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THE DEAN AND HIS DAUGHTER

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BY

F. C. PHILIPS,

AUTHOR OF "AS IN A LOOKING-GLASS," "A LUCKY YOUNG WOMAN," "JACK AND THREE JILLS," "SOCIAL VICISSITUDES."

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TO

EDMUND YATES,

IN RECOLLECTION OF MUCH KINDNESS.

THE DEAN AND HIS DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER I.

When I look back to the earlier days of my life, I wonder why I did not follow the example of Bampfylde Moore Carew, and run away with the gipsies. Many of them came through our parish on their way backwards and forwards between the south, and Exmoor and Dartmoor in the north.

Ossulston was, I think, the most miserable village in all North Devon. For miles and miles there was not a hedge—nothing but heavy, squat, stone walls. The river ran through the parish, and there was a mill,

of course, and a mill-dam with trout in it, which used to lie under the shadow of the old stone bridge; you could lean on the parapet and watch them hanging lazily about in the stream, each in its own especial nook.

My father was the Vicar of Ossulston, and I was his only child. The Vicarage was a stone house of eight rooms, roofed with stone roughly chipped into heavy slabs. We kept a couple of cows, some pigs, and of course poultry and ducks. I need scarcely say we had an orchard, but the trees had not been grafted for years, and were long past their prime. We burned wood and turf—being many miles from the nearest railway station, and even from the canal.

Our roof was thickly covered with yellow stonecrop, houseleek, and other such parasitic plants. In the garden my father allowed

old gooseberry and currant trees to run to waste, and there were a few wallflowers. Once or twice a year my father went to Exeter, coming back with clothes for himself, a supply of tobacco and spirits and rough stuffs, flannel, calico, print, and serge, to be made into garments for his daughter. He used to bring back some ready-made boots and a few other domestic necessaries, not to be procured at the village shop.

Of myself, and my education, with the exception of Greek and Latin which he taught me more or less thoroughly, and of anything that might concern me, he took no heed whatever. Except that I had to go to church twice on Sundays, I was as little looked after as an Exmoor colt.

I was happy, however, in my own way. For I could not even remember the loss of my mother, and there was nobody to care

or trouble where I went or what I did. When I was six years old, I recollect that I used to steal the fresh eggs early in the morning, make little holes in them with a pin, suck out the contents, and carefully pulverise and bury the shells.

My father often wondered why his hens did not lay as regularly as they ought to have done; but he never seemed to trouble himself as to how I got my breakfast, or, indeed, whether I got any breakfast at all.

In summer there were apples and plums. After dinner I could forage for myself in the kitchen, for my father dined alone. Sometimes I did not see him for several days together. When his own dinner was over, he used to sit in an arm-chair in his room, smoke a long clay pipe, and drink spirits and water. When he had had enough tobacco and enough spirits, he used to go to bed.

His great occasions were when a neighbouring farmer asked him to dinner. He always accepted such invitations.

"We must be all things to all men," he used to say solemnly. I fancy he gave this precept a somewhat liberal interpretation, for I know now that the peculiar condition in which he used to return home was due to strong waters, and that his late hours the next morning, with his anxiety for dry toast and weak tea, had the same explanation.

I have since heard that he was a disappointed man. He ought to have taken high honours at his university, but instead of that he somehow failed to take a good degree. He ought to have had a Fellowship and a College living, but his claims were passed over. As he got on in life, or rather in years, his friends per-

sistently gave him the cold shoulder. The livings he had been positively promised, and which had been given to other men, were more numerous than the number of pounds in his own wretched stipend.

He once in desperation thought of writing a book on the antiquities, county history, and natural history of Devonshire, but he never got further than ordering several reams of foolscap and a big jar of ink, for both of which he was ultimately sued in the County Court, when an order was made against him to liquidate the amount by monthly instalments of four shillings each.

My father was now perilously close upon sixty years of age, but had a pleasant habit of telling everybody that he was somewhere between forty-six and fifty. Age had certainly put very few traces upon him. Like

all selfish men he was thoroughly well preserved, and if he had been a duke, with the medical resources of a duke, with the culinary resources of a duke, and with ducal opportunities for travel, change of climate, and special attention to every minute detail of comfort, might, perhaps, have lived on into his tenth decade. With nothing to worry you, and with plenty of money, it is perfectly possible to trifle with Providence up to an immense age.

His own views of life and its arrangements, so far as they concerned himself, were simple enough. He had his income as Vicar and his bit of glebe, which he prudently let out. During the summer months, when London was empty, he made a clear profit. Some fashionable London preacher would come down and take the Vicarage for three months, undertaking all the responsibilities

of parochial service. Out of this temporary transfer my father used to make a comfortable annual sum. In fact he farmed his Vicarage, and the summer months in which he let his house were the season of his fat kine.

Always struggling to make both ends meet, he somehow contrived to satisfy the problem from his own point of view. For my own part I know no more dull, wretched, miserable being than a stupid man with a few worthless and fourth-rate university credentials, on the strength of which he believes, or has once believed, that he can take the world by storm.

My father had forgotten all that he ever knew, if, indeed, he had ever known anything; and in the private bar-room of the village inn he was, as I knew perfectly well the general butt of the company. They pre-

tended to listen to him, they treated him to whiskey and water, and when the time came for closing, he was, in consideration of his position, sent home in charge of the stable-boy.

That youth had a very fair alto voice, in virtue of which he sang in the parish choir. It was unpleasant to see him put his tongue in his cheek when my unhappy father stumbled through the words "manifold sins."

These were a few of my youthful trials. So the years slipped away until I was twenty. I kept no account of time; why should I have done so? There was nothing in the past to which I could look back, nor anything in the future to which I could look forward.

Andromeda, chained up by her hands to the rock, was not more helpless. But she had a

chance which I had not. At any moment the sea monster might put in an appearance and devour her. I had no prospect of any such sharp, sudden, and merciful end to my sufferings. There I was—chained. Twenty years from now I should be an old woman. And the twenty years showed no hope, prospect, or even chance of release. It was horrible.

One morning there came a break in this terrible monotony. My father received a letter which evidently puzzled him. It could not have been a County Court summons, for he anticipated those and knew their contents before their arrival. Neither was it an offer of preferment, in which case he would have at once made his way to Pentridge, the nearest railway station, and have done extravagant things in telegraphy; perhaps even have borrowed a couple of pounds, on the strength of the good news, from the land-

lord of the "Bull Hotel" at Pentridge, and so have hurried up to London, by way of taking time by the forelock, and making assurance doubly sure.

Evidently it was none of these things. Equally clear was it that it meant something, and as the something in question could not possibly be for the worse, I was content to wait.

That afternoon, my father, at an hour earlier than usual, betook himself to the room which he called his study. Let me give the inventory of this apartment. There were several battered volumes of Bohn's Translations of the Classics; there were some odd volumes of South, Barrow, and Tillotson. There was Stanley's "Sinai and Palestine," an old edition of the "Encyclopædia Britannica," Alford's "Greek Testament," Harold Browne on the Articles,

Paley's "Evidences," and a few stray novels in yellow pasteboard; "Barchester Towers," "The Last Chronicles of Barset," "Dr. Thorne," "Tom Jones," "Peter Simple," and other such ecclesiastical and unecclesiastical romances. On the mantelpiece was a tobacco jar, and by it were one or two clay pipes; there was a shelf with bottles white and black, most of them empty. On rails against the wall, hung in various stages of dilapidation, overcoats, leggings, and waterproof garments. There was also an old double-barrelled gun, a powder flask, and a shot belt, for my father, being on terms with the surrounding farmers, considered rabbits a lawful part of the tithe of which the State had iniquitously despoiled him.

I entered this sanctum sanctorum without terror. I was too old for my father to smack me, and there was really nothing

else of which I need be in the least degree afraid. But I knew it was his habit to transact important business in the study. Unimportant business, such as the bill of the butcher or of the baker, he used to transact at the garden gate; and so, when summoned to the study, I knew that there was something more important on hand than the weekly accounts, or the prospects of the potato patch, or the precise reasons why the old brown Cochin hen should have left off laying.

My father was in an old wooden arm-chair, in which he looked almost venerable. It was close to the table, which gave him an appearance of having that very moment abandoned his work. There must have been in him, at some time or other, some vague instincts of art, for the pose and the surroundings were really clever. As I opened

the door I almost seemed to hear a small bell jingle for the rising of the curtain.

My parent arranged his necktie, and ran his fingers through his hair; then he twisted his only ring round upon his little finger, bringing the small brilliant diamond held in its claws into prominent play. Then he cleared his throat and began.

"Take a seat, Miriam," he commenced.

Then, when I had obeyed, he proceeded cheerily, and in a tone of assurance, as if he possessed the secrets of the Universe, and it lay with him only to hold up his little finger and to at once stop the rotation of the earth upon its axis.

"My dear friend, I may say my oldest friend, for long years have not diminished an affection which was commenced at Rugby, continued at Cambridge, and confirmed and consolidated in riper life; my dear

friend, I say, Sir Henry Craven, is exhausted by his manifold duties in town, and writes to say that he wants a few days or weeks of entire rest. Of course I have asked him to share our humble roof; his wealth is enormous, his influence immense. I believe that to-morrow he could get me made a Bishop; you may be sure I shall not lose the chance, and you must use your wits to aid me. He is a man of the world, and men of the world are captivated at once by an *ingénue*. You see, my dear, this place is lonely, desolate, and remote. You have no companions of your own age; you have not those pleasures and innocent enjoyments, which it is the chief sorrow of my life that I am unable to provide for you. And I too," here my father expanded his chest, and assumed an appearance of intense responsibility, "feel myself a labourer in the vine-

yard whose allotted work has not yet come to his hand. I am wasting my abilities and my time in a small parish, when I ought to be leading public opinion, warning against the errors of the time, and pointing out the true path to take among the many rocks, shoals, gulfs, and quicksands that beset our age. And so, my dear, we must be practical. Get the house in order; get some ammonia and sponge the grease spots out of my Sunday suit; see that my study is put in order, and make the reception-room look as pretty as you can. Juggins our churchwarden has a greenhouse, and no doubt Mrs. Juggins will lend you a few geraniums or calceolarias, or something of the kind in pots. And if you have a muslin dress—I believe you have—you had better get it washed and ironed, for you'll have to dine while Sir Henry is here; and you

will want a little blue ribbon round your waist, and some velvet, or something, round your neck. Here is a two-shilling piece. And now pray be as quick as you can, for money in travelling expenses is no object to Sir Henry. He thinks nothing of ten shillings for a fly. It is odd that the good things of this world should be so unevenly divided. And he may be here very shortly. He must on no account find us unprepared."

And herewith my excellent parent strolled away down the village to visit his senior churchwarden, intimating that he wished me to accompany him. By a singular and happy coincidence it was one o'clock. Mr. Thacker, a prosperous blacksmith and wheelwright, was just about to dine off bacon and broad beans, with a treacle dumpling to follow. The call of the Vicar was positively opportune. My father and I stayed

to dinner, and after it he smoked a pipe with Mr. Thacker, over which they discussed the present average prices of market produce. He also intimated the name and rank of his expected visitor, whereat Mr. Thacker put aside the tobacco jar, and produced a box of cigars, together with a choice bottle of old Hollands.

"He had always himself," said the churchwarden, "been a hard-working man who had paid his own way, every farthing of it, and had never been beholden to anybody for anything."

This was a home-thrust which made my father gulp his Hollands at the temporary risk of suffocation.

Mr. Thacker added that good men were scarce, and he, for his part, should like to see my father made a Bishop, or a Canon at least.

"What does it matter, Mr. St. Aubyn?" he profoundly observed. "Some of us ride to the hounds in pink, and some in black. 'Tisn't those who ride in pink that are always in at the death. Give me a man who knows the country. Look there, the Hollands are your way. It's only April now. Wait till the hunting season. I shall see you in gaiters long before you'll see me in my old tops. When you've got the gaiters you must remember an old friend, and let me have a good Cathedral lease. I never like to trouble a friend, especially a gentleman and a reverend gentleman like yourself, and that little matter of three pound ten last Michaelmas may stand over as long as you like. Here's my hand upon it."

To forego a very doubtful debt of seventy shillings for the prospect, however remote, of an advantageous lease, is not, as things

go, a bad speculation. Evidently Mr. Thacker did not think so; for, as his Vicar left, he pressed a sovereign upon him, with some incoherent remarks about the number of turnpikes upon the road. He must have forgotten, in his excitement, that his reverend visitor had been a foot passenger, and did not live more than half a mile away.

The gold in his waistcoat pocket imparted elasticity to my father's tread. He hummed operatic airs as we walked back. He had been, in his younger days, one of the leading spirits of a musical club. His head was erect, and his chest expanded like that of a pouter pigeon. Indeed, his enthusiasm was positively infectious, and I began to picture myself the proud possessor of a silk dress, a sewing machine, and a complete set of Tennyson's poems, inaccessible luxuries for which I had often yearned when sitting alone

in the twilight upon the kitchen hearth, knitting mittens and stockings for the winter, and sorely puzzled over the stockings in the matter of heel.

I held a brief council of war that night with Mrs. Peel, our only domestic, in which we rehearsed the household stores, and went into a number of minute economic details.

There is an infinite amount of trouble involved in such small matters as linen, the best china tea service, and the temporary reproduction of almost forgotten household treasures that are resting in lavender and must be furbished up for this special occasion. But my father did not interfere with us, and so upon the whole we settled matters more expeditiously than might have been anticipated.

CHAPTER II.

Two days later the great man himself arrived somewhat late in the afternoon, and while the swallows were still flying high.

He was the sole occupant of a pair-horse fly, the front seat of which was littered with newspapers and other light baggage. A second and humbler vehicle conveyed his valet with a portmanteau, a fur overcoat, rugs, and other necessaries of travel all charmingly strapped together in the most delightful order.

Before the first fly had stopped the valet was waiting at our porch to let down the

steps, open the door, and assist his master out. It must have been many years since our village had witnessed so imposing an arrival.

My father received the old gentleman in his most courtly style with marked cordiality, but without effusion. Sir Henry, after shaking hands, looked round and pleasantly remarked that it was a pretty place, but that it would be, he should imagine, rather dull in winter. My father answered with a bit of Latin which I had heard him quote so often that I knew it by heart. It was: O fortunati nimium, sua si bona norint, Agricolæ! And he wagged his head as much as to say, "a Dean should always be a learned man. Look how I have kept up my classics."

Sir Henry's answer was vague but reassuring, and evidently intended to be kindly.

He said: "Exactly so. What I have always felt myself. Poor Peel used to say that every man should know his Horace by heart; but I never really had the time." And with this we all went indoors.

We had dinner at seven, and it went off better than might have been expected. There were freshly caught trout with melted butter, a pair of broiled chickens with vegetables, an apple pie with clotted cream, and some cheese and salad.

Sir Henry had with forethought brought down a supply of wine and liqueurs, partly, no doubt, out of kindness, and partly with due regard for his own comfort. The valet, Mr. Watson, waited upon us with a solemnity that almost chilled my veins. He had an eye that seemed to be perpetually occupied with estimates and measurements. I am sure before the dinner was over he had thoroughly

satisfied himself that the carpet had been turned a second time, and that it had not been originally planned for the room.

Dinner over, Mr. Watson produced fresh wines and the liqueurs, and somehow I found myself drinking a glass of claret. It was the first time I had ever tasted claret in my life, and I frankly confess that I did not like it. He then with deliberation placed on the table a large box of cigars and a small silver spirit-lamp. I took this as a signal for my departure, and after exchanging glances with my father and returning Sir Henry's bow, acted upon it. I was not sorry to get away, for Sir Henry, although he did not stare at me, eyed me, as it were, round the corner, and with such persistency as to make me extremely uncomfortable.

Mr. Watson with many apologies begged me to permit him to make the coffee himself,

as he knew exactly how Sir Henry liked it. He performed the task to a marvel, and returned from the dining-room with the welcome intimation that my father desired me to be told that I need not sit up. This was but too pleasant news for me, and I hurried off to bed, Mr. Watson handing me my candle with the most profound gravity, and asking me if a cigar in the servants' hall would be against the rules of what he called "The Rectory." I reassured him on this point, and in a very few minutes was sound asleep.

Early next morning I was up and about. The sitting-room, where we had banqueted the night before, had to be arranged and decorated with fresh flowers. Of these I managed to get together a sufficient allowance. Mrs. Juggins had been very liberal, and so had the Thackers. I also scalded a bowl of milk, and

made some fresh clotted cream in the most approved Devonshire fashion.

The delicate sulphur-tinted primrose was thick on every hedge bank, and I adorned the table with its blossom, and with some violets which grew in a treasured nook of my own.

This exhausted my own resources. From Mrs. Juggins and Mrs. Thacker I procured a few more flowers, and what was far more important, a young duckling and some early potatoes not much larger than big walnuts, to the preparation of which articles for the first *déjeuner* our Vicarage had ever witnessed, I at once addressed myself, only too glad to have anything to keep my mind employed.

My father was later than usual. He was dressed with scrupulous care, and had an indescribable air about him of one who was artistically accommodating himself to an

amusing situation, an air which might almost have fitted the Grand Monarque at the Petit Trianon. He looked radiant, and positively many years younger than his actual age.

Sir Henry, of course, was about three-quarters of an hour late, but was also most carefully arrayed. The same age as my father, as nearly as might be, he looked about fifteen years younger. He was slightly bald, but not a gray hair was visible upon his head or in his daintily trimmed whiskers. His single-breasted morning-coat fitted his well-preserved figure to perfection, and his Parisian boots were as resplendent as if cut out of solid jet.

I could not help in a kind of way admiring him. He was beyond doubt a fine and handsome man, or at any rate had once been so, and he had that

ease and charm of manner which means nothing in itself, but can only be acquired at Courts.

I understood this secret soon after, when I found out that he had been successively at Eton, a Queen's page, a cornet in the Blues, and ultimately military attaché, and after that, Secretary of Legation at Vienna—still the most exclusive Court in Europe, and the one where old traditions are the most jealously preserved.

Breakfast over, Sir Henry declared himself in favour of a walk. England, he observed, was the only country in which a walk in the lanes was really possible, and even pleasant. Besides, our English villages were picturesque without being squalid or malarious. He was a bit of an antiquarian, he added, and there would almost certainly

be some monuments, or possibly even bronzes in our beautiful old church, which would interest him. Would I kindly act as his guide ?

"When," said he with a smile that did credit to his dentist, "I visit a country place, I always follow the example of our greatest living lawyer, Lord Selborne. I look into the local antiquities, and try in my small way to fit them in with the county history. Now, I came across a most curious inscription once in a parish church in Torbay. It was in memory of an Admiral who had died in the Spanish main, and it commenced, 'Here lie the heart and brains of——' well, whoever it may have been. It was strictly correct. The gallant old gentleman had died in action, and they had brought home his brain and his heart in a small keg of

rum. With you, Miss St. Aubyn, to guide me, I am sure that we shall unearth something of interest. Your father must be too busied with his parochial work to spare many moments of his hardly-earned leisure for archæology."

My father frankly admitted that this was the case, carefully adding, however, that archæology in all its branches had always been his favourite pursuit, and concluding with some incoherent remarks about a rocking stone in the nearest parish.

So I picked up my hat and a light shawl, and away I went with the old gentleman. It was impossible to be angry with him. It was exasperating. He gave you no loophole whatever. He was the very pink of politeness, an Emperor of small-talk. Besides, his small-talk was really clever, and wholly

unlike anything I had ever heard. He was far too satisfied with himself and his own position, to be in any way vain.

How the time passed, I can hardly tell; I was excited, and, to tell the truth, a trifle overwrought. But everything went smoothly enough, for Sir Henry, somehow or other, gave me no trouble.

Looking back at things now, I should say he was endeavouring to impress me with the idea that he would make a most admirable and indulgent husband.

"Devonshire, Miss St. Aubyn," he said, "almost reminds me of Nice and Mentone. The climate seems identical. Of course you have seen the Mediterranean."

I replied that I had not.

"Ah, indeed! I suppose your father has been too engrossed in his literary labours to take you there? It is the garden of the

Hesperides, the land of the Phœnicians. Oranges, and peaches, and lemons grow in the open air, and the tideless sea is perpetually calm and blue. You are too happy to think of anything, or even to do anything. And up above you are the Alps; pine forests at their base, then gorse and heather, then eternal snow. It seems strange to sit in the shade and to look upwards at untrodden snow. Travellers will tell you of the glories of Rio, and of Jamaica, and of San Francisco Harbour, but for my part I prefer the bay of Villefranche and the Riviera generally to the rest of the world. To tell you the truth, I have an idea of building myself a villa there and never again returning to this land of fog and mist."

I answered, wholly without enthusiasm, that it was no doubt very beautiful, but that I myself had never been out of Devon-

shire, and could so but half realise his description.

The discovery that I had never left my native county made him very angry. I ought at least to have been to Paris, to London in the season, to Cowes during the Regatta week, to Ascot, to the Highlands, and to a number of other places, with all of which he was eminently familiar.

Feeling bound to somehow stop this flood of conversation, I quietly reminded him that my father's stipend had put an annual Continental tour beyond his reach.

In the most airy and graceful manner possible Sir Henry assured me that money was a mere trifle, that my father's position would soon be most materially improved, that some other clerical preferment was a certainty for him, and that with a wider field his talents could not possibly but assert themselves.

"Your father," he went on to say, "has hidden himself too much, and has not done his own great abilities justice. But he is still in the prime of life and fully able to make his mark. And," he went on to add, "I am now speaking to you, dear Miss St. Aubyn, with your father's permission, and indeed at his express wish. He is most anxious to resume his fitting position in the world, a position distinctly due to his birth, his connections, and his great natural gifts. But his first and one thought is for yourself, and he wishes you to understand that in every step he may take under my guidance, or with my assistance or otherwise, the one and only object nearest to his heart is your own welfare and happiness."

Here he stopped, and I had to reply as best I could, and without consideration. Of course I had sense enough to know what the

whole thing meant, but what was I to do? I was as helpless as the daughter of Jairus or as Iphigenia herself.

I remember feebly saying that I loved my father dearly, that I was aware his abilities had never found a proper field, and were quite thrown away at Ossulston, and added that I should be most delighted to see him in a position worthy of himself and of the family traditions.

"Then," gallantly replied Sir Henry, "we may, I think, consider the matter settled. The Deanery of Southwick is vacant at this moment, and my personal influence with the Premier, to say nothing of His Grace the Archbishop, will make the matter a foregone conclusion, as in fact it ought to be when we consider what will be the average calibre of the average candidates for the post."

By this time we had reached the Vicarage,

where my father stood awaiting us under the porch with a radiant smile.

"I have been talking matters over, my dear St. Aubyn, with Miss Miriam," warbled the diplomatist. "She is entirely in accord with myself that I ought in your interests to at once proceed to London, and, if you will allow me, I will give orders to my man this moment. In a matter of this kind every quarter of an hour is of importance. I am sanguine as to the result. In fact, I feel that my past services entitle me to command it, and I have never yet, that I can remember, asked for anything. We will have, if you do not mind, a pint of champagne and a biscuit before I start, and I think that while I am away you may let your mind be perfectly at rest."

The champagne and the biscuits were produced from Sir Henry's stores. He had

spoken of them carelessly, as if they were somewhere in my father's cellar and store-room. The lynx-eyed Mr. Watson, without the least bustle, had every arrangement, down to the fly at the door, ready to the exact moment, and before I could fully realise what was going on, Sir Henry had bowed his most courtly of bows, had wrapped himself in his cloak, and was being quickly hurried away.

As the vehicle turned the corner and was lost to sight, my father, with his sweetest smile, gently laid his hand upon my shoulder and said: "Miriam, my dear daughter, I very much want to speak to you."

I impatiently shook myself free, ran up to my own little room, threw myself down on the bed, and burst into a passionate flood of tears.

My father, after an interval of some ten

minutes, followed me up, and tapped at my door. Then he called out to me several times. Then I heard him go downstairs again, and I soon afterwards became aware, from the mixed aroma which forced its way into my room, that he was smoking one of Sir Henry's large cigars, and moistening it with rum and water.

Later on in the evening I heard the voice of Mr. Thacker, and soon afterwards there was an increase in the aroma of rum and tobacco smoke. Mr. Thacker and my father parted in the road. Their voices were thick. My father evidently intended to be patronising and reassuring. Thacker was cordial and familiar, slapping his Vicar on the back.

"I told you it would turn up trumps, parson," he said, "and I'm very seldom wrong, from a spring handicap down to a field of oats. I wish you joy with all my

heart, and may we never smoke worse cigars than the ones old Cockolorum has left behind him. As for little missy, I wish her joy."

By "little missy" Mr. Thacker evidently meant myself, and he was wishing me joy on my marriage to the "old Cockolorum."

After all, it is a mercy in this world that there should always be a grotesque side to your misery. Otherwise the burden of life would now and again become too great to bear.

CHAPTER III.

Soon after my father had fastened up the front door, screwed down the windows and ensconced himself in his study for a couple of hours of what he used to call meditation, I stole downstairs to take counsel with Mrs. Peel.

Now dear old Mrs. Peel was very fond of me. But that evening she was in an aggravatingly practical frame of mind, and correspondingly inclined to lecture me very soundly.

She did not see, she told me, what occasion there was for me to trouble myself.

It wasn't as if I cared for anybody else like she had once cared for Peel before he took to drink, when he was young and good-looking, and could thrash any man of his own inches at the Michaelmas goose fair. I might stop on poking about in this little hole of a place, and perhaps never get married at all. Nobody could tell. My father couldn't live for ever, and what was I to do when he died? As for being a governess, governesses, she could tell me, had a far worse time of it than housemaids, and often worse wages into the bargain.

Anything would be better for me than maundering away my life at home. If I married this old gentleman I should be well off and comfortable. Watson had told her that Sir Henry's house in London was like a palace, with one man sitting in a big chair in

the hall, in gold livery and a powdered head, who had nothing whatever to do but to open the door. I should have as much money as ever I could want to buy whatever I pleased, and a lady's maid to look after my things, and no tradesmen's bills to worry me.

If I had no children, I could busy myself my own way. If I had any I could fuss over them all day long, though she had heard that some fine ladies never even saw their children from daylight to dusk; "and," added the good woman emphatically, "if I were you I'd be even with that old father of yours. I wouldn't let him inside the house. I wouldn't give him not so much as the price of a glass of rum. If he came bothering about, I'd have him ordered off, and if he came trying to screw money out of my husband I'd put a pretty sharp stop to it. He's putting a good thing

in your way," she went on, "just for his own sake. He wants you to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for him. Pull 'em, I say, and stick to 'em for yourself, and let him have the husks. That's more than he deserves," concluded Mrs. Peel. "It makes me sick to hear him preaching it out about the Scripture moving us in sundry places. I'd move him in sundry places and myself too, if I had the chance. And he knows it."

And herewith Mrs. Peel tucked up her skirts for work with an air that said, "I have had enough of conversation on a distasteful subject."

I tried to plead with her for my father, more out of long habits of respect than from sense that he had been harshly judged, but Mrs. Peel was inexorable.

When I pointed out that he was old, she retorted that he was lazy, and old enough to know better. When I urged that he required comforts, she replied with acerbity that he had better work for them like other people did.

It was impossible to mitigate her wrath, and I ultimately had to abandon the task as hopeless, not without a very strong conviction that upon the broad facts of the case her judgment was perfectly sound, and that there was very little indeed to be urged with any plausibility in the Vicar's behalf; and in this frame of mind I went to bed.

I read for an hour or two until I was tired. Then I left my candle burning and turned Mrs. Peel's advice over in my mind. It did not upon mature reflection seem so distasteful as at first. It was like most

home medicine for children, strong, nasty, and yet wholesome.

Sir Henry beyond all doubt was a gentleman. I had before me a life of entire freedom, with every possible comfort. Certainly it would be far pleasanter to be mistress of Craven House than to drag on year after year as domestic help, or as the advertisements now call it, "lady help" to my father.

There was the promised Deanery, of course, but that haven of refuge had no definite prospect for me, and besides, it was too evidently part of the stipulated price to be paid for my acquiescence. Had I not better boldly tell the old gentleman that I could not promise to love him, but that I would do my best to try and make him happy and to follow out his wishes in every

possible way, and so throw myself upon his kindness, and make an end of the matter?. It really seemed the best course under all the circumstances.

And having ultimately resolved to adopt it, I fell asleep just as the sun was breaking and the noisy cry of the April cuckoo began to make itself heard in the orchard, a favourite haunt of his, as the hedges were thickly tenanted by his unhappy victim, the poor little hedge-sparrow, with its clumsy nest and its tiny blue eggs, always at the mercy of the village schoolboy.

My parent must have risen early that morning, for when I descended to prepare his breakfast he was walking up and down in the lane outside the house with more than his usual air of humility and self-denial.

"Good morning, my child," he said, in his most patriarchal manner.

"Good morning, papa."

"It is a lovely morning this, almost Italian in its freshness and brightness."

I made no reply, and he went on:

"'O fortunati nimium!' He was a great poet, Virgil. Sir Henry mistook him for Horace the other day, but I thought it wiser not to correct him. Virgil loved the country as fondly as do I myself, and, like myself, would have preferred to spend his days in it among his flowers and his books. But the Fates were too strong for him, and ordained that he should go to Rome and be the ornament of the most brilliant Court the world has ever known. It is so always. Man proposes, and Providence, which knows better than man, disposes for him. We are but potter's clay."

And my father rubbed his hands and thrust out his right leg, contemplating it fondly, and evidently with black silk stockings and buckled shoes in his mind's eye.

I remarked that it was a very fine morning indeed, and that breakfast was ready for him, and with that we went indoors to our tea and toast.

When he had done justice to this repast, my father cleared his throat, arranged his necktie, and took up his position, and with it his parable, upon the hearthrug.

"I suppose, Miriam," he commenced, "that you have some idea of the nature of the important communication which I have to make to you."

"Oh yes, papa," I replied defiantly, "and so has the whole village by this time. You and Mr. Thacker were talking

it all over in the lane last night at the top of your voices. Every one in the village knows by this time that the forty pounds you owe Mr. Thacker can wait, along with the three pounds ten, and that he is to be paid when you have married me to Sir Henry Craven and got your Deanery. I dare say they are talking about it now in the taproom at the 'Goat and Compasses,' and saying what a lucky thing it is that everybody will be paid at last without having to go to the County Court for their money."

My father winced smartly, but recovered himself with great promptitude and marvellous solemnity.

"Good news, my dear child," he said, "travels fast; and it may well be that in this little place, where I am known and

respected, the visit of Sir Henry may be understood to have a significance of its own. But I am anxious this morning to discuss matters with you reasonably and in a proper spirit, and to lay my views before you as to your future and, I may say, my own as well, fully and clearly."

"Then you may save yourself the trouble, papa. I have considered the matter for myself, and have fully made up my own mind."

My father turned purple, and evinced other strong symptoms of a sudden attack of apoplexy.

"You cannot possibly mean to tell me——" he burst out.

"Pray do not get black in the face, papa. I say I have considered the matter for myself, and I have talked it over with Mrs. Peel, exactly as you have

talked it over with Mr. Thacker. Mrs. Peel thinks——"

"Good heavens!—Mrs. Peel! What can that ignorant woman know of such a matter?"

"Mrs. Peel thinks that upon the whole I had better marry Sir Henry, and I have told her only this morning that I shall do so."

My father collapsed into his favourite arm-chair, and gasped for breath.

"And so," I added with a laugh, "you may make your mind happy, papa, about the Deanery. I am going down into the village to make some little purchases. I dare say our credit now is re-established at Smoothy's, and before I go I will tell Mrs. Peel to bring you in the rum and some hot water. You look as if you needed a

gentle stimulant." And I dropped him a curtsy and ran out of the room. I need not say that we did not meet again for the remainder of that day.

Late in the afternoon my father went down into the village and, to use his own expression, "mixed with his parishioners," that is to say, he sat in the bar-parlour of the "Goat and Compasses," and drank hot spirits and water.

I for my own part knew that for some hours, at any rate, I should have nothing to trouble me; so, on my return from Smoothy's, I got through my household work, had my dinner in the kitchen with Mrs. Peel, and then went out for a long stroll in the lanes. When I returned, Mrs. Peel and I had tea together.

"Your father's gone out to visit Mr.

Thacker," said that lady, "and I reckon he won't be back till late. P'r'aps Thacker will have to see him home. If I was you, miss, I'd go to bed and have a good night of it."

I took her advice and proceeded upstairs to my room, but I did not exactly have a good night of it, for I lay awake, sometimes reading and sometimes dreamily thinking matters over, until long after the swallows had begun to twitter in their nests above my window; and I was not at all sorry when Mrs. Peel came up in the morning with a cup of really strong tea and some exquisitely crisp toast, which she pressed upon me, and in fact insisted upon seeing me take.

Then I walked out into the glorious morning air, and as I crossed our threshold

CHAPTER IV.

My father, I found, would prefer to have his breakfast in his own room, and had suggested dry toast and a couple of red herrings. Knowing perfectly well what this meant, I felt that should any encounter occur during the day, I was morally certain of victory.

So I actually, out of what schoolboys term "devilment," prepared the herrings and toast myself. When they were ready, I felt pretty confident that my father would, to use Mr. Thacker's elegant expression, "rinse his throat out" with claret and water, shake up the

pillow and bolster, turn round in bed and again resign himself to the sleep of the just.

So of course it turned out. Mrs. Peel, when she brought down the tray, informed me, with a broad grin on her features, that the master did not seem at all himself, and had said that he would ring for his hot water when he wanted it.

For my part I caught up my hat, and sallied out for an objectless walk. I stopped here and there in the village to chat with parishioners and, as the phrase is, to take notice of their children.

To take notice of a child in the country you must first pat it on the head, and then shake hands. The child thereupon will hang its head down and thrust its left thumb into its mouth. This stolidity is more apparent than real, and is only due

to shyness. Even a butcher, unless history be grossly inaccurate, becomes utterly shame-faced and sheepish if a Duchess takes him by the whiskers, tells him he is the best-looking man she knows, and kisses him then and there, under the very eyes of his wife, at the same time asking him to forego his strictly Tory principles, and to kindly oblige her by voting for the opposite candidate.

Amongst others I went to see old Mrs. Daller. This old lady was the widow of the late village carrier, whose son, resigned unto the heavenly will, as the quaint old epitaph runs, kept on the business still, and fairly prospered upon it.

Mrs. Daller had the reputation of being a "wise woman," which in the country means a great deal. Superstitious and ignorant people were afraid of offending

her, and it was sometimes whispered that she knew more of the forbidden arts than did all the gipsies who passed through the village in the course of the year.

She had heard the news—as who had not?—and she laughed over it, catching up my hand and pretending to read the lines in its palm.

"Look," she said, "the line of life is clear. A long life for you, my dear; but there are many crosses in it. See, there are more than my poor old eyes can count. But there is money, and plenty of it, and people dying of love for you, and heaps of friends. And that little cross just at the end is a thing I don't understand myself. Some people say it means a second husband—but there, nobody knows, nobody knows." And she let my hand drop again.

I remained staring at her. The old

dame rocked herself backwards and forwards with a distant, dreamy look in her eyes, and began again:

"I knew your poor mother, my dear. I've talked to her about you many's the time before you were born, if it wasn't before you were thought of. And you haven't got her here now to go to. Well, you do what I say, Miss Miriam. Marry this old fossil. You're a child still, and he won't last, I dare say. Better that than poverty coming in at the door and love flying out at the window. Marry him, and make his guineas spin. It will be a good thing for the reverend gentleman. Poor man, he's had a hard time of it."

My last visit was to Mrs. Sabey, the wife of a fisherman and naval reserve man. She was a Plymouth woman, and people said she had Spanish blood in her. She

was tall and swarthy, with crisp black hair, and did not look her age, which was considerably over forty.

Mrs. Sabey, like the rest of the village, knew all about my matrimonial news, and addressed herself to it at once.

"We can't afford," she said, "to lose you yet, Miss Miriam; and even if we could, the right man hasn't come to take you from us. If he had, it might have been another thing. Be true to yourself, my dear, and there are lots among us will be true to you for your own sweet sake, and for that of your dear mother in heaven, where she's past all trouble. Why, if she'd been alive, your father would never have dared to make a bargain over you in this kind of way, just as if he were buying and selling in market. Put your foot down, my dear, and keep it down. And look here, the tea is waiting

for Sabey. Just have a cup along with me. Sabey will be glad of the sight of your face."

So I had a cup of very nice tea with Mrs. Sabey, who talked about everything except my troubles, until Sabey came in fresh from the pump, and bringing with him an invigorating fragrance of yellow soap.

Sabey, who stood in wholesome dread of his wife, said as little as possible. I remained a short time longer chatting with the two about every detail of village gossip, except that which most closely concerned myself, and so at last departed homewards.

One or two things, at any rate, were tolerably clear, and I could see them without any egotism. Everybody in the village sympathised with myself, however much opinion might be divided as to the most

prudent course for me to adopt, and nobody whatever sympathised in the slightest degree with my father, or believed for a moment that he was guided by anything except his own personal purposes and objects.

On the whole, then, I reached home in a happier and brighter frame of mind than that in which I had set out. The public opinion of even the smallest circle is, if you are only certain that you can get at it truthfully, by no means the worst of the many possible guides to be selected in this bewildering world.

Next day, somewhat late in the afternoon, Sir Henry returned, accompanied, of course, by the faithful Watson, who had charge once again of a multiplicity of packages, the bulk of which were at once brought up to my little room.

After the lapse of about half-an-hour, during which I presume it was supposed that I was inventorying this wonderful consignment, like Marguerite her jewels, my father came up and found me seated by the window placidly darning the heel of an old stocking.

"Miriam, my dear," he said reproachfully, "Sir Henry has returned."

"Yes, papa, I am aware of it."

My father coughed, and in his own manner shifted his legs.

"But, my dear Miriam, you have not even looked at the things he has brought you. Most beautiful things, and chosen with consummate taste."

"I did not know that you had looked at them, papa; but I do not want them, and I am not going to look at them myself."

My father stamped his foot impatiently.

"Miriam, I insist that you at once look

at these things, and then come down and thank Sir Henry for them."

"That will do, papa. I will come down and thank him at once. Perhaps while I am doing so, you would like to stop and look at the things yourself." And I stepped through the door and went straight downstairs.

Old Sir Henry, who was in the parlour, rose at my entrance with a good deal of grace.

"You have brought me down a number of presents, Sir Henry, and I am extremely obliged to you. I suppose it would be ungracious to refuse them."

"I hope, my dear Miss St. Aubyn, that you like the pearl necklace. I selected it myself, and I really believe that I am a judge of pearls, although, of course, they are ladies' jewels; not that I wear jewellery, except,"

he added guardedly, "in the shape of a neck-pin."

"You are very kind, Sir Henry, but I have not as yet looked at any of the things."

He laughed pleasantly. "Time waits for her favourites, my dear Miss St. Aubyn. I am not in that happy number. Time, which in my foolish days I used to say was meant for slaves, is now my stern warder, as inexorable as Sir Hudson Lowe himself. But evidently my days are to end in sunshine."

"I am sure I hope so, Sir Henry."

"I understand," he went on, "from your father that I have everything to hope, and I need only say for my own part that it will be my one object to show my devotion to you in every possible manner. You will be, my dear Miss St. Aubyn, entirely your own

mistress. You shall live—that is to say, we will live—where you please, and how you please. It is a pleasure for me to know that I shall always be able to gratify your wishes. If you like travel you have only to say so, and I will immediately resign any engagements that might otherwise detain me. If you should prefer England you need only choose your own place, and if, when you have tried it, you find it to your mind, my lawyers shall see that it becomes yours absolutely, so that you can deal with it, improve it or alter it according to your taste, without the idle formality of applying for my consent."

"You are very kind, Sir Henry—far too kind," I answered, "and I am sure that I shall have everything which a woman needs to make her happy; but I have no fancy of my own at present, and would sooner wait

to consider these things. I quite understand your generosity, and shall not tax it."

Sir Henry laughed pleasantly.

"You will never tax any of my few Christian virtues, I am sure, so you need only remember that the choice rests entirely with yourself. Meantime, my old head was so full of ourselves that I had forgotten to speak about your dear father, whose immense abilities and energy have been too long ignored. He has been, I am happy to say, appointed to the Deanery of Southwick. The stipend is not large—a mere fifteen hundred a year—but there is a most comfortable Deanery with large grounds. In fact, the Dean of Southwick is, if the clergy are to be believed, far more comfortably off than the Bishop himself. And your father will now have that leisure which he has so long desired, and which will enable

him to finally complete the literary labours to which his life has up to now been devoted, with what I may be perhaps allowed to term most inadequate recognition."

I solemnly declare, as I write these words, that I could hardly keep from laughing out loud. Knowing my father *au fond*, I knew exactly what his literary labours had been, what they were worth, and what they would be likely to come to in the *otium cum dignitate* of a Deanery.

But there was another side to the question, and a very practical one. Once safe in his Deanery, my father, having no annoyances of his own, would cease to annoy me. He would be as much upon a comfortable, well-aired, and well-ventilated shelf, as a mummy in the British Museum.

I had no longer any affection for him.

But I still retained the sense of duty, and I knew that when I had once seen the little black rosette in the front of his hat, I should have performed the operation known to men of business as making up the balance and putting your pen through the pages.

This was a real weight off my mind. Besides, my father would make a capital Dean, inasmuch as he would say nothing, do nothing, live thoroughly up to his decanal income, and look portentously solemn. My father, at any rate, would be no longer a trouble to me. In fact, in the sinecure cares of his new office, he would probably forget all about me. After all, there are certain advantages in marrying well, especially if you marry a man who has both money and influence.

Matters thus settled, we went in quest of my father, whom we found in the garden looking every inch a patriarch, and most patriarchally engaged.

There was an immense show about him of buckets, and watering-pots, and shears, and twine, and as he heard our steps approaching, he distracted himself from his labours and mopped his forehead with a large handkerchief.

"Adam," he observed sweetly, "was a tiller of the ground, and agriculture is the most ancient of honourable pursuits. It is the only form of business in which our canon law allows the clergy to occupy their few leisure moments. I am, as you see, toiling in my little vineyard, and rearing the familiar fruits of the earth for my humble table. 'Better is a dinner of herbs

where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.'"

I felt it incumbent upon myself to open the talk, knowing that, this achievement once effected, I could immediately retire.

"We have very good news to tell you, papa," I said. "It is so good, that Sir Henry had better tell it you himself."

Sir Henry at once assumed what has been termed "the deportment of a plenipotentiary," and in fact, his very first words were wonderfully diplomatic.

"Among relations," he said, "as I suppose we may now consider ourselves, the customary and tedious formalities are a waste of time. You have, my dear St. Aubyn, placed at your acceptance, the Deanery of Southwick. It has been filled by illustrious predecessors, and you will

add a new lustre to the stall. In these days of Radicalism and haphazard, an appointment like your own, which is pre-eminently safe, will be received with a universal chorus of welcome. *Nolo episcopari* is a very pretty saying, but *nolo decanari* will not, I am sure, be in your mind."

"Nor is it for a moment," replied my father. "How can I thank you, my dear Craven? To some men their reward comes late in life, and to others early. I should possibly never have reaped my reward at all, but for you. I have still," and he ran his fingers through his hair, "some few years left in which, to the best of my humble abilities, to serve my Queen, my Church, and my country. What more could a man desire?" and he smiled sweetly.

"You have still many years before you, my dear St. Aubyn," Sir Henry laughed back, "and it is out of our Deans, as no one knows better than yourself, that Ministers pick our Bishops, unless some unusually gross favouritism should be exercised. You have had your foot on the first step of the ladder far too long, but Miriam and I will yet see you at its summit."

"All things," said my father, "are ordered wisely and divinely." And I wonder, with Thackeray, that he did not also say, "Propria quæ maribus," or "Mars, Bacchus, Apollo, virorum," either of which remarks would have been equally classical and equally appropriate. Never, probably, was a mere matter of buying and selling more shamelessly and at the same time more decorously conducted.

It began to dawn upon me at last, that an ambassador may, under circumstances, be occasionally worth the salary which he draws.

CHAPTER V.

Of course the day of the marriage had to be fixed by myself, and knowing that I should gain nothing by delay, and somewhat in the frame of mind of a patient making an appointment with his dentist, I named an early day in the following month—the 4th of May. It was a Saturday, and I resolved that I would not attend church the Sunday before it, and would so avoid the infliction of a wedding sermon in which my father, who had announced his intention of taking for the subject of his sermon, the marriage in Cana of Galilee, would, I felt sure, compare

himself to all the most eminent personages of Scripture history.

For him, at any rate, I reflected bitterly, the marriage meant a very practical miracle indeed—the conversion of his potations of spirits and water, for the remainder of his life, into some of the best acknowledged vintages.

I am bound to say that Sir Henry, who was a thorough gentleman, gave me so little trouble, that I almost began to feel a sneaking regard for him. He was always at hand when wanted, and yet was never obtrusive. He seemed to know by instinct not only when I preferred silence, but also when I preferred to be left entirely alone, and on these latter occasions there was invariably some ingenious little excuse for his departure.

After all, I began to reflect, Mrs. Peel

may not be so entirely wrong. I shall be entirely beyond the reach of all small troubles and bitternesses, and my prison will be as pleasant a one as Art and all the infinite resources which are at the command of wealth can make it. And thus the hours slipped rapidly by.

On the Friday morning arrived a new importation to our circle — a lady's-maid, with whose services Sir Henry told me I might dispense at any moment that I pleased, whether temporarily or finally, but who had a good and tried character, and would for the present, at any rate, be useful to me.

Miss Jackson—or Jackson, as she preferred to be called—was about thirty, of pleasant appearance, nimble and clever, and quite silent until addressed. These were valuable qualities. Indeed, I am not sure that when the eventful Saturday morning

came, I could have managed to array myself without her aid.

At my express wish the marriage was strictly private. There were no bridesmaids and no best man. The curate of an adjacent parish came over to assist in the ceremony, but, if I remember rightly, he did nothing except ask the question, "Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?" to which my father responded with all his own gravity, "I do," and then proceeded with the remainder of the service on his own account, entering into the spirit of the thing, and not omitting a single word or even hurrying himself, although no doubt he was anxious for the moment of breakfast and champagne.

It was over at last somehow, and somehow I found myself at the wedding breakfast

and cutting the cake. Beyond this I have a very vague idea of anything that happened, but I just remember being dressed for my journey, and I remember the dress, which, like everything else, had been furnished by the great Madame Elaine, who had received *carte blanche* from Sir Henry. It was a plain shepherd's plaid silk, a long jacket of sable, trimmed with priceless sable-tail, and a tiny bonnet, which was a work of art.

"All your ladyship's things," Jackson announced, "have been properly packed. I have your ladyship's hand-bag for your ladyship's handkerchief, gloves, and other things, and this is your ladyship's dressing-bag."

Before I got into the carriage I had to submit to a farewell embrace and blessing from my father, but I paid no

attention to it, and so his remarks were delivered to the bystanders, for whom no doubt they were intended, and who cheered them lustily, and altogether exhibited that effete enthusiasm so common on similar occasions. The cheering was kept up as we drove away.

"You may probably be too tired, my dear Miriam," said Sir Henry in his most courtly manner, "to care for conversation. I confess myself that these early hours are unusual and bewildering."

I gratefully smiled a feeble smile of assent, and we did not exchange another word until we reached the station.

It had been settled that we were to pass the honeymoon in Paris, breaking the journey in London at Craven House. By the time we reached this mansion, which was at one of the corners of

St. James's Square, I was thoroughly tired out, and but dimly remember the hall, blazing with lights, arrayed with a wealth of hot-house flowers and gorgeous with serried ranks of domestics.

Anyhow, it was a relief to have the day over, and an immense satisfaction to know that for once and for all I was absolutely rid of my father. That worthy man would, within a very few hours, be reading himself in as Dean, and would, no doubt, for some time, trouble himself as little about me as I about him.

On Monday morning there was a victoria and pair waiting for us after breakfast, and Sir Henry suggested shopping. London shops were for myself, who had only seen the Cathedral Close on rare occasions, a

new experience, and, I will confess, a pleasant one.

We first stopped somewhere in Bond Street, where Sir Henry made some little purchases, and more especially an exquisite purse, or rather *porte-monnaie*, of inlaid tortoiseshell, which, as I discovered when I examined its interior more carefully on leaving the shop, had been filled by some magic with new bank-notes and mint-new sovereigns—somewhere about one hundred and fifty pounds altogether, as I afterwards ascertained.

Then Sir Henry asked me if I would mind going by way of the Foreign Office, and waiting for him there a few minutes. Of course I said no; so we rattled down St. James's Street, and then through the Mall to the back portals of that enormous pile.

It was a glorious day, and I certainly saw London for the first time at its best and brightest. The Park was beaming with hawthorn, and I could see through the railings the ornamental water alive with every kind of rare and beautiful waterfowl.

Presently a squadron of Horse Guards trotted past, their cuirasses and helmets flashing in the sun, and their scabbards rattling and jangling. The interminable succession of carriages was even more bewildering than it had been in Bond Street, and yet the smell of the fresh may-blossom from the Park and the cries of the waterfowl made me believe myself again in the country.

So I sat dreamily looking on, for it may have been twenty minutes, or even longer, and then Sir Henry reappeared radiant with what was evidently good news, and followed by an obsequious hall-porter who bowed

profoundly as our footman—I was already beginning to say "we" and "our"—having seen his master seated, jumped upon the box.

"I have some really good news, my dear child," he said; "better news than even perhaps that of the Deanery, and certainly more immediately affecting ourselves."

"I am delighted to hear it. Pray, what is it?"

"I am asked to undertake in September," he replied, "just when London will be empty and dreary, a most delicate and important mission to Constantinople. The compliment is one to which I feel myself entitled, but which I yet confess I had hardly expected, so that it has to a certain extent taken me by surprise. But should I succeed in my negotiations, of which I entertain but little doubt, I am promised, as distinctly as anything ever is promised in the official world,

an important and brilliant post, in fact, no less than that of Minister at the Court of St. Petersburg, from which Lord George Seymour will at that time be retiring with a full peerage, and not at all improbably the Garter itself. Constantinople, which I have visited more than once, ought really to be the capital of Europe, and is not only unlike any other city in the world, but is in many respects finer than them all. It is certain to interest you extremely."

I had nothing to say except to smile assent as pleasantly as I could, while Sir Henry in his most vivacious manner commenced to discourse eloquently about the Golden Horn, and the subterranean reservoir, and the bazaars, and the Sultan's Court, until I almost imagined that I was once again poring over my Lane's "Arabian Nights."

One thing only was clear, that we had

to start that evening for Paris, and so we at once made the best of our way back to St. James's Square.

It was my first sea voyage, and also my first departure from England, and we journeyed so luxuriously that I freely confess I enjoyed myself. There was a special saloon for the short run from Victoria to Dover, and instead of going by the steamer, we had an Admiralty yacht waiting for us at the pier.

At Calais, again, another saloon carriage had been reserved, and as the train rattled us along, the change of air and the fatigue of the journey made me dreamily and pleasantly drowsy.

As we passed the fortifications, Jackson made her appearance with coffee and pistolets, and a cup of coffee, really exquisitely made, fairly roused me so that I can re-

member distinctly the drive from the busy Gare du Nord through the empty streets to our quarters at the Hôtel Bristol, and the immense fire of wood that was blazing and crackling on the tiled hearth. But I remember little beyond this, for the journey had quite worn me out, and I was soon asleep.

That afternoon, for the first time in my life, I saw Paris in the height of its season, and in its full glory.

Sir Henry had to go to the English Embassy in the Rue Faubourg St. Honoré, but Jackson, amongst her other accomplishments, knew her Paris intimately, and under her escort I went shopping, and certainly, according to my own ideas, spent money recklessly.

Why should I not do so? For the whole of my life hitherto, I had been com-

pelled to consider every sixpence before I parted with it, and to carefully reckon my change.

Now I could do as I pleased, and from my own point of view I am afraid that I plunged wildly. I remember buying a number of things which I did not want, and to the ultimate destination of which, Jackson, who suggested the purchases, and chattered voluble French to the assistants, had no doubt her own eye—things such as gloves, and lace, and a parasol or two, and other nicknacks.

This was, in reality, shopping for Jackson, but I also did a little shopping on my own account, bringing back with me some exquisite flowers, with fruit and bonbons—crystallised violet blossoms I particularly remember—and some books, English and French, daintily bound, and some photo-

graphs, and a rosary, the beads of which were guaranteed to be cut out of the olives of Gethsemane, and possibly may have been, for all I knew or even cared. You must understand that I was becoming hardened and reckless.

I had got the money. It was the price I had taken for myself with my eyes open, and why should I not spend it? And so when we reached the hotel on our return, the victoria was filled with packages which gave Jackson no little trouble in their superintendence and ultimate arrangement upon my table.

It was strange. Six weeks ago I could have lingered over these many treasures for hours, examining them one by one. Now that I had got them, and the excitement of purchasing them was over, the mere sight

of them seemed to weary me, so I sat idly in a chair by the open window, in which Sir Henry presently found me ensconced and occupied with nectarines, a fruit which I had never before tasted in my life, and which I still hold, as I held then, to be a direct product of the Garden of Eden itself.

Sir Henry seemed positively beaming with hope, and life, and good-nature, and everything pleasant except youth. His dignity had somehow vanished, and he was as vivacious as a schoolboy upon breaking-up day.

"I have secured a box at the Opera to-night, my dear Miriam," he said, "and it is actually between those of the Austrian and the Italian Ambassadors, both of which will be occupied, so that your maid will

have to do her best. Not that any efforts are needed on her part," he added in his most courtly manner, "where, as with yourself, nature unadorned adorns the most. The opera is *Dinorah*, in which competent critics hold that Meyerbeer is at his best, and Patti at hers. I am sure that it will please you, and after the performance we are to have supper at the Russian Embassy. You will find Prince Xuroff a most accomplished and charming man, and fully worthy not only of his exalted position, but of his most fascinating wife."

No Talleyrand could have been more impressive. It was impossible not to smile assent graciously. But somehow or other I could feel no enthusiasm at all this gaiety. How different I should have been under happier circumstances!

Jackson had now, for the first time since my wedding-day, an important duty, to the accomplishment of which she set herself with thoroughly professional zeal.

I could not help admiring the result of her skill as I glanced at myself in the immense cheval-glass. My dress was of rich white satin, deeply trimmed with old point-lace. My jewels, tiara, earrings and necklace, were pearls, at the value of which I could hardly guess. My rings were most judiciously selected, and to pass over other items, my fan claimed to be a veritable Watteau, and I dare say was.

Fight as I might against the new comforts of wealth, none the less I began to feel the enjoyment of them perceptibly growing upon me, and to almost fear that I must have inherited some slight touch of

my father's weakness, in what I may fairly claim to have been its most pardonable shape.

When I appeared in the *salon*, Sir Henry contemplated me critically, and was evidently not only satisfied but pleased, for he kissed me very graciously and spoke a few words of condescending approval to Jackson, who received them with the humility of a superior young person who knows her own value, but, like Mrs. Kenwigs in "Nicholas Nickleby," considers pride in it to be sinful.

In a very few minutes we had passed up the immense staircase, with its profuse decorations, and had been ushered into our box, and almost immediately the overture began. You must recollect that it was the first time I had ever heard

any other music than that of our parish organ and parish choir, beyond a stray afternoon service in the Cathedral at Exeter.

CHAPTER VI.

THE moment we had seated ourselves it made me angry and indignant to see that every glass in the house was being levelled point-blank at my own face, exactly as if several hundred photographers were at once endeavouring to focus me.

I immediately drew back into the shadow of my own curtain. Sir Henry, apparently seeing nothing strange in what had happened, leaned forward and looked on with a general appearance of critical interest. Of myself, I am glad to say, he took no notice.

and a new sense of life, bringing with it

a new value to life, seemed to have broken in upon me. I sat and listened, and still listened till the curtain fell.

Our box was beset between the acts, but this gave me little trouble. The men who came apparently wanted to talk to Sir Henry. They were introduced to me, of course, and we interchanged a few phrases, worthy to be fathered upon Ollendorf himself.

"Had I been long in Paris?" "No." "Ah, poor Paris! Did we leave soon? Ah, desolated Paris! Was not Paris the centre of the world's smiles?" I declare, as I now look back, that it makes me weary to hear Englishmen chatter about Paris, of which they know little beyond the radius of Bignon's. I would far sooner hear a New Englander talk about "Bor-

stun," and pronounce the dissyllable through his nose.

For myself, when the time came for us to leave, I had only noticed one thing. In the box directly opposite our own, but separated from it by the whole width of the house, had been a lorgnette more or less persistently directed against myself.

When you are one of a large crowd you can be quite aware that you are being looked at, although your next neighbour is quite ignorant of the fact. Your next neighbour will be thinking of himself or herself. In the present case I was certain that this particular pair of opera-glasses had marked me down.

I was a little annoyed by the fact, a little amused, and a little bewildered, all

for reasons which can be easily understood. My own single wish was to be no more conspicuous than I could possibly help; and yet here I was, at the very outset of my married career, singled out for an attack, which the old hands in the house, and the writers for *la petite presse*, with their myriad eyes and their infinite hunger for rounding a paragraph that may possibly bring in three francs next morning for their *déjeuner*, could not possibly have failed to observe.

The possessor of the opera-glasses was a man of uncertain age, and he looked like an Englishman. Between twenty-eight and forty an Englishman alters very little. Between forty and fifty-five he begins to age. He cannot reconcile himself to the idea that he is not as young as he used to be, and he often will

persist in late revels and early mornings with young men, who laugh at him, and amongst whom he too frequently plays the part of Pantaloon.

If I admire one man more than another, it is the man, appreciably past middle age, who will frankly admit that his own time is over, and that his remaining enjoyment in life is to look on while other people are happy.

The man at whom I was now looking did not seem to me at that moment to merit any kind of sympathy. There was a good deal about him to show that he had taken his own part in manly pursuits. He retained the broad shoulders, the upright carriage, and the clear, fearless eye that tell of a youth well spent. His features, so far as I could judge, were clearly cut, regular, and sufficiently pleasing.

The hardness about them may possibly have been due to his age. Beyond this I could conjecture nothing, and, in fact, by the time we had reached our hotel I had dismissed the mysterious stranger entirely from my thoughts.

At the hotel we waited hardly a moment before I found myself being whirled to the Russian Embassy in the Faubourg St. Germain. Here was a blaze of light, a scent from a forest of tropical plants, and a startling lustre and brilliancy that made me for the moment forget everything else. The opera and the Opera House faded away in my imagination as if their dimensions had been those of a scanty provincial theatre.

The supper at Princess Xuroff's was beyond anything of which I have even dreamed. I could only laugh as I pictured

to myself the idea of my esteemed parent solemnly sitting down to it. Poor old man! his highest ambitions had never risen beyond partridges and venison when they were in season, spring asparagus, new potatoes, a bottle of port wine, and then a strong glass of rum and water, and a clay pipe.

Here was every luxury for which it is possible to ransack the rivers and the seas, the mountains or the plains. It was only May, but there were yet immense peaches upon the table—reared, as I heard, each under its own separate glass shade and at a tropical temperature. Time and space seemed to be laughed at when you had on the one hand caviare from the frozen Volga, and, on the other, prickly pears and custard apples from the Southern Archipelago.

Being profoundly interested and conse-

quently attentive to the minutiæ around me, I also noticed that among the wines was Tokay, a wine of which I had heard my father speak with bated breath as being something even more marvellous than Cathedral port itself.

For me the total result was bewilderment. Carry yourself back in your mind to my little home in Devonshire with its stone roof and its humble table; recollect my quest in the morning to discover if perchance a fresh egg had been laid. One of the dishes in front of me was a pyramid of preserved fruit in cut glass, and it was ornamented with stuffed humming-birds poised upon their wings. In the Cathedral Close the price for a stuffed humming-bird, if you wanted one for your bonnet, would range from half-a-guinea to double that amount. Here were the little creatures

stuck about at random, as carelessly as in my old home it had been my habit to place great bunches of spring violets wherever my fancy might suggest.

After supper there was an adjournment to an immense *salon*, opening into a conservatory rich as the South Sea Islands themselves, with tree-ferns, and palms, and a wealth of tropical orchids of every variety of form and colour.

The company somehow melted away, and I can only just recollect my last adieux. The Princess kissed me, but adroitly avoided my own kiss in return. Prince Xuroff, who looked at me as if he would have liked to imitate the first part of his wife's performance—he must have been at least twenty years younger than Sir Henry—assured me that he had watched my husband's career for many years.

"Nature," he said, "had intended him for a diplomatist, but, alas! where was the diplomatist unless he had a wife, such as myself, fresh, charming, and with the supreme art of subjugating mankind?"

I was already beginning to get old and cunning, or, at any rate, to feel so, and I knew quite well that the astute Russian was laughing heartily at my husband, and throwing compliments to myself with about as much real feeling as that with which you toss a piece of sugar-candy to a child.

"It has been, my dear Miriam," said my husband, as he solemnly stood upon the hearth-rug at our hotel after our return, "a most successful evening. Your own tact and good sense have proved invaluable, and I cannot help thinking that I have to-night gained information of the very highest

value which I shall transmit to-morrow to Downing Street by special messenger, and which will satisfy them that I fully deserve, not only the confidence already reposed in me, but even the management of negotiations more difficult and intricate than those to which I must candidly own I feel myself more than equal."

I would have given the world at that moment to have grinned in my husband's face, if I should not have outraged all the proprieties by doing so.

He had learned, I was confident, absolutely nothing; and so far as I had seen, Prince Xuroff could have handled him as a village boy handles his peg-top—twisted a long string of hempen compliments round him, sent him buzzing away through the air into the ring, and have left him there to rotate on his own axis until he fell

from feebleness, or until another top struck him with its iron peg, and either splintered him into fragments, or sent him lumbering away hopelessly outside the charmed circle into the dismal limbo of failures.

You may judge reasonably your estimate of other people if you make allowance for your own personal prejudice. But if you accept your own estimate of yourself, it is somewhat late in the day for you to set up in business as a diplomatist.

CHAPTER VII.

We stayed on at the Hôtel Bristol until after the Grand Prix. Were I to summarise my recollections of this my first visit to Paris, I should say that I found it monotonous. It is a beautiful city, no doubt, but it is rather grand than beautiful, and, for my own part, I can only say that I very soon tired of it. Or was it that I tired of Sir Henry? Who knows? Perhaps under more favourable auspices things might have been very different.

The endless boulevards, with their immense houses and their rows of trees and

their shops, are as wearisome at last in their glaring uniformity as a sea voyage, in the course of which the least speck on the horizon brings every one on deck for want of something better to do. I found some little relief in occasional visits to the further bank of the Seine, to the Jardin des Plantes, and other places.

Old Paris better retains its age, and is correspondingly more precious to the antiquarian than old London. But the exploration of old Paris, as I could have wished to have pursued it, was out of my power. Sir Henry had too many visitors and too many visits of his own to pay, and old Paris was as much beyond my reach as if I had been a thousand miles distant instead of merely separated from it by the Seine.

And so in the gayest city of the world,

my days were practically as dreary as those of the Lady of Shalott in her "silent isle."

I was unfeignedly glad when the time came at last for us to return to St. James's Square, even although there was the terrible certainty of having to face the Very Reverend the Dean of Southwick.

From him I had received a very long and very characteristic letter, obviously intended to be shown to my husband, who politely but firmly declined to be troubled with it.

The expenses of moving into the Deanery had, I was assured, been enormous, and my father had been obliged in consequence to heavily overdraw his account at the County Bank, where they were extremely courteous, but at the same time extremely old-fashioned in their manner of doing business.

"When, my dear child," the epistle went on, "we lived so happily together, you and I, in our humble little house at Ossulston, I never knew what it was to be troubled for a few pounds."—Oh, papa! papa!—"Now I can assure you that I am very sorely troubled for a few bank-notes, and if you could manage to send me a couple of hundred pounds, or persuade Sir Henry to let me have that amount for a year (through his lawyers, if he prefers it), I should be relieved from a weight of anxiety which is positively overwhelming.

"Pray, my dearest daughter, reply at once. I regret to say that my health, owing to the immense arrears of work left behind him by my predecessor, is absolutely appalling. But I strive to do my duty at any cost or sacrifice to myself, and I keep a stout heart.

"Sir William Bull, whom I have been up to London to consult, recommends a temporary visit to Geneva. He says that unless I have complete rest for a month or two, he will not answer for the consequences; and he said this very emphatically.

"He also recommends me to drink Madeira, a wine which it is impossible to procure in the market except at a fabulous price. Perhaps Sir Henry may have a few bottles of it in his ample cellars at St. James's Square.

"I think of you, my dearest daughter, night and morning, and my thoughts would indeed be with you all day, did not the multifarious duties of my position render it barely possible for me to snatch even a few minutes for rest and contemplation."

My reply was brief and to the point.

I told my father that I enclosed him fifty pounds on my own account, and added that if in future he wanted anything from Sir Henry, whether in the shape of money, or of Madeira, or of anything else, he must make his application directly, as I should positively refuse to be the channel of it.

I ascertained afterwards that the cheque was paid into my father's bank the same day on which it was received, and I have no doubt that it was drawn against with corresponding promptitude.

My father acknowledged the cheque by telegram, taking care to add that he should come up to town as soon as we returned.

We got back about the first week in June. The London season was at its height, and I had scarcely a minute to

myself. I had to be presented, of course, my sponsor being no less a person than the wife of the Foreign Secretary, while my father, in buckles and silk stockings, figured imposingly at the Drawing Room himself.

The ceremony amused me, and my dress, a creation of Pingat's, was unquestionably the smartest seen that afternoon at Buckingham Palace. And that is all I have to say about it.

For the rest, the season tired me. The Dean was perpetually coming to me for money, sometimes descending to what is somewhere termed "the ridiculously small sum of ten pounds." But I invariably met him with a firm denial, for which I declined to assign my reasons, and at last I fairly wore his perseverance out, and he wrote a long letter in which with abundance

of quotation he compared me to Goneril and Regan, and drew a most touching parallel between himself and King Lear.

I may add that my father had more than once endeavoured to quarter himself at Craven House, declaring that he found hotels expensive, and that the bustle of hotel life upset his nerves. Here, too, I was relentless, and definitely put down my foot. I told him point-blank that any attempt to make himself a permanent pensioner in Craven House I should resist, and that if he found a London hotel too much for his nerves, there was nothing more easy for him than to return to the learned and placid tranquillity of Southwick Deanery.

One day I received, amongst my other letters, one the handwriting of which I did not at first recognise. It turned out to be

from a Mrs. Fortescue, whom I had met during our stay in Paris, and of whom, so far as I had troubled myself to form any impression at all, I had judged favourably.

The letter ran:

"DEAR LADY CRAVEN,

"I am coming to town next week, and shall stay at Brown's Hotel in Dover Street. Need I say that I shall take the very earliest opportunity of hunting you up?"

Then followed a large amount of irrelevant but amusing gossip.

"If you are looking only half so well as you did in Paris, where every living being raved about you, and where you were, I may most truthfully assure you, the sensation of the season, no one will be more delighted than myself to congratulate you on that charm of youth which in your case is hardly

in its spring. Sir Henry is the luckiest man in England. I hope he knows it. Does he?

"Pray let me find a letter from you at Brown's."

Here at last was a chance of something reasonably distracting. I went straight to Sir Henry, told him of Mrs. Fortescue's letter, and suggested that I should like to ask her to stop with us during her sojourn in town.

My husband, of course, gave his most cordial assent, and in fact was pleased to express his entire approval, and within a very few days Mrs. Fortescue was comfortably quartered under our roof. Her society was in a certain sense a very great relief to me. She saved me the trouble of considering what to do for the day, she kept me from

the terrible *ennui* of thinking about nothing, and it is but just to say that she was thoroughly amusing, good-natured, and full of a vivacity that was possibly acquired from long residence in Paris.

We breakfasted together, drove out together, and, indeed, were hardly ever out of each other's sight, except on the evenings when I had to dine out.

Mrs. Fortescue was a widow, and her husband had been in the diplomatic service, and had been for some years attached to the English Embassy in Paris. He had entered the service as Queen's Messenger, rising rapidly until he became attaché at Paris. His fortune and rapid advancement were regarded as assured, when he suddenly died.

Mr. Fortescue had been dead some three or four years, and either he had left his

wife more comfortably off than his friends expected, or else she must have had resources of her own, for she was certainly not at all pressed for money, although she lived in a handsome apartment in the Rue Royale, and did not attempt, like many ladies in society, to supplement her income by gambling, and not paying when she lost. She did not look more than thirty, and very possibly may not have been more. She dressed with most perfect taste, and was generally taken for a Frenchwoman. I began to wonder to myself why, unless she strongly preferred her freedom, she did not marry again. For she had most of those qualities that seem to attract men, and, indeed, was before everything a "man's woman."

I liked her without having been at first prepossessed in her favour, and it is only fair to say of her that in an indescribable

kind of manner she seemed to grow upon you.

After Mrs. Fortescue had been with us some four or five days, she told me one morning that she was expecting a visitor.

"He is a very old friend of mine, my dear, a Mr. Sabine, whose acquaintance I first made at Homburg, and whom I have since met almost everywhere. He is in the very best set, and is popular with every one. You would most certainly have met him while you were in Paris, which is his head-quarters, only that he was then at Luchon. There are all kinds of stories about him, but I can assure you that most of them are to his credit. The men are jealous of him, of course, for all the women rave about him. But I think that many of the men are afraid of him, for he has been out several times, and it is generally understood that

it is not well to quarrel with him. As for the women, they literally throw themselves at his head. It makes me laugh, my dear; they might as well attempt to thaw an iceberg. He is one of the few men that I know whom it is impossible to humbug. No flattery, however ingenious, has the smallest effect upon him; he is absolutely impervious to it."

"You have excited my curiosity," I laughed. "When do you expect your paragon?"

"Positively this afternoon. I have told him that I shall be in at five. You really must see him."

"I am simply dying to do so."

"I am sure you will admit that he is a sort of Admirable Crichton."

"I hate Admirable Crichtons."

"You won't hate him. But he *is* an

Admirable Crichton. He can do everything, has been everywhere, and speaks languages of which I do not even know the name."

Five o'clock came, and Mrs. Fortescue and I were sitting over tea in my boudoir, when Mr. Sabine was announced. As I rose to welcome him, I recognised in him at once the mysterious stranger of the Opera House in Paris. This was not exactly in itself a circumstance to prepossess me in his favour. But I am bound to say that every moment I remained in his society, served to remove the somewhat unpleasant impression that I had previously formed of him.

He stopped, I should say, about half-an-hour. He had not the art but the gift of conversation. The art, as Sir Henry and my father both possessed it, is not

uncommon; but the gift is extremely rare.

He was considerably above the middle height, although hardly perhaps six feet. His features I have already described. What now most struck me was his physique. His neck was not short, but very thick and muscular. His shoulders were broad and square. In the glare of the Opera House I had not done him justice. His chest was deep, and he moved noiselessly and with that particular ease of the limbs which is most certainly acquired in the fencing *salon*, although some few men pick it up elsewhere, as for example, Canadians, who acquire it on the ice.

We chatted upon every conceivable topic, and Mr. Sabine informed me that although his visit had been, strictly speaking, to Mrs. Fortescue, none the less he

knew Sir Henry intimately, having met him constantly in London and Paris, and also at Vienna and at Moscow if he recollected rightly, and, he added with a pleasant laugh, in the Riviera—"No, he was not staying at Monte Carlo, Mrs. Fortescue. Sir Henry has not been all his life in the diplomatic service for nothing. To be geographically exact, it was at Mentone."

Of course it only remained to ask Mr. Sabine to dinner, and soon afterwards he took his departure.

As soon as he was fairly in the street, I saw him, through the curtain, stop to light a cigar, and he then stride away with that indescribable step of which some few men seem to have caught the habit from the larger beasts of prey—long, noiseless, and elastic, giving the idea of immense strength in reserve.

Watch a lion pacing restlessly up and down behind his bars, and you will know what I mean. Rivière, in his picture, "The Night Watch," has given the effect of it with almost magical fidelity.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. SABINE came to dinner, of course. We had a large party that evening, and a still larger reception afterwards. I could not help noticing him among the other men. In his closely-fitting dress clothes, which showed his square shoulders and deep chest as clearly as if he had been stripped for a boat-race, he seemed to tower above the rest of the company by his head and shoulders at least.

This was merely apparent. It is astonishing what an advantage even a quarter of an inch will give one man over another.

The eye, incapable of adjustment, magnifies an inch, or half-an-inch, into a foot.

Achilles was never so tall, or Ajax of such girth of chest as Homer has depicted them, but Homer was not measuring these heroes for their armour. He was describing them as they seemed to an ordinary eye. And so with Mr. Sabine; the appearance of immense size and strength was as unmistakable as the crisp, curling hair, the cold, steel-gray eye, and the heavy moustache.

And yet there was nothing about it strange or too remarkable. He was not in any way a giant, he was simply bigger and finer than most men are—one in a thousand or a couple of thousand—so symmetrical and compact, that you might well have passed him by in a crowd exactly as you are sure to miss the winner in the preliminary canter, unless you have something

better by far than that special information of which Stock Exchange men say that when combined with unlimited credit, it would ruin the very Father of all wiles and artifices.

After this evening, Mr. Sabine called several times. It happened, as he explained, that he was a member of the Travellers' Club, and that St. James's Square was close to it.

He was always amusing, and as full of anecdote and story as the late Mr. Hayward or Charles Greville himself, although he never figured in his own conversation, except as the narrator of what he had seen, and was at the time describing.

But he apparently knew all parts of the globe. He had seen the Rocky Mountains, and heard the thunder of the Zambesi Falls. He had shot white bear

in Spitzbergen, where he had gone cruising in quest of reindeer, walrus, and musk-oxen; and he had rounded Cape Horn and interviewed the barbarians of extreme Patagonia.

I remember Mrs. Fortescue asking him once why he had not written a book about his travels. He replied, laughingly, that in these days the writing of travels, like the writing of novels, seemed to have got entirely into the hands of women, and that the fact could not be helped, although no doubt it was a pity, and the world at large suffered in consequence.

"That is not a very gallant observation," said Mrs. Fortescue.

"Perhaps not," he replied, "but it is true, nevertheless. And if," he continued, "a man were to-morrow to make some really interesting journey, and to

write an exact account of what he had seen and done, no publisher would venture to put his book before the public; and even if a publisher were found, the public at large would put the narrative down as a tissue of falsehoods."

"Do you know," he continued, "what happened in the days of a certain King of Egypt with a terrible name, who sent away some men—a regular scientific expedition, like that of the *Challenger*—with instructions to sail away through the Straits of Gibraltar, then called the Pillars of Hercules, and to keep on following the coast as long as they could? They were away for three entire years, and they came back with a number of stories, which were considered very wonderful. Great honours were conferred upon them. If there had been a Royal Geographical Society in those

days, they would most certainly have had its gold medal. But they happened incautiously to state, that after a certain period in their voyage, the sun at midday, instead of standing to the due south of them, faced about and stood in the north. 'This is nonsense,' said the scientific men about the Court; 'it is contrary to the ascertained laws of nature.' 'It is worse than nonsense,' said the priests, 'for it is downright blasphemy. The sun is a god, and does not go north in the middle of the day to please anybody.' And the King said that the scientific men and the priests were quite right, and he ordered the explorers to confess their falsehood. This they refused to do; so, by way of a warning to future liars, their eyelids were cut off, and their heads were shaved, and they were solemnly crucified in the midday sun."

"How dreadful!" murmured Mrs. Fortescue.

"Very dreadful, my dear madam; and that is why I do not tell about what I have seen. I should not be believed if I did. If I were to-morrow to tell some of my fish-eating friends in Patagonia (who are cannibals, by the way, when they have the chance) how we live and dress in London, and how religious we are, and how virtuous and charitable, and otherwise devoid of all the little faults of humanity, why"—here he broke into a gentle ripple of laughter—"they would scrape me to death with cockle-shells, and banquet on me afterwards. Oh, no, no, no! Never tell people the strange things which you have seen and they have not. A book of travels! I would as soon write a novel of the domestic affections (in the existence of which, of course, I sincerely

believe), or bring out a new edition of Mrs. Glasse's 'Domestic Cookery,' an excellent book, if it is somewhat antiquated. No. You must, as Mrs. Glasse is reported to have said, first catch your hare. The bibliopole must first catch his author; and I have no intention, as yet, of being caught."

He went away, and that evening, as it happened, Sir Henry, Mrs. Fortescue, and I dined together, *en famille.*

Sir Henry was even more than usually pompous, platitudinous, and vacuous. Mrs. Fortescue distinctly set her cap at him, trying, no doubt, to give him the idea that she would be the very perfection of a wife for an ambassador or an attaché, and that he had better have married her than me.

Honestly, there was some truth in the woman's estimate of herself. Besides, I

am sure that she had not any serious intention of fascinating Sir Henry herself. All that she wished was to secure his good graces. It was one of her rules in life that you cannot have too many friends.

Sir Henry himself was *distrait* and correspondingly ponderous. But after dinner he drank a large glass of Tokay, and as it began to course through his veins, he regained that natural speech by the usage of which it is one of Prince Bismarck's grim jokes to bewilder professional diplomatists.

We talked about the forthcoming mission to Constantinople. Mrs. Fortescue began to chatter about Constantinople, and the Bride of Abydos, and the Hellespont, and I allowed her to chatter.

She went so far as to regret that she had not herself been fully behind the

scenes in all these great State secrets. She was certain, she assured us, that she had a natural taste—she might almost call it an instinct—for diplomacy, exactly as some people had a taste for music, and could not be kept from becoming composers.

All this bored Sir Henry terribly, and he very adroitly remarked that diplomacy was no doubt a natural gift, as was a correct ear for music, but that so far as his own limited experience had enabled him to judge, it was one of those many gifts which are distinctly hereditary in their nature, and that in the Courts of Europe, the diplomatic faculty is considered to be the peculiar heritage of a limited number of families.

Poets, he added, were no doubt born and not made. And what was true of great poets seemed also, so far as he had studied history, true of great generals. But diplomacy,

he said, with his pleasantest smile, is like the habit of setting to the scent of game in the setter. You cannot teach a Newfoundland, or a greyhound, or a St. Bernard—all most useful and interesting animals in their way—to set to game. The accomplishment is not in their repertory of undeveloped faculties.

"Lady Craven," he continued, "has no natural genius for diplomacy, nor natural instinct for it. And I can promise you, my dear," he added, turning most naturally and pleasantly to me, "that I shall never trouble you by asking you to take any serious part in my labours. I, through the perversity of fate, am sent to Constantinople to listen to lies for my country's good, and tell, if possible, bigger lies in the same sacred cause. The telling of lies, my dear Miriam, has ceased to be the legitimate business of a

lady, ever since the original fall of man. It is unpleasant work at the best, however well it may be rewarded either in this world or in the next. And we had consequently better leave it to men, as we do the work of butchering, whether on the field of battle, or in the shambles, of serving in the police, of attempting to discover the North Pole, where they say that truth and honesty lie somewhere frozen up in the middle of a colossal iceberg, and of otherwise running personal risks, and submitting to personal annoyances, and in fact, sometimes insults, for which their too frequent recompense is the ingratitude of the country in whose cause they have spent the best years of their life."

Now this was an unusually long speech even for Sir Henry; but I could not object to it, as I saw distinctly it was intended

to annoy Mrs. Fortescue, and was directly pointed at myself.

If Sir Henry chose to try the point of his blade pleasantly and with no serious intent upon the young widow, it was no affair of mine. I could look on as serenely as if some young and presumptuous Minor Canon were twitting my father over his Greek, and the Very Reverend the Dean were puffing and blowing, and vainly endeavouring to assert his own dignity, and to demonstrate in his own person that Deans, even if they have not acquired Greek by years of ceaseless study, none the less know it by the light of nature.

Sir Henry had one art, at any rate. He never ventured out of his depth, and he never allowed you to exactly measure his depth with your own plummet for your own purposes, and after your own fashion.

There was, in short, more wisdom in his reticence than in his speech. Were there truth in the old joke, and had he really been sent to lie abroad for his country's good, he might, perhaps, have been tolerably successful. Sent to tell the truth for his country's good, he would have been a distinct failure.

But when you came to consider him as being sent abroad with a vague commission, a sort of *carte blanche* to lie as his fancy might please him, keeping always within the limits of safety, or to tell as much of the truth as he might know or was already known, he then became a very admirable envoy indeed.

It has once or twice occurred to me, that an Ambassador stands towards the nation which employs him, in very much the position of a hall porter, whose duty

it is to sit in a big chair, to wear a gorgeous livery, and to tell any falsehood which may be put into his mouth.

And I must here except the hall porters of clubs, for I understand that the hall porter of a properly constituted club, such as the Athæneum or Carlton, for instance, develops a power of mendacity mingled with affability, and of official severity coupled with polished courtesy, which in the diplomatic service would inevitably make his fortune.

If the Foreign Office were wise, instead of setting young men to work to write *précis* and to study antediluvian maps of Europe, it would insist that each of them should serve a novitiate of three months as porter at a club.

In that capacity they would acquire many invaluable gifts. In the first place,

they would gain absolute control over their features, so that they should betray nothing. If clouds of doubt should flit over them, or smiles of assurance light them up, the cloud and the smile alike should be as much under their command, as are the whirlwind and the storm to the rider of the one and the controller of the other.

Now had not it been ordained, possibly before the very foundations of the world were laid, that my husband was to be in the diplomatic service, as no doubt it was also ordained in the same divine scheme of the universe, that my father should be a Dean with gaiters and buckles, and a rosette on the brim of his hat exactly in what anatomists would term the section of median plane, I cannot help feeling certain that my husband would have made a most admirable hall porter himself.

As a diplomatist he was overweighted, and it was to a certain extent a cruelty to send him out for younger and cleverer men to twist him round their fingers and laugh at him.

Providence was unkind to Sir Henry. As towards my father, she had been recklessly prodigal. In a Cathedral the proper place for my esteemed parent would have been that of verger.

He would have trotted about with the silver rod and the dove at the tip of it, with immense dignity. He would have carried his robes decorously. He would have been profound over the archæology of the Cathedral. And, above all, he would have impounded silver coinage from tourists with a taste for antiquity, and candidates for a choir seat for afternoon service, with an exactitude worthy of the Fugger family itself.

And yet my father was a Dean, and my husband an Ambassador in promise and practical certainty. Why do we not now and again make a sweep out of our place-holders, and try the experiment of an appointment or two given in honest accordance with merit?

However, there the world is. And I should say that any attempt to influence the routine of the Foreign Office would be about as hopeful as a corresponding effort to change the precession of the equinoxes.

Many wise sayings stand upon record credited to wise men. Each of the seven sages of Greece has his own. But history has not left on record the name of the village blacksmith, who, when asked by a Deacon, who objected to his profanity, to fix a limit to the powers of Divine Omnipotence, replied that he would give Divine

Omnipotence its run for a fortnight between the Atlantic and the Pacific, and would lay drinks that it couldn't make the village clock strike less than one.

CHAPTER IX.

THE time slipped by. I found each particular day wearisome, but I had not kept a reckoning of their number, so that I neither looked forward nor backward, as did Robinson Crusoe when he cut his notches in his wooden cross.

My one object literally was to kill time. I could not read much, for I was certain to be interrupted, so that my reading hours were principally those of my morning chocolate, over which I would linger as long as I possibly could.

Then would come, if the day were at

all fine, the morning drive, and a little shopping. I believe that many women take to shopping as men take to whist or billiards, because it kills time, and not because they have any particular fancy for it. There would be people to luncheon, and the inevitable afternoon tea, with Mrs. Fortescue's exasperating cackle, and then, unless we were entertaining ourselves, I had usually to dine out. I know that I was heartily tired when the day was over.

Sleep for women is what tobacco seems to be for men, and I, who six months ago was always up with the sun, or nearly so, now began to find myself an inveterate idler. I was rapidly, in short, learning the art of doing nothing and thinking of nothing. And, I am almost ashamed to confess, my mind was often for long intervals as vacuous as that of a boy who sits with his clapper

on the top rail of a gate scaring away the birds.

Sir Henry had ceased to be indifferent to me. He was becoming, indeed, tedious beyond words, and a source of positive irritation. His small talk seemed every day more empty, and his egotism more insufferably prolix and tormenting.

And the worst of it was that he was so intolerably contented with himself. People will tell you that, as a body, artists—using the word in its widest sense — musicians, singers, painters, and actors, are the most conceited class in the world, never talking except of themselves and their own performances. They lay themselves open to the charge, I will admit; but a diplomatist is, of all bores and prigs that this unhappy world produces, out and away the worst, the

most pretentious, the most fatiguing, and the most self-asserting.

The late Lord Westbury once told a distinguished member of the Royal College of Heralds, a Garter King-at-Arms, or something of the sort, that "he was a silly old man, who did not even understand his own silly trade."

Now, diplomacy is not a silly trade, and ought not to be so. But, to tell the plain truth, Sir Henry certainly did not understand it, and was most certainly, as I was now thoroughly convinced, a very silly old man indeed.

His speech, with its assumption of profundity, was but as sounding brass or as the tinkling cymbal. His good nature, such as it was—and he was naturally kind and courteous—was ruined by his pomposity. A

child likes a ripe peach, but will not have it at any price if an intolerable oration is to be the penalty. And was there not once a refractory negro in Jamaica who interrupted his well-deserved punishment with the expostulation, "Massa preachee if massa like, and massa flogee if massa like, but no preachee and flogee too"?

Wilkes, whose ugliness, at any rate, has never been disputed, used to say that with twenty minutes in which to talk away the horrible first impression produced by his features, he would match himself in the *salon* against any man in Europe. I sometimes used to think of this as I heard Sir Henry orating in his own peculiar manner, and used to feel a perverse desire to be able to set Wilkes and Doctor Johnson at him, with perhaps that model of diplomacy, Count Anthony Hamilton, to serve as picador.

What I say of diplomatists is said while I am thinking of our English representatives. Russians and Austrians, and the representatives of the Sublime Porte are, I at once admit, charming, clever, and immensely amusing; while the American Ambassador is always a chartered libertine, with all the license about him of a schoolboy home for the holidays, and an intense desire to make himself pleasant. Besides, he is usually a man of real note in his own country. He may be Mr. Lothrop Motley, or he may be Hosea Biglow, but in any case he is certain to prove the light of any society in which he is thrown.

Meantime, the period of our departure for Constantinople grew nearer, and, to tell the simple truth, I became every day more and more resolutely determined not to go. In this resolution, which I suppose I must

somehow have made apparent, Mr. Sabine concurred and fortified me.

I had asked him, as a great traveller, to tell me what he knew of Constantinople, and he gave me a very doleful picture. The Turkish women, he said, of whom I should have to see a good deal, are far more stupid and uninteresting than the young ladies from a select academy in the suburbs—say Hammersmith or Brixton—which receives the daughters of commercial gentlemen upon reciprocal terms.

They do not even, he continued, talk scandal, for they know nothing of what is going on. They devour sugar-plums and cake by the hundredweight. To ingratiate yourself with them you must appear loaded with lollipops. They smoke cigarettes, and, when they can get it, drink brandy and soda-water,

which their attendants smuggle in under their capacious robes.

Nine out of ten of them, he told me, could not read, so they content themselves with illustrated papers, especially, if they can get them, old numbers of the *Petit Journal pour Rire*, the broad colouring of which pleases them. In their children they take no manner of interest, and their average intelligence and vivacity are not to be compared for a moment with those of an English maid-of-all-work out for her monthly Sunday.

"The Turks," he said with a laugh, "believe that women have no souls. They have treated them on that assumption for centuries, and from all that I could make out, the soul of a Turkish woman, including her intelligence, was as absolutely atrophied as are the feet of a Chinese lady of rank.

You will find the Harem, Lady Craven, perfectly intolerable; and the worst is, that you will probably be compelled, whether you like it or not, to spend several hours of your day in it. I confess I am sorry for you."

"I don't think that I shall go," I replied.

"If you take my advice, you won't," said Mr. Sabine.

The more that I thought over this, the more determined I became that under no circumstances whatever would I accompany Sir Henry on his mission. The matter was not difficult, after all. I had simply got to enter a direct and positive refusal, giving as many reasons as possible, and taking particular care never to give the same reason twice.

Sir Henry, in all probability, would go without me. If so, all the better. If he decided to stay at home, I should still be

troubled with him, of course, but I had now learned how to reduce this trouble to a minimum. The struggle for liberty was bound to come sooner or later, and it might perhaps as well come soon as late.

So, having thus marshalled my forces, I placidly awaited the results, in the serene assurance of smart skirmishing and ultimate victory. When the fighting really commenced, I am bound to admit that I found it warmer than I had anticipated. Sir Henry at first was going to send for my father; but I pointed out to him that my father, now comfortably ensconced in his deanery, would be the last man in the world to embroil himself in the matter, and that, if any attempt were made to drag him into it, he would take to his bed-room or run away to Switzerland, or even further from the scene of conflict; and Sir Henry, who had

pretty well gauged my father by now, saw the force of this.

The matter in dispute was of course the mission to Constantinople, together with my determination that nothing should persuade me to take part in the journey, or sojourn there.

"But," remonstrated Sir Henry, "I cannot possibly go without you. The Foreign Secretary distinctly understands that we are to go together, and, indeed, expects it." This was of course nonsense. "The expectations of the Foreign Secretary," I replied, "are interesting; but I do not recognise them as binding upon myself, and I am afraid that I shall have to disappoint him."

Sir Henry began to talk voluminously, and not very diplomatically. "You are very unreasonable, Lady Craven," he said, "and

most ungrateful. You seem utterly to forget how much you and your father owe me. I have raised you from a position of obscurity to the very front rank of European society. I have given you everything for which a woman can wish. You have now an opportunity which a peeress might covet, and you are rejecting it out of mere pique, or something worse."

He had by this time fairly worked himself up into a passion. "For my own part," he continued, "I put my foot down. I insist, for once in a way, upon being obeyed, and I *will* be obeyed. I am speaking and acting for your good, and I have to tell you that I insist upon your accompanying me. Let us waste no more words or time over the matter."

"And I, Sir Henry, have in turn to tell you that I utterly refuse to go, and

that I also refuse to discuss the matter further. It is idle to do so."

Sir Henry turned livid with passion. "You tell me that you refuse to go," he said, as if doubting the evidence of his ears.

"Most certainly. I refuse to go. Pray let us talk no more about the matter."

We did talk no more about the matter, on that occasion at any rate, for Sir Henry swung round on his heel and left the room, slamming the door after him. So far clearly the campaign had been in my favour. It is always well to win the first pitched battle.

The fighting had been sharp, and I recruited myself with a strong cup of tea, and then, by way of complete rest, went to bed, and soon read myself to sleep over some story or other by Gaboriau,

the plot of which was too recondite to be followed by the limited amount of human patience remaining to me at the time.

What Sir Henry did, or thought, or what he said or to whom he said it, was entirely indifferent to me. But I have very little doubt that he went away to the Travellers' Club and ventilated in that sanctum of diplomatists, his own wrongs and my ingratitude. If so, I can only hope that he bored his listeners and got snubbed for doing so.

The next afternoon I received from him a very long and intensely diplomatic communication, of which I can only say, as a celebrated individual did once of a similar statement of facts, that it had much in it that was true and much that was new, but that what was true was not new,

and what was new was most certainly not true.

It had evidently been drafted, reconsidered, and copied, but I did not see that it called for an answer, and I consequently locked it up in my despatch-box and did not trouble to reply to it. Why should I have done so?

August had commenced, and London was emptying rapidly for the moors, the Solent, and the Continent. As there were now but two or three weeks left before Sir Henry's departure, it was decided that we should spend them at Cowes, and Mrs. Fortescue had arranged to accompany us.

My husband had given way at last with a very bad grace, and had determined to go to Constantinople alone. It was decided that I could remain in St. James's Square, if I pleased, or could take a furnished house at the sea-side or in the country.

I declared that St. James's Square would weary me, and it was consequently shut up. For myself I selected a small house at Brighton—so small that it would be impossible for the Very Reverend the Dean to quarter himself upon me. It was in the Montpelier Road, and the little bow windows had a distant view of the sea.

As I should have no cellar, and contemplated early dinners, and a return to the simplest mode of life, I looked forward to a quiet and comfortable existence, and I think that the modesty of my plans to a very great extent appeased Sir Henry's indignation and satisfied him that my objections to Constantinople were sincere.

Anyhow when we parted, he was more than usually gracious and paternal, and expressed a gallant wish that I should write to him regularly, if not at any great

length, with which, of course, I promised to comply.

"God bless you, my dear Miriam," he said. "I shall use all my influence to expedite the appointment to the Court of St. Petersburg. I really cannot blame you for selecting a house too small for the accommodation in the fitting style of your worthy father, who, if he comes to Brighton in search of rest, will find every comfort at one of the hotels. I wish you could have come with me; but I suppose that I must for the present, until the Foreign Office fulfils its very distinct assurance to me, acquiesce in our temporary separation as inevitable. Should you need anything you can telegraph to me, and I will at once attend to any request you may have to prefer, knowing beforehand that it will be reasonable."

And with these solemnities he took his departure in ambassadorial state, with a

separate compartment, an attaché extracted from the Foreign Office, and Watson and a courier in the next carriage. He thoroughly understood the effect in this world of keeping up appearances.

It was a relief to find myself alone in my little house in the Montpelier Road, and more absolutely my own mistress than I had before been in my life.

CHAPTER X.

ALONE at Brighton. Nevertheless, I found the place insufferably dull. I believe its only merit to be its easy access from London. An immense amount of nonsense is talked about the air; but I have never been able to see that the air of Brighton is in any way better than any other, or that the Brighton downs are a bit better than any other downs.

Americans, in moments of ill-advised confidence, will tell you that Saratoga itself is an over-estimated place, and that if you are

rash enough to try it, you will find it very tiresome and stupid, and, to use their own expression, with no more points about it than any other place.

Brighton, so far as I have troubled myself to inquire into its history, owes its success to the people who have visited it. The Thrales, if I remember rightly, actually persuaded Dr. Johnson to go down there; and Dr. Johnson's opinion of Brighton was by no means a pleasant or a flattering one. Then the Prince Regent went there and built himself the Pavilion; and after this we find Brighton gradually becoming more and more a London suburb. Dr. Blinker has his select academy there for young gentlemen. Big hotels grow up; and, finally, the Brighton of to-day is no more the pleasant little watering-place it once was, than is West Kensington, with its immense avenues of

stucco palaces, the dear old Kensington which Thackeray so loved.

For my own part I found Brighton, and everything belonging to it, so intolerable that, one evening, in a fit of worse than usual despair, I wrote to Mrs. Fortescue and suggested that a change of air might possibly do her good.

She had been most careful not to lose sight of me since we parted at Cowes; and had, in fact, about twice a week reminded me of her existence, and of her extreme and, indeed, almost sisterly affection for myself.

Consequently I happened to know that she was at this moment quartered on some friends in the neighbourhood of Sandringham. She had sent me most glowing accounts of Sandringham itself, and of the

exalted personages there, and of the great fun she was having.

So I wrote pleasantly, I hope, but not at all enthusiastically, suggesting that a few weeks at Brighton might recruit her, and spent quietly with myself, prove a pleasant contrast to the vortex of gaiety in which she had lately been plunged.

I received my answer with a promptitude as appalling as that with which our tradesmen down at Ossulston used to respond to my father's airy suggestion that they should send in their accounts.

Mrs. Fortescue was absolutely wearied of Norfolk. She had never been more bored in her life. It had been well enough for the first few days; but she had soon found out that the men talked about nothing except the crops and the partridges; and the women about nothing whatever except

the toilette. Their ideas on this subject, she added, were as primitive as their clothes, which latter must unquestionably have come out of the Ark.

"It will be *the most delightful change*, my dear Miriam, to be with you once again and to enjoy, if only for the shortest time, complete rest which my poor shattered nerves sadly need, and a little rational conversation which I can assure you I need still more.

"I shall start at once, or as soon, at any rate, as I can make a decent pretext for leaving. And, to be with you again, will remind me of the many happy hours we spent together in St. James's Square.

"Pray remember me most kindly to the Dean, who, of course, before long will be wearing the mitre. I am getting tired of the pomps, if vanities, of this wicked world;

and I wish he would pick me out an eligible second among his Minor Canons so that I could go to choral service twice a day and hear the rooks caw in the Cathedral Close, and walk in the beautiful old cloisters if it were wet, and read 'Holy Living and Dying,' and get the *Christian Year* by heart, and do my best to forget a very great number of years which I am afraid have been shamefully wasted.

"I do not mind telling you in confidence, that, when I went the other day to have my hair singed, I was told to my horror that there was a gray hair here and there amongst it. Of course, I have had rather more than my fair share of trouble. But, even so, dear, one does not like to get old before one's time."

A postscript added that she would not of course bring her maid, as, doubtless, my

treasure, Jackson, would be able to attend to her few simple wants.

The widow was as good as her word, and made her appearance with military promptitude. One fly conveyed herself, and another her trunks, each as long as coffins and twice as roomy. And she was more than ever radiant with delight and enthusiasm.

The sea made her feel at least ten years younger. So, at any rate, she declared. She was astonished to find Brighton so little altered. Did Mutton's still exist? Did we still go for morning rides on the downs? And was that charming physician still practising in Royalty Square? And so she rattled on, with a string of disconnected questions, never once waiting for an answer.

I judged it upon the whole to be the

safest policy, so far as my own nerves were concerned, to let her run herself down. Ultimately, when she had asked all her questions, and told me all her news, and suggested that after a long journey a cup of tea with cognac in it had been positively ordered her by Sir Humphrey Jorkins, she retired to dress for dinner, leaving me to reflect on what I had let myself in for.

I began almost to repent of my unfilial conduct towards the Dean, and to wish that I had him down with me, and could so play off my two visitors one against the other.

At dinner I need hardly say Mrs. Fortescue, knowing or guessing that the was champagne in the house, de that she positively required a steady her nerves after the terri

of the express; so a bottle was produced and two glasses were filled. She finished the remainder herself, and I can honestly declare that it made her more loquacious, communicative, and critical than ever.

She put me up to a wrinkle, as she termed it, which was nothing more than the fact that brandy and water is really necessary to "settle" champagne. "Else, dear Miriam," she added, "the champagne, pleasant and exhilarating as it is, will most infallibly settle you, and leave you with a terrible headache the next morning."

So she had her brandy and water. The Dean, to do him justice, used to call things that he liked to eat and drink by their proper names. I almost began to wonder whether she would not tell me that her medical man had recommended her a cigar. She

stopped short, however, at this particular trial of my patience, and contented herself with two or three diminutive Egyptian cigarettes; and after several attempts to keep herself awake, declared that the journey and the change of air had thoroughly exhausted her, and that she should not be herself again until she had had a thorough night's rest.

It was a somewhat dreary outlook with the certain prospect of a fortnight at least. So I resigned myself to the inevitable, and, as I blew out my candle, could not help wishing I were the man on the Eddystone Lighthouse, or St. Simeon on his column, or even Teufelsdröckh in his garret. Any of these places would have, at all events, the one advantage of affording a sanctuary from Mrs. Fortescue.

A day or two after my guest's arrival, we were walking, or, rather, sauntering in the morning along the King's Road, crowded as usual with its indescribable mixture of Brighton residents and Brighton visitors, flys, Bath chairs, goat chaises, boarding schools in double file, Jews as obtrusive as their own noses, and here and there an Indian Ayah with her baby, when it pleased Mrs. Fortescue to become suddenly, unaccountably, and violently agitated.

"My dear," she exclaimed, "there he is! I declare, there he is! What on earth are we to do?"

"There is who?" I asked somewhat snappishly.

"Why, Mr. Sabine, my love. Look, he has seen us, and is coming up."

Mr. Sabine it proved to be, looking

completely himself. He had been knocking about, he explained apologetically, as if he had no business to be in Brighton at all. He had been to all kinds of places, to Deauville, to Homburg, to Baden, and Carlsbad, and they had all alike tired him out. They were dull and tedious. He had now come to Brighton to get out of the way, and to see what entire rest and the air of the Sussex coast would do for him.

He had brought nobody with him, and had not expected to meet anybody, least of all myself, whom he had supposed to be anywhere rather than in this terrible London-sur-Mer, where the Londoners had succeeded in spoiling and blighting everything except the glorious Channel breezes.

Hitherto, his forecast had proved correct. He had found himself as entirely alone as

if he were at Margate, or Blackpool, or Weston-super-Mare. He was stopping at the "Old Ship," where there was not a person whom he knew, and he was dividing his time pretty impartially between the tennis court, the Parade, and the downs. It was quite a relief to meet a face he knew. Where were we stopping? Might he vary the monotony of his own existence by looking in to afternoon tea?

So he went on until he had fairly launched Mrs. Fortescue on the full flood of her small talk. When she showed signs of stopping, he caught the ball, and threw it back to her. And thus, before I could tell how it had all happened or come about, we found ourselves back again in front of my house in Montpelier Road.

I was about to say that I was obliged to ask him in. This, however, would not

be strictly the truth, for I was, if anything, glad of the chance.

He was, anyhow, a relief to Mrs. Fortescue's persistent babble, which was becoming as wearisome as that of Tennyson's brook. He needed no pressing, but came in at once, and stepped quite naturally into the part of a tame cat.

He showed us how to make tea in the Russian fashion, and to drink it with little slices of lemon instead of cream and sugar. He rallied Mrs. Fortescue on her weakness for an occasional cigarette. He told us how Russia is the only country in the world where you get champagne, because it forestalls for years in advance the entire yield of the champagne district; the only country in the world where fresh caviare is to be procured, and the only country where you get genuine tea, because Russian

tea is brought overland by caravan, and so does not lose its aroma in the course of a sea voyage.

The more he talked, the more it became impossible to avoid contrasting what he had to tell us with the terrible platitudes of Sir Henry. And I began at last indolently to wonder whether he might not be possessed of some secret mission from St. Petersburg, and so probably know far more about my husband and his foibles than he might choose to reveal.

The idea was amusing, if a little far-fetched, and I could almost fancy I heard Sir Henry himself ponderously declaring, as if it were a new discovery doing himself infinite credit, that Mr. Sabine was evidently a most highly-educated young man, with exceptional abilities and powers of observation, who must have spent many years of

his life in travel, and have mixed in the most exclusive circles.

When Mr. Sabine at last took his departure, Mrs. Fortescue was comparatively youthful with radiance.

"Did I not always tell you so, my dear Miriam? Is he not marvellous? I believe there is nowhere he has not been, nothing he has not done, nothing that he cannot tell you all about. I sometimes wonder whether he is not the Wandering Jew himself, of whom they tell you at Venice, where he last condescended to show himself, that he was the most accomplished and fascinating person in the world. You have never read the 'Wandering Jew,' I suppose. I know that Mr. Sabine always brings him to my mind. Only they say the Wandering Jew is indiscreet at times, and apt to let out who

he is and where he has been. Catch Mr. Sabine letting out anything about himself. Why, he does not even keep a servant, for fear the fellow should chatter about where he has been and what he has done. I am sure that there cannot be any other reason, for he has plenty of money. At Vienna he ran horses in his own name, and had over some of the best English jockeys; and at Paris last year, towards the very end of the season when we were all grumbling about the heat and wishing ourselves at the North Pole, it turned out that he had actually gone right up to Spitzbergen and the Kara Sea in a yacht of his own, and had shot white bears, and had speared walrus, and driven a sledge of Esquimaux dogs, and seen the sun in the sky for weeks at a time."

"He seems a very wonderful man," I remarked.

"Next time he comes, mention Patagonia. I am sure you will find he has been there, like dear Lady Florence Dixie, and seen the cannibals, and in all probability, if he were to own to it, shot a number of them, which would be quite justifiable seeing that they are terrible creatures who have no religion, and do not cook their food, and murder you, if they get the chance, by strangling you with a piece of rope and a big stone at each end of it. I declare, my dear, that, fascinating as he is, he sometimes makes me, in spite of myself, feel quite uneasy and almost creepy."

Of course I could only reply, that for my own part I saw nothing so very terrible about Mr. Sabine, and did not con-

sider that Mrs. Fortescue need be under any immediate apprehension.

"It's not myself, my dear," said Mrs. Fortescue, nodding her head most sagely and emphatically. "It would be vanity on my part to pretend as much. But you should be very careful with him, Miriam. I am quite sure that he is a very dangerous man; not at all the man," she added, "for a Devonshire village, or even a Cathedral town, and I doubt whether there is much that he could learn even in Vienna itself. Perhaps dear Sir Henry may be able to give him a wrinkle or two on his return from that shockingly wicked city, Constantinople, which they say combines all the vices of the old world and the new, without a single redeeming virtue from either. If anybody could be a match for him, it would most certainly be Sir Henry."

And with this parting stab in the back both for Sir Henry and for myself, my good friend retired to divest herself of her war paint, and see what a night's sleep could do towards temporarily repairing the inexorable ravages of time.

CHAPTER XI.

THINGS went on in this way for several weeks, it may very well have been six or seven or even more; I will not really undertake to say. I know, however, that I had heard from Sir Henry several times. With shorthand clerks at his disposal, his tendency to be prolix grew upon him, and I actually believe that the tedious letters he sent me were rough drafts of despatches afterwards toned down, mellowed, and varnished for the Foreign Office.

I used to read them having nothing much else to do, and dutifully to acknow-

ledge them and answer any questions they might contain. And in a dull, methodical kind of way I folded them up and docketed them, and put them away in a despatch box. This was really the only responsibility which my marriage at this time entailed upon me.

Mrs. Fortescue still stopped on, and showed no intention of going. She reminded me of one of those funny little animals which you see at the Aquarium—the hermit crab.

Mr. Hermit Crab has powerful claws, and a well-armoured chest, but the remainder of his body is hopelessly soft and unprotected. So he fixes himself, tail first, into some convenient shell — usually that of a deceased whelk, hiding his defenceless portion within it, and boldly thrusting his mailed half out at the door. When he is tired

of his particular shell he gives it up for another, and if he sees a smaller hermit than himself with a more comfortable home, he promptly lugs him out of it and takes possession himself. This was Mrs. Fortescue all over.

At present she had a shell that suited her. But she was ready any day to change it for a better. She had not even the common industry of the spider which constructs its own web, or the caddis worm which builds its own house.

But on the other hand she was distinctly amusing, and in many ways very useful. She was a parasite, no doubt, but one of those parasites that give no annoyance. On the contrary, she always had some happy suggestion as to how the day ought to be spent. She took all the trouble of housekeeping off my hands. She could guess

my humours, and knew to a nicety when to speak, and when to keep a tranquil and golden silence.

And I think I may honestly say that, in my case at any rate, she was exempt from flattery, which is the besetting weakness of parasites. If anything, she was frank, and would even take me to task with such justice that it was impossible to be angry, and with such geniality and humour that it was equally impossible not to be amused.

In fact, I really believe that she had found me useful at the outset, and had ended by liking me as heartily as it was in her nature to like anybody.

Mr. Sabine soon became a regular visitor. There was no yachting at Brighton, he explained, because it was a lee shore, and harbourless. The Brighton Harriers were

beneath contempt, the thing was a gallop from first to last, with no hunting in it, and if there was a check for more than ten seconds, the hounds were lifted. It was no more hunting than circus riding is horsemanship.

For himself, he had long ago come to the conclusion that one of the greatest pleasures in life is to do nothing in your way and at your own time. And he thus found sufficient occupation.

When Mrs. Fortescue pressed him as to how he dealt with the "wicked old enemy," and begged him with much coyness to teach her his infallible secret of perpetual youth and spirits, he answered cheerfully that he feared the methods which he employed were beyond a lady's reach.

He used, he explained, to commence the day with a plunge into the sea from

the bathing station under the end of the pier; then he allowed the weather to guide him. Sometimes he would play tennis; at others he would go out with the fishing boats; at others walk or ride on the downs. Sometimes he would drive tandem, a secret, he added, which not even Americans had ever mastered, although American gentlemen were our equals in most things, and our betters in not a few.

Cricket, tandem, and tennis, were all peculiarly English. They all required nerve, health, high animal spirits, and considerable patience and practice; and it was for this reason that he was so fond of them.

Of course Mrs. Fortescue had nothing to say in reply. The least approach to common-sense was always sufficient to neutralise her babble of common-place.

And Mr. Sabine combined the strongest common-sense with a humour which, as he pleased, could be either genial or exasperating. Mrs. Fortescue certainly did not seem to find it genial.

Some few days later I was out alone, Mrs. Fortescue had got what she called a sick headache. I turned on to the Parade and was leisurely making my way towards Hove, when I recognised a springy step behind me, and the next moment Mr. Sabine was at my side.

I was more than usually disposed to welcome him, for I was irritated out of measure with the Dean, with my husband, and I might almost say with the world generally.

Mr. Sabine seemed to divine this, and almost majestically accommodated himself to my humour.

I remember he had with him an immense hound almost as large as a calf, and brindled, with white feet and a white blaze on its chest. I inquired about the monster, and Mr. Sabine told me that it was a bearhound from the kennels of the Czar at Moscow, and that he had obtained it through the Russian Ambassador at Paris.

"Look at him," he said, as, half in play, and half by way of reminder towards good behaviour, he gave the brute a gentle kick in the ribs, "he will tackle a Russian bear almost as big and as heavy as a dray horse, and enjoy the business into the bargain; as for a man unarmed, he would tear his throat out in a moment."

"A nice sort of animal to take about," I remarked.

"I have been warned once or twice," he

replied, "that it is dangerous to keep him; but Serge obeys me, don't you, Serge?"

And Serge, hearing his name in the interrogation, looked up with an ugly kind of growl, fawned with his tail, and, in obedience to the gesture, slunk to heel and slouched along behind us. His manner in its canine fashion was so distinctly belligerent as to almost make one feel uncanny.

Of one thing I am certain, that dogs, although they cannot use human speech, understand far more of it than might be believed.

Presently, I cannot tell how, I found Mr. Sabine talking to me in a low tone, but earnestly and almost passionately. I knew that I ought not to listen. I knew that I ought to leave him then and there, to seek any refuge, to escape from him under

any pretext. And yet I listened and let him talk on.

I had read before then how the serpent fascinates its prey, and how the snake charmer in his own turn asserts the ultimate superiority of man by fascinating the serpent. No one who has ever been in the East doubts for a moment that certain Hindoos possess this particular skill just as certain men—Van Amburgh, Carter, Bidel, and Maccomo—are born *dompteurs*, before whom the most savage beast quails.

Now this man had this particular kind of power, whatever it may be and however acquired. There was nothing supernatural in it.

Van Amburgh would have laughed in your face if you had told him that he relied upon anything beyond the power of his own nerves consciously exercised. So

it seemed to be with Mr. Sabine. He had made up his mind to have his own way, he took it, and he had it without the show of dispute.

For myself I ought hardly to say that I began to abandon all idea of resistance to his wishes; for, to be exact, the very word abandon implies quite as much a conscious resolution as is involved in the act of laying down your arms or hauling down your flag.

I somehow found myself drifting, as a sailing vessel will in a strong current when there is not so much as a capful of wind to fill her sails or give her the way to hold to her helm.

I knew perfectly well what was going to happen. I could see it all before me as did Tennyson's "Lady of Shalott" when, "seeing all her own mischance, with a

ghastly countenance she looked down to Camelot."

Why should I trouble? Why weary myself? Destiny was stronger than I and would work things out in its own way.

One evening, about the beginning of November—as a matter of fact it was the very first day of that month—Mr. Sabine called in the afternoon. It was five o'clock, and twilight was past. Mrs. Fortescue was indisposed, a bad sick headache had confined her to her room. Such, at all events, was her excuse; although I believe that, as a matter of fact, she was awaiting the arrival of certain very special cosmetics from town, for the fresh air of Brighton tries the complexion terribly, as poor Mrs. Skewton found out.

After we had some tea Mr. Sabine suggested a stroll, and I gladly threw on

a heavy cloak and sallied out with him on to the Parade. We sauntered down the King's Road, and as we made our way along a smart man in quiet navy blue and gold buttons, with a broad gold band round his cap, stepped forward, touched the peak of his cap, and fell back again.

"I had quite forgotten to tell you," said Mr. Sabine carelessly, "my yacht is lying here. Would you care to see her? We can go on board for a few minutes."

We went down some battered old stone steps and picked our way over the shingle where a four-oared cutter was lying in wait, every man at his thwart and the coxswain in the stern.

In a moment we were off, and before I knew it I was on board the yacht. It was so dark that I could make very little out; but I distinctly remember the quiet

luxury and comfort of the cabin, which was fitted in dark walnut with deep crimson velvet and gold and lit by swinging lamps most carefully trimmed.

We seemed to have been expected. Anyhow, a steward, unordered, brought in a variety of dainties worthy of the "Arabian Nights," and I just remember running riot like a schoolgirl with a cup of chocolate, some superb grapes thickly covered with their own bloom, and some little marvels of French confectionery, all of which appeared and disappeared.

Mr. Sabine having obtained my permission by way of formality to light a cigar, and having accomplished the process satisfactorily, removed it from his mouth and gravely commenced:

"Suppose, Lady Craven, at this moment you began to hear the engines throb and

to feel the vessel vibrate, and found that we had weighed anchor and were under steam for the South?"

I just hesitated for a moment. Then I looked at him and said defiantly:

"You would never do such a thing. You know as well as I do that it would be cowardly. And, whatever you are, you are not a coward."

He seemed pleased and laughed merrily.

"No," he said, "it would be a very cowardly thing to do and very treacherous. I always prefer fair fight. It is utterly untrue that all is fair in love and war. It is not fair, for instance, to buy a man's daughter at the price of his debts, a position, and an income. I value nothing myself for which I have not fought. Look there."

He pointed to the cornice of the cabin,

and I saw in a small glass case, grinning through reeds and sedge, the head of an Indian tiger. Beneath in a smaller case hung a heavy hunting knife.

"I killed him with that," he said; "ripped him up, in fact, before he had time to perform the same service for myself. Here is one of his claws." And he detached from his watch-chain an immense talon set in a filagree of gold.

"And here, if the sight of it will not make you scream or faint, is the scar." And he drew up his sleeve above the elbow. There, clearly enough, ran down the whole length of the arm a long, deep scratch, looking as if some cruel steel hook had been dragged like a ploughshare through the flesh.

I could not help a little cry.

"Oh no," he laughed, "you need not

be afraid of me, Lady Craven. I love you too deeply not to respect you, and I have full faith in my own star. Everything in this world comes to the man who trusts himself, whether his object be an embassy, or a pearl beyond the price of empires. Come; let me see you ashore."

He blew a shrill call on a whistle and offered me his arm up the companion. At the side of the vessel lay the long boat, and after a very few strong, sharp strokes her bow was grinding on the shingle.

He sprang on the beach and held out his hand. In a second I was by his side. We were exactly opposite the street leading to Montpelier Road, and in a very few minutes I was at my own door.

"I deserve something," he said, with a low laugh, "for my self-denial in not slipping cable as, if I recollect my Eton days rightly,

Jason did. But I will not inflict myself upon you to-night; I shall try to find you in to-morrow. Meantime I think I shall for once in a way stroll round to the club and have a game of billiards. I feel exactly in the nerve for it."

I had taken off my right glove and had given him my hand. He caught my hand and raised it to his lips. The glove he thrust into the breast of his coat, and he then stood bareheaded in the street for one or two brief seconds until the door had closed upon me.

Mrs. Fortescue had heard that I was out. Apparently the news had restored her, for she had come down to the sitting-room and was patiently awaiting my arrival.

"Where on earth have you been, dear Miriam, at this unearthly hour, and in this terrible weather?"

I looked her full in the face. "I have been to and fro upon the earth, Mrs. Fortescue, something like Satan in the Book of Job, who went about looking for an honest man. I, however, have been looking for an honest woman, and, not finding her abroad, have come home to yourself."

"You are joking, my dear," simpered Mrs. Fortescue, as a bright red patch burst out upon each cheek, blazing luridly through the powder and enamel.

"No, Mrs. Fortescue; on the contrary, I never was more in earnest in my life. And now that I am at home at last, and really very tired with the sea air, I think I shall go straight to bed."

"Won't you have any dinner?"

I declined all creature comforts, and in their place ordered an ample supply of hot water to be taken up to my bed-room.

Then I sat for awhile before the fire and watched its ruins crumble away into bridges and mountain-passes, and at last I arose with a superstitious kind of shudder, and, after a brief good-night to Mrs. Fortescue, made my way to my own room.

The day had thoroughly wearied me out, and I was soon asleep. My sleep, however, was disturbed by dreams, not so much terrible as amusing.

Somehow or other we were all on board the yacht together, and my father, in a moment of abject depression from sea-sickness, had proposed to Mrs. Fortescue and been accepted by her. And Sir Henry was writing ceaseless despatches, and talking to everybody. And Mr. Sabine was at the wheel, and I was seated close by him.

And then the sea and the sky together

turned into one glorious glimmer of dim purple light. The waves fell. Our path lay through great beds of water-lilies, the stars hung down from Heaven, as if you could reach out your hand and pluck them like ripe fruit. And then, somehow, there stole over me the sense rather than the sound itself of dim far-off music, and my tired eyelids closed on my tired eyes.

CHAPTER XII.

One afternoon, about a fortnight later, I was in the drawing-room, reading. It was a dull day, and I was near the fire, which crackled cheerfully. The particular book that interested me happened to be, by a curious kind of coincidence, Beckford's "Vathek."

I had given orders that I was not at home, so I was not troubled by a loud knock at the door. To my surprise, the person who had knocked came straight in, straight up the staircase, threw open the door and entered the room.

It was Sir Henry himself, and he was obviously in a state of the most extreme and violent excitement.

I rose to my feet and advanced to greet him, but he waved me back with both his hands, and I could see that he was quivering with emotion.

In a few seconds he sufficiently recovered himself to sit down. I, for my part, remained standing, not to give myself any advantage over him, but simply in utter bewilderment.

When he found speech at last, his utterance was slow and laboured, and I cannot help admitting that I was seized with a fear lest he should be taken suddenly with a fit.

"I have heard everything," he said, or rather stammered out, "and I know everything. Explanations and excuses are out

of the question. I have come down to-day, against the express advice of my solicitors, to let you know as much, and also to tell you that in this world we shall never meet again. I could wish it had been otherwise. It is a sad ending to my life, and it is absolute ruin to yours. But we cannot undo what has been done. I suppose—I know you never cared for me; but I had hoped you might learn, at any rate, to like me. That hope is now past, and it only remains for both of us to forget, if we can possibly do so." And here the old man fairly broke down.

I was so astonished, that I could hardly ask what he meant, and what had happened to so agitate him.

"Don't pretend ignorance," he replied; "you understand me perfectly well. Heaven knows this miserable business gives me more

pain than it does you. Your father, I do not suppose, will trouble himself. But I have my own honour to guard, and where that is concerned, I am resolute and immovable."

Again I looked at him in blank bewilderment.

"I do not suppose you will marry him," he proceeded. "In fact, I am sure that he will never marry you, and had never the slightest intention of doing so, under any conceivable set of circumstances, whatever he may have led you to believe or suppose. I must say good-bye, I cannot say God bless you; but I hope that the remainder of your life may be happy, and its end brighter than that of mine is now destined to be."

Again I advanced towards him, and again he motioned me away. Then he passed through the door, and I heard him

descend the stairs with slow steps and make his way into the street. From the window I saw him get into a fly, and motion the flyman to drive away.

I sat down for some few minutes and wondered; but my wonder did not help me to any solution of the problem. Then I hastily hurried on a bonnet and cloak, and made my way down to the Parade, where I walked slowly along, revolving the situation and wondering dazedly what might come of it.

Never, I suppose, could woman have felt more helpless and isolated in this world. My father, the Dean, was the frailest of all broken reeds. Jackson had evidently somehow been making mischief for her own purposes. Mr. Sabine had gone to town, as I knew. Mrs. Fortescue was the only soul to whom I could turn;

and I had never longed for her so much as I did at that minute.

As luck would have it, I met her within a very few seconds. She was making her way homewards and quickened her pace as she saw me.

"Why, Miriam, what is the matter with you? You look as if you had seen a ghost; and I believe you are trembling. In fact, I can see you are. We cannot go to Mutton's with you looking like that. Now you just come with me."

She seized my arm, hurried me along for some few yards, and then dragged me into a chemist's shop, where she administered a compound which she ordered unhesitatingly. One notices trifles at times like these, and I noticed that the chemist seemed amused at her professional knowledge.

The mixture was a curious one. It tasted, or rather smelt of chloroform, spices, and lavender. But within a minute after I had swallowed it, I felt the colour returning to my cheeks, and the blood coursing through my veins.

We left the shop, and made the best of our way home. Mrs. Fortescue motioned me to the sofa and said, "Lie down, my dear child." Then she rang the bell sharply, and inquired for Jackson.

Miss Jackson had gone out.

"That is all right," laughed Mrs. Fortescue, as the door closed. Then she locked the door itself, and gently and deftly inserted her pocket-handkerchief into the key-hole. Then she came and sat down on the edge of the sofa by my side.

"Now, my dear, I can guess pretty well what is coming; but at the same time, I

am dying to hear all about it from yourself in your own way. Of course, you have heard from that old mummy, and he has threatened all kinds of things."

"Sir Henry has been here," I replied.

"Whew!" Mrs. Fortescue fairly whistled in her amazement. "I never knew such a mummy so galvanised before. Come here himself, has he? And did he condescend to articulate speech, or was he diplomatic and unintelligible? Or did he tear his wig, and crack his stays with emotion, genuine or feigned?"

"Not at all," I said. "None of these things. The matter is far more serious than you think, and of that I am convinced. He was very deeply moved, and evidently in earnest. He told me that we should never meet again, that I was disgraced for

ever, that he had left the whole matter to his solicitors, that he should refuse to see me, and that he should take no explanation or excuses."

"Oh, indeed," said Mrs. Fortescue, snapping her lips together smartly. "Oh, indeed, what a very big man, to be sure! Almost too big to condescend to be Ambassador, even at St. Petersburg. Well, my dear, I should say for my part, if I were you, that the whole thing was a lucky riddance of bad rubbish, and should be disposed to feel correspondingly thankful. And is that really all?"

"That is all," I answered. "Surely it is enough."

"Enough, my dear Miriam," said Mrs. Fortescue. "Quite enough. I do not see how things could possibly have turned out better."

This was a novel view of the situation for me, and I wondered what it might mean.

"Look here, my dear," and the little woman began to check off her points upon her fingers. "You are rid of your father for life, that is the first clear point you have scored. You are rid of your husband, who says he is never coming back. Mind you keep him to that promise. Well, that is the second point. You have not a magnificent but a very good income. You are entirely your own mistress, and of course the old fellow cannot live for ever. What there is to grizzle about I fail to see."

"Sir Henry is going to divorce me," I stammered out. "I shall be disgraced for ever," and here I fairly broke down.

"Divorce you!" cried Mrs. Fortescue. "Where are his proofs? He can't go

into Court on his suspicions, you know. Suspicions go for nothing, even in diplomacy. Where are his proofs?"

At this moment there was a knock at the door. I held up my finger for silence, and then quietly undid the lock. It was the housemaid — a pleasant girl enough, too honest to have been listening, and too simple to have understood anything if she had.

"What is it, Mary?" I asked.

"If you please, my lady, Miss Jackson have just gone away, my lady, and have told me to tell your ladyship that her wages is paid up to date, and that she'll send for her boxes to-morrow morning."

Mrs. Fortescue looked at me and laughed. "Voilà la vipére dans les fleurs. That woman was about as bad and treacherous an egg as ever was hatched into a basilisk or cockatrice, or whatever you call it. Now we know every-

thing, my dear. 'Tell a lie and stick to it, which is the eleventh commandment with promise.' Dear me, dear me, what fools we must have been! Do you know I really feel as if I should like to have that woman stabbed in the back, or tied up in a sack and thrown into the sewers; or otherwise unpleasantly disposed of."

CHAPTER XIII.

NEXT morning about eleven o'clock, Mrs. Fortescue and I were sitting together chatting unconcernedly, and really without any thought of the matters that so gravely menaced my peace of mind.

I after all had come to accept the position, and to see that at the very worst I should be a gainer in certain respects.

I had changed a state of slavery in what was little better than a hovel, under my father, for a slavery in many ways more irksome, although the bars of my cage

were gilded. Probably Sir Henry would fail in the august tribunal presided over by Sir James Hannen. Justice is not always infallible; but my cause must assuredly prevail. In any case I should be rid of my father, rid of my husband, and comfortably provided for for the remainder of my days.

Recollect what a strange life mine had been, and then think how I must have welcomed the prospect of liberty, even though it came with unwelcome conditions.

I should be at last, assuming the very worst, an entirely free woman, as free as the air, still young and without the loss of a single soul whom I loved or cared for.

There was shrewd wisdom in what Mrs. Fortescue had said; and I began

to feel the same reckless spirit again coming over me as that in which I had flung away Sir Henry's money in Paris.

While I was thinking over these things, seated in the window and looking down the street towards the sea, I saw Mr. Sabine coming towards the house with a cigar in his mouth.

I mention this little detail, because it is one of many circumstances that will enable my readers to form their own judgment of the man. A fly was passing him and he stopped it. A few words passed between him and the driver. Then the man took the cigar from Mr. Sabine, put it into his own mouth, touched his hat gratefully, and drove on.

"There's a man for you, my dear," said Mrs. Fortescue. "I dare say that cigar cost him two shillings or half-a-crown;

and so, although he has only just begun it, he gives it to that cabman, who has never smoked anything like it before in his life, and never will again. Now I call that simple, unaffected kindness from the heart. It has the secret of kindness, which is thoughtfulness."

Mr. Sabine (I have before described his peculiar gait) slouched along to our door, knocked, and was shown in.

The first thing to be done was to tell him all that had happened. He listened without interruption, and with an expression of amusement on his features.

"Did you ever hear anything more monstrous, more shameful, more outrageous, more downright and abominably mean and contemptible, and cruel and vindictive in your life?" asked Mrs. Fortescue, stamping

her foot by way of emphasis at each important adjective.

"I don't know," he answered lightly. "I really feel disposed to say for my own part that after one or two things which I have seen, and one or two others that I know of, nothing astonishes me. Sir Henry is, to put the matter as mildly as possible, a miserable, unhappy old fellow, eaten up with doubts and fears and vanities, as much of his own creation as Falstaff's men in buckram, and entirely devoid of even those redeeming points which his age and experience ought to have given him. His morbid vanity would be ludicrous were it not, as it happens, so troublesome.

"Well, he must go his own way. There is no help for it. The faithful Jackson will of course do her duty—that is to

say, she will lie through thick and thin. There will be any number of other witnesses at a few pounds ahead to swear to all kinds of things that never happened, and whose evidence will tally as neatly as the pieces of a Chinese puzzle, when it has been fitted together by the ingenuity of counsel.

"There will be a stupid jury utterly incapable of appreciating evidence, and the counsel for the petitioner will tell them that he leaves the case with confidence in their hands, never having yet seen or addressed twelve more intelligent men. Dear me! It almost reminds me of 'Pickwick.' When a juryman is in doubt, or when he wants to get away, he always finds for the plaintiff. The plaintiff would not have gone to law, he argues with

himself, unless he knew he was right, and he must know a great deal more about it than we do."

We both burst out laughing. Then Mrs. Fortescue said: "Pray light another cigar, Mr. Sabine. Neither of us mind."

"I never smoke in the morning," he answered gravely.

"That," I replied, shaking my finger at him, "is wickedly untrue. We saw you smoking as you came along, and saw you give your cigar away."

He laughed, and lit a cigar. Commonplace as the remark may seem, I cannot help noticing here, that it is only your *bourgeois* who needs a genuine request to be pressed upon him. As the blue smoke began to curl about the room, Mrs. Fortescue produced champagne.

"Quite harmless, my dear," she observed, "if properly qualified." And she filled up the tumblers with seltzer from a gazogene.

We were laughing and talking together, when I heard a parley in the passage, and then the steps of a man on the stairs. The door was opened without the formality of knocking, and a painfully respectable-looking man, about fifty years of age, with gold-rimmed spectacles, and a silk umbrella, made his appearance.

"Lady Craven?" he asked, looking from me to Mrs. Fortescue.

I inclined my head.

"This is for you, my lady." And he politely handed me a piece of paper. "This gentleman, I presume, is Mr. Sabine? I thought so. And this is for you, sir. That lady, I presume, is Mrs. Fortescue?"

"Good Heavens, man!" burst out Mrs. Fortescue, "you're not going to serve me with a citation, are you? My poor husband has been dead for years."

"No, madam. But I wished to be able to recognise you again. Good-day, my lady; good-day, madam; good-day, sir." And with a bow that Sir Henry himself might have studied with advantage, the stranger withdrew.

There were a few seconds of silence. Then Mr. Sabine shook himself, and said very quietly and steadily: "Do not allow yourself to be troubled by all this, Lady Craven. I will watch over you from first to last, and the one thing absolutely necessary at present is that you should keep your mind at ease. Whatever you may do, you must not allow yourself to

break down. It would be fatal to the last degree. Mrs. Fortescue must look after you most carefully."

"Trust me for that," cried the little woman. "Mr. Sabine is quite right, my dear. And now for to-day at any rate we will let this unpleasant matter pass altogether out of our minds. Mr. Sabine, you mustn't dine here; you must finish your champagne and seltzer and go away. Call to-morrow morning about ten, and if you are very good and penitent, and the weather is very fine, I will go out for a walk with you myself. We must have no more worry to-day. Now get away at once to the tennis court, or to your yacht, or anywhere you like, and do not trouble us any more. Sufficient for to-day has been the trouble thereof."

Mr. Sabine laughed and took his departure.

"Now look here, my dear," again insisted Mrs. Fortescue, "no more talk about this worry. No more shop; we've had quite enough for to-day. I for myself am going to be happy."

And, by way of giving practical effect to this virtuous resolution, she poked the fire vigorously, composed herself in an armchair, and began to toast her feet.

There was another ring at the door that afternoon, and there were more steps on the staircase. Even Mrs. Fortescue looked puzzled.

"Come in," she snapped out viciously, as a knock made itself heard on the door. "Come in, whoever you are."

The door was opened again, and the Very Reverend the Dean of Southwick appeared on the threshold and stepped into the room.

His gaiters, his buckled shoes, his decanal coat, his shovel hat with its rosette, were faultless. "Dressed for his part, my dear," as Mrs. Fortescue afterwards most unfeelingly observed.

My father seated himself with solemn dignity, and in his own way took up his parable.

"Miriam," he said, looking at Mrs. Fortescue, "I wish to speak to you alone."

"And I do not intend to speak to you alone, papa. I had much sooner that Mrs. Fortescue remained."

He was not at all staggered by the rebuff. Mrs. Fortescue, describing the interview afterwards, claimed the result as being

"first blood" for myself, whatever that may mean.

"Then, Miriam, I must say that I have come down with the very deepest pain and grief, and I must also add the very deepest sense of shame and humiliation. I know everything; and no one feels more deeply than myself that the present is not a time for upbraiding. I have come because it is my sad duty as a father to — to — to——"

"To do what, Mr. St. Aubyn?" burst in Mrs. Fortescue. "Do you think your daughter wants you down here pottering and bothering about like a bumble bee under a glass? What good on earth can *you* do, and who wants either you or your interference?"

"I am not addressing my remarks to you, madam," interposed the Dean. "I

have my own opinion, as every right-thinking person must have, of your conduct —of the guilty part you have played in this terrible tragedy."

"Have you?" asked Mrs. Fortescue. "And what may be your opinion of your own part in it? Take my advice, Mr. Dean, go back to your hotel. Have you not the tact to see that you are not wanted?"

Utterly regardless of this interruption, my father continued:

"This terrible, this crushing news, Miriam, has reached me from Sir Henry himself. He himself suggested—so at least I gathered from his letter—that I should come down here; I should have done so in any event. It is a fatal and indelible stain that you have inflicted upon the family name. Were your poor mother

alive she would never have survived the shock. For myself I am heartbroken; I shall never again dare to lift up my head. A life that might have been of service under Divine guidance to the Church, and possibly to the State, is hopelessly wrecked. But why should I speak of myself? My first duty, my daughter, is towards you."

I was by this time quivering with indignation. "How dare you assume my guilt?" I cried out passionately. "How dare you do it?"

"Alas, my child," he said, "the matter is beyond proof; it is idle to talk of guilt, and innocence, and of proof, where everything is known."

"It is not idle!" I answered, now thoroughly roused; "and you, who sold me, are the last person in the world who ought to constitute yourself my judge.

You sold me for your own price, and you have received it. Now leave me and go! As surely as I shall have to answer in this world and in the next, the guilt of all this misery rests with you, with you alone!"

"I repeat, Miriam——"

"Go!" I repeated, and advanced towards him. I felt as if I were possessed. I could feel the pulses in my head throbbing. I could hear the beating of my heart as distinctly as I heard the stamp of my foot upon the floor.

My father looked round helplessly for a minute, and then, with a limp effort to retain his dignity, turned round and left the room.

I never before saw him so thoroughly cowed, even in the presence of the most insistent and obdurate creditor. He posi-

tively seemed to shrink within his canonicals, and his limbs trembled under him as he aided himself by the balustrades down into the street.

The tension had been too great, and I only remember that, some time afterwards, I found Mrs. Fortescue sponging my forehead with Eau de Cologne, and that the room was swimming round me.

"No talking," said the little woman, "no talking. I have sent out for some sal volatile, and here you are. Down with it, and let me throw this cloak over your feet, and then just go to sleep again. If you don't, I shall send out for the doctor. But if you are good, and do as you are told, I will sit here by you, and won't move until you are all right again."

I smiled gratefully at her, and she sat down close by me. Then my eyes closed,

and I suppose I must have fallen asleep again; for, when I next remember anything, it was to find the room dark, and it was not until I stirred that Mrs. Fortescue, who was still sitting by me, lit the candles, bustled about, attended to the fire, and, her labour concluded, exclaimed triumphantly: "And now, my dear, we'll have a nice quiet evening together, with no more talking or worry. And I shall sleep to-night in your room, in case you should want me."

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. SABINE, who had not taken advantage of Mrs. Fortescue's invitation, made his appearance next morning about eleven o'clock, and, of course, we began almost immediately to discuss the crisis.

"Sir Henry," he said, "has his own solicitors. They are, I perceive from the interesting document with which they have favoured me, Messrs. Nisi, Slowcoach, and Absolute, a very respectable firm in Lincoln's Inn Fields—just a sort of firm an Ambassador ought to employ. I shall have my own solicitor, of course, and

a separate defence. That is absolutely necessary."

"I know nothing about these matters," I said.

"You, Lady Craven, had better go to Messrs. Wylie and Wylie, the sharpest firm in London. I will give you a letter of introduction to George Wylie myself. He is about the cleverest man I know in his profession, or out of it, and if he takes up a case, *con amore*, will win it if it is to be won. If he had gone to the Bar he would have been an Attorney-General long ago. The great advantage of going to him is, when once you are in his hands, you have really no further trouble. He never needs to be stirred up or even jogged. He takes a pride in his work, and he can only pursue it for its own sake, for one way or another

he must be by this time a very rich man."

I went up to town accordingly, and saw Mr. Wylie — a sharp-featured little man, dressed in perfectly good taste, and with the most extreme possession of manner.

He listened to what I had to say, took notes of it, said that he would arrange every detail, and give the matter his own personal attention, and so bowed me out with the assurance that I should hear from him at once, if it were necessary for him to see me again.

There was something in his manner that seemed to reassure me, and I made my way back to Brighton in infinitely better spirits than when I left it.

There was evidently nothing more to be done, except, as Mrs. Fortescue observed,

to trust in Providence and keep our powder dry. I really believe that Mrs. Fortescue would, like Sir Thomas More, have joked upon the scaffold. Meantime, by Mr. Wylie's advice, Mrs. Fortescue and I remained in Brighton, while Mr. Sabine went away to London, although we heard from him two or three times a week.

And I now began to see how much I had misjudged Mrs. Fortescue. In the moment of trial when I had imagined she would forsake me, she proved my most staunch and kindest friend. She was with me literally day and night.

I knew that it was her regular time to return to Paris, and I pressed her to go. But she answered that she had already let her flat, and should consequently stop with me.

What I should have done without her

I hardly like to think; very possibly something foolish or desperate. But she kept me bright and cheerful in spite of myself; insisted on taking me out for walks and drives; assured me that dry champagne was better than all the sal volatile in the world, and made me act on the advice, and kept me up chatting at night until she could make sure in her own mind that I was sufficiently tired to go soundly to sleep the moment I went to bed.

"Sleep, my dear," she insisted, "sleep, champagne, and exercise are the three finest things in the world for the health, the temper, and the complexion. I believe I should look ninety if I did not dose myself with them regularly. They save all your doctor's bills, and keep you young and happy for ever. They are the salad-dressing of life, which, without them, would

be a very sorry dish indeed of very bitter herbs."

I had forgotten to mention money matters; these gave me no trouble. I received a letter from Messrs. Nisi, Slowcoach, and Absolute, intimating that, in order to avoid any unpleasant application for alimony, they had received instructions from their client to place a thousand pounds to my credit at any bank I might direct; and that, should the hearing of the suit be at all delayed, a further sum would be at my disposal on my application for it.

Thus, then, there was nothing to do but to wait; and I agreed with Mrs. Fortescue that we might as well remain comfortably at Brighton, as trouble ourselves with a move or even with anything like travelling.

In this manner nearly six months passed pleasantly and almost rapidly away. Then, after Easter, came what Mr. Wylie called the summer sittings, and the case of Craven *v.* Craven and Sabine found its way into the list, and, as Mr. Wylie gave me to understand, might come on any day.

Application was made to the Court to fix a day for it, with an intimation that it might possibly last two or three days, if not more, and ultimately a day was appointed towards the end of May.

The evening before I came up to town with Mrs. Fortescue, and, at the suggestion of Mr. Wylie, we took lodgings together in Sackville Street. "Lodgings," said Mr. Wylie, "look better than an hotel; and Sackville Street is sufficiently near the Law Courts, and is a most unexceptional locality."

It is not my intention to go into the details of the trial. I suppose it was very much like any trials of the same sort. A vast amount of the evidence was purely formal.

Sir Henry, of course, could prove nothing at all bearing on the real issue. The Very Reverend the Dean looked the picture of paternal anguish, and with sublime ingenuity contrived to give the jury the impression that he had warned me against Mr. Sabine, that he had specially come up to London to do so, and had been practically refused admission by me to the house, and told to mind his own business; and—this of course—that the whole thing would bring his gray hairs with shame and sorrow to the grave. His voice trembled with emotion as he

told his story, and the jury were visibly affected.

The important witness, the one whose evidence decided the case, was Miss Jackson. She had evidently kept a most careful diary, and her memory was never once at fault, although, as Mr. Wylie whispered to me, she was far too clever to overload herself with details.

She declared that the frequency of Mr. Sabine's visits had aroused her suspicions; that she had spoken to me on the subject, and had been sharply reprimanded, and told to hold her tongue; that, without her constituting herself in any way a spy, circumstances had been so recklessly forced upon her notice that she could not help observing them. These circumstances she gave in detail, with a most malignant ingenuity.

Ultimately, she said she had felt it her duty to communicate with Sir Henry himself, and, having done so, had of course left my service.

Cross-examination failed to shake her in any way, and I saw that Mr. Wylie by no means liked the turn which her evidence had given to the case.

The other witnesses on Sir Henry's side were comparatively unimportant; but the jury exchanged glances with one another when it was proved by the lawyer's clerk, who served the citation, that he found Mr. Sabine, Mrs. Fortescue, and myself altogether in my sitting-room at eleven in the morning, drinking champagne out of tumblers.

Another witness, whom none of us had expected, was a coastguardsman, who proved that, after dark, I had accompanied Mr. Sabine on board his yacht, which was lying

in the offing, and had stayed on board at least a couple of hours.

Asked where the yacht and its crew now were, he replied that, to the best of his belief, they were now in the Mediterranean, but that the yacht had sailed shortly after my visit to her.

This piece of evidence was, of course, strictly true, and I did not need Mr. Wylie to tell me that it produced a very unfavourable impression.

After this, even I had sufficient sense to see that the case was virtually over. I was called, and I, on my oath, denied the shameful charge brought against me. And I do not think that I was more nervous or hesitating than might have been expected under cross-examination. But I could tell, instinctively, that the jury did not believe me.

Mr. Sabine made, as Mr. Wylie remarked to me, an admirable witness. His account was that he pitied the lonely life I led at Brighton, and that his attentions had been entirely those, which, as a personal friend of Sir Henry's, he had felt fully justified in paying.

Mrs. Fortescue puzzled Sir Henry's counsel extremely. It was admitted that she had been staying with me, with Sir Henry's consent, and that she consequently enjoyed his confidence.

She declared that, with the exception of the one visit to the yacht, she did not believe I had been out of her sight the whole time that we were at Brighton; and, as she afterwards said herself, the more they pressed her with questions, the less change they got out of her.

This practically ended the case, although

I can even now recollect the vigorous and magnificently brilliant speech which my counsel made in my behalf, and in which, I am pleased to say, he did not at all go out of his way to consider the feelings of the Dean of Southwick, or even to spare him unnecessary pain.

Terrible as the crisis was, I enjoyed hearing things said of my father which I had often felt, but never been able to express. And when he spoke of my unhappy girlhood without a mother's care, and without companions, and invited the jury to believe that I was, in reality, more ignorant of the world and of its conventions than any village schoolgirl could be, I did not need Mr. Wylie to whisper to me that the case was magnificently put.

The summing up was a very lucid recapitulation of the evidence, coupled with

what certainly seemed to me a somewhat feeble running comment.

If, his lordship told the jury, they believed the evidence of Miss Jackson, then, of course, there was an end of the whole matter, and it was for them to say whether they believed her. If she was telling the truth, she was only discharging a painful duty. If she was telling falsehoods, they must conclude that she was doing so out of the most pure and wanton malignity, inasmuch as it had not even been suggested for a moment that I had in any way done anything to arouse in her a feeling of revenge.

Mrs. Fortescue's evidence was too negative to be of much service in enabling them to make up their minds. As far as it went it was in my favour, but it went a very little way.

My own denial was no doubt entitled to their most careful consideration, as also was that of Mr. Sabine, the co-respondent. They could not shut their eyes to the fact that on one side or the other there must be something very like wilful perjury. It was only their duty to remember the gravity of the issues which they were called upon to determine, and to allow no consideration of the result of their verdict to influence them in the slightest degree.

How far all this aided the twelve Middlesex tradesmen who filled the box I cannot pretend to say. They were absent for about an hour and a half, and at the end of that time they returned into Court with their minds made up.

I could read the verdict of the jury in the foreman's face before he delivered it for himself and his companions. They

found that I had been guilty of adultery with Mr. Sabine on various occasions, and more particularly on that when I had visited the yacht. And the judge, without any comment, gave effect to their finding in what Mr. Wylie told me were the usual terms.

I felt stunned, and just remember Mr. Wylie giving me his arm and leading me out of Court.

Here I was a divorced woman, ruined and disgraced for ever, a thing to be shunned and avoided as if plague-stricken, and yet, as I shall have to answer for it in the last day, and in a Court where all hearts are open, as absolutely and wholly innocent of the foul charge brought against me as a child could be.

I only just remember being helped into

my brougham and driven rapidly back with Mrs. Fortescue to Sackville Street. The next thing I remember is waking up as if from a long sleep and seeing that the room was darkened and that there were medicine bottles about, and that Mrs. Fortescue was seated by my bedside.

"Now you are to be perfectly quiet, dearest child," said she; "and you are not even to talk to me. If you do, I shall have to leave you and hand you over to a hospital nurse, which I am sure you wouldn't like. So lie still and keep quiet."

I smiled languidly and tried to sit up in bed, but found I had not the strength. Mrs. Fortescue, however, managed to prop me up with some pillows. Then she sponged my face and hands with Eau de

Cologne and water, and gently curled my hair, which I noticed had been cut to about a third of its length.

Then she gave me a glass of champagne and milk.

"This is what you have been living on, my sweet, for nearly a fortnight," she said, "and now you must lie down again."

Just as docilely as a child, I did exactly what she told me, and so lay for some hours, as it seemed to me, watching the pattern of the wall-paper and counting the tassels on the fringes of the bed hangings.

Then a stout tall man came, who felt my pulse and smiled pleasantly.

"You will soon be able to be moved," he said. "I think we must send you to Torquay, or, at any rate, somewhere south. Meantime you must be kept quiet,

and you must drink champagne whenever Mrs. Fortescue here tells you to do so. We all want to get you away from here and to see the roses in your cheeks. But we can't do that until you are strong enough to be moved."

I must, indeed, have been terribly weak, for this pretty little speech seemed almost as interminable to me as the summing up of the judge himself. It quite tired me out. I remember Mrs. Fortescue handing me a bunch of violets, which I smelt, and then kept in my fingers. "They come from Nice, my dear," she said, "where we will go in the winter, if you will only do as you are told, and get strong again. As soon as you can be moved we will leave town, and the sea air will soon bring back the roses."

Then she sat down, took up a book,

nodded at me kindly over the top of it, and began to read, or to pretend to read, with admirable industry.

I was now sufficiently recovered to realise that I was indeed far weaker than I had supposed. So I allowed my eyes to close dreamily, and from weakness, for it could not possibly be weariness, fell asleep again.

I found afterwards, what I did not then know, that they had saved my life by morphia, which had been actually forced into my veins through a tiny little syringe with a point no larger than a needle.

I found also that for some days my life had been despaired of; that Mrs. Fortescue had never left my bedside; that Mr. Sabine had called twice, and sometimes three times every day; and that the Very Reverend the Dean had left town for the Cathedral Close

on the evening of the trial, and the Sunday after had preached a most affecting sermon, in the delivery of which his voice was frequently choked with emotion, while the eligible widows and spinsters, who formed the bulk of the congregation, had sobbed audibly.

The sermon was afterwards printed by special request, and my father had actually the assurance to send a copy of it to myself, and another to Mrs. Fortescue, with his own precious autograph on the title page. "A signature, my dear," said Mrs. Fortescue, "which, before he got his deanery, the smallest money-lender in England would not have touched with a pair of tongs."

And I could not help laughing, for I knew that, when we were living at

Ossulston, my father was perpetually writing to advertising money-lenders, who never so much as condescended to even answer his epistles.

END OF VOL. I.

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