Fred replied.

"Well, there wasn't much use in asking the question, because you couldn't make any other answer. At least we can try to be friends, and if we don't succeed it can't be helped. How shall we begin? Are you doing anything particular to-night?"

And, on hearing that Fred had no engagement, she resumed: "Then why shouldn't we go and dine somewhere together? There are restaurants in London nowadays where one can get what men call a good dinner, are there not? Personally I don't know a good dinner from a bad one."

Fred mentioned a restaurant in the neighborhood which had a high reputation, and added that he should feel greatly honored if she would accept his hospitality at that establishment; but to this she would not consent.

"You may order the dinner if you like," said she, "but if you want to make me happy you will let me pay for it. It can't be any novelty or luxury to you to pay for things, but it's both

to me, and I want to avail myself of every opportunity of indulging in it before it palls."

So it was agreed that Fred should give instructions for the preparation of this banquet on his way home to dress, and that he should call for his cousin at eight o'clock. He had not quite made up his mind about her when he went away, nor was he sure that he liked the look of her as much as he had professed to do. She was very pretty and very unconventional; but, like the majority of young Englishmen, he had no great fancy for unconventional ladies, and it seemed to him that some of her speeches had been marked by a certain lack of good taste. As she herself had said, there wasn't much use in asking questions to which only one answer could be returned.

But this slight inclination to take up a critical attitude was dispelled before he had been sitting a quarter of an hour opposite to her at the little round table in the restaurant. She was not in the least fast, or vulgar, or anxious to achieve small effects, he decided; she was simply a child of nature. She disguised none of her impressions or sentiments, least of all the almost infantine de-

light which she derived from having plenty of money to spend; she said whatever chanced to come into her head; and some of the things that came into her head were rather quaint and made him laugh. She entered into conversation with the waiter, who was a German, asking him why he had left his native land, whether he would have to go home in case of war, and whether he didn't think it would be a much better plan to get himself naturalized as a British subject at once. And when he became red and resentful, as Germans are apt to do when questioned, she said, in a soothing tone, "Oh, well, never mind! It doesn't really matter what you are, you know, so long as you perform your duties and don't upset the melted butter." Whereupon she slipped something into his hand which, from the man's face of amazement, Fred shrewdly suspected must have been at least half-a-sovereign.

She devoted a good deal of her attention to the other occupants of the crowded room, and wanted to be told who they were and to what class of society they belonged. "You don't know!" she exclaimed, rather impatiently. "But why don't you know?—you live here. Before I

had been a month in London I should be able to place every one of them for you. Look at that prim little grizzle-headed man with the fat wife. If we were in Australia I should put him down as a government official. What is he in England, I wonder? Not a Member of Parliament? He isn't happy; he doesn't like dining in public; it is his wife who has made him come here. She is greatly interested in us, and can't make us out at all. She has put up her glasses to try and discover whether I have a wedding-ring; because she thinks you can't be my husband, or you wouldn't be so civil to me. Now I am going to make her thoroughly uncomfortable."

Mrs. Fenton, as she said this, fixed her eyes upon the lady in question with a look of distressed commiseration, which speedily produced the desired effect upon the latter, who began to fidget about in her chair uneasily and to cast furtive glances over her shoulder.

"What have you done to the poor woman?" asked Fred. "Have you mesmerized her?"

"No; but she thinks there is something dreadfully wrong with her back, and of course she can't see it. Now she is asking her husband.

He says, 'Oh, bother! it's all right'; and she says he might at least have taken the trouble to look before making so sure of that. They will come to high words presently. No; they are going away. He says it is time to be off; and he has got a pair of opera-glasses, so I suppose they are going to the theater. I wish we were going to the theater. Is it too late?"

Fred was afraid it was.

"Well, perhaps we might go some other evening. What are we to do now? Of course you want to smoke. Couldn't we go and sit in the Park? It is such a beautiful, warm evening."

Fred shook his head.

"I don't think that would quite do," he answered, smiling.

"Then you had better come home with me. Would that do? Or would the hotel people think it odd that I should ask a young man to smoke in my sitting-room?"

"Oh, I'm your cousin, you know."

"Yes; I might tell them so if they looked scandalized; only isn't that what the cook says when she is discovered giving supper to the policeman? Never mind; we'll chance it."

So Fred returned to Albemarle Street with her willingly enough, for indeed he found her a very amusing companion. No sooner, however, had they reached their destination than she ceased all of a sudden to be amusing, and became silent and depressed. When he knew her better he found that these abrupt transitions from gayety to gravity were natural to her, and that they as often as not occurred without any discernible cause. This time, perhaps, there was a cause, in the shape of a careless question which he had put to her on their way, about her life at Sydney. "Oh, don't speak of that!" she had exclaimed. But now she began to speak about it of her own accord.

"You want to hear something of my history," she said, in a changed voice and one which sounded to him like that of an older woman. "It is quite natural that you should want to hear it, and I should have had to tell you some day, though it isn't a subject that I like to dwell upon. My husband drank himself to death; that says everything, doesn't it? He might have made money if he had been more persevering, for he was an excellent teacher and a very good theoret-

ical musician; but for a long time things went badly with us, so he lost heart and took to drinking. For some years we were at Wellington, in New Zealand, and then he thought there might be more of an opening in New South Wales, so we went to Sydney. But it was the same story over again there. People heard of his habits and wouldn't employ him; and he was not a good-tempered man. His pupils complained of his roughness and rudeness, and so he soon lost the few that he had ever had. If I hadn't been able to give lessons myself we shouldn't have had enough to eat. I worked all day and every day, and when I went home in the evening he used to— Well, he is dead now; we needn't say any more about that."

Fred gazed at her pityingly, and his heart was moved with indignation against the deceased Fenton. One does not like to hear of any woman being made a slave of and ill-treated by a drunken husband; but of course the thought of such brutality is a little more painful as associated with some women than with others. "Were you— were you fond of him?" he ventured to ask at length.

"Not latterly; he made that quite impossible. I suppose I must once have been fond of him—in a way; but I am not sure about it. Probably you can't at all enter into the feelings of a girl who is naturally high-spirited, but has always been contemptuously suppressed—a girl who has no friends and scarcely any associates, except servants—a girl who is forever vacillating between an exaggerated idea of her own talents and gifts, and so forth, and a self-distrust which makes her resent casual compliments as a sort of insult. As far as I can remember, that is the kind of girl that I was, and I was naturally delighted to find that there was one person in the world who really cared for me and believed in me. Most likely Mr. Fenton believed that my voice would be the means of bringing him a fortune even if my parentage didn't. He was bitterly disappointed in my voice, and he didn't live long enough to share my inheritance. Well, all that is over and done with, and I am not going to pretend that I regret being a widow. The one thing which I do regret with all my heart is that I have been made rich at your expense."

"You mustn't regret that any more," said Fred; "I assure you I don't regret it. We couldn't both of us have my uncle's money, and it would have been far more unjust to disinherit you than me. After all, I believe it is rather an advantage than otherwise to a man to be obliged to work."

"Ah, that is what the Master of All Saints says; but perhaps both you and he only say it to console me."

She really did look rather disconsolate at the moment; but Fred did his best to comfort her, and after a time she returned the favor by comforting him; for she induced him to tell her all about his prospects and ambitions and aspirations, and she was so kindly and sympathetic that before he went away she had heard the whole story of his attachment to Susie Moore.

"It seems to me that you have been a great deal too diffident," she remarked. "How is the girl to know that you care for her unless you tell her so? If she is worth anything, she wont mind waiting a year or two, and if she isn't—why, you will be well rid of her."

"Yes," answered Fred dubiously; "that

sounds like common-sense; but then you see, it isn't as though she had only her own inclinations to consult. She has a father and a step-mother."

"Oh, bother her father and step-mother! Let her snap her fingers at them."

"I don't think she would do that."

"Well, if she is so poor-spirited—but of course I can't judge of her without having seen her. Perhaps you may be able to find some opportunity of introducing me to the young lady. I know I shant like her, though."

"Why not?" inquired Fred, with raised eyebrows.

Mrs. Fenton laughed. "For a very humiliating reason," she replied. "I am horribly jealous; I always have been, and I can't help it. I have taken a great fancy to you—which I dare say you will think rather precipitate of me; but I can't help that either. I like people very much, or I dislike them very much; it's my nature. Well, you know, no wife can endure a woman who likes her husband very much; and so when you marry, we shall cease to be friends: that's why I wish Miss Susie Moore was—in heaven. All

the same, I wont try to poison her if we ever meet, and what's more, I'll give you an honest opinion about her. I am a good deal more capable of forming one than you are; so that it may be worth something to you."

CHAPTER VIII.

FRED MUSGRAVE was a young man whose affections were easily won. He was by nature something of an optimist; he was not particularly fastidious; he had broad sympathies and entertained a favorable opinion of the human race as a whole. When people were kind to him he did not—as most of us, unhappily, so soon learn to do—ask himself what motive they had for being kind, but took it for granted that they liked him for his own sake (which, to be sure, was generally the truth), and felt this to be an excellent reason for liking them in return. His cousin, therefore, obtained without difficulty the friendship which she had declared that she coveted. Fred called every morning to inquire whether he could be of any use to her, and her reply always was that he could sit down and talk to her, if he wasn't in a hurry.

"You must go away the moment that you are tired of me," she would add; "we should lose all

the advantage of being first cousins unless we could dispense with ceremony."

However, he was seldom in any hurry to go away, and it was generally she who had to dismiss him at length; for she had a good many engagements of one kind and another. The letters which she had brought with her from Sydney had borne immediate fruit, and much civility had been shown her by those to whom they were addressed.

"You can't think," she said, "what a funny sensation it is to be spoken to as an equal after one has been either patronized or trampled under foot all one's days. Sometimes I have to pinch myself to make sure that there is no mistake about it and that I am not the victim of a wildly improbable dream. These great ladies—I suppose Lady Clamborough must be a great lady? She is a viscountess and she lives in Belgrave Square: that makes her a great lady, doesn't it?"

"I don't know," answered Fred. "Yes; I dare say it does."

"Anyhow you must allow me the satisfaction of calling her great, because she is certainly the

biggest person on my little list. I was going to say that these ladies really behave as though I were one of themselves."

"Well, so you are. You are as good as any of them by birth, I imagine."

She made a gesture of dissent. "I shall never be able to feel that. I have been crawling about in a lower sphere for too long. Still, as I am a pretty good mimic, I daresay that with a little more practice I shall be able to pass muster as one of them. This is Lady Clamborough."

She rose and crossed the room with short, tripping steps, screwing up her eyes and murmuring, "Who is it? Oh, Mrs. Fenton—how do you do, Mrs. Fenton? I couldn't make out who you were. I am so wretchedly short-sighted, and I can't think what the deuce I've done with my eye-glasses."

"Does Lady Clamborough say 'what the deuce'?" asked Fred, laughing.

"She said it twice yesterday. There were several gentlemen in the room, and she was careful to inform them that she had eaten an apricot tart at luncheon and had a horrible pain in her stomach in consequence. She is fond of plain

language, as I notice that they all are. Why, I haven't quite made out yet, but I fancy it must be to mark the difference which exists between them and the middle classes, who are always afraid of being vulgar. Viscountesses of course can't be vulgar, so they may say what they please."

One morning she announced to him with some pride, that she was a social success. "There's no doubt about it; I have met with acceptation. Last night I dined at Lady Clamborough's, and met the best of good company. After dinner I was begged to sing. At first I thought of declining, because, you see, the days are past when I used to be invited to Government House in acknowledgment of the fact that I had a voice, and when it would have been almost dishonest of me to refuse to raise it. But I said to myself, 'Don't you be too uppish, my dear. After all, what are you, with your paltry eight or nine thousand a year, among these high magnificences? You must amuse them, or they wont take any more notice of you.' So I gave them a song or two, and I must say that a more easily pleased audience I have never been blessed

with. When I had finished, they literally rushed at me in a compact mass, and fought over me. I am now going to dine with every one of them."

"You must have a wonderful voice," said Fred.

"It would be natural to suppose so, but in reality I am scarcely a third-rate performer. The voice—what there is of it—is good, and as an amateur I dare say I could hold my own with any other lady in London; but that isn't saying much. My voice has never brought me any money worth speaking of, and so I have always felt more ashamed than proud of it; but now I begin to see that it may be of use as a passport to the society of the great."

"Do you think the society of the great such an immense boon?"

She made a slight grimace. "Perhaps not exactly that; still I like it. It is altogether new to me, you see, and it gives me a kind of pleasure that I can't quite describe, to shake hands with duchesses. Is that very snobbish, I wonder? Anyhow," she added, after a moment of consideration, "I don't care whether my *friends*

have coronets or not, and you are my only real friend, Fred."

He was very willing to be so described, and when he next met Mr. Breffit, he spoke of his cousin with a warmth of appreciation which delighted that benevolent schemer. There are people who object to the marriage of first cousins, and bring forward reasons for their objection which sound plausible; but is it possible to imagine any project or arrangement against which no objection can be urged? In this imperfect world the best we can do is to weigh the *pros* against the *cons*, and the weight of £200,000 must be admitted to be very great.

"Leave 'em alone and they'll come home," said Mr. Breffit jocularly to Sir James Le Breton, who shrugged his shoulders, and replied that he asked nothing better. He was not, he thanked Heaven, Mrs. Fenton's trustee, nor was he her guardian. By all means, therefore, let her marry her cousin if she wished to do so, though, for his own part, he should have thought that to retain undisputed control over her fortune would have been a wiser course.

But Fred's heart, as we know, was no longer

his own; and his cousin, instead of wanting to marry him, showed every disposition to promote his marriage with somebody else. At least, she buoyed him up with encouraging speeches and listened very patiently to the rather monotonous repetition of his hopes and fears. More than that it was not in her power to do, since she was as yet unacquainted with the object of his adoration. She was extremely anxious to be introduced to the Moores, and he professed himself equally anxious to effect the introduction, but these things are not very easily managed without the aid of chance, and as the season was now on the wane, it was more than likely that Susie might leave London before Mrs. Fenton had found any opportunity of expressing an honest opinion about her.

Chance, nevertheless, did bring about the desired meeting one evening, when, at her request, Fred had taken his cousin to the theater. Mrs. Fenton enjoyed the play just as she enjoyed everything else; that is to say, after a most hearty and unaffected fashion. She deeply regretted that Fred's little comedy had been withdrawn from the boards, but could not agree with

him that, since that was so, there was no particular necessity for their witnessing the farce which had replaced it. "Anybody who offers to take me to the theater must make up his mind that he is in for a night of it," said she. "Good or bad, dull or funny, I want to see it all."

Consequently they had been for some time in their places before a party of four persons arrived to take possession of the four vacant stalls in front of them. First came rubicund General Moore, beaming upon surrounding men and things, as usual; then came his handsome wife, and then Susie; the beauty of the procession being somewhat marred in the eyes of one spectator by the inevitable Claughton, who brought up the rear. All of them nodded and smiled to Fred, and all of them, except Claughton, cast inquisitive glances at his companion. Mrs. Moore, as soon as she was seated, turned round and entered into conversation; so that there was no difficulty about making his cousin known to her. He performed the ceremony with some inward trepidation, because he knew that ladies who have already a large acquaintance do not always like it to be increased with-

out their permission; but his alarm was groundless, for nothing could have exceeded the amiability with which Mrs. Moore accosted the stranger.

"So very glad to meet you, Mrs. Fenton," said she. "I have heard about you from Lady Clamborough, who declares that you have the most wonderful voice in the world."

Mrs. Fenton smiled. She did not seem to think such a ridiculous statement worth protesting against, and only remarked that she was rather fond of music.

A brief dialogue followed, in the course of which she amused Fred by making it quite plain that she did not intend to be patronized. He had before this had occasion to admire her skill in the art of imitation; he now saw how cleverly she could avail herself of that talent when it suited her to do so. It was evident that she had taken Mrs. Moore's measure at a glance, and in talking to her she adopted the style and manner of conversation of a modern fine lady with such absolute exactitude that nobody, meeting her for the first time, would have felt the slightest doubt about her being what she affected to be. She

had the whole correct vocabulary at her finger's ends; she was perfectly at her ease; she even made some passing allusions to social events which were supposed to be known only to the initiated few; in short, she surprised and impressed Mrs. Moore so much that the latter lady, who had begun by being gracious and a trifle condescending, very soon changed her note and became almost humble.

Seeing that his cousin was so very well able to take care of herself, Fred felt at liberty to turn his attention to Susie, who was seated directly in front of him, and over whose shoulder he ventured to breathe some commonplace observations. But Susie did not get much beyond monosyllables in her replies, nor did she turn her head to look at him. Apparently she preferred to communicate any ideas that came into her mind to her neighbor Captain Claughton, while he, for his part, was at no pains to conceal the fact that Mr. Musgrave was a bore to him. He talked to Miss Moore in a whisper (which was really very bad manners), and when Fred spoke, he pulled his moustache and sighed and looked away with an air of patient resignation.

"I didn't come to a hot theater in the month of July to be annoyed in this way," was the remonstrance which his face expressed, but which he politely refrained from uttering.

When the curtain rose, all interchange of amenities between the two rows of stalls ceased perforce, and Fred did not care to profit by any subsequent opportunity of renewing them. Good-humored though he was, he left the theater very cross indeed, and as he drove away he said to his cousin, "I'll tell you what it is, Laura, I'm beginning to think that I've been an utter fool."

"That is not impossible," she returned, with a slight laugh, "but what makes you say so?"

"I mean I have been a fool to imagine that that girl ever had the smallest liking for me. If she cares for anybody, it is for Claughton. She must have cared for him all along, I suppose, only I was too stupid to see it."

Mrs. Fenton's slim fingers were stretched out in the darkness and met Fred's great strong hand, which lay upon the seat beside her and which did not respond to her pressure. "Poor boy!" she exclaimed commiseratingly.

"I shall be twenty-eight next birthday, con-

sequently I am not exactly a boy," said Fred, whose nerves were much irritated.

"No, but you are old enough not to mind being called so, and in character you are quite a boy still. I like you all the better for it. I don't know whether Miss Moore likes you or not; it was impossible to judge from what I saw this evening, but I'm afraid she doesn't like the notion of being a poor man's wife."

This was the very thought which Fred had been trying, with more or less success, to keep out of his mind all through the evening. It was certain that Susie's demeanor toward him had undergone a marked change, and it was no less certain that that change had first become perceptible simultaneously with the change in his fortunes. Still one does not always enjoy hearing one's secret thoughts put into words by other people, so he answered, "You don't know much about her, Laura; she isn't in the least what you suppose. Upon the face of it there's nothing improbable in her having fallen in love with Claughton."

"Nothing at all," agreed Mrs. Fenton, rather provokingly.

"Then why do you hint that she would throw over a man whom she cared for if he weren't rich?"

"Only because it struck me that she was rather emphatic in the way that she turned her back upon you. One can turn one's back upon a man without being emphatic about it. However, I may be quite wrong, and I hope I am. At any rate, you mustn't get angry with me for saying what I think, Fred, for you will make me miserable if you do. I haven't been able to say just what I thought to anybody for I don't know how many years. When one's daily bread depends upon one's civility, civil one must be, and honesty must go to the wall; but with you I want to be myself—if you will let me."

"I beg your pardon, Laura," said the young man, who was already ashamed of his petulance. "I know quite well that you wouldn't willingly say anything to hurt my feelings, and I would much rather that you were honest with me than civil. All the same, you don't quite understand Susie yet; how should you?"

"Well," answered his cousin, laughing, "I dare say I shall have an opportunity of studying

her more closely before long, because it is obvious that Mrs. Moore means to cultivate me. By the way, I hope you noticed my behavior to Mrs. Moore. Was it a good piece of acting?"

"It was excellent; it couldn't have been better. Only I don't know why—"

"Oh yes, you do; you know why perfectly well. I might have been the humble ex-music-mistress, and then, perhaps, she would have asked me to come in some evening and amuse the people who had dined with her, but I have played that *rôle* for a very long time now, and I am a little tired of it. I don't want to amuse Mrs. Moore's friends; I want to be amused by them; so, as I have been associating with peacocks lately and have picked up some of their stray feathers, I thought I would dazzle her with them. And dazzled she was. You will see that she will call upon me at once—in fact, she asked for my address—and very soon after that I shall be invited to dinner."

This prediction was promptly fulfilled, for on the very next day Mrs. Moore left cards in Albemarle Street, and before the end of the week her new acquaintance received a friendly little note,

in which she was begged to excuse so short an invitation and to "dine with us quite quietly on Tuesday next. We are only expecting a very few people, of whom I hope your cousin will be one; and we shall be delighted if you are able to join our small party, for, as we are soon leaving London, I am afraid this will be our last chance of seeing you both for the present."

Mrs. Fenton proved the sincerity of the interest which she took in her cousin by throwing over one of Lady Clamborough's most influential friends in order to accept this invitation. "If I can do nothing else for you," she remarked, "I can at least insure you a fair field by drawing off Captain Claughton—and I will."

Fred was rather amused by her self-confidence. "Do you think that will be such a very easy thing to accomplish?" he asked.

"The easiest thing in the world. You don't half know me yet, my dear Fred. It has been a matter of sheer necessity for me to acquire the art of making myself agreeable, and I will make so bold as to say that I am not a bad hand at it, especially as regards the male sex. At Sydney I was considered quite attractive."

"That does not surprise me," said Fred.

"Thank you; but you have no idea as yet how attractive I can be when I like. Nat had they; it wouldn't have been safe. It was most important that I should keep upon good terms with the women there, so I had to be very cautious in my dealings with their husbands and brothers. After all, I don't feel particularly proud because I can lead men by the nose: it is a trick which any fool can learn so long as she doesn't happen to be downright hideous. All you have to do is to persuade them to talk about themselves, and Heaven knows that that requires no great persuasion."

"H'm! it strikes me that you have pursued that system with marked success in the case of one humble individual whom I know," observed Fred.

"No; I have always been myself with you. Perhaps that is why my success hasn't been very marked so far. You wont stand any criticisms upon Miss Moore from me."

"I only think that you are not well acquainted enough with her yet to be able to criticise her fairly."

"I shall be better acquainted with her soon,

but I doubt whether I shall dare to say what I think about her unless it is flattering."

"You will be very unfriendly if you don't say what you think," Fred declared. "I am not such an ass as to expect everybody to fall in love with her; only I dare say you'll allow me to keep my own opinion, even if it should differ from yours."

"I *must* allow you," answered Mrs. Fenton, laughing. "I wouldn't if I could help it, because it stands to reason that my opinion must be the less prejudiced of the two and therefore the more valuable."

CHAPTER IX.

FRED escorted his cousin to Cromwell Road on the evening of Mrs. Moore's little dinner-party. They were rather late, and the remainder of the company, which consisted only of some half-dozen persons, had already assembled when they arrived. Captain Claughton was conspicuous by his absence, which was a relief to Fred for more reasons than one. In the first place he naturally did not wish to be interfered with by his rival, and in the second, he was not particularly anxious to be delivered from him through the benevolent intervention of Mrs. Fenton. Charming though his cousin was, he sometimes thought that she was just a shade wanting in refinement. Possibly no man altogether likes to hear a woman boast of her proficiency in the art of flirtation.

The young man was received with much cordiality by his host and hostess.

"So glad you were able to come!" the latter

said. "We really seem to have seen nothing of you for ages." And then, in a lowered voice, "How very pretty your cousin is! And so—so nice altogether. Well, I think we are all here now. Captain Claughton couldn't come; I daresay you have heard of his loss."

Fred shook his head. "I don't often see Claughton. What has he lost? His watch, or his heart, or any other valuable of that kind?"

Mrs. Moore laughed a little. "No, only his elder brother. At least, I didn't mean to say 'only,' but it *is* his elder brother. Well, it seems that the poor man was subject to the most dreadful fits, so one can only regard it as a happy release. Captain Claughton has gone down to attend the funeral, I believe. Of course this will make a very great difference in his prospects, but we all hope he wont retire just yet. It seems such a pity for a man of his age to give up his profession, doesn't it?"

Fred Musgrave's perceptions were not abnormally acute, but he could hardly help appreciating the significance of these confidential remarks. They meant, of course, "You are not to suppose, young man, that you have been asked here to-

night for any other reason than that we are kind people and unwilling to show the cold shoulder to those who have fallen into adversity. Ten thousand pounds, however, will not do at all, and it may save you disappointment to be told at once that we take a parental interest in Captain Claughton, who is now heir to more acres than you have sovereigns."

All this Fred quite understood, and he even thought that Mrs. Moore was somewhat needlessly explicit. Whether Susie was of one mind with her step-mother remained to be seen. After glancing round the room and drawing up a hasty mental scale of precedence, he thought it highly probable that he would be asked to take Miss Moore to the dining-room, but this anticipation was not fulfilled, he being told off to a sprightly, middle-aged lady, while Miss Moore walked downstairs alone. She took the place on his left hand at the dinner-table, though, and as soon as the sprightly one would let him, he endeavored to enter into conversation with her. She answered him very much as she had done at the theater: she was just polite, and that was all. It was in vain that he attempted to interest

her in matters which she had formerly seemed to find interesting; in vain he told her about the play upon which he had been at work, and which he hoped would prove the first rung of the ladder which was to lead him to fortune and renown; it was evident that she did not care to hear about that play; and what was equally evident and still more ominous was that she was absent-minded and out of spirits. Well, if she couldn't dispense with Claughton for one evening without looking so dismal about it, there was no more to be said. After a time Fred said no more, and his silence was noted with some irritation by his hostess. One doesn't ask people to dinner simply in order to feed them.

But if Mrs. Moore was not best pleased with this taciturn guest, she had no such reason to complain of his cousin, whose loquacity left nothing to be desired. Mrs. Fenton made a speedy conquest of the General, to whom she communicated her impressions of London society with a mixture of artlessness and shrewdness which kept him bubbling over with laughter from soup to dessert; moreover, she managed to draw everybody within earshot into a discussion

in which she took the principal part. There are a great many people who can accomplish that much, and some who accomplish it rather more often than could be wished; but it is only a genuine conversational artist who can do all the work and at the same time persuade others that they are taking their full share of it. Mrs. Fenton proved herself a true conversational artist that evening, and when she quitted the room with the other ladies, she left behind her four or five men who felt that, for once, they had been really brilliant. This made them very happy, because, unfortunately, it is so seldom that one meets with women who instantly see the point of one's little ironies and jocosities. It also caused them to entertain the highest possible opinion of Mrs. Fenton.

But it is one thing to captivate men (for we are a simple, unsuspicious folk for the most part), and quite another to ingratiate yourself with members of your own sex. Mrs. Fenton, as has been said, had hitherto been tolerably successful in this more difficult undertaking: but when she tried to be kind to Susie Moore she met with a check. Susie, for reasons best known to herself,

did not choose to respond to the other lady's advances. She was distant; she was reserved; she was even, if the truth must be told, a little sulky. When Mrs. Fenton began to talk about Fred and praised him up to the skies, she maintained a chilling silence. All she would say was, that she had always understood that Mr. Musgrave was very fascinating, but that she herself did not know him particularly well.

Mrs. Fenton raised her eyebrows. "Dear me!" said she. "I fancied from what he told me that you were a great friend of his."

"I don't think he can have told you that," answered Susie, flushing slightly. "For a few weeks we saw a good deal of him, because we were getting up some theatricals then and he used to come here to rehearse; but since that we have scarcely met at all. Perhaps, though, he didn't tell you so; perhaps you only fancied it."

"Oh, I wont swear that he actually told me so," returned Mrs. Fenton, laughing; "but I certainly had that impression. I'm sorry you don't like him; because I like him immensely. I don't think I ever met any one more unaffected

and honest and good. He ought to hate me," she added presently, "for it is entirely owing to me that he is comparatively poor now, whereas he might have been rich. But he doesn't. On the contrary, he has been kindness itself to me from the very first. He couldn't have been more attentive or more charming if I had been his own sister, instead of a highly inconvenient cousin."

Susie replied shortly that she was glad to hear it, and with that the colloquy ended; for now the gentlemen had come upstairs, and Mrs. Moore sailed across the room to ask whether Mrs. Fenton would do them all a very, very great favor, and sing something to them.

Mrs. Fenton complied at once. She had brought no music with her, she said, and she was not much accustomed to playing her own accompaniments, but she would do her best, and if she broke down they must excuse her.

So she moved towards the piano, drawing off her gloves, and stopping on her way to address a few laughing words to the men, who had assembled in a group, as men are apt to do after dinner until they receive the expected signals from the

offing which cause them to disperse. "Stick to me," she whispered, "support me! I'm going to sing, and words can't express how nervous I am. Nothing terrifies me so much as these drawing-room performances."

Some members of this contingent, accordingly, formed themselves into a semicircle in the neighborhood of the piano at which Mrs. Fenton seated herself; and, after bestowing a smile and a little grimace upon them over her shoulder, she struck the keys. Nervous she may have been; for, as everybody knows, the most experienced and accomplished artists are not always exempt from that form of suffering; but her nervousness was not apparent, nor had she the slightest occasion for feeling any. Her voice was not quite a contralto, although most people would probably have described it as such; it had a curious sort of occasional break in it, which, however, did not give the effect of a dissonance; and it was one of that rather rare quality which exercises a direct physical influence upon listeners. Her late husband had been in the habit of telling her that she had a voice like a fiddle, and he did not mean to be complimentary when he said so. But then Mr,

Fenton had expected certain definite results which were quite unattainable from the voice in question: others, not having the same reason for being exacting, were more flattering, and as for Mrs. Moore's guests, they were fairly carried away by her. First she sang them two quaint, plaintive Swedish ballads, and then, as they joined in entreating her to go on, she gave them Schubert's "Adieu," which they liked even better, because they had all heard it before. It may be doubted, nevertheless, whether they had ever heard it sung quite in that way before.

Fred, who had separated himself from the cluster of men near the piano and had taken a vacant chair beside Susie, was not the least enthusiastic of her admirers. "Isn't she wonderful!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, she has an extraordinary voice," answered Susie, who had the air of paying this tribute of praise a little grudgingly, "and she seems to be very clever in managing it. I should think she was very clever in every way."

"Oh, I don't know; she is very original—very natural. In some ways she is almost a child. I think you would like her."

"It so happened that Susie had formed a very strong contrary opinion. She did not, however, give utterance to it, but merely observed, "You, at all events, seem to like her very much."

"I'm delighted with her; so is everybody else, even old Breffit, the lawyer, who can't be called impulsive, and who has been wishing her dead for the last three or four months. Old Breffit has always been rather an ally of mine, so he wasn't half pleased when he heard that she was to have her father's money. He has come round now, though. He doesn't exactly say so, but I believe he thinks that such a daughter as Laura deserves any fortune."

"I suppose," remarked Susie slowly, "that there is nothing very unnatural in a father's leaving his money to his daughter."

"Of course not. If there was anything unnatural in the business it was his never taking any notice of her or even mentioning her name for twelve years. I must confess that I think he ought to have told me he had a daughter."

"Yes, it is unfortunate for you. Still, your case isn't altogether hopeless, perhaps."

"I didn't mean to make any complaint," an-

swered Fred, rather curtly. He was puzzled and provoked by the girl's way of speaking to him, which he did not see that he had done anything to deserve. It was not like her (at all events, it was not like what he had imagined her) to treat him so disdainfully because he had ceased to be a matrimonial prize, and yet he could conceive of no other reason for the change in her demeanor.

After a few moments she said, "Your cousin is a good deal older than you are, isn't she?"

"I suppose she must be a year or two older, but she certainly doesn't look it. I shouldn't have set her down as a day more than five-and-twenty."

"I should have put her at over thirty; but then I don't admire her so much as you evidently do."

"Well, we had better not talk any more about her," said Fred with a shade of impatience, "for it doesn't seem to be a subject upon which we are likely to agree. Let us try to find one that will please you better—Claughton and his good luck, for instance."

"It is always pleasant to think about Captain Claughton, because he himself is always pleas-

ant," returned Susie, rather defiantly. "I don't quite understand what you mean by his good luck, though."

"Why, his brother's death, of course. Isn't it the best of good luck to be promoted from younger son to heir-apparent?"

Susie looked her neighbor full in the face, which she had not done before. "Do you know, Mr. Musgrave," said she, "I think you have become very ill-natured all of a sudden."

Now that was precisely what he had been thinking about her; but a woman may say things which it is not permissible for a man to say, so he bit his lips and held his tongue.

"Everybody," the girl continued, "does not think money the one important thing in the world."

It is not surprising that Fred should have been greatly incensed by the outrageous injustice of this speech. If Susie loved Captain Claughton, no reasonable being could be angry with her on that account; if, without exactly loving Captain Claughton, she was going to marry him because her people wished it, and because she herself appreciated the advantages

of ease, that also was a course of action which, by stretching a point, one might perhaps bring one's-self to pardon. But hypocrisy was not pardonable. It was really a little too much that she should attempt to disguise her own failings by boldly accusing others of them, and nothing but the intervention of Mrs. Moore, who thought that her step-daughter had been talking to Mr. Musgrave quite long enough, saved Susie from a rebuke of the most outspoken and uncompromising kind.

Fred's first remark, after he had seated himself in his cousin's brougham and was being driven eastwards, was, "Well, that's all over!"

Mrs. Fenton did not affect to misunderstand him. "I am sorry," she answered, "and yet I am glad. Do you think me very unfeeling for saying that I am glad?"

"I don't understand why you should be glad."

"Don't you? Suppose you were as fond of me as I am of you—is your imagination equal to that effort?"

"I think so," answered Fred, with a rather woe-begone laugh.

"Spur it a little further, then, and suppose

that I have fallen in love with a man who likes me pretty well, but likes my money still better. Suppose that I have suddenly been deprived of my money, and that my lover has hastened to beat a prudent retreat. You would be sorry for me, I hope; but wouldn't you also be rather glad for my sake that things had so fallen out?"

Fred sighed. He was not more fond than the rest of us of facing disagreeable facts; but there are circumstances under which facts must needs be faced, and after the conversation which he had with Susie he could not pretend to think that his cousin had misjudged her. "You may be right to rejoice, but I dare say you'll excuse me if I don't join in your rejoicing," he observed presently. "Somehow or other it's no great consolation to me to know that what I wanted wouldn't have been worth having if I had got it."

"A day will come when that knowledge wil be an immense consolation to you," returned Mrs. Fenton hopefully. "I am not without experience; I have learned what it is to make mistakes which can't be corrected. As for you, my dear Fred, I will risk offending you very deeply by predicting a speedy recovery for you.

You see, if you had really cared a great deal for Miss Moore, you wouldn't have behaved with quite such punctilious discretion during the last few months. Men never do."

Meanwhile Mrs. Moore was saying to her step-daughter, "Apparently I was not so very far wrong in my conjecture. It is pretty evident that Mr. Musgrave is either smitten with his cousin, or wants her to think that he is. Well, one can hardly blame him, I suppose."

"It seemed to me," answered Susie, "that it was rather his cousin who was smitten with him. She hardly took her eyes off him the whole evening."

Mrs. Moore shrugged her shoulders. "So much the better for Mr. Musgrave! I'm sure I hope he really cares for her, poor little thing! It isn't very pretty in a man of his age to have such a keen eye to the main chance; but it's what we all come to sooner or later, and in a certain sense we are right. Because, whatever people may say when their own interests are not at stake, money is essential, whereas love isn't. All the same, he ought to find it easy enough to fall in love with Mrs. Fenton, and most likely he will."

CHAPTER X.

MRS. FENTON had not been much mistaken in assuming that she would offend her cousin when she told him that he could not have been quite so deeply in love with Miss Moore as he had fancied himself. Though he made no rejoinder at the time, he was a good deal hurt, and thought that if she had been really in sympathy with him she would not have made such a speech. The fact was that her character, like her voice, had occasional queer breaks in it, and more than once before he had noticed in her a want of tact which had surprised him. In this particular instance he would, no doubt, have forgiven her more readily had he not felt that her taunt was, to say the least of it, plausible. Perhaps he had been over-punctilious, perhaps it had been absurd to expect that Susie would understand why he had avoided her for so long, perhaps— But he determined not to cheat himself with hopes for which there was absolutely no

excuse; and if he was a little disappointed when he heard that the Moores had left London, that was only because even inexcusable hopes die hard. The General, it appeared, had been threatened with an attack of gout, and had therefore hurried his family off to Kissengen, whence they were to proceed to Switzerland later on.

"I suppose Claughton will have the gout, too," Fred said to himself, with a doleful laugh. "Or perhaps he will join them without a pretext; probably they wont require one of him."

We all know how people who have always enjoyed robust health will howl the house down if a little salutary physical discipline in the shape of a headache or a toothache comes upon them. We endeavor to be sorry for such people, and to make due allowance for them; but when we reflect upon our own heroic and constant endurance of far worse things, we can't help remarking that they do not bear pain very well. Poor Fred had plenty of courage and a perfect temper, but he had never, until now, known the meaning of a really sharp bout of mental suffering, and the consequence was that he made himself slightly

ridiculous, exhibiting a countenance of the most deplorable misery to a world which is only too prone to laugh at miserable countenances. Some of his friends knew or guessed what was the matter with him, others supposed that he was still grieving over the loss of his uncle's fortune; only one of them sincerely pitied him. But then, to be sure, she was a host in herself.

If Mrs. Fenton had seemed to lack nicety of perception on the occasion just referred to, she did not again lay herself open to any such reproach. Her opinion as to the comparatively trifling nature of her cousin's malady may have remained unaltered; but she abstained from expressing it, and, indeed, she was good enough to abstain from any direct allusion to Susie Moore. What she did was to cheer the young fellow up as best she could by giving him plenty to do. She insisted upon his taking her to theaters and concerts; she affected to lean upon him a great deal, to be guided by his advice in a hundred small matters; in short, she tried to give him the idea that he was indispensable to her; and if he saw through her kindly stratagems they were not the less successful on that account. Whether he

was indispensable to her or not, she became, by degrees, almost indispensable to him. His happiest hours were passed in her society; she made him forget his troubles; sometimes she made him laugh, and when she had achieved that feat she was so childishly triumphant over it that he could not but be touched and grateful.

She and he spent several afternoons in house-hunting together, for he agreed with her that her best plan would be to make London her head-quarters. For the matter of that, there was no reason why she should not have a small house in the country as well, if she cared to set up two establishments. However, she did not find anything in Mayfair, or Belgravia, or South Kensington that altogether satisfied her, and the end of it was that she decided to remain homeless until the autumn.

"After all," she said, one day, "who knows whether I shall ever want a house of my own? I may be going to die, or I may be going to lose all my money—who knows?"

"Considering that you are in perfect health, and that you have Mr. Breffit to look after your investments for you, I don't think either of those

catastrophes is very probable," answered Fred, laughing.

But she was in one of her depressed moods and she did not join in his laughter. "Nothing is improbable, except happiness," she declared. "That is impossible for everybody and most improbable for me. Just now I am quite happy—at least, I should be if I could believe that things would go on like this. But I can't believe it. Sometimes I can hardly believe that I am myself, and that I am rich, and that I can sit with my hands before me, doing nothing for the rest of my days if I choose."

"Didn't it ever occur to you that your father would leave you at least a part of his fortune when he died?" asked Fred wonderingly.

She shook her head. "Never! I give you my word that I never bestowed a single thought upon the subject until that day when I saw the advertisement in the Sydney paper. I didn't look forward at all; I just went on from day to day and tried to forget that there was an awful future coming when I should be old and ugly and voiceless. Well, we wont talk any more about that," she added, with an abrupt change of man-

ner; "the past is dead and gone, and the future is the future. The present, at all events, belongs to us, and we will make the most of it. I wish you enjoyed it as much as I do."

He said he enjoyed being with her—which, indeed, was quite true—and she seemed to be pleased with his reply.

But the time very soon came when these two good friends had to part. Parliament had risen; all the fashionable people had left London, and Mrs. Fenton had engagements which necessitated her departure. Lady Clamborough, who had taken her up very strongly, had invited her to spend a few weeks in Scotland, and other ladies, thinking that she would make a useful addition to a house-party, had been equally hospitable; so that there was little likelihood of her becoming her own mistress again before the middle of September. "And then," she said, "I think I will go down to some quiet little seaside place and rest awhile. If I do, will you come and see me?"

"Of course I will," answered Fred, "but I don't much believe in your burying yourself at the seaside. You wont feel any great craving for rest

when you get among all these magnificent friends of yours."

"Oh, nonsense!" she returned; "the magnificent people aren't my friends, and never will be. I don't belong to them; I only amuse them. For the present they amuse me, but I dare say they will cease to do so when I have become more used to them. It is you who have friends; I have only one."

And this sentiment she repeated with even more emphasis when he accompanied her to King's Cross to see her off to the North. "I shall write to you," she said, "and I shall expect you to answer me and tell me all about everything."

"I'm afraid there wont be much to tell," replied Fred.

"Oh, yes, there will, if you will write about yourself. That's all I care to hear about—only you. We have had a pleasant time together, haven't we? I wish it were not over! Perhaps it hasn't been so very pleasant to you, though. No, don't make pretty protestations, they wouldn't take me in. You are not an adept at taking people in, and I know you have sometimes

enjoyed yourself lately and sometimes been bored. Good-by, Fred; don't forget me."

She would no doubt have felt flattered if she could have known how much he missed her after her departure. It was quite true that he had no lack of friends, and during the remainder of the summer he had what he would formerly have called "a very jolly time of it," staying for a few days in many country houses and playing cricket a great deal. He had, besides, his comedy to finish and polish, which occupation filled up all the vacant hours. But through it all he had a perpetual dull pain at his heart and a sense of loneliness for which it may be that Susie Moore was not wholly responsible. He had determined to get over his love for Susie, and perhaps he was succeeding; but he wanted encouragement and sympathy and consolation, and nobody but his cousin could provide him with these anodynes. He was a little surprised to find how he looked forward to receiving her letters, and how disappointed he was if these were a day or two later than he had expected in reaching him. It is true that they were very clever and diverting letters, containing lifelike and slightly satirical portraits

of the persons with whom Mrs. Fenton was brought into contact, and describing the kind of life that she was leading in a style which was at once terse and vivid; but the charm of her correspondence did not lie so much in that as in the kindly, almost tender, interest in himself of which it breathed. Nothing is more soothing to a man who has been crossed in love than to feel that the world contains at any rate one woman who takes a tender interest in him.

Incidentally he heard that his anticipations had been verified, and that Captain Claughton had left for Germany to join the Moores. "I suppose," he remarked, in a letter to his cousin, "that we may take that as final." To which she replied by return of post that she was afraid so, but that, do what she would, she could not manage to feel as sorry about it as she ought to feel. "Do you remember," she wrote, "my telling you once that I was abominably jealous? Well, that is the shameful truth. I should have hated Miss Moore if she had been worthy of you; and perhaps that is why I don't hate her at all for being what she is. May she be happy with her Life Guardsman! And may you soon find out

what an easy thing it is to be happy without her!"

Fred did not resent this candid aspiration as he would have done a little earlier in the year. There is something rather contemptible in making yourself permanently wretched about a girl who neither wants your love nor deserves it; and all the world is agreed that friendship is more stable than love. He had perhaps lost his chance of supreme felicity; but that is what most people must make up their minds to lose; and a great deal still remained to him—health, strength, a modest fortune, a very fair prospect of achieving literary renown, and an exceptionally charming cousin. As time went on, his longing to see this charming cousin of his again grew stronger, and he was very glad when, in the month of September, she wrote to him from Dawlish to say that she had established herself in that remote little watering-place, and that she now claimed the fulfillment of his promise.

"Come and stay with me as long as you will and can," she entreated. "I have got a wee house with three sitting-rooms in it, one of which shall be given up to you to smoke in, or

write plays in, or go to sleep in, as you please. There is nothing whatever to do, except to sit upon the beach and watch the funny-looking people who wander about there and station themselves in the most conspicuous places with their arms round each other's waists. The men wear dirty flannel trowsers and sand-shoes and caps on the back of their heads; the women are like—oh, I don't know what they are like! Words can't describe them. It amuses me to study them and their queer ways of going on; but perhaps it wouldn't amuse you? Anyhow, I have seen and done so much since we last met that I have a stock of conversation on hand which can be spread out over three days at least. If you begin to yawn after that, you can go away."

He did not think it at all likely that he would yawn in Laura's company, and he lost no time in obeying her summons. The weather was fine and hot, and pretty little Dawlish, with its white houses drawn up along a strip of beach flanked by red cliffs and facing the open sea, impressed him favorably on his arrival. Not less friendly and pleasant was the aspect of the modest dwell-

ing, overgrown with climbing plants, in which Mrs. Fenton had taken up her quarters; and most pleasant of all was the warmth with which that lady welcomed her visitor. She stepped out through the bow window which opened upon the lawn, and came to meet him with outstretched hands.

"You dear boy!" she exclaimed, "so you have really come! How very, very nice of you!"

"Well—you asked me, you know," answered Fred, with a laugh.

"Oh, I asked you; but asking is one thing and obtaining is another. All day long I have been in momentary expectation of receiving a polite telegram from you: 'So sorry. Unavoidably detained. Will write and explain.' And then I thought that to-morrow's post would bring me an explanatory letter which, being interpreted, would mean, 'All things considered, I really can't go all the way down to Devonshire to face a prolonged *tête-à-tête*; but perhaps we shall meet in London later on.'"

"I don't believe you expected anything of the sort," returned Fred. "You are fishing for compliments, Laura."

She shook her head. "No, I am not; I wanted you to come so much that I felt almost sure you wouldn't come. Do you know that you are looking much better than you did when I left London. Your eyes are clearer and you are burnt as brown as a berry. You have been cricketing a great deal, I suppose."

She scrutinized him so intently for a second or two that he reddened a little, notwithstanding his sunburning; for he was a modest young man, and possibly he may have been aware that he was also a very handsome one. "And how am *I* looking?" she asked presently.

Well, if she was fishing for compliments she got what she wanted this time; for it was in a tone of unmistakable truth and sincerity that Fred replied, "I think you are looking simply lovely."

The fact was that he was struck and a little startled by her beauty, which was in some sort a revelation to him. He had admired her very much in London; but there are more ways than one of admiring a person, and perhaps it was his way of admiring his cousin that had changed all of a sudden, though he thought that the change

was in her. "I don't know what you have done to yourself!" he exclaimed, after a pause.

"Thank you," she returned, with a slight grimace; "at my time of life it is something to be told that one is looking lovely, even though the statement has to be qualified by expressions of such extreme surprise. I assure you I haven't had recourse to art, if that is what you mean."

But she knew very well that that was not what he meant; and as for his surprise, it was susceptible of an interpretation which could not but be welcome to her. In London he had only had eyes for Susie Moore; but now, perhaps, he was beginning to discover that there were other women besides Susie Moore in the world—which was a hopeful sign.

And while they were dining together afterwards (she had made a great point of preparing as artistic a dinner as was possible under the circumstances), she was glad to find that he could talk cheerfully and laugh heartily, and that he was so much interested in hearing about all the people whom she had met during the summer as to be almost inquisitive upon the subject. Particularly he wanted to know what the men had

been like, and although he refrained from asking in so many words whether any of them had made love to her, it required no great acuteness of insight to perceive that that was what he wished to discover. She amused herself by baffling his artless inquiries and watching his increasing disquietude.

"I know what you are thinking," she said at length; "you are thinking that I have fallen a prey to some fortune-hunter, or that I shall before long, unless I am looked after. Well, what if I do? What difference will it make to you, pray?"

"What difference? Well—is it likely that I should wish you to marry a fortune-hunter? To confess the truth, however, I can't think that I should be very much pleased to hear that you were going to marry anybody. You ought to be able to understand that; because, as you may remember, you told me in one of your letters that you would have hated Miss Moore if she had been what you were pleased to call worthy of me. I wont go so far as to say that I should hate a man who was really worthy of you; but—is there such a man?"

"I don't know," answered Mrs. Fenton; "modesty forbids me to fix the standard of my own worth. But I have the best reasons for believing that there is more than one man who considers himself quite good enough for me."

"Oh! you have had some offers, then, since I saw you last?"

"No less than three; two were from old men and one was from a young one. The two old men, I must say, were not attractive. The first who asked me had a title, and the second, so far as I could make out, had nothing except a shocking reputation and a splendid audacity; so I sent them both to the right-about, and they were not inconsolable. But I was sorry about the young man, who reminded me of you in some ways. He assured me that he didn't want my money, and that he loved me for myself; and though I dare say you will call me a fool for my pains, I couldn't help believing him."

This conversation took place in the garden, whither the cousins had betaken themselves after dinner. The sun had set long ago, but the moon, which was at the full, illumined the landscape and made a path of silver across the sea

and fell upon the profile of Mrs. Fenton, with whom it seemed to Fred perfectly possible that any young man might fall in love. He sat looking at her for some little time before he asked, "Why did you refuse him then, Laura?"

"For the good or the bad reason that I didn't love him," she answered. "It is a good reason, now, perhaps; I don't know whether it was a good reason for refusing all the men out in Australia who asked me to marry them after I became a widow. Some of them were rich, and I was miserably poor; often I used to say to myself that I must be a perfect idiot to refuse them. But, thank Heaven! I did refuse them."

For a long time after this nothing more was said. Fred had lighted a cigar, and, with his hands clasped behind his head, was gazing at his cousin, who was gazing out to sea. At last she rose, stepped through the open window into the drawing-room, struck a few chords on the piano, and began to sing. That queer voice of hers, which was like nobody else's voice, and which had an indescribable sort of humorous pathos in it, floated out to Fred, as he sat smoking in the

moonlight, and produced a curiously disturbing and exciting effect upon him.

> Nature asks not whence or why
> Nature cares not how;
> 'Tis enough that I am I,
> And that thou art thou.

This refrain of a ballad that she sang haunted Fred long after he had retired to his bedroom, and actually prevented him from going to sleep. He thought a good deal more about Laura than about Susie Moore that night, although he was perfectly certain that he could never love anyone but Susie and that his affection for Laura was only that of a somewhat puzzled and anxious brother.

CHAPTER XI.

HUMAN nature being what it is, one hardly ventures to blame the skepticism of those who deny that any man can feel a fraternal affection for a woman of his own age who is not his sister. Mrs. Fenton ought, no doubt, to have provided herself with a chaperon before inviting her cousin to stay with her; and when she laughingly asked him whether he thought that she had compromised herself by what she had done, he answered that perhaps it would be as well not to mention it to her friends.

She said she would be careful to abstain from doing so. "Meanwhile," she added, "as nobody knows us here, and as nobody need ever know that you have been here, we will make the most of our time and enjoy ourselves. I don't think we should have enjoyed ourselves very much in the company of a third person."

He didn't think so either, and was far from regretting the absence of such an incumbrance.

Of his cousin's company he had just as much as he chose to ask for and no more. She breakfasted in her own room; she scrupulously avoided thrusting herself upon him at any hour of the day; she did not suggest that they should make excursions in the neighborhood, nor did she attempt to provide amusements for him. Only she was always at hand when he looked for her, and always delighted to do anything that he proposed. There was not very much to be done; but, so long as the weather keeps fine, two young people who are in sympathy with one another can do nothing together for a considerable length of time without feeling the need of a change. Fred spent a week at Dawlish very happily and contentedly, and was amazed to find that he had so soon reached the date which he had mentally fixed upon as the outside limit of his stay with his cousin. During that time he had, he thought, learned to know her much better, and he had also grown much fonder of her. Indeed, he would have been most insensible to favors if he had not, for she had been kindness itself to him.

"You are spoiling me, Laura," he said to her

one evening when they were sitting in the garden after dinner as usual; "you give way to me in everything; you make me say what I should like, and then you do it as if you had only been waiting for orders. That is all wrong, you know."

"My motives are purely selfish," she answered; "it pleases me to please you. Besides, there are some people who are born to be spoiled, and I think you are one of them. I dare say it wont do you much harm."

"I am not so sure of that," returned the young man, shaking his head. "Thus far I have been tolerably modest, because there has been nobody to interfere with me; but I shouldn't wonder if you were to find me rather overbearing and tyrannical when you come up to London again. I shant like being told that you are engaged when I want you to give up an afternoon to me. By the way, when are you coming back to London?"

"I don't know; I haven't thought much about it yet. When will you be there?"

"Oh, I shall be there to-morrow evening, I'm sorry to say. I shant stay more than a day or

two, because I have a few weeks of shooting in prospect at different places; but I suppose before the end of next month I shall have pretty well settled down for the winter."

"To-morrow evening!" exclaimed Mrs. Fenton, in a voice of consternation; "you are going to desert me already, then! Well, I wont beg you to stay. Of course it has been dull for you; but you have been very good about it and haven't even looked bored the whole time, and—"

"You know very well that I have never felt so," interrupted Fred.

"Haven't you? Well, your looks pretty generally reflect your feelings, I must confess. Anyhow, I'm not ungrateful—though I'm sorry. And now, as this is to be our last evening, may I dictate the programme, for once? That will give me an opportunity of judging whether you are spoiled yet or not."

Fred, of course, replied that she might dictate anything she liked, and no undue advantage was taken of his complaisance, for it seemed that she only wanted to go out in a boat.

"You needn't take the oars if you would.

rather sit in the stern and smoke," she added; "I'm quite accustomed to rowing."

But he said that he, too, had had some little experience of that kind, and that, if she didn't mind his taking it easy, he thought he could manage to combine smoking and sculling. Ten minutes later they were out upon the sea, which was almost as calm as a lake. There was no moon that night, but thousands of stars shone down upon them from a cloudless sky, and the ripple caused by a faint southerly breeze made flashes of phosphorescent light over the far-stretching surface of the water.

"I love to be on the sea," said Mrs. Fenton. "If I am ever so short a distance from shore I feel as if I had got out of the world—away from all the cruel people, and the malignant people, and the wearisome people whom one calls one's fellow-creatures."

"But I thought you rather liked the society of your fellow-creatures," Fred remarked.

"Oh, they are indispensable, of course; one can't remain in the world and take no notice of them. But some of them have treated me badly, and some I am afraid of; and I often think how

delightful it would be to escape altogether from this world with—shall I say, with one of them?"

Fred rested on his oars, pitched away his cigar, and sighed.

"I should think it very delightful indeed, if you were the one," he said.

"I'm afraid you wouldn't. I have tired you in a week, you see; and I knew I should, though I have tried hard not to be tiresome."

Fred protested warmly against so false an accusation. Did she suppose, he asked, that he liked leaving her? Did she suppose that he would enjoy going up to London to meet Mr. Breffit, who wanted to see him about some matters of business? All he could say was that nothing would give him greater personal satisfaction than to stay where he was and throw up every engagement that he had made for the next month.

"Throw them up, then," she returned; "that is easily done."

But when he opened his lips to reply, she held up her hand and stopped him.

"Don't be ridiculous," she said laughing; "you can't throw up all your engagements; and if you

could I wouldn't let you. I am selfish, I own, but I am not quite so selfish as that. Only I shall miss you dreadfully, and I don't know when I shall see you again, or whether I shall ever see you again in this way; and so—"

She did not finish her sentence. Her voice seemed to fail her suddenly; and when he bent forward to look at her he saw that there were tears in her eyes. This discovery—or possibly another discovery, which he might have made before if he had not been a little dull of apprehension—completely upset his mental balance, and left him at the mercy of the impulses and emotions of the moment. He took her hand, which she had allowed to fall listlessly upon her knee, and she did not withdraw it from his grasp.

"Laura!" he exclaimed, "I love you! We needn't part any more unless you wish it."

Never, perhaps, was a more unpremeditated declaration of love uttered. There is no doubt that if Fred Musgrave had been asked five minutes before whether he was in love with his cousin he would have replied in the negative; yet his heart beat fast while he waited for her answer, and he drew a breath of relief when the

answer came, though in truth he had known quite well what it would be. The old saying that love begets love may not be as absurd as it appears to be upon the face of it. That it does not always do so is obvious, but under certain conditions it is by no means unlikely to produce that effect, and that these conditions existed in the present case Mrs. Fenton was well aware. She confessed as much, indeed, after an interval, during which the usual incoherent vows had been exchanged.

"This has been all my doing from beginning to end, Fred," said she. "When you came here you were very sorry for yourself, and because I consoled you a little you liked me. Then, at this last moment, you became sorry for me—and that finished you. It is no use making generous offers which you wouldn't accept to-night; but I promise you—and I want you to believe it, because it is the truth—that if to-morrow morning, or at any future time, you should wish to draw back, you may do so, and you shall not hear one syllable of reproach from me."

However, when the next morning came, Fred had no such wish. If eight hours of sleep, and the

more dispassionate view of things which naturally resulted therefrom affected him in any way, it was only in so far as it brought a somewhat important circumstance to his recollection.

"Has it struck you, Laura," he took the earliest opportunity of asking his betrothed, "that by marrying you I shall get my uncle's money after all?"

"Why, of course it has, you goose!" she answered. "That's just the glorious part of it. You don't know how miserable that money has often made me! Rejoiced though I was to be delivered from the bondage of poverty, it has never really made me quite happy, because I have always felt that I was robbing you; but now—just think of it! At one stroke that burden is to be lifted off my shoulders, and I am to marry the man whom I love! I suppose at this moment I am the most contented woman in the whole world."

She was radiant. Her spirits fairly overpowered her and found vent in some exhibitions of childishness which he thought very charming. There was no use in telling her that all his friends would certainly set him down as a fortune-hunter. "Let

them!" she returned; "who cares? Come now; you are not going to tell me that you care what they say, I hope. If you do, I shall think that you can't care very much about me. Am I so hideous that nobody would marry me except for the sake of my income? Now, I will tell you what is a great deal more likely to be said, and that is that I have made a dead set at my handsome cousin; which ought to be very galling to me, because it is true. Yet I don't mind one little bit. I don't mind anything, so long as you love me, Fred."

What could he do but asseverate that he did love her, and would always love her? He was doubtless sincere; yet it would have been plain enough to any on-looker that he did not care for her as she cared for him, and it is probable that Mrs. Fenton, whose perceptions were exceedingly keen, did not deceive herself upon that point. Nevertheless, she was wildly happy, and her high spirits did not desert her until it appeared that, in spite of what had taken place, Fred still meant to go up to London that afternoon. Her distress at this announcement was out of all proportion to its cause. She implored him not to leave her;

she declared that if she went away now she was sure he would never come back again; and when he laughed at her, pointing out what nonsense this was, and that a man must keep his business appointments, and that his absence would not extend over more than three days at the outside, she was only partially reassured.

"But what about those shooting parties?" she asked apprehensively. "You don't want to give them up, do you?"

"I certainly do want to give them up," he answered, "and I certainly will. If I'm not back here the day after to-morrow, I shall be back on the following day for certain."

"I shall believe that when I see you," she sighed. "Nothing is certain; all sorts of dreadful things may happen at any moment."

And after that she did not recover her gayety; though she vexed him with no more entreaties and tried to seem interested in the fancy sketches of their future life with which he amused himself. It was agreed between them that they should be married as soon as possible—perhaps in the month of November—and then they would go abroad for the winter, and on their return they

would see about providing themselves with a permanent home. Not a word was said about Susie Moore; there was a tacit understanding that that chapter should be regarded as closed, and Fred was not a little grateful to his cousin for a reticence which he hardly ventured to expect of her.

She insisted upon accompanying him to the station; it may even be that up to the last moment she had some faint hope that he would relent (for surely writing to your lawyer is much the same thing as seeing him); but she knew that she must not be silly or exacting; and he, for his part, having no acquaintance with the anguish of nervousness, had never thought of abandoning his journey. He would have been better pleased if she would have allowed him to say good-by to her in her own house, where, of course, good-by could be said in a more agreeable and emphatic fashion than upon a public platform; still, he was willing to indulge her; and so, when the train had come in and he had jumped into a smoking-carriage, he contented himself with squeezing her hand and bestowing an eloquent look upon her. Her eyes were full of tears as

she smiled back at him; he thought her fond and foolish, yet adorable. What man ever thinks anything else when a woman smiles upon him with needless tears in her eyes?

But Mrs. Fenton was not a foolish woman, and while she made her way slowly homewards she said to herself that there was really nothing to cry about. Only by some extraordinary and most improbable stroke of ill-fortune could she now be deprived of what, until yesterday, had seemed to her to be almost hopelessly out of her reach. Luck, which for so many years had been against her, appeared at last to have definitely taken her side—according to the doctrine of averages, some months at least ought to elapse before it turned round again. Some months!—well, she asked for no more. "Let me only be his wife," she murmured, "and then *advienne que pourra!* He doesn't care for me very much yet; but he cares a little, and perhaps in time he will care a good deal. I shall be worse than clumsy if he doesn't."

Despondency with her never lasted long. She went and sat upon the beach and threw pebbles into the sea and forgot certain catas-

trophes upon the possible occurrence of which she had allowed her mind to dwell for awhile. She began, instead, to build castles in the air, which is a far more sensible thing to do. She saw herself wandering beneath blue skies with Fred and reveling in the beauty of those Italian landscapes and cities which she had read of but had never seen; she drew mental pictures of an artistically furnished house in London, where there would never be any lack of company, and where the company would always be the best of its kind that could be obtained; she had visions of brilliant social triumphs, combined with unbroken domestic felicity; and through all her musings one thought was ever present to her—"He will have the money! It will be his money, not mine; I shall never be made miserable again by knowing that it is I who have made him poor."

It was evening when she rose and strolled toward her temporary abode. In order to reach it she had to cross a broad walk, where a German band was playing, and where the attractive beings whom she had described in her letter to Fred were pacing to and fro in large numbers. She

contemplated them with friendly and lenient eyes; for amongst them were many lovers—or, at any rate, potential lovers—and she felt that she was bound to them by the tie of a common humanity.

But these sentiments of abstract benevolence were replaced by an emotion of a keener and very different kind, when her eyes suddenly encountered those of a solitary individual who formed one of the throng. This was a swarthy, vulgar-looking little man, whose age might have been anything between forty and fifty. He wore a glaring check suit, and had a huge black cigar in his mouth; there was a suggestion of sporting proclivities about his white linen scarf and the cock of his hat; his general appearance was not unlike that of a bookmaker. He stared very hard at Mrs. Fenton, who, for a moment, returned his stare and then passed on. Her face expressed neither recognition nor perturbation; but the color had left her cheeks, and, after crossing the road, she quickened her pace considerably. When she reached the little iron gate which gave access to her garden she glanced for one second over her shoulder. It was as she had thought: the man in the check suit had followed her, and

from a distance of some fifty yards or so was watching her movements. He now turned away and retraced his steps.

Mrs. Fenton had led a life of some peril and adventure, and, like others whose experience has been of that nature, she seldom lost her presence of mind in an emergency. The moment that she entered the house she rang for her maid, and gave orders that her things were to be packed up forthwith.

"I find that I shall have to go to Paris to-morrow," she said. "We will leave this place by the night mail. Tell somebody to take this check to the house-agent's at once, and to wait for a receipt. I shall not want to occupy the house during the remainder of the term."

She issued her behests in a somewhat peremptory tone, but with no appearance of agitation or alarm. Yet she was in truth very much agitated and not a little frightened. "There is no doubt about his having recognized me," she was thinking. "He will come here in the morning, and he will know that I have run away from him. That is unfortunate; but it can't be helped—anything is better than having to speak to him.

If he were to come to-night—but he wont do that. He will want to make some inquiries first; and when he does come, he will only hear that I have gone to Paris. Oh, what a mercy it is that Fred left to-day! If he had stayed on, as I begged him to do, nothing could have saved me from shipwreck. Well—it looks as if I couldn't be destined to suffer shipwreck in this way, anyhow."

Nevertheless her nerves were in a state of agonizing tension for the next few hours and not until she was being whirled toward London in the express did she breathe freely once more.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. BREFFIT was overjoyed to hear the news which Fred lost no time in communicating to him. "My dear fellow," said he, "you are going to do such a thoroughly sensible, desirable, and altogether satisfactory thing that the chances were fully a hundred to one against your ever doing it. I don't know whether you'll believe me or not, but it's Gospel truth that as soon as I saw your cousin, I said to myself, 'Here's Fred's affair for him, as plain as a pikestaff.' Only the perversity of human nature is such that I was afraid you wouldn't look at it in that way."

"I certainly didn't look at it in that way," answered Fred; "but I suppose I shall never be able to persuade you or anybody else that I didn't."

Mr. Breffit laughed. "If you have been able to persuade her," said he, "you needn't much mind about me or anybody else. As a matter of fact, I don't find the least difficulty in believing

that you have fallen in love with Mrs. Fenton. She is a woman quite out of the ordinary run," added this connoisseur impressively. "I don't know that I have ever met a woman quite like her."

If a tendency to do rather extraordinary things proves a woman to be out of the ordinary run of her sex, Mrs. Fenton undoubtedly merited the lawyer's encomium; and so Fred thought when, on reaching home, he found a letter from her, dated "Grand Hôtel, Paris."

"I wonder," she wrote, "whether you will be very much astonished to hear that I have deserted Dawlish. Most likely you will be, because you are a man, and you are very sensible, and you wouldn't understand how any place could become unbearable and uninhabitable simply because a single individual had left it. Nevertheless, that is quite a possible thing to happen; and what shows that it is possible is that you hadn't been gone more than a few hours when I began to pack up my clothes with feverish haste. I *couldn't* have stayed there without you, Fred! Well, I was ashamed to follow you to London; and besides, what could we have done in London at this time of year? So, as I had never seen Paris, and as I hoped that perhaps it might amuse you a little to show all the sights to such an unsophisticated savage, I came straight here without drawing breath. And I wont go any-

where or see anything until you come. Because you *will* come, wont you, Fred? After all, Paris isn't much farther away from you than Devonshire. I will try not to be dreadfully disappointed if you say you can't manage it; but I confess that I shall be rather unhappy and a little frightened until I get your answer.

"Ever your loving

"LAURA."

Fred could do no less than dispatch a reassuring telegram to her, and follow it in person as speedily as might be. Her precipitate flight from Dawlish struck him as a somewhat whimsical proceeding; but he did not for a moment doubt the truth of her explanation, nor was he very sorry that the attractions of Paris were to be substituted for those of a remote English watering-place. One cannot always be boating by starlight, and two people who can sit indoors together through a wet day, with nothing particular to do except to repeat "I love you," at intervals, must indeed be desperately in love with one another. Whatever Mrs. Fenton may have been, it is pretty certain that Fred was not so much in love as all that.

He found his cousin luxuriously installed in a gilded and mirrored saloon at the Grand Hôtel,

and the delight with which she welcomed him could not have been greater if they had been parted for months.

"Now I have got you!" she exclaimed exultingly, "and I am going to keep you. That is, unless you get tired of me. Will you soon get tired of me, do you think? Not quite so soon here, perhaps, as you would have done at Dawlish? You shall not be tied to my apron-string, you know. You shall play about and amuse yourself as much as you like. Only, when you want me you will say, 'Laura, my dear, as you have been a good girl to-day I am going to take you out for an hour now, to look at the shops.' And then I shall pop on my bonnet, and off we shall go. And sometimes, in the evenings, you might like to look in at a theater. Or do you hate turning out after dinner as much as most men do?"

He made the only answer that could be made; and indeed she had no reason during the fortnight that followed to complain of any lack of attention or devotion on his part. They visited some of the sights of Paris (but only a few of them, because, notwithstanding his protestations,

she knew that he could not really be so abnormal as to enjoy sight-seeing); they made excursions to Versailles and Saint-Germain, and even as far as to Fontainebleau; they patronized nearly all of the theaters in turn, and, as she declared fifty times a day, she was perfectly happy.

Fred said he was perfectly happy too; and perhaps he was. At any rate, he was loyal enough to turn his back instantly upon any passing doubts that may have suggested themselves to him. Once he tried the plan of drawing comparisons mentally between his cousin and Susie Moore, which were entirely to the advantage of the former lady; but somehow or other this did not succeed very well, so he gave it up. What was quite undeniable was that Laura was charming company. Possibly she may have exerted herself to be charming; but if so, the exertion was not apparent. Her gayety seemed to be quite spontaneous; her remarks were always original and sometimes witty; she noticed everything and everybody; and her talent for mimicry was a never-failing source of merriment to her companion. Nothing delighted her more than to make him laugh. A man who laughs, she may

have thought, is a man who is in good spirits, and it was above all things important that Fred's spirits should be kept up to the mark.

Her own spirits were, as they always had been, liable to sudden fluctuations. Sombre thoughts found their way into her mind sometimes and cast their shadow over her features. Sometimes too—though this did not often occur—she could not help giving utterance to them, as when, one day, she said to him abruptly: "This is far too good to last—it can't last! You are perfect now; but you wont always be perfect; you wouldn't be human if you were. Though I dare say I shall always think you so."

"I am quite sure I shall always think you so," he answered, smiling.

"Ah, but I'm not—I'm horribly imperfect. I'm not young, as you are—oh, how I wish I were! I've lived through a whole lifetime, and I've done all sorts of things that can't be undone. Fred, suppose you were to find out some day that I had—that I had—well, that I had flirted a good deal in years gone by, for instance?"

"Oh," he replied, at once, "that is no more than we have all done. I think much the best plan

is to let bygones be bygones. Shall we agree to let the dead past bury its dead?"

She jumped eagerly at this suggestion; although no one knew better than she did what it implied. True lovers are seldom so sensible or so magnanimous; and when she said, with perfect truth, "At any rate, I never loved any one in my life but you, Fred," she was painfully aware that it was not in his power to make a corresponding declaration.

He did not do so, but changed the subject instead. They were walking down the Rue de la Paix at the time, and he directed her attention to a jeweler's window; for he had found out that the mere sight of jewels always exercised an exhilarating effect upon her.

Now, while she was gazing in rapt ecstasy at a diamond necklace, and while he was wishing that he had money enough to buy it for her, an elderly Englishman who happened to be passing by caught sight of the couple, stared at them for a moment, and then accosted them with much cordiality. General Moore said he was delighted to see them both, and they tried, not very successfully, to look as if they were delighted to see him.

"We are on our way home," the General explained. "My wife and daughter insisted upon stopping a few days here to buy frocks. Where are you staying? We are at the Hôtel Bristol. Couldn't you come and dine with us to-night? Do, if you're not engaged; it will be a great pleasure to Mrs. Moore, I'm sure."

To decline a verbal invitation always requires presence of mind; and Fred, whose mental balance had been a good deal disturbed by the unexpected appearance of the General, stammered out a reluctant acceptance before he could stop himself. His cousin would no doubt have found an excuse for him if he had given her time; but since he did not, she accommodated herself to circumstances and said very pleasantly that she would enjoy nothing more than spending an evening with Mrs. Moore. This was well enough, and Fred was grateful to her for her tact and good sense; but the next moment she astonished him, as she had done more than once before, by displaying what he thought a remarkable lack of the very qualities for which he had been admiring her.

"I think," said she, laughing, "we had better

make our confession at once and get it over. My cousin and I are engaged to be married, General Moore."

The General was equal to the occasion. He offered his sincere congratulations, shook hands with them both, expressed no surprise, and very soon took himself off, saying, "We shall hope to have the pleasure of seeing you at eight o'clock, then."

"What made you tell him?" exclaimed Fred, in a tone of some vexation, as soon as they were once more alone.

"Oughtn't I to have told him?" she asked, with a deprecating look. "I thought it was better that his wife and daughter should hear the news from him than from us. You see, they would have been sure to find it out in the course of the evening, which might have been embarrassing. As it is, they will just congratulate us when we arrive, and there will be an end of it."

That sounded plausible and reasonable. "Well, I dare say you are right," said Fred, and then began to talk about something else. For obvious reasons he was disinclined to dwell upon

a topic which his cousin and he had hitherto sedulously avoided.

Matters fell out very much in accordance with Mrs. Fenton's prediction. Mrs. and Miss Moore said what the circumstances required to their guests with ease and self-possession, and although perhaps nobody greatly enjoyed the dinner which followed, it passed off quite pleasantly. The General, Mrs. Moore, and Mrs. Fenton were the chief speakers. Fred was thoroughly uncomfortable, and Susie scarcely opened her lips; but then she was never a great talker. After dessert the General led his young friend off to the smoking-room, remarking with a wink that it was only fair to give the women a chance of criticising one another's clothes.

"And I dare say," he added, after he had ensconced himself comfortably in an arm-chair, "they will have a word or two to say about you, my boy. Couldn't do it while you were in the room, you know. Well, you needn't be alarmed; Mrs. Moore will give you a first-rate character, I'm sure. You're a lucky fellow, Musgrave; though I don't mean to say that your cousin isn't lucky too. In fact, I think she is."

The old gentleman prattled away over his cigar for half an hour or so, receiving monosyllabic replies from time to time, but he made no allusion to the one subject about which Fred was consumed with curiosity to hear, and at length the latter was constrained to inquire carelessly, "Have you seen anything of Claughton this autumn?"

"Yes," answered the General, knocking the ash off his cigar; "oh, yes; he was at Kissingen while we were there. Good fellow, Claughton, very good fellow—I don't know a better." And then he sighed.

That is scarcely the tone in which a man speaks of his prospective son-in-law, and it seemed certain that Captain Claughton had either changed his mind or had been refused. Fred's curiosity was greater than ever; but he did not venture to put any further questions. Besides, he was a little ashamed of himself for being so inquisitive and anxious; Susie and her fate were no longer any concern of his.

Shortly afterwards his host suggested that they should join the ladies. Mrs. Moore and Mrs. Fenton had their heads together and were deeply

interested in examining a pile of fashion-plates. The General naturally strolled up to them, and thus Fred could hardly choose but approach Susie, who was seated at the window, gazing down at the passing carriages and pedestrians in the Place Vendôme. He stood rather awkwardly beside her for a moment or two, saying nothing. He could not help feeling like a traitor, nor could he help suspecting that his former love despised him. And he was not best pleased—probably nothing that she could have said would have pleased him at that moment—when she opened the conversation by praising Mrs. Fenton's beauty and amiability.

"I thought you didn't admire her at all," Fred returned somewhat curtly: "you certainly told me in London that you didn't."

"Yes," answered the girl, after a moment of hesitation, "I remember. You told me that I knew nothing about her, which was quite true. I am sorry I spoke against her; I don't know why I did it."

"Oh, excuse me," said Fred, who was nervous and irritable, and had lost control of himself; "I think you do know. I think you were dis-

gusted with her because you were disgusted with me; and you were disgusted with me because your opinion was that I wanted to marry my cousin in order to get hold of the money which I had always expected to be mine some day. Probably you haven't altered your opinion; but you are mistaken, all the same. I should have asked her to marry me if she hadn't a penny in the world."

Susie looked a little surprised at his vehemence; but she answered gently: "I don't doubt that. Mrs. Fenton has been talking to me about you, and I am sure that you care for her as much as she does for you—which is saying a great deal."

Even after that Fred was not satisfied; but there is no satisfying some people. He had wished to convince Miss Moore that he was very much in love with his cousin; yet he was vexed with her for being already convinced of it, and still more vexed with poor Laura for having convinced her. But he had no further opportunity of displaying his ill-humor and unreasonableness; for now Mrs. Fenton came to wish Susie good-night. It was time to go home, she said,

and of course it was his duty to accompany her.

"What was Miss Moore saying to you, Fred?" she asked, as soon as they had left the hotel. "Was she telling you why she had refused Captain Claughton?"

"No," answered Fred; "we didn't mention Claughton's name. Has she refused him?"

"So it appears. Mrs. Moore is in great distress about it. She thinks Captain Claughton has been badly treated, and she can't make out why Miss Susie wouldn't have him."

"She didn't care for him, I presume," said Fred shortly.

"Then she ought not to have allowed him to follow them to Kissingen. How funny it is that these demure little girls, who look as if butter wouldn't melt in their mouths, are almost always the worst flirts of all!"

"She has a better opinion of you than you have of her," remarked Fred; "she had nothing but what was kind to say about you."

"Probably she had sense enough to know that anything she might say about me to you would come round to my ears. The truth

is that she doesn't like me, and I don't like her."

"Why not?" Fred inquired. But to this rather superfluous query he obtained no answer.

"Mrs. Moore," Laura resumed, after a time, "really means to be friendly. She was kind enough to give me some good advice. Amongst other things she said she was sure I shouldn't mind her telling me that it wasn't quite correct for you to be living in the same hotel with me."

"Did you request her to mind her own business?" asked Fred, who was ready to pick a quarrel with anybody.

"No; I thanked her and begged her not to mention that she had seen us here, and then I observed, as one good turn deserved another I would take the liberty of recommending her not to do her hair on the top of her head. I said it made the gray hairs at the back of the neck too conspicuous."

"H'm! you seem to have been at least as amiable as she was."

By this time they had reached the threshold of Mrs. Fenton's apartments. With her hand on the lock she made a half-turn so as to face him,

and said: "Ah, Fred, I hate these people, and it's no use to pretend that I don't. Yet they are not bad sort of people in their way; I dare say I should love them if—if you didn't."

With that she dismissed him to his reflections, which, as may be imagined, were not of a very cheerful or self-congratulatory nature.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE Moores remained two days longer in Paris, during which time they had several meetings with their friends at the Grand Hôtel; and on the evening of the second day Mrs. Fenton returned their civility by inviting them to dine with her. Fred implored her not to do this, saying that he was sure they didn't expect it, and that, since she didn't like them, it would be better and more honest to refrain from cultivating their acquaintance; but she answered, smiling: "I don't mind accepting favors from my friends; I would rather not be in debt to my enemies. Besides, if one only associated with the people whom one liked, one's circle would soon become unhealthily narrow."

So the Moores came, and were made welcome, and departed after an interchange of polite speeches and promises of speedy reunion in London. Mrs. Fenton said no more about them after they had gone; but she thought about them

day and night, and the thought deprived her of all her happiness. She had been pleased to accuse Susie of being a flirt; but that was not her real opinion of the girl. She knew perfectly well why Captain Claughton had been rejected, and, what was far worse, she was sure that Fred knew too. Love, which in some respects may deserve to be called blind, is only too clear-sighted in others; Mrs. Fenton was at all times an exceptionally observant person, and, even if she had not been so, it would have been no difficult task to her to read so transparent a character as that of her cousin. From the outset, indeed, she had been under no illusion as regarded the nature of his affection for her. He had been touched by her sympathy, by her kindness, by her evident love for him; to some extent also his senses had been affected by the influence of feminine beauty and moonlight; but with the first sight of Susie Moore, and the first suspicion that Susie might have cared for him all along, notwithstanding her apparent encouragement of Captain Claughton, all these feelings had been swept away. Everything proved it—his scrupulously honorable conduct; his determination to

remain true to the woman whom he had asked to be his wife; the exaggerated precautions which he took to avoid being left for a moment alone with Susie; above all, his desperate and most unsuccessful efforts at merriment.

Perhaps under the circumstances, a proud or a magnanimous woman would at once have released the young man from his engagement; but Mrs. Fenton's life had been such that pride was scarcely possible to her, and, as for magnanimity, there are more ways than one of displaying that virtue. She displayed it in some measure by refraining from saying what she thought of her rival, for whom she could not help entertaining feelings of profound contempt. How is a woman who possesses beauty and talent, and is mistress of all the many methods by which men may be attracted, to help despising an insignificant and not particularly pretty little girl who has not even wit enough to retain her hold upon the man who loves her? To be sure, the insignificant little girl had succeeded where the clever woman had failed, but that was not so much creditable to her as discreditable to Fred's taste. However, Mrs. Fenton kept all these reflections to herself

and tried to behave as though nothing had happened. This being an impossibility, she wisely abandoned the attempt before long, and one afternoon, when Fred, with a somewhat gloomy and abstracted air, was sitting beside her in the Champs Elysées, she said quietly: "I have telegraphed to Albemarle Street to tell them that they may expect me to-morrow. Enough is as good as a feast, and I think we have had about enough of Paris, now."

He assented readily. His readiness to assent to anything that she chose to suggest was not a very hopeful sign; but at least he was anxious to please her, and she might be excused for thinking that so docile a *fiancé* might be easily converted into a devoted husband.

They traveled to London on the following day, and immediately on their arrival there became very busy. They were to be married in about a month; so that there was plenty to be done and not too much time to do it in. Congratulations and gifts began to pour in upon them. Sir James Le Breton came up from the country to express his hearty approval of the alliance, and to present the happy couple with a pair of candlesticks;

the Master of All Saints sent a check and a long, kindly letter, in which he begged that the privilege of giving the bride away might be granted to him; many of Fred's friends requested the pleasure of being introduced to Mrs. Fenton; and so, what with one thing and another, they had not much of that uninterrupted companionship for which one of them longed.

Mr. Breffit was quite horrified when Mrs. Fenton coolly informed him that she intended to hand over every sixpence of her money to her husband on her wedding-day, and that she would be obliged to him if he would prepare such documents as might be needful for that purpose. He said he had never heard of such a thing in his life; he assured her that to act as she proposed would be most unusual, and, he would venture to add, undesirable; Fred also declared that he could not and would not accept the money. Nevertheless, she carried her point. To Mr. Breffit she simply said that he might spare himself the trouble of talking, because she had made up her mind, and he ought to know that argument is thrown away upon a woman who has

made up her mind; but with Fred she was somewhat more explicit.

"I have given myself to you," she said; "surely it is no great thing that I should give you my money into the bargain. Besides, it ought to be your money, and it would have been yours but for a little misunderstanding. If you only knew how like a thief I have felt for the last three months you wouldn't try to prevent me from casting this burden off my shoulders. And after all, what difference will it make whether you or I sign checks to pay the butcher and baker?"

"I don't think it right," he answered. "Just now it may seem as if it made no difference, but one can't tell what may happen in the future, and—"

"That's just it," she interrupted. "Nothing is so dreadful as to be impossible, and if we were to quarrel, or if you were to tire of me, Fred, or—or think worse of me than you do now, I would rather not feel that I was independent of you; I would rather that you had the power of making what arrangements you pleased than I."

"You are very generous, Laura," said the young man.

"I love you," she answered simply.

He was touched and a little ashamed, without quite knowing why. "If we ever quarrel," he said, "it shall not be my fault; but I don't think we are at all likely to quarrel, Laura."

And during the remainder of the time that he spent with her he was both more affectionate and more demonstrative than he had latterly been; so that when he went away she was in excellent spirits.

Most of us have a conviction which may be illogical, but which experience seems to support, that if we take an umbrella with us when we go out it will not rain; in much the same way Mrs. Fenton hoped that when once she should be married to her cousin all would be well. "Miracles," says a well-known writer, "do not happen." One hardly likes to be so dogmatic as that; still one may be bold enough to affirm that if, in the case of a man, love ever follows marriage instead of preceding it, the phenomenon must be regarded as very little short of miraculous. Mrs. Fenton probably knew that

as well as anybody; yet, like other people, she may have had a vague idea that miracles do happen—sometimes. In any case, she felt unusually sanguine that afternoon, and gave herself up to the construction of castles in the air, wherein of course Fred Musgrave's figure was a prominent one.

While she was thus pleasantly employed, the waiter opened the door and announced, "Mr. Dodd."

Mrs. Fenton half-started out of her chair and then sank back again, the color slowly ebbing away from her cheeks and lips. A terrible thing had happened to her, but there was no escaping from it; all that she could do was to summon up her courage and retain her self-control.

Mr. Dodd entered, holding his hat under his arm. He was the same man whom she had caught a glimpse of at Dawlish, and he wore the same check trowsers. His coat and waistcoat, however, were now black, and in the buttonhole of the former he had stuck a huge gardenia.

He said: "Well, Letitia, I hope I find you pretty fit. It is a good many years since we last

met; but upon my word and honor you don't look a day older."

Mrs. Fenton did not rise. She gazed silently at the man for a second or two and, then said in a low voice, "What do you want?"

"We'll come to that presently, my dear," answered Mr. Dodd, taking a chair; "let us have a little friendly conversation before we proceed to business. I am sure you wont refuse to gratify the natural curiosity of an old acquaintance. It would be most interesting to me to hear how you come to be living in a small London hotel under the name of Mrs. Fenton."

"That is my name," answered Mrs. Fenton.

"Is it indeed? Well, you ought to know; but if anybody asked me, I should have said that your name was Letitia Watson."

"Then you would have added one more to the many thousand of lies that you have told in your life."

"I observe with pleasure, Letitia, that time has not impaired the natural sweetness of your temper. Do you remember announcing from the platform of a music-hall in New Orleans that you hadn't been paid for six weeks?"

"I remember it perfectly: you richly deserved it."

"I think not, Letitia; I think that in your calmer moments you must have seen the very great shabbiness of rounding upon a liberal employer in that public way. I always made it a rule to pay my *artistes* as long as I had money enough to do so; when the cash box was empty, how could I pay them? But we need not revive bygone unpleasantnesses. We parted at Otago upon pretty good terms, if I remember rightly, notwithstanding the occasional little tiffs that we had had."

"That is to say that, after having cheated me of my pay for several months, you were good enough to cancel the remainder of my engagement and cry quits."

"Just so. I have often thought since that I was foolishly generous; because, although your voice was never worth much, you certainly had the trick of attracting audiences. If you knew how often I have missed you and wished to have you back again, you would be touched, Letitia. However, I never expected to see you again, and it was with the greatest surprise and pleasure that I

recognized you—and noticed that you recognized me—a short time ago at Dawlish. It seems to me that you were ill-advised in running away; still, all things considered, I don't much wonder at your having yielded to panic. Personation, my dear, is a dangerous game, a very dangerous game; and when I found out what you were up to, I made every allowance for your rather rude behavior."

"How did you find it out?" asked Mrs. Fenton hoarsely.

"By the simple and straightforward methods to which my nature inclines me. The local newspaper informed me of the name which you state is your own; I called at your house and was told that you had departed suddenly for Paris, without even leaving an address for letters to be forwarded to. However, I obtained your present address and learned, on inquiring here, that you were expected to be in London about this time. Furthermore I ascertained, that you were a lady of considerable wealth, and that you had succeeded to the handsome fortune of your late father, the Dean of I forget what college at Oxford. This surprised me; because, as you are aware, I

had had the privilege of being well acquainted with your father in Canada, and from what I knew of him it did not seem to me likely that he could have been made a Dean or that he could have had a very large fortune to leave. You were not profoundly attached to him—indeed, I must confess that he didn't treat you very well—so you wont mind my saying that a more drunken and disreputable old reprobate than Jack Watson I have never met in any quarter of the globe. Gratitude is not your strong point, Letitia, or you would feel that you owe me something for having rescued you from the drinking saloon that he used to keep at Montreal."

"My father sold me to you," said Mrs. Fenton. "Probably you had the best of the bargain; what is certain is that I derived no profit from it. Of all the miserable years of my miserable life the worst was that in which I wandered about with your troupe and sung ballads of which I was ashamed in music-halls for your benefit. I have never been a bad woman; I have only been a most unhappy and unfortunate one. Of course it was wrong to personate a woman who is dead; yet things have fallen out so curiously that no-

body would have been the worse for it if you had not appeared at this last moment to ruin me."

"Not to ruin you, Letitia; nothing, I assure you, could have been further from my wish or intention when I looked you up than that. I only claim a share—a very small share—in your good luck. My discretion, like everything else that I possess, is for sale, and I am not so foolish as to place a prohibitory price upon it. What amazes me is the success with which you have carried this fraud through. I always did full justice to your talents, Letitia; but I certainly should have thought that such a stroke of business as this was a trifle above you. How on earth did you manage it?"

She sighed. "It was less difficult than it appears," she answered; "everything conspired in my favor. After I left you in New Zealand I fell in with a certain Fenton, who was struck with my voice and got me to sing for him at concerts. He was a decent sort of man in those days, and he introduced me to his wife, with whom I became intimate and who told me her story. Her father, she said, was the Dean of St. Cyprian's at Oxford, and she had run away with her music-master,

because she was unhappy at home, and because she had an idea that she would be able to make her fortune as an opera-singer. She was a silly sort of woman, but she was a lady and she was kind to me and I liked being with her. I don't know what her voice may have been like when she was a girl—Fenton always declared it was magnificent, so far as it went—but at the time when I knew her she had almost lost it. She was in bad health, and was disappointed and peevish and thoroughly tired of her husband, who was also pretty well tired of her. On the other hand, he took a great fancy to me."

Mr. Dodd grinned. "I can well believe it, Letitia. And so, I suppose, Mrs. Fenton died, and you stepped into her shoes?"

"Yes; she died at Wellington, where I had gone with them, and where we managed to scrape together just enough to live upon by means of concerts and music lessons. She used to tell me a great deal about her father and his relations and the few friends whom she had had at Oxford, so that I knew the place and the people just as well as if I had been brought up there myself. Very soon after her death I married Mr. Fenton, and as we

were not fortunate in New Zealand we made a move to Sydney. However, we did no better there, and he had taken to drinking—in fact, he drank himself to death. As for me, I struggled on, and the Government House people took me up and I made a little money. Of course questions were occasionally put to me, and for the sake of convenience I told some of the ladies in strict confidence that I was the daughter of Dean Musgrave. As poor Laura was dead and buried, there seemed to be no great harm in my identifying myself with her, but I never dreamed of claiming her inheritance, because I never dreamed that there would be any inheritance to claim. She had always assured me that her father was the most implacable man in the world, and that there was not the slightest chance of his giving or leaving her a penny. Then one morning I saw the advertisement that the executors had put into the papers, and it flashed across me that the great opportunity of my life had come. I sailed for England at once, and my claim was admitted as soon as I showed myself. I only had to face one person who had ever seen Laura—the Master of All Saints, a kind-hearted old fellow about whom

she had often spoken to me. It was a great risk, but I came out of it triumphantly. You know what a capital mimic I am. Well, I imitated Laura's way of speaking, and I shrugged my shoulders after a fashion that she had, and I sang to him exactly in her voice. After that he was ready to swear to me. The fact is that, although Laura's features were not much like mine, she had the same coloring, and twelve years make a difference. So they handed over the money to me."

Here Mrs. Fenton, who had begun her narrative in listless, dispiriting accents, but had continued it with something more of animation, paused. She shrank from mentioning Fred's name to the vulgar, brutal wretch whom she associated with all that had been most detestable and degrading in her life, and who, she felt sure, would only see in her engagement an additional proof of her cleverness. Nevertheless, she had to tell him about it, because in no other way could she place before him a statement by which she hoped that he might be influenced.

"Of course," she said, after a brief narration of the facts, "you will not try to prevent my marriage; for that would do you no good at all. I

know I shall have to pay you heavily; but I want you to understand that you will gain nothing—absolutely nothing—by threatening me with exposure after I am married. I have already made arrangements by which all that I possess will become my husband's property on my wedding-day; therefore, from the moment that I am Mrs. Musgrave I shall no longer be in a position to buy you off, and if you were to go and denounce me to my husband, he certainly would not give you any reward for your pains. Now, how much do you want?"

Mr. Dodd looked at her admiringly. "You have genius, Letitia," he remarked. "Under ordinary circumstances it would have been culpably foolish to despoil yourself in favor of your husband; but your circumstances are not ordinary, and I think you have acted sensibly. Shall we say five thousand down? You will hardly call that exorbitant, I hope."

"Very well—on the condition that you are never to come near me again."

"My charming Letitia, it is for me to make conditions, not for you. I will think over your offer, and I will call to-morrow about the same

hour. You had better have the amount agreed upon ready in bank-notes; for everybody's sake, it would be wiser to avoid checks in this instance. I only wish that I could afford to let you off scot-free; but in the present depressed state of business that is, unfortunately, out of the question. Farewell, Letitia, and don't forget to return thanks in the proper quarter for your good fortune. It isn't every man who would have behaved with my generosity; but I always had a soft heart and I always had a particular affection for you."

As soon as he was gone the unhappy woman burst into tears. She did not believe that her secret could be kept. It was true that, when once she should be married, she would be able to defy Dodd; but it was also true that, if he chose to make subsequent demands upon her, she would do all in her power to meet them rather than be exposed. And he would understand that, and he would make the demands, and then, sooner or later, Fred would be sure to see him or hear of him. Perhaps the best and safest plan would be to confess all to Fred at once. If he loved her, surely he would forgive her! He

would get the money in any case; the only difference would be that his wife's name would be Letitia, instead of Laura. That any man's love could be killed by such a disclosure as she proposed to make did not strike her as possible. She had not, and could not have, a high standard of honor; she knew that her love for Fred would not be diminished one whit by the discovery that he had once been guilty of an offense which might bring him within the arm of the law; she thought, too, that he would give her credit for the restitution which she had intended to make. But what caused her to hesitate was that she feared he did not really love her yet. Some day, perhaps, he would, and then she might disburden her conscience. When she went to bed, after many hours of doubt and thought, her mind was not yet made up. Whether Fred loved her or not, she loved him, and, although she had never felt any great compunction about deceiving him, she dreaded inexpressibly the reproaches which he might heap upon her when he should be enlightened, and when he should be bound to her for life. "I think I will tell him to-morrow," was the last thing that she murmured before she fell asleep.

CHAPTER XIV.

UNDECIDED people never abide by the resolutions of the previous night. In the morning everything looks different, and it is especially in the morning that common-sense is wont to assert its supremacy over impulse. When Mrs. Fenton woke and collected her ideas, she saw very clearly how tremendous would be the risk of immediate confession, and how much more probable it was that confession would be rewarded by absolution a few months later than at that particular moment. Her duty, to be sure, was plain enough, but happiness just then seemed to her a more important consideration than duty, and it is no great libel upon the human race to say that in that respect she was scarcely peculiar. The upshot of her cogitations was that she made up her mind to be guided by circumstances.

The first circumstance that occurred was the

arrival of Fred Musgrave at eleven o'clock, in accordance with custom, and Fred was not in a very cheerful mood. The fact was that on the preceding afternoon he had had a short conversation with Susie Moore which had disturbed his mind. For Susie had confided to him that she was anxious to take up nursing the sick as an occupation, and that although her father and her stepmother were at present strongly opposed to her doing anything of the sort, she hoped in time to overcome their prejudices. Now, when a girl of nineteen talks about becoming a professional nurse, it is natural to surmise that she has been crossed in love. This surmise may of course be wholly incorrect, but it invariably suggests itself at once to the male mind, and that Fred should have been saddened and rendered pensive by the communication made to him will surprise nobody. Hence he was a little absent-minded, and quite failed to catch the drift of the tentative observations which his betrothed addressed to him.

In reply to certain questions of hers, he said, somewhat indifferently, what he had said once before, that, in his opinion, it was better that

married people should not inquire too closely into the episodes of each other's past lives.

"But there might be a good deal to forgive," Mrs. Fenton suggested.

"I don't see that," he answered. "I shouldn't feel that I had a right to complain of anything that my wife had done before I met her."

"Not even if it was something disgraceful? You know next to nothing about me; I may have done all sorts of disgraceful things—how can you tell?"

He roused himself from his abstraction to reply rather more gravely:

"I have complete trust in you, Laura. If there were anything that I really ought to hear about, I am sure you wouldn't conceal it from me. As for bygone flirtations, I haven't confessed all mine to you, and I don't expect you to confess yours to me."

He would not understand, and when she tried to put him upon the right tack her courage failed her, and the words died away upon her lips. At length she said: "Men are less inquisitive than women, I suppose. I should like to hear everything that you had ever done from your school

days, but I haven't asked many questions or obliged you to tell any lies, have I?"

"I certainly haven't told you any lies."

"Ah, that's an unpardonable offense, isn't it?"

"Well, I think it is," he answered a little curtly. "At any rate, it's the one offense which I could never pardon. People are either truthful or liars, I think; and if they have been false once, you may be pretty sure that they will be false again. You see, it isn't possible to remove them from temptation's way."

After that, she gave it up and changed the subject. All the passion of her nature revolted against the yoke which her conscience sought to lay upon her, and revolted successfully. She knew that sooner or later a battle would have to be fought which must be decisive as to her chance of earthly happiness; but she determined that she would fight it upon ground of her own choosing, not under the most disadvantageous conditions possible. Presently Fred took his leave, having ascertained that she would not want him that afternoon. She had a great deal of shopping to do, she said, and she was not so cruel as to take a man to shops with her.

Later in the day Mr. Breffit called in Albemarle Street, bringing with him certain documents to which Mrs. Fenton's signature was required. She was at home, he was told, but the waiter believed she was engaged; in fact, there was a gentleman with her.

"Oh, a gentleman?" said Mr. Breffit laughing (for so great was his acuteness that he thought he could guess who the gentleman was likely to be). "Well, you had better put me in the dining-room then; I'm in no great hurry, and I should be sorry to disturb Mrs. Fenton."

There was a dingy little apartment in which Mrs. Fenton took her meals, and which was shut off from the front room by folding-doors. Here the lawyer seated himself and began to arrange his papers, thinking it not unlikely that he might have to wait a quarter of an hour or so. The arrangements of the papers, however, did not take more than a minute or two, and when that was completed he could not help listening to the sound of the voices in the next room. First he noticed that the masculine voice was not Fred's; then he became aware that it was a

very angry voice; and then he distinctly heard the words, "What I want to know is why the devil you haven't got the money ready?"

There was an indistinguishable murmur from Mrs. Fenton; after which the man's voice resumed loudly: "Forgot! Now, look here, my dear; this sort of thing wont do with me. I'll give you another twenty-four hours; but at the end of that time I must be paid, or I'll know the reason why. It strikes me very forcibly that you're trying to make your escape, and I warn you that if you attempt that little game you'll be sorry for it."

Mr. Breffit was an honorable man. He was startled, and his curiosity was much excited; but, since he did not relish the character of an involuntary eavesdropper, he coughed, pushed his chair about and finally knocked at the folding-doors. After a momentary pause, he was told to come in, and as he obeyed this summons he caught a glimpse of the retreating form of Mr. Dodd.

Mrs. Fenton's face displayed some signs of recent agitation; but her manner was perfectly self-possessed. She said: "I didn't know you

were here, Mr. Breffit; I hope you haven't been kept waiting long."

"Only a very few minutes," answered the lawyer, considerately averting his eyes. "I have brought you the papers that I told you about."

He proceeded without further delay to explain the matters of business which had occasioned his visit, and found her as sensible and intelligent as she always was. "I wish all the ladies whom I have to deal with had heads like yours, Mrs. Fenton," he remarked. "My usual experience is that I have to repeat the same thing at least three times to them, and after the third time they don't understand a bit better than they did at first; only by then they have generally arrived at a vague idea that I want to swindle them."

"Well," she answered, "I dare say I am as stupid as the others; for there is one thing that I am not quite clear about. Can I do just what I please with my money until I am married?"

"Undoubtedly. Who is to prevent you?"

"What I mean is that I haven't bound myself to hand over any specified sum to Fred, have I? On my wedding-day I shall simply transfer to

him all that I possess, whatever that may be. I ask because I may have to make some rather large payments between this and then."

"Until then," answered Mr. Breffit, looking a little grave, "you will of course be free to do what you choose with your own. When you speak of large payments," he added presently, "you are alluding, I presume, to purchases that you have made."

This not being a question, Mrs. Fenton did not think herself compelled to make any reply, and a rather long period of silence followed. It was broken at last by the lawyer, who said abruptly: "I am going to be impertinent; but I must trust to your kindness to excuse me. That man who was here just now—wasn't he trying to extort money from you upon some pretext or other?"

"Did you hear anything when you were in the next room?"

"I overheard a word or two, I couldn't help it. Am I wrong in guessing that that fellow was bullying you for hush-money?"

Mrs. Fenton was very pale. Her lips twitched, and she made two ineffectual efforts to speak

before she repeated his words interrogatively, "For hush-money?"

"Perhaps that is too coarse a way of putting it; but I imagine that he has some claim upon you, or pretends that he has. Probably he knows something or other, something that may have happened in Australia, for instance. Now, Mrs. Fenton, will you do me a great favor and refer this rascal to me? Depend upon it, I shall be able to deal with him much better than you will, and most likely it will turn out that you have been scared by a shadow."

But she shook her head. "He has a claim upon me," she answered; "it would be useless to deny it, because you wouldn't believe me if I did. I shall have to buy him off. I am much obliged to you for offering to help me, only the case is not one in which I could ask for your help."

Mr. Breffit looked distressed and doubtful. "If," he began, "this matter is in any way avowable—"

"But it isn't," she interrupted, smiling. "It isn't in the least avowable. How old was I when I ran away from Oxford? Seventeen?—eigh-

teen? And now I am getting on for thirty-one. For a woman that is a whole lifetime, and all sorts of unavowable things may have occurred in the course of it. I wonder how many men or women would dare to look their neighbors in the face if everything were known about them that could be known! But most people are lucky, whereas I have always been unlucky. Well, good-by, Mr. Breffit; I mustn't detain you any longer. I dare say you have business to attend to, and, as for me, I ought to be shopping. Thank you for all your kindness to me. I wish I could profit by it to the extent of handing Mr. Dodd over to your tender mercies; but unfortunately I can't."

She got up and extended her hand to him, so that he could only accept his dismissal. She did not request him to keep his own counsel with regard to what he had overheard, which he thought odd, and he went away in a perplexed and saddened condition of mind which was perfectly intelligible to her.

Instead of going out to do her shopping, after his departure she sank back in her chair and sat for a long time gazing out of the window. Now-

adays London is never empty; in the autumn especially plenty of people come up to buy their winter clothes and see the new plays, and Albemarle Street was almost as thronged with carriages as if it had been the height of the season. By-and-by one of them stopped at the door of the hotel, soon after which the waiter delivered a card and a note in a coroneted envelope to Mrs. Fenton. The missive was from one of Lady Clamborough's distinguished friends, who had just heard that Mrs. Fenton was in town, and who wrote to beg her to join a small dinner-party and meet a certain celebrated statesman. "He has been told a great deal about your wonderful singing and is most anxious to hear you, so I hope you will be good-natured enough to gratify him."

She tossed this invitation aside with a bitter little laugh. "How near I have been to getting all, and more than all, that I ever hoped for in my wildest dreams!" she murmured. "How I should have jumped for joy if I had been told last November that in a year's time I should receive such a note as that! And now it is of no more good to me than any other scrap of waste

paper. It seems hard to have braved the battle and the breeze for so many years and to founder in harbor at last; but I have deserved it, no doubt. Perhaps that is what Fred will say, and I am sure that is what Mr. Breffit will say. Poor Mr. Breffit! He is not at all happy at this minute. He is thinking that it is rather shabby to take advantage of what one has accidentally overheard; but then again, he can't disguise from himself that things look uncommonly fishy, and that poor young Musgrave ought not to be allowed to rush blindfold into a marriage which may have the most disastrous consequences. He can't decide as to what step it is his duty to take; but his indecision wont last long. To-morrow morning he will feel that he has no alternative but to put Fred upon his guard, and Fred will be rather annoyed with him for bothering, but will nevertheless turn up here about eleven o'clock to ask what it is all about, and then—"

She did not finish her soliloquy, but rose and walked to a side-table upon which she had placed a photograph of her betrothed. This she took out of its frame and held close up to her face,

gazing at it intently for some minutes. She kissed it passionately once or twice; after which she threw it away from her suddenly, cast herself down upon a sofa and, began to cry and sob hysterically. Her tears, no doubt, relieved her and did her good; for at length she dried them, sat up and resumed her articulate musings.

"After all, I have had my day; and nobody ever has more. Nothing lasts—not even love. Love least of all, I dare say, though I know so little about it. Perhaps it is better to lose everything at a blow, which breaks one's heart, than to lose it by slow degrees and not care. Besides, there was an end of all hope from the moment that that man detected me. I couldn't have kept the secret, and I don't think Fred would have forgiven me; it was ridiculous to suppose that he would. Well, I'm glad I forgot to have those bank-notes ready; Dodd will never see his five thousand pounds now."

CHAPTER XV.

MRS. FENTON'S forecast of the course to which Mr. Breffit would eventually find himself impelled was verified to the letter; and indeed it is not easy to see what other course any honest man could adopt. He was, as she had understood, very reluctant to act upon words which had never been intended to reach his ear, and during that afternoon and evening he remained, as she had foreseen that he would remain, in an uncomfortable state of hesitation; but when morning came he saw quite plainly that there was nothing for it but to give Fred a hint. The mystery must be cleared up, he thought. It might, of course, turn out to be some very trifling matter; but, on the other hand, it might prove to be a most important one. For his own part, he could not help fearing that she had married some man out in Australia—the very man who was threatening her perhaps—and a family lawyer must not connive, or even seem to connive, at bigamy.

Accordingly, instead of going straight to Bedford Row as usual, he turned aside to Fred's rooms, where he found that young gentleman at breakfast, and, thinking it best to conceal nothing, he gave a truthful and concise account of what had taken place on the previous afternoon.

Fred received the news quite as Mrs Fenton had anticipated that he would receive it. He was a good deal more annoyed than alarmed; he thought the lawyer rather fussy and officious, and he was by no means disposed to follow the advice urged upon him. "I wish you hadn't told me about it!" he exclaimed irritably. "Laura and I have agreed to pass the sponge over what is past; if she has done this, that, or the other in years gone by, I don't want to hear about it, and I hardly feel that I am entitled to go and demand an explanation, as you suggest."

Mr. Breffit shook his head. "Perhaps 'demand' is too strong a word to use," said he; "but I am afraid you will have to request an explanation. This man has some hold over Mrs. Fenton, and if you don't inquire what it is now, you will certainly inquire some day—when possibly it may be too late."

"What do you mean?" asked Fred, rather fiercely.

"Not a word more than I say. No man can allow his wife to pay blackmail. Either this fellow is a mere bully, from whom it is your business to deliver her, or else he is in possession of some secret which ought to prevent her from marrying you. I express no opinion about the matter; I only caution you that you can't shirk a disagreeable duty, by ignoring it."

The truth is that Fred would have been very glad to ignore it; but since, after that explicit warning, it was scarcely possible for him to do so, he presently took his way to Albemarle Street. There he learned, not a little to his surprise, that Mrs. Fenton had left London for a few days. "But I was to say, sir," added the waiter, who gave this information, "that if you would please to step upstairs you would find a note for you upon the table."

Fred went up to the sitting-room which had of late become so familiar to him, and there, sure enough, he espied an envelope addressed to "F. Musgrave, Esq." which, on being opened, proved

to contain several closely written sheets of paper. When the waiter had left him, he sat down to peruse these with a certain feeling of impatience. More than once latterly Mrs. Fenton had seen fit to send him lengthy epistles about nothing in particular, and he thought the practice a tiresome one. He supposed that one of her friends had asked her down to the country for a day or two; he was utterly unprepared for the startling announcement with which the letter began.

"MY DEAR FRED:

"I am running away, because there is nothing else to be done. I have deceived you from first to last, and now I have been found out. I am not your cousin, I am only the widow of your late cousin's husband; and all the money that I have spent since my arrival in this country has been stolen from you by me."

Then, at full length, she narrated the true story of her life. She told him how her father, a gentleman by birth, had sunk to the position of proprietor of a drinking and gambling saloon at Montreal; how she had grown up amid surroundings which had been hateful to her; how she had been insulted and ill-treated; how she had been only too thankful to effect her escape

from such misery as a member of Mr. Dodd's troupe, and how at length the friendship of the Fentons in New Zealand had rescued her from a thraldom which she could not much longer have endured. She did not attempt to make any excuse for her subsequent conduct, remarking that she knew very well how useless it would be to do so.

"The only thing that I hope you will believe, Fred—but I am not sure that you will—is that I really loved you. Perhaps it sounds absurd to say so, because I have robbed you of several thousand pounds, and I suppose, too, that I have prevented you from marrying the girl whom you love. However, it is true; and possibly you wont miss those few thousands very much, and, as for the girl whom you love, she will marry you now—and so all's well that ends well. All wouldn't have ended well if Mr. Dodd hadn't turned up in the nick of time, you will say; but that is as may be. Nobody can tell what might have been, and it wont do you much harm if I go on thinking that you might have been happy with me. Anyhow, you will never see me again; for I know you wont set the police on my track, though Mr. Breffit will tell you that that is what you ought to do. And so, good-by, my dear, dear Fred. If you can forgive me and think kindly of me, you will; and if you can't—well, then I dare say you will soon manage to forget me."

Now, it must be confessed that when Fred had finished reading the letter from which the above extract has been taken he was not disposed to think very kindly of its writer. To begin with, the sensation of having been most completely and successfully made a fool of is one which nobody enjoys. Moreover, those who reserve their confession until they have been found out cannot expect to be mercifully judged. Certainly Fred had no wish to put himself in communication with the police or to see Mrs. Fenton in the dock; but he did think that she might consider herself extremely lucky to have have got off scot-free, and he felt no sort of pity for her. It was all very fine to say that things had ended well for him, and to assume that he had nothing to do but to marry the girl whom he loved, and live happily ever afterwards; but that only showed that Mrs. Fenton judged others by herself, and took far too low a view of human nature. How could he possibly go to Susie Moore now and say, "I have loved you all along, though I was upon the point of marrying a woman whom I believed to be my cousin and an heiress. It turns out that she is neither the one nor the

other, and that the money which I thought was hers is mine. Consequently, I am free to consult my own inclination. Will you be my wife?" Of course he could not make such a speech; and of course, if he did make it, he would be scornfully dismissed.

However, as the day went on, he became a little less indignant and a little more sanguine; because further reflection showed him that the situation was not such as to exclude all hope. General and Mrs. Moore, at any rate, would now be on his side, which was something; and eventually—not at once, but some day—he would perhaps be able to make Susie understand how it was that he had seemed to be false to her. He did not think it necessary to give any information about Mrs. Fenton at her hotel, nor did he care to impart the news to Mr. Breffit that day. He returned to his rooms and sat there smoking and thinking over the strange alteration which had taken place in his destiny, until late in the afternoon, when he strolled round to his club.

He had been holding the evening paper in his hand, and had been bestowing an intermittent

attention upon its contents for some time before his eye fell upon the following paragraph:

"DROWNING OF A PASSENGER BETWEEN DOVER AND CALAIS.—The boat carrying the French mails left Dover harbor last night in heavy weather, and had been about a quarter of an hour under way when one of the crew noticed a lady who had been leaning over the side, suddenly lose her balance and fall overboard. He at once gave the alarm, the engines were stopped, a boat was lowered, and every effort was made to rescue the unfortunate woman; but, owing to the high sea which was running, and the darkness of the night, these proved of no avail, and, after some delay, the steamer proceeded on her passage. It has been ascertained that the name of the missing passenger was Mrs. Fenton, and that she had taken tickets for Paris. Mrs. Fenton's maid who accompanied her, and who returned to Dover by the next boat, states that her mistress could have had no motive for committing suicide, and it is believed that the accident was solely due to the rolling of the vessel and the somewhat dangerous attitude in which the deceased had placed herself."

Fred had to read this bald and uncompromising statement of facts three times over before he could believe in its reality. Even when the evidence of his senses would no longer allow him to doubt that Mrs. Fenton was dead, he felt more stunned and bewildered than sorry, and could

think of nothing better to do than to hurry off and confer with Mr. Breffit. Lawyers are not apt to be stunned or bewildered by any episode, however dramatic.

Nevertheless, Mr. Breffit, whom Fred presently encountered upon the steps of the club, was both. He had seen the paragraph in the evening paper; he had gone immediately to Fred's rooms and, not finding him there, had proceeded to the club.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, "what a dreadful thing! Of course you have heard what has happened. Poor soul! When I saw her yesterday I had no conception that matters were so serious. I expected to hear of nothing worse than some foolish escapade; at any rate, I quite hoped that there was nothing worse to be revealed."

"You think, then—" said Fred, and did not conclude his sentence.

"I don't know what to think; I'm afraid it looks like it. But then what could be her reason? Perhaps you know more than I do?"

"Come home with me, and I'll tell you all I know," answered Fred; "we can't talk here."

The lawyer was much astonished when he

heard what Fred had to say, and no doubt the knowledge that he had been completely duped would also have made him very angry but for the tragic fate which had overtaken the criminal. Under the circumstances he only said: "Poor thing! If she has sinned, she has been punished. I only wish this accident had occurred in mid-channel."

"Why?" asked Fred.

"Because I fancy that in that case the action of the tides might have spared us a very unpleasant duty. As it is, I fear there will be an inquest, and I do not wish to be called upon to give evidence at that inquest. Nor, I should imagine, do you."

Mr. Breffit's apprehensions were justified; for a few days later poor Mrs. Fenton's body was washed ashore near Dover, and in the course of the inquiry which necessarily followed Fred was compelled to make statements which he would far rather have kept to himself. The whole affair excited a great deal of public interest and curiosity, and for a day or two the newspapers were full of it. However, the Coroner's jury decided, quite properly, that the evidence did not warrant

them in assuming that the deceased had intentionally put an end to her existence, and a verdict of "Accidental death" was therefore returned. The seaman who had witnessed the occurrence deposed upon oath that in his opinion the rolling of a vessel might possibly precipitate a passenger over bulwarks of almost any height, and it is not for landsmen to set up their private opinion against that of experts.

Fred Musgrave had his private opinion; but since he was not asked for it, he did not give it. The death of the woman who, if she had lived a few weeks longer, would have been his wife, was a great shock to him, and the manner of it was more shocking still. He had not, it is true, been in love with her, and of late he had known very well that life as her husband must be more or less miserable to him; yet he had been fond of her, and he bitterly regretted that she had not had the courage to confess all to him. Had she done so, he would not, of course, have married her; but he would gladly have provided her with an income sufficient to keep her from want (for, after all, she had been a sort of connection of his), and he certainly would not have dreamed of taking

legal proceedings against her. So, at least, he thought; but it is not certain that he would have acted in that way, or that anything short of the catastrophe which had occurred would have induced him to pardon one who had done him so great an injury. One may manage to forgive a pickpocket, especially after restitution has been made—but it is less easy to forgive a woman who has caused you to desert your true love and the motives of your desertion to appear so painfully and evidently mercenary.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Fenton's foresight had not been at fault in any particular. For some months after her death Fred and Susie did not meet; but they met at last, and then what had been quite sure to happen did happen.

"I never believed that you wanted to marry Mrs. Fenton for the sake of the money," Susie declared; "I told you in Paris that I didn't believe it. I thought you really cared for her, and—and I don't know that I don't think so still."

"I cared for her," Fred returned, "just about as much as you cared for Claughton."

"Well, that was a great deal."

"Exactly; that was a great deal, but not quite enough. Of course you are entitled to trample upon me, because you refused Claughton; but how was I to tell that you meant to refuse him, after leading him on as you did?"

And now Susie made an avowal which proves that, contrary to the general belief, there are women who can be magnanimous upon occasion. She confessed that she had fully intended to marry Captain Claughton. Fred's conduct had convinced her that he cared nothing for her, and she had thought that she ought, if she could, to gratify a man who did care for her and at the same time to gratify her father and step-mother. Only, when it came to the push, she had found that she couldn't do this, and so poor Captain Claughton had been sent to seek consolation elsewhere. She was very sorry for poor Captain Claughton, she added.

"Oh, he'll be all right," said Fred, with easy optimism. "I don't want to breathe a word against him; but as for supposing that Claughton had it in him to love you as I do—well, really that is supposing a little too much, you know."

Susie made no protest against this very unfair

judgment. When we are happy we naturally wish other people to be so too, and are apt to be impatient or incredulous if they give it to be understood that they are not. Cloudless skies are exceptional; but sometimes the sun shines even in England, and when it does, the best plan is to bask in it and avoid consulting the barometer. It is needless to say that Susie Moore married Fred with the full approval of her family, and perhaps equally needless to add that since their wedding-day Mrs. Fenton's name has never been mentioned between the young people.

By other persons, who have not had the same reasons for observing a discreet reticence, her name has been mentioned pretty freely. Mr. Breffit and the Master of All Saints have had to submit to a sharp scolding from Sir James Le Breton; Lady Clamborough has been much annoyed by the ironical condolences of her friends; and Mr. Dodd, when in the safe and select society of his intimates, has not been chary of strictures upon the unutterable meanness of a woman who, after solemnly promising to pay him £5000, went and drowned herself without redeeming her promise. But nobody is remem-

bered long. To be forgiven is what only those can expect whose misdeeds have ceased to be a source of inconvenience to others; but to be forgotten is the fortunate and inevitable destiny of us all. It is the destiny even of Mr. Frederick Musgrave, although, in these days of his prosperity, he has produced a play for which some of his admirers are so kind as to predict immortality.

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