













# HAWKSVIEW:

A FAMILY HISTORY OF OUR OWN TIMES.

BY

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*"There's always sunshine somewhere in the world."*

LONDON:

JAMES BLACKWOOD, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1859.

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# HAWKSVIEW.

## Part the First.

### I.

THE Honourable Roger Bohun was, according to the world, one of the most imprudent of men. He married, before he took his degree, an extremely beautiful and good girl without sixpence, and almost all his great connections quarrelled with him in consequence. He was the seventh and youngest son of the noble family of Bohun of Castle-Bohun, in the county of Kent, a family of immense antiquity and the bluest blood. By virtue of his birth, his fine talents and his handsome person, he might have aspired to any alliance below royalty; and instead, to the confusion of his aristocratic relatives, and the utter destruction of his own prospects in life, he chose to unite himself with a person who, beyond her bright eyes, pure heart and loving temper, had no single merit to speak of. Before the sacrifice was accomplished, the vials of paternal wrath

and the arrows of everybody's sarcasm were showered upon him without stint—probably with preventive views—but afterwards he was treated with silent contempt. Only his mother, who fancied that Roger loved her the best of all her children, and his eldest sister, Lady Harriet Lennox, who had made an imprudent marriage herself, and said it was delightful to see anybody do a foolish thing in these wise days, ventured to take his part; but they were individuals of so little account in the family that they might as well never have spoken at all—better, perhaps; for interference, advice, or contradiction, only acted as rivets to Lord de Bohun's purposes. His youngest son was excommunicated henceforth from paternal favour; his name was erased from the will that gave him Benjamin's portion in the unentailed property, and forbidden to be uttered aloud in the family fireside gatherings; and having thus executed righteous judgment and vindicated his outraged authority, Lord de Bohun was at peace with himself, and slept like the most forgiving and tender-hearted Christian of his generation.

Roger was very properly grieved at the effects of his disobedience, but he was not repentant; mortal man could not be repentant for the sin of marrying, ever so rashly, such a beautiful, affec-

tionate, winning ~~young~~ creature as his darling Agnes. She was scarcely sixteen, lance-straight, but graceful and pliant as a reed, with a countenance all radiant with health, happiness, and spring. The bloom of innocence was on her cheek, its lustre in her eyes, and its purity in her heart—a nobler dower, Roger thought, than if she had brought him her weight in gold or a genealogy unimpeachable and direct from the ark. It was a marriage of first love on both sides, and promised, spite of the clouds on the family horizon, a full harvest of contentment. Agnes had few friends to be either proud or grieved for her. Her father and mother had both died in her babyhood, leaving her to the guardianship of a bachelor great-uncle, who was only too glad to dispose of her respectably and go back to the monastic seclusion of his college, from which, for her sake, he had endured a fourteen years' exile; and of other relatives she had none. When Roger took his degree, and the university lists were published, Lord de Bohun read his offending son's name fourth amongst the wranglers: he would much rather he had been wooden spoon. He was a very vindictive old man, and every congratulation that people ventured to insinuate only added a bitterer flavour to the gall of his ~~unappeased~~ wrath.

Roger wrote to his mother to tell her of his success, and the poor lady, unwilling to answer, or in any way to acknowledge her son's letter, cried over it for half a day, while Lady Harriet Lennox sent him a pretty epistle of felicitation and encouragement, and a bracelet of her own for his wife.

Roger made no application, either direct or indirect to his father for assistance; he took and, by an advertisement, obtained the rectory of Boscombe-Magna in Yorkshire, with a salary of one hundred and fifty pounds a-year, the rectory house, partly furnished, to live in. Besides his wife he had one fine little baby to begin his establishment with; and they were, with nurse Beste for major-domo, and a stout dale's girl for general attendant, went into housekeeping on the very day that Roger was twenty-three and Agnes eighteen.

Agnes said the rectory was surely the sweetest spot out of Eden, and the day was a day of good omen too—Midsummer day.

There was not a cloud in the sky; hill and dale were flooded with an intense yellow sunshine, and all the shadows seemed to have hidden themselves away amongst the cool dense green foliage of the trees. The air was warm, soft, luxurious, perfumed with the breath

of new mown hay, and vocal with the lowing of kine in rich pastures, the lazy chirp of bird or insect, and the whistle of the peasant at his toil in distant fields. The garden was one profuse tangle of roses, jasmin, sweetbrier, and all hardy blooming scented plants, and the sight of the new home was as of some bee-hive or bird's nest, that the flowering creepers had almost overgrown. Scarcely a stone's throw away was the church—a picturesque old church, such as Agnes had loved to prefigure to herself, a church with a low belfry, and shrouded with ivy, even to the concealment of its quaint and homely outline. A double row of patriarchal elms divided "God's acre" from the rectory garden, and a colony of rooks amongst their interlaced branches promised music more than enough in windy March weather; but Agnes vowed she liked a rookery near the house, and that she would not for worlds have it away! Then when they came into the small old-fashioned rooms, which had been made as fresh and gay to view as the flower-beds outside the lattice-paned bay-windows, she said that they were delicious, and that the rectory was the very picture of the place she had always dreamt of in her day-dreams and called Home!



Looking abroad from those queer sunny windows stretched a grand expanse of rich, fertile country, bounded by a line of heath-clad hills; and in the hollow ran a river so clear, sparkling and translucent in the sunshine, that they could see from afar off that it flowed with a swift current and over a pebbly bed. Nature here was in no penurious mood; she had sown her riches broad-cast, and dealt out her best and fairest gifts with a lavishly bountiful hand.

Agnes said in her pleasant voice, which it was sweetest music to hear, "Roger, we may be luxuriously poor in this beautiful country, may we not?" and Roger answered that he should be luxuriously *rich* with her anywhere; that he was determined to make the best of both worlds, and to enjoy, as far as he might, the life that had been given them to spend together, with much more epicurean philosophy to the same effect; and Agnes listened as if he were a god speaking and his lips dropped oracles. These two had accepted life's mightiest responsibilities and touched its climax early; but they had brought to its after-battle romance enough to bear the brunt of its rudest disenchantments, and love to lift them triumphantly above its trivial cares. The new existence showed like the begin-

ning of a pleasant pastoral, through which they were to go hand in hand, without shock of grievous experience or any let or hindrance whatever; all life-long one glowing, glorious midsummer day.

## II.

THE working hours of this white day drew towards a close. The tired hay-makers were wending their way homewards from the fragrant fields; and with the evening purple came a heather-scented breeze that made a plaintive sighing music amongst the elms. Against the nursery window the ruddy-leaved American creeper struck with a faintly sharp monotone, as if keeping time to the mother's love-ditty that Agnes was crooning over her baby, as she lay upon her lap. Little Mona ought to have been asleep in her cot an hour ago, but there she was, her blue eyes wide open, and mischievously watchful, breaking out, now and again, into a vivacious crow that Agnes was fain to smother with a shower of kisses on her pouting rebel lips. She received all her caresses with the superb air of a baby princess accustomed to loving homage from the maternal subject; and treated nurse Beste's expostulatory hushes with truly regal indifference, as if she and her mother were in a league against that judicious woman, and determined to have their pretty play out. Her rosy

fingers made snatches at Agnes's clustering curls as they swept over her face, at the blue ribbon round her neck, and the shining gold chain that held her watch; and every successful clutch was triumphantly announced by a little shrill cry and laugh, than which, I suppose, sweeter melody was never heard by mothers' ears. Agnes thought it the perfection of music, and could have listened to it for ever.

Presently the door opened with an obtrusively cautious creak, and Roger peered in, "What! is the wee rogue still awake?" cried he, when he saw how matters stood, and then advancing boldly, he took his little daughter from Agnes's lap, and proceeded to toss her high in air, to her own intense delight, and nurse Beste's patient aggravation. Agnes sang, clapped her hands, held out her arms in mock terror as she went up, and shook her bright curls over her as she came down, in almost as great an ecstasy as baby herself; and when her last shadow of sleepiness was dissipated she got her back into her bosom for another ten minutes of petting and cooing, after which the bonnie, wistful eyes closed, and with a dimpled smile on her face, and a final but abortive dash at her mother's tangled hair, Mona fell asleep, and was laid down tenderly on her pretty white cot. Agnes was half disposed

to linger by it, but Roger bade her come away into the garden before it was too dark to see the view; and not even for her helpless darling would she forego the quiet twilight saunter that had been amongst their pleasantest of pleasant times ever since they were married.

They walked silently for some minutes up and down the lawn in front of the house, feeling the balmy hush of the hour as a soother of active thought. Roger was the first to speak, and then it was only to remark on the delicious stillness and beauty of the hour. "If we go to the end of the planted walk that runs along the top of the paddock, we shall have even a finer and more expansive prospect than we have here," he added; and happy, satisfied, easily pleased as children, they loitered hand in hand under the trees, while the night dropped softly through the thick boughs, and the breeze sobbed and soughed distantly upon the hills. It was too dusk to see far away; but the slopes of Boscombe Park, and the white chimneys of the great house overtopping the surrounding plantations, were visible; also the scattered cottages, standing each in its enclosure of garden or orchard, and some of the nearer farmsteads were to be seen in a dim seclusion. At the extremity of the walk there was a noble horse-chestnut,

round the bole of which a rustic seat of unbarked fir branches had been constructed; and here they sat down, Agnes wrapped in Roger's plaid and encircled by his arm. These two were lovers to their lives' end, it was said by one who knew them well; the secure and tranquil use of wedded love never wore off the tender romance of their youth.

"Listen, Roger, that twittering of the birds is delicious," said Agnes, in a whisper; "and is that a running water we hear through the trees?"

"Yes, it is Boscombe beck. Look over westward. Do you see a black clump of Scotch firs cutting obliquely against the sky?" and Roger pointed to a distinct ridge of hills beyond which the clouds were still suffused with the roseate glow of sunset.

"Just on the brow? Yes, I see it. What an eerie look it has, standing alone like a clump of spectral trees in a German ballad!"

"That is Hawksview, the outmost bound of our parish. Between it and us the land dips down, and in the hollow lie the village of Moat, and the Old Moat House: melancholy places both."

"Is there any house on Hawksview? I

saw a light glancing, as it from one room to another, a moment since, Roger."

"Yes, there is a picturesque little cottage, sheltered by some fine elms; but, so far as I know, it is uninhabited. If you are credulous of such fables, the country gossips will try to persuade you before long that it is haunted."

"Haunted!" repeated Agnes, shivering closer to her husband's side, and then laughing at her own involuntary fear. "Haunted! Uncle Christopher said we were coming to live a century out of the world; that will be something to tell him when we write. But look, Roger, there is the light again! Don't you see it?"

"That flashing is nothing more than the glitter of sunset on the upper windows of the cottage. If you watch for a few minutes, you will find it disappear altogether. It is gone now."

Agnes was perhaps a little disappointed at this very natural and prosaic interpretation of the mysterious light, for she loved a tale of wonder as dearly as if she had been bred up amongst country superstitions and legends all her life. During some time longer she kept her gaze fixed on the point where it had vanished, in the hope that it would gleam out again; but

the warm flush faded gradually from the hills, and the sentinel firs grew indistinct against the billows of dark purple clouds beyond.

"There must be a story belonging to the place, do you know what it is, Roger?" she asked.

"A story there is, of course; but neither a very old nor a very remarkable one to raise a ghost from," replied Roger, much amused at her credulous interest; "I am not sure that I can tell it correctly either; but such as it is, if you like to hear it—"

"O, yes! I should like to hear it above all things;" and with her face turned towards her husband's shoulder, and her eyes watching the furtive smile on his lips, she prepared herself to listen. He glanced aside and laughed—not a very appropriate prelude to a ghost story, and she bade him begin, with a pretty tremulous earnestness, which testified that some faith mingled with her curiosity.

"I must tell you first that Hawksview is not the property of any of the great landowners of Astondale, and never has been;" he began:—"The Broughs have been lords of the manors of Boscombe and Moat ever since this district was wild, unenclosed forest; and Hawksview, which lies on the western outskirts of their pos-



sessions, has been for generations a coveted but unattainable jewel. It was held in the old troublous times by a branch of the great Vescey family, who built a tower for defence upon it, which gave place long since to the quaint little dwelling-house, the flashing of whose windows in the sunset you took for a moving light just now. Some superstitious bond keeps it still in the same race, who have ever resisted the most tempting bribes to let it pass into other hands. The present story dates scarcely twelve years back—

“Scarcely twelve years back!” interrupted Agnes, raising her head impatiently; “then I am sure it is not a *real* ghost story; but go on.”

“A ghost story, like wine, to be good must be old, must it? Well, mine has an air of antiquity about it too, if you will listen.”

Agnes laid her cheek softly on his shoulder, and promised not to speak again until the tale was done, and Roger continued:—“The house had stood empty longer than any body could remember, when, one late autumn day, smoke was seen to issue from the chimneys; and a casual passer-by on the road that crosses in front of the house, reported that he had seen a beautiful young girl and a dark-looking gentleman sitting together upon the terrace that overlooks the valley, much as we are doing now,

Agnes. Who they were, or whence they came, was a mystery. They received no letters, never appeared at church, or, indeed, anywhere beyond the limits of Hawksview, and seemed to live entirely for themselves and each other. They were there all through the winter; but when spring came the lady was observed to take her walks in the garden alone, and to be often at the gate looking down the road as if on the watch for somebody. Those who saw her said that her face was become wan and haggard, and that she had the air of a person almost beside herself for sorrow. Then the wail of a little child was heard in the house; and soon after its tenants departed as secretly as they had come, and it was all shut up again. Ever since, the gossips say, the place is haunted."

Agnes drew a long breath. "Ah! Roger, it is just an old love story," said she, pitifully.

"An old love story, and nothing else; it does not even pretend to tell what ghosts or shadows have given Hawksview its ill name."

In her gentle imagination, Agnes thought out the details of the sad, simple history, as she leant on the strong, safe protection of her husband's arm. "I think I can see her watching at the gate, Roger—and she may be living now. I wish it had happened a hundred years ago, and

then we should be sure she had done grieving," was the issue of her reflections.

"What a tender little heart it is! Come, the dew is falling, let us go in." And, drawing the plaid hood-fashion over his young wife's head, Roger and she loitered slowly back towards the garden. Hawksview was now only a dim line against the sky, and the monotonous ripple of the beck under the hedgerow was all that the mid-summer day had left of its many-voiced harmonies to the dusk-eyed night. Under the bowery porch they paused to breathe for a few moments the aromatic fragrance of the jasmín, whose tangled mass of leaf and bloom quite hid the trellice-work, and crept up upon the roof.

"If we had sought the world through, Roger, we could not have found a pleasanter place than this!" said Agnes, with an air of profound content. She had made the same remarkable observation at least half-a-score times before that day; but Roger, still struck by its charming originality, responded by a gentle caress of the little hand clinging to his arm. "Look at my Ladye Moon rising over the crest of the hill. Ah! Roger, is Castle-Bohun better than this?"

"No, sweetheart, nor half so good," replied he, with a lingering intonation on that quaint, pretty name by which he loved to call her.

"You are going to be jealous of the old home. Yes, I see."

"Jealous, Roger! Don't think that, for indeed I am not jealous. How could I be?"

Roger did not pretend to answer this difficult question: he merely drew her into the hall, took off the heavy plaid, kissed her dear loveable face, and bade her make haste down from the nursery, whither she was going; for he felt strange in the new home without her. She rejoined him in a few minutes, reporting that Mona slept like a darling cherub, and that she was sure the air of Boscombe was going to agree with her. Nurse Beste, that high professional authority, had just stated such to be her firm, mature, and unbiassed judgment. It was not for Roger to call such judgment premature, or to cast a doubt on what was equally pleasing and probable. He only said, "You always put me in mind of my dear mother, Agnes."

"How so, dear Roger, tell me?"

"Because you always look on the bright side. She will love you dearly when you come to know each other."

Agnes sighed, and thought, "When will *that* be?" but she said no more. This was a rather sore subject with her.

## III.

AGNES had the domestic graces in as fine development as the domestic virtues. She possessed a keen sense of the beauty and fitness of things, which she carried into the simplest arrangements of everyday life; a trace of elegance and perfect orderliness was left on all she touched. Though Roger Bohun had passed his youth in the midst of a superlative luxury, in this old bird's nest of a rectory he missed nothing. The machinery worked noiselessly and out of sight; the same fairy fingers that sacredly respected the disarrangements of his study, kept the tiny drawing-room as bright and pleasant as a holiday; but to Roger it always seemed as if the brightness and pleasantness which had so magical an effect, emanated from a certain pair of blue-grey eyes that were full of heart sunshine whenever he looked into them. There was a sense and a presence as of repose about Agnes, which, to a man intense, passionate, and enthusiastic as he was, were an abiding charm. She never wearied, never disappointed him. There was in her that subtle instinct, that fine pure intelligence which

divines a mood and harmonises with it quite unconsciously. Was he grave, she would sit silent by, waiting till it pleased him to speak; was he gay, she would sing his favourite songs—simple Scotch and English ballads of no great skill, but of a most charming melody; or she would listen to his wise talk about old books and authors that he loved, as if they were her bosom friends too, and so gather knowledge to lift her nearer to his level. She did not coin for herself rivals out of his books or silent thoughts, as some women will, but held herself the crowning joy and glory of his life as he was of hers. Half her love for him was reverence, but all his love for her was *love*, and he used to say with tender pride, that she was a youthful copy of Solomon's famous house-mother, whose price was above rubies; yet, Eli Burton, Roger's friend, declared when he came to know her well, that she was merely a "sweet imperfection."

Eli Burton was abroad at the date of Roger Bohun's marriage, and for some time after, but he was the first guest entertained at the rectory after his return home. Roger wrote him a letter of invitation, to which Agnes appended a post-script that filled him with dismay; for, being given to judging of character by handwriting, he discerned in her's signs of an untamed Katherine.

who, he doubted not, was inflicting a daily matrimonial martyrdom on his poor friend. But, arriving at the rectory in Roger's temporary absence, he was obliged to introduce himself to this redoubtable Kate, who came in from the garden to receive him, with flushed cheeks and loosened hair, having most probably been engaged in a game of romps with little Mona. She greeted him with the sweetest courtesy imaginable—a rather shy and blushing courtesy, perhaps, which made him wonder why the tails of her g's curled so pertinaciously, and why her h's looked so sharp and spiteful.

He, however, soon forgot these ominous warnings, for in less than five minutes he discovered that she was neither cross nor pragmatical, and she liked to talk of nothing so much as of Roger, Roger's friends, Roger's school-days, his college days, his learning, his fine character, his excellencies, and even his prejudices—themes on which Eli was just as fluent; for if there was a being in the world whom he thought worthy of all love, honour and admiration, it was Roger Bohun. Each held a very warm corner in the other's heart, and neither was the man to consider lightly of the precious store of trust, congeniality, and affection expressed in an old friendship of school days. It is not the acquaint-

tance formed when life has become action and struggle, but the love which long habit has worn into second nature, the thousand and one recollections of work done, difficulties pulled through, and holiday times enjoyed together that knit that brotherhood of the spirit closer and dearer often than the brotherhood of the flesh.

When Roger came in he found Eli nursing his left knee in the rectory drawing-room, exactly as he had seen him do a score of times or more during an argument that interested him in his rooms at Trinity. Their meeting was as enthusiastic and gleeful as that of two school-boys, and Agnes, whose tact was delicate exceedingly, contrived to be wanted by Mona until dinner-time; and so left them to have their first long talk—which, be sure lacked not its panegyric on so fair and kind a wife—to themselves.

They sat late after dinner, too; but she had no idea of feeling herself neglected. She ordered tea later, and stayed embroidering Mona's coat till dusk; then she went up stairs to peep at her in her cot, and came back, thinking gratefully how quiet, happy, and easy all her young life had been. When at last they did come, she said, "I am glad;" but without any injured feeling at their having stayed away so long. She reflected that, of course, they must have many things to



tell each other that were not for her to hear; Roger had loved Eli as a faithful companion years before he knew her, and it was not for a wife to come between her husband and his friend, or to be jealous of that niche in his heart which not even she—tender, good, earnest, and intelligent as she may be—can adequately fill.

Eli Burton was a fine scholar, and a very honest gentleman; but he was extremely hard-favoured—an ugly man, indeed. He had a big, loose-limbed, ungainly figure, topped by a massive head and a shock of harsh, grizzled hair, which appeared as if it had not been pruned for years. His forehead was already lined with wrinkles, and his eyes reflected the very dimmest consciousness of there being anything to see within their range; for they were generally fixed on the ground, or on his knee, encircling which were clasped his large-jointed uncomely hands. Nature, however, had given him one grace to vindicate himself withal, and this was a very pleasant voice; almost as pleasant, Agnes allowed, as Roger's. He had been a great traveller during the last three years. He had seen Jerusalem and the Dead Sea, Grand Cairo and the Pyramids, the site of old Troy, Athens and the bay of Salamis, Rome and the Pope, Constantinople and the Sultan, Paris and the Grisettes. He had seen.

all the grand tourists' line of march, and not a few other things besides; but his stories were not of the Baron Munchausen order, or marked by any dramatic mischances; and he wound up a brilliant description of Alpine scenery by saying drily to Agnes:—"Yet, indeed, madam, I was often home-sick, and often disappointed; for travellers do not carry favourable weather in their knapsacks at all times. I cannot remember having ever felt better pleased with any fine scenery than I am with this little valley of yours, of which we have never heard in a guide book."

Agnes left her husband and his friend in the height of the lively talk which had made the hours pass with incredible swiftness, and betook herself to her bed. When she was gone, the two gentlemen adjourned to Roger's study, where Eli could smoke his pipe in peace and comfort, and there they stayed gossiping until far on into the small hours. Waking out of her first sleep, Agnes heard the muffled sound of their voices and laughter, which afterwards wove themselves into a good dream, where Eli was enacting the part of fairy godmother to Mona, and helping Roger to compile a book of ponderous sermons that was to make somebody's fortune. It might have been thought that this long chat would

almost have exhausted their budget of news; but the next morning, immediately after breakfast, they were together again, pacing up and down under the shady elms, and talking as eagerly as if they had but just met. Some chance word, perhaps, called up an interminable series of boyish recollections, young ambitions, and young hopes belonging to those shining golden days when the world's good things seemed only waiting for them to conquer—ambitions and hopes which neither had attained to, nor ever would; but which could not be called disappointments, nevertheless.

## IV.

THE weather being somewhat overclouded and favourable to the sport, they had a day's fishing in the trout-beck; and Agnes joined them in the afternoon for the sake of coming home with Roger. Another morning was spent fossil-hunting in Landsdown quarries, and another in a long excursion to view the Roman remains on Blore Heath. The name and story of Hawkswiew had taken fast hold of Agnes's curiosity; and having made Eli Burton a sharer in her interest, one evening they all went up there together. Agnes had a quick and delicate appreciation of the simple and beautiful in natural scenery—an appreciation eager and artless enough in its expression to make Eli smile, though it did not occur to him to check it, as some travelled people check the simple raptures of contented stay-at-homes. He let her go on thinking, as indeed he thought himself, that Astondale was quite as beautiful, and quite as well worth seeing, as many more famous places to which folks travel at vast expenditure of time and money.

With many curves and bends the road wound

up the hill, at first bordered by stately elm, oak, and ash trees, which gave way presently to plantations of larch, spruce-fir, and hardy Scotch pine. Still higher, on one side, rose a precipitous stony bank, over the ragged edges of which waved sprays of wild rose-briar and white-blossomed bramble. A narrow thread of water ran in a stony course by the road-side; but in the wet season it sometimes flooded the lane so deeply that Hawksview was cut off for weeks together from the rest of the world. Agnes thought the ascent was like going up to one of those enchanted castles in the marvellous German fairy books, which she had not yet quite given up being charmed with; and if something eerie and supernatural had chanced to peer out of a cleft, or to shout to them from the top of one of those great, creaking, giant-armed fir-trees, it would not have struck her as anything remarkable.

Through openings in the foliage there were occasional glimpses of the house, which looked from below like a huge cairn with twinkling eyes of windows in the sunshine; but seen in front, it exhibited a certain grotesque regularity. It was little and low, as if it had cowered down under the trees to let the great winds pass over-head; and was built of rough dark stone, quarried in the hill side; while all the wood-work was of

native larch, cut in the plantation on the brow. Two gables of steep pitch, with eaves projecting like eyelids over the lattices, fronted towards the south—a rude porch was in the midst, and on either side were the low, wide windows of the two parlours.

The garden gate hung by a single hinge to the decaying side-post. The children from Moat, when they went up there a blackberrying, had swung upon it until it had given way under their weight, so that there was no impediment to the incursions of the stray cattle and village donkeys that delighted to make this wilderness of greenery their pound. Eli insisted upon driving out two of the last-named trespassers; and while he was thus occupied, Roger and Agnes went up the mossy pathway to the house. Parting the matted creepers which covered the lower half of the windows, they looked in, as well as the mists of many years would allow, upon the emptiness of the deserted house. Against the mildewed parlour walls a few ponderous chairs still remained; in the rusty grate were some pieces of stick and twigs that had been verdant branches once upon a time; a tattered carpet, colourless as dust, covered the middle of the floor. The door of one of the rooms stood wide open, and beyond it they could see the angle of a staircase, with a ray of

moated sunshine glancing from step to step. Upon the keystone of the porch there was the date 1694, and under it an awkwardly carved presentment of a serpent curved into a ring. This device had also been wrought upon the coping of the windows, upon each peak of the gable, and every prominent part of the building.

"It is very dreary, this old house, Roger; I should not like to live here;" said Agnes, shivering. She was glad to turn from its decaying grimness to the terrace, where Eli, having-ejected the donkeys, was taking his fill of the prospect. Strange to say, it did not remind him of anything grander or lovelier that he had seen abroad. It was simply an English landscape, green and purple, rich and sunny, with a pale sky over it yellowing towards sunset. On this terrace grew the finest cedars and yews in Astondale; and not they only, the nettle, bindweed, and rank grass grew there, too, in wild luxuriance, entangling the shrubs and choking the few flowers that still struggled to bud and blossom in this untended wilderness. The ivy had made a bower of the lover's seat, by festooning its sprays from the branches of a magnificent brown beech behind it. On the smooth bole of this tree two names were cut, "Marmaduke and Clara," encircled by the serpent emblem of eternity—strange use for

such device! The wounded bark in healing had made both the names and their bordure less distinct; but they would probably outlast the lives, as they had already outlasted the love, of those there commemorated. Agnes refused to rest herself in this ill-omened place; but straying further along the terrace, she came to a tree that had been uprooted in a storm of some bye-past winter, and here sat sat down with Roger beside her, and Eli hovering restlessly about to and fro, rather afraid that it might be damp. From this point the eye took in the full range of the valley, sweeping eastward over the open country, round by the barren northern ridges to the hazy grey of the western hills, beyond which were numerous little valleys as beautiful as they were secluded.

“When I leave you I will start on a pedestrian tour up there,” said Eli, pointing in a north-westerly direction with his staff, which he had brought to help him up the hill; “it looks like wild unsophisticated nature, and autumn is the finest time for it. Roger, old fellow, do you remember our tramp into Argyleshire?”

Of course, Roger remembered it with all its difficulties of bed and board, and would be glad to do it again.



Agnes did not seem to find the wish at all extravagant. "If it had not been that we are but just come to Boscombe, you might have taken a month's holiday to go with Mr. Burton now," said she, quite naturally. Not that she would have liked his leaving her (that had never happened yet), but that she would not have him feel his freedom or pleasure curtailed by her. Eli said his friend began to wear the look of a man who was pledged to public conveyances henceforward—at which they all laughed; though Roger declared himself good for a walking tour for many a year to come yet.

In his peregrinations backwards and forwards, Eli twice or thrice struck his foot accidentally against a projecting bulk of stone, which was half buried in the purple-flowered ground ivy that overran at its own wild will footpath, bank, and border alike. Stooping down to pluck a bit of the plant, he tore away the whole mass, and laid bare the surface of what in form was not unlike the headstone of a grave. All the creeping things whose shelter had been thus rudely destroyed made haste to hide themselves out of sight in its crevices; some getting into the ring of the symbolical serpent which was here more regularly sculptured, others trying to bury them-

selves in the old German characters in which the following legend had been cut:—

“Vescey of Hawksview caused me mak;  
Come weel, come woe, none other me tak;  
Honor bind I. Faith keep I.  
Hawksview by Moate.  
None base-born, none braggart, none knave,  
Sal be my Lorde of this blude;  
None but goode Knyghtes and trew.”

Before Eli had deciphered the two last lines, which were almost illegible, Roger and Agnes came to see what he was pottering over with his nose so near the ground. He read the inscription aloud, and Agnes, charmed with the discovery, though it did not elucidate the story of the haunted house in any measure, would have it copied into Roger's note-book, that she might interpret it at her leisure. This incident set them off talking about the curious legends and prophecies that attach to certain of the ancient families in this kingdom.

Roger had a story of a Lady Monica or Mona de Bohun, who had followed her husband in a groom's dress to the wars against the Saracens, and had been killed while interposing her own body to save him from slaughter. This faithful lady was still said to keep a special watch over the soldiers of that house; and, certainly, many of them as was on record,

had made marvellous escapes from the swords of heir enemies, by some invisible shield being interposed between them. Then Eli Burton, who was thoroughly imbued with the romance of mediæval history, involved himself in a monkish legend, full of odd Latin scraps which Agnes could not understand; and so she had time to observe that the clouds, which had hitherto been light and dispersed, were now driving up into thick, lurid banks, and gathering stormily about the hills. She made Roger observe also this threatening aspect of the weather, and he immediately proposed a start homewards; but Eli lost so much time, first in finishing his story, and then in a bootless endeavour to secure the gate against the future inroads of vagrant donkeys, that while descending the hill they were overtaken by a violent rain and thunder-storm. When they had gone about half-way they encountered a man on horseback, picking his road carefully amongst the large loose stones that encumbered the lane, and which would have made incautious riding dangerous. He was protected from the wet by a waterproof riding-coat, and wore a broad felt hat flapped down over his brow. He was a large-made, fine-looking person, with something of a foreign air; a dark beard clothed his cheeks and chin, and his keen eyes glanced

restlessly hither and thither as he rode forward. Agnes could not resist turning round when they had passed him, to see which way he took—whether up to Hawksview, or over the hill to Langwith; but a clump of trees intervening, her curiosity was not gratified. At the beginning of Boscombe lane there was a cattle-shed, the door of which stood open; the place being empty, and as the rain, mingled with hail, continued to pelt furiously, Eli Burton proposed that they should take refuge there until the storm abated. Agnes stayed in the doorway watching the pale refts in the clouds for some sign of the weather clearing; while Roger and Eli talked scientifically of theories of storms, bringing in illustrations of their own experience amongst the Scottish hills, the high Alps, and the fiords of Norway. Eli even went several days' journey into the desert, and was in the midst of an eloquent description of the simoon, when Agnes exclaimed, "That man is coming back, Roger! he must have been to Hawksview."

The stranger rode by the shed at a foot-pace, without apparently observing that any one was sheltering there. He lifted off his hat to wipe his brow as he passed; and Agnes thought she had never seen a face at once so handsome and

so unpleasing. She asked who could he be? and Roger, with an arch laugh, suggested "the Marmaduke of the beech-tree inscription—the master of Hawksview in the flesh."

"If so, he must have fallen on evil days," remarked Eli. "He rides a sorry horse, and travels without much baggage. You saw the shabby little valise strapped behind him."

"Yes," said Agnes, who inclined to believe Roger's suggestion; "but he has not fallen on worse days than he deserves."

"Perhaps we may be wronging the poor man; he is just as likely to be an author or an artist out on a sketching tour," said Eli. "Hawksview has attractions for the like."

"But they generally go a-foot," persisted Roger. "I am disposed to think he is the 'fause loon' of our Boscombe gossips' stories. If Osythe Dobbie saw him ride by her door she is sure to remember him."

"There is a fine gleam now, let us go home quickly," said Agnes; "and to settle the question, let us ask the old woman as we pass."

Osythe Dobbie's cottage was round a curve in the lane, and as they came within view of it, they saw that the stranger had pulled up and was talking to the dame at the door. He rode forward,

however, before they reached it; and Osythe stood gazing after him in a state of profound bewilderment.

"Lord save us! Wha'd ha' thowt to see him i' t' country again?" said she, pointing to the retreating figure. "Parson, yon's t' black Lord o' Hawkswiew that I ha' tell't you on." Agnes heard the announcement without surprise. The grand, remarkable figure of the stranger, and his sardonic countenance, agreed with his history as the gossips told it.

"Indeed, Osythe! and what brings him here again?" asked Roger, betraying as much interest as Agnes.

"Deil knaws! nae good, I'll be boun'. I asked him after his bonnie lady an' the lile bairn I tended, an' he just showed his white teeth an' girmed at me; an' he wadna' say if they was living or dead."

"Was that poor baby a boy or a girl?" inquired Agnes, with earnestness.

"It was a lad bairn—as fine a lad bairn as ever cam' into a warld where he wasn't wanted. His mother gave him Marmaduke to his name, and old Parson Lowndes, that's been dead an' gane this ten year, christened him. I was there mysel'."

"Marmaduke! Was that his father's name?"

"Yes. Captain Marmaduke Vescey—yon man

that's just rode by. An' she was Clara; as pretty a lady as ever my eyes beheld, she was. Her flesh was as white as milk, wi' just a tint a red in her cheeks, lips like daisies, an' hair like fine gold. O! she was right bonnie, she was! I could tell you a deal about her, puir lassie; but the parson's on the move."

"Was she his wife?" said Agnes, in an eager, low voice.

"I canna' just say—*she* thowt so. But I fancy maybe she was not," replied the old woman, gravely shaking her head.

"Come, Agnes, we must proceed, or we shall have the storm overtaking us again." Roger here interposed, and bidding Osythe good evening, he drew his wife's arm through his own, and walked rapidly forward until they came up with Eli Burton, who was about fifty yards in advance. The rain held off until they neared the village, and then recommenced in heavy single drops, which soon increased to a pattering shower. They had to pass the little inn; and just as they did so, the stranger, who had been holding a parley with the landlord at the door, dismounted, and went in, while his jaded horse was led round to the stable, from which it appeared that Boscombe was that night to be honoured by the presence of the Black Lord of Hawksview.

## V.

THE thunderstorm presently passed over altogether, and was succeeded by a gentle, continuous rain. It was still a very sultry evening, however; and after Jenny had taken out the tea, Agnes, instead of bringing forth her work-basket and embroidery, stayed by the open drawing-room window, breathing the rich jasmin scent which the damp air brought out more deliciously, while Roger and Eli talked of passing public events, in their respective easy-chairs; for already Eli had an especial chair and corner that went by his name. By and bye another odour, more powerful and more familiar than the jasmin pervaded the atmosphere—the odour of a fine cigar; and looking in the direction whence the wind wafted it, Agnes saw the stranger crossing the church-yard. He stood for several minutes gazing apparently away over the country towards Hawksview, until he had finished his cigar, then flinging the smouldering end amongst the shrubs, he came through the rectory-gate into the elm-tree walk, as if making for the house. Agnes immediately communicated



the fact to her husband; and before the words were well out of her lips, the door-bell rang noisily, and an imperative voice was heard to ask, "Is Mr. Bohun at home?" Jenny made no demur, but admitted the visitor at once.

"Mr. Bohun, I presume?" said he, bowing courteously to Roger, who had risen to receive him as he entered, and then glancing with stealthy swiftness at Agnes and Eli. Roger did not attempt any introduction, but offered him a chair, of which, however, he would not avail himself, and both remained standing while the object of the visit was explained. "I must apologise for my unseasonable intrusion," said Captain Vescey, "but my business is urgent. Can you furnish me with a copy of my son's baptismal register to-night?"

At Boscombe the registers were kept in an iron chest in the vestry; and the clerk, who lived at the top of the village, had the custody of the church-door key. Roger mentioned this, and was about to send Jenny for it, when the stranger volunteered to go himself; so the curate, with a sigh of reluctance—for no man likes his quiet evening of leisure to be broken in upon—went to his study for the key of the register chest, and accompanied him. As soon as they were in the open air, Captain Vescey continued

his explanations: "The baptism in question took place early in August, in the year 'thirty;" said he. "The child was baptised by the late rector, Mr. Lowndes, and received the name of Marmaduke."

"There will be no difficulty in finding the register since you possess the date," replied Roger.

"Mr. Lowndes is dead, and so my most reliable clue is lost;" added the Captain, who seemed a man of few reserves. "He was the only person in whom Clara was likely to confide. She was a weak fool!" Roger fancied he must be uttering his thoughts aloud, and essayed an interruption of the unwitting confidence; but his singular companion continued deliberately, and in a slightly indignant tone, "A very weak fool, or there would never have occurred this hitch. You see, Mr. Bohun, when I was young and hot-headed, I made a hasty Scotch marriage, and brought Clara to that old barrack on Hawkview. Wasn't it natural that I should tire of it after a while? I did tire of it, and I left it. I have not seen it from that day to this; but if she had had patience to wait, I might have come back earlier. But she had not. She wrote me a flight of vehement letters that I was too busy to answer; so she took it into her head that I had deserted her,

and meant to disavow the marriage, of which she held abundant proofs; and when the child was born she packed up, and went off with him and her old nurse, heaven knows where."

"It is a deplorable story. The poor lady seems much to be pitied," said Roger, to fill up an awkward pause.

"And am not I also to be pitied, who run the risk of losing a magnificent estate through her unfaithful impatience!" exclaimed Captain Vescey. "Here is her own brother, the very first in the plot to assassinate her reputation by raising a question as to the validity of our marriage. She notifies to me the birth and baptism of our child, and then goes away and hides him and herself in some miserable seclusion. She was my wife, she *knew* herself to be my wife; ought she not then, as in duty bound, to have remained where I had placed her? She has perilled her son's inheritance by her precipitate folly, and her own honour and mine, too. What was there to prevent her living humbly at Hawksview, and bringing up the child respectably as I desired? It was impossible for me to acknowledge our marriage just then; but it is surely a very poor kind of love that cannot support a few cold looks and hard words for the sake of its object!"

Roger Bohun pressed his lips together to keep

in his stern disgust at this wicked and unreasoning selfishness.

"I want to collect the witnesses of the birth and baptism of this child," Captain Vescey went on. "I want anybody who can furnish information as to where his mother conveyed him, when she left Hawksview, and whether either survives. Clara was as proud as Lucifer, and would retain the certificates of her marriage like dear life, though she was bound by an oath never to reveal them without my leave; and if she died, which I have reasons for thinking she did, she would leave them as a sacred deposit for her son, with some person in whom she had confidence—Janet Saunders, perhaps; but I incline to think it might be Mr. Lowndes."

When they reached the clerk's cottage, they found the old man just retiring to bed; but the prospect of an ample fee caused him to light his lantern and lead the way to the church with alacrity. It was now fallen dark, and as they entered the edifice the stranger's restless eyes searched the gloom impatiently. The register being laid on the vestry table the clerk opened his lantern, and Captain Vescey looked eagerly from page to page until he lit upon the entry he sought. The baptism was registered as that of the son of Marmaduke Vescey and Clara his

wife. Roger immediately made the required copy, and handed it to the stranger, saying, "Osythe Dobbie, you know—the second witness—is the parish clerk. You remember this baptism, John?"

"O! yes, sir, an' good need too," replied the official significantly. "It was long talked on by t' auld rector."

Captain Vescey would have liked to question him further, and sat down on the chest for the purpose; but Roger was growing a little impatient, and closing the register he bade John restore it to its place. "Can I oblige you in anything else, Captain Vescey?" he asked, stepping into the chancel. The captain followed; and while John was locking the vestry door, he took the lantern, and read some of the inscriptions on the monumental tablets, which were chiefly those of his own family. He did not appear to have heard the curate's question; and without repeating it, Roger walked on to the porch, and thence into the churchyard, where he waited until the stranger and old John rejoined him.

"I feel convinced from this," said Captain Vescey, showing the copy of the register, which he still held in his hand, "that Clara did confide in Mr. Lowndes. He must have left some one behind him; who would get his letters and his papers at his death?"

"Indeed, I cannot tell you. I am but newly arrived in the parish. John is more likely to know than any one else."

But John, perhaps with an eye to ulterior pecuniary profit, was suddenly attacked with deafness and defective memory. "Parson Lowndes might ha' left kin; he could na' tell just then; his memory whiles failed him." Captain Vescey said no more, but paced slowly across the churchyard beside Roger, until they came to the gate. John hobbled after in haste, trembling for his fee, which did not appear to be forthcoming so readily as was desirable. "Here's Miss Sage Booties," cried he, with prompt revival of his dormant faculties. "She was the Parson's cousin; but they were aye at daggers drawn."

Captain Vescey turned sharply round to listen; but John had said his say for this time, and was again mute. "The fact is, you know nothing for a certainty, and can only offer conjectures!" cried he, petulantly, at this tantalizing silence. "I must try Osythe Dobbie again. She was more about Hawksview than any one else."

"Osythe oft talks of that poor little bairn and his mother, and wonders where they went to when they left Hawksview," said the clerk, insidiously cropping this forlorn hope. There was a short pause, during which Roger opened

the gate into the rectory garden and passed through; Captain Vescey was following him absently, when John recalled him to himself by intimating that the other gate went his way. "One more question, and I will cease troubling you to-night, Mr. Bohun. Has any one been brought from a distance for interment in this church during the last ten years?" asked he.

"I must again refer you to John's memory; or, if it will be more satisfactory, we can go over the register of burials for that period to-morrow morning." John remembered two funerals of strange folk; but whether they were men or women he could not *rightlings* say. The register would tell best, for there were no stones to the graves.

"Then we will go over the register as you propose, Mr. Bohun," said Captain Vescey. "Clara once said she should like to be buried here; and as our vault is in the church, she may have had a fancy to be laid in it."

"Vescey vault has not been opened in my time; *that* I do know," declared the clerk, explicitly. "T' last of t' family, your father—auld Duke, as we ca'ed him i' t' dale—was drowned at sea, I've heard." Captain Vescey made him no answer; but thanking the curate for his civility, took his way back to the inn, the unfee'd John following close upon his heels.

When Roger re-entered the rectory drawing-room, he was immediately assailed by Agnes with question after question, to only one of which could he return a perfectly satisfactory answer; namely, that the forsaken lady of Hawksview was Captain Vescey's wife; and that his visit to Boscombe was for the purpose of hunting up evidence of her present place of concealment if she were living, or of her death if she were dead. Roger could not thrill her feelings by any dramatic story of the stranger, because he was so matter-of-fact, bad, and selfish—a man of the world, worldly, not a hero of romance; but he did say that what he had seen of him, he disliked. "Yes, intuitively, Roger, I have faith in those antipathies which look at first sight unreasonable," cried Agnes, with energy. "That man gave me a thrill of repulsion. Whenever I conceive such a dislike, and am afterwards won over to a better opinion, I am sure to come back, sooner or later, to my first way of thinking. It is an instinct such as children and animals have."

"You condemn Captain Vescey on instinct, then?" asked Eli Burton.

"And on evidence, too. Is he not a bad man? Look at his countenance, and think of that young creature left alone at Hawksview!" replied Agnes, flushing with indignant pity. "And the poor



little baby! O! I am sure he is all wickedness; and I do hope it may never fall into his hands. It would be far better brought up as a labourer's child." Since Agnes had learnt that her kind womanly sympathies might be enlisted in the cause of a virtuous wife, instead of a hapless light-o'-love, she was more open and vehement in the expression of her detestation for Captain Vescey. She was never apathetic; what she felt strongly, she showed forcibly and fearlessly.

While they were still talking about the stranger, he rode by at a gallop. He was returning to Hawksview after having supped at the inn; but why he went thither nobody could even conjecture. Osythe Dobbie, who watched him on his way, told it in the village, with ghostly amplifications, that he stayed there all night, and only came back to the inn to breakfast. He was not alone that night, she asserted; a slim white figure, with long yellow hair, dripping like a drowned woman's, ran by him in the lane, clinging to his bridle; he could not shake it off, and the same shadowy figure went in with him at the broken gate. Osythe said she heard him cursing and swearing at the thing horribly; but it would not quit its hold, and when he got off his horse at the door, it cast its arms about his neck and kissed him on the mouth, as with a perfect aban-

don of joy. Half Boscombe believed this fable; and Agnes said, with a shudder, "Ah! he deserves to be haunted!" while Eli Burton remarked that Osythe was a charmingly imaginative old woman, and he must have some talk with her. "But what will become of her reputation as ghost-seer if the lost wife should turn out eventually to be alive?" suggested he.

## VI.

THE rich living of Boscombe-Magna was held at this period by the Reverend Augustus Blaydes, a gentleman who did all his duties by deputy, which, if popular report was to be believed, was quite as well or even better than if he had attempted to do them in person. He resided at Florence, and received annually the sum of eight hundred and fifty pounds for nominating a curate to look after the souls of Boscombe, Moat, and Who'd-ha'-thowt-it—a cluster of cottages which took their name from having been built in one of the most out-of-the-way and unwholesome localities that could possibly have been devised.

Under the prolonged regency of curates which had preceded Roger Bohun's coming, the parish had fallen into a state of anarchy, where confusion was worse confounded by the perpetual interference of a self-elected, spontaneously-acting, female churchwarden, Miss Sage Booties by name, a maiden lady of independent property, who lived at the Old Moat House. She had been a crook in the lot of every curate who had come to

Boscombe during the last ten years, and had generally succeeded in driving them from their post before they had held it twelve months. The Reverend Augustus Blaydes would have been glad to exterminate her—none the less glad, perhaps, because she was his aunt, and must leave her money to somebody. Over the poor she tyrannized with sheaves of violent tracts of her own inditing, and a sort of conjurer's bottle of universal specific, whence streamed, with fatal fluency, physic for every ill to which flesh is heir. Whoever refused to read her good little books, or to swallow doses of Globb's renovator, fell under the ban of her severest displeasure. Her plump, sanctimonious ponies, to which a heterodox miner had given the soubriquets of Amen and Hallelujah, stopped no more with eleemosynary half-crowns at such excommunicated doors, nor yet with doles of welcome Christmas flannel. Her meagre skirts swept in charitable domiciliary visits over other thresholds; whilst violent denunciation pursued the defender even as it were within the shadow of the church; for he or she was always complained of to the curate for the time being, and threatened with vague spiritual penalties that were never, to anybody's knowledge, carried into effect. Miss Sage Booties had been born with a mission, which mission

was, the perfectibility of human nature—poor human nature especially—and she toiled at it without ceasing. She meddled with everything; and whatever she meddled with, she marred. She dictated to Squire Brough about the division of the Canaan at Moat. She first built Who'd-ha'-thowt-it, and then undertook the conversion of its inhabitants by means of the tracts afore-mentioned, thereby driving them for more comfortable doctrine to the little Bethel of Langwith-in-the-dale. She sent tiny cocked-hat notes to the board of guardians, to advise the discontinuance of parish pay to the Widow Glossop as a light character, she having attended Boothe fair with her six children, and treated them to roundabout, swing-boat, and nuts, out of the public money. She undertook the management of the clothing club, and brought the accounts into inextricable confusion. She presided over the bi-weekly distribution of soup in winter, and burnt both it and her own fingers most grievously therewith.

On the first Sunday of Roger's appearance in the reading desk at Boscombe church she arrived very early, and wearing her most critical spectacles. She eyed both him and the sweet girlish face in the rectory pew with marked disfavour throughout the service; and though Roger

gave a truly admirable discourse of twenty-five minutes in length, she pronounced both him and his wife, in the hearing of half the congregation, as she left her pew, "A pair of babes in the wood, and nothing else."

The new curate had the pleasure of making her personal acquaintance the day after. He was sent to Moat to pray with a poor woman who was not expected to live until the morrow; and there, wrangling over the patient, who was suffering from acute, internal inflammation, he found the parish doctor and his irregular rival. Miss Sage Booties, on her own responsibility, had administered a large dose of Globb's renovator a few hours before, and as the basis of that popular specific was brandy, its effects on the sufferer had been far from salutary; yet there the lady stood, firm in her own convictions, and resolved to support the reputation of Globb to the last. Even when the doctor, in fineable language, vowed that she should be indicted for manslaughter if the case had a fatal termination, she was still proudly unmoved. The patient, however, recovered, and Miss Sage Booties ever afterwards referred to her triumphantly as a person whom she had saved from death and Doctor Drake, by a timely and copious administration of Globb's Renovator.

In the course of his parish rounds, Roger stumbled perpetually against the female churchwarden's enactments—the real officials being mere dummies, in abject subservience to her authority, while the schoolmaster ran at her beck and quaked at her frown. This despotism was too ignominious to be borne, and he determined to put a check upon it. But he did not yet know his antagonist. She was a woman of inexhaustible resources; and no sooner was she defeated on one quarter than she made her attack on another, more vigorously and vehemently than before. Roger's doctrine, his delivery, his person, his dress, his wife, his child, his house, his servants, was each in turn the theme of her animadversions. She wrote to her nephew, the Reverend Augustus Blaydes twice-a-week, demanding his immediate removal, first on the score of his being lukewarm, then of his being bigotted, prelatical, tainted with divers heresies, and generally unmanageable.

Such was the formidable single gentlewoman whom Captain Vescey undertook to beard in her den, in pursuit of intelligence respecting his wife and son. He waited upon her the morning after his visit to the rectory, sent in his card, and asked a short interview on business of the last importance. The servant who carried in his name to her mistress was alarmed at the angry storm

it excited. Miss Sage Booties was ordinarily dignified even in her wrath; but the old lady flung down the card and stamped on it, crying out in a shrill tone which penetrated to the ears of the gentleman in the next room, "Captain Vescey, indeed! Captain Rascal, Captain Knave, Captain Fool, Captain Villain! How dare he come on his business to *me*! He thinks to get me to betray her, does he?—then he won't! Piper, I shan't see him!"

Piper picked up the card, carried it back to the Captain, and told him her mistress could not receive him—an intimation which he met with admirable calmness; for he had overheard that significant sentence, "He thinks to get me to betray her, does he?" and was thereby assured that his wife still lived, and that her place of concealment was known to at least one person in the neighbourhood—and if to one, why not to more? The spinster lady, animated by a laudable curiosity, could not refrain from peeping out into the hall to watch the exit of her discomfited visitor, and Captain Vescey, detecting her in the act of espial, lifted his hat with a derisive courtesy, which chafed her too sorely to let her keep silence. "Don't you come to Moat again, Captain Blackleg!" cried she; "Osythe Dobbie has been here to tell me whom you are seeking. I



know nothing about your wife, and if I did, I would not tell you! Piper, turn him out!"

Piper, being a timid little shrimp of a woman, might have found some difficulty in ejecting the tall Captain, if he had not gone of his own accord, which he did, whistling an incredulous reply to the irate lady's assurance that she knew nothing about his wife—at least, so Miss Sage Booties understood him. On leaving the Old Moat House, he went straight to the rectory, and told Roger of his ill success; and though no longer believing that his wife was dead, he looked through the register of burials, as the curate had proposed the night before. He found no name answering to hers; and the search being ended, as if there were an impelling necessity upon him to open his mind to some one, he explained, at length, what depended on the issue of his pursuit to Roger and Eli Burton, neither of whom, it must be confessed, was at all ambitious of his confidence.

The case lay in a nutshell. A wealthy Leith merchant, his wife's godfather, had, by a will made so long ago as at her christening, left her his sole heiress. A handsome landed estate in Berwickshire was entailed upon her children, but all the personal property was left entirely at her free disposal. In case she should die

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unmarried, the whole was to revert to her brother or his descendants, and failing them, to the public charities of his native place. No later will had been discovered, though there was some suspicion that one had existed, which had been made soon after her marriage, and Captain Vescey was now selfishly bent on authenticating his union and producing his son, as the indispensable preliminaries to entering on the enjoyment of a fortune, which his wildest dreams had never anticipated as falling to his lot. Thus far he had obtained no clue; but the motives that actuated him were far too powerful to suffer him to be easily baffled in his pursuit, though, after several days of unwearied research, the only reliable information he had obtained was, that those he sought had made a night flitting of it, and had left Hawksview on foot.

## VII.

WHEN the rumour spread abroad in the country that Captain Vescey was come to Boscombe in search of the lady whom he had deserted and the child she had borne, it was not many people who found it in their hearts to cry him "good speed." In the course of a few days, masons, carpenters, and painters were at work at Hawkswiew to bring the place into habitable condition; and when it thus appeared certain that Captain Vescey was about to take up his residence there, speculation and gossip became rife. In less than a week he had entered on possession, and Osythe Dobbie was hired to attend upon him. In her new office the old woman grew mysteriously tantalizing, and pursed up her lips conscientiously when anybody would have catechised her about her master's doings. "They were a nice pair," said one baffled inquirer; "it was easy to guess who would make a third at their plots and colloquings—nought good, be very sure." It would be impossible to cite one half of the absurd stories to which the stranger's arrival gave currency; but after the first enthusiasm of wonder

and curiosity were exhausted, he was permitted to go on living at Hawksview, without exciting more than an occasional spasm of interest.

His first discovery of importance was of a man who had assisted in transporting several packages from Hawksview to Boothe, where they lay in warehouse some weeks, and were then removed by a public carrier, whose weekly circuit extended from Boothe to the coast, and included half-a-dozen insignificant fishing villages, as well as some places of higher standing. This second person either could not or would not remember anything that had happened before the current year, and proved utterly surly and unmanageable; but Captain Vescey suspected from his guarded manner that he was perfectly well informed as to the ultimate destination of the goods he had removed under such peculiar circumstances; and, therefore, having obtained a knowledge of the different towns and villages the carrier called at, he determined on making a personal tour of investigation. With a view to insure secrecy, he confided his intentions to no one; but, telling Osythe Dobbie to expect his return daily until she saw him, he rode away from Hawksview one evening after dusk, passed the night at Boothe, and the next morning, with the shabby valise strapped behind him

and the felt hat flapped down over his eyes, he pursued his journey in the same doubtful guise in which Roger Bohun and Agnes had first seen him riding up to Hawksview. As it was the tourists' season, and the line of country he had to take was a favourite one among the students' of the picturesque, his somewhat remarkable figure excited little observation, and he went on his way with an eager hope that he had hold of the end of the clue which would lead him, at length, to the retreat of his wife and child.

On the afternoon of the third day from his leaving Hawksview, Captain Vescey rode into the town of Whitmouth. His horse had fallen dead lame; and under a blazing harvest sun, along a dusty, unsheltered, lime white road, the last few miles of his journey had been anything but pleasant. Under these circumstances, the first inn he came to, by the hospitable sign of "The Traveller's Rest," looked especially inviting; so he dismounted, threw his rein to a lad who was loitering about the door, and went into the common room where the landlord was reading a week-old provincial paper. Having ordered a bottle of wine, and the best dinner the house afforded, he lounged on the wide padded settle, and smoked out of the window

sulkily. He had thus far met with no sort of success in his expedition; and though not exactly disheartened, he was extremely out of humour. Here there was nothing to distract his thoughts, or to amuse him, even had he been capable of amusement. The inn parlour was buff and red, like most other maritime inn parlours, with pictures of favourite brigs on the walls, an immense bow-pot of honeysuckle in the chimney, and a pervading odour of last night's pipes. The external prospect was not more cheerful. The house was on the ascent of a steep, roughly paved street, which was almost deserted in the heat of the afternoon's sun. At the open door of a cottage opposite, hung a cage full of singing birds; and on the step sat a child knitting, with a dog at her fet asleep. Now and then a group of amphibious-looking men, too tired to be noisy, came slouching along with short pipes in their mouths, and fishing-nets or creels slung over their shoulders; and once a wicker-carriage, drawn by a pair of donkeys, and containing a whole small family, went leisurely past. A little way above the inn was an old-fashioned, rough-cast house, with a white board stretching across its front which, in gigantic capitals, informed all whom it might concern that baths, both hot and cold, were to be had there. As

his eye caught this tempting announcement, Captain Vescey heard a series of remonstrative and strangled chuckings, as of a fowl just impounded; and, thinking that if his dinner were in that undeveloped stage he had time for the luxury of a bath, he sauntered forth, lazily puffing at the end of his cigar, with the intention of taking one. While he was crossing the road to the house, the slow, ponderous roll of some heavily laden vehicle began to ascend the hill, and he recognised in the driver the Boothe carrier. The man acknowledged him with a stolid, inexpressive countenance, and went on to "The Traveller's Rest," where his horses stopped of their own accord. When Captain Vescey returned to the inn, the waggon was creaking and straining at the moment of departure. The owner looked more stupid than ever, after copious libations of beer; and, in stumbling down the three steps into the street, he pushed rudely against Captain Vescey, who was coming in. The Captain swore at him for a drunken sot, and then struck him smartly across the face with the riding-whip that he had in his hand. The man turned round savagely to retaliate; but the landlord interposed, put him out at the door, and bade him be off before he got into mischief again; so

he contented himself with scowling malignantly at his assailant, and promising to be even with him before long. Captain Vescey laughed derisively, and shook his whip with a menacing and significant gesture.

"Ye're no wise to provoke Branker; he ance killed a man," said a girl who was waiting to see the waggon off, and who was perhaps perilously interested by the stranger's beauty. Whatever Captain Vescey lacked, he did not lack personal courage, and was not likely to be intimidated by the threats of an angry boor. Scarcely observing the girl's pertinent warning, he turned into the parlour where his dinner awaited him, as the waggon laboured up the hill towards the more bustling parts of the town.

In the evening Captain Vescey strolled down to the beach to dissipate his ill mood, and consider what next he should do for the furtherance of his object. He could not learn that any persons, answering to the description of those whom he sought, were known to reside in or near Whitmouth, though the landlord of "The Traveller's Rest" said he could name every one—gentle and simple—that belonged to the neighbourhood.



## VIII.

THE bold and broken coast about Whitmouth stretches out in long, narrow promontories, which form beautiful little bays, where the sand is as fine and shining as grains of gold. The cliffs rise straight and precipitous, the lower parts being of hard flinty rock, where the action of the waves, or perhaps some convulsion of nature, has torn deep, cavern-like fissures, through which the tide roars and surges, even in calm weather, with a tempestuous music. Above the stony strata are bluffs and hollows of red clay, the upper levels of which are clothed with a close green turf bright with daisies, crow'sfoot, and orchis. In some few places adventurous cragsmen have made a perilous footing up the slanting face of the cliff, by cutting little niches in the rocks, but they are, for the most part, quite inaccessible. The tide runs up into these bays with one grand tumultuous sweep after it has crossed the bar; not wave by wave, creeping insidiously over the sands, but with a hungry foam-crested swell, which dashes against the cliffs breast-high at once, and then rises swiftly up to the verge of the clay, lapping the

emerald grass and sprinkling the rose-briers with salt spray. In utter ignorance of this dangerous peculiarity, Captain Vescey sauntered meditatively along until he had left Whitmouth nearly three miles behind. The breeze had freshened, and the clouds hung low and red on the western horizon, where the cliffs plunged sheer down to the sea without any margin of treacherous sand. The tide was coming in with a sullen roar, and he sat down on a huge boulder of rock to rest and watch the gulls flying close to the water, in the idea that it would be time enough to return to his dreary inn when the sun had gone down behind the long promontory which, with its line of dangerous under-water rocks, was called by the mariners along the coast, "Death's Head." He was smoking, and drawing lines on the firm beach with the point of a switch that he had cut before descending the cliffs, when a shrill cry behind caused him to look round, and he saw a lad about half-way down gesticulating vehemently, and pointing towards the sea. It was some time before Captain Vescey could understand what he meant; but at last he perceived that he continued to wave his arm towards the nearest point, round the base of which the tide had not risen; and supposing that some person was in danger there, and that the lad could not descend the precipitous

cliffs, he set off towards it; but the distance was deceptive, and much longer than it seemed, and before he could reach it, the white foam was dashing over the broken masses that fringed its foot. Then, and not till then, did he perceive that the danger was his own. He had had some rough experience and hair-breadth escapes in his time; but at this moment he would have given all his chances of future fortune for one square foot of solid standing ground on the top of those haggard rocks. He was enclosed in a crescent of cliffs, the two horns of which were already deep buried in the water, and up the face of which there was not footing for a bird. The lad, whose warning had come too late, had disappeared; perhaps he was gone to summon help, or he might only have run on beyond the point to indicate some way of ascending the cliff there. In a few seconds Captain Vescey had calculated his chances of escape. He marked the dark reef parallel with the inner promontory, and saw, that once the tide level with its jagged top, it would sweep up to where he stood in one gigantic billow, with certain destruction upon its crest. Anxiously his eye searched the black barrier where, far over head, festooned with tangle and mermaid's hair, projected a sort of ledge which to any one directly below was like a marine roof crusted with shells.

Each successive wave rose higher and higher; his life seemed now only an affair of moments—moments swarming with the remembrances of a bad life, and all the quickened, struggling serpent nest of sins, which he had made his bosom friends, only to sting him now.

When the perfect hopelessness of escape by his own ingenuity became manifest, he flung away the end of his cigar, which he had smoked so closely as almost to burn his lips, and faced round to watch the tide. He quoted it in after life, by way of a bravado of coolness, that in this moment of imminent peril, he drew out his cigar-case and match-box, and lighted and began another, which he finished as he walked back to Whitmouth on the top of the cliffs. It might be true, for he was a man of singular resolution and vast physical powers; still he suffered that quiver which must convulse every mortal, let him be ever so brave or ever so phlegmatic, at the prospect of a cruel and violent death which he must meet passively.

“To be drowned like a rat in a hole,” was his thought, and a very black thought it looked, so near at hand; but he had scarcely accepted it as his possible—nay, his *probable*—fate, when a line of a strong cable ran over the ledge, and dropped on the sands only a few feet from him. It was partially steadied by a lump of ore attached to the

end; but it still looked only a perilous ladder to mount all that dizzy height, and might well make even a man of iron nerve hesitate to trust himself to it were there any alternative; but here there was none. It seemed the very straw at which drowning hands clutch in blind desperation yet hope of life.

“Now, sir, hand over hand, it’s your only chance!” roared a man, projecting his body half over the cliff; “hold on like grim death, and never look down: t’ rope ’s right fast aboon here.”

Captain Vescey needed no second bidding; he began to climb, now resting his knees against the rocks, which scored his hands terribly, and then wavering in mid-air, with no hold but the cable. His weight was an immense strain upon it; and the sharp marge of the ledge cut one twist through before he had made one-half of the giddy ascent. Fortunately he could not know this added peril, or it might have unnerved him, and made his movements slow and unsteady. As it was, every beat of the clock lessened his chances of escape; any hesitation, any faltering must have been fatal. Those above watched his slow progress, with lips compressed and hearts beating anxiously, until he came to the level where they were. Just as the tide rushed over

the bar and foamed up against the rocks below, he laid one hand upon the ledge, and gathered all his remaining strength for the lift that was to bring him upon its upper surface. Several diggers from the adjacent quarries were on the spot, and now lending the aid of their brawny arms, soon pulled him up amongst them, with no worse hurt than a few severe bruises, and looking as cool to all appearance as if he had been mounting an ordinary staircase.

"That was just the sickest minute ever you lived through, master; and you may thank Birdy-fute yonder that it warn't t' last," said one of them, drawing up the chafed rope, and with a single vigorous effort snapping it in twain.

Captain Vescey drew a long inspiration through his closed teeth. "Was that all?" asked he, pointing to the frayed ends; and then he swore a great oath, that the devil had had a narrow miss of him this time.

"It's plain you're not to die t' sailor's death," said an old grim-visaged miner; "but I'm thinking ye might ha' framed better thanks than yon. It warn't Satan 'at helpit ye; or gae ye a lang day to save your soul." Jemmie Crossthwaite was a Methodist, and would have been glad to improve the occasion to the profit of his hearers; but Captain Vescey was in no mood for an

impromptu sermon, and cut him short by drawing forth his purse, and proceeding to distribute to each of the men a much larger gratuity than his present means warranted; but at what moment is a man liable to a fit of generosity if not at that when his life has just been saved.

"Thank ye kindly, sir," said Jemmy, who had no objection to pocket his fee, although, as he would unctiously have expressed it, the donor was a 'titbit for hell-mouth.' "Thank ye kindly. If every ane I've lent a hand to haul up atween this an' Death's Head sin' I were a lad had been as free wi' their money as you, I'd ha' a grand fine spoil i' Whitmouth bank this day."

"Have you many accidents of the kind, then?" Captain Vescey asked.

"There's been more strangers 'at had got 'emselves into your predicament lost i' t' tide down o' them sands than ha' been saved; either help cam' too late, or they darn't trust to t' rope, but they're not sae common now as ance they were. People's getting to knaw t' beach, an' they don't run their heads into wilful paril. Even fools doesn't. Besides, there's coils o' rope handy, and Birdyfute an' t' other lads amang 'em keep a keen look out to warn folk if they wander over far. When t' tide is on t' turn, a wise man willn't round t' Cat's-head; yon's it, that big,

low, blunt rock, a mile an' a half fra' Whitmouth."

"Ane good turn deserves another, you'll own, Sir," said the man who had first spoken; "an' as we be going into Whitmouth for a spree, mayhap you'll pick up lile Birdyfute, and take him on your back to his mother, for t' bairn has hurted his foot badly wi' running, and I doubt he can't walk home."

Birdyfute, as the quarryman called him, was the lad who had warned Captain Vescey from the cliff. He now sat on one of the green slopes a little higher up, his bonny brown face contracted with pain, and a sickly pallor on his lips. As the stranger approached, he looked up at him with a pair of wistful filling eyes, and struggled bravely not to cry out as he attempted to rise.

"Well, my lad, I owe you my life, and you have got an accident in my service; let me carry you home, and then you shall tell me in what way I can best show my gratitude," said the Captain, in his gentlest tone; and when this man chose to exhibit tenderness, or the similitude of any of the finer emotions, he proved himself an adept therein. His countenance softened, and his voice crept in amongst the heart-strings as subtly as that Satan-whisper, which so long ago made an ever-echoing discord through all the ages of



time. The child-instinct was bewildered by this kind address; and Birdyfute, though he smiled faintly, said he would try to walk. There was the sign of a pride on his curled lip, that thought shame to be carried like a baby; for he was a fine, well-grown lad of ten years old at least, and strong beyond his age. Captain Vescey bade him take hold of his arm, and thus assisted, he contrived to limp a few steps, but then was obliged to give in; the pain was too much for him.

"I'm afraid you will remember me sorrowfully a long while, Birdyfute," said the Captain.

"Nay, sir, it's only a sprain; I'll be running about again in a day or two," was the brave answer. He made another effort to proceed, but the mere act of putting his foot to the ground extorted from him a suppressed cry, and brought the tears into his eyes; they did not overflow, however.

"Come, fancy I am your father, and it will be all right," said the Captain; and, lifting the lad in his arms with the utmost gentleness, he was permitted to carry him without resistance.

"My father is not with us here; he is a soldier, and he is away fighting the king's battles," replied Birdyfute.

"He will come back some day."

"I don't know; he has been so long away that my mother thinks perhaps he will not. I mean to be a soldier too when I am big enough."

"Gallant boy! I'll have you in my troop. Here we are at two roads—which way must we go?"

"Straight on." Birdyfute closed his eyes, and seemed to resign himself complacently to his bearded nurse; a confidence which penetrated some soft human bit of Captain Vescey's heart, for he felt a peculiar satisfaction in watching the beautiful sunburnt young face that rested against his shoulder. The child wore a Holland blouse, fastened round his waist with a broad leathern belt, and from the numerous stains of purple juice upon it, he had evidently been regaling on the half-ripe blackberries with which the hedges abounded.

"Why do they call you Birdyfute, my little man?" asked the Captain.

"Because they say I hop about amongst the rocks where there's only foot-hold for a bird. But there are better climbers than me; Willie Sleigh and his brother can get up the Cat's-head from the sands—I can't. I tried once, and fell and got a hurt that frightened my mother, and she said I must promise never to try again; I

sha'nt till I'm older. Willie Sleigh is fourteen, and he works at the quarries."

"And I dare say you go to school?"

There was a little hesitation in Birdyfute's answer; "No, I don't; my mother teaches me," said he.

"But you will go to school by and bye?"

"I'd rather not. How do you think I can get to be a soldier, sir? How long shall I have to wait?"

"We could make a little drummer of you already, I think," replied the Captain, laughing at his martial ardour.

"But I shall not be a drummer. My father is a gentleman, and commands the men. I want to be a great general."

"Then, my lad, you have a long time to wait. I am not a general yet myself, nor am I likely to be."

Birdyfute opened his eyes eagerly, and seemed for a moment to forget the pain of his injured foot. "You are a soldier! You have seen a battle? Ah! I wish you would tell me about it!" cried he.

Captain Vescey said he had been in several battles, and he would talk about them when he got him home, but for the present he had not

breath enough. The way they were taking was by a steep descent, which shut out all view of the sea. A rivulet ran in the middle of the lane, which could be crossed at intervals by slight foot-bridges formed of a single plank. The hill-sides were covered with young wood to the top, and became both steeper and closer the further they went. The last bend of the road brought them in sight of the ocean; and, almost down upon the shore where the stream ran into it, of a pretty village whose ancient church on a green eminence, and whose little white cottages nestled amongst trees, formed, in the soft purpling atmosphere of sunset, a very sweet picture of primitive rustic seclusion.

Birdyfute looked up. "Here we are," said he; "our house is the first you come to. You must cross this bridge. There is Janet watering the flowers, and that is my mother at the garden gate."

Captain Vescey stopped suddenly. "Birdyfute, what is your other name?" he asked.

"Marmaduke Vescey." The lad fixed his steadfast eyes on the Captain's face; and after regarding him for a moment, he exclaimed, with tremulous haste: "You are. I do believe you are my father come home at last!"

"Yes, boy, yes!" and, with a throb of genuine

emotion, the Captain bent down his dark face and kissed his son.

"Oh, joy! How glad my mother will be! Do, do go on. Here is Janet coming to meet us. But my mother does not stir; look at her! is she afraid?"

"Birdyfute, has she often talked to you of my return?"

"Every day, every day. O! I think she will almost die for joy. And are you really and truly my own father?"

"Yes." Captain Vescey, advancing quickly, met Janet as she ran out into the road crying, what had happened to the boy. Birdyfute waved his hand and shouted, "Hurrah! Janet! My father's come home from fighting the king's battles at last!"

## IX.

CAPTAIN VESCEY gave the boy into the old servant's care, and went to meet his wife, who, at Birdyfute's exclamation, had rushed a few steps towards him, and then as suddenly paused, her hands clenched together and her arms stretched down in a sort of spasmodic tension, as if she were almost paralysed by a shock of joy or terror.

"O! Clara, how have I sought you!" said her husband, with a reproachful tenderness of tone, that conveyed a sense of long and patiently endured injury. He chose at once to place himself in the position of accuser, that he might profit by its advantages in making terms for their future intercourse. She did not answer, but turned from him with a low cry, and covered her face.

"Come in-doors," said Janet, touching her mistress on the shoulder authoritatively. "Birdyfute has gotten him a sprain, and you must help me to bathe and bind it. Keep *you* back," she added in an undertone, and with a scowl of bitter

distrust at the Captain; but Clara stretched out her hand and let him take it.

"I have taught *him* to love you," whispered she, pointing to the child; "say you are not come to take him from me?"

"When will you leave off suspecting me, Clara?" Captain Vescey said coldly, as he dropped her clinging fingers.

Poor little Birdyfute—all his gleeful triumph gone, unheeded in his pain, and for the first time in his life neglected by his mother—gazed from one to the other in almost tearful bewilderment, while Janet contemplated the scene with an expression of extreme discontent. "Come, my sweet lammie," cried she at length, moved by his piteous pale face, and kissing him passionately; "come awa', Janet 'll tend thee. I kenned how it wad be if he suld come back to her, poor blinded bairn!" and she carried him off, leaving Captain Vescey and his wife together.

It was a moment of intense constraint. Clara seemed lost. A thousand times and more, during those long years of separation, had she prefigured to herself the mingled delight and agony of such a meeting. Sometimes a flood of wild reproaches swept, desolating, over her imagination; at others, she asked herself had she not been too impatient, distrustful, faithless? Ought she not to have

stayed at Hawkswiew; and, uncomplaining, to have abided cruel sneer and insult for her dear love's sake? She had pictured herself at one moment denouncing him with fierce womanly indignation; at another, crouching at his feet, supplicating forgiveness; and now that he was come, she was mute. They stood apart from each other; she, with the downcast air of a self-convicted criminal awaiting condemnation: he, moved, yet still quietly observant of her, and strong in his absolute coolness, interpreting every quiver of her lips and every loud throb of her heart in his own favour. She was scarcely less beautiful than in her maidenhood, so it cost him nothing to descend from his cold superiority, and to say, in that passionate accent which long ago made every pulse of her being beat to his, "Come, Clara, all is forgiven!" He opened his arms, and she threw herself on his breast in a wild abandonment of happiness, sobbing, "O! Marmaduke, and have you always loved me? You are far, far more generous and forgiving than I deserve!"

He replied tenderly, but still with a rebuke, "For our son's sake, Clara, you should never have left Hawkswiew."

"It was for him, for *him*, Marmaduke, that I went away. I could not bear that *he* should see



me despised. I believed that you had deserted us; that you did not care what became of us——”

“Ah! Clara, weak and suspicious! weak and suspicious always! When I left you I thought soon to return, but my regiment was sent abroad. I went with Evans to Spain, and when I came home, ill and wounded, you were gone from Hawkswiew; you had left no trace; you were lost to me! I sought you—ah! what need to speak of that *now*! You are here—I hold you in my arms. Clara, Clara! how could you doubt me?”

That painful, inarticulate cry broke from her again. “O! I was wicked, I was rash, Marma-  
duke, but I was almost mad,” said she, after a few minutes of bitter weeping; “but you have forgiven me the past, let us leave it for to-night. Ah! you do not know what I have suffered!” She lifted herself up, shuddering; put back her loosened hair from her face, and began to walk rapidly to and fro the room, talking all the time; and, with the unreasoning vehemence of passion, dragging piecemeal into light every sore spot of that melancholy past which she had just wished to hide out of sight. “When you left me that stormy March morning, I thought my senses were forsaking me—that it was not, could not be

real," said she; "you were so cold and hurried—you spoke so harshly—you drove me away from you—you would none of my help. I was sick with grief, and you did not give me one kind word. I waited a month as you bade me—then I wrote. You sent me no answer. I wrote again, twice, thrice—still nothing. The summer was passing—our boy was born—and I thought surely *he* will come to me now. I tried to pour out my whole heart, to tell you how I loved you still. I wrote to you of our child's pretty ways, and of how I had given him your beloved name; but you never answered me, you never came. O! it seemed cruel, it did seem very cruel. You had wearied of me—you had abandoned me—you had gone from England without releasing me from my promise to keep our marriage secret, though you knew how it had abased me from the first——"

"Hush, Clara, I do not know you—you are not like your gentle self!"

"No, I must tell you all—then I will hush. Women cannot suffer so long and be always gentle, Marmaduke; my life seemed the very dregs of bitterness and shame; I felt degraded; I trembled and blushed when any eye looked on me. I thought every one despised me as a miserable, lost woman! I prayed to God that I might die; but he was deaf like you: he would not hear

me. Then I began to say to myself, if I stay here with the child, when he grows up he will hear his mother scorned as an unworthy wretch; he himself will perhaps learn to hate me for putting on him the burden of a shameful name—I will take him away to a strange place where we are unknown. So we went—Janet, and he, and I—we went secretly, that no one might trace us, and that our secret might not follow us. Only the old clergyman who christened my boy knew when or where we went. He was kind; he showed me how it was my duty to live for the child, and bring him up in the fear of God. He said that my vow to you was not binding; but I kept it, Marmaduke, I kept it, except to him.” She stopped suddenly, went up to her husband, and looking eagerly in his face, asked, “You will acknowledge us now, will you not? You will release me from this self-reproach, this secret shame? O! I have prayed for you day and night! I have taught our boy to love you! I said it was better that he should believe his father died a soldier’s death on the field of honour than that he basely and cruelly disowned us. Yes, Marmaduke, he is a brave lad, and he has a tender heart for you; but he loves his mother so that he would hate you if he knew that you had meant her any wrong!” The last few words were hissed

out in a fierce whisper; and Clara clenched her fingers in her husband's sleeve, and looked at him as if she would fain read the intent masked by his dark impassable countenance. He felt that her reviewal of the past had re-excited her suspicions of him, and he desired for the present as much as possible to avoid explanation and recrimination. It was his object now to win his wife back to her old habits of love and implicit confidence, with as little retrospection as might be. He was not indisposed to let her bear the weight of self-blame ultimately, providing that he could tranquillize and make her happy now; and when he spoke it was with a gentle melancholy, half loving and half reproachful, which brought the easy tears to Clara's eyes.

"Yes, Clara, you are my wife, and Birdyfute is my son, now before all the world, if you will," said he. "My reasons for concealing our marriage were removed long since; but when I could have acknowledged it, there was neither wife nor child for me to claim. But come to me now and be happy."

She crept into his arms, humbled and penitent, yet glad with an inexpressible gladness. She had never ceased to love her husband, because a woman can pardon a great wrong, if the silken chain of her affection has not previously been

fretted and frayed with the often recurrence of slight, coldness, and cruelty. He had left her while her passion was still in the heyday of its romance; he came back to her, and her whole soul went out to give him welcome. The next few moments passed in a charmed silence. Clara was rejoicing in her recovered happiness and her restored pride—for she was a proud woman even in her love—and her husband was reflecting on the quick and pleasant solution that evening had brought to all his difficulties. The window of the cottage was wide open to the garden, and the sound of the surf breaking heavily on the shore was distinctly audible. It recalled to Captain Vescey his recent peril and escape; and, after listening to it for an instant, he said, “Clara, do you ever go down upon those sands? But for little Birdyfute, you might have seen me to-morrow lying drowned under the rocks, or perhaps have never seen me again.”

Clara seemed scarcely to understand him at first; but, as he briefly detailed the particulars of his adventure, she clasped her arms round him and cried, “O, Marmaduke! so near to me and to have been lost! God himself surely guided our child to save you! And he was hurt, you say! Where is he? Birdyfute!” She raised her voice and called him twice or thrice, but

without leaving her husband's side. Janet came in.

"Birdyfute is in his bed," replied she, stiffly, in answer to a question as to what had become of him. "I ha' bound his ankle that his mother suld ha' done, an' it's a wae heart the dear bairn's got to sleep on this night."

"Let us go to him, Marmaduke," said Clara, and she led the way to a room where Birdyfute lay, on a little white bed under the window, to which, in the early morning, the birds that he coaxed with crumbs came and awoke him with their singing. He had not tried to sleep, and the tears that he had manfully kept back while there was anybody to see them, had flowed abundantly since he was left alone with his pain and his grieved thoughts; but, when he heard his mother's light foot approaching, he wiped them away, and in the indistinct twilight she did not see that he had been crying. She sat down on the bedside, put her arms about him, and kissed him tenderly. "Did my darling think he was forgotten?" said she, in a caressing whisper. "My brave good boy who saved his father's life!"

"Is he going to stay with us, mother?" asked Birdyfute, eyeing with an ill-defined sensation of fear the tall figure leaning against the wall at

the foot of his bed. He could not forget the meeting of his parents; and it had destroyed his long-cherished illusion of anticipated delight in his father's coming home. At his question, Janet, who had followed her mistress in, exclaimed with gruff displeasure, "I suld like to knaw where we are to lodge him, if he does! He'll ha' to go back to Whitmouth."

"I shall take you all away to Hawksview very soon, Birdyfute—to Hawksview, where you were born," said the Captain.

"There 'll be twa words to say to that bargain," muttered Janet

"You have come from Hawksview, Marmaduke. What does the old place look like? It was so bonnie!" said his wife.

"It looks like a wilderness—lost and overgrown; but we shall soon change all that."

"We were very happy there, dear, once——"

"We shall be very happy there again, Clara."

"Is the sea at Hawksview, mother?" asked the child, who did not lose a word of what either spoke.

"No, Birdyfute; but there are great moors and thick woods, such as we have not here, and which are very beautiful. You will like it quite as well as Cliffend." Birdyfute gazed sorrowfully out of the tiny casement, but said no more.

This beginning of changes did not approve itself to his fancy. To leave the sea, the alum mines and the quarries, Willie Sleigh, and all his old playfellows; to have his mother no more wholly his own; to see old Janet angry, and that dark, severe figure always looming in the foreground of home, made in his mind a nightmare of confused, unpleasant feelings. He put his hand up round his mother's neck, drew her ear down to his mouth, and whispered, "Mother, are you *quite* glad that he has come home?"

She closed his lips with a kiss, and replied in the same tone, "Yes, dearest. I have never been so glad since you were born."

This secret confidence between them annoyed Captain Vescey. He already foresaw in the boy an antagonist, whose devotedness to his mother would incline her always towards him; but he was too politic to make this apparent. He feigned not to observe the whisper; and said, with an air of gracious complaisance, "Birdyfute, you must spare your mother to me now; to-morrow shall be yours——"

"She can go," replied the child, and he turned his face to the wall. Clara stooped down over him, and pressed her lips to his cheek longer and more warmly than usual. "Have you said your prayers, darling? You must thank



God for sending us your father safe home; don't forget;" and without waiting for any answer, she laid her hand in that which her husband offered, and left the room with him. Birdyfute could not sleep because of his aching foot, which she had never thought of, and for long after he heard them walking to and fro in the garden. Quite late, when the moon was risen, and it was almost as light as day, he looked out of his little window, and saw them standing together by the gate clasped in each other's arms. After a few moments of lingering endearment they separated: Captain Vescey walked swiftly away up the path which led along the top of the cliffs to Whitmouth, and Clara, when he was lost to her view, re-entered the cottage.

## X.

JANET, whenever her mistress turned, followed her like a spy. "He's gane at last. It's an ill-wind has blown him home again," said she, in an angry, muttering tone. Clara heard, but did not heed; she went up to Birdyfute's room, and the old servant pursued her, as if she could not bear her to go out of her sight. "I want to know what you are going to do about this puir bairn's father?" she began, coming close up to her. "Are you going back to live with him?"

"Why do you ask such a question, Janet? What have we all prayed for and hoped for these ten years, if not for his return?"

"It was that you might ha' your good name again, and no ha' to hide out i' honest folk's sight; and that the bonnie brave bairn suld get his rights as his father's lawfu' son. I prayed for nought mair, none I."

Clara sat down by the window, and folded her hands on her lap. Janet might have scolded on for ever without provoking a retort, she was so very happy. "It was I who was to blame—I

who failed in my duty, Janet; but he forgives me," said she.

"What fule's talk is this?" exclaimed the old servant, in a high-pitched discordant voice; "let him own you and go his way. Why has he come at all? what is he scheming? I know there's some deep laid plot i' hand. It's not for nothing he's claiming you. Wae's me! but sorrow will fall on you yet, Clara! Ye war ever a heidstrang bairn!"

"Am I not his wife, Janet? And ought we not for Birdyfute's sake to be re-united? That will silence evil tongues. If we had not left Hawksview, long ago, we should have been acknowledged. We ought to have stayed—it was our place."

"Wha' believes that but you? If you had not left Hawksview, your proud heart would have harried you into your grave lang sin'. There was nae God's blessing on you when you cam' together, and strife 'll sunder ye yet!"

"No, Janet, no! he always loved me; he never intended to abandon us. The blame of our separation was all my own."

"Was it your blame he went away cursing? Was it your blame he sent nae word in your trouble, was it?"

"Give up railing, dear Janet, and think of

Birdyfute. If I was wronged, the wrong is my own, and I can and will forgive it."

"Aye, bury it deep down, and stamp on it wi' forgives and forget's; but it 'll rise up to him again. O! Clara, ponder it well," she continued, sinking her sharp tone to one of trembling entreaty. "Wha's been truer to you than Janet? and she warns you not to gi'e yourself ower to him tied hand and fute. Stay till you see what he wants. It's some gain to himsel,' I know. He did nae look at you like a true husband come home; but as eager as if he had found his prey. I watched his cruel eyes; and remember, Clara, my puir bairn, how he left you. O! it's not a kiss and a soft word *now* suld make you forget *then*."

"Are you a Christian woman, Janet Saunders, that would preach such wicked, unforgiving enmity?"

"I'm a Christian woman that wadna' ha' a corbie-craw in my doo's nest. If you go back to him now you'll rue it long ere the day you come to die. He may ill-use that brave bairn that never has he seen till this night. He may leave you your lane, and waste t' bit money t' auld rector gave to bring him up."

"Janet, I will not listen to you any more!" exclaimed Clara, hotly. "Let me be! My love

is my love still, and you cannot divide us. He is my own dear husband, and not the heartless monster you would try to make me think."

"But you *sal* listen to me, Clara! Nay, stop your ears if you will, but you *sal* hear me. You are wilfu' selfish to let t' bairn into his father's hands. If it was *only* you, wad I stand again' your will? Nay, I wad e'en let you sup the bitter drink you ha' brewed. But it's for Birdyfute, the bairn, that can't plead for himsel', I speak. Where are your ain kin? They will uphold you if you prove you are a lawfu' wife, and not the thing they feared."

"I want nothing from them, Janet, or from you, or from any one," replied Clara, proudly, but with a sinking at the heart caused by the old servant's reiterated warnings. "I can trust Marmaduke if you cannot, and Birdyfute is always safe with me."

"Neither he nor you will be safe once he has you in his grip. There's nothing sae strong or remorseless as a bad man and the law. But if you will go to him, go—there's maybe your fate in it."

"Since you speak of the *law*, Janet, perhaps you know that any day, without asking my leave, or consulting me at all, his father can take Birdyfute away from me if he likes, and I could not

help myself. It is well, then, is it not, that I can go without violence to my feelings, for I do think he means us fair, Janet."

Janet seemed confounded, and was silent for several minutes: "Well, there *is* a fate in it," said she at length, with a great sigh.

Clara told her how Birdyfute and his father had met: "And surely he will love his child who saved his life," she added, confidently.

"He'll never love anything but himself," returned Janet, doggedly; "my heart goes sorely against him, and aye will."

Birdyfute, awake in his bed, heard every word of this dispute, and when Janet at last departed, he called his mother to his side and asked her what it meant. "My darling, you should not have listened," replied she. "You must forget what Janet said; she is angry and prejudiced sometimes. You will try to love and honour your father as your best friend, won't you, Birdyfute? Promise me, dearest."

"Not, if he is cruel to you, mother. No, I would hate him—I should wish that the tide had dashed him to death against the rocks!" cried Birdyfute with vehemence. Clara laid her hand upon his lips, and bade him hush; and then, to check any further expression of violent feeling, she left him to himself; but she sat long by the

window, gazing out into the still, moonlit night, and trying dispassionately to comprehend the several bearings of this great crisis in her life.

Janet's faithful remonstrances had not been without their effect. They had lowered the temperature of her joy, as cold east wind blowing over a gleamy May-day freeze the buds of spring, but without altering in any measure her determination to return to her husband. After what had passed between them that evening, she felt it would be impossible to draw back, even if she desired it—their terms were already made. They had parted with an embrace—she could not meet him on the morrow with quibbles, reproaches, and interrogatories. If he had done her a great wrong once, so much the greater should his love be now by reason of her forgiveness; and if, as her love and her pride preferred to think, she was the aggressor, by her intemperate haste and suspicion, in quitting the shelter her husband had provided for her in his absence abroad, it behoved her, with all meekness and humility, to accept the opportunity he gave her of returning to her allegiance. Every point she thought of relating to the present was in his favour. He had sought anxiously to discover her retreat; and Providence had brought his own son to his rescue in a moment of imminent peril, and thus led him back

to her. So Heaven—Fate, Janet called it—seemed to will their re-union. Love also was on his side; and duty, either real or imaginary, persuaded her that for Birdyfute's sake, if for nothing else, a reconciliation was desirable. As for the boy being oppressed, the suggestion was outrageous. Why should her husband have reclaimed them after all that interval, if it was not to give them his protecting care, she reflected. He had found them in the humblest position, when they were incapable of taking their rights by the strong hand if it had still been his desire to withhold them, yet he had immediately, on the question's being raised, proclaimed, "You are my wife, and Birdyfute is my son, before all the world."

After ten years spent in a seclusion, shaded by the indefinable shame and burden of a false position such as hers, it was an inexpressible relief to escape, as it were, once more into the free daylight of fair repute, and to see her child restored to his rightful place. She had been wounded in her affections by her husband's desertion, but she had been wounded in her pride no less. What she might experience when the real cause of his anxiety to recover her transpired, was yet to be proved. His policy it was to conceal it from her until accident or necessity revealed it,



and that would not be until he had had ample time to work his potent spell of love and kindness, and to reduce her once more under his absolute rule and guidance.

## XI.

THE regular, undisturbed life that Clara had led so long at Cliffend, had preserved to her all the fresh grace of youth, while the enduring sorrow, which she could never wholly forget, had tintured her air and manner with a gentle, refined melancholy: a melancholy that added depth to her lustrous eyes, and a soft benignity to her smile. As a girl she had been brilliantly beautiful and gay; but now she had the graver, sweeter charms of a ripe womanhood, and the loveliness which shines forth from a purified spirit. When Janet came to her in the morning, she was irresistibly struck by the change a night of happy thoughts had made in her countenance. Her weariness and patient langour were gone; she had a soft, sprightly air—her voice was quicker—her smile more frequent. She had taken pains with her dress; she had arranged her rich, golden hair in the wavy braids that her husband used to admire; and she looked, when he came suddenly upon her through the trees of the little garden, more winning and beautiful than on that ill-starred evening so

many years ago, when they first met, and fell in love.

"You must not ask me to leave you any more, Clara," said the Captain, with eager, surprised admiration. "I shall take you away with me to-day, unless you will let me abide at Cliffend, my beautiful darling!"

Clara blushed and palpitated with happiness—he loved her still, she was sure he loved her. "Birdyfute cannot be moved yet—he is in here lying on the couch," said she, softly; and pausing at the window, she called to him: "Birdyfute, your father is come again—have you nothing to say to him?"

The child had taken counsel with himself, and intended to try to please his mother by loving the grim Captain, his father, and said, "Yes, tell him not to forget his promise of a story about his battles; I want to hear him talk."

"And so you shall, my boy; only first let me make some arrangements about leaving this place. When do you think you shall be able to move? Not yet, from that wry face! Next week, perhaps?" Birdyfute was silent. "Well, if not then, you shall stay with Janet, and help her to pack up, while I and your mother go to make ready for your reception at Hawksview—is that agreeable?"

I

This proposition in reality dismayed both Clara and the boy. They had never before been separated, even for a single day; and Clara immediately negatived it. "No, Marmaduke, dear, that will not do," said she; "I cannot leave him for the first time, now that he is so helpless. I have never left him before."

Captain Vescey did not press the subject then; but afterwards, when they were alone, and beyond the range of Birdyfute's wistful eyes, he brought all the force of his eloquence to bear upon his love for her, and easily moulded her to consent to his plans. Janet received orders to arrange a few of her mistress's clothes for an immediate departure.

"And the bairn is to go, too?" said the old servant, imperatively. "You will never have the heart to forsake *him*, Clara?"

"He cannot travel, Janet. You must see it is impossible; but I must go to-day, for my husband insists upon it," was the confused reply.

Janet did not trust herself to say another word; she went angrily away, and did what she was bidden, only taking care to keep away out of Birdyfute's sight. While Clara was dressing for her journey, Captain Vescey beguiled his son's attention by the recital of one of the promised stories, and they had just established

a good understanding together when she appeared.

"Where are you going, mother?" the boy immediately demanded, flushing crimson. "Are you going away from us?"

"Only for a little while, my own darling," replied she, kissing him fondly; Janet will take care of you, and bring you to me very soon."

Birdyfute pushed her face aside; and, before the threatened storm of tears and entreaties had time to break forth, Captain Vescey took his wife's hand, and with some urgency drew her from the room. "O Marmaduke! this is not kind to my poor boy," remonstrated she. "I don't think it is right to leave him—" but he hurried her into a carriage that waited in the lane, and they were driven rapidly off towards Whitmouth. The thought of her child thus deprived of her comforting presence, when he most needed it, pursued her through the day, and scarcely all her husband's assiduities could calm her. She feared he would grieve after her until he made himself ill; and true it is that Birdyfute did grieve; but he grieved and raged alternately; raged, too, with such angry vehemence, that Janet, sorely against her feelings, was obliged to bid him "whisht:" for, after all, if his father wished to take his mother away,

and she did not object, he had a right to do so that nobody else could deny.

"And you must not look to be all you ha' been to her," added the old servant, gravely. "She will ha' to take thought for two o' you now; but you'll be sure to be kind and 'bedient to her, for she may ha' muckle ill to thole, Birdyfute."

"Oh! Janet, I wish I were old enough to be a soldier now!" replied the boy, twisting restlessly on his uneasy bed.

"Be patient and you'll get your will; but never hurry about it, lest you suld be contraried. Now, I'll reach you down t' great history-book, and you read while I see about my work. If the minister suld come by, just you ca' him in to hear t' news; t' auld man'll be fain to know your father's come home, for he aye said you would be spoilt among nothing-but womankind."

The history-book was, however, particularly dry that day; and Birdyfute soon tired of it and of his couch too. The unnatural durance was all the more burdensome that he had no company to cheer him. But about noon came the vicar, who had been Clara's only friend in her seclusion, and that pleased the boy. He had heard from Jemmie Crosssthaite of Captain Vescey's perilous

rescue, and had himself seen the carriage drive off that morning. Janet came in to tell him what had occurred ; but she now spared her comments, and confined herself to facts. The vicar was a fine, frank-faced old gentleman ; but his brow clouded over as he listened. When the recital was ended, however, he spoke cheerfully to the child, saying, "Never mind, my little man, they will think of you by and bye ; it is like a new marriage, after such a long separation. And when does your mother come back, Birdyfute ?"

Birdyfute did not know ; but Janet volunteered a statement that they were all going away from Cliffend for good very soon ; but her mistress was to write and tell them when. The vicar said he hoped she would not forget old friends ; and having chatted pleasantly with Birdyfute for half an hour, he left, promising him a new book, and another visit in the evening.

But the summons for Janet and her charge did not come until three monotonous weeks had dragged through their slow length. Captain Vescey and his wife went to Scotland, proved their marriage to her brother's satisfaction, rejected overtures of reconciliation with her family, and then went to London for a fortnight. There they

would probably have remained longer; but Clara became so urgent about her boy, that her husband consented to return to Hawksview, and there Janet and Birdyfute joined them the day after their arrival.



## XII.

"OSYTHE DOBBIE must descend from her tripod to the level of ordinary mortals; Captain Vescey has found his wife," Eli Burton announced one evening as he entered the rectory parlour, after smoking his cigar in the elm-tree walk. Roger Bohun looked up from his book, and Agnes dropped her work to listen. "And not only found her and his son; but he is bringing them to Hawksview immediately," added the news-monger. "Osythe Dobbie herself was my informant."

"Then, there is an end of our romance!" exclaimed Agnes.

"Say, rather, a bewildering crisis in it. Surely your interest will not fail at this first act in the drama?" said Roger, archly.

"Perhaps it may endure until I see her; but I think she has been too forgiving, don't you, Roger?" Roger declined pledging himself to an opinion, and Eli was equally cautious; they would both wait for an opportunity of judging by personal observation.

The said opportunity was not long wanting.

On the Sunday following their arrival at Hawkview, Captain Vescey appeared at Boscombe church with his wife and son. They came in very late, and their entrance in the middle of the psalms, drew all eyes upon them. The Captain stared round in every face as if defying scrutiny, and caused many an inquisitive gaze to droop abashed before his own, but Clara never looked up. She was flushed and agitated, and Agnes saw that she held her little boy by the hand all the time. As for Birdyfute, he was as bold-eyed and handsome as a fairy-tale prince; his brown face, dark waved hair, and bright honest glance, won him admiration from all, even while they acknowledged his strong resemblance to his father. He was, however, shockingly irreverent and inattentive to the service. He talked in loud whispers to his mother, pointed at the monuments on which he read his own name, as borne by generations of his ancestors for centuries back, laughed when the flute and clarionet tuned up in the gallery, and generally misconducted himself, for which Janet afterwards read him a serious lecture, and which caused Agnes to fear that he had been but ill-brought up. But Birdyfute was, like other boys, full of life and spirit, quite incapable of being still long together, especially in a strange place,

and perhaps his wits did not wander more that morning than those of other people, whose opportunities of knowing better had been twice and thrice as long.

When the congregation quitted the church, Birdyfute was in a great fuss to escape, and got out some minutes before his father and mother, who, when they appeared in the porch, could not see him anywhere. The fact was, he had mistaken the gate into the rectory garden for that on the road home, and had rushed through it after Jenny, who grinned, but said nothing. Captain Vescey and Clara were looking up the paddock to see if he had gone that way, and Birdyfute himself, having discovered his mistake, was just dashing back to them, when Roger, Agnes and Eli Burton issued from the church door. An introduction was unavoidable, and, perhaps, was less awkward under such circumstances, than it would have been if formally arranged. The eyes of the two mothers met, and there was a sympathetic goodness in the hearts of both, which instantly disposed them to friendliness.

While the Captain talked a few moments aside with the curate, they exchanged half a dozen simple remarks about Birdyfute, who fixed his great eyes on Agnes as if he were thinking

her wonderfully beautiful. When the two parties separated, Eli Burton was very prompt with his comments on Clara. "She looks as little of the neglected wife as any woman need wish to do," said he; "we have been making an ogre out of an innocent man. She looks as happy as an empress, and the boy is a princely little fellow."

"Yes, we have been rather hasty in our judgments," replied Agnes; "and I am glad we can reverse it so promptly."

"You two pronounce from the outside. I shall reserve my verdict for six months," said Roger, sagely. "She is a pretty creature, and I hope he will use her well; but he did not speak of her very tenderly a few weeks ago. You must cultivate her, Agnes."

Agnes replied that she would. Boscombe had not yet supplied her with a companionable person of her own sex, and there was that in Clara's face which promised pleasant acquaintanceship. Their children would give them one interest, in common, she thought; and as it was probable Clara would live very quietly at Hawkview, she also might feel the want of a friend, for there were many persons in Astondale who inclined to regard her peculiar position with an eye of askance.

The whole neighbourhood, as might naturally

be expected, made itself exceedingly busy in the affairs of the new comers; but all went well at the old house on the hill for some time. Nobody, who did not know it for a fact, could ever have conceived that there was a shadow of a story attached to its inhabitants. Captain Vescey went out grouse - shooting on the moors, and Clara walked on the terrace, or rambled in the woods with Birdyfute, who also had a pony, and rode sometimes to Boothe, or elsewhere, with his father. People called and left cards, and Clara sent her's by her husband, with the excuse that having no carriage she could not return their visits in person; and this civility accomplished, they thought as much as was necessary had been done for a woman who had caused herself to be talked about. Some few individuals elected themselves into partisans, and condemned one side or the other as their own private experience prompted; but the general voice, as is customary in such cases, was against the wife. Her position, in fact, was as anomalous as it could well be; she made no acquaintance, and no friends but Agnes, whose voice was always in her favour when she came under the harrow of public discussion. The gentlemen liked Captain Vescey, and invited him pretty frequently, at first with his wife, who always

declined, and afterwards alone. He had seen a great deal of stirring life in various parts of the world, was conversational, but not often brilliant—too much cleverness would have been more against him than downright dulness, for then he would have outshone his company—a capital sin in some forms of society.

Birdyfute missed Willie Sleigh and his other adventurous play-fellows at Cliffend very much, at first; but, by and bye, when he had his pony—and a gentleman gave him a fine setter pup to bring up against the day when he should have a gun to go out shooting with his father—the interests of the new life increased, and he grew reconciled to the change. From the very first there had been a feeling of shyness, reserve or jealousy, between the father and son; but it did not appear obviously to any one as yet. The Captain told his stories of dangerous adventure by field and flood, and Birdyfute listened with unwearied satisfaction; but the lad never crept confidingly to his father's side, never claimed his help or interest in anything he was doing, or seemed to expect more than the sometimes careless, or rough, or impatient civilities that he got. And on his side, Captain Vescey never offered him a caress or a loving word; he much more frequently bade him go out to play, than en-

couraged him to stop in-doors with himself and his mother; and he always seemed to find his absence a relief, as if he were a spy or a restraint upon him. Birdyfute was quick enough to find out that he was not wanted, and not loved by his father; both were, indeed, secretly conscious of the cold distrust that lay between them, and both tried—though for different reasons—to ignore it and seem friendly and frank towards each other. The lad's education was not much attended to, he was no lover of books—dry books of study, that is—and Clara found it much less easy to beguile him to his tasks than formerly; and she, never willing to thwart him, lamented his idleness, without having courage to enforce a change. As for appealing to his father, that she could not have done, for already an impalpable shadow was creeping over her own faith in his kindness; and she determined to consult Agnes Bohun, who always showed a liking for the boy, as the most trustworthy adviser she knew. She asked if there were any clergyman in the vicinity who would be likely to undertake his tuition; and Agnes having named the subject at home, there was a council held with Eli Burton, the result of which was, that the Honourable Roger Bohun, perhaps not much to his inclination, turned pedagogue for a

couple of hours daily; an employment not very remunerative, but which succeeded as well, if not better, than a speculation in bees which Agnes had undertaken in emulation of a certain French curé who laboured, like the Boscombe curate, under some of the inconveniences of a narrow fortune.

Birdyfute rode down to the rectory by nine o'clock in the morning, with his little bundle of books strapped together and slung over his shoulder, too often—as it soon became evident from the non-preparation of his lessons—the strap being only unbuckled in the curate's study. Roger was a good deal puzzled with his pupil. He told Agnes that a lad of more generous temper or finer natural intelligence he had never seen; but that he either could not, or would not, apply himself to overcoming even elementary difficulties. Once or twice the curate was called from home during the lesson, and then Agnes officiated as his deputy; Birdyfute rather preferred that he should be sent for, as Agnes and he were become great friends together. The lad was good-natured to little Mona, which, of course, went to Agnes's heart, though she did not quite approve of his riding her round the paddock at full gallop. Then Agnes had taken it into her head that he was not very happy at home, which would have



made her kind and gentle to him, even had there been no other cause.

It was quite true that Birdyfute began by and bye to have his trials and troubles. The warm, light summer evenings could not last for ever, and when it began to gloom early, he was obliged to stay in doors much more than he had done. The nights were his most uncomfortable time. Let him be ever so still over his book, or in ever so remote a corner of the room, his father's steel-grey eye would keep working round in his direction, and soon the inevitable command came: "Birdyfute, it is time you were in bed; say good-night to your mother, and go." Clara never begged a reprieve; she would lift up her face to kiss him, and smile, and answer his good-night cheerfully, as if it had always been their custom to part so. She rarely came to see him in his bed either, now; and when she did come, it was in stealthy haste, to whisper urgently that he must be a good boy and obedient, if she fancied she had seen in him any sign of revolt. Yes, there was a vast change beginning to pervade the life of poor little Birdyfute ere the autumn was ended.

Clara could not but feel that her child was being slowly, yet surely, weaned away from her, although at this period she made no sign. When

Captain Vescey was out for the day—which happened occasionally—she would try to indemnify him by returning to her old caressing ways, by giving him holiday from his lessons, and affording him little indulgences that used to gratify him formerly. But Birdyfute's heart had closed under the chill of neglect, and did not open freely to single gleamy moments; he learned to distrust the affection that only dared to exhibit itself in secret, and grew uneasy under its restless uncertain manifestations. He liked to stay down at the rectory with Agnes when his lessons were done, and by degrees absented himself from home as much as he could without provoking comment. On wet days he would carry his books or tools into the straw-chamber over the stable, and stay there undisturbed for hours, while his mother, perhaps, sat alone by the fireside, grown too shy of her own child to seek his society, and yet wearying, O! how sadly! for those old days of love and unreserve, when they were poor and sorrowful, but always, always in each other's company.

Her position became gradually more and more isolated; she strove to blind herself to the knowledge of it, but could not. First came the shadow, then the harsh fact, and incidents multiplying daily in proof of it. Her husband's brief

revival of passion waned again; he was sometimes cold, sometimes sarcastic, almost always careless and indifferent. He ceased to make any account of her will or wishes, which, it must be allowed, she never obtruded upon him; self-negation was the part which she had voluntarily taken up as her own, and in which he acquiesced as a matter of course. She worshipped him, and he received her worship with a half-complacent, half-contemptuous weariness, that all the while masked a quietly developing process of tyranny. He discouraged her visits to the rectory, and there was no other friendly door open to her. On some frivolous pretence he sent away faithful old Janet Saunders, replacing her by a daughter of Osythe Dobbie, until at last Clara found herself a prisoner by her own hearth, and alone in the midst of home.

A woman of stronger or more vindictive character would have rebelled at once, and have struggled vehemently and continuously against this systematic aggression; but Clara did nothing unless it were that she clenched her bonds by her tame silence when she ought to have protested, if not for her own sake, yet for her child's. I am wrong when I say she did *nothing*; she pleaded *against* herself in her *tyrant's* favour; blamed herself for wearying when she would fain have pleased, and sometimes *against* loathed her

own great beauty which was powerless to keep what it had won. Conscious of the yoke which would yet fret her so grievously, she smiled, looked blithe and happy; flattered, caressed, and studied her indifferent husband, letting Birdy-fute fall further and further apart from her, until by and bye she was forced to say within herself: "I have no one who loves me! no one at all!" And it was not easy to walk gaily over that hollow life, while old Janet's warnings recurred hourly with stinging and truthful bitterness.

At this season she learnt all the particulars of the will under which she inherited the estate of Otterbourne and the rest of her godfather's property; and, despite the struggles of her pride, she was compelled to draw certain cruelly mortifying deductions therefrom. Captain Vescey was as sparing of information to her as he could possibly be, and when she would have inquired further into the settlement and amount of her inheritance, he cut her short by saying, that it was useless to harass her mind with the details of business that she could never understand, and that she must leave the management of everything to him. He took such a lofty stand in the matter, and dispensed with her interference so completely, that, for the moment, she was crushed; but, when the capability of reflection came back to her, she

registered in her own mind a vow, that, at whatever risk, she would keep Birdyfute's fortune entire and unencumbered for him; yet, she trembled to think what power she had given into her husband's hands if he chose to use it; and regretted too late the having rejected the advances of her own people, and so cut herself off from their support

## XIII. 4

ONE morning, about a fortnight after Captain Vescey had found himself under the necessity of letting Clara into the mysteries of her own affairs, he came to her with a slip of written parchment in his hand, and said quite debonairely, "Clara, I want your signature here. It is a mere matter of form; but I might as well have it."

"What is it for? Let me read it first," replied she, stretching out a trembling hand, but trying to feel courageous.

"Nonsense; just put your name here," pointing to the foot of the page. "It is only about those farms at Otterbourne, that I told you were to be sold as soon as I could find a purchaser to give my price."

"But, Marmaduke, they are Birdyfute's, and I don't see why they should be sold," said she, folding her hands.

"They are absolutely *mine*, as what is yours is mine. They are not tied up by the entail; and it is selfish in you to desire to keep all for him. If you were dead to-morrow I should be a beggar."

Clara still hesitated. "Could you not make a deed to have them for your life, and that afterwards they should go back to him?"

"Will you sign or will you not? I can act without your consent if you refuse; but it looks better to consult you about the disposal of property bequeathed to you." Captain Vescey seemed quite indifferent as to what course she adopted; but, after a pause, seeing that she still deliberated, he added, "As you seem bent against compliance, I shall hold myself free to act as I think fit, without going through the formality of taking your opinion in future."

Clara, like most of her sex, was in reality as ignorant as a child in all matters of business. She looked up in her husband's face for a moment or two; and reading there nothing but a sullen unconcern, she took up a pen and affixed her signature to the deed, saying at the same time, "Of course, Marmaduke, I should like you to have a provision in case I die before you; but I think it may be contrived without dismembering Birdyfute's inheritance."

The Captain's countenance lightened, and he replied, "I cannot endure to see your suspicions of me, Clara; do you think I would sacrifice my boy's interests?" Clara did not speak, but she thought the more. Her husband eyed her darkly

for a moment, and then, folding up the deed with a smile of triumph, left her to herself. She had ample time that day for the indulgence of her own painful cogitations. Birdyfute had retreated into the plantations, and Captain Vescey went out with his gun. It came on to rain in the afternoon, and then she hoped the boy would seek her in the house; but he did not. He took refuge in the straw-chamber, and there fell asleep over the travels of Rolando. It was quite dusk when the Captain came in, and the fire was low, or he would have seen a treacherous blush dyeing his wife's face, from chin to brow. She had just been thinking that she would write and bespeak her brother's kindness for her boy, and he startled her in the guilty thought. She had a superstitious fancy that he could read her thoughts, and though, while there was nothing but love to read, she was not afraid of his power, since that morning there had come into her mind a ghastly phalanx of doubts, fears, and foreshadowings, that it would be ill for him to see. Oppression makes hypocrites of the weak, so, dissembling her consternation, Clara turned to her husband with a pleasant greeting, asked what sport he had had, what friends he had met, and testified as much cheerful interest as usual in what he had been doing. He was agreeably surprised; for, since



the difference in the morning, he had prepared himself for a change in her affectionate demeanour. No such change, however, appeared; but this, so far from kindling in him any spark of generous forbearance, only emboldened him at once to initiate a project which had lately taken shape and substance in his mind, and which, he was well aware, his wife would disapprove of.

"Where is Birdyfute?" he enquired, after a searching glance round the room, that failed to detect the boy lurking in his favourite corner. Clara said she did not know; perhaps he might be in the woods, where he had spent the morning. Just then a great plash of wind-driven rain smote with a melancholy sound against the windows, as it reproaching her neglect, and the Captain indulged in a sneer at her anxious maternal solicitude.

"It is well that he is out, for I want to talk to you about him," added he, looking down on the hearth, and avoiding his wife's eyes. "The lad is becoming sullen and untractable, and I think of sending him off to school."

"O! no, Marmaduke; he will do very well with Mr. Bohun for a year or two, and then we can consider about it," replied Clara, shivering internally, yet speaking in a careless manner,

as if the subject were not worth a second thought. "Perhaps when we leave Hawksview, which I suppose we must soon do, we shall go within reach of some school."

"But I have no intention of leaving Hawksview. It suits me very well in most respects; and when I want change, London or Paris is the place. I shall send Birdyfute either to Belgium or Germany, I have not decided which."

Clara bravely passed the matter over, dreading to strengthen by opposition what she would not entertain as fact. "But what will become of Otterbourne if we stay here?" she asked. "It is a beautiful old place. I was once there when I was a girl." It was just before her luckless marriage, and she would have alluded to it; but seeing his louring look at her she was silent.

"Otterbourne is just let to an excellent tenant," was his careless reply to her question.

Clara's colour rose loftily to her brow. "I ought to have been consulted, Marmaduke," said she, in a proud, hurt tone. "Why should we live in this miserable cottage when that beautiful place is ours? I would much rather be at Otterbourne than here."

"You did not speak of Hawksview as a 'miserable cottage' a few weeks ago," rejoined

her husband; and without vouchsafing her a single word of explanation, he got up and went away to dress for dinner.

Clara shuddered as if a sleety shower had fallen on her burning heart, and a few tears of passion oozed from her reluctant eyes; but she dashed them away quickly as Birdyfute came into the room. It was some comfort to draw him to her arms, and not be repulsed. The boy heard from her voice, and saw from her flushed cheeks, that something ailed her, and asked what it was. She kissed him, and played with his curls in an eager, half-conscious way, and then whispered, "O! Birdyfute, you love me, don't you?" but as the Captain's step was heard approaching, she pushed him away, and bade him hush. Birdyfute went and hid himself behind the curtains which were drawn over the windows, and stayed there until his father called sharply to ask why he slunk away as if he were afraid of being seen. He then came forth reluctantly, and went to his mother's side, as if for their mutual protection. The Captain was in a species of savage rage, which he kept down with difficulty. "What are you going to conspire about now?" he demanded, angrily. Neither made any reply; but Clara's heart began to beat very fast. She had a presentiment of what was going to

happen, and involuntarily twined her arm about her boy's neck, while Birdyfute's face crimsoned, and his eyes glittered fiercely.

"Why do you look like that?" cried his father. "Come here!"

Clara tightened her hold, and pleaded, "No, dear Marmaduke, no! *he* has done nothing wrong!" but her husband clutched the lad's arm, dragged him from her, and gave him a blow that struck him to the ground. For a second the child lay stunned—then, quick as lightning, he sprang up, rushed at his father, and with all his little might, struck him on the face. His mother shrieked in terrified entreaty to stop him; but the Captain laughed sarcastically, and holding him off, said: "You will be a brave man some day, Birdyfute; but I must teach you filial respect meanwhile, I find;" and then he dragged him struggling into the hall, and having found his horsewhip, administered a terrible chastisement. Every stripe seemed to cut into Clara's tender flesh; but Birdyfute never uttered a cry or shed a tear; and when his father flung him violently away, he turned round with a blazing glance, and said, "I wish, O! I wish the sea had drowned you before you came home!"

The Captain seemed for an instant abashed; he laughed uneasily, and then bade him get out

of his sight. Birdyfute looked extremely inclined to spring again, but his mother wound her arms round him and held him fast, though he struggled to get free, while her husband went into the parlour, dashing to the door. Clara then induced the child to come away to his room, and having locked themselves in, she stayed there in the dark, alternately crying over him and trying to soothe him. The Captain came up by and bye, and told her to go down stairs; but she refused, and finding the door fastened, he retreated, muttering angrily. As for poor Birdyfute, his violence both shocked and frightened her; she had never suspected such a chaos of untamed passions in the breast of her boy as that first fatal blow had roused. Every nerve in his body seemed to tingle with rage: "I hate my father!" said he, vehemently; "I hate him! If it were not for you, mother, I would go back to Cliffend and work in the quarries rather than stay here." She prayed him not to talk so wildly, and promised to take care of him. "But you cannot," was his answer; "he does not love either of us. Why did you let Janet go? He would not have struck me if she had been here. She knew what he was, and warned you, mother."

The implied reproach was very cutting, but Clara felt it was not undeserved. She had ne-

glected to assert her authority for her child hitherto, and it was but natural that he should cease to trust her. She said nothing, but sat listening to the dreary rain, and weeping tears as dreary. As Birdyfute's rage cooled, he began to think of her, and a little to reproach himself for having been unkind; but he did not know how to express the strange, uncomfortable feeling; and when Osythe presently arrived with his supper, and a message that his mother was to go down to the Captain immediately, he let her depart, and afterwards cried himself to sleep for very shame and pity. Clara went into her husband's presence proud and full of resentment. "It was very noble to revenge yourself on poor Birdyfute, because I had vexed you, was it not, Marmaduke?" said she, with tears of anger and contempt brimming her eyes.

He was rather ashamed of what he had done, and attempted a palliation of it; but he had dropped the mask now, and she saw him as he was—a grasping, unscrupulous, strong-handed, cruel tyrant, and she told him so, with bitter defiance. Her blood was boiling then, and bubbled over in irretrievable words. When it cooled, she saw that her policy had been wrong. Craft would have served her better than violence; but she had declared war, and war she was to have.

## XIV.

BIRDYFUTE rode down to the rectory the following morning earlier than usual. He did not wait for breakfast; but having begged a crust of bread from Osythe, started without seeing either his father or mother. Clara from her window watched him go down the hill, and, coward-like, was glad that the meeting between her husband and son should be deferred another hour or two. After breakfast, the Captain had his horse brought round; and telling her not to expect him home until the morrow, he rode off towards Boscombe. Birdyfute was in the midst of his lessons, which were but ill done that day, and the curate was striving to make him comprehend some difficult point, when Agnes opened the study door, and said, "Roger, you are wanted." Out in the hall she told him that Captain Vescey was come, and wished to see him; and entering the drawing-room, he found his visitor standing on the rug, with his back to the fire, and seeming to make the whole room dark with his gloomy presence.

"Good morning, Mr. Bohun. Where is my son? I am come to take him from you," said he,

abruptly; and added, as the curate waited silently further explanation, "You see the lad is getting ruined at home; so I think it well to transfer him to Mr. Warrender, at Boothe, until Christmas, when I can take him abroad."

"To Mr. Warrender? He has the reputation of being extremely severe," observed Agnes, who had re-entered and heard the announcement. "I would not let him have a child of mine in his power on any account."

"Birdyfute requires a strong hand over him just now, and that is the reason I have selected Mr. Warrender," replied the Captain loftily. "He will soon bring him to his senses. I find him headstrong and masterful beyond endurance, and he must be broken in."

Agnes coloured, and would have spoken again; but Roger warned her by a glance not to interfere, though he said himself, that he had liked Birdyfute because his temper was so generous and tractable, at the same time that he was full of boyish spirits and intelligence. To this remark the visitor offered no reply; and the child being brought in, was told his destination. He flushed, and bit his lip, and turned half round to Agnes, as if to claim her protection; but, immediately recovering himself, he said, "Very well," and stood firm. His father bade him go and bring



his pony from the stable, and having shaken hands with Roger, and kissed Agnes, he obeyed. The Captain followed close upon his heels, as if suspicious that he might try to give him the slip, and being mounted, they rode away at a trot.

It was a dull morning, in the beginning of November, and although it did not rain, the thick dim mist was scarcely less penetrating. The trees dropped their few leaves into the standing pools left by last night's storm, and the melancholy sob of the wind over the moors breathed like the voice of winter desolation. It was a long ride by a dreary road across Blore Heath; up there the rich slopes of Astondale could not be seen, and few more lonely spots could be found anywhere than this barren, desolate track. For several miles neither the Captain nor his son uttered a word; but at last Birdyfute found courage to say, "Will you let somebody feed Random?" Random was the young setter before named. "Yes," replied his father, and they both relapsed into silence. In passing through a little village they heard the clock of the church strike one, and that reminded Birdyfute that his mother would perhaps be coming down Boscombe lane to meet him, if she did not know where he was being taken, which he strongly suspected. At last he asked the ques-

tion bluntly, "Does my mother know what you are going to do with me?" to which his father replied with equal plainness, "No, she does not" The boy gulped down a great sob; and in the eyes that he kept steadily turned aside the rest of the way, there rose, whether he would or no, the hottest tears. He was but a child—a child nurtured softly next to his mother's heart, and he knew that he was taken from her for no good cause, but only to punish her through him. "Oh! when I am a man, then I will take care of her!" thought he; for in his unhappiness he remembered how fondly she had loved him when they were only two, and his father was still to be prayed for as one unknown.

It was the market-day at Boothe; but when they rode into the town about three o'clock, the bustle was nearly over, and the country people dispersed. Mr. Warrendar's house was one of the largest in the place, but it looked almost like a jail or an asylum with its dark painted shutters, and iron bars to the upper windows. "You will have to fight your way here, I can tell you," said Captain Vescey to his son as they rode up to the door. Birdyfute glanced up and down the front of the dreary prison-house, and thought of Cliffend with its freedom and quiet affection,

and made answer with a savage earnestness that caused his father to laugh heartily. "And I will fight it! If anybody strikes me, I strike back." A monitory touch on the cheek with the Captain's whip silenced him, as the great door creaked open. It did not seem to have turned on its hinges for a week, and probably had not, as Mr. Warrender's pupils went in and out by the play-ground entrance at the back of the building. Mr. Warrender, the servant said, was at home, and would see them immediately; and, they were conducted to the chilly, fireless, "company parlour," to wait his appearance. He came at length, a frousy man, wearing a limp white neckcloth, and ill-fitting rusty black clothes. His countenance was harsh; but he had an obsequious untiring smile stereotyped upon his pendulous lip, while his voice wavered unsteadily between a growl and a croak. He had not a single personal point to bespeak confidence, and little Birdyfute immediately conceived a violent repugnance to him.

Captain Vescey's business needed little explanation. He wished to place a pupil under Mr. Warrender's charge, and there he was.

"A dependant relative?" suggested the school-master, mildly interested.

"By no means. He is my only son—heir to Hawkswiew, Otterbourne, and other property," replied the Captain, satirically.

Mr. Warrender's amazed expression asked almost as plainly as words could have done, "Then, why do you bring him here?" and the visitor replied to it, "He is rather turbulent and rebellious at home; but I am sure he will soon become amenable to your well known discipline."

The schoolmaster glanced at his new pupil, and mentally registered a vow that never should profane ferule of his descend on shoulders that were heir to such estates. "I don't want any nonsensical distinctions between him and his schoolmates," said the Captain, plainly. "Let him battle his way with the rest—he will be all the better for it." Mr. Warrender acquiesced, with a pious quotation, and promised to be quite impartial; and then a few questions relative to terms having been asked and answered, Captain Vescey shook his son by the hand, gave him a sentence or two of advice, and took his departure. Birdyfute's clothes were to be sent by the carrier the next week; and, meanwhile, Mr. Warrender undertook to supply his wants: the pet pony was to stay at Boothe to be sold.

Birdyfute went to one of the windows to

watch his father ride away, and as soon as he was out of sight, he addressed himself to the conditions of the new life, by announcing to Mr. Warrendar that he had had no dinner, and was hungry. Perhaps such an accost had never before been received by that gentleman during the long course of his scholastic experience. He did not, however, betray his astonishment; but, leaving the new pupil in the company parlour alone, sought his wife—an unpalatable looking counterpart of himself—and bade her give certain culinary delicacies that were reserved for their own table to that favoured young gentleman. To bespeak her kindness, he told her to what lofty destinies Birdyfute was born; and she, being of the same creeping, obsequious character as her husband, readily complied with his wishes. While the boy ate his dinner, she sat by, and encouraged him with fulsome flatteries; but so unresponsive was he, that she afterwards suggested to Mr. Warrendar that if he had not been what he was, his pride would want a good deal of beating out of him.

At Hawksview, Clara passed a most dreary day. She was not much surprised that Birdyfute should not have come home at noon; but when daylight waned, she grew uneasy, and though a drizzling rain was falling, she clad herself to go

down to the rectory and bring him back. Arrived there, she found Agnes alone, and was apprized in a few words of what had happened. She had been far from anticipating such prompt measures on her husband's part, and the shock almost crushed her. Without reflection, she began to reveal to Agnes the persecutions she endured and foresaw; and asked wildly, could nobody interfere between the child and his father? Agnes said it was monstrous injustice to send the boy to Mr. Warrender's school, where his companions were of the meanest class, and the education of the worst, letting alone the severity of the discipline there practised. As for the iniquity and cruelty of removing him secretly from his mother—that she thought beyond comment.

“But what must I do—where must I turn?” exclaimed Clara, helplessly, “I have no friend, anywhere, and now I begin to see that my husband is my worst enemy. Who will help us?” Agnes promised that Roger should remonstrate with Captain Vescey; and suggested that, perhaps, when the affair became generally known, he would find himself so strongly condemned by public opinion, as to undo what he had done. Clara shook her head, and began to weep bitterly, and in the midst of her paroxysm

the curate came in. She immediately explained her errand, and solicited his advice, which he frankly gave.

“Do nothing rashly,” said he. “Mr. Warrendar knows his own interests too well; and as he is only to remain at Boothe till Christmas, there will be little or no harm done. After that, Captain Vescey spoke of sending him to school abroad. Do not oppose his design, but take the pain of separation as chiefly your own. Birdyfute will be better off than he would be under a capricious tyranny at home. Indeed, it is the motive and the manner which make the sole distinction between his case and others. Lads get on very happily at foreign schools. I was at Maunheim myself for three years. If I may presume to offer my own opinion, I should say that it will be your best policy to let the little fellow go peaceably.”

“But is it not barbarous in his father to act as he has done, Roger?” cried Agnes, who, for once, thought her husband too cold and unsympathizing in Clara’s misery. The curate made a reply to the effect that, when any person is all-powerful over the fate of another, it is more politic to conciliate than to defy. The poor wife understood him, and said bitterly—

“You mean I must submit and be still! Ah!

it is easy to advise that; but if you knew what Birdyfute is to me——”

“You must have parted with him soon under any circumstances. He would have to go to school at home, if not abroad; and, as he has already elected to enter the army, the early and thorough acquisition of modern languages will be a positive advantage to him in his profession. Every mother must bear these pangs of parting from her children.” That was the light in which Roger Bohun chose to put the matter. Passion, ill-treatment, hidden motives he waived altogether. It was good for Birdyfute to go: it was imperative on his mother not to oppose his going.

“If I were you I would do as Roger says,” whispered Agnes; “you know there will be holidays, and letters, and then as he grows up you will not need to fear for him; you can make him quite independent of his father.” But Clara thought of herself, and of how lonely she should be—how unprotected, when Birdyfute was gone; and she felt as if the curate and his wife were quite incapable of entering into her position, though both of them felt for her much more acutely than it seemed judicious to express. “Oh!” cried Agnes, when she was gone, “he is a cruel, wicked tyrant—worse even than I



anticipated!" and Roger acquiesced this time without reserve.

Captain Vescey did not return to Hawksview on the morrow, as he had intimated to Clara was his intention; he travelled southwards, and a few days after wrote from London apprizing her of what he had done, and bidding her reconcile herself as best she could to the loss of her child's society. She carried the letter down to the rectory, and would have read it to Agnes, but she, with a twinge of self-reproach at the unkindness in act, if not in spirit, declined the confidence. Clara was her senior by several years, but Agnes had the clearer and firmer judgment. Roger also had prompted this course of conduct.

"Why will you not listen to me? I thought I had found a friend," said Clara, piteously.

"And so you have, dear," replied Agnes, with eager warmth; "but do not take even me into the secrets of your home; it will not lighten your sorrows to blazen them to the world, and when brighter days come you will regret it if you do."

"Brighter days! There will be no more bright days for me. Are you mocking me?"

"O! no, I feel for you most deeply. We will go over, Roger and I, and see Birdyfute, and

bring you word how he looks. Why should you not go too?"

"I am forbidden. But, what do I gain by obeying my husband, or what do I lose by disobeying him? I will go."

. Agnes was sorry now that she had suggested the expedition, and endeavoured to waive it. "There are but six weeks, and then he will come home for his holidays," said she. "Your going might unsettle the poor child: write instead."

"But it will do me good to see him; there is time to-day, and I will start at once. I can hire a light cart at the Inn, and I will—yes, I *will* bring him home again. I feel that I have a far, far better right to him than his father has." This sudden thought diverted her grief for a moment; but Agnes warned her gravely against venturing on so hazardous a step.

"Do consider that Captain Vescey has unlimited power over his son, let the *right* be whose it may," she urged. "Your husband might again remove him, and leave you in ignorance of where he had taken him to. At all events, now you know that he is within reach; you could go to him in the course of a few hours if he were ill, which might not be the case elsewhere."

"You don't know how it would comfort me to

see him even for five minutes. Birdyfute and I have not been such good friends lately as we once were," replied Clara, mournfully. "I should like to tell him his mother does not forget him."

"Suppose we consult Roger. I am sure he will know best—don't you think so," suggested Agnes. "Let us ask him."

But the curate was not at home, so his advice could not be had, and the idea of delighting her eyes with a sight of the child had taken such strong possession of her imagination, that Clara could not be prevailed on to delay its execution. She set off in haste to the Inn, and Agnes presently saw her driven past in the spring cart which took the landlord to market. Arrived at Mr. Warrender's, she was shown into the "company parlour," where, after keeping her waiting nearly an hour, the schoolmaster came to her, himself, and begged to know her business. She said she desired to see her child who had been brought there unknown to her, and against her wishes. Without being positively insolent, Mr. Warrender explained, that he had that morning received a letter from the boy's father, enjoining him strictly to prevent any such interview if it were attempted; and that he held himself bound to adhere to Captain Vescey's injunctions. This cruel indignity roused Clara's pride to passion.

She protested vehemently against the wicked persecution of debarring a young child from his mother's presence, declared that see him she would, and at last, weakened by her violent emotions, tortured in her love and her pride, and bitterly disappointed, she gave way to tears. Mr. Warrender was, however, much too keenly alive to his own interests to be moved to compliance by weeping; and, at length, finding him impervious to threats, bribes, and entreaties, the unhappy mother was compelled to leave the house. Adam Brown, at the Inn, told it afterwards in the village, that as he drove her home, she behaved like a crazed woman, laughing one minute, and crying the next; and that as they passed Blore Pool she tried to spring out of the cart and get away, with the intention as he believed of throwing herself into the water.

After this public scandal, the whole countryside entered into the quarrel, and Captain Vescey's barbarous treatment of his wife and child was the theme of every tongue. Squire Brough gave it as his opinion, that the Captain had better keep clear of Astondale for the future, as everybody was prepared to give him the cold shoulder. Clara met with sympathy enough, though sometimes even pity was tinged with contempt. She poured the story of her griefs and her wrongs

into every ear that was ready to listen to it, until some few were, perhaps, inclined to find excuses for her husband's ill-treatment in her weakness. In Agnes and Roger she had two constant friends and supporters; but even they could do little for one who was daily undermining her own cause, and destroying the respect which attends misfortunes borne with dignity and fortitude, by her unceasing clamour. Captain Vescey did not come back to check by his presence the spreading notoriety of his ill-conduct; his wife heard from him occasionally, but she could not longer be deceived by his fulsome expressions of attachment. The time, he said, was long that kept him from her; but he had business in hand which could not be got through so quickly as he desired. Whenever he dilated upon his feelings towards her, the letter invariably wound up with an intimation that he was going to appropriate such a sum from the Otterbourne rents, or that he intended to seek a more profitable investment for such and such stock, but that he would give her fuller details when they met. Clara tried to bribe him to withdraw the restrictions he had laid on her and Birdyfute; but, assuming a virtuous indignation, he bade her understand that he acted for his son's good in what he had done; and as for their income, he did not acknowledge her power either to give

or withhold whatever he chose to apply to his own purposes. Every such letter, and every such intimation, rendered Clara for a time furious, and she replied in the most unconciliatory spirit. She even proposed a second separation; but this Captain Vescey decidedly refused, saying that he had no quarrel against her; that though she was passionate, headstrong, and wilful, he did not despair of her awakening presently to a submissive sense of her duty. He professed even to count upon her *love* for him—upon a love which was turned almost to hate—and reminded her of the unalterable nature of the tie that united them, as if he himself had ever respected its sacredness longer than selfish passion prompted him. His sanctimonious pretences galled her more than all, for they seemed to place her in the wrong, and him in the lofty position of a righteous husband burdened with a most contrary wife. Clara was determined that hers should be no patient silent martyrdom. The vehemence of conscious weakness is always noisy, and hers proved no exception to the rule. She had been a tender, loving woman once; those ten long years of desertion were borne not ill, but they had changed her; the brief delusion she had rushed into on her husband's return was like the soft delirium of the opium eater, and the awakening from it was as

pregnant with frightful torments of mind and body.

Captain Vescey, while taking his pleasure in London, had no suspicion of the fierce onslaught that was being made on his character at home. He had made up his mind that he had to deal with a slave who could be cajoled one day and coerced another, according to his good or ill will; and he had almost decided upon letting Birdyfute go home for his holidays, when one of her most violent letters reached him, and he changed his intention. He would not be driven, he resolved, and he immediately wrote to Mr. Warrender, bidding him retain the boy at his house until he claimed him in person; having done which, that the point and efficacy of the punishment might not be lost, he sent Clara word by what means she had deprived herself of the child's company at Christmas. At this time she made a second attempt to see him by going to Boothe and hanging about the school all day, but again without success.

## XV.

WHEN Captain Vescey warned his son that he would have to fight his way at school, he used no mere figure of speech. Birdyfute had literally to fight his way, and he fought it manfully. Mr. Warrender's favouritism raised him up a host of enemies amongst the rude race into which he was suddenly plunged, and there scarcely passed a day during which he had not to engage in one or more pitched battles, in which he was sometimes victorious and sometimes beaten. He had not time to feel miserable or to pine after home, for he was in a perpetual state of friction and excitement that developed in him a wholesome and hardy but not unnatural pugnacity. There was no great scholarship amongst the rabble rout of his companions, and the daily tasks exacted were not onerous: the food was coarse but abundant, and stick was abundant also, though Birdyfute escaped its degrading infliction; still there was nothing either to educate or maintain self-respect, but everything to foster the lower passions. As in Birdyfute's case, if a lad's parents were well off in the world, or he



had a tribe of young brothers at home, his due allowance of punishment was portioned amongst his less lucky comrades, and so invariable was this rule that, by the amount of flogging a boy received, his social status might be very nicely calculated. Birdyfute soon penetrated this mystery of discipline; but so far from his own impunity inclining him favourably towards his virtuous preceptor, it only set him the more against him. And when a truce with his fellows was pending, he not unfrequently employed it in devising some droll trick to be played off upon the master in school. His ready wit, his frank audacity, and his courage would in time have made him the little king of this community; but the Christmas holidays came, the lads dispersed and his good genius decreed that he should see them no more. Birdyfute watched one departure after another, secretly longing for his own turn; but finding that it did not arrive he asked Mr. Warrender when he was to go home, and received for answer that it was his father's wish he should stay at Boothe until he came for him. Birdyfute heard this announcement with admirable coolness, and went off to the playground to join those who were in a similar predicament to himself, while Mrs. Warrender rated her husband for allowing himself

to be turned into a jailor, without first ascertaining at what rate of wages he was to hold the honourable post.

Birdyfute was not like the same boy who had left his mother's pining arms only a few weeks ago; he had not run the gauntlet of a great ill-conducted school for nothing; he was prompt with his fists on the smallest occasion; his tears had retreated further from his eyes, and his wits were in good working order. No lad was oftener out of bounds and more rarely detected in that delinquency; and now, on getting free of Mr. Warrendar's presence, after learning his fate for the holidays, he made use of his speed and agility to excellent purpose. He was over the low part of the play-ground wall and half way across Blore Heath long before it was discovered that he had run away from school. It was a stinging cold day, and early in the afternoon the snow began to fall, but manfully forward marched the undaunted Birdyfute. He took many a good laugh to himself at thinking what would be the dismay of Mr. and Mrs. Warrendar when his flight was discovered at tea-time; and then he began to consider about his mother, and whether she would be glad to have him home or not, and to congratulate himself that his father was safe in London.

Agnes Bohun—at the nursery window with baby Mona watching the old woman up in the sky plucking her geese, as the saying for a snow-storm is amongst the juveniles—saw a little dark figure toiling over the hill, and as he came nearer recognised Birdyfute. She uttered a cry of surprise and pleasure that brought Roger from his dressing-room to see what was the matter.

“Look at that brave good boy, I do love him, Roger!” exclaimed she, and the curate himself was touched. Agnes rapped on the glass and the child looked up, triumphantly waving his cap. They seemed so to understand each other—heart spoke to heart as it were.

“The back’s made for the burden,” remarked nurse Beste, with homely philosophy, as the bonny brown face disappeared; “that bairn has gotten a rare heavy one, but he’s not likely to die under it, God bless him!” and so everybody thought.

When Clara came back to Hawkview, Aston-dale and her life both wore a garb of sunshiny beauty; but now they were dressed alike in palest winter weeds. She had been writing a long letter of mingled complaints and threats to her husband, and as the afternoon darkened she laid down her pen and sought the window.

Twilight was creeping slowly out of the woods and clouding the crisp whiteness of the earth. All was very still, not a twig stirred. Sometimes, but very rarely, an imperceptible motion in the atmosphere shook down a miniature snow-shower from an overladen branch; a bird winged its swift way to the shining scarlet holly berries in the hedge, and a faint tinkling of Boscombe church bells floated up the valley, softly unreal as the echoes of Christmas bells chimed long ago. The moon rose early, and in the blue ether the stars came out one by one until the distance was lost in shimmering frosty haze, and the great cedars on the terrace stood out like phantom guardians of the night. The ash-logs and fir-cones crackled and blazed cheerfully in the grate. On the hearth lay stretched asleep Random who had been taken into great favour since Birdyfute went away; and the warm crimson hangings and furniture of the room glowed pleasantly in the firelight. Suddenly a distant whistle was heard, Random pricked up his ears, listened, rose from the rug, shook himself, and with a quick joyous bark ran to the door which Clara opened for him, and away he went tearing through the deep snow and barking vociferously. Soon he returned, bounded over the gate as he had done in leaving the garden, and then stood

still, his head on one side; and flourishing his tail with delight and impatience. Clara went to call him in out of the cold, and just as she got to the porch weary little Birdyfute appeared at the gate. "Here I am, mother," cried he; "I was determined they should not keep me." Clara clasped him in her arms, and half tearful, half laughing, kissed his frosty cheeks again and again, asking, "How did you come my darling?"

"Walked all the way, mother. I've run away from school!" was the sturdy reply.

"My boy! you might have been lost in the snow on that dreadful moor. I am glad; but, love, what will your father say?"

"If you are glad I don't care what he says. I am never going to obey him again, that I do know," Birdyfute announced; and being come into the warm bright parlour, he let his mother seat him in her own chair by the fire, and kneeling before him, chafe his stiffened hands, while the melting snow dripped from his clothing in tiny rills.

"Mr. Warrender will write to your father, Birdyfute; what shall we do by and bye?" said Clara, whose joy was poisoned by the thought.

"Never mind if he does, mother—I don't. I shall have to go back I suppose, but I am here now;" and not to spoil his enjoyment she tried

not to see the skeleton in the back ground, and to be as gay as he was. They even had a laugh together, and more than one, for Osythe insisted on Birdyfute's changing into some dry clothes, and, when he came down in them, they were found to be half way up between his ankles and knees, while his jacket sleeves could not by any arts of persuasion be brought within many inches of his wrists. Clara said she should henceforward always love a scarecrow for his sake, he was so like one; and he told her that nearly all Mr. Warrendar's boys wore their things until they were thus picturesquely outgrown. Osythe made some festive preparations for tea, and altogether it was the happiest night they had since they came to Hawkview. Birdyfute was in fluent spirits, and related his experience at Boothe with a gusto and fun that almost infected his mother. "And you were not miserable then?" said she amazed.

"O! no, not after the first day. What good yule cake this is, mother."

"I am glad you like it, dear, and Osythe will be glad too—she is very kind now to me. Did they give you enough to eat, Birdyfute?"

"Yes; porridge and clap-cake. Mother, do you know what 'toadinyho' is?"

"No, love; what a very disagreeable name! Is it something to eat?"

"Yes; it is tough beef baked in stick-jaw. And there was Saturday's dinner, which was all the scraps and scrapings minced up, and seasoned with Fluffy's old boots and leather caps."

"And who was Fluffy, dear?"

"Old Warrendar himself. He is always stuck over with bits of feather and down, as if he went to bed in his clothes. You should see him, mother."

"I have seen him, Birdyfute—seen him twice;" and then she detailed her two ineffectual visits to Boothe, which made the boy explode with passion.

"If I had only known, darling mother, I would have come before this," cried he. "Why did you not give tongue? Fluffy could not have kept me in if I had heard you were there. Do you know what I am going to do when I am a man?"

"Something very desperate from your face, Birdyfute; what is it?"

"I am going to buy the biggest horsewhip that can be had for money, and to flog old Fluffy round Boothe with it." This terrific resolve being communicated with impressive sternness, Birdyfute again addressed himself to Osythe's excellent yule cakes, which disappeared before him like leaves before locusts. Clara said it did

her good to see him; and while watching his hearty boyish enjoyment she forgot her own cares.

"Do you like being at school among so many people?" she asked him, and he replied, yes, they often had great fun. "But if your father should want to send you a long way off, where you would learn foreign languages that might help you when you are a soldier, would you like that?"

"Yes; Wellington was at school at Angers, and Napoleon was at Brienne, where they played at sieges and battles; the fellows at old Fluffy's never would, though I tried them. You shall see what a fortification I'll make with snow to-morrow, mother; and you and old Osythe and Random may besiege me; but I'm sure you'll not be able to take it."

Birdyfute certainly had fewer qualms of conscience than ever irked runaway school boy before. If he had come home in the most legitimate and orthodox manner possible, he could not have enjoyed more frankly and liberally the charms of freedom. Clara regarded him with mingled pleasure and pain; never more would he be her clinging nestling pet; he would be in time, what was far better, a strong-hearted protector both to himself and her; one who would



neither be cowed by bravado nor broken by persecution.

If only there had been no *to-morrow*? But as Clara and Birdyfute were walking to and fro upon the terrace in the afternoon, Captain Vescey rode in at the gate. "Ah! an unexpected pleasure!" cried he, bowing satirically to his son.

Clara ran hastily up to him, and keeping by his horse's side to the door, whispered in accents of entreaty, "Don't be angry with him, Marmaduke, it was my fault." But Birdyfute heard her, and interrupted, "No, mother, it was not; I came of my own accord."

His father smiled grimly. "Do you know what is the customary reward of runaway school-boys?" asked he.

"A good threshing, I suppose," was the undaunted reply.

"Exactly so. You expected it—well, I won't disappoint you," and the Captain dismounted. "You had better go away," added he, turning to Clara, who clung to his arm and attempted to take away his whip. "I promise you it shall be a good one!"

"No, no, Marmaduke, do forgive him this time, only this time," supplicated she, without loosening her hold; he tried to untwist her

fingers, but failed, and they went into the parlour, the lad following close behind.

"I must say you are very bold, sir," said his father, looking at him over his shoulder. Birdyfute laughed.

"You may flog me if you like, it is over in five minutes. I have plenty of it at old Fluffy's, and don't care," said he, carelessly.

"You are a thorough bred Vescey! I never minded a threshing myself. You have not quite spoilt him, Clara." This was said with a genial air, but with fell purpose, notwithstanding. For an instant, thinking that he had relented, his wife relaxed her hold, when he immediately seized his son and gave him in full measure the meed of runaway school-boys.

Birdyfute bore the infliction courageously; and as soon as it ceased said, "There, mother, don't cry, it is over already." Then facing sharply round upon his father, he added, "You are more spiteful and cowardly than bully Slee at old Fluffy's!" Having vented which expression of filial respect and affection, he shook himself, and looked as if nothing had happened. The Captain made as though he did not hear; but the words burning his face as if an equal had struck him, and old Osythe, meeting him on the stairs with the remark that he had made "a bonny beginning,"

did not contribute to compose him. He did feel a very mean, despicable personage indeed, and not caring to encounter Clara or Birdyfute again just then, he bade Osythe tell his groom to saddle him a second horse that he might ride over to Boscombe to see Squire Brough.

"You may spare yourself the trouble, master," the old woman informed him; "for there's not a door from one end o' Astondale to the other but what is shut against you. Folks ha' talked sin' you went awa'."

"Talked!" cried he, with the addition of an oath; "and what have the meddlesome fools found to say about me?"

"Only the truth, master. They say your wife has thousands upon thousands to her fortune, and you keep her in a poor bit of a cottage, and send her son to school wi' all the riff-raff o' the countryside, while you take her money and spend it or hoard it for yourself. You ha' fine carriages and horses, and maybe somewhat more away in London, while she rides about the country in a spring-cart, and your son tramps over the moors nine lang miles through the snow to see her, and you flog him for it—that's what folk say, and I think myself they're in the right of it."

Captain Vescey did not care to listen to any more home-truths of this nature, so he bade

Osythe go about her business, and shut himself up in his dressing-room. He was taken entirely by surprise, and felt uncomfortably that it might become dangerous to continue his oppressions, if his wife had a party in her favour. After all, her life was of incalculable value to him. It was short-sighted to waste it in anxiety and misery when he could so easily make her contented. After a brief cogitation, he re-entered the parlour where Birdyfuse and his mother were. Neither took the slightest notice of his entrance; and assuming a gay, debonnaire tone and manner, he presently said, "You have had your due, my son, now we will be friends, if you please. Come and shake hands." Clara whispered him to go; but the lad was less forgiving, and would not. "Be it as you will!" said the Captain, coolly. "Clara, I have a world of business to talk over with you when you are at liberty to listen. I have just come from Otterbourne, and find all the place is going to rack and ruin under its present tenants; we must make a change of some kind. What do you say to our going to live there ourselves?"

"Are you in earnest, Marmaduke?" asked Clara, bewildered by this unlooked for gleam of good humour and good sense.

“Certainly. Birdyfute let your mother’s hand go. Come to the fireside, Clara, and let the curtains be closed.” She obeyed reluctantly; and as she passed her husband’s chair he put his arm round her, and whispered, “You must not quarrel with me. That boy shall be brought to reason. It is necessary for his own good; but if it pains you, we will not speak of it any more now.”

“Yes, we will, Marmaduke. It is far more to me than going to Otterbourne;” replied she, with trembling resolution. “Birdyfute likes school. Mr. Bohun says it will be beneficial to send him abroad, and I am glad that he should go. I can bear to part with him altogether; but to see him the object of a cruel capricious tyranny at home would kill me.” Captain Vescey was quite taken aback by this address, and began to swear and bluster at what he called his wife’s insolence. “You will not frighten me, Marmaduke, I know you now;” rejoined she, white, but determined. “If you will keep terms with me, I will do the same by you; but Birdyfute shall *not* suffer any more either by your hardness, or my folly. Seek a school fit for him, and he shall go away to be out of your power; and you may take me to Otterbourne or imprison me here just as you

prefer. While he is safe, I defy you to make me suffer." And twining her arm round her child, she drew him away from the room.

Captain Vescey had not anticipated this demonstration of feeling on his wife's part, and it took him several days to recover from it. It unpleasantly suggested that he had forfeited the only hold over her by which a woman can be effectually guided—namely, her love; and he would have been extremely glad to retrace a few lost steps, could he have done so with dignity. If he had forgiven Birdyfute at her entreaties, it would have been a great gain in influence to him; but that last act of cruelty had taught her that she had nothing to expect from his forbearance or manly feeling. This was not, however, the view he took of his position. The information that Osythe had given him touching the general sentiments on his conduct, made him suspect that Clara had found friends, whose counsels endowed her with a factitious strength, which would fail her when their support was withdrawn; and this he resolved it should speedily be by her removal out of their sphere. The averted or unfriendly faces that he met in the hunting-field the first time he made his appearance there after his return only quickened his proceedings, and he intimated

to Clara that they were to leave Hawksview immediately.

During the last week of the old year Boscombe and the neighbourhood talked of little else but the departure of the Vesceys. Birdyfute was down at the rectory daily; and he told Agnes that he was going to Germany, and that his mother would live at Otterbourne. He seemed in high spirits, and never breathed a word of complaint against his father—never alluded to him by name at all. It was considered very mysterious that Clara, after her husband's arrival, did not appear at church or elsewhere. Some said she was ill, others that she was kept in rigorous imprisonment; but the fact was the same in either case. Nobody saw her; she paid no farewell visits, and even Agnes, who went up to bid her good bye, was not admitted. The exact day of their departure was not known at the time, and Agnes only guessed by the cessation of Birdyfute's visits. Osythe Dobbie stayed in charge of Hawksview; and when the family had been gone a month, the old house put on again its former look of haunted desolation, while the events of the last six months receded into the romantic mists of things bye-past. Agnes, in reverting to them, would sometimes remark that they had the

unreal complexion of a dream or a play, rather than the sharp significance of passages in a life drama in which she had taken a part, and wonder whether the changes and chances of the world would ever again bring her into communication with the actors therein. Vague wishes predicted that they would. .



## Part the Second.

### I.

MISS SAGE BOOTY, the perpetual thorn in the flesh to Boscombe curates, has been already alluded to as persecuting the Honorable and Reverend Roger Bohun with all her might and main, from the very first week of his coming to the rectory ; but Roger had given his hostages to fortune, and it behoved him to keep the respectable maintenance he had acquired ; so, though it was a sore trial to his masculine patience, he bore her stings with the fortitude of a martyr, until, after six months were fairly over, there came a lull, as of vexed and wearied astonishment on the part of the enemy, who, seeing that Roger Bohun was not to be ousted by the same means as had driven his predecessors to a prompt retreat, suddenly changed her tactics, and insisted on being allowed to patronise him. She invited him and Agnes to dine at the Moat house, and told her friends confidentially that she was trying to form the poor interesting young things, who were more

ignorant and inexperienced than any body would imagine, who had not made human nature their study as she had done. Some people, who believed in Miss Sage Booty as an infallible rural Pope, followed her modest example, and offered Agnes receipts, patterns, and advice of an elementary character, until they were compelled to see that, girl as she was, she had more sense, energy, and cleverness than had ever been discovered in a Boscombe curate's wife before; and this conclusion arrived at, she became quite a popular person.

In the midst of this golden time, there came into the world at the rectory a little son. If ever fate shone auspicious on any birth-day, it did on this. It was in the earliest spring; just when the first violets' begin to open amongst the moss, and the birds begin to carol for joy of winter past. A fine square-faced, large-eyed boy he was, in the sturdiest health, and of the most solid good temper; a blessing which all the household thoroughly appreciated. Mona, independent enough now to sit on the hearth-rug, building up wonderful architectural devices from a box of wooden bricks, was of the same placid order—a little resolute and wilful now and then, perhaps—but never fretful or peevish. They were as good as gold, nurse Beste was in the habit of saying; and though they had plenty

of spirit, it was spirit of the right sort, and would never harm either themselves or any body else. They had inherited the benefit of all the holy and gracious influences that surrounded Roger and his wife, and came into the world God's gifts indeed, with as few of the foreshadowing of evil and mischance as children could have, and Agnes rejoiced over them with joy unutterable, and full of thankfulness.

It was reserved for the little boy-baby to bring about a perfect understanding with that crook in his parents' lot, the ever-active Miss Sage Booty. That lady happened to call at the rectory about an hour after he had made his debut on the stage of life, and saw Roger walking about the garden in charge of Mona, who was in a perfectly explosive state of delight at the idea of a little brother to play with. The curate met her at the gate, and announced with paternal pride, "It is a boy this time, Miss Sage Booty."

"O! may I be god-mother? *Please*, may I be god-mother?" cried she, ecstatically; and Roger actually pledged himself that she should, without considering what his wife's views might be.

Miss Sage Booty had a little kernel of heart hidden somewhere in her anatomy; and she drove home, feeling as if she had acquired a property in one human being that nobody could deprive

her of. The next morning she sent for her solicitor, and added a codicil to her will, to the detriment of the Reverend Augustus Blaydes' expectations; and on the day of the christening she appeared at the rectory with silver-mounted coral, silver mug, candle-cup, minute knife, fork and spoon in velvet-lined morocco case, and a purse like a testimonial, containing a hundred new sovereigns, all of which she laid down at baby's feet. He was named Tristan at her special desire. "A strange heathenish name for a Christian bairn," remarked nurse Beste; "but a pretty sounding name, too, let what would come of it." All the officials she fee'd magnificently; and after dinner she made a speech which did equal honour to her heart and her head, expressive of her determination to perform every duty to which she had that day publicly pledged herself, in the most immaculate manner. She would probably have become very diffuse on her favourite theme of education, had not Eli Burton and Squire Brough, who acted as godfathers on the occasion, by a timely "Hear, hear!" checked her pathetic fluency.

From that day forth there was peace between the rectory and the Moat-house, except when Agnes objected to the multiplicity and costliness of Miss Sage Booty's gifts to the baby, and

was peremptorily bidden not to interfere with what was no business of hers. She brought endless series of braided and embroidered coats, resplendent sashes, and more feathered hats than the little thing could have worn if it had been Cerberus; she laid in stores of amusing and improving picture-books and toys of every description, and, in short, gave up her whole energetic mind to the cultivation of the baby. It was delicious to see her handle it; at first gingerly, as if it were a red-hot chesnut, and afterwards, gathering courage, as if it were a sagacious dog, patting it on the head, clapping it on the back, and making a queer, abortive, whistling noise to please it. Tristan would sit in her lap, looking as grave as a judge, with great solemn eyes fixed on her face, as if he were reflecting on its peculiarities; then Miss Sage Booty would ask nurse Beste, whose heart she had completely won, what the innocent morsel could be thinking about, and wish prematurely that it could speak and explain itself. As a student of human nature, she was very anxious for the unfolding of this tender little bud, and many tantalizing disappointments had she to undergo in consequence. She expected it to talk fluently at three months' old; and as it could not walk at six, she would have a surgical examination held over it, which resulted in her

own confusion and baby's triumphant acquittal of any defect. Once, only once, and Miss Sage Booty remembered it to her profit ever after, did she attempt to administer the universal Globb. She came in after a round of parochial visits with the bottle in her bag, and found baby suffering from a little pain. Agnes was walking up and down the nursery hushing it in her arms, and while her back was turned, Miss Sage Booty contrived to introduce a surreptitious spoonful into baby's food, little thinking that an old looking-glass fastened against the wall was betraying her treacherous act. Agnes was so indignant, she threatened never to let her enter the nursery again; and only on receiving a meekly tearful apology, and a promise never, never, never to do it any more, did the aggrieved mother relax in her severity, and consent to be appeased. After this defeat, Miss Sage Booty put herself through a conscientious course of hard reading in the shape of "Essays on the Diseases of Children," "Advice in Casualties," and "Directions for the Management of Infants," that she might be prepared against every emergency. Then she undertook a number of conflicting theories, under the head of "Hints on Education," and brought her mind into a helpless state of coma, from which she roused up to originate a royal road to learning of her own.

Her next feat was the purchase of a beautiful little foal, whose growth and training she herself superintended, with a view to Tristan's taking equestrian exercise when he should be of a fit age. Long before that grand day arrived, however, Tristan had to vacate the place of honour in the house as baby in favour of another brother, Master Harry, who, in his turn, had to make way for wee white-haired Louis.

The birth of a second and a third son to Roger and his wife, caused great heart-burning at Castle Bohun, especially to the head of the house, who regarded the innocent nurslings as the result of a base conspiracy, to injure him in his dearest principle, namely, the succession of purely noble blood to the ancient barony. He had not been fortunate in his eldest born, the Honourable Basil. This young man, after running a brief course of shameful debauchery, was living abroad, nobody exactly knew how or where. He had proposed to him successively, as matrimonial connections, the cross-grained heiress of the Clervils, and the third and ugly daughter of the Duke of Rivaulx, the Lady Alecto Pierrepointhe; but the domestic virtues had no charms for the Honourable Basil, and he declined them both. When, however, the birth of Roger's first boy was announced to the old Lord, the

spirit of his race chafed within him furiously. Basil *must* marry, Basil *should* marry, whether he liked it or not, he swore emphatically. Then he wrote to him, offering as a bribe, the payment in full of all his debts; and adjuring him, by the stainless name and honour of his race, to espouse some noble lady without delay. But the Honourable Basil, though he deplored profoundly his incapacity to avail himself of his father's munificent douceur, replied that he had views of his own on this momentous subject, which would prevent compliance with his commands either then or at any future time.

The second son, Everard, had married early, a plain-featured heiress of noble extraction, but she had brought him no children. The third, Philip, had, like Roger, disgraced himself by a low marriage, and his wife had produced him only daughters. Arthur, William and Richard were all in the army, and all single men; but when Basil's rebellious denial of Lord de Bohun's wishes was promulgated, their father, inconvenient as it was to provide them with establishments, immediately cast about to find suitable alliances for them every one, and they, more compliant than their elder brother, sought for themselves wives. Arthur united himself to the widow of Algernon, Lord Fortmayne; William allied him-



self with the Lady Alicia Montferrat, eleventh daughter of the Duke of Longminstre; and Richard espoused a German dame, older than himself by ten years; but of unimpeachable antiquity of descent. When the last of these auspicious marriages was concluded, Lord de Bohun was made perfectly happy.

"There is very small chance of that lad of Roger's coming into the barony *now*, thank Heaven!" was his devout aspiration on the occasion.

In due course of time Richard's wife bore a child—a daughter, "worse than *nothing*," said the disappointed grandsire; and her wicked example was shortly imitated by William's spouse. Lady Alicia seemed to have a more conscientious perception of what was expected from her, and she presented Arthur with twin boys, who unhappily died a few hours after their birth. When the old Lord heard of this catastrophe he literally gnashed his teeth with rage; and would gladly have made all his dutiful sons divorce their wives and marry again, if the law had not been opposed to such a summary repudiation.

From that well-omened midsummer day, when Roger and the wife took possession of Boscombe Rectory, seven years had elapsed, and still the

only boys of the younger generation belonged to the outcast son and his despised helpmate, while the other wives of the house, with what their father-in-law denounced as irrational and wilful perversity, had only daughters; "little, peaking, good-for-nothing daughters!" It was marvellous how those boys thrived too. They were the tallest, largest, loveliest children in the district; and Agnes, in the midst of them, was as fresh and blooming at matronly six-and-twenty as she had been at maiden sixteen. There had been no attempt at reconciliation; and with the exception of an annual present of Scotch tweed and linsey wolsey from Lady Harriet Lennox, whose lord could scarcely supply kail and parritch to his own numerous brood, Roger got no help from his own people. The said linsey wolsey was fashioned into frocks and tunics by the deft and industrious fingers of Agnes and nurse Beste, and Roger himself always turned out on week days in a sober suit of the dark tweed. Agnes also had gown and cloak of the same material, and might have had a bonnet too, had not Dunstable straw been cheaper, and more becoming.

## II.

THE Bohun children all got their first teaching from their mother; but when Tristan could say his prayers, repeat his catechism, and read a chapter in the bible fluently, the curate, greatly to Miss Sage Booty's disappointment, announced his intention of undertaking the boy's instruction himself; but having got herself up for educational purposes, regardless of trouble and expense, and disdaining to hide her talent in obscurity, she entreated Agnes to allow her to try her skill on little Mona, always, be it understood, beneath mamma's supervision—and to this, consent was given. The first lesson was a lesson on objects. The child was planted firmly on her feet in front of her preceptress, who fixed her with her eye in a way that would have utterly annihilated any less high couraged creature, but which had not the slightest effect on Mona. She shook back her hair from her face, dropped her little arms demurely, and resigned herself to be made a clever girl out of hand. Agnes sat in the back ground making a cockade for Louis, and smiling doubtfully for the issue of this undertaking. At the critical

moment, with those great sensible child's eyes upon her, Miss Sage Booty began to feel an awful sense of the responsibility of her task, but at length she deliberately opened a card-board box and took therefrom a magnificent butterfly, speared upon a pin. The large eyes became larger than ever at this sight, and travelled slowly round to mamma, who drew a little nearer to profit by the lesson also.

"What is this, Mona?" asked the teacher, pointing with a skinny forefinger at the impaled insect.

"Butterfly," replied Mona, with sedate promptitude.

"Diptera; insect, having two wings and two elevated alteres or balances behind each. I don't see the alteres, but there are the wings. Blair's Preceptor, where I learnt that a butterfly is a diptera, omits to give an illustration. Now, Mona, what has it wings for?"

"To fly with. Let it off that paper, please."

"It does not wish to go, it is dead. Can you tell me who made this pretty butterfly, my dear?"

"God made it. I want to know who killed it?" said the child, breathless and interested.

Miss Sage Booty tried to avoid the query and pass on. The fact was, she had netted and killed the insect herself for the illustration of this very

lesson, not anticipating a counter catechism such as seemed impending. "It was very kind of God to make this butterfly for Mona to look at, was it not?" said she, with grammatical precision.

"He made it to fly in the garden, and it was naughty to kill it. Mamma told Tristan he must not kill butterflies," was the response.

Poor Miss Sage Booty was confounded; she said that would do for that morning, and became vitally interested in Louis's cockade. The butterfly was left on the table, and Mona was left by the butterfly regarding it. There she stood, her hands clasped behind her, and her face settled into an expression of precocious gravity and thoughtfulness. She had not much of the dimpled waxen prettiness so greatly admired in little children; her eyes were like her mother's, dark blueish grey, with a peculiar steadfast gaze, her forehead was large, frank, and open, and her other features were tolerably regular; but it was the rich glow of transparent colour, the bloom, clasticity, and radiance of perfect health that made her what everybody acknowledged her to be, namely, a gloriously beautiful child. Her limbs were lengthy, round, strong and full, of a supple grace. No matter into what attitude she dropt, that attitude was, for the time being, the most exquisitely picturesque that could be

imagined. Miss Sage Booty watched her with secret uneasiness, troubled by a dawning perception that there might be depths even in a child's mind which all her philosophy could not fathom. The insect, motionless, yet vivid in colour as when fluttering about amongst the trees of the garden, was quite a new idea to Mona. If it had looked tarnished, or if its golden wings had drooped flaccidly she might have understood it, but it was in the act to fly. She put forth a careful finger and touched it; then she took it up, blew on it softly, and seeing that had no effect, she carried it to a window where was a basket of flowering plants, and laid it on the broad leaf of a scarlet geranium. For five patient minutes longer she stood considering it, to find, apparently, whether proximity to the gay blossoms would revive it; but perceiving that it continued unstirred, she quietly restored it to the box from which it had been taken, and shut it up. As she did so her glance shot straight across to Miss Sage Booty and their eyes met.

"Could I not learn from live butterflies as well as dead ones? I like them ever so much better," said Mona, distinctly.

"Yes, dear, yes. But come now and repeat me your new hymn," hastily replied the precep-

tress. "I will tell you more about butterflies another day."

Mona complied immediately; but Miss Sage Booty felt that the child knew *she* had killed the insect, and that her thoughts were running upon it all the time she was reciting the verses. There was, indeed, a straightforward sagacity about Mona, as about many young children that was very difficult to baffle. Already the elements of her character had begun to develop themselves; she was earnestly truthful, frankly affectionate; much given to protecting and defending whatever was smaller and weaker than herself; proud, sensitive, impatient of control, and sometimes wilful and wayward. Her breadth of character, so to speak, was pleasant, open and free as the beautiful scenery amidst which her childhood was passed; and it was suffused with the genial warmth and glow of a loving and happy home; but its delicate shades, its minute touches, arose out of accidental impressions, scarcely perceptible when received, perhaps, but adding, as stroke by stroke, to the harmonious individuality of the whole. Just as the hymn came to an end, Roger entered the room with Squire Brough. The latter carried a pretty little lady's riding-whip, mounted with a stag's head in gold, which he laid playfully across Mona's shoulders, asking if she had been

a good girl at her lessons that day. Miss Sage Booty, who was in mortal terror of any further reference to the murdered butterfly, hastened to state that she was always good; an assertion which the mischievous spark in Mona's eye as promptly contradicted. She seized the whip in her fingers as it was again descending, and cried out with delight. "Is it for me? O! mamma, when may I ride? I do so want to ride."

"What a pity she was not born a boy. She would have made a noble boy!" said Squire Brough, eyeing her with immense favour.

"I am very content with my little girl as she is," rejoined Agnes, affectionately; "she will comfort her mother when the boys leave home."

Roger lifted the child upon his knee, and permitted her to try the temper of her whip across his boot. When tired of that exercise, she looked at her mother with a pretty persistence, and reiterated, "When may I ride, mamma?"

"Darling, ask papa. Roger, you must not make a tomboy of her," said Agnes, reluctantly. This being tantamount to consent, Mona clapped her hands for joy, showing that her mother's warning against *tomboyism* was not altogether uncalled for. Her frolic was rather apt to pass into wildness—a result not much to be wondered at, when we remember she had only boy playmates.



Indeed, at any moment she would abandon her doll for a game at horses, or a slide, or a climb up into the yew-tree in the garden, where she would sit throned like a queen, refusing to come down for all nurse Beste's coaxing, commands, and expostulations. Squire Brough, whose prime favourite she was, encouraged her in all these pranks, predicting that she would come out in the end as pure, gentle, and gracious a pattern of womanhood as her mother; the only perfect wife, he averred that he had ever seen, except his own dear deceased Dulcibella.

The entrance of Tristan, noisy and rosy, enabled Miss Sage Booty quietly to possess herself of the butterfly box, and to glide off, as she thought unperceived, while Mona was busy showing her brother her whip; but before she had gone half-way down the garden walk, the child was after her crying out, "Mammie, when will be my next lesson? Kiss and make friends."

Miss Sage Booty, who was not overwhelmed with affectionate relatives, thought that "kiss and make friends" of little Mona the prettiest phrase in the language. She always used it either when she had been naughty herself, or any body had grieved her. It seemed as if her heart were too tender to keep a wrong feeling in it long.

"Do you like my lessons, Pet?" asked the

delighted teacher. Mona was not prepared to say "yes" after the issue of the present one; but she said, "come again soon," which was almost as flattering, and then ran off to rejoin Tristan.

But the second lesson proved no more of a success than the first. It was on bible history; and the preceptress, daunted by the result of her former attempt at original illustration, determined henceforward to teach entirely by book. They, in consequence, got entangled in a difficulty about the wifely merits of Rebecca, whom the catechism explicitly declared to have been "a very good woman." Mona doubted this, and said she taught her boy to tell lies and deceive his father. Her mamma did not do so, and she was sure it was naughty.

It did not occur to Miss Sage Booty to point out the obvious lessons demonstrated by the life-long separation of the mother from her best-beloved son; or the sore punishment that afterwards befel that son in the base filial ingratitude of many of his own children. She was only bewildered; and reiterated the statement that Rebecca was a very good woman, which left a little trace of confusion on Mona's mind for Agnes to brighten away.

They next tried English grammar; but that was found so utterly wanting in interest, that it was abolished forthwith, and the multiplication table shared the same fate. Miss Sage Booty then began to doubt whether she had the art and knack of teaching; and one day Mona having suggested that they should have a story instead of lessons, she narrated the veracious history of "Puss in Boots" with such happy effects, that she decided to keep in the flowery paths of romance henceforward, and leave Agnes to cultivate the useful herbs of knowledge. This division of labour was eminently satisfactory. Within six months from that date, Mona could have taken honours in the nursery classics; and was, in her own person, a very successful narrator of the rhymical versions of "The Life and Death of Cock Robin," "The Babes in the Wood," and other pathetic histories, charming at her all-believing time of life.

Miss Sage Booty committed to memory hosts of spectral German legends, fairy tales, and sea stories for the delectation of her pupil, and really went through as much hard and conscientious study as if she had undertaken a course of geology, or any other highly profitable branch of useful information; and at the same time she

was cultivating her own heart, and improving it amazingly, although, in her public capacity of church-warden and censor-general of the parish morals, she was still often a sore grievance to the curate and his wife.

## III.

HAWKSVIEW, which had formed the limit of Roger Bohun's favourite walk with Agnes, was fixed upon for little Mona's first ride. She had often begged nurse Beste to take her there before; but her legs had always fallen short half way, and necessitated return. Now, however, her longing was in a fair way to be accomplished. For half a mile or so, the novelty of her position moderated the little maiden's enthusiasm; but by and bye she began to feel at home on pony-back, and showed it by noticing the natural objects on the way. Roger was glad to observe this early quickening in her mind of the germ of that true love for nature, which is so kindly a friend in life's long inactive seasons, and Agnes, from whom she inherited it, fostered it tenderly.

When they were about the middle of Boscombe lane, they encountered Miss Sage Booty driving in her pony carriage. Amen and Hallelujah were both very fresh, and pranced along, shaking their heads, and whisking their tails, and behaving in a very light independent fashion. They

decidedly objected to being pulled up; but Miss Sage Booty said she insisted upon it, and ordered a little boy who sat behind, to get out and hold their heads. She had recently mounted a new driving costume, consisting of a tight jacket, and a hat with a little feather curling over the brim, in which she sat very stately, with a waspish faced terrier, named Candy, besides her. Candy felt it incumbent on him to get down and bark vociferously, for which dereliction of manners his mistress administered a lash of the whip, telling him that discipline must be maintained, and then she addressed herself to the curate, asking if he had heard the news.

Roger had heard no news in particular. "What had come to pass," he inquired.

"The Vesceys are returning to Hawkswiew. Osythe Dobbie told Piper this morning. What do you think of that?" Roger did not know what to think. He could not say he was glad to hear it, so he said nothing. "Osythe has only got her orders to prepare for the Captain and his wife, so I suppose they don't bring the boy. He was the best of the bunch," added Miss Sage Booty, sharply, "and I hope he will remain so. Now, Mr. Bohun, I won't listen to any excuse—I am only going to leave a bottle

of Globb for Mary Spinks and the twins, and then I shall drive home again and expect you and the little one to luncheon. Say you will come—you might as well stop at Moat, while you are there, and look round on the people, they want you sadly. They are a benighted race, and Wha'd-ha-thowt-it is as bad."

Roger, for once, allowed himself to be dictated to; and after Mona had seen Hawksview they went to the old Moat House. Luncheon despatched, he left his little girl to be amused by Miss Sage Booty, and walked into the village. Moat had, ever since his coming to Boscombe, been the part of the parish that had given him the most anxiety and the least satisfaction. It lay low in a hollow, thickly-wooded, which seemed to imbibe and retain noisome fogs as its natural atmosphere for two-thirds of the year; and in the other to evaporate them in malignant fevers, rheumatisms, and catarrhs. The people were of more irregular habits than others, and were continually in difficulties, either from wrongdoing, improvidence, misfortune, or overplus of children; and charity, which was more freely dispensed amongst them than any other community in Astondale, seemed to have the further effect of increasing their helpless dependence. The curate's first visit was to a middle-aged bed-ridden man,

who had lost the use of his limbs while blasting in a quarry some years before. This man was a favourite subject with Miss Sage Booty, and her prime minister, Piper. Roger found him propped up in bed, listening to the drowsy humming of the summer flies in the window pane. The house was very bare and empty of furniture, and the man himself, though of an intelligent countenance, looked fearfully emaciated. What the parish allowed, he said, scarcely kept body and soul together, for he had so many bairns, all of them with a "capital twist." This was no case of "go work or starve;" but one of patiently "lie still and starve," which the President of the anti-alms-giving society himself might have pitied and relieved without wounding his too tender conscience. Roger had always felt a deep commiseration for this man, whom he could not effectually relieve, and he now sat down on the lang settle to have some talk with him about his wife and children. They were all at work in the hay-fields, he said, and what a blessed thing for poor folks it was that the harvest was promising so fair.

"And is the young missis nicely?" he inquired, with frank civility. "My old woman says, she's a sight for sair e'en."

Roger smiled at the homely compliment, and



replied that she was quite well, and would come soon to visit him.

"I ha' begun knitting t' bairn's stockings as she advised, an' I read when I ha' ought worth reading; but look you here sir," and reaching of his hand to a narrow shelf fixed against the wall, he took down a new copy of, "A call to the unconverted, or a thunder clap from Zion," and held it out to the curate. "We ha' gotten a library at Moat now, so I sent t' lads for a book, an' that's what master gave 'em. Law, sir, I'm stalled o' thunder claps! If it was 'Balm for a wounded Sinner,' 'or Food for them 'at ha' no meat,' there'd be a kind o' comfort in it; but, to ha' anc's ears danged wi' threats for ever, is more than I can stomach. I'll ask you, Parson, will you lend me a book or an auld newspaper ance i' a way?"

"Certainly, I will, Mills. I only take a weekly paper myself; but you shall have it regularly. As for books, tell me what you like, and I'll do my best for you in that line too."

"I'm like t' bairns sir, a story book or a song book for me, an' travellers' tales that may be is true an' may be isn't. Something that will make a man forget his miseries. This thunder clapping only gars 'em stang worse, I think."

"I will remember your wants, Mills; but tell

me who has organised this library at Moat? I have not heard a word of it before?"

"Miss Sage Booty is at the head of it, her and Mrs. Piper. If you could 'siniate what to buy, it 'ud be a good thing; for these ladies is so conceited o' themselves, they think poor folks is to be talked to an' pettled like bairns."

"I will go in and look at what they have collected on my way home. I believe they wish to benefit you."

"Yes, parson, I ha' no doubts o' that, it's t' way of it, is all wrang," replied Mills, in a tone of sarcasm; "do folks such as you be always at milk for babes o' grace, and such-like spoon meat? Law, parson, I ha' gotten my auld mother's Bible here, and I can read it if I've a mind too, for it's all as plain as a pike staff *there*. These little bits o' books wi' their warnings, an' awakenings, an' thunder clappings, is enough to daze a man like me, instead o' helping him forward. I ha' been at t' first step ever so lang. First, Miss Sage Booty, she brings me 'The Alphabet o' the only true Wisdom,' an' as soon as I ha' gotten that of, comes Mrs. Piper wi' 'Leading-strings for tottering babes.' I get out o' them into Miss Sage Booty's 'Go-cart for falterers in Faith,' an' then I tell 'em I'd like to go forward if they pleased; an' parson, what do you

think they says then? They says, ‘Mills, you’re a poor benighted sinner, and must let them as ha’ more light see for you.’ I fairly wished ’em out o’ t’ house, I did. Then I sent to t’ school for something more lightsome, and there comes this thunder clap!”

“Not the most relishing diet in the world to judge from the look of it,” said the Curate, furling over a few of the leaves, and culling here and there a sentence. “It would try a stronger digestion than yours Mills, I am afraid.”

“Eh! parson, it sours on one’s stomach, and does more harm than good, as I telt them ladies this morning, an’ Mrs. Piper she left me a little trac’—there it is on t’ dresser. But I’m set again’ reading it, it’s gotten such a name: ‘The Burning Brand.’ Now, if it was possible for anything ladies says to poor folk to be impertinent, I suld call them two right-down impertinent wi’ their tongues. I never did like calling bad names, an’ they as good as telt me *I* was t’ Brand i’ t’ trac’. My auld woman would use their bits o’ books for kindling if she daur; but it won’t do, I tell her, to affront Miss Sage Booty.”

While Roger listened to Mills with that interested patience that the poor know so well how to appreciate, a woman put her head in at the door and asked, “I heard t’ parson was here,

Mills; is he long gone? My old man wants to see him a bit."

Roger immediately rose up and said, "What is it, Mrs. Frouston; is he particular to see me to-day?"

"Yes, sir, he's gotten something on his mind, he says, that he must tell you. My old man's always gotten something on his mind," replied the woman, philosophically. Roger said he would follow her in a few minutes, and then she went away.

"Jerry has been taking his drink o' Miss Sage Booty's grand stuff, and it's gotten into his head," observed Mills, shrewdly.

"Not impossible, I fear. Send one of your boys to the rectory, to-night, and I will return you a newspaper and a rabbit for to-morrow's dinner. And now, good-day to you," said Roger, kindly. "And I'll look out a book too, such as may suit you."

"Thank you, Sir. I won't say but that t' rabbit 'll be very acceptable, book or none," replied Mills, with a hollow, hungry smile. And then the curate departed, leaving behind him one heart robbed of its bitterness; and all the more resigned in its suffering, for the kindness which cost the giver nothing yet made the receiver rich.

Mrs. Frouston was standing outside her door to conduct Roger to her old man's presence. "He was getting very tedious with his flights and his fancies again," she said. "Perhaps the parson would give him a good talking to, to set him right in his wits."

"Well, Jerry, your wife says you have something to tell me. What is it?" Roger asked, approaching the fire over which crouched a decrepit remnant of superannuated mortality.

At the sound of a strange voice Jerry lifted up his head and cried in a passion: What! she's been at her lees again, t' auld wife! I want noan o' t' parson! Get awa' wi' ye both;" and he followed up his commands by muttering a series of oaths, and brandishing a feeble arm as if he would strike. Jerry Frouston had been imbecile for many years; but not imbecile enough to forget the flowery eloquence of the days when he had been a horse-jockey. His wife bade him be civil.

"When he gets into his tantrums, sir, a clout on t' head wad do him good," remarked she, apologetically, to Roger. "He's always i' this way when he's supped much o' Miss Sage Booty's physic, and he's emptied a whole bottle sin' morning."

"Then you have nothing to tell me, Jerry;

your mind is quite comfortable?" said Roger, quietly.

"Nought as I know on, 'less it be that t'auld Queen Anne's dead; an' it's no a hanging matter that I'm aware on, Parson."

"Scarcely, Jerry. Then I'll bid you good afternoon. And Roger went his way, pursued by a volley of anything but blessings.

His next visit was to a tumble-down cottage where lived Branker, formerly a carrier at Boothe; but who had lost his character and business by a series of petty thefts, for which he had undergone a term of imprisonment. He had a sickly wife, whom he treated ill, and several starved-looking children, whom Agnes helped to clothe by her own little ones' cast-off garments. The mother was well-meaning and religious; but so ailing and helpless, that amongst the many miserable families at Moat, her's was ever the most destitute. Miss Sage Booty would not assist them because of the father's bad character, and Roger could do but little among so many. The mother received him with the usual torrent of complaints against her husband; but grew quieter under his gentle counsel and reasoning. And when he gave her half-a-crown, she was only eager for him to be gone, that she might crawl out and buy bread and an ounce of tea before

Branker came home and took it from her to spend at the ale-house.

This was Roger's last visit for that day. He returned to the old Moat House for Mona, and they rode home. Agnes's face was always a refreshment after a round at Moat; but she met him at the door more beaming even than usual, and bade him guess who had come upon her unannounced that afternoon. Entering the drawing-room in haste, he found Eli Burton in possession of his easy chair; and the way in which they greeted each other showed that the friend of school and college was still the dearest friend of the family-man.

Agnes Bohun was always delighted to have Eli Burton at the rectory, his society was such an enjoyment to Roger, whose increasing family and narrow means kept him always at home. She would have liked him to have his holiday yearly; but the necessity of strict economy had presented itself in the curate's house as a guest that never went away, and warned them both from any indulgence that could not be dispensed with. Happy as she was, the gentle young wife often knew the want of what only money procures; and though never for a moment did she regret it for herself, she regretted it often for her husband and her children.

After dinner the whole family, except Louis, who was cozily snoozing in his cot, gathered round the early lighted drawing-room fire. Mona, with the affectionate familiarity of long liking, climbed upon Eli Burton's knee; Tristan got possession of a stool by the fender corner near his mother; and Harry, the audacious, entered upon the occupancy of the centre of the hearth-rug with his Noah's ark. Conversation and mutual gossip flowed apace. Eli told of recent pedestrianizing in Airedale and Warfedale, and of his last year's coracle fishing expedition into North Wales, while Agnes breathed an envious sigh for her own dear Roger, whose excursions never extended beyond the bounds of his parish. Suddenly the curate recollected the news he had heard from Miss Sage Booty that morning, and he stopped in the midst of another subject, to communicate it to his wife. "The Vesceys are coming back to Hawksview, Agnes," said he; "such is the report, at least."

"Coming back to Hawksview!" echoed she, in very considerable astonishment. "It is not the shooting season—what brings them, I wonder?"

"I think I can tell you," Eli Burton interposed. "They have just lost their lawsuit about Otterbourne. I suppose you have heard of it."

"Not a word; we hear nothing here," Agnes



said, with a little haste; and then she added, as if fearing lest her words should seem to imply discontent with their secluded position: "Nothing of our neighbours' quarrels and disputes that is."

"Then I will tell you what I know. You will recollect that it was under an old will that Mrs. Vescey got the property; and that there was some disagreement between the Captain and her brother at the time as to its validity. Some months since, a will of much more recent date was found, which revoked all the provisions of the former one in favour of the brother. He instantly claimed Otterbourne, but Captain Vescey would not yield his prize without a struggle; and trusting in the old adage that 'possession is nine tenths of the law,' he determined to fight every inch of the ground. He declared the new will to be an impudent forgery; but when the cause came on for trial, it was pronounced valid. The upshot was that the Vesceys lost the estate, and gained an enemy by their pertinacious resistance of the rightful owner's claims. Mr. Loftus, the successful party in the cause, demands back rents for six years, which he states he should not have done had his brother-in-law yielded to the evident justice of his claim, and not set up against it the ridiculous plea of forgery."

"Then all poor Birdyfute's inheritance is Hawks-

view, with the few acres of moor and wood," said Agnes, rather sorrowfully. "What a pity that he should have been brought up with high expectations to be disappointed at an age when he will feel it keenly."

"I don't fear that much," rejoined Eli. - "I should imagine that he has learnt to rough it."

"Poor little Birdyfute!" Agnes murmured, reflectively; and in her memory she saw the small black figure of the boy toiling through the snowy winter twilight of a day more than seven years ago—that memorable day when he ran away from school to see his mother.

Tristan at her knee, with his grand Arabian story book, looked up when she repeated her pitying words, and wondered a little why mamma's eyes looked so very bright, and why her slender white fingers afterwards rested so long and gently on his head. She was thinking prayerfully, perhaps, that she trusted in God to save her boys from serving their apprenticeship to life through the "roughing it" process, which had been the experience of Birdyfute, her little friend of early Boscombe days.

## iV.

It was only three days after Roger Bohun brought home the news, which set all Astondale gossiping, that Captain Vescey and his wife arrived at Hawksview. There was no Birdyfute with them, neither did they bring any servant. They had travelled to Boothe by the stage coach, and thence had driven to the cottage in a chaise cart; they reached their destination unobserved after dusk, and found Osythe Dobbie, according to her orders, ready and expecting them. Clara immediately retired to her room, and the Captain ordered lights and supper into the parlour, where he remained alone; his wife re-appearing no more that night. The Captain was, according to Osythe's report, as savage as a bear, and would not suffer himself to be spoken to; and as for his poor lady, she was as wan and weary as a ghost, with a face that looked as if the misery would never go out of it any more. The neighbourhood had not for some time any opportunity of verifying this account, for nobody chose to be the first to call, and neither Captain Vescey nor Clara appeared.

abroad. There was not a single horse in the Hawksview stable, and Osythe denounced the housekeeping as "meaner than mean, quite beneath gentlefolks, however poor." Captain Vescey was undeniably very poor, being, in fact, worth some sixty thousand pounds less than nothing. His paying the back rents, claimed by his brother-in-law Loftus, was utterly out of the question; and he had written to him saying, that it was a case as hopeless as trying to squeeze wine out of a flint, to try to get money from a man who had none. Mr. Loftus was irritated, and not unnaturally, at the base charge that Captain Vescey had invented to upset his rights, and though not intending, for his sister's sake, to proceed to extremities against him, he would not yet relinquish the power that he held in terrorum over him. He did not reply to his letter; and in this uncertain position of their affairs, it was that the Vesceys returned to Hawksview.

Captain Vescey was now more straitened and encumbered in his circumstances than he had ever been before, insomuch as he had a wife and a son to maintain. But it did not enter into any one of the plans that floated through his mind to allow himself to be long hampered by these entanglements. He intended

to change his name and go abroad, where it would be hard, if, with his imposing person, his skill at fence, and his tricks at play, he could not maintain himself in tolerable luxury.

To obtain the means for this new start, he had an idea of selling Hawksview to Squire Brough, in the midst of whose property it lay; then his wife might go back to her brother, and his son might learn to shift for himself. But while the peach of his intentions was slowly ripening, behold, the hand of fate was gliding stealthily over the wall to pluck it from his possession.

They had been above three weeks at Hawksview, and not one old neighbour had been near them, except Roger Bohun and Agnes, whom Osythe had strict orders to exclude. The Captain found it intolerably dreary, and Clara did not add to its cheerfulness. She was always ailing and complaining—indeed, it seemed as if a long course of neglect and ill-treatment had weakened her mind. Her brilliant beauty was faded, her golden hair dimmed, her graceful figure worn and bent. Her husband was in the habit of taunting her, by saying she was about as lively a companion as a Death's-head, and she would answer him with a low unmeaning laugh; but one evening this slight manner of indifference

or defiance left her, and she tried to look gay and pleasant with the slavish craft of fear and weakness that has an end to gain. Captain Vescey saw through the device easily enough; but as it was now one of his keenest enjoyments to subject his victim to a species of slow torture, he let her fancy for a time that she was beguiling him into a consenting mood.

"Marmaduke, I believe, I am very ill. I should like to see my boy; I have not seen him for three years," said the poor lady, restlessly, locking and unlocking her fingers. "Three years is a very long time."

"You look no worse than you always do. It is nonsense to bring the lad away from his studies for a whim," replied her husband.

"It is not a whim, Marmaduke. If you do not let him come to me soon, I shall never see him again. I shall not know my darling's face when we meet in Heaven! You look kind; you will grant me this last request, and I will bless you!"

"Pshaw, I hoped you were as sick of heroics as I am! The lad does not care for you—he has not asked to be with you for a long while now. He is happier away. In fact, you weary and disgust him as much as you do me, and no wonder!"

Clara's white lips quivered with pain, which she tried to change into a smile. He could stab her cruelly yet. "But let him come; let me write to him myself," pleaded she. "If I am sometimes tiresome, he would not like his mother to die without blessing him."

Captain Vescey puffed lazily at his cigar, and lifted his eyebrows contemptuously. "There is ~~no~~ question of dying at present. A creaking gate hangs long," said he, bitterly. "I wish I could see a prospect of such a blessed release."

His wife had drawn a little nearer to him, impelled by God knows what delusive and tenacious hope, but now her countenance fell again. "I have tried to kill myself, Marmaduke; you know I have; but I *dare* not," muttered she, "I dare not go into God's presence till he calls me; but when I stand there, I will bear witness against you that you are as much my murderer as if you had drawn a knife across my throat or strangled me in my sleep. I will, Marmaduke, I will."

"Curse you! get out of my sight; the sooner you go and bear witness the better. Write to the lad at your peril. You shall not see him for another year for this!" cried he, wrathfully, and he took her arm to thrust her from the room. She tried to wrench herself free, and it was

pitiable to see the struggles of her weakness in his relentless grasp; but she was finally put into the hall, and the door shut upon her. For a few minutes she stood panting and trembling on the mat, half disposed to brave her tyrant again; but Osythe, who had been listening to the scuffle, came and enticed her away to her chamber.

“What’s the good o’ striving wi’ a man that’s possessed by a legion o’ devils?” remonstrated the old woman. “You’ll provoke him to kill you one of these days.”

“I wish he would, I wish he would!” cried Clara, passionately; “he would put me out of my torment then!” She raved about the room like a crazy creature—indeed, it is probable that she had intervals of frenzy, which passed and left her dull and half imbecile for days together. Osythe Dobbie in her own mind held her as “daft,” and watched her cautiously during these periods, lest, as she phrased it, she might be tempted to put an end to herself. This evening she was more violent and uncontrolled than usual, and the succeeding reaction was proportionate depression. When worn to exhaustion, she sank in a heap on the floor, moaning and crying out sharply, as if tortured by some physical pain. After a little while, she let Osythe undress her and lay her on the bed; but that cry still went on, until the old



woman was alarmed, and thought of seeking the Captain, and asking if he would fetch Dr. Drake.

"What ails you, tell me where the pain is?" said she, kindly. There was no answer, only the low, unmeaning moan. Captain Vescey had also heard it, for he mounted the stairs and opened the chamber door to look in, taking his cigar from his lips as he did so.

"Is anything the matter more than usual?" inquired he, approaching the bed carelessly.

"Nay, I don't know; look at her!" and Osythe held the candle so as to throw its light on Clara's face. Her eyes were closed, and she was evidently unconscious; her lips were apart and stained with blood, and her breath came in short rattling gasps. "I had better fetch Dr. Drake."

"No, stay, I'll go myself. I would not remain with her in that state for a kingdom; the scandal-mongers would say I killed her," was his hasty reply.

"An' so you have," muttered Osythe, as he went out of the room; "and your black heart 'll tell you so enow." The old woman busied herself in making the chamber neat, and then, shading the candle, sat down by the bedside to watch the patient, and to wait the return of her master with Dr. Drake.

It was a clear moonlight night when Captain

Vescey set forth down the hill towards Boscombe. He walked at a smart pace, looking neither to the right hand nor the left; but if there had been any spy to watch his face, he would have seen that he was not altogether calm. His compressed lips were livid, his eye was more sinister in expression even than usual, and there was a twitching about the muscles of his mouth which showed a mind ill at ease. He kept out of the deep shadow, cast by the elevated bank, and more than once he stopped with a start, and peering forward as if he discerned some suspicious shape in advance. Dr. Drake had just ridden up to his own door from one direction as the Captain approached it from another, and as soon as he understood the urgency of the case he turned his horse and galloped away towards Hawksview, leaving Captain Vescey to follow. In returning past the rectory, Captain Vescey noticed the bright light in the drawing-room which shone from the window across the lawn; and after a moment's hesitation he entered the garden and rang at the bell, saying to himself, "Clara believed in priests and prayers. I suppose, if she is really going to die, she would like to see Bohun." He sent in his message and waited in the porch while it was delivered. Both Agnes and Roger came out to him almost immediately. Agnes

was desirous of going with her husband in case she might be useful to the sick lady; but Captain Vescey coldly declined her offer.

"I hope poor Birdyfute is come?" said she.

"There has been no time to send for him. Clara was taken ill scarcely an hour ago," was the negligent reply.

Roger was now ready; and after whispering a few words to Agnes, he left the house with his companion. Their walk was rapid and silent, for when the curate attempted to speak, Captain Vescey answered only in surly monosyllables. There was a light shining from Clara's window; but as they drew near to the house it receded, and on opening the door they saw Osythe leaning over the banisters to show Dr. Drake down stairs. The country surgeon was not a courtly person, and he had just seen that which made him more savage than ordinary. "I can do nothing for your wife, Captain Vescey, she is past human aid," said he, abruptly.

"She is not dead, is she? I hear her moaning," replied the Captain, listening towards the room in which Clara lay.

"Not dead; but dying. A few hours will end it all."

"What ails her? She had no mortal disease that I knew of."

"Don't ask me what ails her. You should know best, Captain Vescey," replied the surgeon, with marked significance. Then turning to Roger, he whispered, "that what he came to do he had better do quickly."

"I should desire you to remain, Dr. Drake, to watch for any favourable change that may take place," said Captain Vescey, loftily. "I do not see why my wife's sudden illness should all at once assume a serious aspect. Please to follow me to her room."

The surgeon made no remonstrance but remounted the stairs quietly, the curate after him. Except that the pitiable moaning was gentler than before, Clara appeared as she had done when her husband left her; death was in her countenance unmistakably; the spring of life was running down very fast. Roger, however, saw a gleam of consciousness come into her face as he began his prayers; it faded again as fast, though perhaps the words of comfort penetrated her failing sense, for her moaning ceased. Suddenly she opened her eyes, and fixing them on some object that she fancied she saw standing beside her, said, "Birdyfute, bend down your face and kiss me. I always loved you, darling—you will forgive your father." Her lips continued to move for several minutes inaudibly,

and then ceased. Roger Bohun resumed his prayers; and while he was uttering the closing words, Clara Vescey's soul departed. Dr. Drake who had been leaning over the foot of the bed with his watch in his hand, restored it to his pocket, and with a gesture of his head to Osythe intimating that all was over, he walked away towards the door, Captain Vescey and the curate following in silence.

## V.

THE intelligence of Mrs. Vescey's sudden death flew from lip to lip like wildfire, accompanied by many a suspicious whisper and shocked comment. Dr. Drake even went so far as to say, that there was evidence enough of ill-treatment to support a charge of manslaughter; and the women who laid out the corpse talked long and loudly of the cruel bruises that darkened the tender flesh. The universal verdict of Astondale was, that in all England there lived not a greater villain unchanged than Captain Vescey. He did not bear his loss so philosophically as might have been anticipated. During the first two days after Clara's death he would have given much to hear her feeble uncertain step, faltering down the stairs at his imperious summons, as was its wont; he missed his victim, and though not repenting of his former harshness, he would much rather that it had not become so notorious. Very reluctantly had he written to Mr. Loftus, desiring his presence at the funeral, and still more reluctantly had he summoned his son; but common decency demanded the appearance of young Marmaduke,

and the Captain hoped to make good terms for himself with his brother-in-law, during the softened feeling which a meeting at such a time might be expected to produce; but in this last hope he reckoned on the weakness of human nature, and was disappointed. Mr. Loftus had arrived, bringing with him old Janet Saunders, who speedily carried Osythe's reports to her master, and thus changed his wavering resentment into settled rancour. He felt that Captain Vescey was no better than a murderer; and though he did not say so in plain terms, he let him see that with his wife's life had ended every claim he could lay to her brother's forbearance. After their first awkward meeting they had voluntarily kept apart, each in his seclusion, steadily revolving his own plan of action as soon as the event which had brought them together should be over.

The evening of the day before that fixed for the funeral was come, and Captain Vescey in restless discomfort awaited the arrival of his son. The lad and he had not met for a long time, and to meet under the present circumstances was very awkward. Birdyfute was a boy no longer to be tyrannized over and beaten for rebellion; he was a man almost—eighteen on the very day his mother died. The hour when he was expected

to appear passed, and Captain Vescey had just resigned himself to his cigar with a sense of relief, in the idea that his son would not come till the morrow, when a quick impatient knock re-echoed through the silent house. He started up from his chair with a bitter oath; then hurriedly composing his countenance, passed into the hall to receive his son. They shook hands in silence, then went into the parlour together and shut the door. For a second or two they confronted each other with a steadfast gaze, half searching, half defiant; then Captain Vescey turned away and dropped into his chair.

"It is a pity you were not here earlier, Marmaduke; but your mother's illness was so rapid that it gave us no time for anything," said he, and then relit his cigar with ostentatious calmness.

"Did she ask for me?" inquired Birdyfute. "I am sure she must have wished for me."

"The strangest thing of all was, that, when she lay dying, she fancied you were present and spoke to you; she kept the delusion to the last."

"O! mother, mother!" and Birdyfute, forgetting all else, wept for the dear and tender guardian of his childhood with bitterness.

Captain Vescey watched him with sardonic contempt. It was a long while now since every



germ of natural affection had died of drought in his own arid heart, and he thought his son's tears showed a lack of manhood. But when the fit of emotion was passed, and he lifted his face from the table, where he had hidden it upon his arms, his father saw a countenance and a spirit of which he might have been proud (had he not forfeited all claims to such an honest pride) to say that they were his boy's. Birdyfute had grown to his father's stately height, and while he had inherited his physical strength, grace and courage, he had taken a strain of his mother's tender beauty, and showed in his countenance that he was gentle as well as brave, and faithful as he was beautiful.

When Birdyfute presently left the room, his father guessed whither he was going, and forbore remark. Pausing for a minute outside his mother's door, he heard Janet Saunders weeping and lamenting within. "O! my poor murdered lamb," sobbed the old servant; "ay, surely murdered; and dying wi' such sweet words o' pardon on her blessed lips! Birdyfute may forgive his father; but that will I never." He entered noiselessly; but Janet, who was kneeling beside the bed with her hands stretched out towards her darling, heard him, and sprang up with a cry of surprise and sorrow. "Birdyfute,

ye're too late to save her—she's dead!" exclaimed she, clasping his arm, and looking into his face with tearful eyes; "ay, she's escaped her tyrant, an' I know not that we suld grieve. It's better as it is."

Birdyfute drew near the bed and looked at his mother. His face was very pale, his lips were compressed, his eyes were hot and dry. Those words that he had heard Janet utter, mingled like a subtle poison with his blood, and gave his feelings the corrosive taste of hatred to his father. Gazing on that beloved face, even in its deathly calm wearing the impress of long suffering, his heart hardened against her cruel tyrant, and he breathed aloud some angry words of threat and revenge. Osythe Dobbie, who had entered the room unperceived, then spoke: "I was bye when your mother died, an' the last thing she said to be understood was, 'Birdyfute, you will forgive your father.' What the dead ha' so desired must be obeyed, or they don't rest still i' the grave. Janet Saunders, it's no' becoming to mak' ill bluid atween father an' son; it's what *she* always tried to hinder." Birdyfute felt rebuked for his unchristian passion, and turning to Osythe, bade her tell him all particulars of his mother's death.

"What is there to tell?" replied she, seeing

the difficulty of complying with this demand without increasing the resentment she sought to quell; "her hour was come, and she just moaned her soul away to parson Bohun's prayers. At the last it was given her to fancy you was there, an' she said what I tell you: 'Birdyfute, you will forgive your father.'"

"Only she knew what a long score o' wicked cruelties there was to forgive!" cried Janet, bitterly. "Hard words an' harder blows—aye he's a strong, bad, remorseless man; an' you'd best forgive him, Birdyfute, for he's an enemy to fear."

Up to this moment the lad had stood with his hand laid on the clay-cold brow of his dead mother, while the great tears rolled silently down his cheeks; but at those words of Janet's, "hard words and harder *blows*," he started, and the fire rushed into his face.

"*Blows!*" he repeated. "Do you mean that my father ill-used her so infamously as *that*?"

Janet was about to reply, when Osythe sternly raised her hand, "Whisht," cried she; "whisht—*she* left a message for you, Birdyfute, hearken to naught else. Ye can't unspeak ane oath, or unstrike ane blow. What has been, *has been*, an' has gone wi' her to her grave. There let it lie as she bade you, if you would not break her rest."

The lad's face was darkling, and his eyes were dry as he passed without another word from the room. Osythe covered the corpse, and said warningly to her companion. "Take heed, Janet, you ha' dropped that into the heart o' Birdyfute that may tempt him to spill his father's life. I'm misdoubting what that look o' his meant as he went out; it's ower like the Captain's to please me."

Janet rushed away after her former nursling in fearful haste, and arrested him at the stair's-foot. She held him fast till she had regained her breath to speak, and then entreated him to seek his father's presence no more that night. He understood her terror and said: "You need have no fear, Janet, I shall not brawl with him with my mother's corpse in the house. I will not even mention one of the bitter accusations that are surging upon my heart. As far as in me lies I will do her last bidding; but when the earth has closed over her poor remains we must separate. As father and son we never have been, and never can be to each other in anything but name.

The Captain heard the whispering of voices, and opening the door bade his son come into the parlour; and releasing himself from the old woman's tremblingly tenacious grasp, he told her to be at peace for him, and obeyed without

any visible displeasure. Yet, when they were again seated opposite to each other, a single glance sufficed to show the father that his son had heard and seen what had converted him into his mother's partisan for life. Affecting a careless unconcern, he took up a book and continued smoking; but every other minute he raised a stealthy scrutiny to his son's overcast countenance. The silence grew more and more awkward, and at last, determining to brave out his position, Captain Vescey flung the volume, of which he had not read a line, noisily upon the table, yawned, dragged his chair closer into the fire, and began to talk. At first Birdyfute was as unresponsive as if he had not heard a word that was spoken; but presently a remark aroused him from his indignant taciturnity.

"My uncle Loftus here—my mother's brother?" repeated he; "where is he? I should like to see him at once."

"He is most likely sulking in the room at the other side of the hall. He and I do not pull well together. He has behaved to me like a robber; but perhaps you may make terms with him for yourself. He has no child of his own, and you are his nearest relative, so far as I know. As he has defrauded you of your inheritance, he must do something for you to start you in life."

Birdyfute's thoughts were not running in the same groove as his father's by any means; but he longed to know the relative of whom, once or twice during the last time he and his mother were together, he had heard her speak with a tender regret, as one who would have been a faithful friend both to her and to him, had she not rejected his overtures of reconciliation during that luckless crisis of her life when she had returned to the protection of her cruel and treacherous husband. Quitting his father's presence, he went immediately to the door of the other parlour, and after knocking twice, he was bid to come in. Mr. Loftus rose to meet him rather stiffly; but his manner softened as he held him by the hand and gazed long into the frank, handsome young face. "You have a look of your poor mother, Marmaduke; but you are a true Vescey in height and mien—pray God, in nothing else," said he, fervently.

Mr. Loftus was a high-featured, middle-aged gentleman, quiet and courteous in manner, but with nothing that marked him as Clara's brother. Birdyfute's first impression was one of disappointment; but as they fell into conversation the feeling rapidly wore off. He made his nephew give him a sketch of his bringing-up from the time that Captain Vescey had removed him with his mother

from Cliffend to the present time. The episode of Mr. Warrendar's school at Boothe came first on the list, then followed an account of two years at Angers, two at Brussels, and two Coblentz, since which, he had been six months with a military tutor, who took pupils to prepare for the service.

"You have had a peculiar training for an English boy—it must have destroyed your nationality, and made you a young citizen of the world," remarked Mr. Loftus, growing more kindly disposed towards his relative as he listened to him.

"It has not destroyed my longing to be an English soldier," replied Birdyfute. "Perhaps it may serve me as well as if I had had my education at one of our own public schools. My father made no secret of why he sent me abroad—it was to separate me from my mother." The lad kindled into indignation at all the cruel recollections that name brought before him, and added, impetuously, "it was his choice engine of persecution; and at last when I found how miserable he could make her through me, I was glad to be away from home. He was a harsh tyrant to both of us. I have learnt to hate him!"

"Lad, lad, *hate* nobody—*hate* grows from bad words to bad deeds," said Mr. Loftus, startled at the force of untamed passion Birdy-

fute's countenance, even more than his words, betrayed. "Your father has proved himself a man, hard and unscrupulous; and, I believe in my heart, that he shortened your mother's life; but it makes me tremble to hear you cry out you hate him."

For a few minutes Birdyfute was silent and sullen; but when his uncle presently began to speak of her who lay dead in the chamber above them, of what she had suffered, and what she had died praying, the evil spirit departed out of him. "Since we came away from Cliffend," said he, in a calmer tone, "I have not spent three months with her altogether. About three years since I came home to Otterbourne for a few weeks; but it was a wretched time. My mother was ill—more in mind than body, perhaps—and my father seemed to take a cruel delight in keeping her in a continual state of fret and exasperation. Their quarrels were commonly about myself; and I remember that when the time arrived for me to leave home, I went away without regret. Since then I have never seen my mother till to-night. It is well she left me such a message as she did, for, when I recal her face as she lies in her coffin, my heart burns with rage." The poor young fellow stopped abruptly, dropped his face upon his hands and burst into



tears. Recovering himself with difficulty, he presently went on, "We were so happy at Cliffend before he came. My mother talked of my father every day, and every night she made me say a prayer for his safe return. And when he did return, what a miserable change! She seemed to have no more a son. I seemed to have no more a mother! I cannot understand why God let him find us out as he did, or why I was to be the one sent to warn and save him, when he was caught by the tide under the rocks. It was like bringing a wild beast into a sheep fold."

"Marmaduke, it is my belief that but for Clara's unlucky inheritance, which was a blunder after all, Captain Vescey would never have acknowledged your mother's marriage or your legitimacy. One tangible benefit, therefore, accrued to you by his return," said Mr. Loftus, quietly.

Birdyfute started and coloured. "If he had not reclaimed us, then the world might have called me base-born!" cried he, bitterly.

"It *might*. Clara would not have found it easy to prove her irregular marriage; and, if I remember her temper aright, the cruelest pang she suffered during the long years of her desertion, must have been the dread lest she had entailed on you an irremediable wrong. You

bear honestly a name that was noble once; you may raise it to honour and distinction again, though it has pleased the two last generations who have borne it to trail it sadly in the mire."

Birdyfute looked miserably depressed and grieved. Mr. Loftus thought he was anticipating the hardships of his future career, unbacked by the inheritance he had been brought up to expect, and said, in a rather cooler tone than he had yet adopted, "Your father enjoyed Otterbourne lawlessly; he stripped the house of all the pictures and of every valuable piece of furniture in it, besides clearing the estate of wood. I have been over the place twice, and have determined to sell it in lots. I set no store by the property myself." The young man made no answer, and his uncle wished he had spoken less hardly. Though inly desirous of befriending him, at this moment he refrained from holding out expectations, which ultimately he might be disinclined to realise. The lad was probably the genuine character he seemed; but still he was so like his father in person, that their dispositions might assimilate also, and to give wealth to bolster up iniquity was what Mr. Loftus would never do. But Birdyfute's heart was too full of sorrow for any ideas of personal interest, such as his father had suggested, to find any place there at such an

hour. He did not suffer from the surface coldness of his uncle, and though not a single promise or profession was extended towards him, he felt instinctively that he had found one friend.

Strong as was Mr. Loftus's own aversion to Captain Vescey, in every further reference that was made to him, his words tended rather to soothe than increase young Marmaduke's resentment. There was something awful to the gentle temper of poor Clara's brother, in the thought of the unnatural animosity that lay between her husband and her son; and when they shook hands and parted for the night, his final advice to him was, "Marmaduke, remember your mother's last words; try to forgive your father, and while decency compels you to remain together, strive to live with him peaceably."

## VI.

THE Vescey vault in Boscombe church had been opened, and there, side by side with Captain Vescey's mother, who had died young and early, Clara's great sorrows and great wrongs were laid to rest. Both church and church-yard were crowded with curious spectators, who eagerly scanned the chief mourner's dark sardonic countenance, and sympathized even to tears with the sorrow of his son. Roger Bohun, who read the burial service, carried home to Agnes a pitiful story of the lad's grief, which touched her mother's heart to the quick. "He was always a dear good boy!" cried she, warmly. "Roger, I must have him here to comfort him."

I know not how Agnes contrived to have it intimated to Birdyfute that she desired to see him; but he certainly made his appearance at the rectory one morning soon after breakfast, and Roger and Eli Burton, who knew that woman's counsel comes most benignly to a wounded spirit, soon left them to themselves. In his mourning he looked tall and manly—so much as to be almost grown out of remembrance, Agnes said;

but again and again her eyes filled with tears as some chance word or gesture, or some trick of expression, vividly recalled the merry nut-brown lad who used to come to the curate for his lessons seven years before. In its melancholy gravity his countenance was singularly fine, his eyes were a deep blue, clear and full; but once or twice as they were talking, their natural light went out, and a passionate gleam like lightning kindled them instead. Agnes listened to his every word with a lively sympathy, to which he could not but be sensible, and the lad showed her all his heart—all the bitterness, revenge, and hatred which his mother's dying prayer was powerless to stifle. He gave utterance to a denunciation so savage and so fierce, in one gust of angry remembrance, that Agnes laid her hand gently upon his, and said, in a grieved, warning tone, "O Birdyfute! for your own sake, quench this wicked rage!" when he was immediately silent.

"You must go away from Hawkview. You must leave your father for the present; it will be safest, best," added she, soon.

"I intend to do so. Mrs. Bohun, is Mona in the house? Let me see her, and get away from these black thoughts which put me almost beside myself," said the young man; and Agnes, eager

as himself to change the subject, rang the bell for nurse Beste to bring down stairs all her youthful rank and file, to be presented. Mona entered first with all her dignity, in starched white frock and sky-blue sash, and put up her face to be kissed; Mona always did put up her face to be kissed to anybody she was disposed to like. The boys, cooler and more independent, thrust out their little fists, and after a few minutes of decorum, escaped through the open window, into the garden. Mona stayed behind, and presently, by some feat of fascination peculiar to herself, she was found perched on Birdyfute's knee, beguiling him into all manner of queer little stories for her amusement. She even stuck a flower into his hair, and then lifting up his face by the chin, bade her mamma say if she had not made him look pretty. Marmaduke forgot himself and laughed; and Agnes thought, and rightly, that there was not much to be feared of evil in a mind that could yield so readily to the infection of a child's buoyant, mirthful spirit.

"You have done me good. Will you let me come here again?" said he, as he was going away.

"As often as you like," replied Agnes, with cordial pleasure. "Come to us every day—when-ever you want cheering or refreshing."

Birdyfute was not slow to avail himself of this permission; and for several days he might have been found at the rectory more frequently than at Hawksview. Mr. Loftus had returned to Scotland, and the lad needed a strong and daily moral tonic to enable him to endure with filial patience his father's sardonic company. Captain Vescey felt or feigned a sovereign contempt for his son; he had a caustic wit, which he indulged perpetually at his expense, jesting at his principles and opinions, laughing at his foreign ways, mimicking his rather singular accent, and provoking him whenever he could to an outbreak of passionate resentment.

Osythe Dobbie used to creep into the hall and listen trembling, afraid, as she afterwards said, lest something bad should happen when they were quarrelling. Birdyfute tried hard to control himself; but his task was often a too difficult one, and many there were at this season who overheard angry threats and defiances exchanged between them, which took eventually a terrible significance. The whole neighbourhood echoed with stories of what was passing in the cottage on the hill, and with predictions of what would happen if the father and son continued much longer to inhabit it together. Squire Brough had declined to listen to any proposals for the sale of

Hawksview as illegal, considering the entail, which young Marmaduke was not of age to join in cutting off, so that Captain Vescey found himself without that sum of ready money on which he had begun to count as almost certain. He therefore loitered on at the cottage, the solitude of which became daily more irksome; indeed, but for his contentions with his son, its stagnation would have been nothing short of intolerable. His chief expectation now lay in the possibility of extracting from Mr. Loftus such a provision for Birdyfute as he might share, and to this end he indited letter after letter to his brother-in-law, who never vouchsafed him any reply whatever. Meantime the yoke on the lad's neck grew too heavy to be borne; he began to feel that escape from it he must at whatever risk or cost, and a feeling remonstrance addressed to him by Roger Bohun, on the scandal caused by the publicity of his quarrels with his father determined him to speak out his resolve. The opportunity offered almost as soon as his mind was made up; it was one evening when they had had even a severer contest than usual, and the bad blood of both was up.

"I am sick of this life!" cried Birdyfute, with a passionate sweep of his arm above his head.  
"It is like living in hell! You have no other



use for me than to make me your butt, and so you must forego that indulgence for the future. I shall not endure this dangerous game at 'Who is the master?' any longer."

"What will you do, my intrepid son? How will you live?" retorted the Captain, with a savage sneer. "What if I will not let you go? and I *won't*, for I cannot spare my butt—the only amusement I have in this dog-hole!"

"You think to break my spirit as you broke my mother's; but you will not accomplish it. She loved you, and I never did!" said Birdyfute, defiantly; "and as for letting me go, you cannot keep me an hour longer than I choose to stay!"

Captain Vescey laughed. "I can trust my well-trained boy's sense of duty—he will not forget my paternal office or his mother's command. Besides, you have not a guinea in the world, and are not quite hero enough to set off on a penniless search after fortune. What has become of your martial vapouring? Are you ready to toss up your cap, accept the sergeant's shilling, and cry 'God save the Queen!' on sixpence a-day?"

The lad chafed indignantly under this scornful tone; but he made no reply, and his father presently added, in a threatening way, "You are proud of your gentlemanhood; take care lest I

pull down that high crest of yours, and proclaim you to the world what, by God, you are—”

“Stop!” shrieked Birdyfute, springing to his feet, and turning livid with rage. “What you are going to say is a lie!—a lie! and I cast it in your teeth!”

Again the Captain laughed his taunting laugh, far worse to bear than any violence, and then said, with mocking calm, “You are Marmaduke Vescey so long as I please, and no longer, though I would not have the information spread beyond you and me at present; but my marriage with your mother was no marriage at all, and for a most excellent reason—” He paused and watched the lad with curious, triumphant eye, as if reveling in the keen torture that he had inflicted. When he had given his words time enough to sting, he went on, with derisive jocularitv, “You want to know for *what* reason—for the best of all; because I had a former wife living, who is living yet, and who may claim me any day for aught I know.”

Captain Vescey *did* lie, and his lie was but the inspiration of the subtly vindictive moment. Birdyfute was sure of it, although it sounded truth-like—and the aspersion of his dead mother’s honour—the false blot inflicted on his own name, dropped like a spark on gunpowder. For an

instant he stood panting, glaring, wild-beast passions tearing at his heart: then he sprang, and the struggle was deadly. The elder man was taken unawares, or his virile strength would have proved more than a match for the tiger-fierceness of his son. As it was, he was borne to the ground with a crash; and Birdyfute, with his knee on his chest, and his hands clutching his throat, dared him to repeat the monstrous fable.

Osythe Dobbie rushed in at the noise, crying, "Help here, or there 'll be murder done!" and her son, who was in the kitchen by stealth, come to fetch the broken meats which the old woman freely dispensed to her family, followed her. They tried to drag the lad off; but the Cain-demon in his wild blood was strong; and their efforts, half paralysed by fear, were vain. His grasp on his father's throat tightened instead of relaxing.

"Are you going to strangle me?" gasped the Captain. "You are my own son; no doubt of it."

"Unsay that damnable lie!" cried Birdyfute, hanging his distorted face over his father's "Unsay it, or ——"

"I only meant to try you. I was never married to any woman except your mother."

The lad's lips were white, his eyes had a bloody glare in them, as, for a moment, he wrenched the Captain's head from the floor, then dashed it violently down, and relinquished his hold. "Never breathe it again, or I shall forget that your blood is in my veins, and kill you!" said he, with a savage gesture of his clenched hand.

Captain Vescey was evidently cowed. He rose slowly, and with difficulty; his great frame shaking from head to foot; but he looked more dizzied and confused than enraged. A dead silence followed the brief tornado of passion. Young Marmaduke stood staring and heaving with the subsiding violence of his wrath for several minutes, then turned short on his heel and went out into the hall. Osythe Dobbie and her son followed him; and saw, with relief, that he took his hat and coat from their peg, and put them on.

"You're going, an' it's well," said the old woman; "life is'n't safe between you two. Where sal you bide to-night? I'll send your clothes after you; an' whatever you do, don't come back."

"Send them to Boothe, directed for me at my uncle Loftus's—I shall go there," was the reply; "and send the books in my room home to the rectory, with a message that I am off."

Osythe opened the cottage door, and looked abroad. "It's a fine night, and the moon's rising," said she; "you'll go by the wood? Ha' you any money?"

"Enough to carry me to Scotland. Well, Osythe, it has soon come to good-bye again."

"It has, lad. I wish you better luck than you ha' had since I knew you." They shook hands without more words, and separated. Marmaduke marching off with firm step and head erect, as if the recent conflict had proved to him a latent strength, which would be a competent match for all the foes he need expect to encounter in the future campaigns of the war of life. Osythe watched him out of sight; then, with a thankful ejaculation, closed the door, sent her son back to the kitchen to collect his spoil and begone, and herself went into the presence of her master.

Captain Vescey was sitting in his chair by the fireside, his cigar-case in his hand, and a very unsuccessful attempt at coolness on his countenance. "So the young reptile has chosen to take himself off," said he, as the old servant appeared.

"He's gone, an' not a minute ower soon. You may be thankful me an' John was at hand, or worse 'ud ha' come o' your strife."

"Pooh, pooh! Marmaduke's no assassin. Young

curs bark lustily, but they fly at the shadow of a kick—he's combative but not destructive; too much of the mother's milk in him to love the taste of blood yet. No saying what he may come to though!" The Captain having lighted a fresh cigar looked round the room for his shooting cap, saw it on the window seat and put it on.

"What are you going to do? You're not going out to-night, surely?" exclaimed Osythe, in renewed alarm, "you'll never follow him?"

"Follow him! No, I prefer his room to his company at present. ' But I promised that poaching fellow Branker, that I would catch him in my wood before long, and I'm just in the temper to give him a meeting now. I'll not carry my gun, but only the loaded stick; fetch it from upstairs, Osythe."

"Master, if you'll be advised you'll bide at home, one ruffling's enough i' one night."

"One ruffling warms the blood for another, so I'll not be advised; but on second thoughts it may be as well to take my gun. That Branker is a desperate fellow, and he is destructive amongst the game."

Osythe talked on to gain time, and succeeded by one feint and another in delaying the Captain full ten minutes, but at last he pushed her impatiently

aside, and laughed at her detected fears. "I am not going to provoke another struggle with my cub," said he; "I don't wish the last of my race to die on the gallows—I shall feel his fingers at my throat for a week—he can take a good grip, but he uses his nails. Stand by, dame, and let me pass."

Captain Vescey strode out of the house and down the same path to the wood, as his son had taken half an hour before. When he had gone about a couple of hundred yards, he turned back and shouted to Osythe, who still stood in the porch, "go to bed, dame, don't wait up for me; it may be morning when I come home. Leave the door on the latch."

"Very well, sir," responded the servant; and in a few moments more the darkness swallowed him up from her sight. She went into the kitchen soliloquizing: "The lad has had time to get clear away—he walks smartly—there's naught to dread; but it's a fearsome thing to see them two men quarrel. Father an' son too—right glad I am 'at Birdyfute's away for good an' all—we'll may be know what peace means again now. What strange things happens i' t' world, an' nobody heeding."

The old woman made herself a comfortable cup of tea to restore her shattered nerves, and sat till near midnight warming herself over the fire; and

as her master had not then returned, she lighted her candle and went to bed, very tired of her vigil, and wondering out of which of her master's possessions she could best indemnify herself for so much overwork.



## VII.

THAT same night it happened that Roger Bohun and Eli Burton were returning from a missionary meeting that had been held at Boothe. They were on horseback, and took the bridle-path across the fields and moor to shorten their ride, the moonlight making the way clear and safe, which it was not on dark nights on account of two or three unfenced quarries on the heath. The road over the moor was marked by great blocks of stone, set up at intervals, with a daub of white paint on the top to render them more conspicuous, and these guides showed for a considerable distance in advance, rising out of the black sea of ling and whins. The two gentlemen were riding silently, Eli Burton in front, when a figure of a man appeared at a short distance to the left, coming straight through the heath towards the path. The curate saw him first, and said, "Is this Marmaduke Vescey?—it has his air."

"Yes. Running away, I dare wager my head!" replied Eli; and then, raising his voice, he hailed the traveller, who, as soon as he descried the

horsemen had bent his steps so as to avoid them, by striking into the road at a point which they had passed. No answer was returned, so the curate cried out, "Birdyfute, you are out late to-night; stop and tell us where you are bound for." This brought the young man to a halt. "I'm bound for Boothe," cried he; and waving his arm in token of farewell, he marched on.

"My mind misgives me. I don't quite like the look of this," said Roger, thoughtfully. I should like to ride after the boy, and ask him what has come to pass. It is his habit to whistle on his way. He seems agitated and hurried; and which way has he come?"

"He must have come from the Hawksview wood, and out at Dean's Gap. I do not see any good to be gained by following him. You do not wish him to go back home if he has succeeded in breaking away."

"No, assuredly; and we are late already. Agnes will be on the watch for us." The curate put his horse in motion again, and they rode faster to make up for the minutes they had lost.

"It was a quarter past ten when we left Boothe; it must be nearly eleven now," Eli remarked, as they trotted into Moat. There was a noisy group about the door of the alehouse, whom the landlord had just turned out; they

were quiet for a moment as the parson rode by, and then their half-quarrelsome merriment broke out louder than before. Roger felt vexed; he had waged a long and wearisome crusade against beer-bibbing in the parish, but with little success.

"Slews and Branker, as usual," said he; "and Branker's wife is lying at death's door. She will never rise from her bed again."

"I did not see Branker. I thought that heavy man by the door-post was Matthew Topham," Eli Burton interposed.

"It might be. I did not give a second look their way; but I believe it was Branker."

Roger, however, was mistaken; for just at the entrance of Boscombe Lane they met Branker walking very rapidly, and quite sober. He slunk by without speaking, surlily touching his cap; and the curate observed to Eli, as he did so, that the man must have been out on one of his poaching excursions, which would by and bye bring him into trouble. It was just a quarter to twelve by the rectory hall clock when they arrived at home; both Roger and Eli observed it, and said it was pretty good night travelling for their ponies to do nine miles in an hour and a half, especially of such rough road. Agnes was waiting up to receive them, and when she had heard the account of the meeting at Boothe, who was there, and

who spoke, and what the speeches were like, Roger told her of their rencounter on the moor with Marmaduke Vescey.

"I don't care how he went, so that he is delivered from his father's power!" cried she. "I dare not tell you what catastrophe I feared while they were together. Nothing is too dreadful to have happened, with their feelings towards each other."

"Right, Agnes. Now I know there is an anxiety off your mind, and off mine too, for that matter," returned Roger, cheerfully. And little imagining the terrible revelations of the morrow, they all felt as if a difficulty and a danger were taken out of the way.

Murder! There had been murder done in Hawksview wood in the dead of the night! Two labourers, going to their work early in the morning, had found the body lying beside the path—the head beaten in—the face one bruised and broken mass—every feature undistinguishable; but they recognised, in the gigantic frame, the "Black Lord" of the country gossip's tales; and rushing down to Moat they proclaimed their hideous news, and found reluctant help to carry the corpse home to the haunted house upon the hill. All about the place, where the murdered man lay, the turf was cut, and the ferns torn and trampled as if

there had been a long and deadly struggle. The Captain's gun lay at some distance, both barrels discharged; but that plunder had not been the object of the manslayer was evident from his purse and watch remaining untouched in his pockets. Dr. Drake examined the body, and gave it as his opinion that the murder had been pre-meditated, and that Captain Vescey had been attacked from behind by a heavy blow from some blunt weapon, which had not fulfilled its purpose of stunning him; that he had then turned on his assailant and fired but ineffectually, and dropping his gun had engaged in a hand to hand conflict; but dizzied by the former blow, he had probably fallen over the roots of the elm under which he was found, and thus lay in his antagonist's power. That they must have been pretty evenly matched, as regarded personal strength, seemed undoubted from the traces of their struggle.

Who was the murderer? who was the murderer? A whisper gave the name first; but, ere noon, the whisper grew to a loud execration—it was the murdered man's own son—Marmaduke Vescey, the younger. Suspicion pointed at him straight; and as the fearful quarrel that preceded his flight oozed out through Osythe Dobbie and her son, suspicion in most men's minds was converted into certainty. The story, with all its horrible details,

came soon to the rectory. Roger Bohun and Eli heard that Birdyfute was suspected, without daring to lift up a voice for him; but Agnes, with pale cheeks and eyes full of tears, eagerly exclaimed, "I will pledge my life on his innocence. He might have struck a fatal blow in his mad rage; but he is incapable of deliberate assassination!" But Agnes was in a minority of one, against the opinion of Astondale, combined to condemn him.

The coroner's inquest went closely into the evidence, entirely circumstantial as it was, and returned a unanimous verdict of wilful murder against Marmaduke Vescey, the younger. Warrants were immediately issued for his apprehension; and the notorious evil living of Captain Vescey was forgotten in his miserable fate, and the hatred of his murderer. Every threat, every angry and incautious word that Birdyfute had ever uttered, was now remembered against him, and quoted with such additions and enforced meanings as the imaginative echo chose to give. That day will long and long be remembered through the valley, where every one talked and no one worked; and pilgrimages were made to the scene of the murder, and then, to Hawkview, for the gloomy pleasure of watching the window of the room where the dead man lay and the inquest was sitting.

Before night it was known that Marmaduke Vescey had been apprehended as he was leaving Boothe; and the next day he was examined before the magistrates, and committed to take his trial on the charge of parricide.

"I will never believe he did it!" cried Agnes Bohun, with an outburst of compassionate tears, "Never! Roger, will you go over and see him? He must be well defended. O! Eli Burton, the poor lad has nothing, you must undertake his cause."

"He might have better counsel than myself; but I will go with Roger and volunteer myself if you wish it; but I must tell you, that my own impression against him is strong, very strong," Eli gravely replied. Agnes glanced at her husband's face, then at Eli Burton's, and saw that both went with the stream; but for once she dared to maintain her own opinion against Roger's, and not to maintain it outwardly only, but to be strengthened and upheld by it in her natural sorrow and anxiety for the lad she had known and liked so long and dearly.

## VIII.

MARMADUKE VESEY had been removed to Carlisle, and thither journeyed the curate and Eli Burton—charged with many messages of hope and kindness from Agnes—the day after the murdered man had been deposited in the vault of Boscombe church. They found him in a grave mood, neither sorrowful nor defiant, nor yet anxious, but only chafed by the rigorous confinement to which he was subjected. He scarcely seemed to suppose it necessary to assert his innocence; and his natural assumption that no one who knew him could for an instant believe him guilty, carried a welcome doubt to the minds of both Roger and Eli. This doubt was still further increased at an interview they afterwards had with Mr. Loftus, who had already engaged the highest talent of the bar for his nephew's defence, and who was firmly persuaded that he was not cognizant of his father's murder. With this consolation, slight though it was against the body of evidence



arrayed on the other side, Roger Bohun and his friend returned to Boscombe. Agnes smiled triumphantly: "I was sure you would change your minds;" said she; "he will be acquitted!"

But though she believed this firmly, the interval until the trial came on was one of most wearing anxiety; and when it did come, the mental distress she experienced was so intense, that if it had been a child of her own who was in Birdyfute's awful position she could not have suffered more. She accompanied Roger and Eli Burton to Carlisle, and was in court from morning until evening during the whole of the two days and a half that the trial lasted. Miss Sage Booty and Squire Brough were present also, and many other Astondale folk, who were not amongst the cloud of witnesses. When Marmaduke first appeared he looked much agitated; his countenance changed repeatedly, his colour came and went like a modest young girl's, and on the strength of this emotion two-thirds of the court condemned him as a truculent, cowardly, self-convicted criminal; but Agnes, who never took her eyes from his face, read in it no such signs of guilt, and better physiognomists than herself said it was a fine, handsome, ingenuous countenance, expressive of strong and

untamed passions, but altogether clear of craft and malignancy.

But the lad's fate depended not on what this person or that person thought of his appearance, but upon the evidence that could be brought for or against him. When the examination of witnesses had gone on for some time, Agnes felt as if a net of false appearances were being drawn gradually around him; he became conscious of it himself, and seemed to gather his forces up to watch for a weak place to break through. It was towards the end of the second day that he passed a slip of paper to Eli Burton, with a few pencilled words: "It will turn on a question of time—have Osythe Dobbie recalled to speak to the hour I left Hawksview, and the Boothe innkeeper to the time I reached his house."

Osythe Dobbie declared that it was just on the stroke of ten when she shut the prisoner out of Hawksview front door, and the innkeeper at Boothe stated that it was as nearly as he could remember half-past twelve when he was rung up out of his bed to admit the traveller, who said he had walked from beyond the moor since moon-rise. He looked tired and dusty; but not to say exhausted. There was nothing suspicious in his appearance. He ate a hearty supper;

went to bed, saying he should want to break-fast and get away very early in the morning. Between his leaving Hawksview and reaching the inn at Boothe no one had met the prisoner except Roger Bohun and Eli Burton. They spoke to the place where they had passed him, and to the hour as nearly as they could. The place was distant about three miles and a half from Hawksview, and about five from Boothe.

Thereupon ensued a question of walking. Could a man walk three miles and a half, and commit such a murder as had been committed within a single hour? Four miles an hour was fair walking on level ground. The prisoner, as was in evidence, had crossed the encumbered heath, where his progress must necessarily have been slower than on the high road; yet, at such a time, he was at such a distance from the scene of the murder. To this it was objected that the hours named were conjectural—nobody except Osythe Dobbie could swear to an exact point of time—and in this case, a single half, or even a quarter of an hour, was vital in its bearing on the prisoner's guilt or innocence. The father and son after a bitter quarrel had left their home, and gone in the same direction within ten minutes of each other. A witness named

Branker stated, on oath, that he had gone up into Hawkview wood to look after some snares that he had set for game, and that he saw Captain Vescey and his son together in that wood; and that suspecting that they had come out to look after him, he had hidden himself behind a pheasant shed until they had gone by, when he had run away, and returned home. The prisoner and his father were talking angrily when he saw them; they went in the direction of the elm tree, where the body was found; and he, the witness, escaped in a contrary direction, which obliged him to make a circuitous route to get back to Moat. An attempt was made to throw discredit on this man's testimony, because of his known bad reputation; and because he had himself once stood in the dock, charged with a brutal murder, similar in character to the present one, but which could not be brought home to him. This attempt, however, failed, and rather damaged Birdyfute's case than otherwise. Then as to the instrument with which the deed had been committed, there were suspicious words and circumstances against the prisoner. It was a short, heavy iron bar, jagged and rust eaten; and John Dobbie swore to the following conversation between himself and Captain Vescey's son. The iron bar was lying

on the floor of an out-house, with several vermin-traps and other rubbish; and about a week before the murder was committed, while John Dobbie was looking amongst them for a trap to take home to catch the rats in his barn, the prisoner came in and asked him what he was about. Then he picked up the bar, and swung it round his head, as if it had been a light switch, and brought it down with a crack upon a block of wood, saying, "if that were your pate, John, I think there'd be no need to repeat the dose!" John replied, "that he believed his skull was uncommon thick; but he wouldn't like it to be tried with that tool, in a hand like young master's." They then fell to talking of games that brought out the muscles, and strengthened them; and the prisoner plucked off his coat, pushed up his shirt-sleeves, and showed John his arm, "proudlie, to let me see what a limb it was for a lad," the witness said. Then the prisoner straightened his right arm, and defied witness to bend it. Witness tried with all his might, but could no more bend it than he could bend the iron bar. The prisoner laughed, and said some day it would deal straighter and stronger blows than any it had dealt yet; he then held it out, looked along it, doubled his fist and shook it, with a wicked look in his eyes;

then putting on his coat again, he took up the bar and walked off with it. The next day, while witness was cleaving fire-wood, the prisoner came to him in the yard, and asked him if he had removed the iron bar from within the house-porch where he had placed it; witness had not seen it since he carried it away; witness never did see it again, until a week after the murder, when it was found in Hawksview wood, amongst the long grass and ferns, about a dozen yards from the elm tree, where the body of Captain Vescey had been discovered. The examination of this witness closed the case for the prosecution. Few persons were called for the defence; and a real sickness of heart fell on Agnes as she listened to the speeches of the counsel on each side. Birdy-fute had found her out; and he might have read the fluctuations of his fate in her face, even if he had not heard himself first eloquently denounced as a cold-blooded, cowardly, midnight murderer, by one gentleman in a wig; and then pathetically cited as a victim, whose life was falsely sworn away, by another. The summing up was, on the whole, against him; but the judge dwelt carefully on the time between the prisoner's leaving home and reaching Boothe, as short for the distance he had to walk; and on his demeanour at the inn, which was quite collected and

unsuspicious. Then he cited the damning facts of quarrel and threat; and the positive testimony of the man Branker, who had seen the father and son together near the fatal spot, and had heard their voices in contention. He said there had been an attempt made to upset this man's evidence. His character was against it; but what motive could he have in swearing away the life of an innocent person? They (the jury) must carefully sift the evidence, and convict or acquit on what had been brought before them in that place, without reference to any unsupported suggestions that might have been thrown out. The conversation about the iron bar, with the witness John Dobbie was not very important; it sounded like the bravado of a boy proud to exhibit his strength to a servant who had known him from childhood; but the disappearance of the bar was suspicious—the jury must consider where the probability lay. Had the prisoner himself removed it from the porch to a convenient hiding-place until such time as he found an opportunity to use it, or had it been carried away by some other person? If the jury believed that the prisoner had purposely concealed the iron bar, and then feigned to have lost it, that would be a strong point against him; but they must remember that it had never been seen in his possession

after he removed it from the tool-house. There was another view of this part of the evidence: if the prisoner had designed the bar for a murderous use, would he have put it in so conspicuous a place as the porch through which his father passed many times daily? Osythe Dobbie saw it there, and the man Branker saw it there when he was laying down new gravel on the garden walks, the same day as John Dobbie said the conversation between him and the prisoner took place; afterwards it disappeared, and was seen no more until it was found in the wood, clotted with blood and human hair, near the spot where the murder had been committed. This part of the evidence was weak; but in support of it they had the positive threat sworn by two witnesses, "I will kill you, if you do so and so," and the sudden attack of the prisoner upon his father, which might have terminated in murder *then* but for the interference of the female servant and her son. Within half an hour of this attack, if the prisoner were guilty, the murder must have been accomplished—and within two hours and a half after, he was eating a hearty supper at an inn nine miles off, without any of those appearances of disorder and personal distress which might be expected to ensue on a



deadly struggle, which ended in a foul murder. The jury must not, however, attach too much weight to unsuspicious appearances, for the nerve and strength exhibited by great criminals in the concealment of their crimes, were qualities that enabled them to commit them. If they believed that the prisoner had deliberately planned his father's death, and done the murder, as the evidence tended to show, then they must convict him; but if they had any doubts they must acquit him. It was better that many guilty should escape than one innocent man suffer.

The jury retired to consider their verdict; and after being absent for a considerable time they sent for the plan of the localities. When they finally appeared, amidst the dead silence of the court, their finding was that the murder had not been proven, and they acquitted the prisoner. This verdict had not been anticipated, even by Marmaduke himself, and was received without any token of applause. The judge, after a pause, said it was the only satisfactory conclusion they could have come to. He then addressed a few stern words to the prisoner on the ungoverned violence of his temper, which had brought him to that place, admonished him that his sin would yet find him out, though human testimony

failed, if he were indeed guilty of the crime for which he had been arraigned, and then ordered him to be discharged.

"My Lord, I am not guilty of my father's blood," replied Marmaduke, lifting his face up. "He had other enemies besides his son."

When he had spoken he looked towards the place where Agnes had sat throughout the trial, but she had disappeared, and he was sharply commanded by a policeman to "clear out of that and make way for his betters." As he went forth from the court the people fell back and made way for him, gathering their garments closely about them lest they should be defiled by the touch of a murderer, for such, in spite of his acquittal, the popular voice declared him to be. In a few minutes he found himself standing in the winterly sunshine out of doors, dazed, confused, yet with an exultant sense of freedom swelling his heart almost to bursting. What cared he for curious gaze and ostentatious repulsion at his presence? He never saw them! He had escaped that hateful prison; he had been delivered from imminent death, and restored to the possession of real existence. Such a whirl of thoughts and feelings swept over his heart and brain as could not have risen out of any other train of circumstances

in human experience. While he was standing thus quite inobservant of external things, his Uncle Loftus took his arm suddenly and drew him away—and not a moment too soon. The mob that would have made holiday at his death had he been convicted, began to gather at his heels with hiss, yell, and execration. From words they might soon have passed to deeds, but a hack cab dashed up to the pavement, Mr. Loftus hustled his nephew in, and they were driven rapidly off out of sight and hearing of the tumult. Those few moments of mob-hatred and scorn made a man's indignant and resentful heart burn in Birdyfute's breast. He never knew a boy's gay, exultant feelings again. He had stepped over the threshold of life into a world that branded him a murderer, where every hand and every voice would be raised against him.

"England is no home for you, Marmaduke, while the mystery of your father's death is uncleared up," said Mr. Loftus, sadly. "You must change your name, and start afresh in a new world."

"The sooner the better," was the proud and sullen reply. Mr. Loftus looked in the young man's face, and saw his eyes glittering; he was touched, and laid his hand gently upon that with

which Marmaduke convulsively clutched the side of the vehicle.

"It is very hard, lad; but 'tis your only chance," said he, with shaking voice. "My heart warmed to you when I first saw you; but we can't live together now. You can't live where everybody avoids you. You heard those yells—that's the general feeling about the matter. Mrs. Bohun is persuaded of your innocence and so am I; but we are only two against the world."

No more was said until they reached the inn. There Roger Bohun, Agnes and Eli Burton were waiting to see him, and say a few words of good-bye. It was to Agnes he could best bear to listen; she drew him aside and spoke so kindly and soothingly, that the evil spirit of anger was obliged to keep silence before her. "You will leave us all, Birdyfute, because it is the best for you," said she, holding his hand and peering sweetly into his clouded eyes; but I know this hand is clear of blood, and I look forward to the day when all the world shall know it too. Live in hope of that day that you may come back to us, my dear—live as your mother would have wished you to live—remember always that you are a

Christian and a gentleman. Let suspicion say what it will, I shall not forget you. Never hold back from claiming my friendship if you return to us, or from seeking our counsel if it can in any measure help you." She pressed his hand warmly and hurried away; and a few minutes after he saw her get into Squire Brough's carriage and drive off. He turned from the window and approached his uncle, who was selecting several bank notes from his pocket-book. "Let us eat together, uncle, before we separate," said he. "It is not dark yet; when it is I will go. You are right, England is no longer a home for me."

"I will look after Hawksview for you against you come home. You have an empty purse now; but there are the means of a beginning of life for you. You must write to me wherever you are. Gather up the notes. Is there anything you would like to have done at Hawksview?"

Marmaduke did so. "Yes; have the cottage razed, the trees cut down, the garden obliterated. Blot the place out of the map of Astondale; it is accursed. Turn it into a farm, or let it run wild, I care not. I shall never see it again."

"Would you like to sell it to Squire Brough?"

"I cannot sell it. There is a clause in the deeds forbidding it. Only, if the Vesceys were extinct, it lapses to the crown—it is worth little."

"It is a name. Vescey of Hawksview was once synonymous with all Christian and courtly virtues."

"Once I might have said that so it shall be again; but my chance has passed from me," replied Marmaduke, bitterly.

When the night fell, the uncle and nephew parted, Mr. Loftus to return to his solitary home, Marmaduke Vescey to float adrift upon the sea of life, cast loose from every anchor of youthful love and youthful hope.

## Part the Third.

### I.

'Tis no uncommon thing for people to exclaim, in desultory moments, "I wonder what we shall all be doing ten years' hence?" Ten years is such a long time to look forward to; but when they are gone, memory flies back to some event beyond their remotest limit, and our cry is, "It seems to have happened only yesterday!" Yet, when we begin to take to pieces the interval, or to examine the changes that have been working all around us, while those ten years were passing silently from us, we perceive that the way is distinctly marked; and that every individual day has had its mission, and fulfilled it ill or well.

Even a careless observer would have seen, that during the ten years which had elapsed since the murder of Captain Vescey of Hawksview—an epoch from which the country folks dated in preference to any other—a great and important revolution had been wrought in the parish of Boscombe-Magna. Squire Brough's house re-

mained as of old; but the church had been rebuilt in very respectable ecclesiastical taste, and the rectory had been enlarged, the pretty bay-windowed drawing-room, with its outside verandah of creepers remained; but there were handsome apartments beyond, which better accommodated themselves to the present rector's family. There was a total transformation at Moat; and Wha'd-ha'-thowt-it? had disappeared from the face of the earth. The former village was represented by two straight rows of model cottages, with gardens in front and rear; a new school-house, and a mutual improvement society's room and library, over which Miss Sage Booty held only a nominal presidency. The ale-house was there still; but it looked the least thriving concern in the place, and the landlord might have been obliged to shut it up long since, probably, but for the profits of his little farm and market-garden.

These changes had been wrought under the influence of the new rector, the Honourable and Reverend Roger Bohun. The Reverend Augustus Blaydes had been apoplectically gathered to his fathers at his villa near Florence; and the bishop of the diocese immediately presented the living to the hard-working curate, who had now lived in the parish altogether nineteen years. Besides being rector of Boscombe, he was also



canon residentiary of Boreham-cum-Minster, where he went for three months annually, and which made a handsome addition to his income. The head of the noble house of Bohun had also restored its customary allowance to the youngest son; and submitted to a reconciliation under stress of circumstances, and a longing desire to behold the only grandsons it had pleased providence to vouchsafe to his prayers—Tristan, Harry, and Louis.

Tristan had just joined his regiment as ensign; Harry had been afloat nearly a year in the Queen's service; and Louis called, from his exceeding gravity and solidity of deportment, "The Archbishop," was preparing for college at Boreham-cum-Minster. Mistress Mona had just reached her twentieth birth-day, unwedded and unwooed—a circumstance which puzzled Agnes exceedingly, for Mona was very beautiful, very spirited, very amiable; and her mother never forgot that before *she* was twenty her two eldest children were born. Mona had cousins married, not half so charming as herself, who would sometimes ask her if she meant to die an old maid; though anything less suggestive of that chilly idea than her bright and blooming face could not possibly be conceived. "Die an old maid? Certainly not," she used to reply, with arch laugh.

"It is my impression that I am saving up for somebody nice, and I shall abide in patience until he finds me out. I should not like at all to succeed Miss Sage Booty, though she is a dear old soul, because I can see with my eyes, and feel with my heart, how much happier my mamma is."

Such were Mistr ss Mona's views on the great matrimonial theory. She was very candid, and allowed to all her young female relatives that she had never enjoyed the sublime triumph of refusing an offer, because no gentleman had ever proposed to her. They rather despised her for this; but Hatty Lennox, who was good-natured and sharp-witted, though she adored admiration, averred that it was not, and could not be, true—somebody *must* have fallen in love with her, yes, over and over again! Mona looked guilty, and repeated her first asseveration, whereupon Hatty, with an acuteness that would have done credit to a detective, exclaimed, "You have never had to say 'No,' because you can *act* 'No' in such a way that no man, who is not a blind bat, could mistake you; and no man who is not an infatuated goose would plunge head over heels into certain refusal. I know ever so many people who like you, and who would do more if you would let them; but, I suppose, you don't think flirting an innocent amusement."

"Well, think I cant see that next to the pleasure of saying 'Yes,' must be the ecstasy of saying 'No,'" remarked a young un-come-out cousin, a born coquette, and a budding beauty of great promise. She was Lady Alicia Bohun's daughter.

Mona did not think anything about flirting; she never flirted, and everybody liked her. Tristan, Harry, and Louis agreed unanimously upon one point—none of their girl-cousins were to be compared to their sister Mona. Look how beautiful she was; and when did anybody ever see her cross? She was as generous as July sunshine, and clever!—why, she knew everything. The boys might well say so. Who was it elucidated early lessons? Who was it smoothed fraternal squabbles? Who was it that had a ready and deft pair of hands when they were as helpless as kittens? "Bless her!" as midshipman Harry said, "she's a clipper of a sister!"

Agnes loved her daughter fondly. Grievous, most grievous would a separation have been to her; but the maternal pride was rather hurt at seeing so much beauty, grace, and pleasantness unsought, and apparently unappreciated. She would have liked to see Mona worthily courted and worthily won; but once or twice, when she had detected suspicious symptoms in any guest,

and had let her own countenance shine thereupon, the young maiden had become frigid as a polar winter, until these tender germs were effectually nipped and killed, when the frostiness thawed gradually into a sisterly amity. So it came to pass that Mona had many devoted friends, but no lover; for she never mortified any man, and never encouraged one either.

Agnes once whispered a little complaint to Roger, when a promising bloom had been prematurely pinched off; but the Rector laughed, and said he was glad Mona was in no haste to leave home, for when she went, he must have a second curate. I know not whether she was accessary to the translation of two gentlemen who had served the church and her father in that capacity, but Miss Sage Bootie, whose bosom in her later years opened to clerical woes, gave her credit for it; but we have Mona's word that she had never received an offer, therefore *she* could not have blighted the curates, and probably somebody else was responsible for that iniquity.

Mona had reached the mature age of twenty without having experienced one pang of the tender passion, or even having fancied herself in the least touched thereby. Perhaps she was rather cold; perhaps she was rather scornful, or proud, or indifferent, or bad to please; perhaps she had

not had opportunities; or again, as she herself suggested, perhaps she *was* saving for somebody nice, who had yet not turned up.

Let us then leave the conjectural, and regard the actual Mistress Mona Bohun, the sunshine of Boscombe Rectory, the prettiest and pleasantest young woman in the parish, godmother to many babies, school-examiner, church-organist, and choir-leader, papa's amanuensis, mamma's spectacles, brother's pride, and everybody's favourite—Mistress Mona Bohun, sitting at the writing-table of the old drawing-room, with intent face bent over her desk, making a fair, legible copy from several sheets of blotted manuscript that lie strewn at her left-hand—the manuscript of that now well-known work, “Bohun's History of the Christian World.” Now, a truly beautiful woman is a rarity. The sex are generally best described as pretty, handsome, interesting, pleasing, ordinary, or very plain; but a woman whom everybody agrees to pronounce *beautiful*, is—I repeat it emphatically—a *rarity*. Such a woman was Mistress Mona Bohun.

There was plenty of sunshine in the room; but where she sat, was shade. The clear, perfect outline of her face was not hidden, nor yet hardly exposed, by any fantastic arrangement of her hair, which, rippled by a natural wave, dark or golden

as the light caught it, was rolled back in loose braids, and knotted low on her neck. There was a cool morning bloom upon her cheek, a subdued lustre in her large pure violet blue eyes, a maidenly candour on the tender rose of her lips. She was tall, but not too tall; slight and shapely, graceful in repose, agile and swift in action—a woman, pure and simple, not a suspicion of the goddess about her.

This description is miserably inadequate, but it must pass. Let the reader vivify it with his own ideal—he can conceive of nothing more lovely, nothing more loveable, than Mona Bohun.

If, instead of being a comfortable church dignitary, her father had continued a poor curate, she would have kneaded the household bread, brushed the carpets, mended the family stockings, made her brother's shirts, and thrown all her young energies into her work, without ever proposing to herself a discontented thought; but fortune had raised her above the contemplation of daily needs, and up to this date, sickness and sorrow had passed her by, as something charmed against their universal touch.

The task now before her was one that would occupy her full three hours, and she applied herself to it, with the matter-of-fact diligence of a copying

clerk. The long slender white fingers moved at even pace along the lines. Never a blot, rarely an erasure, still more rarely, an omission. It was manuscript that a compositor would delight to put in type. When she was about midway at her work, Agnes came in and looked over her for a little while, resting one of her fair hands on the girl's shoulder.

"It does not tire your eyes, Mona! Pray, write no more at a time than papa asks," said she, with maternal anxiousness.

"No, mamma." Mona turned her rosy lips and touched her mother's hand. 'Twas a slight action; but it spoke her caressing nature, and showed how perfect was the love that subsisted between them. Agnes still lingered, and presently Mona looked up at her.

"Anything the matter, mamma?" she asked. "Any more news of Tristan. Ah! there is, there is!"

"Yes, love. His regiment is ordered to the East. We expected it, you know. Immediately too; and your grandpapa wants us to go to Castle Bohun to see him, as he will not get more than three or four days leave."

"It does not trouble you, mamma; does it? Tristan will be overjoyed," said Mona, rising and

putting her arms round her mother's waist, and kissing her when she saw a tearful dimness cloud her eyes.

"It ought not to trouble me, Mona. There, there, we must not be foolish. Finish your writing, and then come to me." Agnes extricated herself, and put her daughter off with a smile, and Mona resumed her pen.

By twelve o'clock the sheets were filled, and gathering them together, she carried them to the study, singing one of her favourite spirited songs that set the heart beating fast to hear it. Agnes felt her imagination fired by it, as she listened with brighter hopes for her soldier son. Mona knew the cheering effect it would have, and continued it until she was seated in the drawing room with her brother's letter in her hand; and even then, she went on, though rather more softly :

"March, march, Ettrick and Teviotdale ;

Why, my lads, dinna ye march forward in order ?

March, march, Eskdale and Liddesdale,

All the blue bonnets are over the border.

Many a banner spread, flutters above your head,

Many a crest that is famous in story ;

Mount and make ready, then, sons of the mountain glen,

Fight for the Queen, and the old Scottish glory."

"We shall go into Kent, mamma, shall we not?" she asked, bringing her reading and her song to an end at the same moment.



"Papa has not seen the letter yet; we must hear what he says. I should have liked Tristan here, all to ourselves," replied Agnes.

"Yes, mamma; but half the time of his leave would be spent on the road coming and going. Grandpapa would be so disappointed too, if he did not pay him a visit. Then if we go into the south we may see him embark. Mamma, speak for our going."

"Leave me to think it over, and go to the Moat House, dear; Miss Sage Booty will want to hear all the news. You might carry the letter with you; but bring it back. Papa will not be home from Boothe till evening, too late for to-day's post; but I will write to Tristan a line now, or he will be put out. To-morrow we will decide—I think it will be best to go."

"Yes, mamma, I'm sure it will. Mammie (Miss Sage Booty) will miss him, and that is a pity. I must comfort her with visions of glory. Darling, you are not to fret. It will do Tristan good to see some fighting—you are not to think of wooden legs and empty sleeves, but of stars and garters. Mamma, I don't like to see you so sad." Mona patted her mother's hand fondly; but there was a mist in her own eyes too.

"I shall cheer up by and bye—now do run

away and let me write my letter.' Thus imperatively admonished, she only lingered one more minute to press another longer and tenderer kiss on her mother's cheek, and then took herself off.

Miss Sage Booty was over head and ears in business when Mona arrived at the old Moat House, and communicated her intelligence.

"Everything comes at once, I do think!" cried she, leaving a pestle and mortar, with which she had pounded herself into a high fever, and dropping wearily upon the sofa. "Tristan is going out to the Crimea. Of course, that is the luck *I* bring him. If he had been anyone else's godson he might have walked calmly up the ladder of promotion, without ever getting within eyeshot of an enemy."

"But that would not have suited Tristan; we must have one bit of glory amongst us."

"Glory, stuff! Piper, please to go on pounding that mixture. I must tell you, Mona, my dear, I was in distress before you came, and little needed this news about my boy. 'When sorrows come, they come not single spies, but whole battalions.' Yes, Mona, that they do; Solomon must have been in his wisest mood when he said that. Solomon—let me see, was it Solomon or Shakspeare—I'm sure I forget

which; I must be taking leave of my memory. I've lost my best patient in all Moat—old Jerry Frouston's gone; such a mild guidable old man, and faithful to the last to Globb—that excellent specific, my dear, to which your mother has such an unaccountable antipathy. Piper reckons that, during the three and twenty years that he has taken it, he must have swallowed as much as one thousand seven hundred and ninety-seven bottles, or a bottle and a half a week."

"What an enormous quantity! And did it never cure him?" asked Mona, innocently.

"Cure him! my dear; there was nothing the matter with him but wickedness and bad temper, but he's gone now."

"He cost my mistress in the specific two hundred and twenty-four pounds, twelve shillings and sixpence, for it was half-a-crown the bottle;" interposed Piper, desisting from her pounding, and clasping her wrist tenderly; "I say, 'tis extravagant in a poor man to drink so much physic—a bottle a year's enough."

"It did not come out of your pocket, Mistress Piper," retorted her patroness sharply; and did not he always say that his stomach felt to want it. Did he not tell me it was like a warm lining to him? Speak respectfully of him, now he's departed, if you please."

Piper looked highly scornful, but tightened her lips and held her peace, while Miss Sage Booty went on. "But I have not yet got to the end of my chapter of troubles; that fellow, Branker, has contrived to catch his own hand in a fox-trap and smash it horribly—Drake wants to take it off, but he won't submit—and just at this crisis to think that I should be out of Globb. I don't know when such a thing has happened to me before. Piper do go on pounding! We are trying to make a substitute for it until the next case comes down from London. I believe I have found out the receipt all but one ingredient."

"That will be a great saving of expense, I should think," suggested Mona.

"O! dear, no, Miss Mona, that it won't," cried Piper, defiantly. "Nothing will my mistress have used but the very best French brandy."

"Do you suppose I want to poison people?" said Miss Sage Booty. "Would I condescend to offer distilled turnips and potatoes? Far be it from me to use such impositions. That is the specific, Mona. Medicines are always made with pestle and mortar. I wish you would taste it, dear, and tell me if you think it is right." Mona begged to decline, on the plea that she had to walk home, and she was afraid of her head.

"Oh! there is nothing to hurt you in it. It is only carraway seeds and cognac. I wonder what else Globb uses." Mona suggested water, and Piper seized on the parsimonious idea with avidity. "Water it is," cried she. "Water, and nothing else, unless it be treacle."

"I don't think our attempt to counterfeit it is lawful, so I shall only dispense a little of this to Branker, to keep him from sinking; but I will write to-day, and order a whole case of a dozen quart bottles to be sent to Tristan. He may find it a real comfort."

"I think Tristan would prefer *your* Globb, Mammie," said Mona, laughing. "He hates anything with the name of medicine."

"Well then, I'll send him some of that golden brandy that my poor nephew Augustus brought over the last time he came to see me. He must take it to keep out the cold. Poor, dear boy! And where is he going? Mona, I wish you could think of somethink else for me to give him. Does he want a horse? Piper, pack me a box, and I'll go to Canterbury to see him myself, and find out what he wants."

"I don't think he wants anything, Mammie, you have been so generous to him already."

"You are like your mother, my dear; she always liked to keep him short of hats and coats

when he was a baby. I insist upon his wanting something. I know, from Augustus Bladyes, that he must want many things. Augustus always did. I look upon him as my eldest son. I've left him all my property in my will. Why cannot I be allowed to indulge him in my lifetime?"

Miss Sage Booty looked highly affronted, as if she suspected Tristan's family of conspiring to defraud him of the benefits that she thirsted to bestow. She was a generous crotchety old soul, and her love for her god-child had developed her best points.

Mona soon smoothed down her ruffled quills, and brought her round to a state of amiable composure, in which she left her, pounding the carraway seeds and cognac, which Piper had triumphantly drowned in a copious infusion of spring water. Branker would have a much better chance of successfully combating his inflammatory symptoms if dosed with this amateur specific, than he would have done if the original Globb had been exhibited in his case.

As Mona went through the village of Moat, she saw Dr. Drake's gig standing at the injured man's cottage door, and was told by a woman who came out that he had consented at last to allow his hand to be taken off, which would make him a cripple for life. It was his right hand; and how he was

cursing and swearing with the pain. The girl hurried by the house, for she could hear the hoarse, screaming voice, which sounded like that of a delirious person, and all her nature recoiled from the repulsive and brutal character of this man.

When she reached home, she found her mother calm again. Her letter to Tristan was written; and her mind had stayed itself upon the promise of God, "As thy day is, so shall thy strength be. The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."

## II.

ROGER BOHUN had got back from Boothe, and promptly settled that they should all go to Castle Bohun on the following Monday, and regulate their after-movements by Tristan's. If his regiment sailed from Portsmouth, to Portsmouth they would follow; or if from Dover, to Dover they would go.

"I hope our ghostly protectress will accompany him with her invisible shield," said Mona. The rector looked very grave for a moment or two, then smiled cheerfully at his wife, and began to talk of something else.

Dinner was just over, and they were grouped cosily round the fireside when a servant entered hastily, and said that a messenger had come from Moat to beg the rector to go over immediately to Branker's; he was almost mad to see him, and he could not live over the night. Roger Bohun never sent his young curate on such an office as this, or there would have been temptation enough to do so now, for the night had closed in wet and cold, and he was already tired with his long ride to and from Boothe. Mona made him wear a



plaid over his coat, and dismissed him with a kiss, and a promise that tea should be all ready for him on his return.

"O mamma, these must be trying scenes for papa!" said she, standing with reflective face before the fire when he was gone. "What can he say to Branker? They seem to send for the clergyman as if he could save them when they are dying—these bad men. Do you think it is true that he did murder that gamekeeper, as Osythe Dobbie says? He has an awful countenance; I was always afraid to look at him. Is hell what such as he fear, I wonder? Is it for such as he it is prepared?"

"Mona, the Bible nowhere says that hell was *prepared* for man," replied Agnes, seriously. "There are fearful punishments denounced against the wicked which I *cannot* explain, and which I *dare* not explain *away*; but we must prepare them for ourselves—we must reap what we sow. Let us hope that this man may have a longer day given him to repent of his guilt, if there is, indeed, blood on his right hand."

Once out upon the road, the rector, with his hat pressed down firmly upon his brows, walked rapidly forward. The rain came down slantwise full in his face, sharp and stinging almost as hail. It was a dark night; and but that he

knew every foot of the ground he had to traverse, every soft, boggy place, every deeply-broken rut, and every obstructive heap of stones flung down at random in the choice Astondale method of mending the roads, he would scarcely ever have got to Moat at all. On reaching the cottage where Branker lived he found a group of idle people, notwithstanding the inclement weather, crowding round the door, and when he entered he saw, to his astonishment, Miss Sage Booty sitting at the bed-side, writing from Branker's dictation. She looked very sick, and struggled to look dignified, but it would not do. The moment the rector appeared she dropped the pen, and said, "Here, Mr. Bohun, 'tis Branker's confession, you must finish it, for I cannot bear this any longer, I can't indeed!"

Dr. Drake was leaning against the chimney-piece, regarding the clammy visage of the dying man with disgust. Branker himself seemed only intent on getting his task over, lest he should leave it incomplete. He was a powerfully built man, but his flesh was wasted from him, and his present appearance was revolting in the extreme, for an expression of pain contorted his mouth into a sardonic grin. He followed Miss Sage Booty's retreating figure with eyes that moved in a stiff ghastly way, like the eyes of an

automaton, until she passed through the doorway, and then he turned them on Roger.

"Branker was detailing the murder of Lord Foulis's gamekeeper when you came in Mr. Bohun," said Dr. Drake, abruptly.

"Yes—and when I had made sure he was dead I flung him into the pit-hole. There had been rain, and it was well-nigh full of water. Write that down, parson," said the ruffian. "This hand that the doctor cut off this morning was the hand that done it. What says the scripture? 'If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off and cast it from thee——'"

The rector checked his blasphemous use of holy writ with an imperative gesture. "Go on with your confession," said he, seating himself in the place which Miss Sage Booty had vacated. Branker took a silent fit, which lasted a considerable time.

"Have you anything more to say. If you have, let it be said quickly," urged Dr. Drake, who was impatient to be gone from a scene where he could do no good. "You killed Robin, and that we all knew before you made a virtue of confessing it."

"I may live; I may get better yet," muttered the man. "I don't feel like dying. What should I put my neck in the halter for?"

"There's another murder on his conscience," whispered the surgeon. "He was tried and acquitted for the gamekeeper, you know."

The rector nodded, and signed the other to be silent. He was intently watching Branker's countenance, and the inaudible murmers of his purple lips. There was a swealing tallow candle in the room, which threw an unsteady flare upon the bed and its occupant. First one, and then another of the curious folks outside, opening the door a few inches to see what was going on within, the flame wavered in the current of air, and, at last, in a stronger gust than usual, it was blown out altogether. In the sudden darkness that ensued, Branker sprang up with a wild yell of terror. "Not yet, not yet; I'll confess the other!" shrieked he. "Parson, *let me feel your hand.*" Some of the women who heard the cry ran home stopping their ears, and declaring that the devil had passed into the house and claimed his own. By dint of talking it over afterwards, they persuaded themselves that they had actually seen him in the shape of a winged beast.

There were a few half-burnt sticks on the hearth, and Dr. Drake quickly blew them into a flame. Having relit the candle, he took the precaution of fastening the door to avoid a repetition of the accident, when the more daringly

inquisitive applied themselves to watch through the uncurtained window.

"Branker, that fearful cry of yours told us that there is yet another secret crime on your unhappy soul," said Roger Bohun, solemnly. "Speak; purge your conscience by full confession, and then seek your peace at God's hands, if haply you may find it."

The miserable man still showed a strange reluctance. A mortal horror had got possession of him; the bed under him shook with his convulsive trembling; his lips moved fast; his face was beaded with sweat.

"He has been a bad man; he dies very hard," said Dr. Drake. "Can you make anything out of this silent gibbering?"

A vivid flash of recollection streamed into the rector's mind. He paused a moment, as if in horror at the picture thus suddenly presented to him, and then pointing at the writhing, cowering figure on the bed, exclaimed, "Captain Vescey was murdered in Hawkview wood ten years ago—surely this is the man that did the deed!"

Branker heard the words, and understood the gesture. He tried to drag the coverlid over his face, then cast it off, and cried, with cowardly bravado, "As well die game! I killed the Captain that his son was tried for. I was lying

in wait with the iron bar when the lad passed me in the wood, and so I thought to put it upon him. You're witness, parson, and you too, Dr. Drake, that what I say is true. Set it down on the paper with the other, and I'll sign my name to it."

Roger Bohun complied, and then held the sheet of coarse paper on a book, while the dying man, with his left hand, scrawled an almost illegible signature, to which the rector and the surgeon added theirs. This was Branker's last act. He preserved his consciousness to the last; but the guilty soul quitted not the body in which it had sinned without an awful struggle. Drop we the veil over that terrible scene through which he passed into the presence of God.

When the rector came out from it he was faint, and staggering like a drunken man; and all he could say, when he rejoined his womankind at home, was, "I have heard that to-night which clears Marmaduke Vescey from all suspicion of his father's death. John Branker was a double murderer."

## III.

FOR many months after the death of Branker, readers puzzled over the following advertisement in the "*Times*," which was inserted at intervals of a week each, without ever eliciting anything in the shape of a reply.

"Marmaduke V——y, of H—ksv—w, can return to England. All suspicion is cleared from his name by the death-bed confession of the actual murderer. He is anxiously expected by all who love him, and is entreated to communicate with his uncle immediately."

After a long time the advertisement varied, and a hundred pounds reward was offered to any one who could give information respecting Marmaduke Vescey, of Hawksview, who was supposed to have quitted the kingdom in 1844, after his trial at Carlisle, for a murder of which he was innocent. The proffered reward was doubled and trebled but it brought no clew to him, living or dead.

Mr. Loftus it was who inserted these advertisements; he was growing an elderly man now, and he longed passionately to embrace his nephew

and to see him restored to his natural place in the world before he died. From the hour when they parted at the Carlisle inn he had never heard a single word of the lad—Marmaduke had voluntarily severed every link of communication between himself and his former friends. What was become of him formed the theme of many wild conjectures both at Boscombe and elsewhere, but a painful idea lurked in silence that he had sunk so low in the world that pride withheld him from coming forward and presenting himself. The week the first advertisement was published was the week that the Bohuns went into Kent to see and take leave of their gallant young soldier, on his departure for his first campaign.

Tristan was hot and eager for the fray, and excited the sympathy of his proud old grandsire, who had himself served in Spain, under the Duke. Roger was remarkably cheerful, and Mona kept up her heart wonderfully; but the boy's mother was sad and tremulous. She had companionship in her natural sorrow, for Colonel Richard Bohun was going out also, and his elderly German wife was persuaded she should see him no more. Lord Bohun appeared to think much more of his grandson Tristan than of his son Richard. Was it because he saw in



the former the future representative of the ancient barony, which was his visible god? Miss Sage Booty, to her never-ending exultation, had received an invitation to present herself at Castle Bohun, which invitation had been won for her by Mona's laughing communication to her grand-papa of the amiable spinster's intentions with regard to Tristan, a state of feelings which the old Lord said was a very proper one to encourage. The party spent a week together, and then all journeyed in company to London, where Colonel Richard's regiment, in which also Tristan served, was preparing for embarkation.

It was on a February morning that they marched out of their barracks, through streets alive with sympathising spectators, on their way to Portsmouth. Mona and her father followed with the stream to the station, and then rejoined Agnes and Miss Sage Booty, who were determined to go down and see them embark, and have the last glimpse of Tristan. The same evening it was that they went on board, and when it came to the final separation, the mother plucked up her fortitude and courage and showed her boy a cheering face. "It seems to me saddest for those who go without any to regret them, Mona," said she, as the men filed past, "'tis an inspiring sight—here is my boy!"

Tristan looked all life and spirit—they all took it as an augury for good.

“He will come back to us, please God,” replied Mona, fervently; and strange it was to see her eyes dimmer than all the rest.

Miss Sage Booty was in a state of violent excitement.

“*Our* Tristan’s a boy to be proud of,” said she; “and there’s another I would be fain to see marching here, and that’s Marmaduke Vescey.”

“I was just thinking of him too,” added Agnes. “What brings him to my mind now, I wonder!”

As Miss Sage Booty uttered the name of Marmaduke Vescey, a man in the ranks, with a serjeant’s stripes on his arm, was passing. He turned a dark handsome face towards her, and smiled under his thick moustache, but went on unrecognised. *That* was Marmaduke Vescey, under another name, one of the most gallant of all that gallant host of men. When he stood upon the deck of the ship amidst his comrades, and looked back to the shore at the cheering and weeping multitude, he saw Agnes leaning on her husband’s arm, waving her handkerchief to Tristan. In the beautiful girl beside her, he recognised the merry child who used to climb upon

his knee and stick flowers into his hair; and under his coarse scarlet coat his heart beat to a great resolve, that in the coming struggle he would win a name of honour to himself or die. There was no one amongst that throng watching for him; but he kept his eyes upon that little group of his one-time friends, until he could distinguish them no more, and then addressed himself to a comrade, who had left behind what all men hold dear—his young wife and little son.

## IV.

How was it, then, that Marmaduke Vescey, after ten years abroad on the world, found himself one of the undistinguished rank and file of a regiment of Guards? He had left Carlisle, as we have seen, to help himself. In a month his uncle's money was expended. He had but one strong predilection in his mind—he was a born soldier; and as his evil fortune had ruled that he should not enter the army amongst gentlemen, his equals, he carried his thews and sinews and six feet three of stature to a recruiting office, and enlisted himself in the ranks. It was slow promotion in the piping times of peace; but when the rumour of war sounded through quiet camps, Marmaduke Vescey prevised that his time was come either to fulfil his visions of glory, or to leave his bones to bleach on a field of battle. So he marched with his regiment eagerly; and if ever he was disposed to rail at fate for having allotted to him in it a grade so remote from his aspiration, he never found the panacea of independent spirit to fail him when he thundered out his favourite song, “A man's a man for a' that!”

He was a favourite in the regiment, both with the officers and with his comrades. Out of school into the ranks was but exchanging one form of discipline for another, and it never galled him as it would have done had he passed through a long intermediate stage of freedom and idleness. He was a mighty man in all trials of strength; he was better educated than half of his officers; but he had such a frank simplicity of mind, and such an easy courage of manner, combined with strict sobriety and discipline, that none could feel jealous, none refrain from liking him. It was known by all that he was a gentleman by birth, and it was surmised by many that Sergeant Carr bore a name to which he had no right; but when one of his comrades, with rough good humour, challenged him on the subject, the sergeant put him to silence so imperatively that there was not a man in the regiment ever cared to moot that theme again. But Marmaduke Vescey never forgot the order he had left, and never ceased to aspire to its re-conquest. What, then, would have been his glowing feeling had he been so fortunate as to light upon the advertisement that his Uncle Loftus had caused to be inserted in the *Times*? But though he studied the newspaper, it was not the advertisement sheet that attracted him, so it was passed over, and he marched out.

of England without knowing that his real name was clear of shadow, and he might resume it any day.

The group on the shore, as the vessel moved away, haunted his mind all through the voyage. He liked to think of Agnes, who had believed in his innocence so openly, and of that beautiful Mona, all whose childish professions of liking recurred to him with a curious distinctness. He one day contrived to get into conversation with Ensign Bohun, whom he remembered chiefly as a noisy seven-year-old drummer at Boscombe rectory, and told him he was an Astondale man, a piece of information which induced the dandy boy-officer—for Tristan was a dandy of the first water—to patronize Sergeant Carr considerably, and to speak of him afterwards in his letters home as the finest man in the regiment, except, perhaps, Uncle Richard, its Colonel.

It was through Tristan that the important advertisement came, at length, before Marmaduke Vescey's eyes. He read it at Malta, with what proud throbbing satisfaction may be imagined. His first impulse was to confide his case to his Colonel, and get leave to go home; but scarcely had the thought suggested itself than it was scouted angrily. "I will remain Sergeant Carr through our first campaign," said he to himself.

"If I die no hearts need ache for me; if I can win distinction, then the old name shall bear it, and Vescey of Hawksview shall come by honour again." He left the newspaper on the Ensign's table, where he saw it on going into his room, with a message from the Colonel; but he carried away in his mind a very clear impression of the advertisement. He never happened to see any of the several repetitions of it that afterwards appeared, or probably he might have given some intimation of his existence and whereabouts to his Uncle Loftus. The rapid and exciting events of the next year or two kept him so earnestly employed, that few thoughts, beyond the day and its work, ever intruded into his active mind. It is from Ensign Tristan's letters home that the details, both of his own doings—of which the modest young gentleman says but little—and of Sergeant Carr's impetuous gallantry, will be best gathered. The boy soldier usually addressed his epistles to his mother, who was a tolerant critic of queer orthography and irregular grammar. Tristan was no scholar; but he was a fair shot, and brave, as all English blood is. In one of his earliest letters, written from Varna, during the time of mortality there, we find him sending messages to Miss Sage Booty, about the brilliant success of her *Globb*, in warding off sickness from himself and friends, and

greedily hinting that a second consignment of the same admirable specific would never come amiss. Another relates an encounter with an old family friend, Eli Burton, who followed the expeditionary force, mounted on a shaggy Cossack pony, from the time of its landing in the Crimea until the war was closed. Agnes treasured these letters, as if they were compositions beyond all price; and so, to her, they were. Passing over a few of the earlier documents, we will give Master Tristan's account of his first engagement, in the epistolary style which his mother thought so admirable:—

“MY DARLING MOTHER,

“I'm all right after our brush with the Russians at Alma, which, I dare say, you have read about in the papers, except a hole in my coat sleeve, and a shave of *skin* off my elbow, that a *sixpence* will more than cover. 'Tis the only bit of *glory* I got through the day, but 'tis my *right arm*, and that is as much of it as I could afford to lose *so easily* in the campaign. We cruised about in the Black Sea over so many days, but saw none of the Russians fleet—they were *afraid* to come out. At last we landed, and glad was I to be on terra firma, even an enemy's terra firma. 'Tis Harry who is the *duck* of the family, and takes the water best. I wish Mona could have seen the march on the 19th from Kamischli to Bulganak, where we bivouacked the night before the battle. 'Twas as fine as a *picture*. The next morning we went forward again, and about noon on crossing a line of hill, we came full in sight of the Russians entrenched beyond



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the river Alma, three miles distant. We advanced steadily, until we were within two hundred yards of the river, then rested for five minutes, and forward. The shot was flying about us like *hail*; at first it took away my breath, but my blood warmed fast, and then I felt *mad* like to be at them. When we got to the river, the men dashed in—we were up to our *waists* in water—and we halted under shelter of a high bank to re-form. By this time the light division had gained the entrenchment, but they were forced back, and some confusion took place amongst those advancing to their support, out poured the Russians amongst us, and a *terrible* struggle ensued. 'Twas my honourable post to carry the *colour* that day. Foulis was with me as we climbed the steep, but in this melee he fell, *never* to rise again. I thought, mother, if it had been *me*—and poor Foulis was *his* mother's only son. I think but for Sergeant Carr of ours—who, I told you before, was an *Astondale* man—I should have left *my* bones there too. A Russian struck me on the head with his sword, but my cap saved me, though I was *dizzied* by the blow. He was lifting his hand for another stroke, when I could not have warded off a *pin* or a *straw*, but Carr sprang on him, and cut him down. 'Twas here that Captain Morley *died*, and that Edward Wyvil got his *mortal* wound. Uncle Richard was always in the van cheering on his men. I think our Lady Monica must have been with him, for he got no hurt though his horse was killed under him, and he always seemed to be where the bullets were flying thickest. The regiment suffered heavily, as you will see when you read the list of killed and wounded. Some of our men got separated from the main body, and were *cut to pieces* by the Russians. I am sorry to say, that Tom Dobbie, Osythe's grandson, was amongst them. The Russians finally *ran away*, and the day was ours. While

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we were *excited* with the victory, the scene was not so fearful ; but, mother, the dead faces I saw when I was ~~out~~ next morning, will *haunt* me as long as I live. Some poor wounded fellows were out all night. I saw Eli Burton's *long shanks* and shaggy pony often that day; he went every where—always into the dangerous places, and always in his *spectacles*. He found me out at evening, and drank Miss Sage Booty's health in a glass of her *Globb cognac*. I have more compliments and good wishes to her than the postage of one letter will carry ; but I'll send her one all to herself soon, with the names of her *grateful admirers*. Sergeant Carr says he has a *high respect* for her, and I'm sure she will have for *him*, when you tell her how he saved her precious godson's life. We have a great deal of sickness amongst us, and a lack of necessities of all kinds ; but we are eager for another *tussle*, and the sooner the better. 'Tis well Harry's ship is with the fleet. They say the scene of the battle from the sea was *grand*—lookers-on see more than actors. I was in the smoke too much to see far about me. If it please God that I should come home again, I shall have thousands of things to tell you ; but now I must stop.

“ My love to my father and Mona, and your *darling* self,  
from your affectionate son,

“ TRISTAN BOHUN.”

The name of Sergeant Carr was a great puzzle to the Rectory Family, for when Miss Sage Booty was applied to, to say who he was, she declared there were no Carrs from one end of Astondale to the other, and never had been, to her knowledge. “ Unless, indeed,” she sug-

gested, with a peevish air, "it be Topsy Carr, who was poor Augustus Blayde's first curate here, and whom I drove away for his unclerical ways and customs. I should think it very impertinent in Topsy Carr to have a high respect for me, for I never spoke a civil word to him in my life. But it may be, he was far fitter for camp than church."

"Tristan once before spoke of him as a very tall, strong, fine looking man," suggested Mona.

"Topsy Carr might have been a prize-fighter; but as for being fine-looking, that is a matter of taste. He had a round nose, freckles, and red hair. I considered him ugly, myself; but I was always fastidious about men—curates, especially. You can describe Topsy Carr to Tristan when you write; and if the Sergeant *be* that person, why I'll send him a case of *real* Globb—he loved strong waters dearly."

But Tristan replied, in answer to inquiries, that the ex-curate did not correspond with the Sergeant at all, unless he had dyed his hair, and shaped his nose into more classical mould since he had exchanged the ministry for the sword, which seemed improbable; and Osythe Dobbie having also asserted that she never knew any Carrs in the valley, not she, the mystery

remained unelucidated. Another of the ensign's despatches gives a pathetic account of the loss of part of his baggage, including the precious *Globb*, and then goes on, "It did my heart good to see our *Harry* in Balaclava, t'other day; we met quite by *accident*. He has come ashore with Captain Lushington's Naval Brigade to '*sarve aboard tents*,' as Jack says." The next gives a detailed account of the battle of Balaclava and its famous cavalry charge, of which the writer speaks with soldierly enthusiasm; but as he took no part in the action of that day, we will pass it over for one received at Boscombe, late in November, after the battle of Inkermann, where Sergeant Carr again appears as his preserver, in circumstances of more imminent peril than before. The lad shall tell his own tale.

"MY DEAR FATHER AND MOTHER,

"The glorious 5th of November has left me sound in wind and limb, considerably to my astonishment, thanks to God and Sergeant Carr again. The papers will have told you that the Russians *surprised* us. We knew that they had got in very large reinforcements, and rather anticipated a second attack on Balaclava; but they fell upon us in a different quarter, the *weakest* and most *exposed* of our positions. I was out with the picket on the night of the 4th, and a

bitter night it was. I had mounted Miss Sage Booty's *poncho*; but could not keep warm under it, 'twas so *rainy*. I had never seen the camp so *quiet*; only a light now and then in the lines gleamed through the mist. The batteries on both sides were silent, and about an hour before midnight the church bells in Sebastopol began to toll. We wondered what was up. The air was so hushed, that Sergeant Carr said he could distinguish a *swelling* sound as of thousands of men's voices uplifted in a solemn *chant*. 'Twas in the darkest of the morning that one of the picket reported to the captain a *thundering* sound in the valley below the hill, where we were lying out. We thought that it was only the *waggon*s of the *convoy* entering the city, but it proved to be the *enemy's artillery*, which they brought up *under cover of night*. I heard afterwards that the *French* turned out early, roused by these suspicious sounds; but it was not until the gloomy day broke that we discovered what the Russians were at. We saw half a dozen of our men running towards us, and Sergeant Carr, who had been very alert and restless all the night, cried out, "'tis a surprise!" The *grey-coats*, like *swarms of locusts*, rushed up the hill and the battle of *Inkermann* began. O! mother darling, Alma was *child's play* to it. While our picket fell back, fighting every inch of ground, the alarm spread through the camp, but we were obliged to give way, and I never shall forget Sergeant Carr's *rage* when the Russian guns were dragged up the hill to the position we were forced to abandon. We ought to have had a battery of our own there, and its occupation by the enemy cost us *dearly* that day. I cannot *describe* this battle; 'twas a series of individual

conflicts. The mist hid all distant movements. The Russians were intoxicated with religious fanaticism and *raka*; they precipitated themselves upon us with *fury*. 'Twas clear they had come out to achieve *great deeds* that day; and they did show more spirit than we had given them credit for before. We who had been out on picket or in the trenches all night, were desperately cold and hungry, but such minor miseries were soon forgotten. Uncle Richard soon got his men together. All the troops came up as fast as they could by brigades, battalions, or companies, and took whatever ground was most important to be occupied at the moment. There was a two-gun battery where the fighting raged most fiercely. The 41st and 49th, after holding it a little while against *overwhelming* odds, had just been driven from it as we came up, and the Russians were gleefully yelling over their *victory*. The guards answered back with a *cheer*, and they *swept them clean out* of the battery. Again they came up in *headlong torrents*, *thrice* they gained the parapets, and *thrice* they were driven back with *fearful slaughter*. Still unexhausted they poured in like a *returning wave* and *surrounded* us. We were at *close quarters* now, man to man, or rather *one man to half a dozen Russes*. Sergeant Carr was near me, and his courage was *wonderful*; 'twas like that of the *ancient heroes*. His musket was broken, but his arm wielded it and came down with the weight of a *sledge hammer*. If I told you how many fell before him you would think I was *romancing*. The thick fog prevented the other divisions from seeing our perilous position, even if they could have brought us help. Our band was scarcely a thousand strong, and the word being

passed to "*keep firm on the colours,*" we ran out and up the hill, leaving many of our poor fellows *wounded* within the battery. When we retook it they had all *been killed*. As the day advanced the sun came out upon the field, and showed us our own *thin line* opposed to *dense masses* of the Russians; but the men still fought with *dogged courage*, and fell with their *faces to the foe*. 'Twas a right welcome sound when the bugles and the loud vivas of the *French* echoed along the hill top; down swept impetuous the *Chasseurs* and *Zouaves*, our wearied men *rallied*, raised a *cheer*, and rushed on with our gallant allies. The Russians turned and *fled*, *throwing away* their arms as they ran. 'Twas *then* that Uncle Richard was struck from his horse, and that Sergeant Carr *bayoneted* the two Russians who were upon him, and so *saved his life*. I saw the whole affair, and as soon as Uncle Richard was on his feet again, the Sergeant left him to join the pursuit. 'Twas not my luck to see any more that day, for a shot, almost spent, struck me on the right knee and brought me to the ground. I had got a thrust in the arm too, and fell sick with the pain it gave me, or the blood I had lost; but neither wound was of serious importance. I *limp* a little, but shall soon be better of that. I had dropped below a hillock, and was unconscious for an hour or two. There were many dead and wounded all about me, and the shot came amongst us where we lay. When I came to myself I tried to crawl away but could not manage it. I was in such a fever of thirst that I would have sold my birthright for a *drink of water*. 'Twas great misery; but there were hundreds worse hurt than myself. 'Twas towards night, when I had almost made up my mind that I must lie there and *die*, that

I saw Sergeant Carr coming towards me. He stopped once to give a poor fellow a drink, and I *hailed* him as strongly as I could. He came running in an ecstasy of delight, and said he had been afraid to find me *dead*. You might have thought he was my *brother* from the *feeling* he showed. He helped me up, and carried me down the hill a little way, and now comes his great feat of *arm* not *arms*, that is to say, *weapons*. We were passing by a clump of thick brushwood where half a dozen Russians had contrived to *hide* themselves, and seeing such a *brilliant* opportunity of distinguishing themselves, out they sprang. The Sergeant must somewhere have learned the noble science of self-defence, for the first went down before a blow of his *fist*, that would have *felled an ox*. He wrested the musket out of his hands, and swinging it round his head like a staff, compelled the others to keep a respectful distance. All this time he kept on moving towards our lines, and only one fellow got a poke at him. I suppose their ammunition must have been *spent*, or we had both been *dead men* that night. The fellows did not follow far, and got away, probably after dark, to their own camp. The Sergeant's wound was a *bayonet thrust* in the *side*, a *terrible painful* wound. He is gone to Scutari hospital, and Uncle Richard says he shall recommend him for his *commission*—he ought to have it, I'm sure—there's not a *braver* or *better gentleman* in the whole army. When we come *home* you must *all* know him. Inkermann made me a *lieutenant*. I dare not speak or *think* of our losses; but the Russians suffered *much* more severely. This is a *long* letter, and as I am not a *dab* with my pen, let it go to grandpapa, so I shall not have to do my account twice over. Harry is in



*glorious* spirits ; he was up here a day or two since, and sends his love. Eli Burton has given up *spectacles*. He told me why ; 'twas because a shot struck the ground near him, and dashed up the gravel, and *broke the glasses*. He was nearly taken *prisoner* a week ago. He had ventured a good way beyond our lines, with either *geological* or *botanical* views, and two Russians gave chase after him ; but his little Cossack pony brought him all safe in except his *wide-awake*. He is an *immense* favourite here. Sergeant Carr said he knew him ; but they never met, which I was sorry for. 'Tis a cold wet night. I fancy you round the fire at *home*, and *wish* I were with you. I shall look for letters *before* Christmas day, when you must think of me, and I shall think of you. 'Tis the *first Christmas* I shall have ever spent *away* from you all. My love to you, my dear father and mother, to Mona, Louis and Mammie, and now good-night.

“TRISTAN BOHUN.”

A copy of this letter was duly forwarded to Castle Bohun ; but the original document Agnes would not suffer out of her own sight. Miss Sage Booty was obliged to come down and read it at the rectory, which she did every day for a week after it was received. The gallant Sergeant was more than ever an object of interest and mystery to Tristan's family, and again inquiries were made up and down the dale for any of his kith or kin, but with signal ill-success. Mona, in her enthusiasm for whatever was brave or noble, revered his idea warmly ; and in

answer to her brother's letter, she wrote that she longed to see and thank his preserver. It was about this time that the hearts of the people of England were beginning to burn at the stories of the sufferings of the soldiers in hospital; and when the nurses went out, Miss Sage Booty determined to set off also, chiefly with a view to seeing that Sergeant Carr was properly attended to. She made extensive purchases of warm clothing and internal comforts; but just when she had solemnly made over the Globb to be used in the parish in her absence, to the weeping Piper, a letter from Tristan announced that the Sergeant had recovered from his wound, and was come back to his duties in the Crimea. Miss Sage Booty was then persuaded from her first intention, and stayed at home, her welcome consignment of good things being duly despatched in her stead.

## V.

SEBASTOPOL had fallen. The war was at an end; peace was proclaimed; the Guards were on their way home.

Lord Bohun, dictatorial always, was domineering now. He would have his whole family assemble at the Castle to receive their returning heroes. None of them were called upon to mourn a loss—Colonel Richard, Lieutenant Tristan, and Midshipman Harry were all safe.

“Grandpapa, we must show some respect to Sergeant Carr, to whom we owe both Tristan and the Colonel,” Mistress Mona suggested eagerly.

“Of course, my dear, of course. We shall go to town when the Guards make their entry into London, and then we shall see and thank him.”

Mona seemed to think that a very moderate testimony of gratitude; and Alicia, who had that season begun to prove the influence of her beauty upon susceptible younger sons, pouted a pretty disapproval. “Grandpapa, we want to have him here,” said she; “we want to see what he is like. They say he is not quite a common soldier, you

know, and that he has had an education, so it need not be awkward."

The old Lord looked dubious. "I should be proud to sit down to dinner with him myself; but there's the Colonel and Tristan, and there's military etiquette, my dear," replied he, shaking his white head. "I'm sure I don't know how it would do; we must consult Roger."

"But if he has a commission given to him, grandpapa?" persisted the brilliant coquette, who, Mona angrily suspected, was already plotting the destruction of the sergeant's peace of mind.

"If he has a commission given to him that alters the case—a Queen's officer is all men's equal," replied Lord Bohun.

"He will be just the same *man* both before and after; but the invitation would not come with the same grace if it were deferred," said Mona.

"He shall come. There, there, children, let me go! If he is uncomfortable amongst us it will be your fault," and the grandpapa retreated.

Alicia laughed aloud, and clapped her little white hands. "'Twill be such fun!" cried she; "I expect he's quite an Ursa Major."

Mona reddened and looked vexed. She did not like her enthusiasm for Tristan's preserver to be so flippantly assailed. "If you are going to tease

him, Alicia, I shall be quite sorry I urged grand-papa to ask him here!" she exclaimed, indignantly.

"Tease him! Do you think I shall condescend to do more than bow to him!" retorted the beauty. "I have no grand heroic ideas of him such as you entertain. I daresay he transposes his h's, and puts his knife into his mouth at dinner!"

Mistress Mona was so affronted by this highly probable suggestion, that she drew herself up haughtily, and marched out of the room; neither would she ever enter into conversation about Sergeant Carr with her cousin Alicia again.

Lord Bohun and all his family went up to London two or three days before the Guards' triumphal entry. They had embraced the Colonel and Tristan beforehand, having met them where they landed; and an invitation to Sergeant Carr to spend his first leave at Castle Bohun had been forwarded through the young lieutenant. The sergeant accepted it; but as it happened he did not get leave at once, he did not go into Kent until Colonel Richard returned to town from his father's house, and brought a repetition of the invitation. Mona thought, perhaps, military etiquette had something to do with this arrangement; but she did not make any inquiries.

Alicia had made a bewildering toilette for the first evening that the sergeant was to dine there, and was clearly bent on captivation; but her carefully enhanced charms were puerile in the presence of Mona's simple dignity. Mona herself was quite excited at the near approach of a meeting with the man her imagination had exalted to a hero, and asked Tristan over and over again how he would come, and at what hour? He did not come until rather late, and when shown into the drawing-room where the ladies were by Tristan, who had met him at the door, Agnes, after a moment's startled look at the grave brown face, cried aloud, as she clasped the hand stretched out to her first, "Roger, Tristan, this is Marmaduke Vescey of Hawksview!"

"I remember you quite well," said Mona, rising with blushing pleasure. The sergeant blushed too as their fingers met—"He looked down, and she looked up, and so they fell in love."

"Marmaduke Vescey, one of the most ancient and honourable names that England boasts," repeated Lord Bohun, betraying his foible, and thinking far more highly of the inherited than the personal dignity of the sergeant. It was pleasanter to the old noble to owe an obligation to one of his own order than to an inferior; and the welcome he gave his guest was cordial in the

extreme. Roger's was no less so; but it was the kind words and looks of the women which touched the soldier most nearly. Tristan stared in amazement, and then gave a grasp of congratulation to the right hand which had saved him more than once. "I've often heard my mother talk of you; come and sit by her!" cried he. "I call this a regular chapter out of a romance."

O! what an old, old chapter of romance and real life it was that floated through the mind of both Marmaduke and Mona during the next half hour! Marmaduke talked to everybody except Mona, and Mona looked at every one except Marmaduke; but little Mistress Alicia, with a true feminine prescience, detected mischievously what had befallen them both, and veiled her useless fascinations. When the party were pairing off to the dining-room, Tristan cried, "Here, Vescey," (the name came quite familiar already), "take my sister, and leave me Alicia. Mona will put you through a catechism of the war—she never tires of your glories!"

Marmaduke Vescey would have been very glad to submit either to that or to anything else she might choose to inflict, and offered his arm with a grace that astonished Alicia, and gave her a really serious spasm of interest in the handsome sergeant.

"I want to ask you about Hawkview," said Marmaduke to his companion, when they were seated at table, and the hum of general conversation had begun. "If you remember me so long ago, you will remember the old cottage that once stood there."

"It is there still. I have heard mamma say that some workmen were once sent to pull it down; but an accident happened to one of them the first day it was attempted, and none of them could be prevailed on to go a second time; so it was left."

"I'm glad of it. I always regretted my order to take it down."

"It is one of the prettiest walks in Astondale along that terrace where the cedars grow. There are no such trees elsewhere."

"Osythe Dobbie lives, and Miss Sage Booty, I understand? I had often a difficulty in not betraying myself to your brother when he spoke of his godmother and her universal Globb. Are her two ponies, Amen and Hallelujah, living also?"

"Amen is dead, and Hallelujah has a retiring pension, and a little paddock to himself. She will be highly delighted to hear that you are not her great aversion, Topsy Carr, and that still you are an old acquaintance."



Marmaduke Vescey seemed to be seized with some grave reminiscences. He was silent several minutes, and then spoke abruptly on another theme: "Do you know my Uncle Loftus? Have you ever seen him?" he inquired.

"No; but papa was saying only the other day that he had received a letter from him, and that his anxiety to see you grew on him."

"I must get away into Scotland speedily. I knew long ago that he was seeking me; but I thought to spare him the heart-ache by leaving him in ignorance of where I was. You must have known what anxiety was while Tristan was away."

"Yes, indeed; but mamma felt it the most. Do you think mamma looks well to-night?"

"Very well—she always had a lovely face. I remember her when I was a little lad, and she was younger than you are now. You were a baby; I have nursed you many a time—trotted you on my pony. Do you recollect?"

Why did Mona blush so beautifully when she said "Yes?" Perhaps she recollected something more. Marmaduke certainly did; and he knew quite well that she recollected too. So, not to confuse her, he started another topic—and this time it was the war—many strange and grotesque incidents in which he related with great spirit.

"I hope," by and bye, said Mona, "that you will get your commission; you have fairly earned it if ever soldier did."

"I am not sanguine."

There has been many a fluent chapter written on "love at first sight." These two young people had certainly known each other before; but they met now under such widely different circumstances that they might be regarded as strangers. In their own minds, however, there was an instant recognition of the person and qualities which had long been the ideal of each. In Mona, Marmaduke saw the incarnation of that maidenly modesty, beauty, and spirit, which had haunted his masculine dreams as a vain shadow for many a year; and in Marmaduke, Mona felt that power, energy, truth, and ardour, which she had never been able to discern in any of the speechless aspirants to her favour, who had looked up hopeful, received a chilling glance, and gone on their way.

Alicia sat opposite to them at table, with her cousin Tristan on one side, and James Lennox on the other; but these boys were comparatively tame and easy conquests, and her ambitious little soul was fired with a longing to subdue the grave, stately, romantic personage whom the whole house conspired to honour. It would be such a feather in her cap. Not that she wished to vex cousin

Mona. O! no. Not for the universe; but it would be the greatest fun. And there was no danger for herself, as she was incapable of a serious passion; and as for doubting her *power*, such a humiliating conception was far from her thoughts—she could accomplish whatever she set about in good earnest, and she would quite enjoy accomplishing that piece of mischief. She would open the campaign in the drawing room that very evening. But pretty Alicia might have been enacting her wiles and graces before a stone guardsman, for any impression they made upon the heart or the senses of Marmaduke Vescey. He did not care for her milk-white skin, or her golden “men traps,” as an old lexicographer styles women’s ringlets. As for her eyes, he thought them far too quick and brilliant; what his taste required in the sex, was repose. She sang a thrilling Frenchied air; but her dimples and bridlings and arch glances were wasted, except upon Tristan, who, with cousinly familiarity said, “Jove, Alicia, but you are going the pace now. I’m sorry for poor Vescey.”

“Don’t be impertinent, sir. What have I to do with your Sergeant?” retorted she, shrugging her fair shoulders. “He’s a perfect savage.”

Tristan laughed and told James Lennox, who was in the first stage of infatuation with Alicia

himself, and resented it. "He is a savage," said the young gentleman, darting furious glances at Marmaduke, who, in a state of beatitude, sat between Agnes and her daughter, conversing with the former, and agreeably sensible that the latter drank in every word that he uttered.

It was a warm moonlight evening, and one of the drawing room windows stood open to the terrace invitingly.

"Who will come out?" cried Mistress Alicia. "Tis a sin to stay indoors on such a night." James Lennox sprang forward and said he would; but that was not what his fair cousin meant. "Cousin Mona, you adore the moonlight. Why don't you walk on the terrace?"

Marmaduke Vescey was on his feet in a moment. "Yes, come out," said he eagerly. "You will not move, Mrs. Bohun?"

But Agnes would, and she accepted his arm, Mona taking her mother's also; and in this order they passed out upon the broad paved walk in front of the Castle. Alicia was foiled again, and she was rather cross in consequence; the moonlight was less attractive than before.

"Mona, won't you come down and look at the lake? I am going!" said she, joining the group, and coming to Marmaduke's right hand. "The lake here is beautiful at night, Mr. Vescey, and

you have never seen it. 'Tis worth while to go down there for once."

Marmaduke referred to Agnes, and as she would not encounter the dews on the long grass, he said he would see the lake by and bye; and the damsel reluctantly allowed James Lennox to be her escort. About a quarter of an hour after, Agnes having returned indoors, the Sergeant and Mona made their way down the steps from the terrace, to that part of the pleasure-grounds where the lake was. At the moment Alicia espied them coming, she gave a frightened little scream, slipped, and fell. She was close by the water's edge, and Mona cried out, but was composed when she saw she had only fallen on the turf. Tristan and James Lennox were trying to help her up, but she moaned gently as the others came close, and said with such a pretty, piteous air, "'Tis my foot. I have hurt it. I'm sure I cannot walk."

"Let me carry you, Alicia?" said James, eagerly. How proud, how delighted would he have been of the office. Gladly would he have knelt down to kiss the little maimed member, but she repulsed his enthusiasm impatiently.

"Carry me! such nonsense! as if *you* could. I'm a great weight," moaned she, with a soft pleading look upwards to where Marmaduke stood.

"Take Jim's arm on one side and mine on the

other, and try to hop on the sound foot," suggested Tristan. "You can manage it if you try."

"Leave me where I am!" gasped Alicia, in despair. "Hop! did you ever see me hop? 'Tis ridiculous!"

Marmaduke Vescey's countenance expressed concern struggling with mirth; he did not in the least know what he was expected to do. James Lennox was a stalwart young Scotchman, quite capable of carrying a brace of Alicia's; and if the young lady declined her cousin's kind offices, was it for a modest gentleman like himself to suppose she would accept his? "Which foot is it?" asked he mildly.

"The right foot," replied Mistress Alicia, beaming thankfulness upon him from a pair of eyes lustrous with tears.

"Alicia, dear, if you cannot walk, and will not let anybody carry you, what is to be done?" said straightforward Mona.

"I'm sure I don't know!" and the pretty face drooped. 'Twas really a most pathetic and touching scene—dangerous too.

"I'll tell you what," cried Tristan, who was a young gentleman of plain and practical resources, "I'll run up to the house and make some of the men bring down a mattress—then you can be carried comfortably."

Alicia absolutely shuddered, and cried "Stop!" with remarkable vigour, as he was running off to execute his design. "Stop! Tristan, how can you think of frightening mamma in that way? If somebody will help me to rise, perhaps I could walk now."

Marmaduke Vescey would never have been so ill-natured as to interfere with the prerogative of any young gentleman in the circumstances of James Lennox, so he did not lend a finger to set Mistress Alicia on her feet, neither did he press himself into her service to lead her home. She went off supported by James and Tristan, looking very interesting, and walking not at all ungracefully, considering the sprained foot, which, to be candid with the reader, was not sprained at all. She danced upon it very agilely the next day.

Marmaduke and Mona did not stay behind. They looked at the lake, which was, indeed, the centre of a lovely night landscape, and then followed slowly in the wake of Alicia's procession.

"You will come down into Astondale soon, will you not?" Mona asked, as their conversation verged again in that direction.

"I hope so. I must see my uncle Loftus soon. I leave here the day after to-morrow. Do you remain much longer?"

"I think we shall stay a month; and then

it will be papa's turn to go into residence at Boreham-cum-Minster. It will be the end of November before we get back to Boscombe."

"I shall be in London again before you leave Castle Bohun. I hope we shall meet."

"We often go up to town for a day or two, when we are with grandpapa," replied Mistress Mona, who had the same wish as himself.

Alicia caused her escort to pause until Mona and the Sergeant drew near, and then asked, significantly, "What are you two so exclusive and unsociable for? 'Tis impossible to get a word from either of you?"

Mona felt as annoyed and uncomfortable as her cousin intended she should do; but Marmaduke Vescey replied with prompt self-possession, "We are each other's oldest friends, Miss Bohun. We have not to begin our acquaintance to-day, but only to renew it."

Alicia went on rather pleased. Cousin Mona had displaced her brother Tristan and taken his place, and the two groups were united until they reached the house, when the young coquette was summarily put under nurse Beste's care, and dismissed to bed, and Roger Bohun claimed the Sergeant for a little conversation himself.



## VI.

MARMADUKE VESCEY got his commission, contrary to his expectation. He received his medal, with clasps for each action in which he had been engaged, and his cross for distinguished valour; but by the time he had received these merited rewards, he had begun to value them less for themselves than for the honour they might win him in Mistress Mona Bohun's eyes. His uncle Loftus, just two days before Marmaduke's arrival in England, in despair of ever beholding his nephew again, had perpetrated one of those foolish marriages into which elderly men, with a view to securing a nurse for their dotage, sometimes allow themselves to be inveighed. When the young man arrived in Scotland, he found a buxom housekeeper installed at the head of his relative's table, who gave him to understand that he need have no expectations in that quarter now—her own children, by a former marriage, would be the old man's heirs. Mr. Loftus was evidently under the thumb of his wife, and dared do nothing without her cognizance, and Marmaduke took his leave of his uncle with un-

deniable feelings of disappointment, and proceeded to Hawksview.

The Bohun's were not then at Boscombe; but Miss Sage Booty was at Moat, and as soon as she heard of his arrival in the dale, she sent off a special messenger, desiring him to make her house his home during his stay—an invitation which he was glad to accept, for though Osythe Dobbie had professed to keep Hawksview cottage in order, it had a miserably desolate and haunted aspect. For a lady who had had small experience, if any, in the working of the tender passion, Miss Sage Booty was wonderfully quick-sighted to its symptoms in others, and when Marmaduke Vescey regaled her ears daily with remarks on Mona's graces and virtues, she knew very well whither the brave gentleman's thoughts tended, and as she liked him exceedingly, she gave him all the encouragement in her power. But Marmaduke knew well that his means as an officer in the army, without private fortune to purchase his steps, and without any even remote expectations for the future, were such as prudent parents might well decline to let a daughter share. His uncle Loftus's foolish marriage had quite cropped down his blooming hopes. The war being ended, the field of quick promotion was closed against

him just when a prize worth winning rose within his view. Under these circumstances it would have been discreet in Marmaduke Vescey to have avoided the fascinating presence of Mistress Mona; but his discretion was not of that well-balanced nature, and failed him in time of temptation.

As luck would have it, the regiment which he had joined was stationed at Boreham-cum-Minster while Roger Bohun was in residence there with his family, so it naturally ensued that, having at first no acquaintance in the town besides, he should be found more frequently than was consistent in the drawing-room of the canon's house. Agnes always gave him a kind reception, and Mona was pleased to blush him a welcome whenever he came. Roger also extended to him a generous hospitality as to a friend and habitue of the family. What followed? Exactly the consequences to be expected. Eyes had exchanged signs and meanings before; but one evening—it was in an October twilight, in the Old Residence garden—Marmaduke Vescey spake, and Mona responded. They loved each other, and none else. Both looked so happy and exalted when they re-entered the drawing-room to Agnes, after the mutual confession, that the mother imme-

diately divined what had happened. They made her their confidante, and she was to speak to the canon.

It was very strange; but Roger professed to be surprised. He had been wrapped up in the proofs of the celebrated work before-named, and had never suspected what was going on in his daughter's mind. "My dear Agnes," said he, in a remonstrative tone, "I like Marmaduke Vescey, and I wish to see our girl happy; but what could they live on if they were married?"

"We were very poor ourselves, Roger; but how happy *we* were!" replied Agnes. "Mona will never form another attachment. They seem to me to have been born for each other. 'Tis delightful to see them together. Look at them now."

It was scarcely justifiable in those married lovers to spy out of the library window, as they did, at that other couple sauntering about in the late autumn morning so anxiously contented, so foolishly happy, while their fate was being discussed by the elders. Roger turned to his wife and kissed her still blooming cheeks, for that little vignette under the brown beech-trees of the fading garden revived his own courting days. Agnes clasped her hands about his arm, and the

tears came into her fond eyes, as she said, "You will consent, Roger."

"Yes, I suppose I must. I have no right to sever two who seem, as you say, 'born for each other,' " was the reply.

"Then let us go and tell them—"

"My love, I think they can dispense with our company for a little while. They seem very well satisfied with each other."

MARMADUKE VESCEY and MONA BOHUN were married, and they are happy, though their prospects are by no means sublime. Mr. Loftus, by a violent exercise of his independence, contrived to give his nephew five thousand pounds, and Miss Sage Booty bestowed upon her favourite another thousand, being an advance of half of the sum the old lady had given her in her will.

Mistress Alicia, who has coquetted herself into coronet, and is the purchased property of a gentleman as old as her grandpapa, laughs at her cousin Mona's unambitious marriage; but Mona's life is complete and happy; and Lady Alicia's! no one can say in what slough it may issue! She is beautiful, thoughtless, and intriguing—her cold heart keeps her from being miserable, and may keep her from being wicked; but her lord

lives in a fog of jealous suspicion, and inclines to become tyrannical. Woe betide him if he drives her past her patience! She is childless.

Marmaduke and Mona have one son, in whom and in his father the fair repute of Vescey of Hawksview may yet revive again. The old cottage on the hill has been taken down and rebuilt in less haunted style. It is leased now to a tenant; but Marmaduke looks to it as his future retirement when his days of service are over. That will not be until our century is almost gone.

FINIS.



