THE POISONED CHALICE.

THE POISONED CHALICE.

A Novel.

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"This even-handed justice
Commends the ingredients of '*our Poison'd Chalice*'
To our own lips."

—MACBETH, Act 1, Scene 7.

NEW EDITION

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PREFACE TO NEW EDITION.

I FEEL that I owe some apology for having added another book to the already congested state of the Novel market. My reasons for doing so were, that I thought that I had something to tell which had not been said in the same way before, and that an almost literally true story, dealing with the quaint life of an old Irish city and county might be worth preserving — especially as it has now entirely passed away, and is as extinct as the Dodo.

The City and County of Limerick, where I have laid my scene, derive their name from the Danish "Leem Rick," or "Rich Loam," which I have changed into Richland, which exactly describes them, and I was more desirous to paint them as

they were, and the life which once obtained amongst them, rather than to write a sensational story of the vulgarizing style now so popular. The name, which has been a stumbling-block to some of my critics, was intended to convey the idea of a moral, rather than of a physical, poison, and the retribution which of necessity follows all wrong-doing, as it was originally used by Shakespeare in "Macbeth," from which I have taken it. And now, while thanking the numerous kind friends and critics who have honoured this sketch with their approbation, I must confess to feel towards the general public somewhat like the ambitious rustic, who, seeing an actor win rounds of applause by imitating the cries of a fictitious pig—supposed to be concealed under a long cloak—must needs try and show them the real thing, by going up on the stage with a living pig under his cloak, whose cries, when its ear was pinched, was received with loud marks of disapprobation, as not being *natural*.

I must confess to feeling that there is too much of the *real* pig in these pages to make them popular. Lord Garryowen's dying words that "there must be a hell—or where would the poor people go to?" which

has been decreed an impossibility, is a true story; while as to the outspoken plainness of speech of those times, it is refinement itself when compared with the unchivalrous brutality which now finds favour, especially on the stage. It would have been much more pleasant for me, instead of painting an almost literally true character of a young man, brought up in the selfish, egotistical morbid school of the Byronian literature of the day, and the necessary consequences of such a bringing up, to have written a story with plenty of plot and make it end in the conventionally happy manner. I could have drawn Ridgway, the agent shot by an exasperated tenant. The hero, just coming up in time to receive his dying enemy in his arms and talk sentiment. Surprised—covered with blood—arrested—tried—condemned by a weeping judge and an hysterical jury—when, just at the right moment, the right witness, who has seen all, comes up; all is made right, and the hero and heroine fall into each other's arms amid thunders of applause. Such it might have been, but unfortunately, besides being unnatural, it would have prevented me from publishing the sequel, as I had intended—as this was in reality the first volume of

a three-volume novel, which it was inexpedient to publish as such — hence its apparent defects in plot.

I can only say, in conclusion, that if the kind reading public will condone this offence, I, for my part, will faithfully promise never to tell the plain unvarnished truth—at least in fiction—again.

THE POISONED CHALICE

CHAPTER I.

THE city of Richland is situated in the county of the same name, in the south of Ireland.

It is a place of great antiquity, and has been long celebrated for a variety of attractions, amongst which the beauty of its women has always been one of the most noted. "The Richland Lasses," was once a favourite melody, and was sung in former days at concerts and convivial meetings; and their charms were acknowledged at a period when beauty was considered a flower of Italian or Spanish growth, and one of the rarest attributes of the Anglo-Saxon race. Richland gloves were also widely known; and, made up in walnut shells, formed one of the curiosities of a generation much more easily amused and astonished than their *blasé* and hypercritical descendants. Richland was also noted for its lace,

which still forms a fashionable article of female costume, and rivals in beauty some of the finest specimens from the looms of France and Belgium. But it was for its social advantages that the city was in former days especially celebrated. It was long acknowledged to be one of the gayest and most delightful residences in the United Kingdom, since it combined the attractions of an episcopal, garrison, and assize town. The Bishop, who ruled over the church militant, and the General, who commanded the military quartered there, lived in handsome houses, entertained splendidly, and spent their money lavishly—for the good of the place, as well as for their own pleasure—and this was considered by the citizens quite as much a part of their duty as preaching, praying, or campaigning. They were, in addition to this, generally fair judges of claret, and played a good game of long whist. As for the legal aspect of the town, the Assizes formed two special epochs of the year, at which period Richland was enlivened by more balls and parties than usual, and the good stories and scintillations of wit, for which the Irish Bar was then celebrated, were echoed from mouth to mouth, and supplied the absence of light literature and comic periodicals.

With regard to the inhabitants in general; the gentry were rich in the sense of having abundant credit, and abundance of the necessaries of life on their estates. They were rather exclusive, if compared with those of the present day, but fond of entertaining the military and their own equals. The county was a sporting one, and supported several packs of hounds; it also abounded in game. Provisions were cheap and plentiful, and the only article that was scarce was ready money—but this was more than compensated for by a system of credit, which had its ramifications far and wide, and seemed to answer quite as well as the real article. It may, therefore, be easily imagined that Richland formed an agreeable permanent residence, and a most delightful quarter for the regiments, who, for the time being, had the good luck to be installed in its happy, but incommodious barracks.

The original town was built on an island, in a broad and navigable river, which answered as a natural moat in the troublous times of its early settlement. Indeed, it would seem as if a canal had been dug out through some marshy land, into which the river was let flow; thus forming a second and smaller island, upon which a fortified town was built.

On this latter island also was situated the Cathedral, with its massive square tower and battlements—more suggestive of a tower for war, than a temple for peaceful Christian worship—which were filled with cannon during the numerous sieges which the old city sustained. Not far from this is the Norman Castle, built by King John, who visited Richland on his Irish tour, and granted it a charter, being much struck, as is handed down, by its "pleasaunt and commodious situation on the river."

The fortifications, with their round Norman Towers—some of them still capped with a conical roof—remain to this day, and are preserved in the ancient and genuine arms of the city. Here also may be traced portions of the massive walls; and gabled houses, built during the reign of the king of glorious memory, still crop up among the narrow lanes and streets, where once dwelt the nobility and gentry, but which are now only inhabited by the poorest part of the population.

The island by degrees became connected with the mainland by numerous bridges—one called "Baal Bridge," denoting the early fire-worship;—and here a new town gradually sprang up, which was divided into the English and Irish towns. The

first was comparatively clean and well-built; the other, where the remnants of the ancient Irish lived, was filthy and squalid in the extreme; the entire arrangement resembling in no small degree the European and native quarters of Calcutta or Bombay.

The population of the English town, though so far superior to the native quarter in cleanliness and education, still, if reports are true, were somewhat behindhand in their mode of life, and might have studied sanitary science to the great advantage of their own olfactory nerves and those of their neighbours. They were less addicted to the use of soap and water, both in their dwellings and in their persons, than would be considered quite polite or elegant by their fastidious descendants. A strange idea was then prevalent, that it was only very dirty persons who required to be always tubbing and washing themselves; and I once, in my young days, heard an old Irish servant descant on the cleanliness of one of the guests who was stopping at a country house, "that he was mighty clane in himself, as he did not require to be constantly washing himself," like the other guests, whom she naturally considered to be excessively dirty.

There is a story handed down of an old lady—the last of a race noted for the severe patriarchal aspect of their lives and habits—who, even in those early days, was remarkable for the absence of those effeminate practices, as she considered them, which have become one of the necessities of the present degenerate age. She dwelt, and reared a numerous family—in health and vigour, if not in elegance and refinement—in a quarter of the town which rejoiced in the expressive and appropriate denomination of *Hog's Lane*. When the town began to extend, she, with her husband and family, migrated to the newer and more fashionable quarter of St. John's Square, from which she came one day, swelling and strutting in the pride of her new residence, to pay a visit to one of her quondam neighbours, who had formerly lived next door to her.

"And how," said she, swelling with importance, and assuming a patronizing air, "How are you all getting on in Hog's Lane?"

"Oh! excellently," said the neighbour, annoyed at her patronizing tone, "excellently—since the old sow and her bonnives have gone out of it."

Richland was in the height of its fame and popularity during the first thirty years of the present

century. The Rebellion of '98, and the disturbed state of the country, drove most of the landed gentry to seek refuge in its hospitable quarters; and this, coupled with an increased garrison, the members of which spent money and promoted all the gaiety, raised an artificial state of prosperity which it must have missed in more peaceful times.

The society was of a highly aristocratic nature, consisting of about twenty families, who jealously excluded all others, except the military and their own connections and younger branches, from their select circle. In no part of the United Kingdom was the pure Norman blood more unmixed, as there were no rich heiresses, as in England, of the manufacturing middle classes to intermarry with; and the native Irish were set apart by religious and political barriers. Consequently the old families only married among themselves, or renewed the blood from the old stock in England, and remained, a proud, exclusive, privileged class, like the Magyars of Hungary, or the Spaniards in South America.

The city was portioned out among a few families, who possessed the entire interest, patronage, and power. Lord Garryowen, who owned a large portion of the town from which his title was derived, almost

always returned one Member for the city; the Vansittarts, a family who had come over with King William, were paramount in the corporation; and the Eltons generally returned the other Member. The De Burghs, a great Norman family, as their name denoted, commanded the county militia, and most of the county votes; while Lord Garryowen commanded the city militia. He was a wit and man of fashion, and began the custom of selling the commissions, "to make it as like the 'Line' as possible"—as he innocently remarked when remonstrated with for doing so.

With these Norman houses were mingled some of the great old Celtic families, whose ancestors had been kings and chieftains, but who had submitted to the English Government, had changed their religion, and were now among the most loyal supporters of the British Crown and the Established Church. There were also some English families of pure Saxon blood; like the Harolds, who had changed their manners and religion, and become more Irish than the Irish themselves. Then there were Scotch Bruces, and Welsh Apthomasses: in fact, it was a very mixed race, and made up of many heterogeneous materials, and

might be compared to their own whiskey punch, in which the lemon and sugar-water and whiskey were all combined, forming a very agreeable beverage, if not a very safe or wholesome one.

If any exception could be taken to the good people of this period, it might be on the score that they drank and gambled a little more than was quite good for their constitutions or pockets, and were rather prone to fight duels on the smallest provocation, or sometimes on no provocation at all. It was Lord Garryowen—a noted fire-eater when a young man—who made the celebrated retort, which led to a duel—remarkable even in those days. He was standing on the steps of the county club, laughing as was his wont, when a stranger, who was evidently mad for a fight, stopped and asked him angrily—

"What the d—— he meant by laughing as he passed?"

"And what the d—— do you mean by passing when I laughed?" said his lordship, thus showing greater ingenuity than the other in the art of taking offence.

On the whole, however, Richland was not a quarrelsome or blood-thirsty place; the last duel

that occurred showed how ready the Irish genius was to accommodate itself to law and order, and how readily it could turn the most unpromising materials to account. This duel occurred after the establishment of the new constabulary (then called "Peelers" after their founder), and was fought between two territorial magnates. As the magistrates feared that it might result in a free fight, *the constabulary were kept on the ground to see that there was fair play between the rival parties!*

Some of the municipal arrangements might doubtless have perplexed a foreigner or stranger, as might a few of those connected with the due carrying out of the law; yet when these were looked into, they would also be found to have in them a strong practical tendency, far differing from that poetical one with which it has been the habit to invest the Irish character. The office of sub-sheriff, and the manner in which he was paid his fees was one of these.

In the good old happy days, the man who attempted to serve a writ was generally considered fortunate, if he had only suffered the mild penalty of having to swallow it, without having his ears or nose cut off into the bargain. But, when that

patriarchal age had passed, never to return, and the cruel Saxons began to insist on having some attention paid to their laws, the quick-witted people discovered a means of avoiding the discomfort of imprisonment for debt, while at the same time avoiding the greater discomfort of having to pay their just dues. This was effected by allowing the sub-sheriff a yearly sum for giving the creditor due notice when a writ was out against him, and thus enabling him to take measures to avoid having it served. The income derived from this source was reckoned at about two thousand a year, raised in a manner agreeable to all parties, except perhaps the creditor, for whom, as at present, few felt any commiseration.

If the people of Richland cannot claim the honour of having invented the system of "Flying Kites," they at least proved their appreciation of it by putting it into practice as much as possible. This invention, which, like many other great ones, has now become common property, gave token that the Irish people would have attained great commercial success, had the genius of the nation only been directed in that way. In those early days, credit—that vast engine of modern civilization, which can

now, with only pen, ink, and paper, create a capital of millions—was, like steam, undeveloped in the womb of time. The man, therefore, who invented the system of keeping a bill of exchange floating for an indefinite time, must have had in him the capacity of a Baring or a Rothschild. The idea probably came by some chance and happy inspiration; necessity, as with most great discoveries, was the mother of invention. It may have struck the originator of the scheme that when the bill became due, it would be much pleasanter not to have to pay it in the low vulgar coin of every-day use; then the idea probably flashed on him of raising the money due by a new bill for a larger amount, which was to pay for the old one; and when it became due, to meet it by raising money on a third acceptance, which in due time should be met by another: thus establishing a chain of sequences, which, with common luck, might last a man a lifetime. The paper thus perpetually kept flying was called a *Kite;* and it was remarked that, while in other countries the wind raised the kite, in Ireland the kite raised the wind!

With the exception of these little peculiarities, then common to all Ireland, society in Richland was sociable in the extreme. Its propriety was sometimes disturbed by some wicked practical joke; but

it was an age of strong nerves, and the perpetrators were soon forgiven and forgotten. All the young men were more or less wild—the more, predominating—but it was considered to be one of the diseases incident to youth, as measles or whooping cough are to childhood. Sowing wild oats was the favourite occupation, and was steadily and industriously pursued under all sorts of difficulties: and if "Flying Kites" might be looked on as the first dawning of the commercial mind of the nation, so sowing wild oats might be equally regarded as the first faint impulse of its agricultural bent. It was followed with great perseverance and success, and, in spite of the moisture of the climate—indeed, it was notoriously a thirsty soil, and needed constant moistening of the clay—yielded abundant crops; but whether the reaping in after life was as pleasant as the sowing, was a question which troubled but little the philosophers of that period. If it left a headache or a heartache which could not be easily shaken off, or if the more feebly constituted somehow disappeared in early life, or lived on with beggared estates and shattered constitutions, such isolated cases were soon forgotten in the wild excitement of the pursuit, and the thoughtlessness fostered by rude health, iron nerves, and strong digestions.

CHAPTER II.

In the early years of the century which is now drawing to its close, a large dinner-party was assembled at the hospitable mansion of Mr. Robert Elton, to welcome back his two sons who had just returned home on leave, meeting for the first time since they had gone to serve in the Peninsular War.

One was a lieutenant in a cavalry, the other a captain in an infantry regiment; and, although often close to each other, yet they had never met, and were no better off than the Irishman who joined the 87th Regiment in order that he might be near his brother in the 88th.

The Eltons were one of those fine old Patriarchal families which have now almost become things of the past. Seven sons and five daughters—ranging from the eldest married son down to the little girl in a short frock and frilled trousers, who found herself an aunt at four years old—was a number at which even the stoutest heart might have quailed.

But Mr. Elton had money and interest for as many more; and no visions but happy ones floated through his mind as he looked on his assembled children. They were a handsome race, blue-eyed, brown-haired, and fresh-complexioned. The sons, stalwart and strong; the daughters, soft-eyed, with lissome figures, frank, open countenances, and the clear, beautiful complexions which bloom in the damp, mild climate of the South of Ireland.

The father and mother were worthy progenitors of such a race. He was a small but still singularly handsome old man, with aquiline features, and high, bald, noble forehead, on either side of which fell locks of white hair, as smooth and glossy as silk. His features were beautifully cut, telling of aristocratic birth in every line. A physiognomist would have at once given him a character of shrewdness and benevolence, mingled with an almost child-like simplicity, and he did not belie his countenance; for his life was one of close practical business, combined with active charity. In his clear eye and finely-chiselled mouth might be detected traces of family pride and imperiousness; but these were almost the only faults in his kind and noble disposition.

Mrs. Elton was a bright-eyed little woman, preserving in her present hideous dress but little traces of the exquisite beauty, whose portrait hung on the wall behind her, as she appeared at eighteen dressed for a ball in India.

It represented a beautiful girl with oval face and patrician features; the delicate bloom of the countenance and tender softness of the dark grey eye were brightened by the white powdered curls which hung in masses round her shoulders, gathered at the top in a wavy muslin scarf which hung down behind. A blue silk dress—the only ornaments of which were large pearls—completed a costume such as one sees in some old miniatures, the most graceful and becoming of all that have been handed down to us. Such she appeared at the Governor-General's ball at Calcutta, where she broke the hearts of a dozen admirers, and yielded up her own to the handsome young Irishman who was the Apollo of the room, and a worthy match for her own peerless charms. He wooed and won the beauty and heiress, whom, as an infant, he had often nursed, before she had been sent back to England to be educated. On the very day of his arrival in India, the guns of the fort were being

fired and joy-bells rung in honour of her birth. He married her there, and in time succeeded his father-in-law as governor of a province something larger than France, England, and Italy, which he ruled for many years with justice and kindness, and finally retired to his native town, bringing with him habits of business and punctuality which made him one of the most useful citizens there.

The Eltons were indeed the favourites of fortune, and withal possessed such generous and genial natures as disarmed envy, and made them favourites alike with high and low, with the proud ruling English and the still poor, unemancipated Irish race. As they sat round the dinner table they formed a picture not easily forgotten. The Captain and Major, browned by long exposure to the sun, the Midshipman, as gay as a lark and full of tricks as a monkey; the Barrister, full of good stories and jokes (then fresh from the mess of the Munster Bar, now of time-honoured antiquity). But above all were the girls, shining like stars, in spite of the leg of mutton sleeves and hideous dress of the period. The three elder ones ranged from eighteen to three and twenty, and nobly sustained the fame of Richland for the beauty of its women.

The rest of the company were worthy of the occasion; some of them morally not perfect, but socially ranking very high. Politics make strange bed-fellows, and though Mr. Elton looked with aversion on gambling, duelling, and other social peccadilloes, still he numbered among his friends and acquaintances many who, even in the most piebald flocks, would be accounted black sheep. Foremost among these in rank, wealth, and station, was Lord Garryowen. He was a *roué* of the old school, but in manners most courtly and agreeable. He belonged to that class of noblemen in olden times, about whom our ancestors loved to terrify themselves in the long winter evenings, by stories of their appearing after death, to male and female boon companions, and signifying their presence by finger-marks burned deep into the wrist of the female friend (which was always in after-life concealed by a strip of black velvet), or by the marks of a hand impressed as though with red-hot iron on the chest of drawers or table, as a sure proof that it was a true appearance, and that there might be no doubt of the nature of the place from which they paid their evening call. Report said that he was a gambler; but openly he was quite correct in his life and

manners, and seemed, rather than otherwise, to enjoy the stories that were told about him.

It was once related of his lordship that, being rather embarrassed for ready money, he sold his seat at the cathedral (at which he was a regular attendant) to two persons—being tempted by another and higher offer after he had concluded the bargain and pocketed the money of the first. On the following Sunday, both purchasers, with their respective wives and families, made for the Garryowen pew, and great was the commotion when both exhibited their receipts in his lordship's writing. On the following Monday both appealed to the peer, from whom they could get nothing but sympathy, for the disagreeable *contretemps* of the preceding day.

"But your lordship will surely refund the money?"

"Ah! the money is gone long since."

"But your honour, my lord——"

"Ah! my honour was gone long before the money; but"—as if a happy thought struck him—"*Sit in the aisle—as I do!*"

However, when he had enjoyed the joke sufficiently, it was supposed that the money was returned to one of the parties.

Next to Lord Garryowen, a lady intervening, sat the Bishop of Richland. He was a stately, handsome man, and one of the best whist players in the country. Report said that he owed his elevation to the bishopric rather to his being a boon companion of Lord Garryowen than to the brilliancy of his talents, or the orthodoxy of his views; but as Richland had from time immemorial been provided with its Bishop by a patriarchal government, without the slightest reference to its own wants or wishes, it was very happy when the occupier of the See was not an open profligate or avowed sceptic. This the Bishop certainly was not. He preserved the same regard for outward decency as his patron, and therefore was outwardly respected. He had a numerous family of daughters, who were extensively sought in marriage by the young clergy of the diocese, and very soon all the good livings were filled by his numerous sons-in-law. Chief amongst these in position and wealth was his eldest daughter's husband and his private chaplain — the Rev. Percival Churchland. He had livings not only in Richland, but also in other distant counties, and his income out of the Church might be reckoned at about £3,000 a year. He sat now opposite the Bishop, and enlivened his

immediate neighbourhood with small clerical jests from the Episcopalian table, and anecdotes, with just a sufficient *soupçon* of scandal and naughtiness to render them highly agreeable. He was a fine, portly man with a clear head, which he principally applied to long whist, and a sound judgment exercised in the choice of port wine for the Episcopalian cellar. He was also specially noted for his orthodox manner of carving at the Bishop's table. In his youth he had been devoted to fox-hunting, but had now given up this, in consequence of the difficulty of getting well mounted, had resigned his country parishes to curates, and settled in Richland, at the palace with his father-in-law, who was a widower. In the tone of his voice, as in his manners and conversation, he had all the marks of a man who was in a comfortable position, and knew it.

Seated opposite to him, between two very stout ladies, whose voluminous persons and large leg-of-mutton sleeves scarcely allowed his thin person and yellow face to appear, was seated the general commanding the garrison, Sir John Stockley, K.C.B. He was a dried-up little man, as thin as a whipping-post, and stiff as a ramrod. He was, however, a

distinguished officer, and the first who had appeared in Richland with the novel distinction of Knight-Companion. When he arrived to take the command, great was the commotion among the lady population. The fame of his deeds, and his novel title, which had for weeks been belled about, had raised expectations to the highest pitch. But when, instead of the Ajax or Achilles they had expected, they saw a little elderly man in a laced coat, nothing could equal their disappointment. One lady, celebrated for her outspoken manner, exclaimed, in a tone of utter contempt, "Night companion, indeed, I am glad he is not mine!" A witticism which was received with much applause and circulated far and wide, and thought rather a good thing in those plain and simple times. Some time after, he paid a good deal of attention to the same lady, without, however, having any idea of marrying her. He thought it necessary to let her know this, lest the disappointment hereafter should be too much for her, and told her of it in the most delicate manner possible.

"And pray, Sir John," said she, "do you think that any woman who could possibly help it, would marry such a dried-up herring of a man as you are?"

It was an outspoken age, and impertinences were not a very dangerous game. He had risen from the ranks, and, like all rather illiterate persons, was very fond of long words, which he used without much regard for their real meaning or pronunciation.

When Moscow was burned, a young scamp of an ensign took advantage of this, and was the first to bring him the news, which he, out of malice, pronounced *conflagèration* of Moscow. The general was delighted, and rode round the town, detailing to every one he could meet, the wonderful news of the *conflagèration* of Moscow.

A little below Sir John Stockley sat Mrs. Percival Churchland; and, as it is generally said, that in marriage, people choose their opposite, so in this case the theory was carried out to its fullest extent. She was a rich Bishop's daughter, he a poor curate and younger son. As a foil to his fine presence, rich port-wine complexion, and mellow voice, she had a thin person, sallow complexion, and shrill voice, and it needed all his good temper and epicurean *bonhommie* to live peaceably with her. He was a churchman of the good old high and dry school, who followed religion as part of his Church, and loved his Church as an exclusive caste of which he formed a command-

ing and dignified portion. He had no religious hatred in his nature, and simply despised the Dissenters as being too much in earnest for common sense, and too vulgar for polite life. The Roman Catholics he simply regarded as a high-caste Brahmin regards the Pariahs; but, on the whole, he was a kind, charitable man, and a regular clergyman in the performing of all his obvious duties. Mrs. Churchland was one of those women, who, not having any religious convictions of her own, made a set for herself, by bitter hatred against all who were not exactly of her own way of thinking. Had she been born at Mecca she would have cursed and spat on the ground with extra unction when any Christian crossed her path; or had she been born a Fire Worshipper, she would equally have hated all the believers in Islam; as it was, she kept all her detestation for the New Evangelical party, which was now beginning to disturb the spiritual repose of Richland. She would have burned them if she could; but, not being able to do so, she used against them the next most deadly weapon in her poisoned armoury—her tongue. That weapon always stood her in good stead. And she was more feared, and therefore more courted and flattered, than any woman in the

city. The Rev. Percival, on the contrary, was universally popular; his good qualities were all his own, his bad ones might justly be set down to the age in which he lived and flourished. Had he lived a couple of generations later he might have been as good a clergyman as he was a man; as it was, the wits of Richland called him the Rev. "Purseyfull," as both his purse was full and his form pursey.

Flanking Mrs. Churchland was Dr. Drugwell, M.D., M.R.C.S., &c., &c. Outwardly he was paying her great attention, and laughed at her spiteful sallies, for he knew that her tongue was more deadly than any lancet in his case, and her breath more poisonous than any of his most deadly drugs; but in convivial moments, when the wine was in and the wit out, he used to say confidentially that the Bishop had given the Rev. Percival a more bitter pill than any he had ever compounded for him, and that he would undertake to cure her of any disease except her spite and ill-temper.

Dr. Drugwell was one of the good old blistering, bleeding, dosing, and cupping school of medical men, and was warmly supported by his patients, whose leading idea was that the nastier the dose the

better the medicine, and that the wisest way to cure a patient who was weak and thin, and suffering from a deficiency of blood, was to take away the little that he had in his body. He, in his way, was quite as severe against medical heretics—who pretended to cure without much physic, and by means of air, exercise, diet, and the like—as Mrs. Churchland was against spiritual ones. His usual treatment consisted of bleedings, cuppings, and leechings, varied by doses of violent purgatives—twenty grand doses of calomel, or any other harmless drug, washed down with black draught, and prescriptions in which twenty different medicines were mingled, of no one of which did he understand the real properties or action on the human frame. He killed off his patients in a scientific and business-like manner that gave general satisfaction, and amassed a large fortune on which he retired in dignity and ease.

Although the doctor had suffered a greater number of his patients to slip through his fingers—such was the delicate mode of putting it—than was even thought quite allowable and proper, and although the Rev. Percival had disposed of the remnant of his flock, in his country parish, who had all turned Roman Catholics in even less than the usual time,

still they were both strictly dogmatic in their cure of souls and bodies, and would have felt deeply insulted had any one ventured to hint the possibility of any opinions being true which were not strictly in accordance with their own orthodox ones. The Bishop and parson would look on such a one as a sceptic of a much more dangerous type than the *roués* who drank, gambled, and fought duels, but who went regularly to church on Sundays, or at least took off their hats when they passed one, like Dr. Johnson's amiable scamp. Equally so would Sir John Stockley have denounced the innovator, who ventured to doubt that the British soldier could possibly fight, were he not pipe-clayed and stiffened up to the last extent, his neck so confined in an almost iron stock as to render suffocation in hot climates a matter of almost certainty, and his coat so tight that he could scarcely use his arms.

Such were a few of the Richland worthies of those days, as they appeared to the eye. Mentally they were of a type we can hardly conceive. They were Tories in the utmost sense of the word. Everything that they did was right, everything else was wrong, and all who differed from them were Radicals, firebrands, or impostors. Could they now look out of

their graves and see that almost everything which they thought absolutely right, we now think almost or altogether wrong, and that those whom they called infidels and scoffers were in reality the prophets and wise men of the age—could they see geology (which was to most of them utter infidelity) taught in every national school, and evolution recognized by all the scientific world, could they see all religious opinions having equal right, and all taxpayers having equal votes—surely they would feel as strange and scared as some ancient Greek or Roman who would equally see all his cherished beliefs set aside and new religions set up in their place. Each might equally learn the only lesson never taught during their brief stay on earth, namely, toleration for the new truths of the present, and respect for the ones looming in the future.

CHAPTER III.

THE Eltons, like most of the great territorial families in Ireland, claimed to trace back to the Norman conquest, and to be descended from a certain Reginald D'Elton, who came over with the Conqueror. One of them came over and settled in Richland in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, where he got large grants of land, and where the family flourished steadily, in spite of occasionally losing large fortunes in contested elections for the city or the neighbouring borough of Desmondstown. But these disasters only served to make them put forth their native talent; and, when thus impoverished, they rose to be judges, bishops, generals, or admirals, according to their tastes, and restored the wealth and glory of the family. It was indeed difficult in those days for the gentry to avoid having judge, bishop, or fellow of his college among them, as all these dignities, being confined to the small minority of Protestant families

the prizes were numerous, while the competitors were necessarily few.

The English branch of the family was, on this occasion, represented by Mr. Reginald Elton, who had just come to Ireland to visit some of his property situated there. He was a tall, handsome, fashionable, but rather *blasé* looking young man, a good deal resembling the pattern hero usually served up in the novels of that period; who, after three volumes of cleverly-invented difficulties, after pacing up and down the usual corridor in his castle, and mounting the inevitable coal-black steed, is at last united to the heroine at the end of the third volume, with whom it is rather to be hoped than anticipated that he lived happily for the remainder of his life. Reginald Elton had the clear-cut Greek type of face, pale complexion, blue-grey eyes, and general expression of countenance which it was the fashion to call the poetical type, and which was realized in the poetical idol of the day, to whom he was considered to bear some slight resemblance, without, however, the club foot or genius, both of which were generally strangely lost sight of in the imitators of the bard. He had, however, a dash of real talent which, rightly directed, might have rendered him capable of doing

something in life; but, up to this, it had done him nothing but harm; and the fancied resemblance, coupled with a romantic tone of mind, had led him to cultivate a cynical, misanthropic, sceptical manner and mode of thought, which had done, and threatened to do him, much injury.

Seated opposite to Reginald was an individual—gentleman he could not claim to be called, especially in those exclusive times, save for the fact of his having gained admittance to the table—who in manners, appearance, and education was so direct an antithesis to him, morally and physically, that it would seem as though they had been placed there to show how utterly unlike two beings could be, while belonging to the same human family.

Mr. O'Ryan Ridgway was agent to Mr. Robert Elton, and to his eldest brother, Mr. Eyre Elton, of Elton Towers. He was a short, thick, clumsy, common-looking man, with red hair and whiskers meeting under his chin. Nothing could equal the contrast between these two men. A thoroughbred racer and a common cart-horse, a piece of Sevrès china and a brown earthenware crock, a brilliant gem and a piece of rough iron, could not resemble each other less than these two. The one was tall,

slight, and elegantly formed, with broad shoulders, deep chest, hands and feet small and beautifully proportioned, but in every way active and manly-looking; the other short and squat, with narrow shoulders, broad hips, and hands and feet so large as to be almost deformed. The one had a clear pale complexion, high white forehead, straight nose, well-formed mobile mouth, with white teeth, dark silky hair, and a voice whose very inflexion was like music; the other a coarse, red, freckled face, low, rugged forehead, thatched with coarse hair, a large hooked nose, and a mouth like a big gash full of yellow fangs, eyes of a gooseberry-green colour, and a voice brassy, harsh, and discordant, whose very tone was an aggravation. Yet, unmatched as these men were, they were destined to be rivals. It was again the case of the hare and tortoise, and the slow, clumsy reptile was fated to run the hare very hard, and perhaps to win the race.

As Mr. O'Ryan Ridgway represents a class in Ireland now almost extinct, it may not be out of place to give a short account of his history and antecedents. He was the son of a small farmer in Desmondstown, where the Elton property was situated; a shrewd, thrifty, cunning man, one of

a class very common in Ireland in the olden times, but not much taken notice of by those who have drawn the Irish character. His Celtic cunning soon made him aware that two things kept him back in life, his name and his religion, and he unhesitatingly changed both. He took his wife's name, which was Ridgway, and also adopted her religion, then the dominant one, and bloomed out into the highly-respectable Mr. O'Ryan Ridgway, a Protestant, a Tory, an Orangeman—in fact, everything that belonged to the winning side.

He profited much by the change, and bound his son, a hopeful scion of the same stock, to an attorney in Richland. When he was well acquainted with the law of real property, and had made himself tolerably familiar with all the family secrets of the gentry, he got him transferred into the office of Mr. Elton's youngest brother, who was agent to the family estates and other properties.

Here the sharp industrious clerk got knowledge of all the details of the properties, and in time was left almost entirely to manage them; Mr. Elton being in a delicate state of health. At his death everything was in a state of the greatest confusion which Ridgway only could unravel; he was accord-

ingly appointed to the agency, and thus achieved one of the great objects of his father's ambition. He was not a bad agent as they went in those days. His common sense told him that honesty was the best policy, and he steadily went in for respectability. Like all renegades, he and his father were more bitter partizans, both in politics and religion, than those whose faith they adopted. But he was quite prepared to change when they ceased to belong to the winning side. Respectability was the great aim and end of his life, and in dress, manner, and conversation, he was always in the extreme of whatever was respectable. However hideous and uncomfortable was the fashion, indulged in by the respectable people in Richland, his was sure to be more hideous and uncomfortable still. When baggy neckcloths were in fashion amongst them, his was the baggiest in the town. When square-toed shoes came in, his were so square that they ceased to resemble shoes at all. When again high, stiff neckcloths betokened respectability, his was so high and stiff that he could scarcely move his head, and was constantly threatened with apoplexy. He worshipped rank and wealth, and fawned on and flattered their possessors, in spite of every

indignity; this he made up for, as is usually the case, by brutality and harshness to all beneath him. He was much disliked, and not a little despised; but his knowledge of family secrets, and his clear head for business, made him a useful and necessary ally, and politics which (more even than necessity) "makes strange bedfellows" got him admitted into society, which he would otherwise have had as little chance of entering as the servants who waited at table, or the grooms who cleaned the horses.

From the moment that these two men met they conceived the most violent animosity to each other; the one made no attempt to conceal it, he looked down on the other as a well-bred mastiff looks down on a mangy cur: the harsh, brassy voice went through every nerve of his artistic, sensitive nature. The large flat feet, shod with coarse boots, always smelling of new leather, the thick, coarse ankles, the large, shapeless hands, covered with freckles and red hair, utterly disgusted him. In politics and religious principles they were equally opposed.

Reginald Elton was aristocratic and liberal. He hated conventionality, and what is now called Philistinism, and Ridgway was a Philistine to his finger-ends. Reginald Elton was also liberal in

religion, and honestly hated that phase of it which led to wealth, honour, and position.

He had also refused to give Ridgway his agency, which had just become vacant, and was endeavouring by justice and kindness to do away with the evils, which had developed themselves through generations of dishonesty and misrule, whilst his ancestors were absentees. He had not only done all this, but had treated the agent with a fashionable insolence and disdain which cut him to the quick, and for the first time for many years he saw the position, into which he had hoped that he had securely crept, threatened to be taken away from him. He, too, despised the other in his own way; he looked down on him as a bull-dog looks down on a curled King Charles spaniel, and longed to give him one squeeze that would do his business for him; but in this view of the case he was much mistaken; the fragile-looking man of fashion was more than a match for him in every physical sense. Everything that art and training could effect had been done to make up for the want of mere robustness, and with pistols, swords, sticks, or fists, the coarse, strong man would have come off worst. But in one way he was Elton's superior; he pos-

sessed a patient, watchful temper and judgment, and a mind educated by constant labour, application, and habits of business, in which the other was totally deficient, and they were more, equally matched than would appear to the thoughtless beholder.

But great as was the natural antipathy, it never would have been called into active life, but slumbered on, marked by mutual sarcasms and avoidance, had there not been another element in it; and as in all cases, from the siege of Troy down to our own times, a woman was at the bottom of it.

Mr. Elton's third daughter was one of the most lovely specimens of Irish beauty in a country long famed for the attractions of its women. Annabel Elton was not tall enough, nor were her features regular enough, to be a perfect beauty. Had it been so, she would have lost one of her great fascinations; which was a playfulness almost amounting to coquetry; this alternated with a vein of thoughtfulness, sometimes amounting almost to sadness. They existed together, and followed each other so waywardly and capriciously, that they gave a weird and wild character to her beauty. After a fit of the wildest gaiety and levity, a

shadow would seem to pass across her mind, leaving its visible expression on her sensitive features, and lingering in her deep, thoughtful eyes, like the recollection of some higher existence—some better world from which she was an exile, and to which she would fain fly again from the vanity and falseness of the present one. Her countenance, even at rest, was very lovely; the features, though not perfectly regular, were clean cut and well formed. There was no bungling about them as we sometimes see, no weak chin or poor mouth, or wounded nose, as though at some time a housemaid or upper servant had slipped in among the female progenitors. All was clear cut, but decidedly feminine. The nose was straight and well formed, but with just that *soupçon* of the *retroussè*, which gave an air of archness to her face. Her complexion was the clear, healthy, delicate red and white which the mild, damp climate of Ireland induces.

Her head was high and well shaped, and masses of silky brown hair fell clustering on a neck and shoulder of dazzling whiteness. But it was the tender, half sad, half gay, look in the eyes that formed the most dangerous attraction, which few

could resist, and which had driven many a man already to the verge of despair; that vague, longing look, could it have been understood, formed the key to her otherwise inexplicable character. It was as though there was within her reach a something she longed for, but had never realized. A something that would have been called into being, had she met with a man of strong, earnest, deep convictions, who would guide her to something beyond the mere world in which her lot was cast; but up to this she had never met such a one.

The service in their parish church, was of the good old orthodox style. The clergyman read it, just as a Buddhist might have turned off his mill of paper prayers, and the clerk repeated the responses, as though he were some capital ecclesiastical machine, and the congregation would as soon have thought of joining in them as they would of preaching the sermon. This latter was a good sound discourse, delivered in the longest words, and having as much to say to human feelings and longings as a discourse on Chinese metaphysics; and went through the usual round of platitudes, truisms, and generalities, as though it had been a barrel-organ grinding out its round of

accustomed tunes, and the sermon was as well known, the moment the text was given out, as the tune would be the moment the first few bars were sounded. "The axe to the root of the tree," and "The leopard and his spots," were the greatest favourites, and when the parson told them to lay the axe to the root of the tree of every known sin, it was supposed to refer to a contest which he had had with a troublesome parishioner, as to his right to cut down a certain tree in the churchyard. When he spoke of the vanity of wealth and the happiness of virtue—he being an intimate friend of Lord Garryowen — they all naturally applied it as only intended for the poor and more ignorant part of the congregation. This opinion was very prevalent—even his lordship, who, during his life was something of a freethinker, became sufficiently converted before his death to acknowledge it. He exclaimed, penitently, "Ah, yes; there must be a Hell, or where would all the poor people go to?"

So it resulted that Annabel Elton became a flirt and a coquette, and went on her way of life without compass to guide, or rudder to steer by, doing an infinity of mischief to herself and others. She was a puzzle to her friends and family; virtuous,

high-principled people, who went on their way directed by a sort of natural instinctive goodness, without wishing for or experiencing the want of any of those higher feelings which seemed so essential to her.

Just at this time another element came into play which complicated things worse than ever. A wave of the great Evangelical movement had reached Richland. A new clergyman, who differed from none of the others in doctrine or mode of worship, opened a church and attracted a large congregation. He and his followers were, of course, received with great scorn. They were called "The Saints," and it was generally supposed that they were a set of hypocrites who condemned every one else but themselves; they being in reality a quiet, serious set of people, who only wished to worship in their own way, and had no notion or desire of attacking their neighbours. They were, therefore, turned into the greatest ridicule. Every action of their lives was criticised, and had they been virtue itself they could not have escaped scathless. Mrs. Percival Churchland mimicked the preacher, falsified his doctrine, and disseminated every scandalous story about them; and it was an edifying

thing to see her at her husband's table, surrounded by clergy, turning them into ridicule. The Rev. Percival took things with his usual *bonhommie*. He looked down on the clergyman for not being a profound scholar, and one who would probably not know the difference between old port and Cape Madeira. He bore them no ill-will, but thought them simply fools for not enjoying the good things of life as he did, and proved that he did not hold their views by enjoying himself more than usual when he had the opportunity.

One evening Annabel and her eldest sister Marion were passing the new church, while a prayer meeting was going on inside, and they went in out of pure fun and frolic; in some degree also with the idea of turning the whole thing into ridicule. But, as has happened to many before, and will happen to many hereafter, it had quite an opposite effect—they went to mock, and remained to pray. There was probably much rant, and cant, and vulgarity; but there was something new, strange, and terrible. For the first time in her life Annabel felt herself a responsible being; for the first time a ray of higher life penetrated her heart. They returned home sadder and wiser, and were so sober that many

laughed and said that they, too, were converted, and would give up balls and parties and take to rant and psalm-singing. Others were much disappointed, as Annabel was a capital mimic, and much fun had been expected from her. She alone said nothing about it, and seemed more strange and wayward than ever. She felt that her family disapproved of the new sect, as they were called, and there was no human being on earth to whom she could turn for support, encouragement, or advice.

Meanwhile the dinner was proceeding amid a clatter of knives and forks, and a babel of voices, interspersed with good stories and good sayings, which first kept the company silent and then convulsed it in a roar, such as we have now not the slightest conception of in our degenerate times. The dinner was well worthy of the guests. Few countries equalled Ireland at that time for the goodness, cheapness, and abundance of every necessary article of life. Magnificent sirloins of beef, fed in the rich natural pastures, four year old mountain mutton, and Shannon salmon (the richest and most delicate in the world), were all to be procured at from four to six pence a pound. Fat turkeys were to be had for a couple of shillings, and fowl for a few pence apiece;

as to wild fowl, a good sportsman could easily bag twenty brace in the day, and less than that was considered bad sport.

But good as the eatables were they were nothing to the wine. In those old days temperance would have been considered a deadly sin, both by parson and doctor, besides the greatest insult that could have been offered to a host.

Mr. Elton, like most old Indians, was celebrated for his Madeira, which had twice doubled the Cape. Claret, however, was then the Irish gentleman's drink, and whenever Mr. Elton gave a large dinner party, his custom was to broach a hogshead, which was drank on draught, and the remainder bottled next day.

I must, however, retain the drinking part of the entertainment for another chapter.

CHAPTER IV.

It was not until the ladies went upstairs that the drinking commenced in earnest. Drinking was a science in those days, and, although Mr. Elton was a remarkably temperate man, still it would have been considered a disgrace at a dinner party if about ten times as much wine was not drunk as would suffice in these days. I once heard two old topers talking with fond regret of their feats in drinking, and, although I will not vouch for the truth of what they stated, they said it with an air of truth, as if it were much too solemn a thing to joke about. A young officer happened to say, incidentally, that it was a bad plan to mix one's wine, or some equally innocent remark, when he was caught up by one of the old gentlemen, just as a child would be if he attempted to give an opinion on politics or any abstruse science.

"Mix your wines, indeed, any fool knows that. I'll tell you what you must do if you want to drink

properly. There are six rules:—First, you must never touch beer; secondly, you must not, of course, mix your wines together; thirdly, you must eat no sweets; fourthly, you must not on any account taste any made dishes; fifthly, you must not sit with your back to the fire; sixthly——' but I forget the remaining one, and I only recollect that the poor young officer was covered with confusion.

"Do you remember," said another old gentleman, warming with the subject, and addressing a rosy-cheeked one opposite, "do you remember the night that we drank the thirty-five bottles of claret, and could not, if we were given a thousand pounds for it, make up the three dozen?"

"I never shall forget it," said the other, in a sorrowful tone, "it was a great pity."

"Yes," said the first, "I never regretted anything more in my life, but it could not be done, or we'd have done it."

"And pray," said I, innocently, "how many of you were there?—about ten, I suppose?"

"*Ten!*" said he, with scorn; "there were three of us, and if we had only come a little better prepared, we would have finished our twelve bottles a man."

And now the silver claret jug, replenished from the hogshead, began to circulate briskly, and woe to the mean-spirited guest who attempted to leave the room and join the ladies until he had drank his share.

"Well, baron," said Lord Garryowen to a mutilated gentleman, with a decidedly Teutonic cast of countenance, "what do you think of this claret? Beats most of your Rhine wine, I should think?"

"It is goot, very goot," said the Baron, who, like Sir John Stockley, delighted to interlard his broken English with rare and fine words; "it has one fine superlative flavour."

The baron sometimes got into scrapes from his love of uncommon words. He was never content with the ordinary ones, but would look out in the dictionary for the uncommon, and would apply his knowledge in the most wonderful manner. Once when he was paying attention to a Richland lady, he horrified her, when she handed him a flower, asking him if it had not a beautiful perfume, by replying—

"Ah! mademoiselle, it has one beautiful sthink," quite certain that he was using the most elegant and appropriate term of approval.

Baron Hogfleisch was a Hanoverian, and now a

retired officer of the German legion. He had lost a leg and an arm in the Peninsula. When his arm was shot off, and he found that he was entitled to a pension of a hundred a-year, he was as much pleased as most people would be at some unexpected good fortune. Some time afterwards he was badly wounded in the leg, and, after a consultation it was decided it would be safer to amputate it. The surgeon broke this to him in the most delicate manner, hinted at the danger of mortification, and ended by saying, as a salve, that it would entitle him to another pension.

"Another hondred a year! Off wid it, off wid it! I did never tink dat I should be worth two hondred a-year in my life!"

The military mustered strong on this occasion. Besides the baron and the young Eltons, Lord Garryowen was colonel of the county of Richland militia, and Colonel Vansittart, a very short-sighted man, who, like the baron, could not pronounce his t's, and commanded the city militia, was also present. They had both seen service, and were equally characters from a military as well as a civilian point of view. If it was Lord Garryowen who invented the happy idea of selling the commissions in his corps

—"To make them as like the line as possible,"—it was Colonel Vansittart who once marched his men down straight to the river, where, if they had obeyed orders, the entire regiment would have been in the Shannon. As it was, when they came on the verge of the quay, after waiting in vain for the word of command to halt, the first rank commenced marking time, which was followed by the whole regiment before the colonel perceived the dilemma. He was only delighted at their efficiency, and remarked to a friend: "Only for de disipline of de men dey would have marched into de river!" Although a bad drill he was a fearless officer, and at the battle of Cooloney charged with some of his men right into the French lines. He was so very short-sighted that he was unable to realize the situation.

"Have we taken, boys, or are we taken?" he asked.

"Begorrah, yer honour, we're taken," said one of his soldiers.

However, they were soon retaken or exchanged, and he drilled his regiment for many years after in Richland with great honour and glory.

But although the military element predominated at the table, the other branch of the service was not

entirely omitted. The navy was represented by a quiet, gentleman-like man, under whose peaceful-looking exterior was hidden a most daring and gallant soul.

"Come, Compton," said Mr. Elton, "you have not told us one story to-night. You must remember that we have an Englishman among us, and he must not go home with the idea that Richland is quite shut out from the naval glories of the country. Reginald, allow me to introduce you to Lieutenant Compton, one of Lord Nelson's officers at the Battle of Trafalgar, and who served under him in many other well-known engagements. Come, Compton, tell us the story of the butcher's boy from Charleville; no one at the table knows it but myself, and it is too good to be lost."

"Well, Mr. Elton," said the lieutenant addressing Reginald, "just before the Battle of Trafalgar we impressed one of the most extraordinary specimens of an Irishman that I have yet met on board ship. He was originally a butcher's boy in Charleville; from that he went to Lundy Foot's snuff shop in Dublin. How he was impressed I forget, but he furnished the ship's crew with amusement by his extraordinary Irish oddities; but

it was at the Battle of Trafalgar that I first became acquainted with him. He was attached to my gun, and at the moment firing commenced he began running about, first to one side and then to the other, which of course is quite inadmissable in action. I drew my pistol, and said I would shoot him if he did not remain quiet.

"Yarrah, thin, to be sure I will, leftenant, darlin. I wouldn't stir, *but I alway heard that thim Frinch couldn't shoot flying.*"

Just then one of the surgeon's mates was slightly wounded, and there was a cry from the men.

"Come along, Butcher, and carry down the mate."

All this was sufficiently amusing, as no one had been badly hurt. Just then a chain-shot came and killed five men at the gun. It was a horrible sight, and I looked round to see if my friend was trying to slink away or hide himself, but he turned round coolly to me, as the thought of the snuff-shop life came across his mind: "Begorrah, yer honour, if that shot had come into Lundy Foot's shop, it would have set all Dublin sneezing."

"You must think us a queer lot in England, Mr. Elton," said D'Arcy Osborne. "A trifle difficult to comprehend, I should imagine?"

"Well, that is the general impression," replied Reginald, "but, for my own part, I never found much difficulty in the problem of the character of the people, or how to govern them. I am a Radical, or perhaps the word Liberal will express my opinions better. I never could see any middle course in governing Ireland. It can only be done in either of two ways—by giving them everything to which they are justly entitled, and by putting them entirely on a par with the English, or by exterminating them, which perhaps now would be rather difficult. It might have been done a hundred years ago as was done in parts of Germany and Bohemia, where, during the Thirty Years' War, all the people who differed in religious opinions from the majority were put to the sword, and the young children brought up in the religious belief of the Government. It has saved a great deal of trouble, and there is now absolutely no difference of opinion in those countries."

Reginald Elton was one of those young men who delight in paradox, preferring rather to dazzle than to shine, and would rather be taken for a clever fool than remain unnoticed. This had been the great bane of his life; in all he undertook he tried to arrive at the end before he had mastered the begin-

ning, and only studied the most advanced views, without caring to take the time and trouble to read up the various steps by which the knowledge had been originally reached. He affected all that was new and strange in life, politics, and religion. In politics he loved to mingle his really liberal opinions with a cynical flavour, as if he were ashamed of them. He horrified the steady, old fashioned, religious, or rather correct, people, by introducing the most advanced scientific opinions of geology—which were to them, what the Darwinian theory is to the great mass of the present generation.

"And supposing you were not able to do that," said Mr. Osborne, much amused at this novel view of governing Ireland, "what would you do then?"

"Well, I should first fill the country with troops, so that no one could stir a finger or misuse their new liberty, and as a proof that the Government were not acting under the influence of fear; and then I would give equal rights to every person. I would make all religions equal. Pay the Roman Catholic clergy, repealing, of course, first of all, everything that remained of the penal laws and disabilities of all kinds whatever."

These new views about Ireland were received

at the table with ominous silence. In fact, had they not been uttered at his relative's table, they would have probably ended in a duel, or some deed of violence. Any ideas of the kind were then as much high treason in Ireland as a proposition to liberate the slaves in the Southern States of America would have been before the war. However, there was something in the idea of the alternative that tickled Lord Garryowen's cynical humour; he, of course, having the corporation and representation of half the city in his own hands, would have been the greatest loser by any change or reform, and therefore it fell on him to answer it, or chastise the daring exponent of such new and unorthodox views.

"I see you have been a student of Machiavelli, Mr. Elton. I really like your idea as to the alternative methods of governing a disaffected country, either by giving them all they want or exterminating them; it has at least the advantage of novelty. But I fear it is too late in the day for one, and that if the other was tried, there would be a rebellion among the Protestants, which would be very different from the wretched attempts on the other side that have occurred up to this."

"If a Prime Minister of England, backed by the English nation and Parliament, chose to do it, he could keep the country so that no man should dare to stir," replied Reginald Elton. "Look what England has just done on the Continent against all the world, and the greatest genius that ever lived, at the head of the coalition against her. Has she not triumphed over all, and chained him to a desert rock in the Atlantic Ocean?"

"You never will get a Prime Minister and Parliament to do it; that's one comfort," said his lordship, "so I suppose we may take the world easy for another fifty years or so."

"It will come in time," said Reginald Elton, "and the next generation will live to pay for all the faults and follies of the past ones."

A red-faced country gentleman near the host was just meditating an angry denial, which would have probably ended in the lie direct, had not Mr. Elton stopped him by putting an end to the controversy.

"Come, come, gentlemen, we can't mend matters now. So there is no use discussing them. By the way, Osborne, was there not a good story about old Tim, the waiter at the club? I wish you would tell it to us."

"Well, I am afraid it will give your English relative but a poor opinion of our honesty, however we can't be thought much worse of in England, than we are at present. There was very high play going on a few nights ago, and a friend of mine, whom I will not name, on rising from the table had a roll of a hundred pound-notes in his hand, ready to take away with him. When he got home he found that he must have dropped them in the club, and that he had not a number or trace by which he could recover them. He went there early in the morning, and the first person he met was Tim."

"Oh, Tim," said he, "I'm in a dreadful state, I dropped a roll of a hundred one-pound notes last night, and I have not got the numbers, or any way of tracing them."

"Where were you sitting," said Tim.

"At the table near the window."

"Here they are," said Tim. "I found them under the table this morning."

My friend rewarded Tim handsomely, and thanked him over and over again.

"Oh, yes, your honour," said Tim, confidentially. "*What luck it was that none of the gentlemen found them!*"

This story was received with shouts of delight and applause, as though it had reflected the highest credit on Richland, its club, and people. There was a slight movement of chairs closing up nearer to the host, so that the claret might go the round with less trouble and more comfort; the door was not locked, as was sometimes the case, and Reginald Elton—who was no toper, when he saw his opportunity, stole away to the drawing-room.

CHAPTER V.

WHEN Reginald escaped from the dining-room, Lord Garryowen and the other seasoned topers were just well into their second bottle of claret per man. A fresh infusion of company had been added in the drawing-room to those who had dined, and a young lady was treating them to what was termed then as now, "a little music."

It might have been termed then, as often now, "but very little music," as the great object seemed apparently to be to get everybody in the room (whether they understood or not even the rudiments of music) to sit down at the piano and make a noise, under cover of which the others talked at the highest pitch of their voices.

A glee—which seemed to have given universal satisfaction, if one could judge by the noise that had gone on during its performance—had just concluded. It was to the effect that—

"Violantry, in the pantry,
Gnawing of a mutton bone;
How she gnawed it, how she clawed it,
When she found herself alone."

The gnawing and clawing parts had been rendered in their full purity by ladies who were blessed with very harsh, unmusical voices, and who, in addition, sang very much out of tune and with a thorough independence of each other, so that the success was unequivocal. They were followed by a stout lady of mature years, who in dulcet strains entreated some unknown individual—

"Will you come to the bower I have shaded for you,
Your bed shall be roses all sprinkled o'er with dew."

This, however, was generally understood to be asked only in a musical light, as, besides the impropriety, a bed of damp roses would have been anything but pleasant even to the most robust, in so moist a country as Ireland, whilst to delicate and rheumatic people it would simply have been out of the question. The performer, undismayed by any such reflections, gave it out honestly and conscientiously in a steady sing-song manner, like a hurdy-gurdy player, or a school girl getting through her appointed task, and dinned the refrain—

"Will you, will you, will you, will you,
Will you, will you come?"

with almost dogged pertinacity to the end.

There is an old and misapplied saying, which was a great favourite in my younger days, that "the bird that can sing and won't sing should be made to sing." But, so far as my experience of musical life goes, I think the sentence should read thus: "the bird that can't sing and will sing, should not be allowed to sing." For it generally happens that for the one rare bird that can and won't sing, there are a hundred unmusical birds who can't and will.

On the present occasion one after another of these tuneless songsters warbled away so unremittingly—for the good old English custom was rigorously observed of asking every one in the room to sing; not for the pleasure of the company, but as a compliment to themselves and their friends—that Reginald Elton was about to beat a retreat, when Annabel sat down to the piano.

It was one of her fatal gifts to do everything unlike any one else. In appearance, air, manner, dress, she was unique and original; but in her singing there was a wild grace and nameless charm that made it the most dangerous of her many attractions.

She had a rich, sweet voice, perfectly cultivated, which she shared in common with many; but it was the passion and intense feeling which she threw into her singing that separated her from almost all the others. When she sang she yielded herself entirely up to the emotion, forgot herself and all around her for the moment, and seemed to pour out her very life and soul, more like an inspired being, or an actress—as some very correct persons thought—than a nineteenth century young lady.

The Irish melodies were just in the freshness of their beauty and bloom. The Harp had only just been taken down from Tara's Halls, and "The Last Rose of Summer" was then a fresh bud, and not the overgrown, overblown flower of the present day, so sung, and pianoed, and fiddled that we wish it *was* the last rose, and that there was an end of it. She seemed unconscious of everything as she sat down to the piano. There was a hush of expectation as she struck the first chords. The old gentlemen who had beaten time to "the bower," as though it was their special business, now forgot to do so, as she seemed to speak to the heart rather than to sing the weird, wild melody called "the Coolin." As the plaintive notes rose and fell she alone seemed unconscious of

all around her, as one who, for the time being, was in another world. She was not allowed to rise without singing again, and this time she sang, by request, "The Meeting of the Waters." Her sensitive, thrilling voice seemed to realize the very feelings of the poet, as though the spirit of friendship and love were being breathed around, and the last notes died away fainter and fainter like the murmuring voices of the distant rivers.

"And our hearts like thy waters, be mingled in peace."

There was a sense almost of relief when it was over. Several of the ladies were in tears, while the old gentlemen unsuccessfully endeavoured to conceal their feelings, by blowing their noses violently in voluminous silk pocket-handkerchiefs.

In the beautiful myth of Orpheus, the loved one is recalled, even from death, by the power of music. And so, alas! it is still—the singer can recall the past—the loved, the lost, even the dead—can recall as vividly as in the bright days gone by. Recall, but not restore. As Eurydice came back for a moment from Hades to her lover, so now in many a cold and withered heart, the loved, the lost, the dead, the spring-time of life, the vanished

joys, the long cold kisses, and those by fancy feigned for lips that are for others, all came back and lived a moment, then to fade away for ever.

Reginald Elton sat like one in a painful dream. Like the Sultan, in the "Arabian Nights," in a few moments his entire life seemed to pass before his eyes, and parts of it that he would have given all that he possessed to blot out seemed written in words of fire, never to be erased.

He had met the only woman in the world capable of making him happy; there was upon him a weight which he could not shake off, and he entered the battle a half-defeated man. In her presence he was silent and depressed; he was unable to cope with those whom he would formerly have despised and confounded with wit and ridicule. He was conscious that he was of different calibre from most of those around him; was better educated, had travelled and mixed in the most brilliant society, yet it was all in vain; now that he had met with the woman of his choice, he became conscious for the first time that he had thrown away the talisman which would have ensured him an easy success, the only thing that was wanting to gain a lasting and permanent power over her.

Like her he was naturally of a serious and thoughtful turn of mind; but, unfortunately, he had been at an early age left master of himself and of an independent fortune, and had been thrown, more by accident than choice, among a wild and thoughtless set of companions, when he yielded to the silly vanity of gaining their applause by assuming a character of sceptical cynicism, so fascinating to the young. He affected a mixture of benevolent philosophy and mocking wit; and, if for a moment he was led to speak seriously on any subject, he loved to demolish all he had said by some startling antithesis of sarcasm and jest. The truth and purity of woman was one unfailing theme; and he, who by nature was chivalrous as a knight errant of old, found himself recognized as a leader who spoke of woman as a toy; and on the man who bound himself in matrimony, save as a monied speculation, as a poor, foolish drudge, an obvious butt for ridicule and contempt. Had he been content with mere theory he would have done comparatively little harm; but, unfortunately, he found it necessary to assume something of the real Don Juan to support his assumed reputation. It began to be whispered that a lovely girl had fled from her

father's home with him. Great was the admiration, not a little the envy, among his less successful associates. His character rose immensely, he was a thousand times more the lion and chief than ever, and none stopped to reflect whether any wrong had been done, and, least of all, anything of which he should feel ashamed, or which should hereafter give him an hour's pain.

For a time all went smoothly; if his conscience upbraided him, he was able to stifle its warnings, until he was attacked with a severe fever, through which the woman he had so cruelly wronged, nursed him with the most unremitting care. Then, during the languor and weakness of a slow convalescence, the magnitude of his crime rose before his eyes. His first thought was by marriage to right the wrong that he had done her; but he felt that he had been false in every way, and in the face of all his vows and endearments he was conscious that he had never really loved her, and that to marry her would be to perpetuate a life of misery for them both. Racked with these thoughts he had hurried over to Ireland for change of scene and forgetfulness; there, in his cousin, Annabel Elton, he met with the woman destined to exercise a lasting in-

fluence on his life, and at the same time he felt himself incapable of winning her confidence and love.

So it is ever in life, and such are the strange riddles which so often mystify those who are not behind the scenes. She, who felt so much the want of a strong influence to control herself, was destined to exercise this influence over him; and he who, up to this, had possessed the power of influencing others, now found himself totally deprived of it the moment he met the only woman whom he really loved.

* * * * *

There was another who watched and waited at a distance, as Annabel Elton stood surrounded by a group of young men, the centre and attraction of all, and bided his time as the patient spider does, whilst the thoughtless fly is buzzing about in careless ignorance of the web laid for its destruction. There was something in the man that she dreaded and disliked; and yet he had a power over her which she could not shake off. The agent always spoke to her with a humility almost bordering on servility; he never for an instant presumed to overstep the distance that lay between them, and yet she

felt that he saw through her, that he knew every weakness and defect in her character. She felt at times as powerless before him as the bird does under the fascination of the snake.

This is one of our social enigmas. How it comes to pass that often highly-bred, elegant women fall under the power of coarse, vulgar men, and select them out of the crowd of their admirers. In this case she had given him the power which he took care never to lose; in exactly the same manner as the person mesmerised first yields up his or her will to the mesmeriser; without which all the art and power of the latter is vain. In her mad love for admiration, she had determined to have him too at her feet, and had lured him on, until he had quite forgotten the distance between them and everything else but his wild passion for her. Not until then had she awakened to the real state of affairs. In vain she repented of her coquetry, and would have given all that she possessed to undo the mischief that she had done. She could not shut her eyes to the fact that he loved her to excess, in his own vulgar way, and with a violence that she was totally unprepared for. She saw his coarse, uncouth form bowed down with grief, and the tears coursing down

his rough, ungainly face; and, too late, felt shocked at what she had done, but a secret lay between them which she was bound in honour not to disclose, as it would have led to his immediate dismissal from the agency.

She felt at times like the student in Frankenstein who had created a monster to be the curse and terror of his existence. The agent was one of those heavy dogged, obstinate men who never flinch from a purpose, once they have formed it. He had also great natural sagacity, and saw in her a depth of humility and distrust of herself which promised to render her an easier prey to his designs; and he now steadily set himself to lessen the distance between them, so that in her self-abasement she should, in her own opinion, fall to the level of himself. After being with him she was always conscious that she was a flirt and a coquette; that she was weak and wilful; that few men would be happy married to her, and that her only chance of happiness would be with a man of strong mind on whom she could lean and find support; a man who knew all her faults, and loved her in spite of them; in fine, a man who, in a licentious and profligate age, would be a Puritan in religion, and could aid her in that vague longing for

something better than the world she saw around her, and unite with her in those designs and longings which had been so powerfully aroused after her visit to Mr. ——'s church.

So day by day she found herself coming insensibly more and more to a level with her father's agent; and when the Fairy Prince appeared who might have broken the spell, he also had lost the talisman which would have enabled him to slay the dragons, break through the bolts and bars, and rescue his beloved princess from the deadly enchantment which surrounded her.

Some little stir was made as another young lady was forced to the piano, amid protestations that she had a cold, was hoarse, &c., &c. Annabel was left for a moment alone, and Mr. Ridgway came up to her, rubbing his hands together as if he was washing them, as is the habit of vulgar men when they address a lady.

"What a distinguished-looking man your cousin Mr. Reginald Elton is, Miss Annabel. What an enviable position is his—rich, young, and handsome. It is no wonder that he looks down on an individual like me, who has nothing but his own industry to raise him in the world."

Every word in this sentence was carefully prepared. Whilst seeming to praise the other in a generous manner, and disparage himself, he well knew what an opposite effect it would produce on her, and that he could disparage him a thousand times more by his praise than by abuse, did he dare to venture on it.

"I do not think so. I do not think any one is to be envied for mere gifts of fortune."

She thought she was giving utterance to her own sentiments; but they were his as surely as if he had taught her every word of them, and she knew as little as the person mesmerised that she was speaking his words, not her own.

"That is not what the world thinks, Miss Annabel; I do not wonder at his being as proud as he is reported to be, and looking down on me; and yet, humble a man as I am, I dare say I felt a truer pride on the day that I was able to pay off all my old father's debts, and saw him walking forth a free man before all the world."

"I do not wonder at your feeling proud at it," and she felt it in her heart. "How I wish I could do something at which I should have a right to feel proud."

"But all pride is wrong, Miss Annabel, if we believe the Scriptures. I was induced by my sister to go and hear Mr. —— preach, and I was amazed at the new light he threw on all these subjects. His text was, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' It was a blessed discourse; I felt very thankful at having been permitted to listen to it."

Mr. Ridgway had a powerful ally in his sister, Miss Anastasia Ridgway, who had formerly been governess to the Misses Elton, and who now occupied a sort of neutral position something between a confidential friend and a poor relation. She decked the feast at which she never sat, and adorned the young ladies for triumphs which she was not expected to share; but, like her brother, she too, bided her time, and laid up in her bosom a long arrear of hatred and revenge for all the real or fancied slights that her position entailed on her, and only lived in the hope of paying back all the fawnings and flatteries with which she now loaded them. She was one of the few who knew the effect which Annabel's visit to Mr. ——'s church had produced on her character, of which her brother was kept well informed; and he now, by her advice, became a secret attendant with her

there,—not that he cared for, or even liked the doctrines taught there, but that they served his turn for the present. He looked on them as a plank which would bridge over the chasm between himself and his employer's daughter, secretly determining, however, if ever he reached the other side by its aid, to kick it away, once again hold to the rich, respectable church, and leave the other to the lowly and humble, who would be welcome to any gratification they could get out of the doctrines which were no longer necessary for him.

"I hope your cousin is not as proud and haughty as he looks. I hope you will pardon me for feeling a deep interest in all appertaining to him, since I have heard the report that there is likely to be a closer connection than cousinship between you."

"What do you mean, Mr. Ridgway?" said Miss Elton, colouring; "to what do you allude?"

"I hope you will pardon me, Miss Annabel, if I unintentionally offend you. But the report is current that you are engaged to Mr. Reginald Elton."

"Surely, Mr. Ridgway, you must know enough of Richland to be aware that for a lady to speak twice to a gentleman is enough to have it settled that they are to be married!"

"You make me so happy, Miss Annabel. I hope I may be pardoned for feeling anxious when I feel that I, perhaps, of all the world, know how much the happiness of your entire future life depends on the character of the man to whom such a treasure is entrusted."

"And pray, Mr. Ridgway," said Annabel, now standing up for her cousin, "have you heard anything against my cousin, Mr. Reginald Elton, that makes you look on him as such a dangerous man?"

"Only reports, Miss Annabel, which I have always contradicted. But Richland is a censorious place, and they have got hold of something which I should like to have authoritatively denied; that he had led a wild life in London, and had induced the daughter of a most respectable family to run away with him. It is very likely not true. But you must pardon me if I felt anxious, nevertheless."

"I thought, Mr. Ridgway," said Annabel, haughtily, "that you had lived long enough in Richland to know that no reliance can be put on the scandal and gossip which is for ever being invented and circulated."

"I know it well, Miss Annabel, and denied the rumour in the most emphatic manner; but you must

forgive an old follower of the family for being, perhaps, unnecessarily alarmed; and I hope you will also forgive me for saying that I feel certain that you never can be happy unless married to some one who possesses an influence over you founded on strong moral and religious grounds. No one will feel happier than I when the right man comes; but meanwhile you must pardon me for feeling anxious about you. And now I must say good-night. I have a long account to make up, and while all of you are dancing and enjoying yourselves, I shall be hard at work."

The moment he left her, Reginald Elton came up and took his place beside her in the window.

"I wonder, Annabel, that you can bring yourself to speak to that man; he is, without exception, the most common, vulgar-looking fellow I ever saw in my life. I wonder he is admitted into gentlemen's society. A few years ago he would not have been let higher than the kitchen."

There was something in the tone and manner that grated on her ear; she was too much accustomed to adulation and flattery to submit to be lectured, and he seemed to be taking something of the privilege of a husband in choosing who were, and

who were not to be her friends. She turned to him with a heightened colour, and answered him coldly—

"He is my father's agent, and has known me since I was a child. I could not help speaking to him even if I wished it. But I cannot conceive what difference it makes to you one way or the other."

They were on strange terms with each other, most puzzling to the looker-on. Almost on the moment of their acquaintance he had avowed his love for her in a wild and frantic manner that caused her to dread while she pitied him. She had neither absolutely accepted nor refused him, and had looked on his passion as a mere fancy, which might pass away when he knew her better; but as time passed on she was forced to acknowledge its sincerity, while she was equally unable to make up her mind as to what answer she should give; for, though she liked and admired him, and saw in his position and fortune everything that was suitable for a husband, yet she felt that Ridgway had truly fathomed her character when he said that she could not be happy with any one who did not possess a strong religious and moral influence over her. This she felt Reginald had not, and feared he never could possess.

"How can you say that, when you must know that everything connected with you possesses an interest for me beyond the power of words to express?"

"But why need you mind whether he speaks to me or not? He is a man who has been forced to make his way in the world by sheer hard work, and has not had time to cultivate those graces which you think so essential."

"How can I help noticing it, when I see him addressing you as an equal—a fellow not fit to black a gentleman's boots, whose very appearance is enough to prevent his getting a place as servant in a gentleman's establishment."

It is dangerous work abusing a rival; there is something of a love of contradiction in the female heart which leads them to take his part, or it may be a sort of chivalrous defence for an absent man; but, however it may be, there is no surer method of making a woman like a man than by attacking him behind his back. Men have now so well learned this, that to hear one man praise another is generally a pretty good sign that he hates him, and looks on him as a rival.

"I really cannot see what right you have to

choose my friends for me. I am the best judge of that myself."

"But he is so utterly beneath you. I am sure if your father knew it he would not approve of the intimacy."

"You may be sure that, if I had the least doubt on my mind of my father's approval, I would at once clear it up, and not wait for an almost stranger to teach me my duty."

She turned away with a proud, swelling feeling of wounded pride and self-respect. She had been too long the acknowledged queen of hearts to bear thus being taken to task.

"You are not going to leave me in anger. I know I am always offending you. It is my fate to please those to whom I am indifferent, and only to offend the one whom I love better than my life."

"You must not say those sort of things again; they pain me more than I can express."

"Will you come into the other room? My head feels on fire; and the air is suffocating."

"You will blame me some other time, and call me a flirt and coquette; that is the way with men; they induce women to do all sorts of things, and then turn round and reproach them!"

"Come what may, I never will reproach you! You will not refuse such a trifle as a few quiet words with your own cousin!"

"Why can you not say them here?"

She was a woman, and she yielded. She doubted whether she was doing right in giving him any apparent encouragement. She liked him, not quite enough to marry him, but her love of his admiration was too strong to give him up entirely. She pitied him too much to deny him absolutely, and yet she felt that it might be kinder in the end to do so, but being a woman she yielded, and accompanied him into the next room.

CHAPTER VI.

THE rest of the party were too intent on their own amusements and flirtations to make inquiries after the truants. Lord Garryowen, the Bishop, the Rev. Percival, and Mr. Elton, were settled in a small cozy room at a game of whist; they only played shilling points and a half-crown on the rubber, which to his lordship, accustomed to guinea points and five guineas on the rubber, seemed like child's play, but he was too courteous and well-bred to make any remonstrance.

The young people betook themselves to dancing, and Miss Ridgway played the piano. She was a tall, rather good-looking, but masculine young woman, with a very cool, collected manner, and a great eye for generalship, which she now exercised in the most wonderful manner. She had rendered herself so useful to the family since she had ceased to be governess that they could now scarcely get on

without her. She wrote the notes of invitation, and gave the finishing touches to the young ladies' toilettes. If a guest failed at the last moment, and there was danger of thirteen to dinner, she was ready to fill the vacant place; if not, she looked after the dinner while it was being served; came out in the evening and made the tea and coffee, and all the while was smiles, blandishments, and flattery, while nursing in her heart a deadly feeling of animosity for all the indignities she had gone through, and a determination at some future day to pay it all back with compound interest. She lived in the hope of seeing the time when the family which patronized her and had raised her up should be humbled, and herself elevated by their fall; and it was on this account that she furthered by every means in her power her brother's designs on Annabel. She hoped to pay off a double grudge by revenging herself also on Reginald Elton, who had treated her and her brother with what she considered aristocratic *hauteur*.

She now executed an admirable piece of diplomacy in her good-natured offer to play for the others, being thereby enabled to carry on a quiet flirtation with little Mr. Crushton, Lord Garryowen's nephew and presumed heir, who had lately got a fall out hunting,

which prevented him from joining the dancers. He was supposed to be an admirer of Miss Marion Elton, Mr. Elton's eldest daughter, and no one but a clever woman could appreciate the adroitness with which Miss Ridgway led Mrs. Elton to suppose that it was entirely for the sake of furthering the match that she took Mr. Crushton under her care, and the skill with which she sung her praises, and that of the Elton family generally—when any of them were near—and flirted violently on her own account when she found herself alone with him.

Mr. Crushton was a little, weak, delicate man, with flaxen hair and pink eyes, like a ferret. He had travelled on the continent; was fond of good living: and, like all little, weak men, was a good deal struck by the tall, fine-looking, practical-minded Miss Ridgway.

It is generally the fashion in novels to draw governesses as a persecuted and down-trodden race, snubbed by the mistress, despised by the servants, and bullied by the children; but my experience is not quite this. So far from seeing all governesses bullied or put down, I have certainly seen some who were much more the mistress of the establishment than the lady of the house, and have known a threat

of leaving if such and such a thing was not attended to, to be looked upon with the greatest dismay; while, as to being despised by the servants, there was not one in the house who did not know that it would be impossible for him or her to hold their place if they incurred her ill will.

Mrs. Elton, who was a most amiable, easy-going old lady, was first a little startled when she saw Miss Ridgway appropriating Mr. Crushton, and getting him to turn over the leaves of her music. She walked up to the piano, but went away immediately reassured, when she heard her praising Marion in a way to go at once to a fond mother's heart. She was pointing out her graces of mind and body, designating the one "angelic," the other "swan-like."

"I was just telling Mr. Crushton of the walk I had with dear Marion yesterday, Mrs. Elton. What a graceful figure she has; you must positively see her sitting at the harp, Mr. Crushton. It is the perfection of form and sound."

No wonder poor Mrs. Elton went away reassured, and thinking what capital hands he was in, and then said to a crony, that "Anastasia Ridgway was a dear, good girl, and that she never repented of taking her

up as she had done, and how delightful it was that she so thoroughly knew her own place." If she could only have heard the little "but" with which her devoted follower commenced the next sentence.

"But still, Mr. Crushton, how badly most of the girls are brought up in this country; they are mere dolls—pretty to look at indeed; but then, how insipid is their conversation to an educated man who has travelled and seen life. As to their being any use in a house, they are absolutely in the way. I often think of your story of the German Countess."

This was an allusion to one of Mr. Crushton's pet stories of a German Gräfin, whom he had met in her little town on the Rhine, who told him that she and her sisters, together with all the other German ladies, were accustomed to take lessons in cookery from a professed cook. As he was a great epicure, this struck Mr. Crushton much more forcibly than the scenery and antiquities, and he was fond of telling it, and lugging in the fair countess on every occasion.

"Ah, yes, indeed. It is a great pity that the girls don't learn a little cookery."

"Yes; I know what you are going to say. That if dear Marion possessed that accomplishment she

would be irresistible. How clever you are; that is just what I have often told her."

Little Mr. Crushton murmured something, and looked quite delighted at the cleverness thus imputed to him.

"I am afraid you are a dreadful quiz. I shall be quite afraid of you. I know quite well what you mean. That no girl who has not travelled, and does not understand foreign languages, can possibly be a companion for a highly educated man. I do so wish the dear girls could travel. When I was living in Hanover with my friends the Baron Von Rauchimmer and his family, it was so different; the dear girls could talk French and English like natives—of course we conversed in German—they were more conversant with English literature than most English girls, and we all took lessons regularly in cookery from a man cook. Now that is my *beau ideal* of what a young lady should be—perfectly *au courant* with every phase of society, and still able to manage a house, so that if the cook were suddenly taken ill, even on the eve of a dinner party, she could dress the dinner first, and then take her place at the table, and act the hostess as though nothing untoward had occurred."

"Gad, you are quite right," said Mr. Crushton, remembering some awfully bad dinners of which it had been his sad fate to partake when the cook had suddenly been incapacitated through drink.

"But, as you justly remark," continued Miss Ridgway, pretending that he had made some brilliant remark, "the conversation of most home educated young ladies is just as insipid as their cookery would be."

Here the quadrille ended, and some of the Elton party came up near the piano. Miss Ridgway adapted herself to the occasion.

"Not but that dear Marion must be charming in any society, and under all circumstances."

"Oh ah, yes, surely," said Mr. Crushton, quite delighted, and fully believing every word of the adroit flattery thus cleverly administered, and not stopping for a moment to consider and find out, as he might easily have done, whether the ladies' cookery or German quite came up to her own flattering view of the case. She had, in fact, been for a few months in Germany as a nursery governess, but was so ignorant of her own language, that she had to be parted with, the moment that the children were far advanced enough to require something beyond mere

conversation. Her cookery was about on a par with her German. But she knew how to flavour one sauce to perfection, and that was "flattery"—a species of melted butter which she poured lavishly over every human being who came in her way. Under the soothing effects of it Mr. Crushton, while implicitly believing all she said about herself, fully believed that in reality he was an agreeable, clever man, and that it was due to the dense stupidity of the rest of the world that he was not acknowledged as such, and he began to feel quite attracted towards the appreciative young woman who was able to comprehend him; who had such correct principles about dining; and who so fully comprehended the whole duty of woman, as contained in the cookery book. He declared afterwards that she was a deuced clever young woman, with no nonsense about her, and that it was a great advantage for a woman to know something of continental life and manners.

This feeling was increased by the rather unflattering remark which he overheard from the outspoken young lady whose speech to Sir John Stockley was mentioned before. When she and Mrs. Elton came up to the piano about some change in the music, Miss Ridgway said in an audible voice to Miss

Blunt—" I have had such an intellectual conversation with Mr. Crushton while you were dancing. He was quite struck with you and dear Marion, while you were dancing *vis-à-vis*. Is he not nice ? "

" Very nice in his eating, I have no doubt," said that candid young lady in an audible voice, to Mr. Crushton's intense disgust.

Thus Miss Ridgway and her brother alternately matured their plans. She held a long flirtation and made a deep impression on Mr. Crushton, while getting credit from Mrs. Elton for anxiety and energy in furthering her match-making scheme, and so managed to get a firmer footing in the house.

Mr. Elton's was one of those fine old family mansions which people built for themselves in the olden times, with the intention that their children and grandchildren should inhabit them afterwards. It was therefore solidly and well constructed, with wide staircases and balustrades of solid wood, while doors of mahogany harmonized with the furniture of the rooms. So far all was English taste; but like most old Indians, Mr. Elton had still a hankering after some of the institutions of that sunny clime, and had constructed a large verandah along the front of the house, which only

required sunshine to give a cool and delicious shade.

It was to this that Reginald Elton led his half-unwilling cousin—ostensibly to look at the old town and cathedral by moonlight — a pretence that both knew to be as transparent as the rays of that luminary itself.

It was a calm sultry evening in August; the moon was rising like a large golden shield, behind the square embattled towers of the old, grim cathedral. Opposite them, divided by the flowing river, lay the old town, with its quaint, Dutch-gabled houses extending all along the island, till they reached the Norman castle, with its round towers and conical roofs, as it lay surrounded by the broad and rapid flowing river.

Everything was now glorified by a silver mist of moonlight, which lighted them sufficiently to show all the picturesque and quaint objects, without revealing the dirt and squalor which lurked within.

The streets were silent and deserted; outside the house a row of sedan chairs were drawn up, the porters of which were seated in the kitchen, or in the public houses not far away; and there was no living thing abroad, save a solitary woman,

who crouched down under the hall door. The murmuring of the river was only broken by the cry of the night watchman on his distant rounds, as he called drowsily, "Past twelve o'clock."

It was one of those calm and sultry nights when the atmosphere seems to the senses to be a dense and palpable fluid in which we move and live. It was a moment when love and passion might take rein, unchecked by the cold, stern realities of life—a moment when woman is weaker and more easily moved than in the cold, hard glare of day. There were chairs on the verandah, where they had been sitting before dinner; the air was laden with the perfume of mignonette; everything was intoxicating, and breathed of poetry and romance, and Annabel could not but yield, as Reginald seated himself on a chair beside her, and took her unresisting hand.

"Annabel, I cannot support this state of misery and uncertainty any longer. I have never, from the first moment that I met you, concealed the love with which you have inspired me. The world believes that I am the same as engaged to you. Your own family would wish you to be my wife. There is everything in rank, position, and fortune to make me

a suitable match for you. Why then do you trifle with my affection ?. You tell me you like me ; sometimes that you could love me as a brother ; but when I want some definite promise, you tell me that you will never marry, and hold me in a state of suspense that tortures and destroys me. Annabel, be content—you are the first woman I have ever loved — I believe I might say without vanity that I might have chosen rank, wealth, and beauty, had I been contented to have mated without love ; but I could not do so. It has been the want of my life to meet a woman who could inspire me with a strong and lasting passion which will enable me to become, I hope, a useful and better man. You are that one; you have gained that influence over me, which can make me anything you desire. Do not, then, refuse my request. By one little word you can restore me to health and happiness, and to a life which shall be devoted to making you happy."

Annabel Elton was a flirt and a coquette, accustomed to live on the adulation and incense which was hourly offered up at her shrine, but she could not help feeling that there was a real passion in every word that he uttered. She liked him better

than any one that she had yet met. She thought him everything that a lover should be, but the one thing — and here the insidious words of the agent began to work their power over her—"If he should be a *roué*." She had a well-founded dread of such. An aunt of hers had married a man who had neglected her when sober, and ill-treated her when drunk; still, she had sufficient confidence in her cousin's nobility and honour, and in the reality of his passion for her, to think that there was not much danger of this. But it was the other words that made her pause. They rung in her ears like the knell of fate.

"You can never be happy with any man who has not a strong moral influence over you."

That was the rub. It was as much for him as for herself that she was alarmed, for she knew in her heart that, unless to such a man, she could not guarantee in her own conscience that she would be able to fulfil the true duties of a wife. As a girl the want of it terrified her; as a married woman she felt it might destroy her. The want of that influence had ever been present to her mind since the evening of her visit to Mr. ——'s church, and her conscience told her with true

prescience that without it rank, wealth, honour, position, could not give her a chance of happiness or peace.

And so she could not say the little word of only three letters, on which, with its little opposite of two letters, half the happiness or misery, success or failure, of life depends. She endeavoured therefore, with true woman's skill, to turn him off on another scent, and not be obliged to give him a direct answer.

"That is the way with you men — you flirt and pay attentions as much as you please. At the last moment, if it does not suit your convenience to propose, you walk off, and no more is to be said. The woman must not utter a complaint, but bear it all in silence. But if one of us does not make up her mind the very moment that the Sultan honours us by throwing his handkerchief, we are flirts, coquettes—we are shilly-shallying, and heaven knows what besides. You say I trifle with your passion, and other accusations of the kind. I can only say that I can look back on all that has occurred, and that I cannot blame myself for one single act or one single word, except, perhaps, coming here with you this evening."

She made a movement to go.

"Nay, Annabel, do not go. I made no accusation. I am merely miserable, and do not know what I am saying. You said you could love me as a brother."

"And so I could. I would not have come out here with you if I could not. But you like me in a different way, and if you do, it is not my fault. I did not seek your admiration. I did not desire it. It pains me more than I can say, when you accuse me of having tried to fascinate you. I did all in my power, when first I met you, to keep out of your way, and prevent you from liking me, and now you blame me for it. . . . No. I may have wilfully injured others, but to you I have done no wrong."

She was thinking of her father's agent as she said these words, and the recollection of the wrong that she had done him, helped to steel her heart against her cousin. It was strictly true; the efforts she made to avoid him were what made her irresistible to the *blasé* man of fashion, and gave her the greatest charm in his eyes. And so the wheels move within the wheels in this complicated drama, which we call life. Fools call it chance, but the

wise see in it the working of a Providence, that shapes all things to its own ends.

"It is true, I acknowledge it; and it was that which gave you the greatest charm in my eyes. I have been so accustomed to see men hunted down for their position and fortune, every fault overlooked, every sin condoned, if richly gilded over, that your perfect freedom and innocence gave you first an interest, then an indescribable charm, which I was unable to resist. Oh, Annabel, if I could lay bare my heart before you, you would pity—perhaps love me. I have been up to this a purposeless, useless man. I have had no stay, no anchor in life. Until I saw you it had grown so wrecked that I sometimes felt tempted to put an end to an existence that was hateful to myself, and useless to all around me, and from which I saw no escape. Do not think that I am morbidly condemning myself. I am the victim of circumstances, more than of any faults of my own. I, too, have had longings after a purer and higher life—but I knew not where to turn to realize them until I met you;—from that moment all has been changed. Before I met you I was like one wandering on a dark starless night among what seemed a wild and horrible wilderness, but when I

met you it seemed as if the glorious sun had arisen to dispel the gloom. What before had seemed wild brakes and rocks, and tangled thorns or dangerous precipices, now appeared to be bright fountains and lovely flowers; and I found that I had been wandering through a beautiful garden, and had been stumbling at every step, dashing myself against trees and fountains, tangling myself among beds of flowers, and dreading everything that should have only yielded me pleasure and delight. Such has been your influence on my life. Do not then without consideration cast me off, to wander again a waif and stray through existence. Take me as I am, and all the good that you have given to me shall be returned with interest and be devoted to your welfare and happiness."

There was such truth and reality in all that he said that she could not have resisted him, but for the warning given her by Ridgway. Was there some bad secret in his life that might wreck hers? So she hesitated.

"So you do love me much. How much?"

"I love you as no other man ever can—dearer than everything on earth—better than life a thousand times—only less than a vague longing for

a heaven peopled by such as you—a home of purity and peace."

There are moments when men rise into real poetry, under the influence of true passion; and now he spoke in words and in a tone which the most sceptical could not doubt. How could she, being a woman, do other than yield. The time—the hour—the magic of the scene were all in his favour.

The moon had risen higher in the heavens, and, silvered with a dim and hoary light, the old cathedral and its ancient walls and square embattled tower, scarred by the fury of man and the wasting hand of time, now lay bathed in a still and peaceful haze of glory. The old carved portal, with its pillars marked with long, deep, straight lines, where Cromwell's Ironsides had sharpened their swords and pikes, still stood erect, calm and serene, in dense and sombre shade, as though it mourned the vain distorted passions of man ever destroying each other in the name of religion and truth; and the river murmured along, bathed in the moonlight, as though its stream had never flowed choked with corpses and stained with blood.

Annabel's silence almost gave consent, and yet the words of Ridgway kept her trembling in the balance.

"And have you never loved any other woman but me? How can I know that your love will last and be always as it is now? I would die if I were married to a man who for a moment changed and ceased to love me."

"Change!—If you knew my heart, you would not think of change. No, Annabel, I swear that I cannot, will not, change! I swear that I have never, never cared for any woman but you—that I would sacrifice life, wealth, position, everything that the world holds dear, for the one rapture, the one dear hope of having you for my wife."

Another moment, and the word would have been uttered, and this story would never have been written, for who cares to read of commonplace love and marriage, happy because not too exacting or interesting. But men cannot sin and repent, and have it all as if it had never been. Each action and word leaves its impress on the Eternal Mind, and brings with it its own punishment or reward in this world. Read it, change it, alter it as we may, stifle it beneath false philosophy and perverted sense, the truth remains the same.

Before the little word could be uttered that should give happiness and peace of life, the stillness

of the night was broken by a piercing and terrible cry from the street, which froze his blood, and for a moment caused his heart to cease from beating —a cry of bitter, deep distress—of terrible anguish—in which was concentrated a lifetime of suffering, sorrow, and despair!

"Oh, Mr. Elton, that was the cry of a woman!"

When they looked down they saw the pale and lifeless form of a woman, who had fallen in a faint on the hard flags near the hall door.

She was taken up and brought into the house, and slowly restored to life. She would give no account of herself but the name of a small lodging house in the poorer part of the Irish town. It was supposed that she was some poor half-crazed creature, who had strayed from her home and had a fit. When everything that kindness could do for her had been done, she was sent home in one of the sedan chairs, with money to be left in the hands of the lodging-house keeper, in case she was in distress, until something could be done to restore her to her friends. The circumstance caused a little talk and many surmises, but was soon forgotten by all but Annabel and Reginald. It gave her a shock, a nameless fear of disaster, that she could not easily

shake off. But in his case memory was never to be a blank again; that one scene stood out for ever, written in words of fire, like the writing at Belshazzar's Feast.

When he returned to the drawing-room his face was ashy pale. He had not been recognized, but one look at the insensible form told him in a warning voice that went to his very soul that his sin had found him out—that he had filled for himself a cup of bitterness, and must drink it to the very dregs.

CHAPTER VII.

It needs no doctrine of Purgatorial fires to interpret the course of events in this life. So surely as wrong is committed, so surely it leaves its mark behind, never to be erased, but, bit by bit, atom by atom, to be worked out and atoned for by sad and bitter suffering here below.

Some suffer and learn, some suffer and learn not; but as surely as a violation of the physical laws of Nature results in disease in the frame, so a violation of the moral laws leaves its mark, a canker on the soul.

As nothing in the physical world can be lost or destroyed, though fire may have consumed it, or earthquake engulphed it, so nothing in the moral world can be lost or blotted out, but man must atone for it in this life, and every act brings of itself its own punishment or its own reward. So surely as the wind returneth again according to its circuits, and the sun hasteneth to the place whence he arose,

so surely does the moral world run in its accustomed course; and as each uttered sound is transmitted on each successive wave of air, so is each act and thought self-registered in the eternal records of Time.

When Reginald Elton awoke in the early morning—that terrible hour of retrospection and remorse—he felt a dreary sense of weariness and exhaustion, as though years of suffering had passed over his head, and with it came a gloomy foreboding that he in vain tried to stifle or shake off; and the one event of his life on which he had been once accustomed to look with pride and exultation now arose before him in its true aspect of shame and remorse. He had been on the very eve of gaining the object of his most ardent desires; a few moments and the word would have been said which would have made him a happy man for life; but the cup had been dashed from his lips the very moment he had tasted it, and he felt that it was his own hand that hurled it to the ground.

Immediately after breakfast he started off in the direction of the poorer part of the town, known as the Irish town, frequently losing his way amid its gloomy streets and narrow lanes. The entire district

seemed to consist of small public-houses, coffin makers, and second-hand clothes' shops. These, with sellers of pigs' feet, and beggars, who were probably better off than the poor on whom they preyed, seemed to be the only callings that flourished, except the pawnbrokers, whose golden balls hung at every corner. Here and there were tall, old-fashioned houses, formerly inhabited by the gentry and nobility, but now tenanted by the poorest of the poor. The underground apartments of these were now reached by trap doors, opening in the streets, unsafe to the ordinary passer by, but apparently constructed as traps to the drunkards who staggered by, and whom nothing but a special providence seemed to preserve from broken legs or even death. It was a dreary scene, at no time calculated to raise the spirits, but in his present frame of mind offering him new food for reflection and remorse. How different had his life been from that of the poor wretches born to such degradation and poverty, and how thankless had he been for all the good things distributed to him. What had he done to deserve the one lot in life, and they the other? Was he in reality any better than the blear-eyed drunkard now staggering home? if the wretched creature had had his opportunities

might he not have been a better man than he? He loathed himself as such thoughts passed through his mind. If he could but live his life over again with his experiences, if repentance could but save him from his fate! Alas! repentance could not save the half-paralyzed, blear-eyed wretch to whom the craving for drink had now become a tyrant neither to be evaded nor subdued; nor could it restore to health the loathsome object who, with face disfigured by disease, now craved his charity with inarticulate and horrible sounds!

He was at last directed to a lodging-house of the poorest sort, and asked the woman if Mrs. —— was lodging there. He then desired her to say that the gentleman to whom she had written about a situation was below. He was shown into a small room above stairs, and there, gazing out vacantly, sat the subject of his remorse. He closed the door carefully, placed the key so that no one could look through, and then addressed her as sternly as he could bring his faltering voice to do.

"Alice, why have you disobeyed my orders and followed me?"

She looked at him with a cold, vacant expression, as though some great grief had frozen her blood;

and as he looked at her he felt for the first time how deeply and grievously he had wronged her. She looked like one who had been struck almost dumb by some terrible piece of news; and when she tried to speak it was in a low, scared whisper, as if they were not the actors in the scene, but she was telling some fearful tale of another to another.

"I heard it all last night. Oh! it is horrible, very horrible! He said that he loved her alone, that he never had, never could, love another!"

She looked at him as if she did not know of whom she was talking; then, by degrees, the truth seemed to dawn on her that it was of herself and of him; and with a cry of anguish she threw herself on her knees before him.

"Oh, my God! Reginald! is it true that you do not love me, that you never have loved me? Or am I mad, and is all this but a terrible dream?"

He tried to soothe her with gentle words. But what could he say? How could he recall his own words, or deny the secret she had overheard?

"Oh, Reginald! why did you take me from my peaceful home if you did not love me? I was innocent and happy, loving my parents and beloved by them, until you came and won my heart away

from them, and swore to me, by sacred oaths that I could not choose but believe, that you loved me better than them all, and would make me your wife. I left them all for you. My mother died of a broken heart. My father, with his last breath, cursed the outcast child who had brought shame on an honest house. My brothers look on me as a degraded wretch, and would not give me a crust of bread to save me from starvation. I bore it all whilst I felt certain of your love. But can it be true that you do not—that you have never loved me? Oh! merciful God! against whom I have sinned! Then I am an outcast indeed!"

She burst into an uncontrollable fit of weeping, whilst he turned away horror-stricken at the ruin and misery that he had brought about. This was what it had all come to! But would this be the whole? Was it the "be-all and end-all"? Alas! a warning voice told him that he had sown vanity and folly, and that he must reap misery and despair.

"Alice, I would to God that I could undo the past! I would give all that I am possessed of to make you happy, and atone for the cruel wrong that I have done you! I see it now; the wrong has recoiled on my own head. Pity me; forgive me!

If you had not heard my words last night I would sacrifice my own happiness to try and atone for the wrong I have done you. But it is impossible; you know all; I can do nothing. Yes, another woman has gained an influence over me that I cannot gainsay or resist—an influence that life only can end, that eternity cannot destroy. I am a changed man—I, the sceptic, the mocker, the almost infidel, have bowed myself before Heaven, and with bitter tears have sought pardon for my sinful, wasted life."

He pressed his hands before his face, and his frame was shaken by convulsive sobs.

The poor girl was terrified by the violence of his emotion, so as for a moment almost to forget her own great grief.

"We have both sinned. Let us try and pray to be forgiven. I know that I shall not live long. While I believed in your love I could have faced every misery, every shame or disgrace. But now—my mother came in my sleep last night, and beckoned me away. Promise me that when I am dead my child shall be brought up in the faith of his fathers. Will you take care of him? Oh, do not let him know my sin, and curse his wretched mother, who can only leave him a heritage of shame!"

He promised her everything she asked—promised it in a manner that she could not doubt. He tried to soothe her, but felt how utterly useless was all that he could now say or do.

The deed was done, never to be recalled. What would he not give to be able to undo it! Wealth, life—all that he possessed he would have given. But when once she knew the fatal secret—that he loved another—that he had never loved her—all reparation was impossible. He might sacrifice himself, but he never could restore her to happiness. He left her apparently calm. How he wished she had upbraided or cursed him; but the look of patient, profound melancholy, and when she tried to smile, the vacant, wistful look, cut him to the heart.

He left money with the people of the house for her in Mr. Robert Elton's name; they had been old servants of the family, and he knew that it would be safely applied, and did everything that lay in his power to undo the wrong that he had done her, but how little could it be? Her look of vacant, tearless grief haunted him, and their first meeting and their then parting came like a vision before his eyes.

He saw a gay, bright girl—happy in her own station of life—parents, friends, lovers, everything

that could make her happy. He had taken her away from all this. He came, and won her confidence and love, and now—what an utter wreck and ruin had he made!

Every one who looks back through their lives must see how everything great or small, however trifling its importance may seem at the moment, tends to the one definite end, and how the most trivial incidents fit into their own places, to work the greatest changes for better or worse.

Had Reginald been now guided by calm reason: or had he any judicious friend to advise him, he would have carefully avoided the woman he loved until his own mind was more calm, and the startling incident which had broken in on them the night before had somewhat faded from her memory; but that inflexible destiny which rules our lives, and makes us its instrument while we seem free agents, guided him to her in his present shattered condition of body and mind.

Were I writing a romance, I would describe her seated in her boudoir, or in some bower of roses, surrounded by every attribute of luxury and wealth,

and attired in one of those ravishing morning costumes, which women are said to wear in order to captivate the other sex, but in reality to drive their own mad with envy. But I must describe her where she was in sober reality, making pastry for the dinner, down in the still room, an apartment in which, in former days, young ladies spent a good deal of their time, with great advantage to their charms, mental and bodily, and in which they made themselves much better prepared for the future duties of life than the majority of them are supposed to do under the present more fashionable and useless young lady dispensation.

With the freedom of a cousin, and one living in the house, he sought her out, and found her looking, if anything, more bright, gay, saucy, and enchanting, than perhaps at any previous moment of their acquaintance. Her lithe, graceful figure was enveloped in a long dress of grey serge, confined round the waist by a simple belt, which set off her exquisite proportions as no silk, satin, crinoline, *crinolette*, or other abomination of French fashions could have done.

As he came near, she was leaning over a table rolling out pastry, and started up laughing, armed

with a rolling-pin, in size and shape like a field-marshal's truncheon, shaking back the profusion of golden hair that had fallen over her face. Her arms, which were bare to the elbow, were covered with flour, and showed how little they required of artificial powder to enhance their whiteness. She blushed when she was thus discovered in her domestic duties, and the changing light in her deep grey eyes, sometimes sad, sometimes thoughtful, now flashed with playful, saucy *badinage*. It formed a picture never to be forgotten, and which he remembered to the last hour of his life.

He sat down near the table on which she was now cutting the paste into long delicate strips.

"Pardon me for interrupting you. I am not given to flattery, but I never saw you look so lovely as you do in that dress."

She gave a saucy laugh.

"Unless you wish to learn how to make pastry, I cannot see what you want here."

How little does the world know of the passion that is lurking unseen in everyday life, and which now and then crops up in the most unexpected places and in individuals apparently most removed, by age and circumstances, from its power. How little real

passion is there often in the brilliant ball-room or splendid conservatory, although so many love-scenes are laid there; and how many a tragedy of real life has taken place in the cold, hard, business-like, unsympathising railway station, amid a selfish, struggling crowd! Who, that has ever felt, does not know that it was in some such place, or in some dingy room, or in some strangely-unromantic spot, that the dearest or the saddest episodes of life have taken place! Annabel was in her gayest and most thoughtless mood—as changed from the yielding being of last night as though months had passed. Had Reginald been wise he would have left her, or not have approached the subject uppermost in his own mind; or he would have tried to accommodate himself to her present mood, and be gay when she was gay. But fate urged him on, and he could not escape from it.

"Annabel, have you thought over what I said last night? You seemed then to listen to me as though you could love me. Will you not now say that little word which will make me the happiest of mankind?"

"I think we were talking a great deal of nonsense, and that I was very foolish—perhaps wrong

—in listening to you. I forget all about it, except that you were very lackadaisical, and that we seemed to be rehearsing the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet!*"

This is the most aggravating thing in love-making—the sudden change of mood in woman.

We have been conjugating the verb "to love" in the present tense in apparent harmony—"I love, thou lovest." The next morning we find it all changed into the subjunctive—"If I love, it thou lovest." The day before, the battle has seemed almost won; the "Up, Guards, and at them!" has been all but uttered, the iron has been hot, and we were ready to strike the final blow, but for some interruption. An acquaintance, how undesired, has come in—a rude brother, a foolish child, has broken in on us, or the news that dinner is ready or tea waiting has intervened. As the philosopher was interrupted, just as he was about to solve the great problem of his life, by the demand whether he would like the mutton boiled or roast, so our problem just solved has been interrupted; and next day the iron is cold, the enemy has brought up new forces, all has to be begun over again, and the end seems as far off as ever.

Had he been wise he would have left it for a more favourable occasion; but he was ill and exhausted—full of himself and his own unhappiness and remorse—and instead of showing himself to her as a strong staff on which she could lean through life and gain support; he appeared as a weak, melancholy man who would lean on her, and look up to her as the good angel who alone could rescue and help him.

"Nay—do not answer me thus. I have nothing in the world but the hope of your love. I am an utterly miserable man. Were it not for you, I would have no hope in life, nothing worth living for."

She heard him with astonishment, somewhat mingled with dread.

"I fear I have been very wrong in permitting you to address me as you did last night. You have only known me for a very short time. If you knew me better you would soon find out your mistake."

"No, Annabel, it is not so—I see in you everything that is angelic and good. You possess an influence over me such as no other woman ever has done or can do; you alone can guide me to a better life; with you alone I can hope to blot out the past, and live a better future."

"If you knew me better you would soon learn how little I am able to guide or influence any one—I who only feel how much I require to be guided and supported myself. You seem inclined to set me on a pedestal and worship me; if you had your own way you would soon find that your goddess was made of clay, and depose her from the elevation on which your imagination had placed her, and then blame her for not being all that your fancy had painted her."

"Do not answer me thus. I am utterly, thoroughly wretched. Do not jest away my happiness, and give a final blow to a life that is all but lost, and which your love alone can restore——"

"I fear you do not understand me. I have no wish to jest or be unkind, but I cannot answer as you would wish. When you talk so wildly of having no life, and speak in a tone of such remorse, you only terrify me, and prove to me how utterly unable I should be to give you the happiness you seek; and how surely I should make my own future misery were I weakly persuaded to yield to your entreaties."

"Why should you not be happy with me, when

my entire life would be devoted to making you happy? Oh, Annabel, if you could see this heart laid bare before you, you would see every pulse, every throb, beats for you alone!"

"Let us be friends. Some day you will thank me for having acted as I am doing now. You do not know me as I know myself. Seek out some woman who is wise, and calm, and good, and with her you may hope for that happiness which you foolishly think that I am capable of giving you."

She held out her hand in such a kind and playful manner that he could not refuse; and was forced to be content with her answer.

"Time alone will teach you how truly I love you; but I do not give up hope that you will soon change your feelings, and on that hope I will live for the present."

He kissed her hand as he left her, and quitted the house to take a long, solitary walk.

She felt relieved when he was gone. She was beginning to feel afraid of him—the wildness of his manner, his remorse and unhappiness, all gave her a well-founded dread that there was some truth in Ridgway's story. She, too, was not happy, and between her two lovers entangled gradually in the

meshes of a web from which saw no escape. Her family were beginning to feel alarmed at her reputation as a flirt, and would be justly angry if she refused her cousin; and yet, much as she liked him, she could not bring herself to marry him, and could scarcely help smiling as she felt how truly she envied some of her plain acquaintances, who were not troubled with any lovers whatsoever.

But Reginald left her in a much more unhappy frame of mind. He did not despair, but he was vanquished and baffled. It was a bad day's work from every point of view. He had been refused by the woman he loved, and he had broken the heart of the woman who loved him.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN Mr. Elton returned from India, he brought back with him a variety of new ideas, which he set himself at once to carry out, with all the energy and regularity of a clear-headed man of business.

He had been a wise and able Governor of the immense province then under his control, and had once saved it from a famine, which had desolated all the neighbouring ones, by buying up, at his own risk, immense stores of grain and rice, which he sold to the natives at the price which he had paid, merely clearing the expenses. Had he only charged one farthing a stone he could have cleared a million of money; but at the cost of numerous lives. When he was an old man the recollection of this was very pleasant to him; and he would often say—"I must soon go out of this world, and that one reflection gives me the greatest happiness; I have not one drop of black blood on my soul."

He now brought the same benevolence and ability to bear on the restricted area of his new life. He was the originator of the savings bank, at which he attended every Monday, until his death at eighty-five. The new county jail was the object of his constant care and supervision: but his favourite hobby was the new lunatic asylum, then just organized on the new and humane system of gentleness and kindness, in place of the old plan of chains and flogging, gloomy dungeons, and other methods considered by our ancestors, as the most sovereign remedy for bringing mad people to their senses.

There was a sort of *fête* there, at which the lunatics who were not dangerous were to dance in the open air; and Mr. Elton, with some little difficulty, persuaded some of his own family and Reginald to accompany him to it, being most anxious to learn whether it was conducted in the same manner as the new ones in England, and in order that his English nephew should bring away with him an exalted opinion of the civilization of Richland.

The asylum was a large and handsome edifice of cut stone, standing in a trimly-kept garden, planted with handsome shrubs and flowers. It was one of those public buildings which, like Greenwich Hos-

pital, strike foreigners with astonishment, when they learn the purposes for which they are used. Any one entering the town, through nearly a mile of low, filthy, thatched mud cabins—on the roofs of which as much grass was growing as in the fields—with small square holes, generally stopped with old hats, to serve as windows, and walls as green as the ponds in front of them, would have naturally supposed that this was the Governor's house, the Lord Mayor's residence, or the palace of some important public functionary, and would have been surprised to learn that it was the house for pauper lunatics, and that the other cut-stone building near it was the county jail.

After partaking of luncheon in the doctor's apartments, they were led through the building, and here the exquisite cleanliness, order, and regularity, showed the efficiency of the new system.

In one of the large squares outside, all the quiet and harmless patients were assembled, and in the centre of it was a large wooden platform, on which they were to dance. They were all clean and well fed, and looked absolutely gay at the prospects of the ball. A poor crazed musician, who fancied himself Paganini, and that all the musical world had combined to rob him of his fame and glory, and through

jealousy had shut him up there, now condescended, on being asked by a deputation, as Paganini, to play to them while they danced. He was treated outwardly with the utmost respect, and thanked after each dance for his beautiful music; but in secret each smiled to him or herself at the delusion under which he was labouring, each knowing well that he was only a poor Richland teacher of music, who had gone mad on thorough bass, and an endeavour to compose an opera.

The next most important personage was a dancing master, who had fancied himself Lord Chesterfield, and that he had been shut up there by the Prince Regent through jealousy, on account of the impression he had made on the Marchioness of ——. He acted as master of the ceremonies, and danced and directed the others with the most ludicrous grimaces and contortions; but at all times paid the greatest attention to a little old lady, who was seated in state, and addressed by them all with many covert smiles as Queen Charlotte. One fat, jolly old woman, especially attracted their attention; she led the dances with much vigour, and performed a variety of astonishing steps, winding up with a jig with Lord Chesterfield, at the express

desire of Queen Charlotte, who testified her extreme approval, and took heaps of snuff like the august lady whom she represented. Mr. Elton's brother, the dean, who made one of the party, was inclined to think that there must be some mistake, and that this vigorous dancer was one of the female warders or keepers, whom they took for a lunatic.

He took the doctor aside and pointed her out.

"You do not mean to tell me, doctor, that that jolly, rosy, happy woman is mad! There must be some mistake; I never saw a more sensible or happy-looking person in the entire county of Richland."

"That woman," said the doctor, "murdered her three children, and is one of the most hopeless cases in the asylum."

"Is it possible," said the Dean, starting back. "How easily one is deceived."

"You must see strange things, doctor. What is, now, the most common hallucination from which they suffer?" asked Mr. Elton, joining them.

"Well, we meet with all kinds. We generally have a king or queen, a judge or two, or a Lord Chancellor: which reminds me of a thing that occurred at Swift's, in Dublin.

"The present chancellor, who, of course, is a member of the board, went there one day shortly after his appointment. He happened to be shown into a waiting-room by himself, being a little too early, and it chanced that on the same day a patient was expected, and by some mistake the chancellor, who was a very plain man, and dresses very badly, was mistaken for the expected patient. After waiting for some time he rang the bell, and told the keeper who answered it that he could not possibly wait any longer, and must go home if the others were not ready. The keeper tried to humour him, by making several commonplace remarks, at the same time keeping his eye on him, and barring the door."

"What do you mean by this conduct?" said the chancellor, angrily. "I shall complain to the doctor."

"Keep quiet, now; that's a good man," said the keeper. "It will soon be all right."

"Do you know who I am?" said the chancellor, angrily.

"Oh, yes, of course. You're the Emperor of China, we have been expecting you this long time."

"No, sir: I am the Lord Chancellor," thinking at once to awe the man when he heard this title.

"Oh yes, of course. Take it easy. Bless your soul, we have six Lord Chancellors here already."

"Dear me, how strange," said the dean, "of course he was not kept long?"

"Oh no, the moment the doctor arrived he was released, and they had a hearty laugh at his imprisonment."

"Have you many interesting cases now?" asked the little, old dean, who was possessed with an insatiable curiosity. "I suppose disappointments in love, and religious enthusiasm, are the great causes of insanity—at least, so I have heard."

"Well, they may bring in a few," said the doctor. "But I should say that 'whiskey' was the great cause. About sixty per cent. come here from insanity caused by drink, and numbers are sent out cured when they can be kept under control, and not allowed to indulge in it. I have had some in four or five times from the same cause. If we could abolish drink we might close the asylum."

"Dear me, dear me. I should have thought that moderate drinking would tend to cheerfulness, you know, 'wine that maketh glad the heart of man.'"

"Ah, whiskey was not invented in those days, or

we should have records of lunatic asylums in Palestine."

"Dear me, dear me, how strange," said the little dean, who, although a temperate man, shared the idea of most of the clergy of those days, that drinking in moderation, especially of port wine, was quite an orthodox habit, and rather separated the Church of England from the Dissenters.

Dean Elton was brother to Mr. Robert Elton He had been put into Holy Orders in order to occupy the family living, and had risen to one of the numerous deaneries which, with archdeaconries and rich livings, seemed to make up for the want of congregations in the south of Ireland.

He was a remarkably handsome old man, now grey, but in his youth with jet black hair and whiskers. When shaved, his chin bore the marks of the blue-black beard which should have grown there, and it and his upper lip excited the envy of light-haired cavalry officers who, being the only people then allowed to wear moustaches, seemed by some curious fatality to have generally had red ones.

Richland abounded in good stories about all its principal inhabitants, one was related of the dean, that he chose for the text of his first sermon,

"Though I am black, I am comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem." Punning texts were common in those days; but in spite of them he was an energetic and good clergyman; clever and well read—as innocent as a child—and devoured by a child-like curiosity, but beloved by all, especially by his nephews and nieces, whom he now persuaded, after some difficulty, to follow him and see all the curiosities of the place.

"We have now a really curious case," said the doctor. "A young girl was brought in this morning, who seems to have fallen from the clouds, as no one knows who she is or where she came from. She was found floating down the river on a gandolo, a sort of flat-bottomed boat that they use for fishing about here. She was sitting in it, carried down with the tide, and singing a plaintive Scotch ballad. I fancy she must be some poor creature who had been deserted by her lover or husband, and that she had some vague idea of following him, perhaps to India, by that means. She has remained sitting in the one attitude of hopeless grief, plunged in a profound melancholy. She is a lovely girl, and has not yet had her long hair cut off. We were afraid of doing so, as the idea seemed to fret her, and I wished her to rest and take some food first."

"Dear me, dear me," said the little dean, "we must see her. Come, girls. How interesting. Do you think she will recover?"

"It is impossible to say, youth and a good constitution may do something."

"Do you think we might see her? It might rouse her, you know."

"I do not think it can do any harm. If anything could rouse her, it would be the best thing for her."

"Come along, girls. Come, Reginald. It is exactly like the scene out of Mackensie's *Man of Feeling*."

There was some demur, but the dean had his own way at last, and they followed the doctor to another part of the building.

The girl was seated on a truckle-bed in a small chamber, with only one grated window, through which the light fell on her as though on a picture; in her face and attitude there was something of the pathetic portrait of Guido's, which has come down to us as "Beatrice Cenci."

Her form was bent slightly forward, her hands clasped, as though in supplication, and her face almost covered with the long, silky, dark hair that

fell in profusion around her. Her eyes had a vacant, fixed look, as though seeking for something she had lost; and in the long, deep, hopeless gaze, there was an air of profound melancholy, which went to the hearts of the beholders. At times she sang a few words of her little ballad, in a low, sweet voice, to an air of her own.

"A chieftain to the Highlands bound,
Cried, 'Boatman, do not tarry,
And I'll give thee a silver pound
To row me o'er the ferry.'"

And then she would lift her head and gaze as if into another world of vacancy.

"Come, come, my dear, and speak to these kind gentlemen and ladies who have come to see you. Tell them what you want and they will try to help you. Whom are you seeking at the ferry? we may be able to help you to find him."

She turned her sad eyes, and they rested on each in turn with a deep, longing, earnest gaze. As they rested on Reginald Elton, his cheek blanched and his heart almost ceased to beat. But, after a long, fixed look, they wandered on as if she had never seen him before. As they rested on him with the vacant look of lost reason, more horrible than recognition,

the words of Marguerite in *Faust* flashed across his mind like a prophetic appeal.

"And hast thou, then, forgot that kiss of thine,
My love? so short a time away, and yet
To have forgotten all these signs of love—
Why do I feel so sad upon thy neck?
Oh! there was once a time when all thy words,
And every glance of thine seemed heaven to me,
And warmly did'st thou press me to thine heart.
Oh! let me feel once more that loved embrace,
Alas! thy lips are cold and dumb. Ah! where—
Where is thy love? Who robbed me of thy love?" [1]

She looked at him again, long and earnestly, as though some vague recollections were passing through her brain. It seemed as though it brought some sense of pain, more bitter than the vague sense of loss, which plunged her in despair. She started up from the couch, raised her hands to her forehead, and put back her hair wildly; then clasped them over her head, swaying her body backward, lifting her eyes to heaven as though in mute appeal, and, with a deep groan of anguish, fell heavily at his feet.

Reginald Elton turned away as if a dagger had gone through his heart. In the poor mad girl he recognized the victim of his vanity and crime.

[1] Anster's Faust.

CHAPTER IX.

EYRE ELTON, ESQ., D.L., J.P., of Elton Towers, County Richland, as he loved to be designated, was the elder brother of Mr. Robert Elton, and lived in state on the family property of Desmondstown, about twenty miles from the city of Richland. There were to be great festivities at Elton Towers, on the marriage of his eldest daughter, who was about to be led to the Hymeneal altar, as the *Richland Chronicle* described the event in the usual heathen fashionable diction, by the favourite nephew of a wealthy Glasgow merchant, about whose ready money, fabulous stories were circulated, that being then a very scarce article in Richland generally, and at no place more so than at Elton Towers.

The entire Elton Clan assembled to do honour to the bridegroom elect, and his monied uncle, who was to grace the wedding with his presence. Among the first to arrive were the household from Richland, including Mr. Reginald Elton, who, being an

Englishman, was considered a sort of set-off against the Scottish merchant prince.

There could not possibly be a greater contrast in appearance, manner, and character than there was between Mr. Robert Elton and his brother. While the younger had been acquiring habits of self-control, order, and regularity, while making a fortune in India; the other had been acquiring exactly the opposite ones, while living the life of a petty chieftain, and devoting his time to fox-hunting, racing, and conviviality. While the one had rubbed off all the angles of his character, by contact with the world around him; the other had cultivated and indelibly fixed all his peculiarities, by living in a retired part of the country, among his family, tenants, and retainers, with few equals and no superiors. He was a benevolent despot; loved by all, feared by none; and gave the law equally at the little Petty Sessions Court at Desmondstown, and among his own followers and family; and from the fox-cover in the morning to drinking toasts in the evening, was, in every respect, a perfect example of the good-natured, hospitable, proud, eccentric, wasteful, generous, simple-minded old Irish country gentleman.

He had been educated at Eton and Cambridge, and had passed the first few years of his manhood as a young "Blood" in London, where he had mingled with the set about the Prince of Wales, and shared the follies and vices of the period. On coming in for his property, however, he had come over to Ireland, married, and settled down; and for nearly thirty years had not left Elton Towers, except to go in state to Richland twice a year, when called to serve on the grand jury. He had, as the natural consequences of this life, grown into one of those characters which are now fast disappearing, if not entirely gone out of the world. With the coarse exterior of a jolly Irish squire was mingled the old-fashioned politeness in vogue before the French Revolution; and oaths, jokes, and stories of rather an equivocal kind were interlarded with scraps of pedantic learning, quotations from Virgil and Horace, and anecdotes of the Prince of Wales and the set about him at Carlton House. He was something of an Irish Sir Roger de Coverley; and the pride and imperiousness resulting from his bringing up and mode of life were tempered with a real charity and benevolence, that more than neutralized them, and made him the most popular and beloved neighbour and landlord in his district.

The old ruined town of Desmondstown, close to which Elton Towers is situated, has been called the Palmyra of Ireland. It consisted in those days of a long street of cut stone houses, dating from the reign of Queen Elizabeth, with arched stone entrances and carved stone mullioned windows, some of them still possessing the remains of the rich gilding with which they had been adorned, and all the other marks of taste and beauty which marked the period at which they had been built by the magnificent Earl of Desmond and his retainers; at a time when Richland was only a little provincial town, and when letters of the period were directed to Richland, near Desmondstown.

This part of Richland is situated in the celebrated Golden Vein, or Vale, which is composed of a deep alluvial soil, and stretches away east until it meets the mountains; it produces such rich pasture that parts of it will fatten a bullock and sheep to the Irish acre. It was an old and oft-quoted story, illustrative of the rapid growth of grass, that a stick left out at night could not be found in the morning, until it was surpassed by a County Tipperary man, who declared that he would back his county to beat it—"For that, if a horse was left out in a field

about him, you would not find it in the morning,"—which was certainly true, by all accounts!

Desmondstown is situated in an undulating valley, surrounded by mountains, watered by innumerable lovely streams; and the traveller who stands on the top of the hill, looking towards the east, sees at his feet a panorama unsurpassed in Europe for richness and beauty.

The old ruined city of the Desmonds lies at his feet, with its ivy-covered moated walls and tall castellated towers and palaces; while below them, among the rich green pastures and meadows by the river side, nestles the ruined abbey, with its tall square tower, reminding one not a little, in miniature, of Melrose Abbey on the Tweed. Far beyond is an undulating plain of rich pasture land, well planted, and studded with gentlemen's seats; and bounding all, as in an amphitheatre, a range of lofty hills joining the Galtee Mountains, which rise to the height of over two thousand feet above the level of the sea.

Elton Towers lay to the right of the old city, part of whose ruined ivy-covered walls now did duty as the demesne one. It was one of those patched houses which every one condemns, and still, which

every one as a rule in Ireland, invariably builds. This was partly due to the Irish rule of beginning on such a grand and extravagant scale that, before the building was half run up, the money was entirely run through; like the signs and names over shops, which are there begun with such magnificently large letters that before half the name and trade is inserted the space is nearly exhausted, and the remainder has to be squeezed up in a corner in the smallest possible letters.

Mr. Elton's father, who had princely notions about most things, but about architecture in particular: after he had nearly ruined himself in a contested election for the Borough of Desmondstown; tried to repair his fortune by building a mansion and offices which would have been very suitable for a duke with a hundred thousand a year.

He commenced with the offices, (intended hereafter for a steward's house and stabling) in the very largest print. They were built of cut stone. The steward's apartments consisted of eight or ten splendid rooms, and formed one side of a quadrangle, the other two sides comprising half a dozen coach-houses and stabling for about fifty horses. When this was finished in the highest style of decoration

of the period, he moved into it, while the dwelling house was being erected in a style suitable to the offices; but after the foundations and one story were built the funds fell short; so the house was left unfinished, and Mr. Elton was obliged to content himself for the remainder of his life in the offices, which were finer than most of the houses in the neighbourhood. He married late in life, and his eldest son, the present Mr. Eyre Elton, came in for the property unencumbered, and with savings of a long minority, while his younger brothers all made fortunes for themselves after the manner of the family.

Mr. Robert Elton had gone to India and shaken the "Pagoda Tree" to some purpose, as he returned with a larger fortune than his elder brother; whilst the dean, in addition to his deanery, had a snug parish consisting of several townlands, without any Protestants in them, but bringing him in an income of nearly a thousand a year; it being generally the rule in the south of Ireland that the fewer the parishioners were, the larger was the income.

When Mr. Eyre Elton came to settle on the property, he found himself with splendid offices built, and a magnificent mansion just begun. He natur-

ally felt that he ought to finish it in the style of magnificence in which it had been planned and commenced, and again encumber the property for another generation; but fortunately he was saved from this by an accident, resulting from the very extravagance of his father.

When old Mr. Elton had built the offices—as he intended occupying them for a year or two at least—he had moulded all the walls and ceilings in the most costly and beautiful manner of the period. He had discovered a native artist full of genius and taste, and entrusted this part to him, and he had done it in a manner that made the offices a show place; one ceiling in particular had been painted in fresco, with allegorical figures, which were the wonder and delight of the country round. It was this ceiling that saved Mr. Eyre Elton; and the extravagance which the father lavished on the offices, neutralized the extravagance of the son, as one poison does another.

The offices were too handsome to leave to a steward, and the ceiling could not be removed, and this decided him; so he resolved to throw down the portion of the new house, which commanded a beautiful view of the lake and old city, and to add to the offices, and, like Mahomet's mountain, as the

ceiling could not be brought to the house, he determined to bring the house to the ceiling. He sent therefore for an architect, celebrated for remodelling old houses—most costly and uncomfortable to live in—but which all allowed had displayed the peculiar genius of the architect: and gave him orders to pull down the half-finished house, and with the materials, plan one which should leave him the offices and his ceiling, and be a residence worthy of the owner of Beech Mount, for that was the old name of the Elton family residence.

Every gentleman's place in the county of Richland, no matter whether it be situated in a deep valley, a smooth plain, or built in the most uncompromising style of a bald square house, or small cottage, is a Hall, a Mount, a House, or a Castle. Beech Mount was no exception to this. Although beautifully situated, and surrounded by mountains, and with a broad and extensive lake, still there was not near the house a hill or a mount much larger than a mole-hill, and on this account, probably, the name had been chosen—on the usual *lucus a non lucendo* principle.

The architect, Mr. Blundel, took in everything at a glance. He was a wise man in his generation, and

although a bad judge of architecture, was a good one of human nature; he at once saw the man with whom he had to deal, and he measured him for the house as a tailor would for a suit of clothes. He designed and sent in a plan which so took Mr. Elton's taste, that no arguments or remonstrances could alter his opinion about it. The architect designed a new front of cut stone, embattled at the top, and flanked by two lofty round towers. He simply tacked this on to the old offices as he might have tacked a new velvet collar to one of Mr. Elton's old coats, but under all was a large scroll in old English letters, with the new name—

"Elton Towers,
The Residence of Eyre Elton, Esq., D.L., J.P., etc., etc."

The name did the business, and he was at once commissioned to execute his design, and build the new front facing the wrong way.

In the new house everything was sacrificed to the hall and towers. The house was intersected by two stone corridors, crossing each other, and no matter which way the winds blew, they took these corridors on their way, as the doors had been ingeniously planned, so as to catch them all. The dining-room

and kitchen were at the extreme ends of the house, and no dinner ever arrived hot, after having had an airing through the long stone corridor. The principal drawing-room looked out on the yards and stables, and although all the rooms were profusely decorated with stucco and gilding, few of them had bells. If any of the rooms had them, they were generally out of order; but this made little difference in a period when people were much more independent than they are in the present days.

Such was the aspect of Elton Towers, at the door of which stood old Eyre Elton, ready to welcome his brother and his family with true Irish hospitality and delight.

Mr. Elton was a stout, hearty, full-blooded man, with that peculiar red, raspy complexion which betokens good living, combined with a healthy out-of-doors life. His hair and whiskers were a sort of yellowy white, and the contrast made his skin look as red as brick dust. His eyes were light, and from constant exposure to the wind, generally a little bloodshot; and his entire appearance fulfilled to the life the expression so common in the olden times, of "a jolly old cock."

His temperament was sanguine and choleric; his

favourite amusement was fox hunting; his favourite expression, "zounds." But his ruling passion was hospitality. It was once said of him, after his death, by an old servant of his, who met a gentleman in the village of Desmondstown—

"Ah! the poor Master! If he was alive, and knew that you were here, and could not have you up to dine with him—his dinner would not agree with him!"

He had an idea of his own, that his occupation was farming; but this in reality consisted in a very easy but unprofitable method known to most of the Irish gentry in those days, which consisted of—

"Buying and selling, and living by the loss."

It seemed, however, to amuse him, and keep him in health. He was one of the last of the Irish squires to keep up the old dress, consisting of a bright blue swallowtailed coat, with bright brass buttons, a white baggy cravat, a gorgeous waistcoat—such as is worn on the stage by those delightful old uncles, who always, in the end, bless their nephews, and give them immense wealth and the lady of their love—leather breeches, from the fob of which descended a massive gold chain, terminating in a bunch of huge

gold seals; top boots, wrinkled below, over the tops of which his calves stuck out like a pair of large puddings; a walking stick, more like a club than a cane; and a low broad-brimmed hat, completed his attire.

He continued till near the end of his life staunch to this costume, in spite of all his wife's entreaties that he would dress like the rest of the world; until one day his fancy was taken by some new tweeds which a pedlar brought to the door. He was especially struck by one bright green tartan with yellow cross bars, of the very largest pattern extant; so that he resolved to gratify his wife, and give her a surprise, and got a suit of it made up privately by the village tailor, who exercised his skill to such advantage as almost to drive Mrs. Elton and his daughters into hysterics, when the squire appeared at breakfast in his new garments. The coat was a modern shooting coat, but the pattern was so large that he appeared as it were mapped out in three large green fields, divided by yellow hedges, as Mrs. Elton described it, when telling a friend. In addition to this, the tailor had exerted his ingenuity in giving him pockets in every conceivable part of it, in all about eighteen, for powder horn, caps, wads, flask, &c., &c.,

so that most of his time at first was spent in emptying them out when he wanted to find his knife or pocket-handkerchief; but he admired it immensely, and could not be persuaded to change it, except when he went to church, or into Richland for the Grand Jury.

But the great time to see the master of the house was after breakfast, when he sat at the open window of his study or library, dispensing justice as a magistrate; receiving rents as a landlord; purchasing fish, flesh, fowl, game, eggs, mushrooms, as the season might be, and chaffering with pedlars or oystermen who regularly took the Towers on their rounds.

Round the window a regular levee would be assembled—a couple of policemen with a prisoner, a dozen countrymen with geese, turkeys, chickens, and ducks, a tenant with a hare from the mountains, others with their back rents, a donkey cart with codfish, herrings, or oysters, and dozens of small children with bowls of eggs or mushrooms. He went through them all in order—the prisoner was committed, the rents received, the various other commodities purchased in such profusion that Mrs. Elton, although a good housekeeper, was sometimes

aghast at the stores thrust on her hands in hot weather—a couple of dozen lobsters, or a barrel of oysters was not uncommon.

As the sellers were paid, each got something over and above; the men a glass of whiskey, the women a little snuff, the children some apples, often very unripe. As for small copper coin, he kept such a supply that many of the people thought he had a seignorial right to coin it for himself.

This took rise from the fact that once, when a new copper coinage came out, he was the first to bring back ten pounds worth of it from the bank; but when he began to pay it, he found out that all expected double prices for their commodities.

When he remonstrated angrily, one old woman spoke up for the rest.

"Shure, then; what does it matther what yer honor pays, whin ye can make as many of them as ye likes—*Haven't ye got the 'mould' inside?*"

Some of the whiskey might have been objected to by a fastidious palate. He had got down a cask of very fine whiskey from Dublin, and had divided it into smaller ones; the first time it was tried, it had a most extraordinary taste.

"Zounds," said Mr. Elton, "this must have been

put into the cask that held the *train oil*. Never mind, it will do for drams!"—and so it did, and was highly esteemed for its strange flavour, as something peculiar, patronized by the quality.

The hall door was, as usual, hospitably open; over it was a motto engraved on the stone, "Mihi, vobisque."

Not a bad emblem of Irish hospitality in the olden time.

"Zounds, Robert, I am glad to see you, you look as fresh as a 'two-year-old.' I hope, madam, I see you well, you are welcome to Elton Towers. Welcome, girls, welcome—blooming as usual—I must have a kiss, that is the least we old bucks are entitled to. Welcome, Annabel, my tight wench; whose heart have you been breaking last?

"'Quis multa gracilis te puer in rosa
Perfusus liquidis urget odoribus,
Grato, Pyrrha, sub Antro?
Cui flavam religas comam
Simplex munditiis? Heu quoties fidem
Mutatosque Deos flebit.' . . .

"Never mind, though, the right man will come at the right time, and will master you, as I'd tame a tricky young colt."

The girls hurried off blushing, as their uncle's jokes were generally more broad than elegant, and Reginald was introduced to his new relation.

"You are welcome, sir. I am proud of the honour of making your acquaintance. I would have gone into Richland to call on you, but I felt sure you would excuse me when you saw how busy I was here. We'll teach you farming before you go back to England." And he looked complacently round the yard, where most of the gates had not been painted for years; many were off their hinges and none had locks, most being tied with hay ropes called "Soogauns." "Nothing like farming to shake off the smoke of the city.

> "'Agricolam laudat juris legumque peritus.
> Sub galli cantum, consultor ubi ostia pulsat.'

After luncheon, we'll go round the farm, and then see the horses fed. No danger of having their teeth greased then."

He was as good as his word; and Reginald, for the first time in his life, was introduced to a real Irish country house and establishment.

It was not exactly a Castle Rackrent, for Mr. Elton, through all his eccentricities, preserved one

trait of his English ancestors, a horror of debt. But in all other respects it was a picture of wastefulness and neglect. Paint was an unknown article in the domestic economy. When a new timber gate was put up it often rotted on its hinges before it was painted, and was then perhaps replaced by a new one or by an old cart without wheels to fill up the gap. The harness was stitched up by the coachman, when broken; sometimes mended by tenpenny nails, driven through the traces and clenched. When the nursery cups and saucers were broken, some old Sevrès from the china closet were taken out to replace them; old cut glasses of the purest crystal found their way into the kitchen, for the want of a few shillings to pay for common ones.

The plantations were destroyed for want of thinning; the hedges for want of pruning. If a tree fell, it lay where it fell until it decayed. The avenue was never gravelled; he once went so far as to have heaps of gravel put out along it; but they were never spread, and served to overturn many an unwary visitor who came to dine on a dark night without lamps. But all this was a matter of course, and no one felt aggrieved; it was reckoned as part of the fun and jollity pertaining to Elton Towers.

"By the bye, Robert, have you seen the new tutor? He is a Kerry lad and speaks Latin like a native."

Mr. Elton's manner of procuring a tutor for his sons was even more original than most of his other conceptions. He was seated one morning at his study window, buying fowl and eggs, etc., when Larry O'Sullivan, the oysterman, came up on his rounds with his cart loaded with fresh Poldoody oysters from the coast of Burrin. When Mr. Elton had concluded his purchase, Larry opened his budget of news. It turned somehow on education, and Mr. Elton interrupted him by asking if he could recommend him a good tutor for his sons.

"Faix, then that is what I can, Colonel! I know a boy down the County Kerry that 'ill just suit ye—an illigant Latin scholar, understands 'jommethry,' and can put a hole in any manner of larnin'. I'll be passing there next week, and will send him down if your Honour will give him a thrial."

Accordingly, soon after, the tutor arrived, and proved to be a capital one, and remained there for some years.

The title of Colonel was another of Mr. Elton's

peculiarities; there was a vague idea extant, founded chiefly on an old military cloak, which he used to wear on cold days when out in the fields, that he had at some period of his life been in the Militia; and on this account the title of Colonel began to be applied by the common people as a sort of mark of chieftainship, and gratified that love for titles which the lower order of Irish share with the Germans.

Mr. Elton was as good as his word, and showed them round the farm; and then, as a special treat, showed them the horses being fed.

The young Eltons and their Richland cousins had enjoyed the English one's looks of astonishment as Mr. Elton gravely pointed out to him all the details of Irish farming, which consisted of pasture fields, showing the wonderful richness of the soil by the size and luxuriance of the weeds—there were thistles that almost vied with the garden artichokes; yellow rag-weed, so tall and strong that they seemed like young plantations of some strange yellow tree—among which the reclining cattle were quite invisible, and standing among which the smaller Kerry cows barely showed their horns. He had provoked their laughter when he exclaimed—

"Dear me, the cows have got into a field of

cabbages!" which, on closer inspection, turned out to be a patch of lordly docks, quite as large and luxuriant as any cabbages in the garden. They were amused when he was caught in an apparent shower of snow, which was the white seeds of the full-blown thistles and ragwort—all of which Mr. Elton saw with perfect equanimity, as if the land was intended to produce weeds instead of grass.

They were highly delighted when the old gentleman showed them a dry, washed-out litter, which he called hay, which was never cut until it was white with age, and always kept through the fine weather uncut, waiting for the rain.

"Now, come along, and you'll see the 'Wind-up'—the Patent Rat Exterminator!" said Jack Elton, the Jack Pudding of the sons; and they all followed the old gentleman up a narrow, shaky, rotten, wooden staircase which led up to one of the lofts over the stables.

In a corner of this was an immense oat-bin, apparently capable of containing a small field of oats.

Mr. Elton proceeded to unlock a large padlock, while the boys stood by in silent delight. When he had opened the bin, he made a great effort with his body; buried his right arm up to the shoulder in

the oats, and after some groping brought up in triumph a huge, old silver turnip watch. This he proceeded to wind up. He then put it to his ear, and again plunged it deep down among the oats, where they could hear it ticking loudly. When he came again to the surface, puffing and blowing and red in the face, he turned gravely to Reginald.

"That is a plan of my own, which I invented for keeping away the rats! They hear it ticking among the oats, and think it is something alive. Come along, boys. It is time to see the horses fed, and then to dress for dinner. Do not be making eyes at the dairy girls."

Such was the "wind-up," as Reginald saw it, of the before-dinner wonders of Elton Towers.

CHAPTER X.

At Elton Towers dinner was the great event of the day. Seldom less than twenty sat down to it, and, when the host was at the top, he felt like a king, and was as happy as the traditional one. He looked, indeed, like some old chieftain, and might have sat for the picture of Göethe's King of Thule.

Mr. Elton's family, like his brother's, was of goodly proportions, and alone formed a good-sized dinner-party, and in the hunting-field a respectably-sized meet.

They also partook of the family qualities of robust health and longevity; they usually lived to ninety, and, unless killed in a duel or from a broken neck out fox-hunting, it was considered rather a disgrace to die before that period. Mr. Elton's father had reached it, although for many years doomed to an early death by his followers and retainers, in consequence of his having planted one

of the forts—commonly called "Danish," but in reality the abodes of the early Celts or aborigines—in the neighbourhood. One day he gave orders to the steward that the labouring men should commence planting it at six next morning; but, when he came on the ground, he found them all standing idle. No one would turn the first sod; there was an old superstition that the one who did so would die within the year.

When he learnt the cause, he took a spade and turned it himself, amid the astonished glances and murmurs of horror of the workmen, who treated it as an act of suicide. They then all worked away readily, and the fort was planted; but all looked forward to the undoubted death of the master before the year was out. He was then a young man, and, it is needless to say, outlived every one of the men who were present, and some of their children and grandchildren. If hospitality was at that time an instinct in Ireland, with him it was a passion, a mania. The more numerous the guests, the more his spirits rose; the more frequent the calls on the huge sirloin of beef, the more his face beamed with jollity and good humour, and then he looked the chieftain to perfection.

Who that knew him, with all his kindness, hospitality, and genial good nature, does not love his memory, although a smile at his numerous oddities and eccentricities may mingle with the tear?

The dining-room was exactly suited to the master, and on a par with all around it. When empty, it was the coldest, dampest, and most gloomy and uncomfortable room that could be imagined; and it absolutely required a numerous company to warm it into life and make it comfortable.

Whenever in winter, by accident, there was only a small party, the ladies were all arranged for warmth at the fire side of the table, and the gentlemen opposite; but now it was warmed by the company and the steaming viands, under which the table absolutely groaned. The sideboard was laden with massive silver cups, chiefly racing ones, salvers, and goblets; and in front of it were ranged the regular servants, and all the hangers-on, helpers, and stable-boys, who were put into livery, and sent in to attend. The stock of liveries which had done duty for the javelin-men, when Mr. Elton was High Sheriff, was kept, and used on these occasions;

and the rank and file of the yard, dressed up in the light blue liveries, trimmed with yellow, and the yellow breeches to match, made a fine show, and filled the room like birds of some strange plumage. They were certainly not of much use in the way of attending, and did rather more harm than good.

One stable-boy in particular, probably from an early-acquired habit of hiding things, put everything entrusted to him into such extraordinary and wonderful places as nearly to drive the staid and respectable butler distracted, who was quite unable to cope with these guerillas.

"I thought I helped you," said Mr. Elton to Reginald. "Pat Toomy, you rascal, what did you do with the beef I gave you for Mr. Reginald Elton?"

"Here it is, your honour," said Pat, diving under the dining-table, and bringing the missing plateful up from where he had put it out of the way when he could not find out for whom it was intended.

"Zounds, you fool, what made you put it there? Give it to Mr. Elton, immediately."

Pat Toomy distinguished himself on several other occasions before the dinner was over; but perhaps the most brilliant of his efforts was the

hiding away of the tureen of lobster sauce so effectually that even the keen eyes of the butler could not unearth it, until the close of the dinner, when Pat found it himself, and, determining that it should not be wasted, handed it round to all the guests who had taken plum pudding, and almost insisted on their helping themselves to it, until it was finally wrested from him, after a struggle, by the butler; when, instead of considering that he had done anything wrong, he always held to his opinion that he had pursued the proper course in trying to have it finished before the dinner was over.

But these episodes, instead of putting the host and hostess out, as would be the case at a stiff dinner in modern days, only served to add to the fun, and Mr. Elton filled in all pauses by drinking wine with every one, so that it was a wonder how, between this and carving, he got any dinner for himself. He did, however, and his usual dinner was a wonder to have seen. It was almost his only meal.

He ate a light breakfast, a mouthful at luncheon, but his dinner made up for all.

It was worthy of those Grecian heroes whom Homer describes at their feasts of roast pork and ox

flesh. He would commence with the soup, for which, however strong, if not made with vegetables, he had a great contempt, and would send out his plate and have a head of cabbage or a couple of cauliflowers, turnips and carrots, added to it. This formed a good foundation on which to build up a solid dinner, consisting of a pound or so of salmon or turbot, and then a huge plateful from the royal joint of roast beef, saddle of mutton, or huge tail of boiled beef which almost always graced his end of the table, and nearly hid the portly host behind it.

"Come, gentlemen," said Mr. Elton, for the twentieth time, "fill your glasses, and we'll have a general 'breezo.' Father O'Rafferty, I drink your good health. Fill Father O'Rafferty's glass, Thomas!"

This was the Parish Priest, who was a constant guest at Elton Towers, and a firm friend of all the family. He was one of the old-fashioned priests, educated at St. Omer, a most gentlemanly man, and a great favourite with all the gentry round. He dined constantly at all their houses, including that of the Protestant rector, with whom he lived on the best of terms.

"I am glad to find, Father, that none of the

boys about here were concerned in that last row at Ballynashrig. I think they'll be quiet for a bit, since the five of them were hung for O'Reilly's murder."

"They are a hard lot to manage, sir," said the good priest, shaking his head. "I have done all that mortal man could do to reclaim them. I have cursed them from the altar; I have gone to their houses and abused them; I have horsewhipped them until my arm was tired; but it is of no use. They will get into mischief if they get the chance."

"But, Father O'Rafferty," said Miss Eliza Elton, who, as has been stated, was of a very serious turn; "did you ever try teaching them the Gospel?"

"The Gospel, Miss, cock them up with the Gospel, the blackguards!"

"They seem such a quiet, harmless people; and so obliging when you talk to them, that it is difficult to realize how they can commit those horrible murders," said Reginald Elton, who was greatly amused at poor Miss Elton's look of horror at the good Father's mode of enlightening his flock.

"So they are," said a stout, red-faced man from the bottom of the table. "They are one of the

quietest people breathing. It's half out of spirits that they do most of the mischief. But don't touch the land, and make it their interest to keep you alive, and you may live in Ireland to the age of Methusalem, and not a man from Cape Clear to the Giant's Causeway will touch a hair of your head."

"But how the deuce are you to do it," said Captain Elton. "I thought that out in Spain we were supposed to be in more danger of a stray bullet than people living quietly at home here; but I really believe I was in error! If there is any difference about land, I should think a jack snipe must have about as pleasant a life as an Irish landlord's agent."

"I discovered a plan to do them," said the stout gentleman; "not but that one may not have a chance of a stray shot, but that does not count, as once happened to me when I was riding very fast along a road in Tipperary. I heard a shot fired after me, turned round, and as I was on a very quick horse, caught the chap with the gun in his hand. 'What did you mean by that?' said I. 'I have no quarrel with any one about land. Do you know who I am?'"

"'Troth, an' I don't, your honner! I hope you won't be angry with me, but when I saw you tearing

along at such a rate, I could not for the life of me help taking a flying shot at you.'"

"Of course you had him severely punished."

"Ah, how could I, the poor creature, when it was only done out of divarsion? I warned him to be more careful for the future, as he might hurt some one with his tricks.

"But I hit on a plan by chance. Once I was riding, on a lovely evening, in a very bad part of the country. I was going along slowly, keeping a good look-out, when I saw three armed men waiting for me behind a hedge. I was just debating whether I would run or fight, when I saw a violent argument going on among the three of them, and at last they all skulked off across the field, and left the coast clear. I went on, feeling very much relieved in my mind. I had forgotten all about it, when some time after, at a trial for murder, the whole affair came out in evidence.

"It seems that it had been arranged to shoot me, and a man hired to do the job for five shillings and three glasses of whiskey. He was not told who was to be shot, and it was not until he saw me on the road that he knew who it was. The moment he recognized me, he not only refused to shoot me, but

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threatened to turn king's evidence if a hair of my head was injured. And now, what do you think was the reason of it?"

"Gratitude, I suppose," said Captain Elton.

"Gratitude, indeed!" said the other, in a tone of the utmost contempt. Not a bit of it. No!—*I was the last life in his lease!* So now I put my life in all their leases, and there's not one of them who would not shed the last drop of his blood in my defence."

"I must tell my friend, Woodcock, about that," said Captain Elton, "if it were only for the benefit of any friends who may take a drive with him. I had occasion lately to go into rather an unfrequented part of the country, and he offered me a seat on his outside car. When we had gone some distance, I leant my arm on the cushion covering the well and it sank down on something hard; looking to see if I could arrange it better I raised it, and in the well I found a regular armoury, consisting of two blunderbusses and three pair of pistols, all primed and loaded.

"'Hullo!' said I, 'are you going to stand a siege, that you require such a lot of weapons?'

"'Oh, no,' said he, laughing; 'but they often take a shot at me from behind a ditch. At about

half a mile beyond this, they let fly at me last time, and I returned it with a blunderbuss, and chased them through the field with my pistols, and I think I winged one fellow though I did not bag him; but we may have better luck this time. You may as well have a blunderbuss handy. And if you see any fellows lurking behind the ditches let fly at them at once—nothing like having the first shot. It spoils their aim.'

"'Faith!' said I, 'as I am in for it I'll do my best; but I wish that you had told me in time, and I would have given you a wide berth!'

"'Why,' said he, 'I thought as you were just back from the wars you would enjoy a little skirmishing.'

"However, we arrived safe home, and he has not been shot since, so I suspect his friends have had enough of it."

* * * * * *

When the ladies had retired, the gentlemen drew round a table placed in the bow-window looking into the garden, and Mr. Elton gave his usual toast to suit all politics and all religions—"Come, gentlemen, fill your glasses; I'll give you, 'The glorious, pious, and immortal memory—the Pope—and the Ladies.'

Take your choice—I'll drink 'The Ladies' for my part!"

The toast of "The Ladies" always brought out a number of stories, chiefly of a nature not flattering to married life. Mr. Eyre Elton, like his brother, was a kind and indulgent husband; but from the tenor of his conversation he might have been a Bluebeard or a Henry the Eighth.

This is one of the strange characteristics of the past generation which I have never seen explained: the number of old stories in which the death of the wife seemed to be a most desirable event.

He now told one of a friend whose pony had shied and killed his wife, upon which a married friend at once endeavoured to purchase it. "No," said the widower, "*I mean to marry again!*" He then told of another man, who, when a friend said that the fine weather would bring everything over ground, exclaimed—

"The Lord forbid—I have buried three wives!".

The number of old stories of this class have often led me to the reflection—Whether there might not have been some truth underlying them; whether the married yoke may not have been more difficult to bear than in these days; and whether the

married women dressed and laid themselves out to please their husbands less than they do at present, or were less educated and intellectual companions. I merely throw it out as a hint for some future philosopher.

"That was a great run we had entirely," said a voice from the end of the table.

"*Z*ounds!" said Mr. Elton, "the horses are not half as good now as they were in my father's and grandfather's time. Since mail coaches have come in they have ruined the breed of horses. I remember well my father telling me of the time when the judges, barristers, and attorneys all rode round the Circuit on good, strong geldings. Then a man had to depend on his horse, and made him his friend; now he only uses him for luxury and amusement."

"You never said a truer word than that," said a voice from the opposite side of the table. "Many is the good story I have heard my father tell of the days when he went Circuit, carrying his clothes in saddle-bags, and a good pair of pistols in his holsters, in case of a highwayman. A horse was a real friend then, and his master looked after him himself, and did not leave him to grooms and stable-boys to illtreat, as we often do!"

The speaker was Christopher Coppinger, a leader on the Munster Circuit, a stout, pleasant, oily-voiced man. He was a descendant from Coppinger, "the Knight with the Golden Spur," whose tomb is still in the old Abbey Church at Desmondstown.

Mr. Coppinger was a celebrated story-teller, and he now singled out Reginald Elton, as a stranger and an Englishman, to astonish with stories of Ireland.

"I remember my father telling me a story of those days when he rode on Circuit:—It was a bitter cold night, and the inn was crowded with guests, when in came a solitary traveller, drenched to the skin and perished with cold. The large fireplace was completely shut round by the others who had come first, and the late traveller had not an inch of room, and was left out in the cold—as we sometimes say now, but which was a reality in those days.

"'Waiter,' said he, when there was a dead silence, every one staring at the new arrival, but no one stirring an inch; 'Waiter, tell the groom to rub down my horse, and when he has done so, open a hundred of oysters and bring them to him; and let me know, and I will go and see him eat them.'

"'Oysters, sir!' said the waiter, in an astonished voice. 'Did you say oysters for your horse, Sir?'

"'Of course I did, stupid; go and get them at once!'

"All the company cocked their ears, and opened their eyes in amazement, at the idea of a horse eating oysters. They had heard of horses that would dance and fire off a pistol, and of highwaymen's horses that would eat beefsteak and drink porter, and do innumerable journeys on this fare; but a horse that ate oysters was a real novelty, and, one by one, they stole out of the room to see this wonderful animal. When the fireplace was cleared, the stranger drew a small table into the cosiest corner of the fire, made himself thoroughly comfortable, and proceeded to dry his wet clothes. In about ten minutes in rushed the waiter, followed by the crowd of guests.

"'Sir—the horse will *not* eat the oysters!'

"'Eh! Won't he?' said the master, coolly. 'He must be off his feed. Tell the ostler to give him a mash of warm bran, and bring the oysters here—I will eat them myself; and bring me some bread and butter, and a tumbler of strong whiskey punch to wash them down with.' And he did eat

them, and afterwards proved a most delightful companion. Those were the days to make a man sharp!"

"Ah, that they were!" said a white-haired, elderly gentleman, from the bottom of the table. He was about seventy years of age, but having been left a minor in Chancery when he was a boy, the term "Minor Clancy" stuck to him all through his life, to the great bewilderment of strangers, who could not understand a "Minor" who was also a grandfather. "Ah! that was the life to develop a man's energies and presence of mind; but there are a few cute men left yet. 'Mail coaches have not taken them all away, I can tell you. A friend of mine was travelling lately, and stopped at an inn where they were celebrated for having very stale eggs, which was one of the things he detested. So, early the first morning, before breakfast, he called the waiter aside—'Waiter,' said he, 'I am going about collecting information about this beautiful country of yours, and I am informed of a strange fact about this town, which I am anxious to verify. They say that, by some strange freak of nature, the hens all lay *stale eggs* here! Is that true?'

"'Thrue!' said the waiter, indignant at the slur

cast on his town; 'the divil a greater lie was ever tould! I'll let yer honner see for yer own self.'

"Forthwith—anxious for the honour of his native place—he sallied out, and brought in half a dozen perfectly fresh and new-laid ones, and placed them in triumph before my friend.

"'Well, they *look* fresh, certainly; but boil three of them, three minutes and a half—not too hard or too soft—and I'll try them myself for breakfast'—which he did, and praised them highly, to the great delight of the waiter, saying that he would let it be known far and wide that the report was untrue, and that the hens did not lay stale eggs."

"Well," said Mr. Coppinger, "I have seen as strange a thing myself almost as a horse eating oysters or a hen laying stale eggs. What do you say to a man using a gridiron instead of an umbrella? Ay, and keeping himself very much drier with it!"

There was a regular chorus of offers of bets that this was not really the case, but only turned on some play of words or pun.

"I'll not bet about it," said Coppinger, "as I should only win your money. But here it is:—The last time I was travelling outside the Dublin day

coach, just as we got to Maryborough, the day turned wet, and threatened to continue till night. The moment the coach stopped, one man who had not an umbrella rushed into an ironmonger's shop and came out with a gridiron in his hand. We all thought him mad; but he wrapped himself in a large cloak, which covered his cap and most of his face and came down to his feet, and seated himself on his gridiron in the middle of the seat. In a couple of hours we knew what he meant. While we were sitting in pools of water from the dripping of the umbrellas, he was sitting high and dry on his gridiron; all the water under it poured down to us, and when we arrived in he was as dry as a bone, while we were soaked to the skin! So I have never laughed again when I see a strange thing done."

"You seem to have seen many strange things," said a young English officer in a neighbouring town, and to whom Ireland and the Irish were an unfailing source of curiosity and astonishment.

"Ah, you may say that!" said Mr. Coppinger. "This is a strange country, and as little known in England as Timbuctoo. I would not like to tell it publicly, as it might give offence; but I have seen things that would make your hair stand on end.

They talk of shooting agents and landlords, but that's nothing! Why, when we go on Circuit, if any senior monopolizes too much business, and his bag is seen too full of briefs, the juniors think nothing of hiring a Tipperary boy for five shillings and a glass of whiskey to shoot him, and then all the business is fairly divided, and no one gets too great a share."

"Good heavens!—You don't tell me so!" said the young Englishman, who was very young and green. "I have heard strange things about Ireland, but that beats them all."

"Oh, I could tell you a hundred such, but you see I have a delicacy. Some men feel sore and hurt if it is known that a near relation or friend has been hanged for any little affair." And he looked round gravely, and shook his head as if most of the company present were in a like predicament.

There was to be a ball that night, and the dancing was to be in the dining-room; so the love of gaiety kept the drinking in moderate proportions, and they all adjourned to the drawing-room, where half the county had assembled for twenty miles round to enjoy the fun. All who came stayed as

long as they liked, and slept as they could. After the ball, the gentlemen who had not beds all lay down and slept in the ballroom; and in the morning, when those of the other guests, who had been lucky enough to obtain them turned out, those who had slept on the floor turned in, and, after a few hours comfortable rest, had a later breakfast at one or two o'clock.

CHAPTER XI.

On the following day the party received an addition, in the shape of the bridegroom elect and his uncle, Mr. Donald MacSpleuchan, a Glasgow merchant, who was a childless widower, reported to be possessed of fabulous ready money, all of which he intended to leave to the future husband of Miss Elton.

The house was furbished up in his honour; some of the gates even got a coat of paint the night before. Everything that could, got what was called a Scotch lick, but not in a complimentary sense, as the general idea in Ireland was that everything in Scotland was superficial, and that the inhabitants were poor and dirty.

The retainers, in their best hats and coats, were ordered to meet the great man at the avenue gate; and the more lively spirits resolved to greet him with a bonfire and a discharge of small arms. In

their imaginations they painted him as a tall, grand, benevolent-looking man; a sort of Good Fairy, as in the story books. But when the real man appeared, he fell very far short of their anticipations.

He proved to be little, ugly, cross, and most satirical; and the knowing ones among his acquaintance would not have given much for the nephew's chance of inheriting his wealth, could he have met with a lady sufficiently attractive, in a personal and pecuniary sense, to have taken the place of the deceased Mrs. MacSpleuchan.

He arrived in a rather bad temper, which he never quite got out of; and it was aggravated by the reception which was intended to dazzle and delight him. He came to Ireland with his mind full of stories of the wild and savage peasantry, and had a vague idea that he might be murdered, either by mistake, or merely to keep their hands in training. He had, therefore, travelled in a perpetual fright; and the stories that he heard by the way did not tend to reassure him. It seemed as if every house pointed out to him was the scene of an outrage or a murder, more horrible than the preceding one. If the people terrified him, the beggars disgusted him.

He had come prepared for them, but they had exceeded his worst anticipations. They seemed an entire nation of beggars, only relieved by cut-throats; as he afterwards described to an acquaintance his experience of them in terms of lively invective.

They had commenced with six, old and young, at the bottom of a hill which ran up through the village. These were increased by a fresh importation from every house, until at the top they had swelled to some hundreds — whining, praying, vociferating, and blessing, which last turned into cursing so violent and dangerous that he was forced to give them a handful of coppers to prevent them from swarming into the carriage. His favourite maxim was "Take care of the pennies;" and he never forgot or forgave the loss of these "bawbees."

In this humour he came to the Towers, near which he was met by what appeared to him a worse mob of cut-throats, shouting, wheeling shillelaghs, dancing, yelling—apparently demanding his blood—in reality giving him their mode of welcome. Just as he was congratulating himself on his escape from these, about a dozen muskets were fired—into the carriage as he thought—startling the horses, and

nearly upsetting him into a huge fire, as if they were going to roast him, after the manner of savages, when he had been first shot.

This, of course, was the salute and the bonfire; but they had an opposite effect to what had been intended, and he arrived in a most diabolical temper, disposed to hate the marriage, the family, the house, and all within it. The family were at the hall door to meet him, and their disgust at his mean appearance equalled his at their savage customs. He was indeed a trying little man even at the best of times, and was generally known by the soubriquet of "Glaskie" by his friends, to denote the extreme cannyness and shrewdness which he had acquired in that mercantile city.

His Glasgow accent, and the needlessly accentuated manner in which he rolled his "R's," were particularly exasperating. "He was a very she-r-r-rewd man," he would say, talking of some acquaintance who had succeeded in grubbing up a large fortune. His Scotch idioms were unintelligible, and he took snuff in a manner alarming to the spectators. He would put a large pinch up one nostril while he closed the other, and then draw it up with a snort so violent that it seemed in the

course of nature that it must come out through his ears.

Nor was his temper improved by his night's rest. Of all things in the world he was most sensitive about his shaving water, and his mood for the day often depended on the keenness or bluntness of his razor. He had been lodged in one of the grand rooms in the new part of the house, where he could feast his eyes on gilding and stucco, had he been so disposed; but unfortunately the trifling article of bells had been forgotten, and amid the confusion of the wedding his shaving water was forgotten also. In vain he hunted for some means of communication. He pulled out the bed, thinking it might be hidden behind it. He searched all over the room. At length it began to dawn on him that there was no bell. Audibly cursing the country, and his own folly in coming there, he sallied out into the long draughty passage in his dressing-gown; and, after innumerable difficulties, succeeded in getting some lukewarm, smoked, hard water that curdled like sour milk. To add to his troubles, he cut himself and could not find his sticking-plaister; so he came down to breakfast prepared to find fault with everything, and to be pleased with nothing.

Reginald Elton would fain have answered the insolent stranger when he hurled his satirical shafts at the country of the woman he loved. But he found himself a prey to a depression and melancholy which he could not shake off, and saw with pain that Ridgway, the agent, took the place which he should have filled. He it was who forced Mr. MacSpleuchan to admit that if the demesne was badly farmed, and the house and offices out of repair, all pertaining to the agency part was sound; that the tenants were solvent, the rents well and regularly paid, and the farm-houses less dilapidated than he had been led to expect.

In Ridgway, the Scotchman met his match, and got many a set down from him, to the great delight of the lookers-on, who regarded him as a sort of champion for Ireland. And the family admitted him to a familiarity that he had long hoped for, but scarcely expected. Reginald found himself tongue-tied and depressed, and almost taking Mr. MacSpleuchan's part and depreciating Ireland, out of his dislike to Ridgway.

He seemed each day further, and the agent nearer, to Annabel. And now another element entered into their joint lives, where they least

expected it—this element was Mr. MacSpleuchan himself.

When Annabel heard the Scotchman abusing her country, and turning it and all her relations into ridicule, her first impulse was to side with the agent against him, thus establishing a greater intimacy than ever between them; then she felt fired to do something on her own account, and teach the rude stranger that there were some things in Ireland that he should admire in spite of himself. And as each animal has its own proper mode of offence and defence, so she brought hers into play—these were her beauty and attractions. She played them off on him as she had done on a hundred others, and with the same result—except that in this case the result was rapid, in inverse proportion to his years. Mr. MacSpleuchan fell bound hand and foot into the trap, and appeared another victim at the chariot wheels of Miss Annabel Elton.

As in all her other escapades, the mischief was done before she saw the danger, and, like all other mistakes of the kind, when done it was irrevocable. He took the sweet disease very swiftly and strongly, and, as usual, made himself supremely ridiculous. It soon became manifest to the entire household.

His first symptom was to rush off to Richland and return changed from a grub to a most gorgeous butterfly. He had invested in several suits of raiment—the most gorgeous that money could buy—and each more juvenile than the preceding one—too much so, indeed, for the gay, wild youths whom he now set himself to emulate. The young lion in love, who roars like a sucking dove, and lets his claws be pared by the object of his homage, is a pitiable spectacle. But the old monkey in love, is at once a ludicrous and melancholy one. The young Eltons were as agile and mischievous as monkeys, and resembled them in this. He only resembled one in appearance; they led him into all manner of absurdities. He hopped races on one leg for wagers; he jumped ditches, and got up to his neck in water. When one of the lads took a run and caught the branch of a tree and hung from it, and did various athletic feats to please the ladies, Mr. MacSpleuchan, in spite of his years, must needs emulate him, and hung from it a pitiable object of misdirected

er they made game of him, copied his ent, asked him if he would have "a few as it was deleechus: and he in his love-lorn

state seemed only to enjoy their impertinence, and told them anecdotes in broad Scotch: "How when he was a wee laddie he was knocked down by a Bubly jock.

"I was sairly freehtened, I can assure ye! and when I cried for help the Bubly jock only fanned out his tail and said, 'Gobble, gobble, gobble.'"

Fired by these reminiscences of his early days, he descended even to the kitchen, where he persuaded the old cook to help him to a concoction, to which in his youth he had been partial. It was called "Athol brose," and compounded of honey, whiskey, and raw oatmeal. And he went round with a bowl of this, which he insisted on every one tasting, and expatiated on its flavour in spite of their wry faces, and told them that his old Heland nurse used to make it for him, and that "when eaten with wee cookies it was very deleechus."

The deeper he fell in love, the more ridiculous he made himself, until his greatest enemy must have pitied him. From abusing and detesting everything Irish, he became now almost an Irishman, to show his devotion to his lady-love. He tried to graft the Irish brogue on his Scottish accent, and would address the young men in the stock Irish of the

theatre. Then to all this he appeared metamorphosed from a quiet little old Glasgow merchant, in a snuff-coloured suit, into a roaring young Buck in bright blue coat with brass buttons, yellow waistcoat, green scarf, and top boots, in which, too, he did such feats on horseback as outdid all his former doings, and ended in his being dragged out of a bog-hole by the heels of his boots, which were the only part of him visible.

Such was Miss Annabel's last conquest. But, alas! amusing as it appeared, it wrought great mischief to herself and others; and the good fairy who had seemed to send him to the wedding, as her golden gift on the occasion, proved to be only a spiteful old hag, who, not being invited by mistake, had sent instead a bad gift, which should cause only misery and misfortune.

Had he kept the thing secret it might not have been so bad; but such was his infatuation that everybody, down to the lowest stable-boy, in the place knew all about it. Such a common subject of conversation had it become; that one of the old family retainers, whose age and long services allowed him to take all sorts of liberties—such as only an old Irish servant could—when Mr. Robert

Elton sent him to look for Mr. MacSpleuchan, summoned him in these words before them all: "Your honour, your Father-in-law is looking for you."

As is usual in these cases, the people most interested in the matter were the last to see it; the moment they did so, the entire wrath of her uncle and aunt fell on Annabel.

She now found herself in a position from which there was no escape; if she accepted Mr. MacSpleuchan, she would be taking his money away from her cousin and her cousin's husband; if she refused him, she would make him for ever an enemy of the Elton family, and he had plenty of other nephews to whom he could leave it.

She was blamed for everything; and they all forgot the provocation she had received, and her perfect innocence in making the mistake she did.

The Spider who was watching all her movements saw his advantage in the false position in which she was placed, and steadily turned it to his own account. In letting her get entangled in this web, he saw how easily she could fall into another and more dangerous one. He at once saw all the possibilities, and shaped his course accordingly. First, he saw that it would establish for ever her character

as a flirt and coquette in her own and her uncle's family, and so that she must of necessity feel lowered in her own eyes, and, from having lost their confidence, seek for it among strangers; and here again his sister aided him, as only a clever, scheming woman can.

Miss Ridgway managed to open a correspondence with Annabel on the subject. She bantered her on her conquest; condoled with her on the annoyance; took her part, as if against her own family; until between them both she began to feel somehow that she had lowered herself in the eyes of her own family and those of the world: and was prevented from going to the only proper quarter for advice and support. Her cousin, Reginald, whose opportunity now it was to aid her and save her, by means of his own true passion for her, was helpless, and weighed down by his own gloom and remorse.

Such was the state of affairs as the wedding night drew nigh. Mr. MacSpleuchan rushed on to his fate in spite of all warnings—proposed, and was refused. In his rage he would have broken off his nephew's match at the last moment, if he could have found out any valid excuse, and here the agent came prominently forward.

He it was, on whom it devolved to carry out all the preliminaries connected with the settlements, to arrange all the law business, and answer clearly all the shrewd Scotchman's searching questions.

Mr. Robert Elton declared before the family that only for Mr. Ridgway's ability and practical good sense the marriage would assuredly be broken off. On Ridgway devolved all the practical work of the wedding—the marshalling of the tenants, the ball for them in the evening. In every position and light he appeared strong, active, energetic, and self-contained; and by his side Reginald appeared a weak, unnerved dreamer, full of romantic ideas of goodness, beauty, and perfection, which he was totally incapable of acting up to or realizing.

CHAPTER XII.

THE first arrivals on the morning of the wedding were Mr. Elton's two youngest sons, Jack and Bill, from school at Fermoy, and Tom and Harry Ormsby, his two nephews-in-law, who had come here, as to a sanctuary, for refuge. The two boys had come from school without leave, and, having no money to pay coach hire, had taken a chaise "on tick," as they expressed it, and now rattled up to the door with four horses and two postillions, with wedding favours in their buttonholes.

"Zounds, my boys, you are welcome! There's nothing like cutting a dash in life," said the old gentleman, who came out to the hall door in great delight, and not only forgave them for leaving school without permission, but paid for the chaise without a murmur.

Tom and Harry Ormsby were nephews of Mrs. Elton, who was the only person blind to the agree-

able qualities of her sister's children. They were the practical jokers, *par excellence*, of Richland, and when any trick of peculiar ingenuity and audacity was played off, it was fastened on them as regularly as all the jokes, no matter made by whom, were credited to Curran and Lord Norbury. The town, on the whole, was rather too hot to contain them comfortably; and, as they had lately exceeded all their previous efforts, they felt that it would require very great skill and ingenuity to dazzle and surprise it any more.

The General, Sir John Stockley, had a favourite small black cow in a paddock, close to his house. This animal was one of his pet hobbies, and was fed and cared for as no cow had ever been before in Richland; he had erected a small shed for her convenience, and his greatest annoyance, and an offence which he never forgave, was any trespass on the domain of his favourite. The intruder was at once sent to the pound, and all the terrors of the law were put in force against the owners of the trespassing animals. Every morning he took a look out into the paddock to see if there were any intruders. One morning, about a month before, when he looked out as usual, there he saw

a white cow grazing away in the most contented manner, evidently having got in at an early hour.

Sir John rang the bell violently, and ordered his servant at once to drive the white cow to the pound, and when it was claimed to let him know, so that he might punish the owner. Having satisfied his vengeance, he forgot all about it until he was informed that his own was missing. At once the town was searched, a reward offered, and every one was talking about the General's cow, when a sudden thought struck him—Could it be some practical joke? He rushed off to the pound, and there in the white cow, looking very wretched and hungry, he recognized his own favourite black one.

It had been whitewashed!!!

Words could not paint his rage and indignation; he had pounded and starved his own cow, and had made himself the talk and laugh of the town; and, worst of all, do what he would, he could get no evidence against the perpetrators.

A few days after this a large ball was given to which the Ormsbys were not invited; as at the last one—a fancy dress ball—they had gone in disguise as pedlars, having among their wares a quantity of small cakes, macaroons, and sweetmeats, which

were all dosed with some drug which made all who ate them deadly sick, and nearly broke up the ball.

So now, in revenge for not being invited; on the night of the ball, when all the guests were assembled, they crept along the roofs of the houses and put wet cloths in all the flues of the chimneys, having first fastened up the front and back doors.

Of course the guests were nearly smothered with smoke, and their dresses spoiled; but public opinion was so much excited by this practical joke, and became so threatening, that even the perpetrators themselves were rather ashamed of the success of this last effort; and for a while betook themselves to the Metropolis, where, with other kindred spirits among their college friends, they endeavoured to enliven the term of their banishment.

The Theatre Royal, Fishamble Street, was the great stage on which they manifested their powers. On a command night, when it was filled with the rank, fashion, and beauty of Ireland, six of them stationed themselves at different parts of the front row of the gallery.

Each of them was armed with a small pillow-case of fine goose down and feathers, which they had brought in under their coats. At a given signal

they were all emptied into the air, and the bags thrown away, and for some time the theatre was exactly as if a shower of snow had come down through the roof. All the people in the pit who had umbrellas raised them, and the fine feathers settled on them exactly as in a real snowstorm.

This was so successful that on the next night, when the play of "Hamlet" was to be performed, the same set stationed themselves in the pit close behind the orchestra, and on a given signal, when the stage was crowded, threw several pounds of snuff in open papers, which scattered in all directions and filled the air. It was during the scene of the second act which is enacted at the back of the stage; and soon the King, Queen, Hamlet, Ophelia, all the courtiers, and finally the mock sleeping king and his murderer, all began sneezing in succession as the snuff reached them, so that the play had to be stopped and the curtain lowered. After this a reward was offered by the authorities for the perpetrators, who thought it safer for the present to seek an asylum at Elton Towers; feeling certain that something would turn up at the wedding to give them an opportunity for the display of their powers.

By way of a start Harry Ormsby desired his

cousin, Bill Elton, to remedy some defect in the position of a large barrel which was under his bedroom window, on which the fiddler was to be stationed for the tenants' dance on the lawn. While the unsuspicious Bill was doing this, he stationed himself in his window with a large jug of water. But Jack Elton, who was emulous of his cousin's attainments in practical joking, seeing this, stationed himself at the window right over him again. The moment that Bill Elton got under the window down came the water on his head, but before Ormsby could give vent to his exultation down came the contents of a pail of water on his head as he leant out of the window, and nearly sent him down with it. It was almost the first time that he had been beaten with his own weapons, so he looked round for some means of revenge and of recovering his lost prestige, which will be related further on.

The wedding was as unlike a modern one, as the breakfast was unlike the modern *déjeûner*. The one included the marriage ceremony, a dance for the tenantry in the open air, and a ball for the guests; the other was a solid, substantial meal, which was to last until supper-time, as no regular dinner could be prepared.

The dining-room also served for a variety of purposes. First it served for the breakfast, then for the ball, and finally as a bedroom, where those who could not get accommodation slept as best they could.

Eyre Elton was in his glory. Champagne, then a rare and costly beverage, flowed like water, and some bottles of really rare vintage were dug up like nuggets, as a punster of the present day might say, out of the surrounding quartz.

"Come, Mr. MacSpleuchan," said he, "let me drink your health in a glass of old hock, 'Hoc erat in votis,' as the Latin poet says. Fill Mr. MacSpleuchan's glass."

This was a favourite quotation, as it was always followed by a story of a waiter, who had once been a graduate of Oxford, reduced in life, who, when some young college lads asked him to bring them some "Hic haec hoc," did not return with it. "Why did you not bring us the hock? Did you understand what we meant?"

"Perfectly, gentlemen; but I thought *you had declined it!*"

Mr. MacSpleuchan was a good judge of wine, and had got a glass of really good hock before, which had

slightly mollified him. But the Fates were against him. When he gulped down the glass he was nearly choked; it was whiskey, which by some accident had got into a hock bottle, and been placed among that wine. This completed his disgust, and he only waited for an opportunity to pay off some of the ill-usage which he conceived he had got in Ireland.

When most of the speeches were made, some demon as usual tempted Harry Ormsby to get his cousin, Jack Elton, to propose Mr. MacSpleuchan's health. Jack was the orator of the family, and intended for the bar. His language was flowery, and he looked out for all the longest words in the dictionary, which he lugged in by the heels, however inappropriate.

He had pined for an opportunity of distinguishing himself, and now seized it eagerly, and in an enthusiastic speech—part of which he had prepared in the vague idea that he might be called on to return thanks for the bridegroom—he got up and proposed the health of their Scotch guest. He described him as coming from the bleak and barren hills of Scotland, where most of the men wore no breeches—he did not describe the women—down to the rich and fertile valleys of Ireland, where all the men were

brave and all the women beautiful. Here he got confused between the uncle and nephew, and seemed to insinuate that Mr. MacSpleuchan was a gay young bachelor, who could not get a wife in Scotland, and was forced to come to Ireland for one. He then tried to get out of it, and, of course, made things infinitely worse, having apparently described him as a young man, formed to shine in the ball-room or on the battle-field. He now took the company into his confidence, and apologized for his being old, ugly, and cranky, and for *not* having been able to get an Irish wife.

It was most embarrassing. Harry Ormsby was tugging at him by the coat to make him sit down. But he was like many an orator—do what he would he could not find out a way to end. He floundered worse and worse, all the while remonstrating audibly with his cousin for pulling his coat-tails. At length, by a happy inspiration, he touched classical ground: here he was at home, and Mr. MacSpleuchan heard himself compared to "Thalia," Clio, Melpomene, and the Nine Muses. He shoved in Rhadamanthus and Terpsichore by way of balance, and sat down amid an explosion of verbal fireworks.

He was loudly applauded, most of the men having

drank too much champagne to be critical, while the father exclaimed with pride—

"Well done, Jack, my boy; your schooling has not been thrown away on you. That is the way to show the worth of the money I spent on your education."

Then Mr. MacSpleuchan got up to reply.

He made a very clever speech, which raised him in the estimation of all who could understand the delicate irony and veiled sarcasm that cut like a razor. He contrasted Ireland and Scotland, and, under apparent eulogy of the former, laid bare all its defects and shortcomings. He acknowledged that nature had made the one fertile and the other barren; but showed that industry and a law-abiding spirit had made Scotland rich; while Ireland was poor and despised. He drew the same comparison skilfully, between the Irish and Scotch women. He complimented the company on the beauty of their women, but hinted that it was more than counterbalanced by their coquetry and want of principle; and he contrasted, by no means to their favour, the honesty and truth of the Scotch lasses.

The majority of the guests were in too convivial a state to read between the lines. They thought it was a glowing eulogy of Ireland, spoken by a

naturally shrewd and satirical man; they also were not in the secret of his refusal by Annabel; but Mr. Robert Elton and his family saw it all too clearly. Now was the time for Reginald Elton to speak up for Ireland and the Irish women. He was an Englishman, and could do so most appropriately. He was known also to be a good speaker at the debating society at Oxford. But, as the ghost of Banquo froze the blood of Macbeth, and rendered him speechless, so the spirit of the murdered girl—for so he felt her to be—stood there before him at the feast. He had heard of her death that very morning, and he saw her now as plainly before him, as on the day when she fell at his feet in the lunatic asylum. Had his life depended on it he could not at that moment have spoken in the sense of making a speech. He felt that Annabel might have loved him, could he have taken her part against the insolent Scotchman, but he could not utter a word. At length, amid a dead silence, Mr. Ridgway rose, and in proposing the health of the visitors, answered him. He was not a good speaker, but he was a clear-headed man, and he had all his wits about him.

He agreed with all that Mr. MacSpleuchan had allowed as to the beauty of the women, and the

fertility of the soil of Ireland, but showed clearly that he could not in a few weeks pass an opinion on the matters to which he had alluded, and assured him that, if he would only devote a longer time to the study of the country and its inhabitants he would find that the Irish women were as honest and true as they were lovely, the soil capable of improvement, and the people most anxious to be improved. Scotland he admitted was under happier circumstances. He insinuated that if he would only come and live in Ireland he would find them all ready to sit at his feet, and learn from him.

He managed adroitly to soothe his *amour propre* by dwelling on the short time that he had been among them, so that that canny, hard-headed individual almost persuaded himself it was want of time and opportunity to display his numerous attractions, and not any coquetry on the part of his lady-love, that had led to his refusal. So Ridgway poured oil on the troubled waters, earned the thanks of all, and was the lion of the hour. Mr. MacSpleuchan expressed the highest opinion of his abilities and management.

Annabel was gratified at the manner in which he had defended her, and helped her out of the trouble

her thoughtlessness had involved her in. But she felt lowered in her own esteem at having sunk so low as to require to be defended by him. And so the Fates silently wove their web, and none could see what was going on before their eyes.

The bridal pair drove off in a chaise and four. The horses were fresh and the postillions fresher, on account of drinking healths and good luck all the morning. Just as they were starting, the bridegroom leant out of the window with his hand stretched out to distribute coin to the innumerable beggars who were clamouring around.

His new brother-in-law, Bill, who always did the wrong thing in the wrong place, thinking that the hand was held out to him for a farewell shake, rushed out to catch it. As he did so the money fell out, the carriage drove off, and poor Bill was so hustled by the crowd anxious to secure the coin, that he appeared to his family on his hands and knees, among a crowd of ragged beggars surging like a sea; and apparently struggling with them to secure a share of the pence and halfpence.

Meantime, a shower of slippers followed the carriage, one of which—being in reality rather a heavy shoe—struck the hindmost postillion on the

head and nearly knocked him off his horse. The second escape was from another salute of small arms, such as had welcomed Mr. MacSpleuchan. They went like a whirlwind through the town, turning sharp corners, grazing drawn-up carts, and just escaping by a miracle; but they got safe on the open road, and the bride and bridegroom breathed freer as they came to rather a steep rise of ground, when they were of necessity forced to slacken their pace.

All now adjourned to the front of the house, where the tenantry, with their wives and daughters, and the labourers and their families, were feasting at long tables; disposing of huge joints of meat and bushels of potatoes in a manner only possible to those to whom meat was a rare luxury. After the dinner there was some singing by the farmers' daughters, who first refused all solicitations to sing, but who, when once they did begin, seemed as if they never would stop. Some of the songs consisted of thirty verses, without any apparent tune, delivered in a droning tone through the nose, and might have been Celtic or English words—after the indistinct manner of many amateur singers, even so late as the present day; but they seemed to give

the listeners satisfaction, and helped to pass the time until they were ready for the dance.

But now a hitch was apparent. The fiddler was drunk, and, while another was being procured, Harry Ormsby persuaded Jack Elton that this was the time for a speech. He was mounted on the barrel, and had a most admiring audience.

He endeavoured to eclipse, if possible, the speech of the morning. All the heathen gods and goddesses had again to do duty. He praised up Ireland and the people, especially the girls; and was getting on splendidly, working up to a climax, like a true orator, when one came of its own accord.

Harry Ormsby, who had been waiting for an opportunity to wipe out his discomfiture of the morning, just as the orator had got into a simile from which there seemed no escape, suddenly pitched a huge feather bed out of the window, which sent him and his barrel flying into the thickest of the admiring crowd, who received him safe in their arms.

This was the climax of the day's entertainment; the dancing was kept up well in the open air and in the hall, but there was no new element of humour introduced into it. Later in the evening the grand

bonfire indeed did explode, when the pound tin of gunpowder which the joker put at the bottom of it got ignited; but besides nearly setting fire to the house, burning some dresses, and almost blowing an old man's eye out, it was quite a tame affair—and with it might be said to end the great *blow out* at Elton Towers!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE summer had passed away with all its gaiety; the autumn leaves were turning sere and yellow, and shortening days and chilling blasts heralded the approach of winter, when Reginald Elton again found himself in Richland.

He had gone to England on business, and had determined never to return to Ireland—but he could not remain away. Miserable as he was in the society of the woman he loved, he was utterly wretched when separated from her. He had nothing to turn to; his former life was a blank to him; his former associates so hateful that he could not bear to meet them. He had carried out to the letter the promises he had made to the wretched girl about her child, and there was nothing now to keep him in London.

He therefore returned to Richland with a hopeless longing and a sinking heart, to haunt, like a troubled spirit, the scene of his misery.

Still he did not entirely despair. On the Sunday after his return, the family were assembled for evening service in the cathedral—that quaint old building on which they had both gazed by moonlight on that evening from which all his wretchedness seemed to date. It was a grim, rude, massive edifice, more impressive and majestic in its very ruggedness than many of the more perfect buildings of later days. It was very ancient, and a portion near the entrance was said to have been part of the palace of one of Ireland's early kings, and to date from a period anterior to the English conquest of Ireland. The remainder had been built at various times, and had seen many vicissitudes. It was the cathedral of an independent Irish Church that elected its own clergy and bishops, before Henry II. had handed over its liberties to his countryman, Nicholas Breakspear, or Adrian, the first and only Englishman who ever filled the Papal chair, in return for the Bull which handed Ireland, bound hand and foot, to the tender mercies of the English king and English nation.

At the period of the Reformation it became the cathedral of the Anglican Church in Ireland, which it remained, except for two short periods—one in

which Cromwell's soldiers stabled their horses in its aisles and sharpened their swords and pikes on the stone pillars of its arched doorway; the other during the reign of James the Second, when it again became Roman Catholic. During the siege of Richland, cannon were served from its square tower, and chain-balls—which hung there to a recent period—embedded themselves in its walls, and hastened the capitulation; the ignorant and superstitious people conceiving that Heaven had gone against them when the cathedral was struck.

Outside, it was a plain, stern building, with a tall, square, castellated tower, and embattled walls; inside, a lofty one, with rows of massive plain, square pillars, supporting arches on either side, and divided by a transept, which gave it the shape of a Latin cross.

But it did not suffer so much from the hand of time, or wars, rebellions, and cannon-balls, as it did from the hand of man. During the debased period which we call "Georgian Era," the cathedral had, like almost everything else, suffered a transformation. The long nave was divided in two by a large wooden partition, in which was placed the organ, thus changing the shape from

a Latin to a Greek cross. Huge, unsightly wooden galleries were erected in the transepts, hiding all the old monuments. The lower part was filled with heavy, square pews, and everything had been done to alter it from a cathedral to a snug, comfortable parish church.

The choir was now one of the best in Ireland, the present being a musical dean. Before him there had been an architectural one, who had put up the screen and galleries. There had been a painfully cleansing one, who had whitewashed all the stonework and old carved oak; and a building one, who had added a long hybrid porch; but the musical one, who spent the entire revenues of small parishes on the choir, did perhaps as much mischief in his own small way.

Reginald and Annabel were in the back of the pew alone, all the others having gone forward, as people usually do, to see the singers, as if they could perceive the music coming out of their lips; and as the words of the anthem, borne on the solemn swell of the organ, and the voices of the singers poured through the dim aisles, they seemed like voices from an unseen world.

"These are they which came out of great

tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

* * * * * *

The Elton pew was one of the most favoured in the cathedral. It was a large, square, curtained room, capable of holding twenty people, and was situated at one corner of the western transept, next to the officers' gallery, with a private staircase of its own, and in such a position that any one entering, however late, could do so unobserved. It was opposite to the seat of Lord Garryowen, and between the two was the officers' gallery, in which, on state occasions, they blazed in gorgeous array, with epaulettes and wings, and gold lace and embroidery, very different from the infantry dress of modern days, which has only comfort, convenience, and utility to recommend it. This made the pew a favourite one with all the Richland young ladies, and great was the manœuvring to get a seat there on these grand occasions. Then, too, the officers would watch with intense anxiety for the moment before the charity sermon, when Mr. Elton would walk round and give his wife and each of the children money to put into the plate; and on other occasions, when the collecting churchwarden would

rattle the money-box—in shape like a small brass warming-pan—steadily before the face of any delinquent who was thinking of shirking his duty, and not putting his penny in.

The large brass chandeliers suspended from the ceiling were lighted before the service commenced, and as the shades of evening began to close round, the old grey walls were filled with that dim, sad, religious light which can only be experienced in the old Gothic buildings of former days. Long shadows crept behind the square pillars, and lurked in the distant chapels; and, as the voices of the choir swelled and sank down again, they echoed through the long stone galleries where the monks walked of old, and back from the grey walls, beneath which Irish kings and chieftains may have revelled long ago.

"They shall hunger no more, neither shall they thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, or any heat.

"For the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

There are moments when voices from heaven seem to speak in real words to the heart of man. It

may be unheard by all around; but to some it is a real, living voice; and so they heard it now. What if there was a last chance, if it were possible that the past might be blotted out, and a future of happiness in store for them?

She felt for him the deepest sympathy and compassion; she loved him as a brother, or as the dearest friend —and yet she could not bring herself to marry him—so penetrated was she with a sense of her own weakness and unworthiness, that she felt that not only would she not be safe, but that she would almost commit a crime; if she married a man who had not that strong mind and powerful influence over her which could save her in every moment of difficulty and temptation; and yet she would have given the world to have been able to feel otherwise for him.

And so they stood together—alone, side by side—their hearts as it were beating against each other's, with long in-drawn breaths as the music thrilled them both with the same intense feeling, answering each other sigh for sigh. So near—and yet so far apart—so united—and yet between them such an inseparable gulf that neither could bridge over or span!

And again the sad refrain rose and fell,

murmuring through the distant aisles and dimly-lighted chapels—

"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

And the hot tears welled up in both of their hearts; and still the Fates wove on their silent changeless web.

After early Sunday dinner, Reginald started off on a solitary walk. He had a headache, he said, and the cool air would do him good. Alas! they all knew only too well the ache that paled his cheek and dulled his eye!

His health was sinking, and he felt at times that he longed for death. He turned down one of the side streets, and the calm, flowing river lay at his feet. The cold, fresh air blew gratefully on his fevered forehead, and the thought came rapidly through his mind,—one plunge! one struggle! and in this life all would be over. But the future one!—and then the words of the anthem rang in his ear, and he turned away calmer and happier. With the poison had come the antidote; with his love for her had come an entire change in his life; and this was the result of the extraordinary influence she had over him.

He felt almost happy for the moment. Could he by any act of generosity and unselfishness make her happy; if she only loved a man who was her equal, he felt that he could willingly sacrifice himself, and follow out his own life, if not happily, at least uncomplainingly, to the bitter end.

He turned slowly homewards, and on his way came on a large plain building, lighted up. It happened to be Mr. ——'s church, or meeting-house, or hotbed of Dissent, according to the taste of the speaker.

He turned in and seated himself near the door. The sermon was just about to begin, and the text was one that seemed chosen as if to suit his mind: "There remaineth a rest, therefore, for the people of God."

He listened to the words as a thirsty traveller to the news that a spring of water has been reached at last. The preacher dwelt on the restless and feverish race of life, the unrest of ambition, the pursuit of pleasure, wealth, or love—of everything that this world seeks after; and then he dwelt on the peace of the Christian life, the only abiding happiness, the peace that springs from faith.

Reginald was deeply moved. Had he deserved

the rest and peace that he desired—a happy life, with Annabel for his wife?

Alas! he felt he had not.

Could he then accept his fate, whatever it might be, and with thankfulness take whatever Providence should send him? He felt he almost could, and that this was what the preacher alluded to. He would leave Richland to-morrow, and in change and absence try and gain the victory over himself, and leave all else in the hands of a Higher Power to guide and direct.

He waited until the church was empty, that he might go home without being observed; when just at the entrance he was startled by the sound of familiar voices. Two ladies passed on, and were followed by a gentleman.

They were Annabel Elton and Miss Ridgway, and the gentleman who followed and joined them was Mr. Ridgway. At once all his better thoughts were swept to the winds. This was not the fate he bargained for. It was his duty to save her from this low, vulgar man, who could only make her miserable. Alas! poor human nature! A moment before, and all his faith seemed strong and unassailable, but the moment temptation

came, all his good resolutions melted away like snow.

He hurried home in a state of wild excitement, and the first person he met in the dining-room was his cousin, Captain Elton.

"What is the matter?" exclaimed the latter. "You look as if you had seen a ghost."

"It is nothing; do not mind me."

"But I must. Indeed, Reginald, you take things too much to heart; and although Annabel is my own sister, I must say she is behaving disgracefully.

Reginald drank off a tumbler of wine, and this added to his excitement. He could not reflect; he did not know what he was doing or saying.

"I have behaved like a fool about her, Frank. I made up my mind to leave Richland to-morrow for ever, and never to see her again. But this evening I met her with that artful woman, Miss Ridgway, at Mr.——'s church, where she had gone evidently to meet, by appointment, that low, vulgar fellow the agent."

"What! do you mean to say she met that fellow by appointment—and that he ever dared to think of her?"

"I am afraid so. I have seen it all along, and I am afraid it is for her fortune he is looking."

"The mean rascal! I would as soon that she stooped to marry one of the footmen. She has been led into it by that sister of his. That's a lady I never liked; she is too clever for me. However I'll put a spoke in their wheel. I am very sorry for you, old fellow, but don't take it to heart; all will come right."

The moment Reginald Elton had time for calm reflection he repented deeply what he had disclosed, but it was too late now; and so, again, the web of their lives was fatally tangled, and through their own fault. She had acted wrongly in going to Mr. ——'s church, and meeting the agent, however innocently—against her parents' wishes—and he in not leaving matters alone, but trusting to his own strength to mend them. And so things were brought to a crisis.

Annabel was forbidden to see or speak to Mr. or Miss Ridgway for the future; the lady was quietly removed from the house, and Mr. Ridgway was dismissed from the post of agent.

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CHAPTER XIV.

It was just before Christmas, and all Richland was wild with anticipations about the Assembly Ball which was soon to take place. As the day approached, young ladies who had been fortunate enough to secure tickets might be seen all the morning matching ribbons; and in anxious consultations at each other's houses respecting what they should wear. Milliners began to be overworked, and sedan chairs were secured many days beforehand, and rose to a premium.

The sedan chair, in spite of many inconveniences, had some great advantages, which have been too much lost sight of in the march of intellect. It could be brought into the hall, and an invalid could get in there and make the journey, perfectly secure from the coldest winds, until again deposited in it in the hall of the other house; having been subjected to no cold, snow, hail, or rain, as in modern

days in the getting in and out of any wheeled vehicle.

Annabel had got strict orders not to dance with or even speak to Mr. Ridgway, and these almost raised an insurrection in her breast. Had she been reasoned with calmly and gently, she might have been trusted to exercise her own good sense and discretion; but it was the time of parental authority, and the sterner course was taken. She heard nothing but abuse of him and comments on his insolence; all of which only made him appear a martyr in her eyes, and, in remorse for the injury she had done him, inclined her more and more to put herself on a level with him. She was placed in Reginald's charge, and if the gossips were puzzled before, they were now at their wits' end to unravel the mystery.

He was in the wildest spirits—some sudden revulsion of feeling acted like an intoxicant on him. Everything suggested some ludicrous image, every word some wild sally of wit and satire. She pitied and liked him so much that they were like a pair of affianced lovers, and, as she was forced to refuse Mr. Ridgway, she determined to refuse all others, and only dance with Reginald. No wonder the out-

side world was puzzled, and waited anxiously for the next act in the drama.

"I have been a poor companion for you up to this, but I will not be so to-night. We will laugh and be gay, although the flood comes to-morrow. I had once some fun in me. I once could be gay and amusing. I could sometimes say a clever or witty thing; but since I met you I have always been dull and stupid. I will be so no longer. We will deceive the world. The Spartan smiled when the fox was gnawing his vitals. Come, we will commence by sacrificing our mutual friends, as the ancient Romans did when they formed a coalition."

"Well, there is Miss O'Meara, a most particular friend of mine. I defy you to say anything against her looks or herself."

"Well, I admit the good looks, but I deny that she is well dressed. Then, note the diplomacy by which her two elderly aunts keep on each side of her, so that all admirers must approach the niece through the aunts, and ask them for a dance also."

"The aunts are to be pitied. One of them would have made a very good match but for her ill-health."

"What was the matter with her?"

"I believe she was subject to fits."

"Not in her dress apparently."

"You are too bad! What has come over you to-night?"

"You have been given into my charge, and I am bound to try and amuse you. Besides, I love to deceive the world. You must join in my humour, and let us for once in our lives be gay and thoughtless. Let the future take care of itself, and the dead bury its own dead."

"Do you know who the young lady in white is who has just come in?"

"She is a Miss Harold, and as Miss O'Meara, who is of true Irish descent, is a Protestant, so Miss Harold, who belongs to the purely English race, belongs to the Irish religion. Did you ever hear about her and the last ball in Lent?"

"No; do tell me."

"Well, she had great difficulty in inducing her parish priest to allow her to go to it. He did so at last reluctantly, warning her not to eat any meat at supper.

"'But,' said she, 'Father, may I take a little valse?'

"She had just been to England, where she had

learned the new dance. He, poor man, concluded that this must be some dainty viand, and answered—

"'A little valse! Don't touch it if it be anything *greasy!!!*"

Annabel looked at him so tenderly and fondly. She knew so well that he was burying deep down his own sorrow for her. That it was no wonder the lookers-on were deceived, and thought that the marriage was a settled thing. But neither of them cared.

"Do you believe, Reginald, in omens and fatality; in influences and powers which envelop us, and from which we have no escape?"

"I do, but I believe that our own actions form the net in which we are enveloped. We are like children in the hands of a destiny which we cannot oppose or withstand. We live for years in a few hours, and we are conscious of having lived a past. Have you not felt it?"

"I have. I sometimes feel that I have lived another life, and I can remember the same things having occurred before. Oh, Reginald, Reginald! we are both under some terrible spell. Why did you ever come here? We are too like each other ever to be happy. Oh, Reginald! it kills me to see you

unhappy, but what can I do? Mr. Ridgway has been ruined through my folly. He has lost his agency; he is forbidden the house. Oh, I dread him, but I cannot help being sorry for him. He has been infamously treated. Oh, Reginald! whatever occurs shall we not be friends? Oh, say that you will not hate and curse me."

"Never, never! But enough of this to-night. I am your chaperon, your guardian and guide, and I must forget myself."

So they danced, and laughed, and flirted all the night through, until supper warned them that the hours were speeding fast. He was not himself, he was somebody else, and, amused as she was at his gaiety and flow of spirits, she sometimes felt terrified at them. He poured forth anecdotes of travel and adventure. Then he would speak of himself as of another being, as though he were some third person whom he was discussing quite calmly.

"Yes, Annabel, that cousin of yours is a vain, selfish, egotistical fellow, pretending to be in love with you, and only wearying you with his melancholy, and spoiling your enjoyment. He shall be sent on his travels. I reason with him in vain, and

then he tells me some childish story of how he loves you, and would willingly die. Oh, if he could but do so to make you happy! But I tell him that it cannot be. We cannot choose our own fate; we must bear and be silent."

"Oh, Reginald! I am wretched! What can I do? What can I do to make you forget me and be happy?"

"Hush! the surging human tide betokens that supper is at hand. Come, and let us mingle with the throng. We will follow that fat old dowager; she is a veteran at the supper-table, and knows, with the eagle glance of a true commander, where the lobster salads hide away, and where are the best fed capons and juiciest hams. She loves the propinquity of the trifle, and knoweth the regions of the ratafia baskets, and if you cannot place implicit reliance on all that comes out of her mouth, you may on all that goes into it. But beware of imitating her in all her ways; for sometimes her disciples have come to grief, for she does not follow the 'Honesty is the best policy' of the supper-table, or, in other words, 'Eat enough and pocket none.' You do not believe me? Then watch her, later in the evening. She will keep

her family for a week on what she abstracts to-night."

"I heard a story about her which, perhaps, will teach her caution. One evening she had just landed a fine lobster in her pocket, when a drunken dragoon officer who had seen it, poured an entire tureen of melted butter after it, saying, "There, ma'am, is sauce for your lobster.'"

Annabel had never spent so delightful an evening. Why had he not always been thus? Why had he allowed that other person to gain such influence over her? She could not see the avenging Nemesis that had paralyzed his life. And now the faint streaks of the dawn were appearing through the windows — turning all the rouged and painted dowagers into wrinkled hags or cadaverous spectres. Some of them were sitting half asleep on the rout seats, blinking at their irrepressible charges—chiefly garrison hacks—and what would now be called fast young ladies—who were finishing out the very dregs of the entertainment with dishevelled men, with tossed hair and vinous countenances, to the wild and fitful strains of the tired-out band.

Most of the people had gone home, only the Eltons and other patrons' families remained.

Suddenly the influence—the one whom she dreaded, but who had fascinated her, as the snake does the trembling bird—appeared on the scene.

Lord Garryowen, moved by Mr. Crushton, who had been asked by Miss Ridgway, had got Mr. Ridgway a ticket.

At the sight of him her cheek blanched, she became ashy pale, and trembled as though she would have fainted.

He came up with the dignity of one who has been injured but does not complain. He knew well the power that he had gained over her sensitive, honourable mind.

They exchanged only the commonest greetings, but his tone was that of a tyrant who knew his power, and was determined to exercise it.

While he was speaking, Mr. and Mrs. Elton came up. They ignored him altogether.

"Annabel, it is time to go home. Reginald, will you see her into the carriage?"

She walked off with him, pale and silent.

"Oh, Annabel! you do not blame me for this? I am as deeply pained as you are at what has occurred. God knows, before whom I stand, that if I could see a way to make you happy, I would

sacrifice myself, my fortune, my very life to help you!"

She looked at him—oh! how kindly, how tenderly!

"I know that you are not to blame. Do not think of anything so foolish. I must make one person unhappy; do not let me make another. You must feel that if I loved you to distraction, my pity, my sympathies, must be with him!"

CHAPTER XV.

If the good people of Richland were puzzled before, they were now ten times more so in endeavouring to guess the relations in which Miss Annabel Elton and her cousin stood to each other. All sorts of stories and reports were industriously circulated among the gossips of the place.

The report most in favour was that Reginald Elton was married already. Some said a beautiful Spaniard was at the bottom of all the difficulties; others were in favour of an Italian. A few said a Creole; but at last public opinion settled on a black wife. This was always a favourite rumour with respect to old Indians, and officers who had served abroad; and although neither of these circumstances exactly suited his case, yet it was such an easy and pleasant belief that nothing could shake it; and when the absurdity of it was shown at the friendly tea-tables, where the subject was

discussed, the believers in it ominously shook their heads and said that time would tell. Fabulous stories of Indian princesses, with dowers of lacs of rupees, and jewels worth millions, were hinted at in suppressed whispers, until at last it became an avowed theory, and all who doubted it were considered infidels, whom nothing could convince.

That Miss Elton had had some sort of a serious flirtation with her father's agent and her former governess's brother, was a fact that could not be gainsaid or contradicted, as he had been dismissed from the agency, and she from all intercourse with the family. In those aristocratic days such an event was an unpardonable sin. It was as much a fall from the standard of society as marriage with a footman would be now.

But while the world was thus going on around him, immersed in its own occupations, joys, and sorrows, Reginald Elton alone was preying on his own heart. At times he felt almost a desperate man, and, had not a higher or better influence come like an antidote, he would have felt capable of committing some terrible crime.

"If I loved you to distraction, my sympathies must be with him." How often did he ponder

over these words! They were the key to Ridgway's influence over her, and he had been unintentionally the one to give it to him.

Could he have remained passive on that evening when he met them together at the church, all might have gone well—at least it could not have been so bad as it was now; and he had done it: he had delivered her, bound hand and foot, into this man's power. Again and again he felt that he had no one to blame but himself. If he could only have waited patiently and done nothing! It seems so easy, and yet it is the very acme of faith, the most difficult to reach in the trials and temptations of life. They were on those confidential terms with each other which made it doubly painful to him. She looked on him as her adviser and only friend.

"You are the only one who does not look coldly on me and blame me," she said to him sometimes. "What can I do? I have behaved so abominably to him; if, after all that has passed, I should marry any other person, I should never survive the feeling of shame and disgrace, that I had acted dishonourably."

She would discuss with him her position, as

though he were her brother; she would explain to him, quite innocently, the reasons for Ridgway's power over her, although she did not care for him, and why, through loving Reginald as a brother, and almost well enough for a husband, she felt herself separated by some unchangeable destiny from him. She pitied him too, and yet could not understand him or what he suffered.

"You can see me whenever you choose, while he is not allowed to see or speak to me." Such was her reasoning; but she could not understand that while the one who could see her was in despair, with "hope deferred," the other, who had business to occupy him, was only suffering in her imagination; that while the one was separated from happiness he never knew, and could never appreciate, the other was like the outcast from the garden of Eden, looking back on what he had lost.

But the supreme hour had come, and the man was ready to meet it. Mrs. Elton, who had been very much annoyed at the meeting between her daughter and Ridgway on the night of the ball, now, when matters became no better, and when she was still further pained at seeing how Reginald was suffering, taxed her with disobedience; and

when Annabel replied that she had done no more than the commonest civility to a chance acquaintance required, her mother so far lost her temper as to say, "You know that there must be more than you pretend, for Reginald saw you in company with him and Miss Ridgway one evening at church."

Annabel now learned for the first time the source of the information which had led to the dismissal of Ridgway. She knew nothing of the circumstances under which it had been revealed in a moment of almost madness. She looked on it as a breach of confidence, and was as angry as it was possible for one of her gentle nature to be. At dinner she would scarcely speak to him, and he could see by her look and manner that something had happened; but at the moment he thought infinitely less about it, than he had done of a thousand other incidents, which had occurred to alarm and distress him.

The moment he met her alone he sought an explanation. It was in the little boudoir, the scene of his first confession of love, the scene of his almost successful appeal, that he now met her for the last time.

"What have I done now, Annabel, that you will scarcely speak to me? Is my life so very happy that you refuse me the little common civilities of it?"

She turned coldly from him. "It was you, then, it seems, Mr. Elton, who told of my having by accident met Mr. Ridgway at church?"

He looked to see if there was any compassion in her face, but there was none—her voice was cold and pitiless.

He would not appeal to her mercy, he would give no answer, speak no word. He felt that the time had come, and he was ready for it.

"It was dishonourable—for you—to have done it!"

Before the words were uttered she was sorry for them. So is the murderer, probably, when the blow is struck which can never be undone; and she felt at the moment the words were said, that they were registered somewhere, never to be effaced.

He sank back on the chair, as though a veritable blow had been struck, and covered his face with his hands; the cruel words went through his heart like the stab of a sharp knife. His past life, his hopeless love, the utter misery of the future in store for him,

which no repentance could change, no prayers unmake — all passed through his mind in a few moments. If he could but die—but such happiness was not to be his—he was not to empty the poisoned chalice at one draught.

She was terrified at his silence; and now the recollection of his long, patient love for her cut her to the heart as she thought of her cruel words. She spoke to him in endearing tones, but got no answer. She removed his hands from his face. He was ghastly pale, and there was in it a concentrated look of suffering and agony that she never forgot till the day of her death. She was about to rush for assistance, but he restrained her. He could not utter a word.

"Oh! forgive me—forgive me; I have been very cruel and unjust!"

"I should have gone before—but I thought that the love I felt for you might have been able to rescue you from the misery which I saw you were bringing on yourself. Through good and evil report I have been true to you. Let God be judge between us if in all that occurred I have not acted to the best of my judgment as a gentleman and a man of honour. There is much that I cannot tell. There

is a great grief on my life that only death can end—a remorse that will follow me to the grave. You can never know it, or understand what I have suffered. Miserable and almost mad, I saw this man, whom I believed to be your evil genius, whom you often told me you disliked and almost feared, day by day gaining an unnatural influence over you. While I was revolving schemes in my mind how I might save you from what I feared would bring you to utter misery, and preparing utterly to sacrifice myself if I saw any way of saving you; I was suddenly startled by seeing you in company with him and his sister, whom I know to be a false, cunning, intriguing woman; and in a moment of excitement and agitation I let it fall to your brother, never dreaming that it would go any further. I may have acted dishonourably to myself, but never to you—and you last of all should have been the one to have accused me of it.

"I would not have said it to a dog that loved me!"

"Oh, forgive me—forgive me, Reginald! I am unworthy of your great love. Oh, do not part from me in anger. Say that you forgive me my cruel, wicked words, or I shall never know an hour's happiness again!"

"There is nothing to forgive—would to God that there was nothing to forget! But there is a scar here, that I shall carry to the grave. Farewell for ever! To-morrow I leave Richland never to return. The moment is come, and I am ready for it. But remember this—that, among all who have crowded round you and flattered you, you have never met one who has loved you as I have; and if you live to the longest span of human years, you will never meet another who valued and appreciated you as I have."

She burst into tears. It was perhaps the first moment in which she realized what his love for her had been.

"Forgive me if I have pained you! May God guard you and make you happy!"

He pressed her to his breast in one long, terrible embrace, and left her for ever.

* * * * *

The departure of Reginald gave materials for new and exciting gossip. Parties were nearly equally divided as to whether she had jilted him or he her. The ladies naturally took his part, the gentlemen hers.

Among her family there was deep and serious anger; and, for the first time in her life, the spoiled,

petted child felt the weight of her parents' wrath. She was sent off to a sort of temporary banishment to her uncle the dean's rectory, and there, in a remote and desolate place, without any amusement or variety, it was considered that she would come to a proper frame of mind.

Here she fell into a deep state of despondency, and the old idea began to fix itself more firmly than ever on her mind, that she had done something that had lowered herself irretrievably in the eyes of all those whose opinion she valued.

"No nice person would care to marry me now. I am looked on as a hopeless flirt and coquette. It makes no difference what I do. I have behaved badly to every one."

A gloomy religious fanaticism began to take possession of her, which, although she never actually shaped it into concrete form, was akin to that which used to fill our mad-houses—that she had committed some horrible sin unawares, or that she was doomed to destruction for no fault of her own, and that she had no power to help herself.

The teachings of her former governess and friend began to bear their fruit, and long letters were filled with texts which were quoted to prove that it was

her duty to forsake father and mother and all that she possessed for the Lord's sake; to separate herself from the carnal world. In fact, from this lady's reasoning, the Ten Commandments were not intended in a literal sense for the new children of light. She painted a picture of the spiritual destitution of Richland, with just enough truth in the statement to make it more dangerous; then she drew a heartrending picture of her brother's ruin, on account of his fidelity to her. In fact, she all but proved that it was Annabel's duty to disobey her parents, and that it would probably tend to her eternal ruin if she failed to do so.

Little dean Elton was also an unintentional ally. He was very old, very romantic, and as innocent of the world as a three-months'-old baby. He took it into his head that Annabel was deeply in love with Mr. Ridgway, and, when that gentleman came down to the neighbourhood on agency business, asked him to dinner. Dean Elton was now near eighty, but as lively and active as most men of sixty. His wife was a pretty little old lady, just like a Dresden china figure. He was devotedly attached to her—his fiddle—and his numerous pets.

Sometimes of an evening, when in unusually high spirits, he would play a lively air and skip about the room, all the while playing and pirouetting.

"I declare, Mr. Dean, I believe that if I were dead you would marry again!"

"Indeed I would, Katty, my dear! Tum-tum-tiddyum-tum!" And the dean would give another flourish to the bow, and cut another caper about the room.

At length a letter came from Miss Ridgway, saying that misfortunes and suspense were preying so much upon her brother's health that his life was in danger. This was not strictly true, but it was one of those "pious falsehoods" which might be compared to those "pious frauds" of which Sheridan is reported to have said—

"I see the Fraud, but I can't see the Piety."

It had its effect. Annabel became so ill that the dean got permission to take her up to Dublin. There Mr. and Miss Ridgway met them, having cleverly imposed on the Eltons by means of more "pious falsehoods."

Miss Ridgway had played her own game also.

She was about to be privately married to little Mr. Crushton, Lord Garryowen's nephew. She persuaded the passive, almost broken-hearted Annabel to put herself entirely in her hands.

The little dean acted with his usual benevolence and vacillation. He advised different things each day, put off writing to Mr. Elton until it was too late, and remained ignorant of what was done under his very nose.

So events wore on; and one morning Richland was electrified with the news of the double wedding.

Miss Annabel Elton, the belle, the beauty, the heiress, had married Mr. O'Ryan Ridgway; and Miss Anastatia Ridgway was led to the hymeneal altar by Mr. Crushton, nephew to Lord Garryowen.

The double event formed the nine days' wonder of the year, and was scarcely forgotten until a new generation had sprung up, who were naturally more interested in the flirtations and marriages of their own contemporaries than in those of their predecessors.

But the effects of it on Reginald Elton, and the less worldly portion of Richland society, was more lasting and injurious. The evil spirit had gone out

of him; he had repented of his past life. He was seeking for a better one to fill the void, but when this event occurred; when he saw, as he believed, his beloved one led away by evil influences, by hypocrisy and self-seeking, under the guise of religion, all his better thoughts were swept away—the evil spirit returned to find his bosom empty, swept, and garnished, and only too ready to receive it back again. His life was one of those that could not end with this. If he had to drink of the poisoned chalice, he had also tasted of the cup of life; and at some future time, if this poor attempt at painting real life finds any readers, I may take up the thread of his life again.

But for the present his faith was sapped, his belief in religion undermined. In his rage he was unable to draw any distinction between true and false religion. He looked on all professors of it as only different versions of Mr. Ridgway and his sister, who made it a path for their worldliness and ambition, or a cloak for their secret sins.

He could not hate his shattered idol, but with her fell to the ground his faith and hopes, in this world and in the future one. He felt as some old heathen might have done when standing among the ruins of

the Temple of Diana, wrecked by foul and sacrilegious hands. As an unknown poet has said—

"Like a last worshipper who lonely stands
Before some beauteous ruined shrine dejected;
Its altars bare, its columns in the sands,
Its faith denied, its offerings neglected.
Where once he knelt—with rank, wild weeds o'ergrown,
And shattered in the dust, the beauteous idol thrown."

The effect on society in Richland was more injurious still, as it comprised a greater number. The supremacy of the old high and dry Church party became more assured than ever, and the Evangelicals, who had gradually been gaining ground, received a blow from which they never recovered. The world naturally only looks at the outside of things and notes the salient and obvious features. Hence the hatred which all writers have felt for the hypocrite; from Tartuffe to Pecksniff they have been their butt and scorn. But the religious hypocrite is much more dangerous; and as the begging-letter impostor and all false mendacity dry up the springs of charity, so does the religious impostor those of true religion.

Parents began to warn their children against the new sect and their hypocritical pretensions, and saw but little difference between them and the profligacy

of Lord Garryowen and his set, or the open worldliness of the bishop and the Rev. Percival Churchland.

The town became more distinctly wicked, and at this time gambling was followed with an ardour and recklessness that ruined the health and fortunes of numbers.

From this period dates the reign of the lady gamblers of Richland, better known as the "Forty Thieves," consisting of the old Dowager Countess of Garryowen, commonly called the Wicked Countess, and a number of others, who played unlimited loo night after night, until some of them ruined themselves, their husbands, and children. From this period dates the scandal of the Corridor in Konkrim Castle—powdered with a flour dredger to mark the footsteps—which ended in a bloody duel and divorce. Connected with it dates one of those horrible ghost stories—horrible because connected with blood and sin—which was told to the present writer by one of the parties to whom it occurred. At the dead of night Eyre Elton was roused from his sleep by a terrible dream, or manifestation of some sort. He saw quite distinctly one of his oldest and dearest friends, but one whose life had been stained with wildness and profligacy, sitting on the seat of a

hearse; and as he came near he froze his blood by the pale, terrible look on his face, as he said, "Do you know, Eyre, that I am dead?"

Mr. Elton started up and lighted a candle; it was exactly one o'clock. He roused Mrs. Elton, and told her of it, and showed her his watch, pointing to one.

He got up, roused the house, and sent a mounted servant to ride post-haste to his friend's house in Co. Tipperary, and inquire if the master was well.

The servant arrived at about eleven o'clock, having ridden all night and changed horses by the way. When he came, all was confusion. A servant, pale as death, opened the door.

"Mr. Elton sent me to inquire about the master. Is he well, or has anything happened?"

And then the awestruck servant whispered to the other—

"He cut his throat this morning *at one o'clock!*"

A ruined woman—a fortune squandered in play—a husband once a friend—lying in a bloody grave—all had ended, as was natural, in madness and self-murder!

And this man, too, had in him some seed of better things. He, too, had once gone with other

wild companions to Mr. ——'s church, and had gone away for the moment sobered and thoughtful, but when he heard how Mr. and Miss Ridgway had made use of all this fine religion for their own purposes, he was easily led to turn it into ridicule, and to assure his wild companions that they only were the real good people, as they not only did not affect any good which they did not feel, but often pretended to evil which had in reality no existence.

Thus, as the seed sown by the good husbandman produces its hundredfold of good, so did that sown by the religious hypocrites produce its hundredfold of evil. And there were others beside Reginald who would have to drink the poisoned chalice which their own hands had filled.

As it generally happens, however, although the eye of Providence seems to wink sometimes, and the foot of Providence to stumble—as one of Miss Ridgway's favourite preachers once said—still in the end the mill grinds surely if slowly.

The two adventurers, who seemed to have carried everything their own way, were both utterly disappointed in the results. The new Mrs. Crushton made sure that she would come over the uncle as easily as she had captured the nephew, and had all

her arrangements most skilfully made. They *might* have succeeded had she ever been given the chance of one half-hour with him; but she never had it.

Lord Garryowen was so enraged that he refused peremptorily ever to see or hear of his nephew again. He cut him off with a shilling, had a violent fit of the gout, and made the town so hot for him that the newly-married pair had to go and live at a cheap small watering-place, where even her skill in economical cookery was taxed to make both ends meet.

Mr. Ridgway was rather more injured than improved by his marriage. He got his wife's fortune, but he lost several of his best agencies. He also thoroughly miscalculated his plans, and proved himself to be a bad judge of human nature.

Had Mr. Elton been a harsh, violent man, he would probably, when the first burst of indignation had passed off in the bad language prevalent in those days, have concluded that it might be better to make up matters and forgive his daughter. But, because he was an eminently calm, just man, of an almost judicial mind, it was impossible to move him when he had taken a deliberate and unimpassioned resolve. He regarded the act taken by his daughter as a

breach of the contract which should exist between father and daughter, and as one that sapped the very foundations of society and domestic life. As the law executes the criminal, not as a punishment for the crime, but as a means of preventing others from the same; so he held, that to receive back his daughter would be an inducement to others to pursue the same course. Although Mrs. Elton and all his friends tried to soften and alter him, it had not the slightest effect; and to the day of his death he never changed his mind on the subject.

The entire family soon left Richland for some time, and never again were perhaps quite the same as before.

And now, as I think over the events which I have, however imperfectly, endeavoured to lay before my readers, and look for the last time at the old yellow letters and scraps out of old diaries on which this story is founded—stained often with bitter tears—I can scarcely refrain from tears myself, so piteous and sorrowful does it seem that these two young lives so capable of happiness for themselves, and usefulness for others, should thus have been destroyed. But so it is in real life; and were we able to get behind the scenes of these mysteries we

could evolve a law as distinct as that which rules the planets or governs the tides.

'We can only make a faint guess now as to their order and course: and still the one law remains as true as on the day when it was first uttered—"Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

THE END.

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