

THE RIVAL SUITORS.

A NOVEL.

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'THE WIFE'S SISTER,' "THE OLD VICARAGE,"
&c. &c.

"THAT WHICH IS CROOKED CANNOT BE MADE STRAIGHT."
Solomon.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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THE RIVAL SUITORS.

CHAPTER I.

“ And who can blame the mother’s fond affright,
Who sporting on some giddy height
Her infant sees, and springs with hurried hand
To snatch the rover from the dangerous strand ?”
CHRISTIAN YEAR.

It was on a beautiful afternoon about mid-summer, that Nora Moore issued from the house, to take a stroll along the cliffs by the sea-side. The sky was all clear blue above, mingling on the line of the horizon so perfectly with the still, azure sea, that the eye could

scarcely detect the point of union. The surface of the water was like glass—no ripple broke it ; but it rose and sunk with a gently-heaving motion, making a pleasant murmur on the shingly beach. Here and there on its bosom, a white sail at intervals flapped languidly, vainly striving to catch a breath of air, and then, as if resigned to rest, slept motionless above its bright reflection on the blue mirror beneath.

The beach, too, was quiet and deserted ; no stragglers were in sight, either there or over the wide reach of open down, whose precipitous edge was, at high water, sometimes washed by the sea.

Everything spoke of peace and stillness ; a stillness Nora felt in her heart as she wandered on. Her eyes were eagerly scanning the track along the downs. She was evidently looking for some one ;—it was her cousin, Gerard Barton, whose return she was every moment expecting.

Gerard Barton was an officer in the Navy : he had reached the rank of commander, and had

been appointed, about a couple of years before, an Inspecting Commander of the Coast-Guard, on the southern coast. This was a great pleasure to him, as he had an only sister, to whom he was much attached, and to whom he was now able to offer a home. Miriam Barton was much older than her brother. There were nearly fifteen years between them. But this did not prevent the existence of a strong fraternal affection ; and as they had few other relations in the world, the brother and sister clung the closer to each other.

It was during one of Gerard's voyages that Miriam had undertaken the care of a girl, the orphan daughter of a cousin, to whom she had in early years been much attached. Nora's mother was not full cousin to Miriam ; consequently the actual tie of blood to her daughter was slight ; but the tie of love was very strong ; and Nora had met, in her cousin Miriam's care, as full a substitute for her lost mother, as it was possible should be furnished by another.

The three lived together now on the outskirts of a small market town and fishing-port, just where Gerard's appointment had fixed them.

Nora had wandered on to about half-a-mile or more from home, but she saw no trace of Gerard ; and after a few more looks in the direction from which she expected him, she turned towards the sea. Just in front of her extended a long, narrow promontory, running out straight into the water, whose precipitous sides hung over the advancing waves, and threw dark green, and purple shadows into their cool depths. To the right and left, a little strip of beach was still uncovered, accessible by many a narrow, zig-zag path, down the grey cliffs. But this promontory, known by the country people as "the Bridge," projected so far into the sea, that Nora thought it would be pleasant to walk down it, and enjoy the fresh smell of the deep waters which washed its foot. She advanced, and presently her attention was attracted by the sound of a child crying. She could see no one,

near; but anxiously following the voice, she went on even to the end of "the Bridge," where the ground on the summit was so rough and broken, that she had seldom cared to make her way over it.

Still the sound arose above the ripple, and the gentle dash, and the heavy, hollow murmur of the waves, as they washed slowly against the rough, honey-combed cliff beneath. She looked over cautiously; there, on a detached fragment of rock, rising but little now above the surface, with a belt of deep water between it and "the Bridge," she saw a child, a boy of about six years old, alone, and crying bitterly.

It was evident, that in half an-hour, or less, the advancing tide must wash over his present refuge. There was no possibility of helping him where she stood; and long ere she could summon aid, it might be too late. She looked around in fear and trembling. What could she do? At that moment another person appeared,

a woman, who came flying down "the Bridge" with frantic speed.

"My child! my Louis!" cried she, wildly stretching her arms towards him.—"*Oh, Ciel! mais tu vas périr là—au secours!*"

Then turning, and catching Nora's arm, she exclaimed, in a low, hoarse voice, "Mademoiselle, tell me, is there no help—no habitation—no man near?"

"I fear not," said Nora, looking round.—"I could run to the Preventive Station; I know nothing else to do." •

"*Mais c'est là, là-haut,*" returned the woman, "too far, too far; he would drown first!—is there no hope?"

"If we could make those boatmen hear," suggested Nora, pointing to a small boat which floated about half-a-mile from the shore.—"Stay, we will try."

She hastily took off the black scarf she wore, and waved it in the air, bidding her companion join her voice, in an effort to attract attention.

It was vain. The boat slipped lazily over the water, aided by the oars, whose sound perhaps prevented the men on board hearing the women's voices.

Still the tide flowed on. Now it wanted scarce an inch of covering the retreat of the child. Had there been any wind, he must already have been washed away. Dashing on the ground the shawl and bonnet which she wore, the French woman approached the edge, and seemed about to spring into the sea.

“Oh, no, don't,” cried Nora, catching her arm, “can you swim? you will drown too!”

“*Mais laissez moi, donc!*” exclaimed she, impatiently trying to free herself from Nora's grasp, “*Que je périsse — que vous impotre. Oui Louis, mon ange — je viens à toi.*”

“No, no, there is some one coming,” cried Nora, more eagerly, “look, a horseman! — perhaps he can help; — wait, I will call him.”

The French woman turned and looked towards the new comer, who was cantering along the

green sward towards "the Bridge." Without a moment's delay, Nora ran forward, again waving her scarf above her head, and calling, "Help! help!"

He heard her, and advanced so rapidly, as to meet her half way, demanding what she wanted.

In the fewest possible words, she explained the situation of the child, whilst he, with an eagle glance, scanned the sea and coast from the edge of the rocks where he stood.

"Could you ride for help?" cried Nora, in an agony of suspense, seeing he paused.

"Too late, too late—there is but one way; lend me your scarf."

As he spoke, he tore off his coat, and catching her black scarf from her hands, he hastily threw it over his horse's head, so as to blind his eyes, then plunging his spurs into his flanks, he urged him on. With one bound the fiery steed cleared the edge of the rocks, and as a half smothered shriek escaped Nora's lips, rider and horse disappeared.

For a moment she covered her eyes in horror, then ran to the bank to look over.

The sea was deep and smooth, without rock or shoal, where he had sprung into it, and ere she was able to recall her attention, his brave horse was swimming rapidly towards the isolated rock, where stood the trembling child stretching his arms for help, though the foam which that bold plunge had raised, yet floated round the spot where they had broken the glassy surface.

Crouched on the extreme edge of "the Bridge," her face muffled in her shawl, and motionless as the stone on which she sat, was the Frenchwoman, whom Nora supposed to be the boy's mother. Her dark eyes glowed from under the shadow of her shawl, like coals of fire; her hands, which supported her chin, were clenched; her whole air and attitude bespoke the highest pitch of agonised endurance.

One glance showed Nora this; then her eyes went back to the bold pair, the man and horse,

breasting the waves below : still, even in that moment of excitement, she could not but feel for the mother's agony, and drawing close to her, she said quietly,—

“Your child will be saved now.”

“*Grâce à Dieu !*” was the murmured reply ; then turning, she exclaimed in English, which she spoke with a slight accent, “Do you know *him*—that man !” pointing to the horseman below.

“I never saw him before ; see, he has almost reached the rock ; he signs to the boy to spring ; he can get no nearer. Will he dare ?”

Nora caught her breath in suspense. It was evident the horse could not approach close enough for its rider to reach the child, there were broken rocks projecting out ; he was encouraging the child to take a leap ; the boy hesitated but a moment, then sprang forwards. The women uttered simultaneously a sharp exclamation, but the suspense was short ; even before they could have spoken twenty words,

the boy was safe in the arms of the man, the horse's head was turned again to shore, and striking out for the beach, aided by the tide, they made rapid way.

"Where will he come to shore?" presently said the strange woman.

"Down below, come let us run to meet him," and Nora started off. She fancied her companion was following her. To her great joy, as she advanced along "the Bridge," she saw Gerard Barton driving towards it. He stopped when he saw her, and looked at her in wonder, for her dress was disordered, her hair blowing wildly about, and her countenance excited in the highest degree.

"Why, Nora!" exclaimed he, when she was near enough for him to speak; "what now?"

"Oh, cousin Gerard, look, look," pointing to the beach which the adventurous horseman had nearly reached with his burden. "Come down to meet him, he has saved the child's life, let us take them home."

Nora's explanation might not have been very effective, had not Gerard's eyes helped it out ; but seeing that something was the matter, and supposing he might be of service, he threw the reins to his servant, and sprang out. Nora caught his arm, and together they ran down one of the narrow winding paths which traversed the broken face of the cliff. As they went, Nora explained, as well as she could, what had occurred, and as the dripping trio gained the beach, Gerard and she both came up and eagerly enquired if the child was hurt.

"I think not," said the stranger, springing from his horse and holding up the boy. "Here he is, all right ; is he yours ? Have I the infinite pleasure of restoring your brother to you ?" He spoke to Nora, and even at that moment his eyes expressed the most unequivocal admiration for her bright young face and slender figure.

"Oh no, I do not even know who he is ; his mother is——where is she ? she was there with me on the rocks, where can she be ?"

They looked round in vain, no one was near.

"We need not stay here," said Gerard. "You are wet, sir, and this unfortunuate child, too ; let us take him home. Come with me, and I will give you dry clothes ; my house is but half a mile off, and your horse, too, can be groomed and rested."

"My noble horse," said the stranger, patting his steed, who stood with drooping head and heaving flanks, panting from the exertion it had made. The child still clung to his preserver's shoulder, and looked fearfully and anxiously about, paying no attention to what was said by the others.

"We will take him home in the carriage," said Nora, eagerly. "Will you come with me?"

The boy took no notice of the question ; recollecting herself, she repeated it in the best French she could command, blushing deeply at the effort.

"*Maman, où est maman ?*" cried he ; "*est elle partie ; mais où est elle donc ?*"

"Come, we waste time, the mother no doubt

will come presently, and we cannot stand here," said Gerard.

"Give me the child," said Nora.

"Oh no, he will make you wet," replied the stranger, "and I have lost your scarf; if you, sir, will carry the boy, I will lead my horse up these cliffs, perhaps we shall find the mother above. I had hoped I was obliging you, too," added he, in a soft voice to Nora as they proceeded onwards.

"And so you did; you made me so happy—oh! I cannot tell the joy I felt when I saw that boy safe in your arms. How brave, how courageous, to take that leap! how quick of you to think of it. Oh! how I thank you! And the mother—why does she not come too? She was a foreigner—a Frenchwoman."

"Perhaps it is my uniform has frightened her away, Nora," said Gerard; "maybe she is afraid of the Coast Guard. There are some people who are not fond of seeing me."

"Ah, I did not think of that! I will go

home with you, Gerard, and take the boy with us. And you, sir, will come too?"

He seemed to hesitate; both the others renewed and pressed the invitation. He said he should inconvenience them he feared—he had better go home; he was guest with Mr. Lawrence at Airstone Hall, and it was only a ride of five miles. But Nora's dark blue eyes looked so persuasively from under their black lashes, that he soon yielded, and they took the road to Captain Barton's house.

Nora was so occupied in soothing the boy on her knees, and wrapping him up in a cloak which her cousin had in the carriage, that she had hardly time to say a dozen words to Gerard regarding the affair, and none at all to bestow on the stranger, who kept his horse close along side of them. Yet he was certainly worth notice too. He was a man of commanding figure and handsome features; critics might have called the former stiff, and the latter stern, or perhaps harsh, but they could not have

denied the claim to an imposing appearance. He was past the glow of youth ; his years must have been forty, and even might be more ; it was not easy to tell the exact age from such a countenance, but time did not seem to have detracted from his favourable appearance ; you would not have said, " How handsome he *has* been !" when you looked at him, but " How handsome he *is* !" And then the romantic incident which had introduced him to her acquaintance, was not of a nature to close Nora's heart to his personal charms.

Ten minutes brought them to Captain Barton's house, and a very few more sufficed to establish the whole party inside of it. If there was one thing which Cousin Miriam was particular about, it was the spotless purity of her house ; the one weakness of her character was a love of order ; in other respects she was a thoroughly good woman, and if you only avoided a dirt or a litter, you might command her services entirely. But certainly tidiness was with her

something more than a hobby—it was rather a nightmare, keeping her in miserable thralldom ; according to her, the chief end of furniture was to be dusted ; chairs were rather intended to stand in their places, than to be sat upon ; books were only right when in order on the shelves ; and the object of putting carpets on the floor, was to have something to cover with brown-holland.

That she was a thoroughly charitable, kind-hearted woman was therefore plainly shown, by her reception of the two unexpected guests. No sooner did she understand what was wanted (and before she knew what had occurred), than she bravely shut her eyes to the sad marks which wet and sand-covered boots had made on her spotless holland, and magnanimously resolving not to mind, she led her unknown guest up to her best chamber, a room standing in all the glory of unused furniture and carefully-screened carpet, and begged him to consider himself at home, and ask for anything he might require.

Then she assisted Nora to undress the scared-looking little French boy and place him in bed, where, from the combined effect of warmth and quiet, after his terror and exhaustion, he soon dropped asleep. It was not till after these duties of hospitality were performed, that Gerard found her armed with a brush and a duster, ruefully contemplating certain stains apparently indelible by any art short of the laundress and her tub. Gerard knew what a shock his sister's feelings must have received on the occasion; and although not much more inclined to superfluous neatness than the rest of his sex, he was too fond of her not to respect her peculiarities. He pitied the misfortunes which had befallen her, and endeavoured to assist in repairing them, but without much success. Nora did better when she came down; she turned her cousin's attention to another object, and working on her humanity and admiration of courage, succeeded in making her forget the mischief which her hospitality had brought on

her. She entered into a most animated detail of the whole adventure, and had just arrived at the point, when the brave and fiery courser, with his long mane waving in the air, and his tail flowing out like Mazeppa's wild horse, had been urged by his devoted rider to take that desperate leap, when her eloquence was interrupted by the entrance of her hero, and as the door of the drawing-room was open, she had the satisfaction of concluding that he must have heard a great part of her enthusiastic speech. There came an abrupt termination to her discourse, and the bright pink colour mounted to her temples. She was too embarrassed to see whether he observed her confusion, and he was apparently too well bred to appear to notice it.

He turned politely to Miss Barton, to apologise for the involuntary trouble he had occasioned her, and then proceeded to inform them that his name was Mortimer, that he was a stranger in the country, now on a visit to Mr. Lawrence, and that his own residence was in a

distant county, to which he expected to return in a few days. They then fell into a conversation relative to the child whose life he had that day preserved. Mr. Mortimer had seen nothing of the mother, who, Nora affirmed, had been with her on the Bridge; he smilingly asked Miss Moore if she were quite sure that this person was not a phantom of her own excited imagination, an ideal personage existing in her fancy only. But Nora declared her certain conviction of her actual presence; she had heard, seen, felt her; but she had entirely adopted her cousin Gerard's suggestion; she probably belonged to some smuggling party, and the sight of the commander would be enough at once to drive her away.

"We will keep the child till the mother comes for him," continued she; "may we not, cousin Gerard?—Do say yes, pray!" and she went up to her cousin, and laid her hand beseechingly on his shoulder. Gerard looked up for one moment at her glittering, blue eyes,

then moving a little so as to withdraw gently from the hand she had laid on him, he answered with a laugh, intended, perhaps, to hide another feeling—

“Oh, yes, Nora, keep him by all means, till the mother claims him.”

“There’s a good, kind cousin,” replied she, gaily; “Now, Mr. Mortimer, you are witness to his promise—I may keep the child till the mother reappears.”

Mr. Mortimer could only agree and applaud. Captain Barton felt tolerably confident that he was not pledging himself to any very rash undertaking, firmly believing that the first time he went out on duty to a sufficient distance, the woman would return to claim her boy; and as he would have the very next day to make a visit at a station about ten miles off, he thought it highly probable that twenty-four hours would be the utmost limit to which the little Louis’s stay in their keeping would extend.

Meantime dinner was served, and Miss Bar-

ton warmly pressed Mr. Mortimer to partake of their family meal, to which he acceded with ready courtesy ; making himself very agreeable to each lady of the family, by his pleasant conversation, and polished manners.

Dinner was followed by coffee and a stroll down the garden, where, whilst Gerard indulged in a cigar, Mr. Mortimer devoted himself to Nora—told her tales of France and Italy, of smugglers and bandits, of Corsican *vendetta*, and Spanish jealousy, till Nora thought herself listening to some charming romance, and only awoke to the memory of who and what she was, on cousin Miriam calling them to tea.

By this time, Mr. Mortimer's clothes were perfectly dry ; and as he was really forced to return to Airstone that night, unless he wished to make his friends there seriously uneasy, he resumed his own apparel, and with a superfluity of thanks and civil words, mounted his horse and rode away through the dusk of the summer night.

Nora watched him as long as her fancy made him visible, and then turned away from the window with an exclamation, that at last she had met with an adventure, and a hero.

“You have been so occupied with Mr. Mortimer apparently as to forget your little hero,” said Miss Barton. “I found the child awake, probably from being very hungry, for he ate a great quantity of toast and butter, and then returned to sleep again. To my mind he has neither eat nor slept for the last twenty-four hours !”

“Poor boy !” said Nora, and she went off to look at him.

Gerard sat down to write ; his sister took out her work ; and when Nora returned she found the parlour as quiet as the bed-room, where she had just left the sleeping-child.

“Busy, cousin Gerard ?” said she, coming up to his writing-table ; “can I help you ?”

He accepted her offer, for he had a great quantity of official writing to do, in which she

often assisted by copying reports ; but her thoughts to-night were wandering, and she made several mistakes, of which she was quite unconscious. She could not help wondering whether she should ever see Mr. Mortimer again, and at last, laying down her pen, she put the question to her cousin.

“ Really, I cannot tell,” he replied with a half-vexed air ; “ it is more important that we should see this French woman, I think, that she may take away the child.”

Nora supposed he was very much worried by his business, for he did not often speak so impatiently : she felt her question had been out of place, and resumed her work in silence.

Bed-time came, and cousin Miriam, who was rather particular that her ward should keep regular hours, reminded her of the necessity of moving. She quietly put the papers together, unwilling to interrupt Gerard again, but he looked up with his own kind smile to thank her for her labours, and as she gave him her hand, he drew her a little nearer, and whispered—

“ I am afraid I was cross, Nora ; forgive me, I did not mean it.”

“ Oh, cousin !” was her only reply ; but it was spoken in a tone so full of affection and confidence, so indicative of astonishment at the idea that he could be wrong, and of shame on her part, at his acknowledgment of it, as to be eloquent with meaning to him.

CHAPTER II.

“Or is it Love, the dear delight
Of hearts that know no guile,
That all around see all things bright
With their own magic smile?”

CHRISTIAN YEAR.

IF Nora's first thought the next morning was, how had her young charge slept, her next was certainly, how good and kind cousin Gerard was. The little French boy, however, gave her a great deal of occupation: she found him in an agony of distress at the absence of “Maman,” for whom he was calling piteously; and she had not sufficient command of the language to be

able to soothe him in his native tongue. Her soft tones, sweet smiles, and kisses were intelligible to him, and eventually had more effect than her words ; although she made him more promises of his mother's prompt return than she had any foundation for giving, moved by his passionate sorrow at finding himself amongst strangers.

At breakfast, Gerard mentioned that he should be obliged, in the course of the forenoon, to drive in a direction towards the nearest large town ; and as the ladies generally had some shopping to do there, he suggested that Nora should accompany him. Perhaps he had a special reason for proposing this plan ; he had a sort of presentiment that Mr. Mortimer would call that day, and although he did not choose to say so to his cousin, nor even quite like to admit it to himself, he felt that was a motive for wishing to take her away with him. Something made him very unwilling that those two should meet again. The evident admiration of the gentle-

man was unpleasant to him. To him it seemed of a patronising, condescending nature, which was offensive to his feelings; he thought it implied a certainty of a welcome, consciousness that he was doing its object an honour, which ought to be received with gratitude and humble wonder.

Gerard was irritated, without liking to own it. He kept on repeating to himself,—we know nothing of this Mr. Mortimer's station or fortune; he may be rich, and great, and honourable; he may be very much above us in position, but if so, nobody asked him to stoop to our level; we did very well without him, and could do so still. If for his own pleasure he amuses himself with admiring Miss Moore, let him be satisfied with his labour as his reward, and not look round after every condescending compliment, as if to observe—"How kind I am to notice her this way."

Such had been Captain Barton's impression of his guest's manners, a little coloured, perhaps,

by certain unacknowledged feelings in his own mind, but yet sufficiently justifiable on the whole ; and it was this which made him anxious to withdraw his young cousin, from a chance of encountering any more of such attentions.

But Nora was not inclined to accede to the plan ; she thought it very possible that the strange mother of the child might return, when Captain Barton was out of the way, and she was extremely desirous of seeing her again ; so she answered her cousin by kissing and caressing her young *protegé*, who sat beside her in mournful silence, stating between these little interludes, that she could not leave the boy. Cousin Miriam proposed to go herself, in that case ; but this Gerard decidedly negatived ; if there was any chance of the stranger coming, he said, his sister had better remain at home with Nora, for she might want more sense and steadiness than was to be found as yet under those pretty curls ; and Miriam readily agreed to a

suggestion which implied that she had sense and steadiness for two.

"I must finish my papers and reports, before starting," observed Gerard, turning to his writing-table.

Nora again offered her services as clerk, but he looked up with a quaint smile.

"It took me till midnight, Nora, correcting the mistakes you made yesterday; so, I think, as your mind is not in the work of helping me, I will excuse you now."

"Was I really so bad, cousin Gerard?" said she, blushing deeply; "I wonder what I was thinking of?"

"So do I—for I found sundry blunders of a wonderful nature. I suppose it was the little boy who had got into your head. However, as I have not time for such elaborate corrections to-day, I think I will trust to my own pen alone."

"No, now, cousin, do let me, I am so sorry for giving you such trouble." Nora's blue eyes

filled with tears, and she looked irresistibly penitent. "Do forgive me!"

Gerard laughed.

"I think I could forgive worse crimes than that, Nora," said he, kindly; "do not grieve so profoundly."

"Then let me write for you now," said she, taking a pen.

"No; go and talk to your new pet."

"I don't want to."

"My dear Nora," said Gerard, laying down his pen and looking up at her, "you would oblige me very much if you would ascertain from that child all you can relative to his mother and her companions. I have a strong notion that she must be connected with some of the gang I have been so long trying to catch; and if you could get any information from him as to their haunts or movements, it might be of the greatest service. It must be before I go out this morning, too; and perhaps I may be able to trace his friends in return."

Nora hesitated no longer ; she comprehended at once what Gerard wanted, and resolved to do her utmost, but this was by no means an easy task ; the boy's infantine manner and imperfect pronounciation might have made it a difficulty, had their tongues been the same ; but though Nora could read French with tolerable ease, it was quite another thing to endeavour to follow the lisping and rapid utterance of the little foreigner, although his language was not exactly a *patois*, only a childish inaccuracy of expression.

From what she did make out, it appeared that he and his mother had come over the sea, she fancied, some days before ; had travelled long by the side of the water ; that he had been too tired to walk farther, and that whilst his mother had gone on to the town to buy bread, he had sat on the rocks till the sea came in all round him. This was all they could be sure of. His name was Louis ; he had no other that he knew of ; his mother's name was

“Maman,” only Pierre called her sometimes “Nanette.”

Who was Pierre, was of course the next question, but the boy could give no definite answer; he was the man in the boat—he had always lived with them, but sometimes he and his mother used both to go away, and then little Louis was left with *Mère Luppé*, in a cottage by the sea, but where this was he could not give them the remotest idea. That it was somewhere in France was all they knew. As to his father, he had never heard of such a person, and seemed inclined to doubt that he had ever had an existence. Pierre was never called anything else, and he was evidently considered as an object of peculiar dislike and fear; the boy shuddered as he mentioned him, and looked round cautiously, as if dreading lest the object of his aversion should appear.

Gerard started alone on his expedition; not a word had passed that morning relative to Mr. Mortimer.

His anticipations proved quite correct. Early in the afternoon a very dashing dog-cart drove up to the door, from which descended the hero of the previous day, and the owner of Airstone Park, Mr. Mortimer and Mr. Lawrence. The latter was known by sight to the ladies at Rock Cottage, for so Captain Barton's residence was named; although, in the natural course of events, it would not have occurred that the great squire and landowner five miles off would have taken any cognizance of the existence of the Inspecting Commander of the Coast Guard.

Miss Barton was a little surprised, half inclined to consider it a liberty, and then good-naturedly resolving the object of the visit into curiosity about the little French boy, she determined to receive it as it was intended, perhaps, as an accident, which would not occur again.

Mr. Mortimer introduced his companion; Mr. Lawrence needed no more to make his own way. He was a younger man, with exceedingly popular manners, such as an M.P. may be

supposed to find most serviceable, which being backed by a pleasant person, and sweet smile, he made himself a place directly in Miss Barton's good graces. His object was avowedly to see the boy whose life his friend had saved. He said, that as Mr. Mortimer was extremely anxious to come for that purpose, and had also greatly excited the curiosity of the family at Airstone, he had ventured to intrude. It was not only curiosity ! it was a desire to know if he, or the mother, stood in need of assistance ; foreigners often were greatly distressed ; had Miss Barton ascertained anything about them ?

It was but little that Miss Barton could tell. The mother had not appeared ; no one had come to claim the child ; they had been able as yet to obtain no clue to his friends, if he had any ; but still there was time. A hundred things might have prevented the people he belonged to re-appearing ; especially, if, as there was reason to suppose, they were a smuggling party : nothing else afforded so simple a solu-

tion to the mystery of her suddenly quitting her child, and Miss Barton was perfectly satisfied to abide by that.

Whilst this dialogue was going on on one side, Mr. Mortimer was doing his best to win from the little boy some account of himself. His French was so much more fluent and idiomatic than any which Nora or cousin Miriam could produce, that it had at first more influence with the little fellow, who went up to him with confidence, and began to answer. But by one of those whimsical changes, or unaccountable connections of ideas to which childhood is subject ; perhaps from caprice, perhaps from sensibility, the child had hardly fixed his large dark eyes on his interrogator's face, than a cloud came over his own ; tears gathered on the shady lashes, he smothered a sob or two, then running to Nora, buried his face in her lap, and cried convulsively. She tried to soothe him, and after some minutes, she succeeded in hushing his sobs, and keeping him quiet in her arms, but she could

not get him to raise his face again, or speak another syllable.

“Poor little fellow!” said she tenderly pressing her lips to his cheek, “I am so sorry it should happen to annoy you,” added she, looking up at the visitor apologetically; for she saw he *was* annoyed — there was a cloud on his brow.

“Oh, never mind. He knows when he is well off. I do not wonder in the least,” was the answer, a little loftily given.

“I can quite understand it,” continued she, in the same soft, apologetic voice. “He probably remembers your face, and the sight of it, no doubt, recalled at once his terror at the water, and his grief for his mother. He is too young to understand exactly what he owes you. I hope your beautiful horse is none the worse for his great exertions yesterday, Mr. Mortimer?”

This led to a long conversation on topics unconnected with the child. The gentlemen

stayed a considerable time, and made themselves very agreeable; probably the horse and groom, all the time waiting at the gate, were the most impatient of the length of the visit. When they were going, Mr. Lawrence observed, "If this woman really should desert this child, we must do something for the poor little thing. Get up a subscription or something of the sort for him. You proposed that, Mortimer, I think?"

"Why, yes: having saved his life I feel an interest in the boy, and would not leave him to perish," replied Mr. Mortimer. "You know the old superstition about drowning folks, Miss Moore; you see I am prepared to defy it."

"Oh, yes, that was a dreadful and selfish idea," cried Nora, shrinking; "invented by avarice to excuse cruelty. It ought to be forgotten entirely. I am sure this dear little fellow will never hurt any one, he is so gentle; and least of all, the brave hand that saved him from death."

"I am not much afraid, at any rate," said

Mr. Mortimer ; “ and with you for guarantee of his good conduct, would have undertaken the risk, had there been any to run.”

Nora coloured at the tone and manner of the speaker ; her embarrassment was half satisfaction, half annoyance ; she was not sure that she liked the condescending compliments so loftily paid her, and her ingenuous countenance perhaps betrayed the thought.

The visitors had been gone some time, before Gerard returned from his excursion. His first question was regarding the French woman, but he did not seem at all surprised when he found she had not appeared. He said he expected it. To Nora's eager questions as to whether *he* had heard anything at all about her, he replied that he had ascertained with tolerable certainty, that they had landed from a French vessel which had appeared off the coast, at a small fishing village a few miles distant ; at least, a party consisting of a man, woman, and child had been seen there, and there seemed reason to think the two

former had returned on board after night-fall. The vessel which had been hovering about all day yesterday, had now disappeared, and for anything he could see to the contrary, they might consider that they were enriched for life by the unexpected possession of this boy, thus unceremoniously left on their hands. He was convinced it was a plot of these French people to provide for the child, and that the mother had purposely exposed it to danger on the beach, in the hopes of exciting the well-known compassion of some wealthy and generous Englishman.

Nora would not coincide. Her recollection of the woman's agony at his peril, was too deeply impressed to allow her to suppose it feigned. Besides, his rescue had been so entirely the effect of chance, and the escape from certain death had been so narrow, that to believe any mother could have depended on it, would be impossible. No, she could not imagine the accident had been planned, though it was just within the bounds of probability that finding her

child sheltered for the present, and unable to reclaim him immediately without danger, she had been not unwilling to leave him with those who had been so kind ; perhaps she had been obliged to embark, and had been without choice as to her conduct, and possibly they might receive some notice or letter where to send him, or what to do on his behalf.

“And you will keep him, Cousin Gerard?” continued she, eagerly, “at least for a little while : do, please !”

“Why, what else could I do, Nora ? I could not throw him over the rocks, nor turn him out houseless and friendless. We must keep him for the present, and see what comes of it.”

“Oh, I am so glad !—How good you are !” exclaimed she, with enthusiasm.

“I dare say no harm will come of it,” said Miss Barton, quietly ; “one need not expect to repent kindness shown to the stranger, the houseless, and the helpless.”

Gerard turned away to a parcel which he had laid on the table at his entrance.

“Here, Nora, I have brought this for you, that you, at least, may have no cause to repent of yesterday’s adventure.—I hope you will like it.”

The parcel, when opened by her eager fingers, presented a very pretty, but simple black silk mantle, intended to replace the scarf she had lost.

Nora was enraptured with the gift, not only for the elegant simplicity of the choice, but for the kind thoughtfulness which it evinced; and she looked very much inclined, in her transports, to thank her cousin with the innocent kiss, which, two years ago, he would have claimed almost as a right. But, for some occult reason, Gerard had latterly seemed unwilling to receive this mark of affection, which, consequently, Nora became shy of offering; so the custom had been suffered to fall into abeyance, and she contented herself with words for her thanks.

He smiled and looked very well pleased at her expressions of satisfaction as she threw the cloak around her shoulders, and turned about to try and see how it looked behind ; or stood on tiptoe, to endeavour to catch a satisfying glimpse of herself in the small attempt at a pier-glass over the fire-place. Her admiration and thanks seemed particularly pleasant to him ; he stood with his back to the chimney, watching her as she skipped about, and smiling at her ecstasies as she declared it was too good for every-day wear, and that she should keep it for Sundays and visits.

But a cloud came over that bright smile when his sister mentioned the visitors they had received that day. Just what he had expected ! Why did it annoy him so ? He turned round ; and whilst still watching Nora's evolutions by means of the glass in which they were reflected, he questioned his sister as to what had passed. Nora took no part in the conversation. Having removed and carefully folded her new cloak, she

sat down by little Louis, and began busily assisting him to construct a castle of cards, in which elaborate occupation she had indeed been interrupted by Gerard's return.

Dinner followed,—that meal, owing to the peculiar nature of Gerard's employment, being at an extremely variable time ; and the evening was devoted by Nora to an attempt to beguile the still sad-hearted boy into something like play in the garden, in which she succeeded more effectually in enticing Gerard himself to join.

However, when the child was eventually put to bed, the more matter-of-fact Miss Barton proceeded to demonstrate, that if he was to remain with them, though only for a few weeks, he would require more clothes than the somewhat worn and shabby suit he had on when found. This led to a discussion, in which she introduced the proposal suggested by Mr. Lawrence, regarding a subscription for his benefit.

Gerard was half affronted. " If he adopted the child, he did not want the neighbourhood to

help support him," he said. "Why need Mr. Lawrence concern himself in the matter? Mr. Mortimer, too, might keep his patronage till it was wanted." He took up the newspaper as he said this, and began to read.

Nora sat by in silence, diligently sewing at one of the small garments which her cousin Miriam had already cut out for Louis, in demonstration of the necessity of making them. For a few minutes nobody spoke; and the sharp crack of certain breadths of calico, which Miss Barton was tearing off, alone broke the tranquillity of the scene. Then laying down her scissors and measure, she next proceeded to lay down the law, in her own peculiarly gentle, yet irresistible manner.

She told Gerard that, "of course, he was at perfect liberty to adopt the child if he pleased; but that as neither of the other gentlemen were aware of his intentions, they could hardly be called intrusive, or presuming, in their wish to do something for the little destitute foreigner: they

might well consider that the burden of such an importation should not rest only on the one household nearest the spot where this waif was thrown. Moreover, although to Gerard, at present the expense of maintaining a child of six years old was nothing, should he be entirely left on his hands, it would become hereafter a very different affair. A few years hence Gerard might be again on half-pay, might be wishing to marry, might even have a wife and family; what would he then do, if he had taken the sole charge of Louis on himself? Would it be just to his own children, or to Louis, if he had refused, from superfluous generosity and overdrawn refinement, the assistance which others might have been willing to afford?"

Gerard tapped the table softly with his fingers while his sister was speaking, but listened, as he always did, with perfect and polite attention.

"My dear Miriam," said he, at length, "I did not know you had so much imagination and fancy."

“ I have not,” said she, quietly ; “ I am sure what I said was plain and unfanciful enough. Don’t put me off with a laugh, Gerard.”

“ Indeed, sister, your flights of fancy surprise me. They are undeniable, as shopkeepers say of their bargains. First, you suppose this child left for years on our hands ; then you suggest that the neighbourhood should be so romantically generous as to subscribe more than enough to buy him a suit of clothes ; and last and greatest stretch of the imagination, you paint me, to my own bewildered and astonished vision, as a man with a wife and family to care for. If that is not a castle-in-the-air, I wonder what it is ?”

“ At any rate,” said his sister, smiling good-humouredly, “ you must allow I keep within the bounds of probability in some respects, since I imagine you, under those circumstances, to be still a *poor* man.”

“ True.”

“ But suppose they did subscribe a considera-

ble sum for this child, say a few hundred pounds, you would not refuse it, Gerard?"

"No, I suppose I should have neither right nor power to do that. All I could do would be to add my own half-crown to the list."

"I mean to provide for him myself," said Nora, "if he is left here. As soon as I am of age I shall settle something on him—half my fortune, I think."

Cousin Miriam smiled again; but neither she nor Gerard objected.

Just then the servant entered with a large *carton* in her hand, such as indicates to female eyes some desirable article of millinery lying within. It was addressed to Miss Barton, and there was a note accompanying it.

She opened it, a little curious and surprised. It was from Mr. Mortimer, and stated, in the politest terms, that, regretting extremely to have been the means of depriving Miss Moore of her scarf, he had endeavoured to replace the article in the best way he could, and he hoped

she would find the accompanying mantle a tolerable substitute. Nora looked both grave and astonished : she did not interfere, but allowed Cousin Miriam to open the box and take out its contents.

It was an azure silk mantle, profusely trimmed and ornamented with all that superfluity of lace, guipure, and frill, which milliners' interests and innate bad taste persuade so many women is at once fashionable and elegant, but which is so ludicrously unfitted for an outer covering in our changeable and humid climate.

"There, Nora, what do you think of that?" said Miriam, as she held it up. "What magnificent lace! it must have cost guineas a yard."

"What makes Mr. Mortimer send that to me?" said Nora, not quite pleased.

"His note gives the reason, my dear. Do you like it?" replied her cousin, still holding up the glistening mantle.

“No,” said Nora, walking leisurely round and inspecting it on every side, until she got into a position which enabled her to take in the present and Gerard’s face at one *coup-d’œil*. There she stopped. He was looking anything but pleased himself ; she could not quite make out his feelings, but there was gloom of some kind on his brow.

“What do you think, Cousin Gerard ? Should you like me to wear that thing ?”

“I ! oh, what does that signify, if you like it yourself ?” replied he, bringing back his eyes from an earnest contemplation of her face, as she raised hers to him.

“Well, I do *not* ; I do not like such finery ; nor do I like taking a present from Mr. Mortimer. Cousin Miriam, I need not, need I, accept it ? I hope I am not proud ; but I do not like being so much obliged to him. Perhaps, if he had given me a plain black scarf like my own, there would have been some excuse for

that. But this !—no, no, I hope I need not wear that !”

“ Well, I will send it back, my dear, if you like. I suppose you need not take it.—She is not obliged to accept it, is she, Gerard, just to please Mr. Mortimer ?”

“ There can be no obligation in the matter,” said Gerard, warmly.

“ I dare say he meant to be very good-natured,” observed Nora, as she assisted to replace the mantle in its tissue-paper envelopes ; “ but I wish he had not done it.”

“ So do I,” said Miss Barton, “ it will be so troublesome to write a civil note to decline it, without giving offence.”

“ Just say the truth, that I do not want a mantle, because cousin Gerard has been so kind ; and that in any case, this is much too magnificent for a country girl like me,” said Nora.

“ It is easy for you to talk, my dear ; but it is a very different thing for me to write such mes-

sages," replied Miriam; and so it appeared to be, for it took her till ten o'clock composing the rough draft of the note which contained Nora's sentiments.

CHAPTER III.

“Darker tempests lour;
Still, sullen heavings rock the labouring ground.”
CHRISTIAN YEAR.

“Now, Miriam,” said Gerard, after Nora had gone to bed, “put away that writing, please; I want to talk to you before I go out.”

“Are you going out to-night?” said his sister; “then I must order a little supper laid for you. I had forgotten.”

“I spoke to Susan about it myself, my dear, when I ordered my horse; I am going at eleven as far as the White Rock, and perhaps shall

not be back till morning. Do sit down and listen."

"Well," said Miriam, arranging herself.

"Well, it seems to me that this boy has been entirely deserted; and if we are really to bring him up, we must prepare not to mind what the good-natured world will say on the matter."

"They would, I suppose, think us foolish, if they did not approve," replied Miriam, composedly; "I do not care in the least."

"They would probably suppose, my dear sister, that the child had a real claim on one of us; most likely they would conclude it was mine, and that I chose this romantic way of introducing it."

"Oh, Gerard, nobody could be so wicked. What! say such things of you?" Miss Barton was shocked.

"I do not suppose any foundling was ever adopted, in England at least, or perhaps any child educated by a patron on whom his claims

were not apparent, without the world suggesting such ideas, Miriam," said Gerard, coolly.

"But the child is only six years old, and a French boy, and you must have been in the East Indies when he was born, I am sure; common sense would show he was not yours."

"That is nothing to the purpose, or rather a confirmation of the fact; I was abroad—his mother was abroad—he is a foreigner; nothing can be more conclusive."

"Well, but what will you do, then?" said she, annoyed at the idea.

"Oh, I do not care in the least; I merely mentioned it to prepare your mind for the fact. We will make out a written account of how he was found, the place, date, and all particulars, and get this Mr. Mortimer to sign it, along with Nora and me, and keep it, in case it should be of any future use to him, and then we will take care of him until some one comes to claim him, or some clue to who he is, appears. I should not wonder if he were one day to prove to be

some important person, the rightful heir to some great property, made away with by interested parties, or the lost son of some noble family, put out to nurse amidst careless peasants."

"You are joking, Gerard," said Miriam, quietly; and so the conversation ended.

How Mr. Mortimer felt at having his magnificent present returned, the dwellers at Rock Cottage could only guess. They neither saw nor heard of him for two days, and Gerard began to think he must have given up the plan of the subscription altogether. But one morning Nora met him again; Captain Barton had taken another long night ride, and having returned and gone to rest, much about the time the others were getting up, she determined to take her little charge out for a run upon the down after breakfast, that she might be ready to write for her cousin in the afternoon, in case he wanted her services.

Louis and she were enjoying themselves very

much in the fresh morning air, rolling stones down a grassy slope, when a voice made her suddenly look up. Mr. Mortimer was close beside her. He was on foot, and she had not heard his approach. She hardly knew whether she were pleased or not; he looked certainly very much gratified, and entered into conversation with readiness and ease. There was much to ask about the boy: how did he get on? had he learnt any English? was he more happy? or had any news of his family been obtained? Then Mr. Mortimer was seized with a violent desire to see the spot again where so tragic an event had nearly occurred, and entreated Miss Moore to guide him. They walked to the Bridge together; the tide was about half in, and the rocks beyond now lay uncovered and black. A pleasant breeze was bringing in the little white-crested waves in rapid succession, and they curled up gaily round the feet of the high cliffs, and danced and sparkled brightly under the sunbeams. The sea beyond glittered

in the glowing light, and here and there a graceful vessel cut its way rapidly before the breeze. Children were shouting and playing on the beach, their voices mingling merrily with the music of the waters ; sea-gulls were gliding overhead, with their plumage shining like silver as they glanced by ; the Coast Guard was quietly patrolling the cliffs at a little distance, scanning the horizon with a careful eye, and whistling softly to himself some popular ditty. Everything spoke of life and cheerfulness, and Nora deeply felt the influence of external objects.

After sauntering about for a quarter of an hour, she suddenly remembered that it must be getting late, and talked of walking home ; but Louis said he was very tired, and that he must rest ; Mr. Mortimer finding a comfortable seat for them all on a rock, and the child seeming unwilling to move, she yielded, though rather against her conscience.

Mr. Mortimer did his utmost to make her forget how time was passing, and his powers

were by no means inconsiderable when he chose to exert them. He had laid aside the tone of haughty condescension which had at first marked his manner ; he was gentle, considerate, and respectful. Nora, in return, became frank and easy. She explained to him who she was, and how related to her guardians ; she described her daily life, and what her usual habits were, and all the while the breeze was playing in her pretty dark curls, and giving so bright a colour to her cheeks and lips, and such lustre to her violet eyes, that her companion found her every moment more bewitching, and was yielding more to that violent passion which a man of fifty sometimes entertains for a beautiful girl of nineteen.

Little as she was experienced in such matters, and different as his manner was from that of cousin Gerard, she could not misunderstand it entirely ; and when, at last, she suddenly recollected herself and determined to go home, it was not before she was become perfectly aware

that Mr. Mortimer admired her extremely. Rising to begin her walk, she found Louis, weary and heated, had dropped asleep on the bank beside her. Mr. Mortimer and she looked at him for a minute, as he lay with his curly hair spreading over his round arm and glowing cheeks, and his long dark lashes forming so thick a fringe to his closed eyes.

“Poor little thing ! how pretty he is—I must wake him, though !” She stooped and kissed his cheeks.

“No need to do so ; I will carry him home,” said her companion.

“He will tire you, it is so hot,” remonstrated Nora ; but he only smiled, took the boy in his arms, and placing his head on his shoulder, walked as if he felt no weight.

“You move languidly,” said he, looking at her as they advanced. “Take my arm—let me support you.”

She declined, alleging that he had burden enough in the boy. But he repeated his en-

treaty in a quicker voice, in a more imperative manner, as if little used to brook contradiction, adding, "I could support you both with equal ease and pleasure."

Nora's cheeks became a deeper pink, she had no idea of being commanded by him, and would not submit.

"Thank you, I am perfectly equal to my own support," she replied, drawing a step or two farther off. He did not like her at all the less for her refusal, it was all of a piece with her returning his present, and decidedly raised her in his opinion. They walked on a hundred yards in silence; then he told her he wanted to see Captain Barton, and wished to know if he should find him at home. She could answer for this, and they proceeded together to Rock Cottage.

It was to renew his proposal for a subscription for the boy that he now sought Gerard. He had mentioned the matter, he said, to several influential people in the county, and they had

approved ; there seemed no chance of the child being reclaimed, Miss Moore was evidently interested for him ; it would be a good thing to rescue him from vice and misery, such as he must be exposed to, amongst a gang of smugglers, and bring him up as a useful member of society. So argued Mr. Mortimer, and Gerard could make no objection, only he announced his determination to keep the boy for the present, unless any more eligible plan could be suggested ; his friends, if he had any, would know where to find him, and Miss Moore took so lively an interest in his fate,—that in short, Gerard meant to keep him.

Mr. Mortimer eyed him keenly as he spoke, appreciated the motive which made him draw back and retreat, after naming Miss Moore, decided that he had a rival in this young, pleasant-looking cousin,—a rival with every opportunity for success, and a long start before him ; and taking a rapid mental view of his position, determined on the line of tactics he must pursue.

He continued, meanwhile, calmly to talk of the subscription list and plans for the benefit of Louis, in whom he claimed more interest than Gerard,—as great, even, as Miss Moore herself could feel. Not that he intended to interfere with Captain Barton's benevolent plan; it would not have been in his power, had he wished it, to have offered the child a suitable asylum in his home; he had no wife to preside over an establishment, no one to compare with Miss Barton in calm dignity and mild suavity; he must be content to resign the personal charge of the child, and take only the secondary part of assisting by his purse. He was happy to say, however, his interest was considerable, even in this county, though not properly his neighbourhood. The Duke, and Sir George, Mr. Lawrence, and the other county member, were all his personal friends, and he had no doubt the two former would readily subscribe to the object in question—of the others he was sure. Gerard listened quietly to his speeches, and when he

paused, observed, that they were all very kind, but he still considered it not impossible that the mother might return to claim her child. However, should that not be the case, he should be glad to assist in taking care of any fund raised for his use, and he suggested that the clergyman of the parish would perhaps be a suitable person to appoint as his coadjutor: he also promised, at Mr. Mortimer's earnest request, to apply to him, if at any time he found it necessary. Mr. Mortimer gave him his address for this purpose, "Owen Mortimer, of Brierly Park, Esq."

"In the county of Warwick; I dare say you have heard of it?" observed he; "my property is somewhat considerable, and has been in my family a long time."

Gerard could not say he had, and Mr. Mortimer was forced to console himself, by despising him internally for such stupid ignorance.

Miss Barton certainly looked on him with additional respect, as this fact of his possessions

came to her knowledge. She had been brought up in that profound reverence for landed proprietors, which is a sort of infatuation with some English people. The doctrine of family estates to be preserved, of the rights of primogeniture, and the claims of property on the respect of the unendowed, are creeds into which English men and women are early initiated, and which it takes more time and reflection to shake off than Miriam had bestowed on the subject.

Whether he gained any value in Nora's eyes by this discovery he could not ascertain; she had returned to the drawing-room just as he made the announcement, but she looked indifferent, and it was not his purpose at the moment to make positive demands on her attention.

"How the clouds have come up in the last half-hour," observed Nora, as she seated herself to her work; "it looks like a storm coming on."

"Yes, we are going to have a change of weather," said Gerard; "I heard the 'call of the sea' last night, as I was passing the top of the cliffs, and knew we should have a sudden shift of wind. And that deep purple bank over the water this morning told the same thing. I noticed it as I was dressing."

"What do you mean by the 'call of the sea?'" demanded Mr. Mortimer.

"Oh, don't you know that strange, mysterious sound?" exclaimed Nora; "the voice of the coming storm, always borne on the direction opposite to the wind, and such a sure prediction of bad weather!"

"I never even heard of it. I have noticed the murmur of the waves on the beach, the growl of the surge as it rolls in over loose shingles, and the harsh grating of the stones grinding together. Is that what you mean?"

"No, it is something different from that; a voice which sounds at once near and far off—but, I believe, only the initiated can hear it. I

could not at first; it took several lessons from old Matthew, the fisherman, to teach me to distinguish it from an ordinary ground swell."

As Nora spoke, Mr. Mortimer looked as if he did not quite like to have any sound audible to others, and not so to himself.

"Oh, and by the bye," continued she to her cousin, "you know you promised me that the next time there was a heavy storm you would take me afterwards to see Crabstone cove, and the wolf and lamb rocks."

Before Gerard had time to answer, the room door was thrown open, and Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence were announced.

Mrs. Lawrence, like many other of the Bartons' neighbours, had become curious to see the little French boy, and the other actors, in a transaction where Mr. Mortimer had formed so conspicuous a personage; and though she had never called on Miss Barton, nor at all been accustomed to recognise the existence of any of Gerard's predecessors in that place, she was not

now to be deterred from satisfying her curiosity by such a trifling consideration. She was not only accustomed to have her own way, but to look on the families in the neighbourhood of the town as much beneath her, and therefore likely to be only too happy in the honour of her acquaintance. She was proud, but it was not a cold, repelling pride, which would make her invariably disagreeable ; it was a dashing, assured, confident feeling ; a smiling, talking, lively, careless pride ; a conviction that advances from her could not be otherwise than welcome ; a certainty, that if one so handsome, rich, and important as she was, chose to smile and be gracious, people could no more help being pleased, than the air could avoid being lighted by a sunbeam. She commanded attentions, asked favours, and gave trouble with the same easy grace with which ordinary individuals would have performed a civil action.

So it was now. Without the least doubt of her reception, she took no pains to apologize

for what might have been considered an intrusion. She patronized Miss Barton, admired Miss Moore, and smiled on Gerard as if she had known them all six months ; as she found Louis was asleep, she insisted on being taken up stairs to see him on the bed ; and then she, too, was seized with a sudden desire to visit the spot where the adventure had occurred. So she gaily desired Miss Moore to get her bonnet and accompany them in the carriage. Nora did not mean to do it all ; but somehow she was overruled, and presently it turned out that Gerard and Mr. Mortimer had to go too. Mr. Lawrence declined altogether, and declared that he should remain to take care of Miss Barton, during the absence of the others.

Mrs. Lawrence ordered her carriage to take them as near the edge of "the Bridge" as it could safely approach ; and as they were going there, Mr. Mortimer began inquiring of Nora where was the cove to which she was wishing to go.

Nora's description of this wild and romantic spot attracted the attention of Mrs. Lawrence, who instantly declared her wish to see it also.

"We will make a party and go together, Miss Moore," said she. "How did you propose to arrange your plan?"

"I hardly know!" replied Nora, quite taken a-back by the lady's determination. "I suppose cousin Gerard would have settled all that for me."

"What a dear little submissive thing you must be!" cried Mrs. Lawrence; "am I to trust to cousin Gerard's sagacity, and submit to his will also?"

"Oh no," said Nora, "you have only to order your carriage, and drive there, whenever you please."

"But who would care for visiting rocks and caves, or for the most majestic scenery in the world, without a companion to converse with on their beauty, or to listen to one's emotions. My

dear Miss Moore, we will go a large party, if you please."

Just then the carriage stopped, and Mr. Mortimer telling Mrs. Lawrence they were close to the spot she had come to see, they all alighted, and walked down towards "the Bridge."

The scene had changed since Nora had sat there in the morning; the sky and sea were alike leaden-coloured now, except where the surf-crested billows of the latter showed their snowy tops. "The wild white horses" were racing after each other through the bay, rearing, tumbling, and plunging gaily about. Great green waves washed up every few minutes against the rocky buttresses of "the Bridge," with a thundering sound, breaking into a cascade of foam which was sometimes carried clear over to the other side, sometimes fell in showers of spray upon the summit of the rocks.

"Let me walk down to the spot where you jumped over, Mr. Mortimer," said she.

"No, you will get wet; it is foolish, dan-

gerous, is it not, Captain Barton?" was his reply.

"Charming. I shall like it all the better. I love danger. Give me your arm!"

"I will not: don't go."

"What a foolish fellow he is," said Mrs. Lawrence to Captain Barton. "There is not really any danger, is there?"

"No, I should think none, except of spoiling your bonnet and feathers," replied he, "unless, indeed, you could not stand against the wind, which is rising rapidly."

"There, take my bonnet and plume," cried she, suddenly untying it, and handing it to Mr. Mortimer, "hold that till I come back, dangling it, if you please, like the bridegroom of Netherby Hall. Now, Captain Barton, give me your arm, and we will go down together."

"I would advise you not; surely you will catch cold," remonstrated he.

"Pshaw! I never do anything so vulgar,"

was her answer, grasping his arm. "*Au revoir*, Mr. Mortimer."

"Don't you come, Nora," said Gerard, aside to her, "you had better not:" but he felt, probably, something like the boatman, who had to ferry over the cabbage, the kid, and the wolf.

"Oh, I wish she would not," said Nora, softly, drawing closer to Mr. Mortimer; "suppose anything were to happen?"

"That is what is called spirit," said he, smiling rather sarcastically; "how do you like her, Miss Moore?"

But Nora's eyes and soul were following her cousin, and she hardly even heard his question. The wind, which was blowing dead in shore, brought back the sound of Mrs. Lawrence's light laugh and determined tones, as the couple struggled on against it: it was a breeze which would have deprived most people of all inclination to talk, but she never ceased a minute.

“How she goes on;” said Nora, presently, “I wish they would come back; only look how wet they will be.”

As she spoke, a heavy sea swelled up, and, dashing with more fury than ever against the beetling rocks, enveloped the two adventurers in such a shower of misty spray as would probably drench them through and through. Mrs. Lawrence’s long, dark hair, escaping from comb and band, floated out on the air like the tresses of a bacchante; but even then, above the roar and gurgling rush of the waves, they could hear her voice and laugh coming back to them at intervals.

“They will be satisfied now, I hope,” said Nora presently, seeing they had paused near the edge from which Mr. Mortimer had sprung; “Mrs. Lawrence will not surely want to go farther.”

Much to her disappointment, after lingering a minute or two, the couple went farther down, struggling on against the gale, which every

moment seemed to increase in strength ; it appeared from their gestures, that it was the lady who wished to proceed, for Gerard turned at first, and apparently proposed to lead her back. Then came another much heavier wave ; and it seemed a minute at least before Nora could see them again. Presently, to her horror, she saw the lady had sunk down on the ground, whether from exhaustion, or wilfulness, from accident, or choice, she could not tell. Captain Barton was stooping by her side ; some moments passed—very long ones to poor Nora—whose anxiety became extreme ; she longed to start forward and ask what was the matter ; indeed, but for the forcible representations of her companion, she would have made the attempt, hazardous as it might seem ; but she could not help fancying that Gerard was in peril, and her only desire was to see if he needed assistance.

Presently he rose, and, looking towards them, waved his hand, as if to call for help.

“There, do go to him,” cried Nora, vehe-

mently, "do you see? he wants you;—run!—fly!—Oh, that foolish woman!"

"Promise me not to run into danger yourself," said he, laying his hand on her arm; "promise to stay quietly, or I will not leave you."

"Yes, yes, I promise.—Go."

He went immediately.

The fact was, that Mrs. Lawrence, like many other women, and men too, who delight in bravado, and venture on rash experiments, was, at heart, a coward. She had proceeded at first gaily and boldly; and Gerard, feeling sure that she acted as much from opposition as any other motive, would not say anything against it, fully expecting that when she had once tried the experiment, she would be glad to withdraw from a contest with such a gale. There was no real danger he knew; "the Bridge" was broad enough for safety; and the sea did not rise so high as to create any fear of being washed away. He allowed her, therefore, to do as she pleased,

and said not a word of returning until they had halted on the spot she had expressed a wish to reach. She was chattering away with the utmost good humour, delighted at her own exploit, and laughing at the thought of what Mr. Lawrence would say, could he know where she was. Then she told him some gay story, to show her own resolution and self-control, not one half of which did her companion catch, whilst her merry laugh rang out clear and high above the wind and waves.

“What fun!” cried she, as the spray dashed in her face, and soaked through her muslin gown. “This is delicious! The wind—ah, I never felt anything like the wind.—Ah, my hair! how lucky it is my own, Captain Barton. If my handmaid, and not nature, had planted those locks on my head, where would they be now? I know some people whose golden braids would have been among the waves before now, had they ventured here.—There again; what a shower-bath! Don’t you enjoy it?”

“Less than you, I fancy; it has not the charm of novelty to me. I have had too many drenchings in real earnest, to court them in joke. Now will you come home?”

“No, not yet; if you are used to the thing, you will not mind it; and I must go farther.”

“Indeed, Mrs. Lawrence, you had better not! beyond this point, the rocks narrow so much, and the waves are so much more violent; let me advise you to return.”

“Indeed, no! I will go on! You may go back if you like. I say forwards, even though alone. Let me judge for myself.”

She prepared to advance, and seemed disposed to drop his arm. But he would not allow that. He said he could not let her go one step alone.

They walked a few yards farther, but she had not calculated on the result. The restless tossing of the waves, leaping up, racing on, crossing each other in every direction, now green, now white, now black; the stunning sound they pro-

duced ; the sort of bewilderment of brain which the violent assaults of the wind occasioned ; the quivering of the rocks on which they stood beneath the blows of the sea ; and, in short, the excitement of the whole scene upset the equilibrium of her nerves. She was seized with a fit of hysterical laughing, and clinging to her companion's arm, with difficulty supported herself. He had never seen anything of the kind before, and did not very well know what was the matter.

“ We had better go back,” said he.

She laughed on, convulsively.

“ Really, Mrs. Lawrence, if you could, stop that most unseasonable merriment !—”

On the contrary, it increased. She clasped his arm with both her hands, and almost reeled with continued peals of laughter.

“ Upon my honour, if you do not leave off—” but he was stopped by the heavy deluge which at that moment poured over them ; the spray was so thick, it was difficult, for a little while,

to draw breath. He hoped, at least, it would sober his companion ; and when he had shaken the water from his hair, and dashed the blinding drops from his eyes, he turned to her, to urge a hasty retreat.

He saw now that she was ill ; she was all black and white in her face ; her features were convulsed ; her hands seemed to drop powerless from him ; she lost her hold, and fell prostrate, gasping for breath, almost as completely drenched as if she had been in the sea, and apparently on the point of suffocation.

What was he to do ? It seemed as if another such wave would strangle her quite. She was a large woman : had it been quite calm, she would have been no insignificant burden to carry ; now he hardly dared make the attempt, so he started up and signed for help.

“ Confound her folly ! ” said Mr. Mortimer, as he made his way down towards the couple. “ I always thought her a goose. I should like to see a wife of mine playing such pranks.”

However, he reached them in time, and, between them, they succeeded in raising her up, and half-leading, half-dragging her along, brought her from off "the Bridge" on to the main land.

Nora ran down to meet her. Poor Mrs. Lawrence, with her discoloured face, her dripping hair hanging down wildly round her throat and shoulders, and her dress in the disordered state which wind, water, and exertion had combined to produce, presented a deplorable spectacle, and quite frightened her companions, now that they had time to look at her. They hurried her to the carriage, and there, after wrapping her in such shawls or cloaks as chanced to be forthcoming, endeavoured, by chafing her hands, to restore circulation and warmth to her blood. Their efforts were quite unavailing; and she looked ghastly and death-like, as she was lifted from the carriage and borne into Captain Barton's house. Her husband's exclamation as he met them in the vestibule, brought out Miriam

at once. She was just the person for such an emergency. Mrs. Lawrence was properly attended to, placed in a warm bed, stimulants and other remedies applied; and in about an hour, Miss Barton was able to assure her husband that the deadly cold and faintness had passed away, that she was easy, and seemed inclined to sleep, so they had no doubt she would do very well.

Mr. Lawrence, meanwhile, had possessed sufficient presence of mind to be able to arrange his own plans. To remove the lady, the Bartons declared was impossible; such a thing must not be mentioned. They would listen to no scruples or difficulties. Their accommodation, although probably not so luxurious as her own apartments, was sufficient for anybody's comfort; and if he wished to remain also, they could easily manage.

This did not seem desirable to him; he would not leave Rock Cottage, certainly, until she was better; but, as he hoped all cause for alarm

would soon cease, he should not trespass on them for the whole day. So he sent home the carriage at once, with orders for his own dog-cart to return to fetch him, bringing a supply of necessary clothes for his wife: he offered also to have her maid to assist Miss Barton; but Miriam, remembering a certain proverb might have a feminine rendering, declined the proposal, privately observing to Gerard, that probably the maid would be like the mistress, and *one* such was as much as she could undertake to manage. Mr. Mortimer had the discretion to return in the carriage, as there was a sister of Mrs. Lawrence at Airstone Hall, who might be alarmed at these arrangements if they trusted only to the servants to carry a report.

When matters began to mend up stairs, and the immediate anxiety was removed, Mr. Lawrence had time to inquire the particulars of this adventure. Gerard and he were quietly pacing the verandah, where, sheltered from the stormy wind, they could each soothe his nerves with a

cigar. Captain Barton calmly related the story, without comment or unnecessary remark; and when he had done, the auditor took his cigar from his mouth, and gave a long, low whistle, to express his feelings. Presently he said—

“You are not married, I think, Captain Barton?”

“No.”

“Allow me to recommend an old proverb to your notice—‘Let well alone.’” So saying, he replaced his cigar in his mouth, and puffed assiduously.

CHAPTER IV.

“Homely scenes and simple views
Lowly thoughts may best infuse.”

CHRISTIAN YEAR.

ONE of the natural consequences of these circumstances was a considerable degree of intimacy between the owners of Airstone Hall and the inmates of the Rock Cottage. The illness of Mrs. Lawrence lasted several days, and during that time, her husband and sister came each day to the Bartons. He did not stay long at a time, but Miss Damer spent hours at the house, sometimes in her sister's room, more often in

company with Miss Moore, and, of course, her cousin Gerard.

There was a striking difference between the sisters. Miss Damer was soft-mannered, indolent, metaphysical, and small; she was fair too, and though not un-pretty, had none of the pretensions to regular beauty which distinguished her sister. Whether she were less self-willed and selfish, remained to be proved; not being married, her character was as yet partially undeveloped; and she was under restraints which the other had thrown off. Like Mrs. Lawrence, however, she was owner of thirty thousand pounds, and had, therefore, according to ordinary calculation, a decided right to be whimsical and idle, if she pleased.

It was a novelty to her to spend hours at such a place as Rock Cottage; and, as a novelty, it had a great charm for her. To sit down to their small meals, waited on by one nice-looking, brisk maid-servant, who, with alert movements and neat hands, did the work of

four of the Airstone tall footmen ; to while away the time in endeavours to conquer the hard heart of that good-looking Captain Barton, whose manners were so *piquant*, and whose ideas were so original, was all exciting and strange. She delighted to get him into some argument about men and women, in which she could put forward the common-place theories started by metaphysical young ladies generally, that men were universally selfish, and women self-devoted ; that the latter were an unappreciated, loving, misunderstood class, trampled on by the former, without remorse or reason ; that the large mind of women, accustomed to form accurate judgments and correctly logical ideas, could grasp, and weigh, and see through the soul of man ; whilst the latter, with their withered feelings, and warped faculties, and used-up hearts, were utterly incapable of understanding the mysterious mechanism of so manifold and majestic a machine as the intellect and inner life of woman.

Nora used to listen to all this in wonder and admiration ; for as she did not understand the young lady's jargon, she concluded it was something very fine. She never suspected that Julia Damer herself did not understand it either ; and that few things would have puzzled her more than to give a rational explanation of her sentences.

After three or four days, Mrs. Lawrence was well enough to come down stairs ; an event which she rather hurried the more, because Miss Barton was so very resolute in refusing to ask her brother to come and see their guest in the bed-room. Her genuine English feelings were not a little shocked internally, at such a proposition ; but the objection she raised was not on the score of decorum, but prudence : so long as Mrs. Lawrence was under the necessity of keeping her room, so long quiet and calm were advisable, and excitement to be avoided. The more urgent Mrs. Lawrence became about her warm feelings, and her anxiety to thank her

preserver, the more positive was her nurse in refusing her request. So the lady at last was glad to be well enough to come down stairs, and habited in a most becoming morning wrapper, took her station on the sofa.

Her demonstrative gratitude rather over-powered Gerard, who was not prepared for such a flow of eloquence. He was the bravest, steadiest, most thoughtful of men ; she owed him her life ; but for him she should never have left the fatal spot ; she should have fallen a victim to the raging elements ; how fortunate that he was there to deliver her from such a perilous position, to save her from so awful a catastrophe. He was her good angel — her protecting guardian !

Gerard fought off from these eulogiums, and after rather bluntly saying that he had done no such thing, he added, that so far from deserving such praise, he believed he had been the most to blame, in yielding to her whims ; had he refused to accompany her, as he ought, and as

Mr. Mortimer did, she would have been saved a three days' illness.

"I would not have been saved it on any account," exclaimed she; "I should have lost one of the greatest pleasures I have ever enjoyed—that of being nursed by your good sister. Dear Miss Barton, she is a sister of charity; I would not have had it otherwise for the world. Her care and attention are beyond every thing. I shall send for her, if ever I am ill again; even if I am at the other end of the kingdom, I shall send; nobody else ever shall nurse me again. She is an angel in a sick-room! so is your cousin Nora!"

With these words the emphatic lady started up, and running to Miriam gave her a great kiss upon her cheek. She then proceeded to perform the same ceremony to Nora; and Gerard, who was sitting next his cousin, had some difficulty in commanding his countenance, so as not to show that he was a little afraid of taking his turn next.

Miss Barton was rather surprised when she understood the recompense which was promised for her kind and gratuitous care: but she reflected, that however far or however often Mrs. Lawrence might summon her, it would certainly be optional with herself whether she should go, so she said nothing.

“I shall never forget,” continued the visitor, reseating herself after kissing Nora, “my emotions on that occasion; nobody can conceive what I felt—nobody who has not nerves strung like mine. I don’t suppose anybody ever was so frightened; that roaring, tumbling sea made me giddy, and the noise gave me a headache, and there was the wind blowing my head off; I was so wet, and without a bonnet too; conceive my situation! but no, you cannot: and that noble brother of yours rescued me, Miss Barton!”

“It is no use talking so to Miriam,” said Gerard, laughing. “She is perfectly aware that I acted like a donkey, and told me so, without

ceremony. A grain of common sense, she said, would have avoided it all."

"I must have you both—all indeed, come to Airstone. I will give a great party, on purpose to introduce the story with effect. I have been thinking of a great many plans; a charade, or a tableau, or a play, in which we could act it over again; only there are difficulties in the way, and I have not hit on a good word for a charade. But the thing would take, I fancy, and might make some noise in the country."

Such was Mrs. Lawrence's idea of gratitude. Her husband's was somewhat different. He expressed warm thanks to the whole family for the trouble they had taken, and a strong sense of the obligation which he had incurred towards them, as being what he felt he could never repay. He hoped an acquaintance begun so happily for them, would not drop now; but that Mrs. Lawrence and he should often have the pleasure of seeing their kind friends at Airstone, where it would be their study to try to equal the hospi-

talities of Captain and Miss Barton. Whenever the former was summoned that way by duty, they trusted he would make theirs a house of call; he could take it when he was obliged to pay night visits in that direction, dining with them, and starting afterwards on his rounds. Then, on holidays, too, in spare forenoons, or indeed at any time that he liked, there was sporting of one kind or other to be had—fishing, shooting, coursing, hunting. Mr. Lawrence begged he would consider he had *carte blanche* to come when he pleased; the keepers should have orders to put his name amongst the privileged few who had the *entrée* of the Park.

In addition to this, Mr. Lawrence put down his name for a very liberal sum for the benefit of the little French boy, and a few days after, there came a present, in Mrs. Lawrence's name, of so handsome an addition to his wardrobe, as spared Miriam any further trouble on that account, and more than compensated the loss of

time which the lady's illness and caprices had occasioned her.

When they were all fairly out of Rock Cottage, the master of the house drew a long breath, and then turning to his sister, observed—

“Well, Miriam, we are quit of them at last. I should not care if I never saw one of them again.”

“No more should I,” replied Miss Barton. “How Mrs. Lawrence can go on so, *I* cannot imagine. Such selfish carelessness is really a puzzle to me?”

Nora was silent. She was internally weighing her feelings, and considering whether she would look on the total disappearance of Miss Damer as sufficient compensation for never seeing Mr. Mortimer again. She took Louis out into the garden, hoping that a game at ball with him might assist to clear her perceptions on this point. She argued the matter profoundly, caught the ball carelessly, found it tiresome, told the

child to play by himself, and sat down on a garden-chair, to revolve the question at leisure.

She had thought two or three times lately that cousin Gerard talked a great deal to Miss Damer, and laughed and was very merry with her; and whilst she had been trying to teach him to sing duets, he had seemed greatly amused, and rather pleased. Julia Damer was lively and pretty, and it was natural cousin Gerard should like her; only Nora had been accustomed to be first with him for some time, and it was hard to give up what habit had made pleasant. But then, thought she, was not this very selfish? why could she not be pleased at seeing him happy? how unkind and unamiable of her to wish to engross him herself: he could have plenty of her society at any time; it had not the charm of novelty to make up for its own deficiencies; it was natural that a clever man like Gerard should want superior conversation, more elevated society, a more intellectual companion than her poor little stupid self. It was

natural and right, thought Nora, with tears in her eyes, she would give up thinking so much about him, and take pleasure herself in other people. There was Mr. Mortimer !

It was with a curiously mixed feeling that she thought of Mr. Mortimer. A something of fear and admiration, gratified vanity and astonishment. For Nora was but a woman, and a very young woman too, and not a great deal more philosophical than most girls of nineteen. To see this man, so much older, wiser, richer, better than herself ; so proud, so brave, so generous, so handsome ; to see him bowing at her feet ; to hear him uttering such gentle, persuasive, flattering speeches ; to know herself admired, esteemed, revered almost, by him, was very seductive to her girlish vanity. And all this his manners to herself gave her to understand. They had had many long conversations together, when none else were by ; for he had been every day at Rock Cottage with Miss Damer ; and she felt—not quite—but very nearly—sure that he

did—she hardly dared finish the sentence, even to herself ; it seemed so presumptuous. Besides, after all, she was not sure ; when Miriam was by he was so devoted to her as sometimes to make Nora doubtful of his meaning.

Miss Barton was a handsome woman, and her age, beyond a question, was much more suitable to Mr. Mortimer's. Disguise it as she might, Nora felt there was a great inequality between herself and him ; he was old enough to be her father ! she was nineteen, in her twentieth year she chose to say, and he was probably fifty. The difference was absurd ! whereas cousin Miriam, who was forty-three, she knew, would suit him exactly ; and very likely that was what he meant all the while. It was simply kindness of disposition which made him good to her, or perhaps he wished to win cousin Miriam's regard, by showing affection for her ward.

It was no use thinking about either of them ; they only puzzled her and made her sad. Julia Damer said all men were “inconceivably incon-

sistent, and unintelligibly strange, mere embodiments of caprice;" those were words she had used: very likely she was right. She raised her head as she thought this, with a sigh, to see one embodiment of caprice, in the form of her cousin Gerard, standing beside her. She started, as if he could have seen her thoughts.

Apparently, however, he could not, for sitting down beside her, he asked her at once what she was musing about.

The subject, of all those which had engrossed her, which she found most easy to acknowledge, was, that she was thinking of Miss Damer.

"How do you like her?" said Gerard.

"I don't know; she is not very pretty, is she? I daresay she is very clever, only sometimes, it almost seems to me as if she talked nonsense; and—and I don't quite like her manners!"

Poor Nora; she was too simple to practice the least *finesse*; but she could hardly have taken a more injudicious way than to begin de-

preciating Julia. Of course, Gerard took up her cause, although had he said the truth, he would have acknowledged the same thing.

“ You women are all alike; one never can praise another without a drawback. If a woman is only pretty and lively, all others abuse her directly.”

Nora blushed deeply, and had a little struggle to keep down her tears.

“ I am very sorry I said it, cousin Gerard. I dare say it does seem ill-natured ! but *all* women are not envious, are they ! I do not think Cousin Miriam is ever ; and it is not her fault if I am !”

The extreme sweetness and humility of her manner would have disarmed almost any one ; it was irresistible to one who really was much attached to her.

He looked at her with great admiration ; and after a moment's pause, he said—

“ You are right, Nora, dear, Miriam is never jealous or envious, and I don't think you are

really ; she has taught you better. Only don't *seem* so !”

Nora made no audible answer, but she resolved for the future to drop the subject of Miss Damer altogether ; so after a little silence, she began talking of Louis, who was busy building a house with sticks and moss amongst the roots of an old tree.

Mr. Mortimer and Miss Damer rode over to Rock Cottage the next day, bringing an invitation for the whole family to spend a week at Airstone Park. Gerard was out at the time, but expected home shortly ; and Julia declared that as she had promised her sister not to return without a positive answer, she should consider herself bound in honour to wait till she could see him. Meantime she took Nora's arm, for a stroll about the garden, leaving the other two to entertain each other as they could.

She chattered an immense deal, telling Nora all sorts of anecdotes, illustrative of her own sweetness and “infatuated amiability,” as she

chose to call it; interspersed with questions about Captain Barton and high praise of him.

Nora was trying to make up her mind meanwhile, as to whether she should like to go to Airstone: it would be a great change, and she was curious to see more of the place, and there would be more opportunity of seeing Mr. Mortimer;—but—well, cousin Gerard, should not say she was envious; she meant to try and like Miss Damer; and, perhaps, when there were other people to talk too, and she was not tied to her side, and obliged to listen only to her, when she would rather have been doing something else, she might not find her so unpleasant.

It was a relief to her, when Miss Barton and Mr. Mortimer came out of the house and joined them in the garden. Miriam took away Julia's exclusive attention, and what was, perhaps, no less agreeable, Mr. Mortimer came to her side, and made the next half-hour pass quickly away.

Gerard came home in the course of time, and after some discussion and hesitation, the invitation was accepted, and then the visitors took leave.

Captain Barton asked with some interest how long they had been ~~there~~, and expressed a degree of vexation at not having returned sooner, which Nora supposed to arise from regard to Miss Damer's society, and privately noticed with regret, for which she blamed herself immediately afterwards.

"I wish they would let us alone," observed he, presently, "I do not want to go to Airstone at all; I dare say there will be no pleasure in it, eh, Miriam?"

"Well, I think I shall like it, just out of curiosity," said Miss Barton, "I rather enjoy seeing new people and new things."

"But then they are so much grander than we are," observed Nora, "that I think we shall be out of place, and I shall be afraid of doing wrong, and not behaving as I ought. Now I

come to think about it as a thing that is really to be, I feel frightened ; though before it was settled, I believe I wished it very much."

"I don't suppose, my dear, that at Airstone Park, good manners are so different from what they are at Rock Cottage, as to lead you into any great blunders. Gentleness, and good humour, and readiness to oblige, must be the same everywhere, and equally proper and right ; and, as to being out of place, if *they* ask us there, we need not fear that ; they would not do it if they thought it would be unpleasant to anybody."

"They ask us for a week," said Gerard, "to pay us in kind for having lodged Mrs. Lawrence for four days. They wish to be quit of the obligation."

"Well, let them repay it," said Miriam."

"I do not want to be repaid," replied he, "why should we flatter their pride, by allowing them to suppose we are to be made quits in that way?"

“ I think, Gerard, there is just as much pride in refusing to take any return for an acknowledged obligation. Why wish to keep them in your debt, unless it is because whilst you feel they are so, it gives you a sort of superiority over those who are otherwise above you?—and is not that pride?”

“ Well, Miriam, I dare say you are right, so I will be content to be repaid in their way.”

“ And wait, my dear brother, before you condemn them as entertaining such a feeling. It is quite right and proper that they should show their sense of obligation ; if they had gone home and taken no further notice of us, you would have accused them of ingratitude.”

“ I dare say I should,” replied he, smiling good-humouredly.

“ Well, then, what are they to do ? If they are attentive to us, you say they are too proud to submit to obligation ; were they otherwise, you would condemn them as too proud even to acknowledge it.”

“Excellently well reasoned, Miriam ; and I acknowledge my own waywardness, as well as your entire superiority,” was his answer.

“Miss Damer says, you know,” observed Nora, laughing, “that all men are embodiments of contradiction and inconsistency.”

“For mercy’s sake, don’t you repeat Miss Damer’s platitudes,” exclaimed Gerard, “leave her in undisturbed possession of her follies, my dear Nora !”

Nora gave her cousin a sort of half-comic smile, partly pleasure, partly amusement, whilst an idea passed through her mind, that whatever other follies Miss Damer might utter, there was truth at least in some of her observations.

“One thing I must observe, Miriam,” added her brother, “and perhaps you will scold me for that too ; but either gentleness and readiness to oblige are not characteristics of good manners, or else good manners are not characteristics of the dwellers at Airstone,—not all of them at least.”

“Well, well, never mind; ‘judge not,’ you know. We will make allowances for unknown circumstances.” Nora, my dear, would you like a new dress before next week?”

They fell into a discussion on matters of the wardrobe, whilst Gerard, having nothing to say to it, gave himself up to the columns of “the Times.”

The family from Rock Cottage, including Louis, drove over to Airstone Park, on the following Monday, arriving there about five in the afternoon.

They saw a large party amusing themselves with archery on the lawn, at a little distance; and Mr. Lawrence, coming forward with *empressment*, invited them to join both the group and the occupation. They declined any more active participation than standing by, and looking on; Nora was too shy to make the attempt, and certainly it was not much in Miss Barton’s line. When their host had introduced them to some of the party, Miss Damer found occupation

for Gerard in picking up and holding her arrows for her, which he allowed himself to be decoyed into doing, that he might leave Nora at perfect liberty to converse with whom she pleased. Poor Nora, frightened at finding herself surrounded by so many strangers, amongst whom she heard the names of a Lady Fanny, a Sir George, and other equally ominous-sounding titles, would gladly have clung to her cousin's arm, and sheltered herself under his protection ; or still more gladly, would have accompanied little Louis, whom Mr. Lawrence very good-naturedly took away to introduce to his own children, who were playing in another part of the grounds.

She looked at Cousin Miriam with astonishment, for she appeared to be conversing composedly with a pleasant lady-like woman about her own age, who seemed much interested in the history of the French boy. Presently she saw them move a little on one side, and seat themselves under a tree. She had a great mind to join them, but to her astonishment, she

heard Lady Fanny speak of the unknown as "Mamma;" so conceiving her to be the duchess, she dared not take such a liberty, and only wondered if her cousin knew whom she was talking to. However, much to her relief, Lady Fanny made some overtures towards friendly acquaintance with her, for Nora was feeling somewhat uncomfortable and forlorn. As to Mrs. Lawrence, she was too deeply engrossed in her shooting, to have particular attention for anything but the target and her arrows; she was twanging her bow with the energetic zeal with which she pursued all her amusements, forming as great a contrast as could well be conceived, to the languid, dawdling movements of her sister. Mr. Mortimer was conversing with another gentleman, to whom he had returned after speaking to Nora; and there was no one else she knew even by sight.

Lady Fanny was a nice-looking, pleasing girl, whose unaffected, lady-like manner soon made Miss Moore forget that she was the

daughter of a peer ; and, as it was impossible to help being pleased with Nora when she was not too frightened to be natural, it proved as agreeable to the one as it was kind to the other, to pursue the acquaintance.

Mrs. Lawrence was shooting a match with the Sir George whose name had helped to frighten Nora, and till that was decided she had no attention to bestow on any one else, although she talked as incessantly as she shot. She won eventually, and then she was at leisure to seek Miss Barton, caress Nora, and flatter Gerard.

“ My dearest child !” exclaimed she, hastily advancing to Miss Moore, and kissing her on both cheeks, “ how delighted I am to see you here. I beg ten thousand pardons for being so rude to you, but I was so taken up with my shooting, I really could not turn round. You know my way, when I do set my heart upon a thing, I do it. I know you will forgive me, because though I am so naughty, you are so

good. There, Sir George, there's the young lady I told you I admire so much. Ah, I did not mean to make you blush; where's your cousin, my pattern-nurse, my sweetest of chaperons? Oh, I see she is walking with the Duchess. I shall run after her as soon as I am rested. Well, Captain Barton, I hope you will make yourself as comfortable at Airstone as you did me at your Refuge. Julia, you shall not engross him entirely—I want him myself."

Captain Barton professed himself quite at her service.

She took his arm and walked off after Miriam, leaving the rest of her visitors to do as they pleased. Lady Fanny, disencumbering herself of her weapons, quietly gave them to Sir George's care, whilst Miss Damer, it may be supposed, was indemnified for Gerard's desertion, by the attention of Mr. Mortimer, which she immediately engrossed.

"I should like to know, only perhaps it may

not be convenient, so it does not signify," said Nora, looking wistfully around.

"What?" said Lady Fanny, "at Airstone everything is convenient that is agreeable."

"How Louis is getting on," replied Miss Moore; "he can speak so little English."

"Oh, you young mother!" said Lady Fanny, laughing; "well, I dare say we could manage to find out that for you. Come with me."

"Do you know your way here?" inquired Nora, as they turned towards a thick belt of evergreen shrubs, and began following a winding path through it.

"Yes, pretty well; I am going to the children's gardens; I often go there and have a romp with them, and I fancy we shall find your boy there too."

As they went on, Lady Fanny explained who some of the strangers whom they had just left were. The gentleman to whom Mr. Mortimer had been so earnestly talking was her own

father, the Duke of Loughborough, Sir George St. Quentin was her brother-in-law.

“So, you see, there is nothing whatever to be afraid about,” added she, “for none of them will mind our doing exactly as we please.”

Nora smiled a little.

“I hope you will not find it dull,” added Lady Fanny; “Mrs. Lawrence is always very good-natured, but she is not much of a companion. I am delighted at the prospect of such an addition to our party, for since Ada married, she has been so much less with me, that I own it will be a real kindness in you, if you will let me sometimes be your companion. I miss my sister very much.”

“Is she not here?”

“Yes—that is, staying here with Sir George; but she has driven over to Moorhaven to-day with my youngest brother, Clarence. It is not often that you will find them so far apart; but the fact was, Sir George had engaged to shoot that match with Mrs. Lawrence, and then came a

letter on business from his agent at Moorhaven ; so, to save time, Ada undertook the business, whilst her husband performed the pleasure part."

The girls had arrived on the brink of a large dell, partly wooded, partly precipitous on the banks, down which several winding paths led in different directions. Guided by the sound of children's voices, they made their way downwards, until they came upon an open sunny lawn, with apple and pear-trees scattered over it, and here they found the three children of the house and Louis, gaily amusing themselves. It was a very pretty spot ; from a large crag on one side trickled a clear spring, which spread into a shallow pool, on the borders of which lay the children's flower beds ; the rocks on the margin of the water were tastefully adorned with blossoming creepers, and its surface was so smooth as to show the gold fish which darted through it, and played amidst the aquatic plants that grew in the basin.

The group beside it was pretty too. A cheer-

ful, neat, French *bonne* was assisting to divert the children and joining merrily in their sports; and when the young ladies appeared, the three young Lawrences ran almost as eagerly to meet Lady Fanny, as Louis did to his protectress. After enjoying themselves for about a quarter of an hour, the *bonne* called the children to accompany her to the house, leaving the young ladies, who agreed to linger a little longer before returning to prepare for dinner. Presently quick footsteps were heard approaching, and a man's voice calling "Fanny!" gave Nora intimation that it was one of the Duke's family who was seeking for them. In another minute they were joined by a fine, elegant-looking young man, who was immediately introduced to Miss Moore, and whose cheerful countenance and pleasant manner greatly abated the awe with which she would otherwise have received a Lord Clarence St. Amand.

"How came you to find us?" asked his sister.

“I met the children, who told me. Where did that beautiful black-eyed boy come from?—He is a stranger,” observed Lord Clarence.

“That is the child of the sea,—probably Cupid himself in disguise, whom Mr. Mortimer snatched from the waves, and threw into the arms of Miss Moore. Have you not heard him talking of the adventure for this week past?” replied Lady Fanny, laughing.

“So, I see.” He looked for a moment at Miss Moore, and then turning again to his sister, he exclaimed, “I had such a delightful drive with Ada. Such a treat to get her away from Sir George—it was quite like old times again.”

“One would suppose, from your way of talking, Sir George was a horrid tyrant, Clarence; Ada would not thank you for giving such an idea of him.”

“No; if he were a tyrant we should be better off; Ada would be as glad to call in her brother’s protection, as Blue Beard’s lady. What

I complain of, Miss Moore, is, that my sister and her husband take such pleasure in each other's society, as to despise and neglect the best company in the world besides. Is not that a misfortune?"

"For you or for her?" inquired Nora, archly.

"Ah, if you had ever lost a sister by marriage, you would know how to pity us," was his answer. "We have not a quarter of her left."

"I never had a sister to try the experiment," replied Nora; "but I think I should have had so much pleasure in even a fraction of one, that I would have compounded for a quarter, and thought myself well off."

Lady Fanny now advised their returning towards the house. It was getting near seven o'clock, and the dinner-hour was half-past seven.

"And do you suppose I may really come here when I like?" inquired Nora; "it would be such a delicious place to read in, so still and retired."

"If you want a quiet, retired place to read in," observed Lord Clarence, "let me recommend the library. There is scarcely a chance of being interrupted in that room, for none of the family go there."

"How do you know?" inquired Nora, "unless you frequent it yourself."

"Perhaps I do; but then it would be large enough for you and me too, and the novels are a very long way from the works on military tactics and the science of gunnery."

"But I don't study tactics or gunnery," answered she; "and my subjects of literary pursuit might not be as far removed from yours as you fancy."

Lord Clarence laughed, and continued to chat with Miss Moore, till they reached the house.

Nora relapsed into shyness and fear, when it came to the formidable moment of joining the party in the drawing-room before dinner, and but for the comfort of cousin Miriam's arm,

she felt as if she could not have ventured down at all. Dinner, too, threatened at first to be dull; she was sitting near Mrs. Lawrence, who was engrossed by the Duke on the other side, and a vacant chair on her left hand did not promise much amusement — Miss Damer and Gerard were just beyond, and opposite were some strangers who came to dinner.

Presently, however, she found the chair at her side was occupied by Lord Clarence, who came down late, and her attention after that was so pleasantly engaged, as to leave her no perception of the length of the meal, or any sensation of weariness.

She told Lady Fanny afterwards, she was afraid she had laughed a great deal too much, but she really could not help it; and Lady Fanny replied, that whilst she sat so close to Mrs. Lawrence, unless she had laughed worse than a hyena, she was safe from being heard.

“I hope, Captain Barton,” said Mr. Law-

rence to his guest, "you have been able to bring us a disengaged week."

"Indeed, such a thing is not in my possession," replied Gerard; "you must allow me to unite business and pleasure as far as possible."

"I can allow no such thing," remarked Mrs. Lawrence, joining the gentlemen. "Your business is to be attended to exclusively, and that is to do as I bid you. Pleasure may be allowed to follow as it can."

"I wish I could submit quietly to your dictation, Mrs. Lawrence," said he; "but you know part of our agreement was, that I should be at liberty to make my regular visits; Miss Damer can attest that article."

"I can attest that you are an obstinate and head-strong man," said Miss Damer, laughing; "but I will not answer for anything else."

"And what is this mighty business?" continued Mrs. Lawrence.

"I must ride to-morrow to visit Hermitage Bay; there is no help for it."

“ And I mean you to escort us to that Cove Miss Moore was talking of. I have arranged everything for a pic-nic there,” replied the lady, resolutely.

“ I could meet you there, perhaps ; what time do you mean to go ?”

“ Ah, I knew we should come to terms. We would start—let me see—about one, I think ; and you will come with us !”

He bowed and smiled, without the smallest intention of altering his own engagements, or changing his plans for her. She enquired next what else he had to do. The answer was, that he should probably take a long ride after dark, on Wednesday night.”

“ Then I shall come with you—where are you going ?” was her answer.

“ The one’s a secret, and the other impossible,” said Captain Barton.

“ Not for me ; I shall order my horse at the same time as yours. I should delight in a moon-light ride.”

"But I shall not go till the moon is set," argued he.

"Well, a midnight ride, then. You know I am tolerably determined, sometimes."

"Yes; but I trust this is not one of those times."

"Indeed it is," said the lady; "remember 'the Bridge!' You know my will!"

Captain Barton gave a half-glance at her husband, who was standing by. Mr. Lawrence took it very quietly, however.

"I dare say a ride at midnight would be very pleasant," he observed; "I shall join your party if my wife goes. I suppose you will not object."

Mrs. Lawrence compressed her lips for a moment, and then turned to another topic.

CHAPTER V.

“ When up some woodland dale we catch
The many-twinkling smile of ocean ;
Or with pleased ear bewildered watch
His chime of restless motion.”

KEBLE.

THE pic-nic to Crabstone Cove was a settled thing, and several families from the neighbouring country were invited to meet the Airstone Park party there.

The morning proved fine, and everything looked propitious for Mrs. Lawrence, except that Gerard Barton had carried his point, and gone off in the forenoon to attend to his own

business, leaving a promise with his host to join the company at the Cove as soon as he could.

Nora had hardly seen her cousin all that morning. The late breakfast hour had carried them far into what was usually called their day at home, before the family met, and on rising from table, Mr. Lawrence had invited both Gerard and Lord Clarence to visit his stud—a move which it never occurred to Nora was pre-concerted, that Captain Barton might be free to take his own time for riding, without being wearied by the importunities of his hostess. The interval between breakfast and one o'clock was spent partly in lounging in the saloon, partly in wandering through the conservatory; and here Nora, for the first time since they had been under the same roof, found Mr. Mortimer by her side. She had wondered a little whether he had purposely avoided her, whether he was ashamed of her acquaintance amid so many grander persons, or what had been his motive! Perhaps she had slightly resented it

also ; at least, there was a shadow more of reserve in her tone when she replied to him, which his observation, being only about flowers, was certainly too innocent to have called forth.

Whether he read her feelings she could not tell ; his next remark was addressed to Lady Fanny, who, with her sister, Lady Ada, was loitering beside a marble bason, making mimic boats of geranium and rose petals, and blowing them across the water.

Nora walked on, leaving them altogether, and taking advantage of an open door, stepped out into a flower-garden. Here, whilst inhaling the perfume of heliotrope and mignionette, she was again joined by Mr. Mortimer. He must have followed her on purpose.

He immediately entered into conversation with her, asked her opinion of the place, the people, the style of living ; paid her several compliments on her taste and discernment, gradually grew more devoted both in his language and manner, and made at length something so

very like a declaration of love, that Nora would have been grievously puzzled what to say next, had not an interruption occurred.

They had crossed the flower-garden, and entered on some shady walks, which, after proceeding a short space, led apparently towards the back premises, forming a means of communication between the offices and the gardens. The tools, such as roller, barrows, and other articles standing about, seemed to indicate that they were intruding on the gardener's premises, and Miss Moore was about to draw back, when the attention of both was attracted towards a figure standing so close to them, that they each felt an instantaneous conviction that the intruder must have heard Mr. Mortimer's last words.

Supposing the person, who was a woman, to be one of the female servants of the house, thus playing the eaves-dropper, for she was certainly half-concealed by a thick and drooping shrub, Nora stepped back ashamed, whilst Mr. Mor-

timer, haughtily advancing, asked who it was thus intruding on their superiors, and what she wanted.

“Charity,” said the woman extending her hand, and assuming the professional whine of a beggar. She was a strange-looking figure. A large cloak was drawn up close round her throat, a blue handkerchief tied under her bonnet, almost entirely concealed the lower part of her face, and some tangled locks of reddish hair, straggling over her brow and eyes, left little visible of a dark-complexioned countenance, except a handsome nose, and a pair of wildly bright black eyes, which Nora thought she had somewhere seen before.

“What business has such a tramp as you here?” exclaimed Mr. Mortimer; “you are trespassing, perhaps prowling about for what you can pilfer. Come be off!”

“Oh, don’t scold her,” said Nora, compassionately; “perhaps she is in distress, and we can help her.”

The woman's eyes, which had flashed almost fiercely at the gentleman's address, softened as she turned them on Nora, and she answered in a gentle voice—

“Kind young lady, I am much obliged to you. I did not mean to offend. Mrs. Lawrence is so charitable, that the poor are never driven unrelieved from her gate!”

“I know Mrs. Lawrence is so weak, that she encourages all the beggars in the county,” exclaimed Mr. Mortimer, angrily; “but I am a magistrate, and I tell you that I will send you to Bridewell as a vagrant, if you do not move off. There is a Union House to go to, if you are in distress.”

Again the beggar's eye flashed fire. She drew herself up, and seemed about to speak; and Nora had a conviction that it would have been in a very unmendicant tone indeed. She hastily interposed.

“There, take this,” said she, giving her a sixpence, “and go, good woman. Go to the

back-door ; Mrs. Lawrence is at home, I know !”

She spoke softly and hastily, afraid of Mr. Mortimer at the moment. His indignation was extreme.

“Miss Moore, how can you ! you are encouraging profligacy ; how, have you no regard for my expressed opinion ? Consider what an example you set. That woman was skulking about here, listening to what was not intended for her ears, perhaps to make mischief, and traffic in gossip. Begone, I say, woman, impostor, vagrant.”

“Ill-doers are ill-fearers,” said the woman boldly ; “perchance, sir, you have as much reason to fear as I have. Your day of distress may come in time, and then you may remember your harshness to me. For you, my sweet young lady, if I could save you from sorrow, I would. May you never know the pain which bursts my heart. This coin—I will mark it—for your sake.”

She drew a large pin from her cloak, and deliberately marked the sixpence ; then turning her back, she hastened away, leaving Mr. Mortimer choking with injured pride and virtuous indignation.

“ The insolent wretch ! ” exclaimed he ; “ were I at home, she should be taken up at once ; but Lawrence is such a fellow, it is no use talking to him. Miss Moore —— ” turning to where he believed Nora to be standing ; but she had escaped, afraid alike of braving his anger, or listening to his love.

She hurried back to the conservatory, thinking, as she went, of the strange woman, and vainly puzzling herself to remember where she had ever seen those eyes, and heard that voice. She fancied the woman was Irish ; her voice and features were certainly not Saxon ; and the peculiarity of red hair and dark eyes was so great that she felt sure she should know her again : she wished very much to meet her once more, and ascertain whether it was only in her

dreams that she had seen such a face ; or whether it was true that they had met before.

It was time to prepare for the pic-nic. Nora had no opportunity of telling cousin Miriam of what had just passed ; she was not in her room ; so Miss Moore threw on her bonnet and cloak with the utmost expedition, afraid of being late, and then ran to see that Louis was ready ; for Mr. Lawrence, who was very fond of his children, had declared his intention of taking the two eldest, and their young companion, on this excursion, to which his wife made no objection, provided he promised to look after them himself.

Nora found Mr. Lawrence packing the children into his dog-cart, in which he proposed himself to drive them ; and he, having proved to Nora that they were all perfectly safe by his mode of arrangement, and that having a groom with him, there need be no cause for alarm even at the spirited character of his horse, she saw them depart with satisfaction, and wondered

whether she should have anything like the enjoyment in the excursion which the children seemed to feel.

The greater part of the family from Airstone were to drive to Crabstone Cove in a *char-à-banc*; but happily for Nora's comfort and equanimity, Mr. Mortimer had previously engaged to take the Duke in his own phaeton, and that nobleman had good-naturedly submitted to an arrangement which he privately thought a great bore, because he would not compel either his son or his son-in-law to take his place.

When at length Mrs. Lawrence and her sister were ready to start, which was not till everybody else had been waiting some time, Nora found herself very comfortably provided for; as, by some management of the others, she was seated between Lady Fanny St. Amand and her brother. They were probably as well pleased as any of the party, and were certainly quite as cheerful.

There was a little village situated above the cove, which had been appointed as the rendez-

vous of the various members of the pic-nic. These consisted of officers from a neighbouring garrison town, a few other country families, and some single gentlemen. The number amounted to about thirty-five, and in so large a society it was not in the least necessary that acquaintance should be general. The Airstone carriage was last, as might be expected, but nobody thought of minding the unpunctuality of a duchess; had they known the truth, they would have ascertained that her grace was the earliest ready of all the ladies.

From the village it was necessary to proceed on foot, by an extremely romantic and varied path, to the cove; the little bay itself was nearly surrounded by precipitous rocks, which in many places hung over the water, and formed at low tide threatening and gloomy caves. It was here, that when a heavy swell set in after a gale, the rush of the waves, and the uproar of the breakers, was something wildly terrific; and it was this that Nora had longed to see. With the present

aspect of the bay, calm and smiling under a summer sunshine, with its sands uncovered, and the rocks at its entrance rising black and bare, she was already acquainted.

At the upper end of the cove the ground appeared to have sunk at some period now far remote, and through the chasm thus formed was the only descent to the water. Nothing could be much wilder than the path they followed. Abrupt steps, rocks hanging overhead as if in act to fall, shrubs waving from the crevices, brushwood and alders covering the banks of a small rivulet, which foamed, leaped, and dashed as it wound along at the bottom of the ravine, the high cliffs above their heads contrasting with a deep blue sky, and the glimpses of an azure sea beyond, combined to produce a most romantic landscape. A couple of rude cottages, with untidy attempts at gardens, the broken pales ornamented by fishing-nets, and the door-step defended on each hand by lobster-pots, old casks and other marine stores,

added to the picturesque effect of the scene, whilst they spoke loudly of the careless habits so common amongst fishers. A boat was lying on the sand at the head of the cove, a little above high-water mark; another was rocking idly on the glancing waters. There were children near, for their voices could be heard; but the visitors had advanced some way before they saw any living thing. They straggled on in separate parties. Nora pointed out the path, but she herself was inclined to linger: she was looking along the open country above the cove for Gerard; most of the others, bent on exploring, followed the various tracks downwards, and presently Nora found herself with only Louis as a companion. In the confusion of so many persons, wandering in such broken paths, where the eye commanded but a short stretch of ground close to them, she was not missed; and it was not till they had all assembled on the small strip of sand below, that Lord Clarence St. Amand and Mr. Mortimer both exclaimed—

“ But where is Miss Moore ? ”

There were plenty of gentlemen now to guard the other ladies, so no objection was made to these two going back in search of her, for which purpose they took separate paths, as nobody could remember where she had been seen last.

Nora did not at all mind being alone ; she wanted time to think, and she wished very much to speak to Gerard. He might be able to get some information about that strange woman, whose aspect and words haunted her ; and, too, there was Mr. Mortimer—she could not tell Gerard about him, but she should be safer near her cousin. She told Louis who she was watching for, and sitting down on a sandy knoll, under a spreading furze bush, she bade him climb up higher, to see if Captain Barton was visible.

Louis, with great good will, scrambled up and got over to the other side of a bank, whilst Nora fell into a reverie, wondering what cousin Gerard would say if he knew what had fallen

that morning from Mr. Mortimer ; wondering, too, what that gentleman really meant,—whether he was in earnest or not, and wishing that he had not spoken so harshly to the beggar at Airstone.

Presently she heard a sound of whistling on the other side of the bank where Louis had gone, then a gruff voice cried “ *Hola !* ” and at the same moment Louis reappeared, pale, trembling, breathless, rushing over the ground as fast as his little legs would carry him, until he sank down by her side, hiding his face in her lap, with a smothered exclamation of “ *Pierre ! Pierre !* ”

Nora gazed around, but saw no one ; she tried to soothe the child, who seemed wild with terror, and prevented her rising by clinging to her ; then she began to wish some of her party were near, especially when on again looking up, she saw a rough cap and rougher face appear over the bank behind her. Could it in truth be Pierre ? She must know ; although alone

she knew she had nothing really to fear ; and Nora, though timid in anticipation, afraid of censure, and shrinking from reproof or ridicule, was braver than many a man in actual danger. Resolutely releasing herself from Louis, but still keeping hold of his hand, she rose and advanced towards the man, who drew nearer to her as she did so.

“ Will you tell me your name, friend ? ” said she, gently ; “ my little boy fancies he has seen you before.”

His wild and almost ferocious face gave her small encouragement ; but he shook his head, as if he did not understand her.

“ Are you a foreigner ? ” asked she, in hesitating French.

His eyes went from her to Louis, and back to her again ; the child meanwhile hid his face in the flounces of her dress, and did not speak. After a little hesitation he made some signs with his hands and fingers, pointing to his mouth and ears, shaking his head, and by other

gestures, indicating that he was deaf and dumb.

Nora thought this strange, as she was certain she had heard him whistle and speak. She tried to spell out, "Who are you?" on her fingers, but he did not seem to understand. She thought, perhaps, it would be better to pass on, and attempted to do so,—but he advanced and stood in her path; pointing to the road downwards, however, and seeming to inquire if she belonged to the party who were down there. Believing his deafness to be entirely fictitious, she told him in plain English that she did, and was going down to them. Again he seemed to hesitate, and she believed he was about to speak, when Lord Clarence ran hastily up the path, and made them both start.

"Why, Miss Moore," he exclaimed, "we had lost you, and all your friends have been in a state of anxiety not to be described. We were afraid something dreadful had happened; that you had fallen into a rabbit-hole, or been carried

off by fairies, perchance; whilst it appears that the misfortune really is, that you are above all your companions."

"That is one way of representing my delinquency," said Nora, laughing, but not quite at her ease. She looked from Lord Clarence to the stranger, who drew off a step, but did not seem inclined to move farther. "I waited to see my cousin," continued she, apologetically; "I am sorry your lordship had the trouble of coming back for me."

"*C'en'est pas votre cousin, celui-là,*" replied he, in his turn eyeing the disreputable figure of her companion, who turned so sharply at the sound of his words, as confirmed 'her conviction that he could hear perfectly well.

"I was looking for Captain Barton," she answered, furtively watching the object of her suspicions. He did not, however, seem more disturbed by that name, which she had pronounced with some emphasis.

"Mr. Mortimer* is coming to look for you

too," observed Lord Clarence, a little puzzled by her manner; "we shall meet him, I imagine, if we go down. Come, Louis, let me carry you, my boy." He caught the child in his arms as he spoke, and swung him on his shoulder. A rapid, but most perceptible, change passed over the stranger's face; he gave one sharp glance from Nora to Louis, raised his fur cap slightly with his right hand, which action concealed from Lord Clarence that he laid the finger of his left hand on his lip, as if to caution silence, and then turning, strode hastily away, in a direction which soon concealed him from sight.

"Who's your friend, Miss Moore?" inquired his lordship, with some curiosity. "I am afraid you have a taste for low society, if you select such companions."

"Nay, you accused me just now of being above my company," retorted she, archly, "so I shall make haste down to a level with the lowest, and turn a deaf ear to your insinuations."

"It is Pierre," said Louis, looking after him.

“Who, my boy?” inquired he.

Nora put her finger on her lips, and Louis, colouring crimson, made no answer. Naturally enough, Lord Clarence’s curiosity was a good deal excited, but he only observed politely—

“I am afraid Miss Moore, I really have intruded on you when I was not wanted. I had not the smallest intention of interrupting your conversation.”

“Neither did you,” replied Nora, hesitating a little; “and I was glad to see you, for that odd man frightened me. He made believe to be deaf and dumb, but I do not think he was either. To say the truth,” she added, in a low voice, “I think he must be concerned in smuggling, and I want to tell cousin Gerard; but do not mention it to any one else, as the least said, soonest mended.”

“Very well; I admire your discretion.”

“Oh, I learned that from my cousin. Here comes Mr. Mortimer.”

At that moment the latter gentleman joined

them, and reproached Nora with both warmth and softness for quitting their society. She thought that even Lord Clarence seemed to notice the peculiarity of his tones, for he presently dropped behind and talked to Louis, as if willing to give them full opportunity to converse together. But she felt shy and restrained, and pausing a little, half turned round, so as to address Louis herself, and thus bring his bearer up close alongside of her. They went down together to the bottom of the cove, where they found the company amusing themselves in different ways.

Some were sketching, some searching for shells or pebbles in the sand ; some endeavouring to advance towards the further extremity of the rocks, which formed its boundary ; and some having hauled in the boat which was moored there, had got into it, and were rocking on the water like children at play.

The servants were busy spreading the eatables on a flat space which Mr. Lawrence had selected as a dining-room, and Mrs. Lawrence

was superintending two young officers, who were disposing the bottles of champagne in a cool stream which trickled over the cliffs.

Having nothing particular to do, and feeling rather uneasy in her mind, Nora did not join any of the various parties, but stood quietly on the beach, watching the glittering waves dancing at her feet, or gazing at the line of the sea, which was visible from where she stood.

All at once a vessel came in sight which she knew as well as she did her own work-box or bonnet. It was the cutter under Gerard's command; and she watched it with interest, but without speaking. The vessel lay-to about a quarter of a mile from the cove; and Nora strained her eyes eagerly, to discover whether, amongst the figures which descended into a boat alongside, she could discern Gerard. She was sure she could, and surer still as the boat approached the shore, until conviction became certainty, for she saw him distinctly. The boat made for the cove, and, in a few minutes, run-

ning towards a little ledge of rocks which formed a convenient landing-place, the crew tossed their oars, and laid her alongside, as only men-of-war's men can. Captain Barton jumped out and approached the party.

Mrs. Lawrence ran up to him.

"Recreant! fugitive! deserter!" exclaimed she, laying her hand on his arm, "I arrest you in the name of honour, loyalty, and truth. You are my prisoner. Yield thee, rescue or no rescue, sir Captain!"

"I yield, fair lady, a willing prisoner. I came on purpose to deliver myself up to your mercy, and I trust I do not make my submission too late for—luncheon!"

"Dismiss your men then; send back your shallop with your followers, that you may have no means of escape."

"I am sorry to say that in this respect I must disobey your injunctions. I have to go off again to the Allumette this afternoon, and cannot return to Airstone to-night."

“What’s that, Captain Barton?” said Mr. Lawrence, just then coming up. “Are we to lose you so soon?”

“I hope to rejoin you to-morrow,” replied he, “to make my excuses for deserting you so suddenly to-day.”

“Cousin, I do so want to speak to you,” said Nora, coming close to his elbow, and speaking almost in a whisper.

He turned immediately. “Certainly; what is it, Nora, dear? I am quite at your service.”

It was said with a look of interest which caught Mr. Mortimer’s jealous eye.

“Come a little this way,” said she, putting her hand through his arm, and they walked away together to a short distance.

Mrs. Lawrence looked after them.

“Odd enough, to march her cousin off in that way from my party,” said she, with some discontent; for those who take most liberties themselves, least like them in others.

“It would be difficult to be offended, how-

ever, at anything Miss Moore does," said Mr. Lawrence, "she is so gentle and pretty."

"I fancy it was something of great consequence that she had to say to her cousin," interposed Lord Clarence; "she expressed a strong wish to see him, and I thought she must have had a message to him entrusted to her by a man she met upon the hill. Captain Barton has probably important business on hand, to judge from his manner."

Meanwhile Nora gave Gerard a short, but distinct account of the interview she had with the stranger, of Louis's positive conviction that it was Pi  re, and her impression that he feigned dumbness for the sake of concealment.

"You are a discreet little girl," said he, smiling. "So you really did not tell these ideas to Lord Clarence? Thank you; perhaps it may be of use."

"What are you going to do, Cousin Gerard?" asked she, as he looked upwards, as if preparing to ascend the cliff.

“ I really must go up and try to meet one of the men up there ; I should like to have that man watched, if possible ; were it only to ascertain who he is, it might be of use. But you would not like now to give up Louis to any disreputable guardian, should you, Nora ? ”

“ Oh, no, I should not like Pi  re to have him, whoever he may be ; the terror of the poor child at the idea is most distressing. And I should be sorry to part with him, too, on my own account. ”

“ You shall have your own way, dear Nora, so far as it depends on me, in this and in everything : and when you leave us, I trust you will think of your home here with pleasure and affection. ”

“ Leave you ! what makes you talk like that ? ” said Nora, blushing deeply.

“ I was thinking that it was natural you should feel for the friendless and homeless ; and that I should not like to be remembered as a Pi  re by you. ”

They both stood silent for a short space. Nora was thinking whether there could be a home where she would be happier than at Rock Cottage. Gerard started, after a minute, as if recalling wandering thoughts, and then said with a sort of sigh—

“ Well, I must be busy ; come, Nora.”

But their path led them past where Mrs. Lawrence and her friends were standing, and it was not so easy to escape from her importunities. She had armed herself with a walking-stick snatched from one of the gentlemen ; and placing herself across the way, with much of the air and attitude of a soldier on guard, she cried out—“ Halt, there !”

Captain Barton stopped, and, raising his cap, he said, good-humouredly—

“ Pray accept my parole, Mrs. Lawrence, and suffer me to go up the cliff for a short time ; on my honour, I have business of much importance.”

“ Well, I don't know—I am not sure that I

will trust you. I shall go with you, and see what your business is," replied she.

"I shall walk much too fast for you to accompany me," said he, trying to pass her on the narrow path.

"Oh, you don't know; I can go very fast indeed," persisted she.

"I have no doubt of that; but I do not recommend you to try in the present instance; when I come back, we will walk a race, if you like. Now you will permit me to pass on duty.

"No, not unless you promise me I shall know what you are going for."

They were standing on a projecting point of rock, forming a sort of shelf on the precipice. Beneath them was another such table, communicating with the beach. The distance between the two was perhaps six or seven feet; and Gerard seeing that, to pass Mrs. Lawrence as she stood, would not be easy, leaped lightly down on the ledge below, and, turning to wave

his hand, rapidly pursued his way to the farther end of the cove.

“Stop him ! stop him, alive or dead !” exclaimed she, laughing so that she could hardly speak ; “ I will give sixpence—a shilling—half-a-crown to any one who will bring him back to me. Mr. Mortimer, go with him, and see him safe back.”

Nora was surprised to find that Mr. Mortimer obeyed immediately. Surprise would not have been her most powerful feeling had she known what passed between the gentlemen.

Gerard walked so quickly that he was soon out of sight in the winding path, and Mr. Mortimer, content to take his own time, dawdled on the way, rather desirous to fall in with the young officer on his descent, than to seem to follow as a spy. Consequently, Captain Barton was quite unconscious of his vicinity ; he reached the summit, met one of the Preventive men, gave him the necessary directions regarding the suspicious character with whom Nora had

met, and was on his return, when he encountered the other gentleman.

“Excuse me for intruding on you, Captain Barton; I did not come to obey the injunctions of Mrs. Lawrence, nor to spy upon your actions; but because I wished particularly to speak to you alone.”

Captain Barton said “certainly;” but it was in a cold, constrained tone. It was impossible that much good will could exist between two, who were secretly, but consciously, rivals.

“You are, I believe, Miss Moore’s guardian, Captain Barton,” said the elder gentleman. “It is in this character that I wish to address you.”

“I am, conjointly with my sister,” replied Gerard, as calmly as he could: he had endeavoured to prepare himself for what he felt was coming. He was sure that Nora was lost to him.

“I have no doubt, sir, that you have perceived my extreme admiration for your ward;

but my admiration is not simply of a passive nature. I would wish to make overtures for her hand."

He looked and spoke as if the magnanimity of such a declaration might well excite astonishment and admiration.

"Your overtures, sir, must be made to the young lady herself," replied Gerard, coldly. "Although guardian of her property, and desirous of her happiness, I claim no control over her actions or affections."

"But you are probably aware, Captain Barton, whether her hand is free, and her heart disengaged — both which are points of great importance to me, as I should not, of course, wish to engage in a hopeless pursuit. You, no doubt, can answer these questions, sir."

"So far as I know, Miss Moore's hand is disengaged," replied Gerard, speaking with all the firmness that he could command. "Farther than this I do not pretend to answer. For her feelings you must apply to herself."

"You are cautious, Captain Barton ; no doubt you are right to be so. But if you will not give me information which might be of material assistance to me, may I at least flatter myself that as Miss Moore's guardian you will not oppose my suit."

"I can only repeat, Mr. Mortimer, that you are at perfect liberty to address her yourself. Although not legally of age, she is old enough to judge for herself, of her own happiness, and neither my sister nor I would interfere, unless——" he stopped.

Mr. Mortimer waited politely for a continuation of the sentence, but as Gerard was silent, he enquired in the mildest voice, "May I ask what circumstances would be considered by you as a justification in an attempt to control your ward?"

Gerard seemed unwilling to answer, then said,—

"None which exist at present."

"I am glad of that sir," replied Mr. Morti-

mer. "It is a great relief to my mind to have ensured the approbation and co-operation of one who must be so warmly interested in the welfare and happiness of one of the most charming creatures on the face of the earth."

"I was not aware," replied Gerard, "that anything which I had said could be construed into either approbation or a promise of co-operation. I intended to express merely a passive non-interference."

"Have you no influence with your cousin, Captain Barton?" said Mr. Mortimer, with a look that expressed a desire to read his motives.

"If I had, I should decline to use it in such a case."

"May I ask why? Is it from any motive in which I personally am concerned? Is it my character, position, or fortune which makes you reluctant to favour my suit? Is it that I am unfortunately some years senior to your charming cousin? I am aware that this might be

considered an objection, although I trust not an insurmountable one. I have no title, no coronet to lay at her feet ; and admirable as she is, you may perhaps consider that she has claims to higher rank than anything I can offer. No doubt she has : but mine is one of those untitled families which yet form the aristocracy of the country. She would fill no mean position as my wife ; she would have no low, or unsuitable associates. I have never coveted rank for myself, but if a title would procure me the happiness I desire, I would stoop to seek for one by any means in my power."

"I hope, sir," replied Gerard, calmly, "that no consideration of mere rank, wealth, or station would influence either my cousin or myself. If you can obtain *her* affections, it will be, I am certain, quite irrespective of your position in society ; and for my own part, I should perhaps consider her prospect of happiness more certain, whilst she remained in the station of life she has been accustomed to. I

believe I may venture to say, that no title would increase your claims on her regard or esteem."

"Thank you. I can easily believe it, of one whose most bewitching charm is her pure, transparent simplicity. Never did I see one who appeared to me so perfectly unstained by worldly motives, or selfish considerations."

They were coming within sight of the rest of the party, and Gerard, most anxious to escape from a conversation inexpressibly painful, quickened his steps, and cut short praises of Nora, which from any other mouth he would have been glad enough to listen to.

CHAPTER VI.

“Oh who shall dare in this frail scene
On holiest, happiest thoughts to lean,
On Friendship, Kindred, or on Love?”

CAPTAIN BARTON might as well have been on board the Allumette himself, for any pleasure that his company conferred on his companions for the next half-hour. So said Mrs. Lawrence ; and she declared her conviction that he was meditating dire schemes against smugglers, which she continued eagerly urging him to explain, until he was forced to rouse himself so effectually to reply, as to banish all appear-

ance of peculiar thoughtfulness. He kept aloof from Nora for the rest of the time he remained at the Cove, and finally left the party in spite of Mrs. Lawrence's remonstrances poured out as she accompanied him down to the boat. There she amused herself with making the boat's crew drink her health in the surplus pale ale, and diverted them by her pathetic, but somewhat indecorous entreaties, that they would upset the Captain, to punish him for his obstinacy in leaving her, by giving him a good ducking. The sailors with difficulty repressed their mirth, which, however, received no encouragement from their commander, who remained impenetrably grave, and as soon as the men had swallowed the liquor which the lady gracefully presented, he stepped into the boat, and ordered them to push off.

Mrs. Lawrence returned his parting bow, by waving her handkerchief, blowing him a kiss, and calling out, "Success against the smugglers!" at the top of her voice. Nora, mean-

while, had hardly found time to think about Gerard ; she was engrossed by the conversation of Mr. Mortimer. Whatever admiration has of most bewitching, flattery of most insinuating, and passion of most prepossessing, was put forth by him to win her. The softened tone, the respectful appeal, the glance fraught with a meaning beyond words ; the implied devotion, the marked preference, the indifference to all else beneath the sky, all these were exerting a new, but most bewitching influence over her. As she sat upon a corner of a projecting rock—for the ladies found seats anywhere they could, and the gentlemen waited on them—his very air and manner, the earnestness with which he helped her to refreshments, or poured out for her the lemonade ; even the attitude in which he stood, seemed to speak of worship, rather than ordinary civility. He had great powers, too, when he chose to exert them ; powers which, when unclouded by self-sufficiency and pride, could not but be felt by her. She could

appreciate his mental superiority, and he gave it now fair play. But after all, the strongest claim, it must be owned, was the ardent admiration which he made so evident. It was in this respect that he differed so decidedly from Gerard in manner. Her cousin was always kind, but seldom more so than a brother would have been ; rarely, most rarely, had he ever shown a feeling more impassioned, or expressed a sentiment which could have raised a question as to its origin.

Nora loved Gerard dearly, but she believed it was a love which might have been owned to without a blush. Mr. Mortimer created very different feelings. It was excitement, gratification, flutter, delight ; maiden pride, unconscious triumph, the satisfaction of exercising a hitherto unknown power ; it was a tumult of feelings which swelled in her little heart ; all those mixed emotions which unite to form that shade of love, the most deceptive and unreal of its numerous types.

To be sought, courted, loved by a man of his claims, that was a charm indeed. There was as much fear, perhaps, as any other passion mixed with her feelings, but women love to fear ; there is to them, possibly, the same charm in worshipping one of whom they stand in awe, as there is in the dangers of the battle-field to the warrior. Perhaps, however, this is too exalted a simile, and it might rather be compared to the foolish infatuation which leads the skater to sweep over dangerous or doubtful ice ; a venture by which, if safe, nothing can be gained, and in which, if otherwise, all may be lost. Even so women are led on to trust their all of worldly happiness to beings whose exterior, polished and refined, conceals, they are aware, unknown depths which they cannot explore ; the hidden mystery, the uncertain safety has a charm irresistible. But oh ! if it yields under their touch, who can say into what black depth they may be plunged, without hope of rescue ?

Mr. Mortimer and Nora were not in the least

conspicuous, for there were too many little flirtations going on under the influence of fine views, champagne, and the open air, for any couple to be more remarkable than the others; Miss Barton was the only person who noticed them, and she was not inclined to find fault with their proceedings; Mr. Mortimer's advances had her fullest approbation, and she looked forward with much satisfaction to the probable termination of the affair. It was not until arrangements were making for returning to Airstone, that Miss Moore was parted from her admirer; he could not relinquish the pleasure of driving the Duke, even for the sake of Nora's company; so they returned nearly as they had come, except that as the whole party were to adjourn to the Park and spend the evening in music, dancing, and other appropriate occupations, Mrs. Lawrence, at the urgent persuasion of her husband, was one of the first to set off homewards, for which act of compliance she indemnified herself, by going off to Airstone in the carriage of one of

the officers who had joined their party, under the plea of not wishing to hurry the rest of the ladies. Mr. Lawrence's philosophy was sometimes so sorely tried, that his advice to Gerard may possibly be forgiven.

Lord Clarence, quite unconscious of what had been passing between Nora and her companion, for he had been happily engrossed in geological researches with his sisters whilst in the Cove, exerted himself to be agreeable on the return home; but found Miss Moore so pre-occupied and silent, that he supposed she was very tired, and soon left her in peace. But, however much thoughts of Mr. Mortimer, and comparisons between him and Gerard occupied her, her attention was called off in another direction on her return to Airstone; for on ascending to her bed-room, a small packet lying on her toilette table instantly caught her attention. It was directed to her, and in an unknown hand.

On removing the envelope, she found a note within; the handwriting was not only unknown,

but strange—evidently foreign ; she was not able to tell whether French or not. The words were English.

“MADEMOISELLE,

“When you throw your eyes on the token which accompanies this note, you will not doubt who addresses you. Yes, it is the poor beggar you so kindly addressed. It is still more—it is, oh, heavens ! it is the mother of Louis. With pain and anguish I write ; but what to do ? I question, I debate, I fight, I hesitate, but I cannot resist. Love and prudence tell me alike the path I ought to take. To carry him with me is to expose him to sin, to sorrow, to suffering ; to leave him with you, in those kind arms so tenderly stretched out to shelter the young unprotected, is only to pierce my own heart, and tear out my own feelings. To own myself, to give my name to you, would be ruin to those whom I would not injure—secrecy from you I implore. In the name of all that is most sacred,

say nothing of this to any one but M. Le Capitaine; to him I trust. Perhaps in brighter times I may be able to reclaim my boy. Ah! you cannot know what such a thought is to me! Louis, though the child of sorrow, is not the son of shame also. His father was my husband—he is lost to me—the boy never saw him. Have pity, Mademoiselle, and do not cast off my unhappy orphan. I trust to hear of him sometimes; as I can, I will write for news of him, and tell you where to address yourself. For the present my mother's heart torn, bleeding, palpitating with grief, must silence itself. Before you see this I shall be far, and before the morning, across the sea to France. Providence has provided your house as a shelter, better than I could have found myself; but rather I would he had perished on the rock than return to my miserable hearth. But you shall have quarterly such a sum as will pay for his support. Ask not how it comes; and *do not suffer cold and hard pride, under the name of charity, to deal*

out its needless gifts to him. He is no beggar. Should my unhappy days be finished before I dare reclaim him, then, when he is of age, open the packet I send, but not till then, and he will know how to act. Adieu—may Heaven bless you, Mademoiselle, and may your days be happy !

“ THE MOTHER OF LOUIS.”

Enclosed was a sixpence, the very one which Nora had that morning seen the woman mark, when she received it of her. She laid down the note on the table, and, dropping into a chair, drew a long breath ; for the rapidity with which she had perused this note, and the excitement of surprise and curiosity, had almost stopped her respiration. What could it all mean ? Who could Louis be ? Was it true which the woman stated ? or had she concocted some fictitious narrative to work more deeply on the compassion of the child's new friends ? Oh, why was not Gerard at hand ? If she could but have

flown to him at once, and told him all, and learnt his opinion ! It was so hard to keep a secret, that she would even have liked to consult with Mr. Mortimer ; but no, perhaps he might not have listened ; he had been angry with the woman, and would not probably interest himself about her. Well, she must wait till the morrow now, and meantime lock up this paper. She took up the other packet ; it was directed to Louis, to be given him when twenty-one, unless, by desire of the donor, an earlier date was fixed.

She paused to read the note once more, weighing each sentence, and trying to find a new meaning to each expression, guessing, as well as she could, the feelings which had prompted the words, and judging mentally whether they were the result of passionate grief or deliberate hypocrisy.

It was no use ; all the meditation and consideration she could give it could not unravel the mystery of those lines ; and she was finally

obliged to go down stairs without having decided on anything, but that she could not understand them. The evening was not, however, entirely devoted to reflections on the unhappy lot of Louis or his mother. Two-thirds, it may fairly be calculated, were given to listening to Mr. Mortimer, and something to other partners.

“Your little boy, Miss Moore,” said Mr. Lawrence to Nora the next morning, “was so delighted with his drive yesterday, that he has ‘encored’ it with all his heart. Do you object to his going out with me to-day?”

“Not at all; when do you go?”

“Now, would you honour me with your company yourself, and see if you could enjoy what Louis likes so much?”

Mr. Mortimer was by her side as she answered—“Thank you, I should like it very much.” She gave a half-glance at him as she spoke: he looked gloomy; indeed, had Nora ventured to think such a thing of him, she would have said he looked cross; but such a

word she would not apply to him. Women have soft terms for the faults of those they love, and softer still for those who love them. The sort of love which was beginning to creep into her heart, if love it might be called, threw a mist before her eyes which she would not exert herself to pierce through. Was it because she feared to know what lurked behind?

But she did not understand her lover now : his frown she fancied to arise rather from reluctance to lose her society than any other motive, and she would not withdraw her consent or change her mind.

“When will you be ready?” asked Mr. Lawrence, after she had put aside some trifling objections which Mr. Mortimer had raised. She answered she would prepare immediately, and left them to do so.

The dog-cart was at the door when she came down, and Mr. Lawrence having handed her in, placed himself by her side, and desired the servant in attendance to lift Master Louis up to

the seat behind. But Louis had forgotten his handkerchief, and ran in to fetch it from the Hall. Just at this moment something startled the horse, already impatient from standing still : it bolted suddenly half round, throwing down the groom who was at its head, and set off full gallop down the avenue. They went at a fearful speed ; but the road was for some distance straight and smooth, and *perhaps* the horse might soon slacken so violent a pace. Nora held tight to the carriage, and ventured one glance at the face of her companion as she comforted herself with this thought. She had the consolation of seeing there unshrinking firmness and composure. On, on they flew, each minute seeming ten in such circumstances ; in perfect silence they were hurried on. Then it seemed as if the speed were slackening ; and Mr. Lawrence, thinking he now had his horse more under control, pulled the reins sharply up—they snapped in his hands, and the animal again went off like the wind ; but the sudden jerk had

caused him to lose his balance, and he was thrown out, whilst Nora was left helpless and alone. She could not turn her head ; she could not think ; she could scarcely feel ; all sense was concentrated in the single effort to keep her seat, whilst trees and fences were racing past her, and the earth seemed flying away beneath the carriage-wheels.

Onwards she was borne to the boundary of the Park. Hitherto the horse had kept to the centre of the road, which had become more winding as they proceeded ; but now they were approaching the gates, and *they* were closed ! Nora held her breath and shut her eyes. In another moment the horse swerved suddenly to the right, turning so sharply that the shafts snapped instantaneously, and she was thrown out, she knew not where.

Stunned for a moment by the violent concussion, she was at first unable to move, but as her senses gradually returned, she became conscious that she was not much hurt ;—bruised

and shaken, but suffering no violent pain. She was, however, too much overpowered to rise immediately, but lay there thinking, in a sort of dreamy, speculative way, how glad she was to be out of that carriage, and wondering where the horse would stop at last. Strange, that at such a moment, in such circumstances, her thoughts should stray so widely. Visions of Mazeppa, scraps of old tales, images of Mr. Mortimer, floated through her mind, all disjointed and shadowy; then she seemed to hear horses' hoofs again, and the sound made her shudder, as if she might once more be compelled to begin that fearful race. The sounds, however, came nearer and clearer; and before her ideas became sufficiently distinct to realize their cause, they were checked suddenly, and in an instant more some one was kneeling beside her.

“Nora!” exclaimed the voice of Mr. Mortimer, in tones of passionate tenderness, “are you hurt, dearest?—can you speak to me?”

She opened her eyes, and made an effort to

rise. He placed his arm round her, and she sat up. She had been thrown upon a heap of fresh-cut grass, leaves, and prunings of trees, which had, by their softness and elasticity, prevented her being seriously injured.

"I am not hurt, I think!" said she, passing her hand across her forehead, and still looking a little bewildered.

"Are you sure?" said he, eagerly, and half-embracing her in the excitement of his feelings. "Sure that you are unhurt, sweetest, dearest girl?"

She began to remember now all distinctly.

"Oh, Mr. Mortimer, where is Mr. Lawrence? he was thrown out before I was—where is he?"

"I passed him in the avenue," replied he; "can you walk, or shall I carry you?"

"Was he not hurt?" she exclaimed, without answering him.

"I do not know; he was lying insensible—dead, perhaps, I did not stop to see."

She turned sick with fright, and grasping his arm, whispered,—

“Oh, not dead! you did not think so — you did not leave him, thinking so?”

“I did—I was seeking you, thinking only of you—fancying you, too, might be a corpse at my feet, and through his fault!”

She shuddered.

“Oh, I must try and go to help him!”

“You! why he had all the servants running out to find him.”

He seemed very indifferent about all but herself.

She thought a little, and then exclaimed,—

“You have a horse, Mr. Mortimer; ride, ride instantly for a surgeon—perhaps his life may depend on it.”

“And leave you here alone?” said he, indignantly; “no, indeed!”

“I want nothing—I shall go home directly—I am quite well now; never mind me; ride, if you have the smallest regard for your friend;

if you have a spark of common humanity even, ride to the nearest surgeon's."

Her energy prevailed ; she started to her feet as she spoke, and he, unfastening his horse, whose bridle he had hooked over a gate close by, threw himself into the saddle, and only saying, " You command, I obey for your sake," he rode off.

Nora's head felt giddy ; she went to the lodge which was close by, and rousing the keeper's wife from the wash-tub, begged for a glass of water. The woman was frightened at her pale looks, and pressed her to sit down, but she only thought of going back to see for Mr. Lawrence ; and begging the woman to follow with some water as quickly as possible, she told her, in the fewest words, there had been an accident, and she feared " the Squire" was hurt.

Mrs. Savin, the lodge-keeper, was a woman of sense, and comprehending the necessity of the case, hurried on with quicker steps than Nora could easily keep up with. They reached the

spot, where two or three frightened footmen or grooms were standing beside the inanimate body of their master, and disputing what to do. All Nora's energies returned at the sight, and the others yielded immediately to her calm, gentle voice, but self-possessed manner.

One was desired to go and find the means of carrying him to the house; a shutter, a door, anything she said, on which he might be laid. The man stared.

"Booby!" said Mrs. Savin; "there, run to the lodge and take the door off its hinges—'tis as easy as talking. There, Roger and Sparkes, you go together." She pushed them off.

Another was sent back to the house with all speed, to say Mr. Lawrence had been hurt, that they were bringing him home, but wanted more help.

Meanwhile, Nora herself had stooped over the body, had loosened the neckcloth, dashed cold water on the throat and forehead, cleared the face.

partially of blood flowing from a wound in the cheek, felt his heart and pulse to see if life was still there, and with Mrs. Savin's assistance, had raised him so as to allow the air to blow on his brow and chest. That he was only stunned, she was convinced ; he breathed, and his heart beat ; but so slowly, so languidly, it seemed as if each pulsation might be the last.

Presently, however, he revived a little, his eyes opened, and he looked at Nora : she was supporting his head, partly on her knees, partly in her arms, as she crouched on the ground beside him. He seemed puzzled for a moment, but she leant eagerly over him, and whispered,—

“ Can you tell me where you are hurt ? ”

He writhed himself half round, and seemed in extreme pain, as consciousness gradually returned.

“ My thigh, I think.”

Mrs. Savin laid her hand upon it ; he shrank in agony.

"Aye, aye, broken sure enough," said she.
"Dear sir, thank Heaven it is not your head."

"What is it?" said he, languidly. "What has happened? Could you give me some water? How came I here?"

Then as memory regained her power, he tried to rise, exclaiming eagerly, "And you, Miss Moore—are you hurt?—have you escaped?—Thank Heaven for that."

He sank back, but looked unutterably grateful as he gazed at her. "I feared I had killed you."

"No, no, I am quite well. Here come the men. Now, Mr. Lawrence, you must be carried home; we will do the best we can for you."

Roger and Sparkes returned with Mrs. Savin's husband and another stout man, one of the woodmen; they brought the door, as they had been desired; but man's energy apparently could go no farther, at least in the case of domestic servants, for they laid it down and looked

at Miss Moore in hopeless perplexity. Harry Savin and his companion, Edwards the woodman, would probably have been more equal to the necessities of the case, had the sufferer been other than the Squire himself; with one of their own companions they would have been at no loss; men who live out of doors, accustomed to meet with accidents, and act in emergencies, with their faculties sharpened by an intimate acquaintance with the wonderful contrivances of wild natural life around them, are not generally such bewildered automatons as those whose minds are contracted by the routine of laborious frivolity.

But the Squire was an object of respect and awe, on whom they feared to lay a hand, lest they might, in endeavouring to save his life, trespass too far over the bounds of familiarity.

“You must lift him on^{*} to this board,” said Nora; “gently—very gently—ah!”

The half-uttered scream which escaped her lips, was but the echo of the shuddering groan

which the attempt to move him called forth from the prostrate man : his face turned of an ashy paleness, and he half fainted. The assistants paused, murmuring in horror that he was dead, and a momentary heart sickness made even Nora's hand tremble : but she nerved herself resolutely for the occasion.

She remembered, how, when she was younger, she had witnessed something of the kind before ; she recalled the precautions she had then seen taken ; resigning her place at his head to the arms of Mrs. Savin, she herself took her position by the fractured limb, and whilst, so far as skilful hands and tender treatment could secure it, saving the sufferer from another such rude jar as the men's first touch had caused him, she showed them how to place the door beneath him with the slightest possible disturbance to himself. Her own shawl, hastily wound round Savin's velveteen coat, formed a pillow for his head, the wound in the forehead being

already bound by her own handkerchief and his united.

Notwithstanding the acute pain which was every moment increasing, Mr. Lawrence was sufficiently sensible to be aware how much he owed to the energy and forethought of the girl whom he would have judged too timid and shy to have been equal to such exertions, and the few words he at first uttered were whispers of thanks; but as they proceeded to carry him towards his own house, thoughts of another nature passed through his mind.

“Do not carry me to the porch,” said he; “take me to the side-door, near the offices.”

“It is much farther round, sir,” observed Savin, “and every step we take gives you more pain, and makes your honour worse.”

“Never mind,” was his reply, mastering the agony which all but deprived him of the power of utterance. “Miss Moore, promise me to take me the back way. Think, I might meet Lady Ada near the house. It must be.”

Nora understood him, and assented.

They had gone about half way, when several more domestics met them hurrying from the house, eager, curious, excited and frightened, at once. However, they were useful in relieving the two footmen, who supported one end of the door, although Savin and Edwards scorned to yield their places to any other hands, or to relinquish the burden which their stout arms bore so steadily. A few hurried and trembling questions on Nora's part, asked in compliance with the low earnest whispers of Mr. Lawrence, drew from these new assistants that the alarm had not spread beyond the servants' hall and housekeeper's room ; the ladies of the family knew nothing of the accident as yet, the housekeeper, a discreet, active woman, having undertaken to break the intelligence to her mistress with proper precautions, but resolved to defer the alarm until the arrival of more certain intelligence.

The next person they met was little Louis, who was running along as fast as want of breath and

tears would permit ; the necessity of stopping to wipe away the latter, interfering much with his progress. Vague childish terrors, disappointment, wonder, and dread, anxiety for Nora's safety, which he gathered from the exclamations of the startled servants, was compromised by the runaway horse ; and curiosity as to this perplexing event had overpowered his feelings, and left him scarcely strength enough to pursue his settled purpose, of going in search of Miss Moore.

Joyfully he now sprang towards her ; but his exclamations of delight were checked by the first glance at her blood-stained gown, and then the white agonised look of Mr. Lawrence's face, whose closed eyes and ghastly countenance would have shocked and overpowered older heads than his.

With steps as swift as circumstances permitted, Mr. Lawrence was carried round the way he had desired, and owing to the prudent precautions of Nora, whose courage still supported

her, the housekeeper, forewarned, met them at the entrance, and the wounded man was at once conveyed to a room which had been hurriedly prepared for him in the most convenient situation.

Happily, just at this moment, the loud peal of the front door bell, pulled by an excited and uncereemonious hand, gave notice of the arrival of the person whose presence was indeed most desirable; and Nora seeing that there was now nothing farther for her to do, turned to leave the room just as the surgeon and Mr. Mortimer presented themselves at the door. But now the stimulus was withdrawn, mental collapse and bodily prostration followed; she had scarcely felt the relief from responsibility which the announcement of the surgeon's name occasioned, than a sudden dizziness seized her: there was a sound of rushing in her ears, a wavering green mist floated before her eyes, hot and cold winds seemed to blow over her face; and presently she found herself in another room, by an open

window, supported in somebody's arms, who held her very tenderly.

Memory and sense were recalled from a wavering, half-unconscious state, to full activity, by a voice which made her supporter as well as herself start.

"Nora!" said Gerar'd, close beside her, "what is this? what is the matter."

Miss Moore drew herself away from the relaxing clasp of Mr. Mortimer's arms, but she trembled so violently that she could not stand, and sank back helplessly on the ottoman in the window.

Mr. Mortimer did not speak, but drew back half haughtily, and watched her with eagle eyes, as Gerard, hastily sitting down by her, repeated his question. The only answer his cousin was capable of giving at that moment was a burst of tears. Captain Barton's eyes went from her pale face and dishevelled hair, and fell on her dress, where large streaks of blood from Mr.

Lawrence's head presented a truly ghastly and alarming appearance.

"Good heavens ! Nora," exclaimed he, catching her hand, "you are hurt—wounded—bleeding—what is the matter ?"

"No, no—I am not hurt ; it is Mr. Lawrence ; but I am tired, and so thirsty ; could you get me—could I have a little water ?" She was gasping for breath.

Gerard rushed off to obtain what she asked for. Nora looked up timidly at Mr. Mortimer.

"What was the matter with me ? when did cousin Gerard come ? I do not remember."

"Do not perplex yourself, dearest Miss Moore ; you are sick and faint still," replied he, taking Gerard's place beside her as he spoke.

"Indeed, I could not help it," continued Nora, in an exculpatory tone. "I hope Gerard will not think—he is only just come in, I suppose, and does not know what has happened—"

She paused again, with a sort of shudder,

and leaned her head back against the window frame.

"It does not signify what he thinks," replied her companion, somewhat impatiently.

"Oh yes, it does," was her answer more eagerly; "he cannot bear women to faint if they can help it, and I would not—I should not like him to think me affected—oh dear!"

Mr. Mortimer bit his lip with internal vexation at seeing the strong influence which Captain Barton possessed over his cousin's mind, then answered in the softest and most insinuating tones, that no one but a brute, or a selfish, unreasonable man, could blame a young and delicate woman for not possessing the iron nerves, or marble temperament of a stone; for his part he admired self-possession and energy most when united to softness and sensibility, and such a character in his eyes was truly angelic. His flattering speeches were cut short by the return of Gerard, accompanied by Lady Fanny St. Amand, who brought eau de Cologne, and aromatic vinegar, to rein-

force the sal volatile and water with which he was furnished.

Lady Fanny was exceedingly kind and attentive, and as soon as Nora was able to listen to her, she said, that Miss Barton and the Duchess being both entirely engrossed by Mrs. Lawrence, who was in violent hysterics, she had undertaken to come and look after Miss Moore, who, the housekeeper said, had more right to be ill than anybody, except her master.

Nora listened with surprise ; the idea of Mrs. Lawrence in hysterics astonished her ; she had yet to learn that obstinacy is not the result of strength of mind, and that the ungoverned self-will which made her conduct the sport of every passing fancy, arose from a weakness which would also leave her the prey to every ill-regulated emotion.

Whilst Lady Fanny was relating how the news of the accident had been announced to them, and the effect it had produced on Mrs. Lawrence, and whilst Nora herself was sipping the contents

of the glass she held in her hand, her eyes were every moment seeking her cousin's face, anxious to read there whether he was or was not despising her recent weakness. His grave, quiet look gave her no intelligence, but her confusion of thought, anxiety, and fear, added to the natural physical effects of prolonged emotion and exertion were so plainly demonstrated in her own countenance, that Lady Fanny insisted on the propriety of her keeping perfectly quiet, and proposed the simple and rational measure of her retiring to her own room.

Mr. Mortimer objected that solitude would be bad for Miss Moore, whose spirits needed at that moment the support of sympathy; but Lady Fanny told him, laughingly, that he knew nothing about it, and was no judge of what was good for a frightened girl; and taking Nora's hand, she begged her to come with her.

The smallest contradiction brought a shade over Mr. Mortimer's brow; but he only rose, and observed with a slightly satirical inflexion

of voice, that, no doubt, in such a case as she named, her ladyship was a good judge. Nora tried to rise too, but it was with such an unsteady movement, as called for assistance and support, which Gerard's arm was as ready to bestow, as she was to accept: his rival's momentary irritation lost him the opportunity, and Nora clinging to her cousin, moved away; with one glance back at Mr. Mortimer, and a half-uttered expression of thanks for what he had done.

The latter gentleman remained alone to meditate on the state of things. He was surprised, and not very well pleased, to find how much influence this cousin still retained over Miss Moore; he had fancied that his own progress in supplanting him had been more decided; and he felt angry and ill-used, to see that Nora was not perfectly satisfied by his approval alone.

How much of his very vehement desire to win Nora's affection arose from the simple wish to oppose and thwart Captain Barton, it would not be easy to decide, nor could I venture to

say what was the precise origin of the envy and ill-will which Mr. Mortimer entertained towards the young officer. Whether his love for Miss Moore was the cause or the consequence of his feelings for her cousin he did not himself know, and did not attempt to investigate. It was his fixed resolution to follow his present pursuit; and as he often boasted that the Mortimers were not accustomed to encounter repulses or disappointments, we may suppose that he expected to succeed in his endeavours.

CHAPTER VII.

! " But two capricious human hearts
No sage's rod may track their ways ;
No eye pursue their lawless starts,
Along their wild, self-chosen maze."

THE illness of Mr. Lawrence caused a sudden dispersion of the party assembled at Airstone, and brought Nora's visit speedily to a close. Fever of a dangerous nature and degree developed itself in the evening after the accident, and it became abundantly evident the next morning that the greatest kindness his friends could show him, was to quit his house as speedily and quietly as possible.

The ducal party returned home, Nora parting with great regret from Lady Fanny, whose extreme kindness to her during the whole of the preceding evening, when a violent nervous headache from over-excitement had kept Miss Moore helplessly imprisoned in her own room, had completely won the gratitude of the Bartons as well as their ward.

Mr. Mortimer would have given a great deal to know what the two girls said of him during that evening, for that they were talking of him he never entertained a doubt; and there were certain subjects connected with his family history, which he was desirous should not be at that time communicated to Nora. The simple truth that his name was never mentioned between them, would have appeared a monstrous incredibility, but so it was. Not that Lady Fanny was blind, but that she was well-bred and womanly in the best sense of the word. Had she known, indeed, how completely ignorant Miss Moore was of all Mr. Mortimer's

antecedents, she might have put her in possession of facts which it would have been an act of kindness to reveal; but Lady Fanny was as ignorant that there were facts to reveal, as Nora herself; the former supposed everything was already known, the latter knew not that there was aught concealed; whilst the consciousness of one, and the delicacy of the other, induced them both to avoid his name.

Mr. Mortimer, although he removed from Airstone when the rest of the party dispersed, declared himself unable to quit the neighbourhood whilst his friend was so ill, so he accepted the accommodation of lodgings at the steward's house, which being about half-way between Rock Cottage and the Park, was conveniently situated for carrying to the ladies at the former place the daily bulletin of Mr. Lawrence's progress.

Gerard had an immense deal to do during the next fortnight; he was scarcely at home enough to allow of the necessary time for eating and sleeping, and his opportunities of intercourse

with his cousin were brief and hurried. He had no chance of making way in her regard, in opposition to the advances of Mr. Mortimer, who was carrying on his siege operations with a skill, energy, perseverance, and firmness of purpose, probably quite sufficient to obtain possession of the strongest heart-fortress which ever beat in a female breast.

At all events, it was enough for his present purpose. And then there were so many traitors in the camp. The presumption of youthful ignorance assumed the name of gentle confidence ; and flattered vanity usurping the garb of humility or modesty, whispered soft things about the preference of such a man ; gratified admiration and deceitful hope dressed up a showy substitute for love, and did not allow her to discover that esteem founded on an accurate knowledge of character and worth, and affection the result of similarity in tastes and feelings, were altogether wanting.

Is this unnatural or improbable, and is my

heroine the only woman who has committed this heavy, irremediable mistake? If so, then have men had less to answer for, and women less to weep over in this world than I have supposed to be the case.

That fortnight of unavoidable occupation on Gerard's part, and of skilful application on his rival's side, decided Nora's destiny. One day Mr. Mortimer asked her to marry him; and she, blushing and trembling with a strange, uncomfortable feeling about Gerard, and yet a decided degree of happy nervousness for herself, said, "Yes," and fixed, so far as mortals can fix, her fate for life.

Miss Barton was extremely gratified when Mr. Mortimer asked her to ratify the engagement they had just formed; she had the highest opinion of the suitor's character and position in life, and had no suspicion that anything was wanting to make either perfect, or to ensure the happiness of her adopted daughter. So she gave her consent with an alacrity and joy which

completed Nora's delusion that she was the happiest creature in the world. It was an error to paint Fate blind. It is mortals who cover their own eyes, or allow them to be hood-winked by others. A small object held close will suffice to obstruct the view of the whole horizon, and then whose fault is it that we do not see our way ?

Miriam Barton had an idol which she would at times view so very near, that she could see neither to the right nor to the left ; and this was the advantage of aristocratic birth and station, the blessing of fortune and influence. It was not for herself that she bowed to this usurping deity ; she was quite content with her own lot in life ; but for her little cousin, she indulged in a series of wishes and plans, which conscience would have rejected had the object been less unselfish.

Blinded she was, even to the very nearest probabilities, and the most evident certainties beyond. She had no suspicion that this prospect,

so fair and promising, could have its shadows for her ward, its gloom and desolation for her brother. She had no idea that Gerard loved Nora, and, of course, had never thought for one moment whether, but for the interposition of Mr. Mortimer, Nora would not have loved Gerard; whether in her real heart she did not even now prefer him. And as to which of the two was the most likely to secure her happiness, had the question been put before her, she would have unhesitatingly given the preference to that individual who was able to promise so much of wealth and station, to bribe with such visions of worldly ease and prosperity. Nora left her to communicate the event to Gerard; something undefined to herself made her unwilling to speak of it first, so she retired at night to her own room before he came home from a late ride, whilst Miriam pursued her needle-work and meditated in silent content by candle-light.

When her brother had returned, and she had seen him comfortably seated at the supper which

she had herself so carefully supervised, she began her communication in the usual way,—

“Well, Gerard, I have some news to tell you.”

“Indeed, anything about Louis?” asked he, quickly, and with interest.

“No, about Nora.”

Gerard looked up, with an almost imperceptible start; then, by a strong effort, repressing an exclamation of emotion, and resuming his self-possession, he returned his attention to his cold meat, and only said, “Well.”

“I dare say you will be surprised at what I have to tell you; men seldom notice or foresee such things; but I have been expecting it some time;” and Miss Barton deliberately threaded her needle with great apparent satisfaction, and an air which seemed to say that there was some sort of hidden analogy between the operation of inserting the cotton through that minute hole, and the happy result to which the intricacies of Nora’s affairs had been brought.

“Well, Miriam,” was still her brother’s reply ; it was his safest refuge.

“Mr. Mortimer proposed to her this afternoon in the most handsome way,” continued Miriam, emphatically. “Certainly, there is something very captivating about him ; he is a generous, high-minded man.”

“And what answer did he receive ?” enquired Gerard, in a singularly calm tone, whilst he was vainly endeavouring to settle the patent corkscrew in a perpendicular position on the neck of a bottle of ale.

“You are screwing that the wrong way, Gerard,” said she, watching him attentively ; “what *are* you thinking of ? Oh, Nora, of course, accepted him, there could not be two opinions about that ; oh, the carpet—the carpet—Gerard, you have poured out the ale upon the ground.”

“Only a drop or two, Miriam, never mind ; it’s all right now. She accepted him, did she ?”

setting down the untasted beverage on the table.

“Yes, it is a most fortunate event for her, dear girl; such an establishment; and everything that could be desired in the gentleman.—But, Gerard, you take it very calmly; I thought you would have been surprised; had you guessed it?”

“No.”

“Are you astonished?”

“No.”

“Well, but why not?”

“Because I expected it; Mr. Mortimer did not leave me to guess it; he told me his wishes some time ago.”

“Oh, and you never told me—that was not fair; it might have been of great consequence that I should know before-hand.”

“It might, in which case, I dare say, you would have been informed.”

This assurance mollified Miss Barton’s momentary excitement, especially when Gerard

added, after a little thought, "I had no right to tell you, my dear Miriam; Mr. Mortimer asked my consent to his visits with this particular object, but I was not at liberty to repeat the circumstance."

"Well, well, are you not glad, at least, if you are not surprised? is it not a good thing for Nora, dear girl? she will be so happy."

"I hope she will," replied Gerard, in a tone of earnest, deep feeling, almost startling in its gravity.

"And he is so generous," continued Miriam; "he gave her such a lovely watch and chain to-day; I should think it must have cost fifty guineas at least. Such a charming thing for her. Now, Gerard, I shall have only one other wish, to see you comfortably married to some nice young lady, and then I shall be quite happy."

"Are you tired of keeping house for me, my dear sister?" replied he, with a somewhat sad smile, "that you want to turn me over to the

tender mercies of some unknown young lady ; for I have never seen the individual yet whom I should like to transplant into our *ménage*. If we could only go on unchanged.”

He sighed, as he uttered the hopeless wish ; well he knew what would have made him happy ; as little she suspected his feelings.

“ Oh, never despair, brother ; you will think differently when you find how dull we shall be without Nora ; you have not thought of that.”

“ I dare say,” was his very quiet answer ; the exact purport of which, although not quite evident, Miriam did not stop to discover, going on in a cheerful way with her own thoughts instead.

“ There’s Lady Fanny St. Amand, now.”

“ Where ?” enquired Gerard, looking up suddenly.

“ My dear Gerard,” exclaimed his sister, laughing, “ not here ; how you started at her name. Well, now, why should you not think of her ?”

"I have not the smallest wish to do so, in any sense," replied he, gravely; "what have I to do with Lady Fanny anything, that I should waste a thought on her?"

"She is a very charming young lady, Gerard."

"Granted, Miriam, and I have no doubt will, in due time, find some very charming young lord to match."

"Provoking fellow!"

"I shall not think him so; whenever I hear her ladyship is suitably married, I shall have great pleasure in wishing for her happiness and health."

"I meant you were provoking, Gerard; it would be such a good match for you."

"My dear Miriam, it will never be a match at all in any sense of the word. Do not be foolish; because your ward is going to marry a rich man, do not fancy your brother must be elevated above his station. My plebeian name, or poetically speaking, my cloth of frieze, will

never be joined to her cloth of gold, and Lady Fanny would probably thank you less even than I do for the idea."

"Well, but—I wish you would marry."

He shook his head.

"Do think about it, Gerard."

"I have, Miriam."

"Well, and what then?"

"I shall stay as I am. Now, drop this subject; tell me all—everything Mr. Mortimer said."

Miss Barton was very complying in this matter, and went off at once into a detailed description of Mr. Mortimer's words, tones, and looks such as only women dwell on or attach importance to. Her brother listened quietly, and finished his supper; but when Miriam drew breath after a particularly enthusiastic description of the suitor's charms, he put in a question regarding money and settlements. But even on this point there was a great deal to be said. The proposals had been most liberal;

nothing could be more satisfactory, and Miriam was overjoyed at this charming termination to her guardianship. So happy did she seem at the prospect of resigning her, that had not Gerard known how thoroughly unselfish and affectionate his sister was, he could almost have imagined that she was really anxious to be relieved from the charge, and that her only object had been to get rid of Miss Moore entirely.

At length, however, everything was said which Miss Barton had to say, and she went off to her own room to dream over the subject, both waking and sleeping, and cogitate on the easiest way of settling about Nora's wedding-clothes. Gerard was left to his own reflections and the comfort of a cigar, to which he resorted, as he walked up and down in the bright moonlight in front of the cottage.

Well, it could not be helped, and it must be borne; he had lost her! no, that was not it either; one does not lose what one has never had; he had not won her, that was the right

expression ; and another had succeeded where he had failed. Yes, it must be borne, but *how* was the question ! not by dwelling on his own disappointment, not by lingering regrets for what he could not have ; not by brooding over unkind, or, at least, cold thoughts about his rival : that would do no good to any human being, and would materially affect his own temper and character.

To have secured her happiness, he would gladly, he thought, have laid down his life ; but since he was not called on to do more than sacrifice his hopes, he might do that fully, entirely, and with a good grace. If she might only be happy !

He thought of Mr. Mortimer, and owned that he did not like him ; but this was possibly the effect of jealousy, producing injustice and prejudice. If he really loved Nora, as he professed to do, no doubt the faults which had offended Gerard, would not appear to her ; and if Nora loved him, she would learn, as women

do, to forget those faults entirely, or perhaps to love him all the better for them.

Gerard knew that he himself was not perfect, and yet *he* had hoped to make his cousin happy ; what right had he, therefore, he argued, to imagine that Mr. Mortimer would not be equally capable of doing so ; why should his faults be more inimical to her future peace and comfort ? He saw that it would be unjust to raise objections or imagine obstacles. Nora had been free to choose for herself ; she had chosen, and cost what it might, he determined that neither word nor look should betray his regret, should occasion a shadow on her path, or raise a sigh in her breast.

So spoke his conscience, whilst in the calm solitude of midnight he listened to its dictates ; whether he would be able to follow the path which he felt to be the right one, remained yet to be proved.

In the nursery, the child who cries when a rainy day spoils his projected pleasure, or sulks

because his companion receives the toy he wished for, is very properly reasoned with, or chidden, by careful and judicious teachers. But in after-life, how often and how entirely the lesson of cheerful submission appears to be forgotten or neglected.

What matters it, whether the coveted idol be a rocking-horse or a seat in the Cabinet, a doll or a lover, a penny trumpet or the voice of fame? in proportion as any earthly object is the prize we struggle for, or, as self-gratification and not self-conquest is our motive, so will disappointment cloud our days, dull our spirits, and embitter our tempers.

But could Gerard really resign his cherished hopes with a true heart, he might look to be the stronger and happier for the sacrifice he made.

Nora knew that cousin Gerard was to be told all about it that evening; she therefore met him next morning with a shrinking consciousness, which materially helped to conceal his secret, by

preventing her raising her eyes to his. And this first meeting over, all congratulations and good wishes being conveyed by the silent pressure of his hand, there was no occasion to revert to the subject in such a way as to call up any emotion.

The conversation at breakfast took a different turn ; the last account from Airstone, brought back by Captain Barton himself, was discussed. Mr. Lawrence was still in a most precarious state. The injuries to the head had proved much more severe in their consequences than had been during the first week supposed. Fever had been followed by erysipelas, and more than once his life had been despaired of. Mrs. Lawrence had not been seen since ; it was understood that she was devoting all the natural energy of her character and spirits to her husband's sick-bed, and on the several occasions when Miss Barton and Nora had driven over there to make personal enquiries, they had spoken to no one save the housekeeper and the French

bonne. Nora thought of him with an intense anxiety, which even her own concerns could not supersede. It always seemed to her, that he was in some way bearing all the pain which she ought to have shared, as if her escape had been at his expense. She knew this was nonsense ; but the idea haunted her. Besides, this suffering had been incurred only for her pleasure, and that of Louis ; if she had but declined the proposal, it would not have happened.

This feeling of hers had been met in different ways by her friends to whom she had expressed it. Cousin Miriam said—"We don't know that : he would have, as likely as not, gone without you, and worse might have come !"

Mr. Mortimer, on the contrary, had whispered—"Yes, I wished you not to go, and you would not attend. I did not like to trust my precious Nora with him. Another time you will perhaps pay more regard to my desires."

But Gerard had calmly reasoned with her, that, as there was nothing wrong in what she

had done, she must not blame herself for the consequences. Repentance and self-reproach belong to faults committed, not to accidents over which we have no control ; and that so far from regretting her conduct, he thought she might remember with satisfaction that her presence of mind and self-command had perhaps saved Mr. Lawrence's life, and certainly averted much additional suffering. Gerard's opinion had always been a great comfort to her ; and now, on this morning, they again talked over the whole affair together, finding it a safe refuge from other more agitating topics.

The next few weeks passed on, much as might be expected. Mr. Mortimer was constantly at Rock Cottage, spending hours of courtship by Nora's side ; bringing her most magnificent presents ; and, in short, going through all the usual routine of flattery, worship, and deception, by which man blinds woman's eyes, and misleads her imagination as to what she may expect in married life.

Miss Barton used to be the channel through whom reports of his sayings and doings were conveyed to Gerard, and certainly they lost nothing either in colouring or volume by the transmission. The brother and sister did not agree in their estimate of his proceedings. What she called generosity, he would not always dignify by that name. To make presents to his future wife was simply giving what would come back to him again ; was, in fact, providing things for his own satisfaction. Gerard could see it in no other light. As soon as he was privileged to use the plural pronoun, as regarded the future, there was no more generosity in providing her with a splendid dressing-case, or any other such luxurious superfluity, than there was in purchasing for himself a carriage and pair of horses. And when Miriam urged that they were so much handsomer than Nora could have expected, her provoking brother coolly replied, that if they were handsomer than her future station and fortune justified, they were acts of

unprincipled extravagance or ostentation ; if not, he saw nothing remarkable in them.

Miriam was obliged to drop the subject of presents, and ceased to enumerate the gowns, shawls, brooches, and bracelets, which Mr. Mortimer laid at the feet of his idol.' His impatience for the termination of his suspense ; his vehement hurry to complete all necessary arrangements, and the persevering energy with which he urged the fixing of an early day for the marriage, was next dwelt on. Gerard listened with a frown. He declared, that Nora should not be hurried, that she should have her own way, and take her own time. He was indignant at the self-will and want of regard for her wishes, which he considered this very ardent lover to be showing. But it was much easier for him to say that Nora should have her own way, than to ensure her having it. She was so yielding, so submissive, so happy to oblige Mr. Mortimer ; she was in such a state of ecstatic enthusiasm about his supposed good qualities, such a vertigo of brain

through the intoxicating effects of his flattery and adoration, that she never discovered that her own wishes were set aside; never dreamt, indeed, that she had any different from his, and still less suspected that she gave up her own will, because she had an unconscious, latent conviction that it was not safe to contradict her lover.

Consequently, all Gerard's watchful care could not prevent the marriage being fixed for a much earlier day than she had wished; nor could it secure her the least free-will as to their subsequent movements. She did not know she was thwarted, any more than she admitted that she was afraid. If when Mr. Mortimer left her side, she drew a long breath, and turned away with an unconscious sense of relief, she supposed it was only the natural result of reaction after excitement. If she felt, as she quitted his society for that of her cousins, a sensible pleasure; if she was aware that she could exchange sentiments with them which she dared not utter to her lover; and that she enjoyed an evening

spent with Gerard, grave and quiet as he now was, more than the many hours engrossed by his rival, she explained it to herself by remembering the strength of childish associations and early habits, and doubted not but that time would produce in her mind the same feelings toward her future husband.

The secret sensation of dread with which she looked forward to the hour when she should be all his own, when there would be no one else to turn to for love and sympathy—when he would be her daily companion for life—was what she supposed all young women must feel on entering on a new and untried existence. It was like looking from a sunny landscape into some dark, cavernous abyss, through which she hoped to arrive at fairy realms beyond, but into which she now shuddered even to plunge her eyes.

Yet she positively dared not contradict him, and dared not either suffer him to see the pain with which she looked forward to parting from her relatives. Once she had asked, that Louis

might follow her to her new home: but the frown which crossed his brow, she never forgot; even though it was succeeded by his most winning smile, and the answer was returned in his blindest voice. It was not a refusal either; it was an indefinite vague reply, which might have been almost construed into acquiescence, if she had only dared to allude again to the subject.

Consequently, when Gerard one day asked her what Mr. Mortimer intended to do about Louis, Nora coloured till the tears stood in her eyes, and then replied—

“I do not think he would like to have him at Brierly Park just now: he says perhaps——indeed, don’t you think he had better not?”

“Yes,” replied her cousin, pitying her conscious confusion, without quite understanding her feelings. He thought her, perhaps, a little tired of her charge, and unwilling to continue it in the newer, gayer, more exciting scenes before her. “Yes, Mr. Mortimer is right; he would be in your way, at least at first. Your time and

attention will naturally be otherwise engrossed, and ought to be so. Leave him with us, Nora, we will take care of him."

"Oh, thank you—thank you so much for understanding," exclaimed Nora, relieved that he did not blame Mr. Mortimer for selfish indifference towards the orphan. "I shall be so glad to leave him with you,—that is, I shall be so sorry to part with him,—so very sorry that—that—oh, cousin—you do not know—"

And Nora's head went down upon the sofa-cushion in a violent passion of tears.

Poor Gerard Barton was a good deal embarrassed. He dared not utter the expressions of tenderness and endearment which his heart dictated; his conscience made every word of kindness seem like betraying his secret; and he really did not know what to do. First he got up, and went to the window, a strong propensity of human nature under any mental perplexity, perhaps resulting from the influence which physical causes possess over intellectual phenomena,

which makes the dark and puzzled mind seek the light of day when it cannot obtain the light of reason. Then he came back to his young cousin's side, and said, in a cheerful voice, which it may be supposed he had derived from external sunshine—

“Come, come, Nora, don't be silly ; *you* have no reason to cry, I am sure. We will take care of Louis for you, and you will have plenty besides to make you happy.—Don't cry.”

“I did not mean to,” replied she, raising her head and wiping her eyes ; “I dare say it does seem silly to care so much ; but I *have* been so happy ; and though my going away will make so little difference to you, yet—” and here her fortitude quite broke down again, her utmost efforts only enabling her to cry quietly, and not sob aloud.

“Make no difference to him,” was that what she thought ? the sun of his life ; the charm of his home ; the hope treasured for the last twelve-months ; the object, for which he had secretly

longed and prayed, to be snatched from him, and he to be supposed not to care?—told it would make no difference? He drew a long breath, and his feelings rushed to his lips—but they did not pass them. He turned away again, and stood fighting with his passionate emotion at the window, for he knew not how long. He was roused by her gentle voice, saying, “I have done crying now, cousin, quite. I will not tease you any more ; so please come and tell me what you will do for Louis.”

Captain Barton obeyed almost mechanically. He dared not contradict her admission that she teased him, false as he felt it to be. It was safer, although not so pleasant, to allow her to misunderstand him. He sat down near her, and said, in a calm voice—

“I always told you that I was ready to take the entire charge of Louis, and so I will. We shall, I suppose, never know more of his parentage or early history, but I can afford the expense very well, and will undertake to provide for him.

When he is old enough, perhaps he may choose my profession, and I might succeed in procuring him a cadetship."

Nora had started, and flushed up as her cousin spoke; and, hardly listening to his last words, she exclaimed, "Ah, I never told you—I forgot—please wait one moment." She then darted out of the room, leaving Gerard a little astonished at her sudden flight. He had not long to wait; she came back, breathless and excited, and laid before him the letter which she had received from the mother of Louis, and the packet so carefully sealed up.

Gerard contemplated them with surprise; and whilst turning over the little parcel, inquired whence she had obtained them.

Nora had to relate the whole story; the interview with the mysterious beggar, the strange words she had made use of; and then she had to explain how subsequent events had interfered to prevent her having an opportunity of showing this note to her cousin. He had been so much

away, and, when at home, so busy, and seemingly so worried about something else, that she had never mentioned it till now. To her cousin Miriam she had not shown it either, from a reluctance to speak about the interview, for which she could not exactly account.

Gerard read the letter carefully, and then, after some meditation, he promised Nora to act upon the mother's wishes. Louis should be treated as a son of his own, and so far as was in his power, should never know the want of that paternal care of which he had so early been deprived.

The letter and the packet were enclosed in one envelope, sealed, and carefully docketed, and then placed in a safe depository amidst Gerard's papers of importance.

Nora tried to express her thanks and gratitude for his taking charge of the child when she could no longer fulfil her self-imposed engagements ; but he cut her short with an abruptness which prevented her renewing the subject then,

and which, although only intended to serve as a screen to his own too strong emotions, had the unintentional effect of strengthening Nora's idea that he was perfectly indifferent about her. As is very common in cases where there is concealment and disguise, he wished only to seem calm and self-possessed, and succeeded in appearing cold, if not unkind.

CHAPTER VIII.

—— “The self-reproaching soul
Flies from the heart and home she dearest loves,
To where lone mountains tower, or billows
Or to your endless depth, ye solemn groves.”

AIRSTONE HALL had, for the last six weeks, worn a very different aspect from what it usually assumed when the Master and Mistress were residing there. The window-shutters of the great drawing-rooms were rarely unclosed; the blinds of the upper story seldom drawn up; the voices of the children were hushed about the place; and music and mirth were no longer heard. The dogs, pining for the caresses of their

master's hand, lounged lazily about ; the horses were turned out to grass ; the utmost efforts of the gardener's boys could hardly keep down the weeds which peeped through the gravel in the drive by the porch ; whilst the stable-yard was rapidly assuming an unusually verdant appearance. Now and then, the once careless and light-hearted mistress of the domain would take a hurried walk along the avenue, when her pale cheeks, heavy eyes, and languid air, confirmed in the minds of such of the dependants as she encountered, the stories which had circulated from the servants' hall, of her extraordinary devotion to her husband's sick bed, and the manner in which she took his illness to heart.

Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence, in their different ways, had both been much beloved by their people ; and warm, true-hearted sympathy met her now at every turn. Nobody ever denied that Mrs. Lawrence was proud ; but nobody ever thought her cold-hearted ; and pride in those who have in ordinary language "some-

thing to be proud about," is not always offensive to those beneath them, especially when accompanied by ready condescension to inferiors. It is the little pride of those who have risen to a superior station, something above what they could have expected, which is detested ; that pride which being continually afraid others may forget what is due to it, is, in consequence, constantly asserting its recently acquired rights. The *parvenu* is the individual who lives a life of prickly, irritating self-assertion, who is continually encountering impertinences, suffering neglects, or making enemies.

But this was not the case with Mrs. Lawrence ; her faults were not those which made her unpopular at home at least ; and all her dependants remembered willingly that she had been a beauty, an heiress, a spoilt and prosperous woman, courted by the great and fashionable all her life, used to her own way, and having a perfect right to it.

So now when she came abroad, with saddened

brow and softened tone, and her whole air and appearance changed so strikingly, they said it was what they had expected of her. With all her flightiness and spirits, she was thoroughly good-hearted; and although, when all was fair, she might tease the Squire a little, she now showed that she had not really been spoilt by his indulgence when first they married.

“What was that Redworth was saying to you this morning about Mortimer?” asked Mr. Lawrence, in the languid voice of exhaustion, as he was lying on his bed, with his wife beside him.

“That he and Miss Moore are to be married the day after to-morrow,” replied the wife.

“That poor child, does she know what she is doing?” sighed he, turning uneasily.

“I am very much afraid not,” replied Mrs. Lawrence, in a quiet, grave tone; and then, after musing a moment, she added, “and really, Harold, since I heard of the engagement, I have two or three times been on the point of rushing over to Rock Cottage, and giving her warning.”

“And why did you not?” inquired he, with a half smile.

“Because, on calmer consideration, I did not think it would produce half a fraction of good. Interference, when young people are resolved to marry, never is the slightest use.”

“He is such a temper!—she cannot have an idea of what he is,” said Mr. Lawrence.

“True, or she would as soon put her hand into a furnace as into his: but the greatest drawback, the daughters, of course she has made up her mind to that.”

“My haunting fear is that he has not told her of them, or, at least, not until too late to retract. It was to give her this piece of information relative to Mr. Mortimer’s domestic affairs that I asked her to go out with me the day of my accident; since that they can have seen no one who could tell them.”

“And can you suppose it possible she can be ignorant of that?”

“If she knows of their existence, she must

be quite unaware of their characters ; for what timid girl like poor Nora Moore would readily undertake to be step-mother to three young women, the youngest several years her senior, and such reflections of their father !”

“ Poor thing ! I don’t envy her. Blanche Mortimer and I could not get on very well ; but perhaps she may manage better : those timid, shy, quiet girls, have sometimes an elasticity and power of endurance which enables them to accommodate themselves to circumstances, and in the end do better than more demonstrative people.”

“ If I had to choose between the three,” replied Mr. Lawrence, “ I would rather have Blanche than Bertha to manage ; but this poor child will have to put up with them all ; and how long will her husband care for her, even supposing he starts with a little affection ?”

“ I should really like to know how much she has heard about her future daughters,” exclaimed Mrs. Lawrence. “ If you are pretty well to-

morrow, I might pay a visit there ; I suppose I ought to call before she leaves the country, under any circumstances."

" Yes, we owe her so much, that I should regret if you were wanting in an ordinary civility. I can never forget her uncommon presence of mind and energy at the moment of my accident. Go and see her by all means ; and perhaps you may be able to judge from her looks and manners how far she is satisfied with her present prospects."

It was in consequence of this conversation that Mrs. Lawrence drove over to Rock Cottage the ensuing day.

The surgeon, Mr. Redworth, had been perfectly correct in his information. Nora was to be married the next morning ; everything was to be as quiet and private as possible. Much to Miss Barton's astonishment, Mr. Mortimer was as resolved to avoid pomp or display as he was to cut short preparation and forestall delay.

There were to be no bridesmaids, no break-

fast, no company. This was his first announcement: and when, by dint of some judicious management, Miriam persuaded him to yield the first point, and allow her to ask the clergyman's two daughters to fill that important office, there she was forced to stop.

In favour of wedding breakfasts and wedding guests, no argument had the slightest influence. Of course they might have their ordinary meal; he did not want them to fast; but why should they require anything different? why should they not take their breakfast as they were used to do, at half-past eight, and their luncheon at one.

And as to visitors, he had no idea of being set up as a gazing-stock, or affording food for gossip to all the odious provincials of a country town. No, he was not going to be so absurd. His marriage was no concern of any one except the parties themselves; and he saw no earthly reason for supposing that it was. And so it was finally settled.

They were to go quietly to church, to come home as quietly, and as soon as the change of dress and final arrangements on their return were effected, the married couple were to start on the foreign tour, on which Mr. Mortimer had decided.

I suppose there never was a more submissive and obliging bride-elect than Nora; and she not only gave the gentleman his own way in all these matters, but she really and heartily seemed to think that that way was the best.

Miss Barton would have rebelled a little had she dared, for she would have dearly liked a little pomp, a little bustle, a little display on such an occasion.

I am afraid this is an admission which will sadly compromise her philosophy of character, for it is a weakness in which so few of her sex will sympathise.

On the contrary, it is a well-established fact, of which no doubt every one of my readers has met with examples, that whenever vanity has

been gratified by ostentatious display, whenever a marriage has been attended by peculiarly pompous accessories, it has always been the result of some fatal concatenation of circumstances quite beyond the control, and entirely against the will, of those who seem to be the moving and managing parties concerned.

We have all, no doubt, been assured by these unhappy but patient victims, that they would gladly have had it otherwise, but that they had no resource.

Custom requires, society exacts, friends expect, propriety enforces, or fate demands that the sacrifice of private feeling to public duty should be made by the mammas, aunts, or elder sisters who rule on the occasion. And it is made accordingly; and the unwilling sufferers, dressed in their sweetest smiles and richest brocades, go through their penance with a grace and air of satisfaction which leaves us in doubt which most to admire, their self-control or their taste in dress and *déjeunés*.

But Miss Barton, to whom all this would have been a treat, was not destined to enjoy any such exciting variety ; and to say the truth, she did sometimes feel inclined to murmur at the strong will which so effectually crossed her own.

Nora and Mr. Mortimer were sitting together in the drawing-room, when Mrs. Lawrence was announced. The brother and sister were not at home ; and Nora had a decided look of being “ caught ” on being thus interrupted.

Inquiries for Mr. Lawrence, and particulars relative to his progress, occupied the first five minutes ; then came the kindest messages of thanks to Miss Moore from the invalid himself, with the deepest, most heartfelt wishes for her happiness.


Mrs. Lawrence could not speak without emotion, and even tears, of what they owed her ; and her softened manner, with just enough of her former energy left to be striking, touched

her companions, who were astonished at the unexpected change.

Before, however, she had found time or opportunity to make any allusion to the subject on which she and her husband had been conversing, or even to ask Mr. Mortimer a single question about his daughters, which might have put Nora's knowledge to the proof, some other visitors entered.

Some ladies from the town, seeing the Air-stone carriage at the door, probably thought it a good opportunity to call on Miss Moore, and now came to pay an unexpected visit. All chance of making discoveries was lost to Mrs. Lawrence.

The new comers entirely engrossed Nora, and as there were four of them, she had no power of listening to any one else. Mrs. Lawrence, overpowered by the noise, was fairly driven from the room; and the last speech she made, although said with some design, was entirely thrown away.



As she shook hands most cordially, she said, in an under tone—"The best wish I can form for you, my dear, is that you and your future daughters may get on well together;" a sentiment which made Nora, who had no idea that these daughters existed, blush very much, and think what an odd woman Mrs. Lawrence was after all.

The results of Mrs. Lawrence's expedition were not entirely satisfactory to herself or her husband, for she had ascertained nothing from Nora; and the coldly polished smile with which alone Mr. Mortimer answered some observations she made, as he conducted her to the carriage, gave her no other information than that he thought her troublesome, and perhaps impertinent.

When he returned to the drawing-room, he ensconced himself behind a newspaper in one of the windows, and assumed so haughty an air, and one which so well conveyed the idea that he was bored by the other visitors, that it be-

came sufficiently obvious to make Nora exceedingly abstracted and uncomfortable, and shortly afterwards to drive the others from his presence ; which being the object he intended to effect, we may conclude that his manners were judiciously chosen, and exactly fitted for the end in view.

That the young ladies subsequently spread reports in the town of his extreme haughtiness and disagreeableness, was not wonderful ; and had he known it, would not have been at all distressing to him.

The next day they were married.

Nora had spent half the preceding night in tears at the idea of leaving her cousins and her old home. She felt very miserable, and had she dared at that moment, she would gladly have broken off her engagement, and remained where she was. She would have been delighted had any one told her she should never see Mr. Mortimer again. How had it happened that she had been so deluded as to promise to leave

these dear, dear friends for him? What was there to compensate for the indulgent kindness of cousin Miriam, who had been like a second mother to her, or for the friendship and fraternal affection of Gerard? It was strange, she thought, that she should ever have resolved to quit them, and for one, too, of whom she yet knew so little.

Then, again, the image of Mr. Mortimer occurred to her. Brave, noble, high-minded, as she fancied him to be; so passionately devoted to herself, could she be otherwise than happy with such a companion, or could she refuse to grant him the life-long felicity which he had so eloquently assured her depended on her accepting his suit. What foolish, childish tremors these were, what idle and unworthy mistrust of him it was to doubt his perfect worthiness, of her regard, or the unchanging nature of his affection!

Oh, no, she did not doubt him, it was only natural regret for by-gone pleasures which gave

rise to these bitter feelings ; when once the change was made, and she had become accustomed to her new position, no doubt she would find a happiness far more complete than what she had hitherto enjoyed. Her misgivings, she supposed, were only those, which in such a situation any woman must experience.

She was very pale, and cold, and quiet as Miss Barton dressed her, and few words passed between them, for a very little would have upset her equanimity. Gerard came in very late to breakfast, ate and drank in a state of entire abstraction, hardly looked at Nora or his sister, and scarcely uttered a syllable from the time when he met them in the drawing-room, till he handed them out of the carriage which conveyed them to the church. Nora went through the ceremony in a dream, hardly realising any part of it ; but she was at that time quite calm, and no one could have guessed that she felt anything beyond a quiet happiness. Happily the service is not necessarily a long one, for

there are few minds possessed of sensibility and feeling who could bear the extension of such a strain.

It was over, and they were man and wife.

They returned to Rock Cottage in order to effect the final arrangements necessary for the commencement of a wedding tour. There was Nora's new maid waiting to disrobe the bride, and dress her in her elegant travelling costume.

Mr. Mortimer asked how long these feminine preparations would take, and then requesting permission to write a letter, he sat down in the dining-room to occupy the interval, until his young bride was prepared for their journey.

He wrote as follows :—

“MY DEAR BLANCHE,

“As you must be aware that ever since the unfortunate death of your brother, it has been a matter of regret to me that there was no longer an heir to my name and property, you will not, I am sure, be surprised, when I

inform you, that I have resolved to marry again. I am just returned from the ceremony, and send you the earliest information, that you may not read it first in the 'Morning Post.' We are going abroad at present, for a month or six weeks, and before I return I will let you know what arrangements I wish to have made relative to apartments for Mrs. Mortimer. You may communicate this information to Bertha and Margherite ; if they are not returned home, tell them that I should wish them to be at Brierly when I arrive there, to receive the Mistress of the Hall with the respect which is now her due.

" I remain,

" Your affectionate father,

" OWEN MORTIMER."

And this letter was the first information which reached Blanche Mortimer that the government of Brierly Hall had passed from her, that her father was about to bring one

there whose first step would be into the place she had so long occupied !

Whilst Mr. Mortimer was deliberately penning these lines to his eldest daughter, his young wife was hastily bidding a long farewell to the scenes of her childhood. She embraced Louis with tears again and again ; she clung round her cousin Miriam's neck, and sobbed in silent grief ; she went from one dear room to another, to take a last gaze at each well-known object, a parting look from every window at the landscape, which her tears would hardly permit her to see.

Time passed so quickly ; the hour which her husband had allotted was three parts gone before she was aware that a quarter had slipped away ; cousin Miriam became anxious that she should recover her composure, and not present red eye brows or pale cheeks on her re-appearance.

“ Come, come, Nora,” said she, with affected lightness ; “ you must not be foolish ; do not

look back and think of what is gone, for you cannot bring it back by all the fretting in the world. Look on to the bright prospect before you ; you are sure to be happy ; much happier than you have been ; think of that, and you will not cry."

"Oh, cousin, you have been always so kind," sobbed Nora.

"You are a good girl, dear Nora ! there, go and say good bye to Gerard ; Mr. Mortimer will be calling you in a minute."

"Where is cousin Gerard ?" said Nora, with a sinking heart.

"In his book-room," said Miriam, "he seemed to be busy ; go to him."

Nora went. Her trembling tap at the door was unanswered, so she softly opened it, and looked in, expecting to find the room unoccupied. There sat Gerard, however, before his desk, with various papers scattered about, to which he was paying no attention, whilst his

face was buried in his hands, as he leant over the table before him.

Nora went up and laid a very quivering hand upon his shoulder.

“Dear cousin Gerard, I am come to say—”

His sudden start, and the strange expression of his eyes as he abruptly raised his head, stopped her. She had never seen him look so before ; what was the source of that despairing, painful, almost terrible emotion which his features expressed ?

She held out her hands towards him, and with a choking spasm in her throat, and tears which her utmost heroism could not keep down, she said, “Good bye.”

He tossed back the thick hair from his forehead ; and a paler shadow flitted across his face. She was frightened.

“Dear Gerard, are you ill?” said she, in a tone of the sweetest affection.

“No, no, it is nothing, Nora,” said he, hastily recovering himself ; “I have been a little

over-worked and am tired ; that is all. So you are going !”

“ Going—oh, cousin, before I go, let me thank you for all your kindness to a poor orphan girl ; you have been very, very good to me. I wish I could tell you how grateful I am.”

“ Don’t, Nora, don’t talk of it—do not thank me—you owe me nothing—if I had but done as I ought—but I am sure I have often been cross and careless, tell me that I have, Nora,” said he, not taking her out-stretched hands, and almost seeming to shrink from her.

“ No, no, never ; you have been the kindest and best of brothers ; you will always think of me as a sister, will you not, dear Gerard ?” and again she affectionately laid her hands on his.

“ I will never forget you, Nora,” said he, in a voice of the deepest feeling.

“ Ah, thank you. You will come and see me in my new home, when you can ?”

“ Yes, when I *can*—when duty will allow me,” was his earnest reply.

“ How I shall long for the time ; oh, how happy I have been here, Gerard, writing papers for you at this very table, in this dear old dark room. If I could but throw off this bonnet and gown, and sit down Nora Moore again.”

“ Nora, don’t talk so !” he exclaimed, with something like a shudder.

“ Is it wrong ? I did not really mean it. Don’t look so displeased, now when I am just going. Will you not wish me happy ? will you not give your best wishes to your little sister, as you used to call me ?”

“ Wish you happy, Nora ! If I could secure your happiness by the sacrifice of life, oh how gladly I would lay it down. Heaven bless you, Nora, dear, *dear* Nora ; best, dearest—if Mr. Mortimer makes *you* happy, I will bless him too ; and if you are in any trouble, any need of a friend, remember there is one whose services you may command at any risk, any cost—under

any circumstances. Promise me, promise me, dear Nora, that if you need my services you will not hesitate to apply to me."

And his black eyes were fixed on her with a look which went straight down into her girlish heart, and revealed more to her than she had known or dreamt of before.

"Thank you," she answered gently ; "I will not forget that I have a relative, a friend, a brother in you ; and now, once more, good bye."

He held her hands in both of his, pressing them with an intenseness, a warmth which spoke what words might not express ; but he simply said—

"Good bye, God bless you."

She ran out of the room ; stopping outside the door to press her hands hard upon her eyes, to breathe one or two deep sighs, and then with external calmness to meet and give her hand to her husband, as he led her to the carriage.

What a dismal, melancholy thing a marriage

is to those who are left behind. Gerard and Miriam looked at each other in blank desolation, when that carriage drove away with Mr. and Mrs. Mortimer. Then Captain Barton threw himself into the saddle, and his good horse felt spurs that day as he had seldom felt them before.

Miriam went to finish the day at the Parsonage, and so supply to the clergyman's daughters, so far as she could, all that gossip and information of which they had been so unfairly and unjustly deprived by Mr. Mortimer's infatuated resolution to have his wedding private.

She was at Rock Cottage, however, in time to meet her brother on his return, for Gerard, from some unavowed motive, had resolutely refused to celebrate the day by dining at the Parsonage, so the brother and sister sat down together to a late dinner, for the first time for a long while, without Nora.

Gerard glanced at the vacant place, and said nothing. Miriam observed aloud—

“ Ah well, poor dear, she will be happy, so it’s all right she should leave us.”

After this, dinner proceeded in silence, until the cloth being removed, and the maid withdrawn, the couple sat together in the cool summer twilight, and watched a rising moon.

“ Where’s Louis ?” suddenly asked Gerard.

“ The girls kept him at the Parsonage, and promised to send him home in the evening,” was Miriam’s explanation.

“ Suppose we walk down and fetch him ; it is time he was in bed,” suggested Captain Barton. “ She always liked him to be punctual.”

Miriam made no objection, and they were soon on their way. They met Louis returning, tired and sleepy from excitement, and just feebly becoming conscious that no dear Miss Moore would be there to attend to and comfort him. Gerard caught him up in his arms, and kissed him when they met, with a fondness he had never shown before.

“ I will carry you home,” said he ; “ shall I Louis ?”

“ Is Miss Moore really not coming home ?” asked he, in broken accents.

“ No, never.”

“ *Jamais—jamais ! hélas, que deviendrai-je.*” He burst into tears, and hid his face on Captain Barton’s shoulder, trying to smother the sobs which seemed as if they would choke him. He was only pressed the more closely for this testimony of regret ; but not a word was spoken by his bearer until they reached the house. Then Miriam offered to take him to his bed, but Gerard did not seem willing to resign him. He carried the sleepy child up to his room, and said he would be nurse himself for that night at least. So, much to Louis’s amusement, he proceeded to undress him, heard him repeat the prayer which Miss Moore had taught, and then, when the sobbing child had laid his head on the pillow, to recover from the agony of grief into which this last act had thrown him,

by recalling thoughts of his protectress, he sat by the bed-side and held the poor boy's hand, until sleep swept the remembrance of his young sorrow from his mind.

When Gerard descended to rejoin his sister, he threw himself into an easy-chair with a groan rather than a sigh of exhaustion.

"How dismal it is without Nora," said Miriam placidly. "Do you know I have been thinking, Gerard, what a pity it was you never liked her."

"Never liked her!" exclaimed Gerard, starting up with a suddenness that astonished his sister.

"Yes! well, I don't mean to say you did not like, but *love* her—if you had married her instead of Mr. Mortimer she need not have gone away."

Miriam, busy with her needlework, did not look up at her brother, and was quite content to pursue the subject though he was silent.

"It never struck me before; to be sure one is so foolish sometimes; but if you had only

thought of it, it would have been so nice. Here have I been hunting about for a wife for you, and there was one just under our hands, quite ready, and in every way suitable. Her fortune and yours would have kept you comfortably : and we all agreed so well together ! How came you never to think of it ?”

“ For mercy’s sake, Miriam,” said Gerard, in a low, husky voice of the deepest agitation ; “ for the love of Heaven, do not talk so. You do not know what you are doing.”

“ My dear brother,” exclaimed Miss Barton with the most unaffected surprise ; then looking at him as she spoke, she started up, “ you are ill !”

His face was ghastly.

He could not speak, and seemed to be vainly struggling to subdue some overpowering feeling ; Miriam took his hand and stood looking at him with a face of perplexed surprise. She had not an idea of the cause of his emotion.

“ I am better now,” said he presently, and

then pouring out a glass of water, he swallowed the contents hastily, Miriam vainly begging him to try some sal-volatile or æther mixed in it.

“Now tell me what was the matter,” said she.

“Nothing new, Miriam ; don’t look so scared,” was his answer, trying to smile.

“Well, but what was it ?”

“Never mind.”

“Was it what I said ?”

“Yes !”

“But how, what, about your marrying ?”

“Yes.”

“But why, you never minded it before !”

He was silent now.

Miriam reflected, and a light suddenly broke over her bewildered faculties.

“Gerard, did you love Nora ?”

“With my whole heart and soul, Miriam,” burst from him in the unmistakable accent of truth. “I have loved her long, long, I do not know how long !”

“Then, my dearest brother, why did you not say so sooner?” was his sister’s natural exclamation.

“What use would it have been? she loves another!”

“Yes, now; but before he came, if you really loved her why did you not show it, and win her heart? You were always like a brother to her.”

“If I had shown it, and *not* won her heart!” said he with emphasis.

“Well!” was Miriam’s ejaculation.

“Don’t you see, that in that case I should have deprived her of her only home. She was living in my house; she had no other protector but you; had I shown my feelings she might have felt obliged to accept me, she might not have known her own mind, she might have mistaken gratitude for love; or I might have driven her entirely from the only friend she had left in the world.”

“That sounds very grand,” said Miriam; “but I am not sure that it is very sensible.

What were you waiting for? Did you think she would make love to you, or love you without your taking any pains to show you cared for her?"

"I was waiting till she was older; old enough to know her own mind, Miriam."

"Well you kept your secret, I must say; I never suspected you cared for her at all."

"I did not intend that you should. When I would not tell her, it was not likely that I should tell any one else." Then seeing she looked vexed at his reply, he added kindly, "You see, Miriam, I *have* told you now. I do trust you with what I would not trust any other human being."

"And do you really love her so very much? Have you been in love with her so long?"

Miriam's whole womanly heart was touched by the idea of this secret attachment and the severe disappointment in which it had ended.

He passed his hand across his forehead, and then answered more firmly—

"Miriam, she is the wife of another now;

do not talk any more about this subject. I must not let my mind rest on it ; she would be the first to tell me I was wrong. But now you see why I say I can never love another woman, and, therefore, why marriage is out of my power altogether."

Miss Barton agreed with him, that it was neither wise, right, nor useful to think of Mrs. Mortimer any more. As to never loving, or never marrying another woman, she had her own ideas about that, but did not think it advisable to mention them just then.

One question, however, she could not forbear asking—

"Did you tell Nora of your feelings at any time, Gerard?"

"No, Miriam, never!"

"Nor even let her know, inadvertently or incidentally, what you thought or wished?"

"I believe not. I am thankful to think that I saved her from such unnecessary pain. It could have done no good, and it might have

prevented her applying to me in trouble, or trusting to me if she wanted advice. Should such a contingency occur, I hope that I shall be able to put away all personal feelings, and act as if I were really her brother: but under any other circumstances I will not willingly—purposely meet her. I could not answer for myself, and I will keep out of temptation.”

From that day no further conversation passed on this matter between the brother and sister, nor did Gerard make the smallest allusion to his disappointment. But Miriam could trace the effects of his private feelings in his conduct in several respects, and, most of all, in his attachment to little Louis.

The child seemed to engross every spare thought, and certainly occupied every leisure hour; first, in quieting and amusing away his sorrow at the loss of Nora, and then, in teaching or taking care of him.

At home Gerard was his constant companion and most patient friend; and he took him out

with him on his excursions, at first only short distances and to the nearest stations. But Louis was bold and hardy for his age, delighting in nothing so much as in being placed before Gerard on the back of his most active horse, or in sitting on the deck of the Allumette, when dancing over the waves before a brisk breeze ; so that soon the excursions were extended in length, and, excepting in the night visits, the two were inseparable.

Louis transferred to Captain Barton the enthusiasm of affection which he had before entertained for Nora ; and if he had been really the child of a deceased wife, and the pledge of conjugal affection, he could hardly have been more cared for or doted on than he was by his self-elected guardian.

Scandal and ill-nature, of course, took the opportunity of insinuating malicious tales as to the cause and propriety of the devoted affection which Captain Barton displayed towards his little charge ; but most of these did not reach

the ears of the parties concerned, and those that did were treated by him with supreme disdain or total disregard.

It was about a fortnight after Nora's marriage that Gerard received a note from Mr. Lawrence requesting him to take the earliest opportunity of calling at the Park. So on his first leisure afternoon, he rode over there, with Louis, as usual, on the saddle before him.

The child spent the interval of the visit in the garden with the little Lawrences; but when his friend returned, as Louis told Miriam afterwards, Captain Barton rode so fast,—so fast, it was going like the wind, and if he had not held him very tight, he would have gone away from him.

Miss Barton herself could easily see that her brother was in a state of extraordinary and unpleasant excitement; but as he said nothing about it, she concluded it was something connected with official business, in which she had

no concern, so she asked no questions. But in the evening it all came out.

"Miriam," said he, stopping suddenly from a patrol of the drawing-room floor, in which he never indulged except when much vexed, "did you know that that man, Mr. Mortimer, had been married before?"

"No. Has he?" was her answer.

"And has three daughters?" pursued Gerard, with a sort of concentrated wrath.

"Daughters, no! how should I? He never told me," exclaimed she, more eagerly. "How very odd, never to say anything about them."

"Did Nora know it?" added Gerard, in the same suppressed tone.

"Well, now really I cannot exactly say, but I do not think she did either, or she would have mentioned them. Who told you?"

"Mr. Lawrence; he would have told Nora, he said, but for his accident. That drive was arranged in order to let her know."

"Well!" said Miriam, and then paused. She

really did not know exactly what to say, or in what light to view this very unexpected announcement.

“Miriam, if Mr. Mortimer did not tell her, he is a villain!” said Gerard, vehemently.

“That is rather a hard word to use, Gerard,” replied his sister. “Perhaps these little girls may not be an evil or a trouble to dear Nora.”

“Little girls! the youngest of them is twenty-one, Miriam. Think of that.”

“Well—” another pause. “They will be companions to her at least.”

“I tell you, if that man (as I believe he did) married Nora without telling her he was married before, he was a deceiver and a villain.”

“My dear Gerard, you talk as if the first wife was still living; in that case I would subscribe to the villainy, but I suppose this Mrs. Mortimer has been some time dead?”

“I believe about twelve years; but does that alter the fact of the injustice and cruelty of

making Nora step-mother to three women older than herself, and such women, too ?”

“ Why she is rather young, certainly ! but how do you know what sort of women they are ! they may be very nice pleasant companions for her.”

“ Mr. Lawrence says that the two eldest are as proud as Lucifer, and the youngest is rather more disagreeable than her sisters.”

“ Poor Nora !” ejaculated Miriam ; “ well, that is rather hard ; but you see, with her husband to take her part, and support her, she will be mistress at Brierly, and proud as these young ladies may be, they must give way to her.”

Gerard resumed his walk, and Miriam her needle ; then he stopped again and said,—

“ When you write, say nothing about this discovery, it might make mischief to meddle and tell that we know it.”

“ Of course she knows it now,” observed Miriam, “ and she will probably allude to it in her letters, then we shall be able to discuss it,

but I will say nothing till she does, if you think it best."

It was not that Miriam when she came to reflect upon it spoke calmly, because she did not see the trouble and discomfort which this unexpected family might occasion Nora, or that she was really insensible to the want of openness and confidence of which Mr. Mortimer had been guilty : when privately considering the facts, she was forced to admit that he had behaved unfairly, and with a painful appearance of duplicity. It was very distressing to think so, but either he was an entirely careless and neglectful father, who almost forgot his daughters' existence, or he had been afraid lest the knowledge of it should interfere with Nora's willingness to become his wife ; and although strata-gem is sometimes said to be fair either in love or in war, Miriam herself could not think so ; nor could she reasonably anticipate much security of happiness from one who could be guilty of what was really a sort of fraud. But

what would be the good of saying this to Gerard, it would only aggravate his feelings and make him more unhappy, and she could see that in spite of his best efforts, he was already suffering enough.

As to Gerard himself, it was perhaps natural for him to see the affair in the worst possible light.

He attributed to Mr. Mortimer a deliberate design to conceal so serious an incumbrance as his three daughters from Nora's knowledge, from judging, and probably with truth, that had she been aware of their existence, she would at least have hesitated before she ventured into circumstances which might prove so inimical to happiness. He did not think she would willingly have undertaken the situation of step-mother even to children; and to three young women, all her seniors, he was sure she would have objected.

But his indignation against Mr. Mortimer was considerably increased by an internal con-

viction that he was himself to blame. He ought to have been more careful; he ought to have made inquiries; he ought to have exerted himself, and not allowed her thus, in her youthful inexperience, to throw herself into a most perplexing and hazardous situation. Why had he never asked Mr. Lawrence more about this man? Why had he been imprudent, blind, negligent? It was a sad mistake, and one the full development of whose bad effects time only could show.

CHAPTER IX.

“Red o’er the forest peers the setting sun,
The line of yellow light dies fast away
That crown’d the eastern copse.”

OCTOBER was drawing towards a close. The mornings were becoming misty, and the evenings chill and cold, when Mr. and Mrs. Mortimer once more landed on the shores of England, and took the road to their future home. .

Nora was not sorry to return; she began to feel that something was wanting. No doubt it was her own fault; she was childish and stupid, and not enough of a companion to occupy the

mind of such a man as her husband. It must be dull for him, to be shut up day after day with no other society, and away from his accustomed occupations, his home duties.

Day after day she saw the shadow of what she supposed to be weariness deepen on his brow; she watched with a beating heart the restless feelings which betokened to her mind *ennui* or disgust. And she was such a child compared to him; she had not felt it so at first, but now every day convinced her more and more of the disparity between them. At home it would not be so; he would have other pursuits and other companions, and he would, perhaps, gladly return from the fatigue and worry of parish business, or farming concerns, or magisterial duties, from steward's accounts, and political discussions, to the wife who could sympathise, if she could not understand.

But she *would* understand. She would spare no pains to educate her mind, and make herself worthy to be his companion; she would throw

herself into his pursuits; she would interest herself in all his wishes; she would be his friend, and not his plaything only. These were the resolutions which occupied her mind, and the sentiments which were animating her dreams, as they drew near her husband's domains.

From the summit of a rising ground, just as they entered the Park, they caught a view of the handsome house which was to be her future home. Her husband pointed it out with complacency, and Nora looked with an admiration she could hardly express. It was very striking in position, and the beams of the setting sun falling on the west end, lighted up the windows and the glazed roofs of the conservatories, as if it were a grand illumination in their honour. They fell too, in long streams of gold between the forest trees, and touched with a crimson and orange glory the beautiful chesnuts and oaks which stood out alone, and whose long, blue shadows contrasted in their quiet coolness with the amber and emerald turf where the bright beams fell.

“Oh, how beautiful!” said Nora, gazing with her whole heart in her eyes. Then, as she turned to look upon the spreading mansion, whose wings stretched out to such a breadth, and whose windows seemed innumerable eyes staring at their new mistress, she said, “What an immense house! Shall we live there alone? It looks too large.”

“I daresay it does to you, Nora; but it is simply a gentleman’s residence, such as men of my station and wealth ought to inhabit. You must give up and get over the narrow and contracted views you have imbibed by your early education, and accommodate yourself to the sphere to which I have raised you. Forget Rock Cottage, and behave as if it did not exist.”

“Forget Rock Cottage!” thought Nora, with a sharp pain in her heart at the idea. Never! but she only said, with a smile which remembrances of other times made somewhat shadowy—

“It may be very suitable for you, but still it is large for two people only.”

“You forget that my daughters reside there also,” said her husband.

“Your daughters !” exclaimed Nora, looking with a wondering incredulity at him, and with some reason too ; it was the first time that she had heard of their existence.

“Yes,” replied he, quite calmly, “where else should they live ? they are neither of them married.”

“But, Mr. Mortimer, you never told me—you never talked about them at all. I really did not know—” she stopped ; for it seemed too much like a reproach to tell him she had never even heard of their existence. The pause and the deepened crimson of her cheeks, together with the pained expression which such a concealment occasioned her, gave additional but unintentional emphasis to the implied reproach.

He drew himself up haughtily, for having been consciously wrong, he was, of course, angry.

“If you felt so little interest in me, or my

concerns, as to ask nothing about them, you can hardly wonder that I did not feel inclined to make them a subject of conversation. But I did not expect my delicacy of feeling would be made a matter of reproach."

Poor Nora was bewildered. It was her fault then, that she had not known more about these daughters; she ought to have asked about them! How could she, when she did not know of their existence! and he had been thinking her, perhaps, a jealous and unkind step-mother, and had been hurt at her silence. Tears rushed to her eyes, and anxious to atone for her fault, she laid her hand in his, and said—

"I am sorry, love, to have seemed cold or negligent; I did not mean it, indeed. But now, please let me make amends. Tell me about *our* daughters, whom I am quite ready to love for your sake."

"Really it is rather too late, and quite unnecessary now, as you will see them in five minutes. I do not value a regard for my feel-

ings, which is not the spontaneous result of yours."

Nora was silenced again ; to conceal her agitation she had recourse to arranging her bonnet and veil, and not another word passed between them till they stopped under the entrance porch. She had not courage to look about her, and could scarcely glance at the spacious vestibule and ante-rooms, through which Mr. Mortimer led her. Her prevailing idea was, that her husband was displeased ; she could hardly even give a thought to what was before her.

The sun had set shortly after they entered the Park, and twilight had darkened over the lofty rooms through which they passed ; but in the apartment into which the attendant finally ushered them, there was light enough. For the curtains were drawn, and a glowing fire and a brilliant lamp made an illumination painfully vivid to eyes which had just quitted the external dusk. Nora could hardly look up.

There rose from a sofa on one side of the

fire a very tall and elegant woman, whose elaborate toilette and self-possessed air struck the new-comer more even than her handsome face. On the hearth-rug there was another lady, standing as if in anxious expectation of their arrival, and who, immediately on Mr. Mortimer's entrance, stepped forward and embraced him with an air of affection.

"My dear Blanche!" said her father as he kissed her fair forehead, "I am glad to see you." And then turning from her to her sister, he saluted Margherite with a much cooler tone.

Nora stood gazing at her step-daughters in amazement, and when Mr. Mortimer turned to present them to her, she was so perfectly overpowered she did not know what to do. Her natural impulse would have been to have kissed both these new acquaintance, and at once claimed a share in their good will and affection. But there was something in the stately manners of the two tall and elegant young women, who stood looking down upon her with their large

black eyes, which repelled her. She blushed deeply, painfully, and her hand trembled as she extended it towards them : she stammered out a syllable or two, met her husband's eyes fixed on her, not with an encouraging expression, but rather with a look of stern consideration ; felt herself awkward and out of place, and would have given worlds at that moment to have rushed from the room.

With the most happy self-possession, with the most scrutinising attention, Blanche and Margherite Mortimer received this new and most unwelcome connection ; there was nothing externally visible of want of respectful deference in Margherite's deportment ; her sarcastic sense of the ludicrousness of a position which called her, to receive as mother, a girl whose age was less than her own, was only shown in the slightly overdrawn humility of her curtsy. There was something of caricature in that. Nor was the bitter heartache with which Blanche contemplated her own changed situation visible in aught, except,

perhaps, the cold smoothness of her greeting. To a keen eye, the very absence of demonstration at such a time, would have told the depth of feeling concealed beneath.

“Where is Bertha?” asked the father, looking round.

“She was here just now,” replied Blanche
“I dare say she will return directly.”

“She has her exits and her entrances,” said Margherite, *sotto-voce*, but with a meaning look.

“Then you had better come, and get ready for dinner,” observed Mr. Mortimer to his wife, who was standing there with the look of a frightened child, and the feeling of a culprit who has suddenly intruded where she has not the smallest right to be.

Any one ignorant of the relative position of the parties would certainly have gathered from the deprecating, appealing look which Nora cast at her companions, that she was introduced into the inferior situation, and was standing before

those over whom she had no claim to authority, and from whom she had no right to ask for any thing but forbearance.

Her husband led her off unresistingly to her dressing-room : but as they ascended together the broad staircase, he turned, and said in an under-tone, but with a sharp inflexion which was fearful to her ears—

“ For pity’s sake, Nora, do try and behave like a woman, and not like a foolish girl just out of the nursery. Really you must remember you are my wife now, Mrs. Mortimer, of Brierly Hall, and have to assume something like manner and air. I am ashamed of you.”

“ I beg your pardon,” replied she sweetly, “ I am so sorry to displease you. Indeed, I will try ; but I was so dazzled and taken by surprise, I hardly knew what I did. I *am* very young, you know, my dear husband, but it is a fault which I can confidently promise every day shall help to mend.”

He did not answer, either by word or look.

“ If you had only told me what very beautiful young women I was going to see,” continued Nora, pleadingly, “ I should have behaved better ; but my breath was quite taken away.”

He did soften at this speech a little.

“ They are handsome—yes ; my daughters are remarkable for their beauty and elegance. But then, so much the more necessary is it, that my wife should not be timid and *gauche*.” As if such words would help to make her less embarrassed, or take off the overpowering anxiety her new situation caused her.

Nora, when left alone in her dressing-room, felt almost an overwhelming inclination to sit down and cry. How little had she known what was before her!—how little had she expected once to hear such words from the lips which used to whisper praises of her grace and beauty. Could he make no allowance for surprise, for emotion, for anxiety,—was an introduction to step-daughters, and such step-daughters, a thing of so little consequence, that it could be gone

through as easily as a meeting with a new neighbour? She knew she had been embarrassed, perhaps she had looked as awkward as she felt but if he did not take her part, who would or could?—if he did not support her in her strange situation, on what arm could she lean?—if he felt no sympathy, where should she look for comfort? Would Gerard have spoken so? The thought flashed through her mind only to be chased away as quickly; for something told her that to think of Gerard was to wrong her husband, and she never encouraged the memory of him apart from his sister. She wished to recollect him only as the Gerard of her earliest acquaintance, not as the sorrowful, tender friend, whom she had parted with so sadly on her wedding day.

But to give way to such emotions, such rebellious thoughts as these, could do no good. She was well aware of that; she struggled bravely for self-command; scolded herself for being over-anxious and morbidly sensitive about

trifles; she resolved to look cheerfully on her situation; to avoid dwelling on what might seem evils, or to learn to overcome them; and, just as she had made these vigorous resolutions, the entrance of her maid, hurrying to arrange her toilette, gave some change to her thoughts and helped her to conquer.

“Madame may please herself,” said the waiting woman, who Mr. Mortimer had chosen should be French. “It is at her taste to dress to-night. Mademoiselle Mortimer is in demie toilette, her sisters have put themselves en grande-toilette.”

“Which do you think right, then, Juliette?” replied the mistress; “but, perhaps, as Miss Mortimer is eldest, I had better follow her way;” with a lively recollection of the sort of shock with which she had seen the beautiful white arms of Margherite uncovered to the shoulder, except for some costly bracelets which encircled her wrists. It was a style she had never seen, except at the full-dressed party at Airstone Park,

and which she had not learned to associate with home life.

Whilst the labours of the toilette were being borne by the young wife, with a philosophy which she had acquired from finding Mr. Mortimer laid great stress on personal appearance, the two sisters were sitting together over the fire, and exchanging sentiments regarding their recent introduction.

“Blanche,” exclaimed Margherite, with energy, “do you not see that I was right? She has captivated our father by her wiles. Could he have been in possession of his sober senses when he gave us as step-mother a girl of eighteen? Impossible! Preposterous!”

“She is too much of a baby to have done anything of the sort,” rejoined Blanche. “I hardly think she is to blame; perhaps she has had a designing mother, or aunt, or sister, who has drawn him in. She would not have looked as she did, were she artful at least.”

“Well, it matters little who has done the

deed. I am convinced that fair means alone were not employed to place her in her present situation. She to stand over us, indeed—to take the first place—be mistress here! She shall rue the day that she ever dreamt of it, or my name is not Margherite Mortimer, and I am an unworthy daughter of an ancient race!”

Blanche bit her lip, and her slight eyebrows were contracted for a moment, then she said, “I do not fear her. I will keep my place in my father’s heart in spite of her. But never, never, shall it appear in public that I have anything to reproach him with. No, Margherite! for the sake of decency, propriety, respectability, do not make our domestic affairs the talk of the neighbourhood.”

Margherite tossed her head with an air of disdain.

“I believe, Blanche, you only live for appearances,” said she.

“No, you do not understand me yet; you never will, perhaps. I do not care for appear-

ances—I care for right and wrong. Even the most careless and indifferent can see that family dissensions are unpardonable if they are made public. All quarrels are odious and vulgar, derogatory to those concerned. I never could comprehend how sensible people could let themselves down to the meanness of quarrelling with their neighbours. It is only fit for little, narrow minds, who can see no farther than the length of their arm. But family quarrels are the most odious of all to make public: The world shall have no share in mine.”

“The world?” repeated Margherite.

“The world!—our world!—ours is as large as other people’s, I suppose. Do you imagine the Mordaunts, the St. Maurs, the Langdales, are not looking, with anxious and malevolent interest to see how the Mortimers take the misfortune which has befallen them? and shall they know from myself I am vexed—will Blanche Mortimer, from an object of envy, become one of contemptuous pity? Never!”

“Very heroic,” observed her sister; “you may learn ‘to bleed in silence, and conceal the smart;’ it’s not my way. It is your resolution to sit smiling patiently at grief, or do you mean to take a leaf out of Bertha’s book, and pretend to be pleased? It will be something new for you to practise hypocrisy.”

“I hope I am as much superior to hypocrisy as you are, Margherite,” replied Miss Mortimer, with the cool indifference with which an impossible slander is met. “One is not necessarily a hypocrite because one does not make strangers parties to one’s sentiments in private affairs. I own I do not like my father’s marriage, and shall not pretend happiness at what cannot be supposed to please me. But there is a medium; as I said before, I do not mean my discontent to be a source of amusement to the neighbourhood.”

“Well, it is not in my nature to pretend to be calm when I am not. I detest and despise this mean, intriguing upstart, who has insinuated

herself into a place where she has no right; I hate her, and I do not care who knows it. I shall make no scruple of doing all I can to circumvent her power, and keep my own position."

"I feel no anxiety about keeping my position at home," replied Blanche.

"Why, what do you mean to do?—to marry?" asked Margherite with surprise.

"No, I am not reduced so low as to be forced to look out for another situation," was Blanche's answer in a scornful tone.

"Well, I rather wonder at you. I always have wondered at you. A word of kindness, a look of encouragement, would have brought a certain person to your feet long ago; and I never could understand why you kept him off. Well-born, well mannered, more than well looking, and all sorts of amiable qualities besides that of being decidedly in love with you, why your coldness so resolutely averted the natural catastrophe is a problem beyond Euclid. And

now you would have so much less to give up, it would be but common prudence. Any port in a storm."

"I should hope no one would presume to raise an eye of admiration to Blanche Mortimer, who was not all that you say at least. But for me to return a love which they may be authorised to express, requires something more than all this. It will be for no light price that I will give my hand; no *passion passagère*, all flame and crackle at first, and ending in a puff of smoke, which will win my heart. The man who would be my husband must be something more than the good-natured, lounging, moustache-wearing, cigar-smoking herd, who fill the ranks of our aristocracy now."

"I am sure I do not know where you will find your *beau idéal*, Blanche."

"Then I shall live and die Blanche Mortimer, who never met her equal and her match."

"Yes, and put that on your tomb. Very good.—Here comes Bertha."

As she spoke the youngest sister entered the room, and immediately enquired where her father was.

Margherite answered they were gone to dress for dinner, "so you must wait for your presentation a little longer, Bertha!"

The latter seated herself in a picturesque attitude on a low foot-stool near the fire; and after carefully arranging the folds and flounces of her drapery, she said, "You have seen her, what is she like?"

"Like what I expected," replied Margherite.

"Not the least what I did," said Blanche.

"Pretty?"

One sister gave an indistinct ejaculation, the other said an emphatic "very."

"Will it be peace or war?" continued Bertha.

"As you make it," was Miss Mortimer's answer.

"Use your own discretion, and follow your own taste, Bertha," said Margherite, scornfully.

Bertha sat looking at the fire in silence, until

her father's footstep was heard on the stairs, and approaching along the vestibule.

As the door opened, she rose and stepped hastily forward; her sisters only pushed back their chairs slightly as the others entered, and then with a half smile of contempt watched Bertha's reception of her young step-mother. It was very different from their own. Smiles decked her face as she stooped forward to kiss the timid stranger; she embraced her with a warmth which seemed to speak a most cordial welcome. Nora hardly knew how she received this unexpected demonstration. She was afraid it was rather stiffly; but the consciousness that her husband's attention was fixed on her, and the recollection of his reproofs, made her feel doubly shy and uncomfortable. Before sympathising eyes it would have been different; but the three pair now bent on her, expressed far more of cold scrutiny than any other sentiment.

She made a desperate effort, however, to rally her self-possession, and take the position pro-

perly her own, although the hand which ought to have supported her in assuming it was coldly drawn back. She had resolved to allow no evil or unkind thought to enter her mind, or, at least, to lodge there; she was determined to see nothing, understand nothing, imagine nothing inimical or ungracious in those about her. She had banished the remembrance of what had at first so deeply wounded her, the deception which her husband had practised; what she could not excuse, she would not think of; so returning Bertha's caress with all the warmth she could summon, she advanced to the fire, and took a seat with a tolerably easy air. It was an effort to summon a steady voice for even the slightest conversation; but the effort was made, and she addressed some trifling remarks on the ordinary topics of weather and season to Miss Mortimer.

The reply was civil, but brief; however, Bertha eagerly took up the conversation, and asked questions about their journey. The elder sisters sat by in profound silence, when not obliged to

speaking ; Mr. Mortimer was looking over the newspaper. Presently he looked up and made a remark on an important question just then before the Tribunal of Public Opinion.

Nora knew nothing whatever about politics, party-questions, or public matters in general. The observation was to her unintelligible ; but Blanche answered it immediately, entered fully into the subject, spoke with energy and good sense, and continued the conversation until dinner was announced. Nora, aware of her own ignorance, would gladly have listened ; but Bertha had begun questioning her about dress and fashions at Paris, and she could not avoid answering, or give her attention as she wished to the other conversation, although she felt that Margherite, who was sitting between the two parties, was despising and condemning her for her frivolous choice of topics.

She hoped for some relief in going to dinner ; but Blanche took a seat at her father's right hand, and devoted her attention to him so

pointedly that Mrs. Mortimer had no alternative but to converse with Bertha, or be perfectly silent, for it seemed impossible to draw Margherite into giving an opinion. The topics which Miss Mortimer was discussing were of a nature to preclude a stranger's joining; they were domestic matters, such as the parish schools, the game-keeper's reports, the harvest, the farmer's prospects, the steward's plans: in all these she evinced a deep interest and a thorough acquaintance which surprised Nora, but which served as a lesson to her. These were the matters of which she must make herself mistress, in order to be a companion and friend to her husband.

She said something of the sort to Blanche when they returned to the drawing-room; Miss Mortimer listened with an air of cold civility, and then replied only by a slightly assenting bend of her head. Margherite observed, looking at a vase of flowers on the table, that "Such things came from early cultivation of natural

roots, and were not to be attained otherwise. Any one might stick artificial flowers in a garden, but it was quite another thing to produce real blossoms and fruits."

It might have been a question whether this speech referred to the floral productions just then close to her, or was metaphorical, and applicable to the wishes Mrs. Mortimer had been expressing ; but Bertha made the application pointed, by putting a patronising arm round her step-mother's shoulders, and saying, " Oh, Margherite, I daresay we shall find that dear Mrs. Mortimer is very capable of learning anything which her situation requires or makes advisable."

" No doubt of it," replied Margherite, with a sarcastic accent, which, however, was less disagreeable to Nora than the insinuating look and tone of Bertha. There was something so irresistibly repulsive in her soft voice, so insincere in her manner, that it required great self-command not positively to shrink from her with evident disgust.

Nora thought more, and to more purpose, after this evening than she had perhaps ever done before in her life. To say that she would have placed herself in her present situation had she known what she was doing, would be useless self-deception. Never voluntarily would she have chosen to be step-mother to three such women. To deny that her husband had practised a cruel deception, in not warning her, was impossible; but she need not think about it. She need not dwell on what had been, or what might have been—it was enough to contemplate what was. She felt mentally, much as she might have done had she actually stepped into a little boat, and floated away from the shore amidst reefs and breakers, and hungry sharks. The means of escape might be there, the rudder, the oar, and the sail, but she knew not how to use them aright, and was most certainly as deficient in strength as in knowledge. Still she had a firm will, a good hope, a most earnest desire to do right, and these she

trusted would guide her in her present difficult situation.

If she could help it, no one should know how completely she had been misled by her husband; whatever it might cost her, she would conceal a fact which she felt could not be looked on with a favourable eye. She would rather be disliked by his daughters, as having presumptuously thrust herself on them, than cause them to think a hard thought of their father. No wonder they looked so coldly on her. She did pity them most sincerely; especially Blanche, who had evidently lost so much in position by this introduction of herself. She could not be angry at feelings so perfectly natural, and for which there were so many excuses. Blanche was undisguised in her cold and lofty politeness, speaking so strongly of disapprobation; Margherite, too, was candid in her sarcastic contempt. It was Bertha, whose expressions might well be mistrusted, whose manners were too flattering to

be a safe index to her mind. Nora thought she could rather have encountered two Blanches than one Bertha.

Still it was of no use to murmur. She must take things as they were, and hope by patient endurance, consideration, and attention, to win the regard of those with whom she must live. "Poor Blanche!" thought she, "I will try not to make it bitterer for you. I will come as little in your way as possible;" and then she resolved to avoid as much as she could every assumption of authority, every attempt to take the lead, and especially, every interference with Miss Mortimer's habits or tastes.

A little experience of life would have shown Nora that her best course was at once to take her proper place, and keep it. Every one has his own position and appropriate work, and if from ignorance, timidity, or idleness, or even from romantic generosity to another, we endeavour ourselves to slip out of ours, and insinuate another in our room, we derange the order of

that part of the social building of which we form a portion, and run a risk of introducing confusion and discord amongst all around us. The wife had certainly a right to be first in her husband's affection, as well as his house; and Nora had the additional right over his daughters, because none knew better than himself how innocently she had stepped into the place.

A day or two passed in her new home, however, showed her, that whatever she might resolve, it was not always in her own power to execute her resolutions. No people living in the same house could move in more distinct spheres and systems than Mrs. Mortimer and her two eldest step-daughters. They had their own apartments, their own servants, their own horses, their own pursuits; and these were so completely independent of hers, that except in one particular, they would never have clashed—but this one was most important, for it was the society of Mr. Mortimer himself. Blanche

gradually drew him more and more away into her own orbit, and Nora, who had at first considered it as natural, and made no opposition, found all too soon that it was become a confirmed habit, of which she felt the evils every day.

Surely, and by no means slowly, coldness, even harshness, took the place of the passionate love which he had once professed for her. In vain Nora strove by every effort to make herself his companion, to enter into his pursuits, to participate in his plans and wishes. She was constantly put back, was told she did not understand, was incapable of judging, knew nothing of such matters: there was no one to support her claims, no one to speak a kind word either for her sense or education. She was treated as a child; with calm civility by Blanche and Margherite; with neglect, if not unkindness, by her husband; and a remonstrance or a struggle only made matters worse. Bertha was often the only companion she had; but Bertha as frequently neglected her, for

Nora would make no confidence of her feelings, and was little disposed to gratify her curiosity, by relating to the idle girl anything connected with her early history.

There was a good deal of stately visiting ; formal and ceremonious in the highest degree. Mr. Mortimer was not liked, but he was feared in the neighbourhood, and nobody wished to offend him, although few had hitherto cared to be intimate with the family. As a friend, or an enemy, he was almost equally dreaded, and Nora was not long in discovering how little real cordiality there was between the families round and her husband.

The first dinner-parties were fearful to her ; she dreaded her husband's censure, and was afraid of calling it forth, but she had tact and quickness of perfection quite equal to her natural beauty and grace. She soon found that she individually was well received ; those who had met her once, seemed glad to meet her again ; more cordial smiles were extended to

her, by far, than to her stately step-daughters ; and as her first shyness soon wore off, she was so universally well received, and so evidently popular, that even Mr. Mortimer occasionally expressed his satisfaction that she had acquired so much manner and *à plomb* in society, since she had associated with his daughters. Praise such as this gave her confidence ; and nothing appeared in external society, in young Mrs. Mortimer's countenance or words, to indicate that she was otherwise than perfectly happy in her domestic life.

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